

## V

### 'THE QUEER FOLK CALLED QUAKERS'

Most people who have any knowledge, even a cursory knowledge, of the history, sufferings, testimony, and social record of those who were once called 'The Queer Quakers' must be filled with a deep respect and admiration for the members of this community, and especially for the witness they have been able to offer to the Christian world.

#### I

Their modern official title is The Society of Friends. They chose this name for their fellowship because the word 'friendship' was so often used by the early Christians to describe their relationship to one another. The Quakers quote especially Christ's words, 'Henceforth I call you not servants . . . but I have called you friends.' They believe that this title best describes the ideals of the early church, and its attitude to its own members and to the outside world.

The more common, but equally honoured, name of *Quakers* was first applied to them in derision and mockery, when George Fox, their founder, appeared in court at Derby on one of his frequent public trials. He records the incident in his *Journal* as follows: 'This was Justice Bennet of Derby, who was the first that called us Quakers, because I bid him *tremble* at the word of the Lord. This was in the year 1650.'<sup>1</sup> In passing

<sup>1</sup> Fox's *Journal*, under date 1650

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we may note that this is only one of many striking instances where a name once given in mockery is now hallowed in honour. 'Christians' were sneered at as the Christ-folk; 'Puritans' as the pure-folk; 'Methodists' as the method-folk; and 'Quakers' as those who asked men to *quake* at the Word of God. Thus time takes its generous revenge, when an ancient sneer becomes a modern honour.

The Friends did not step out, full-grown like Minerva, with a stated theology and a defined system of their own, ready made. They had a long pre-history which goes back to the early days of the Reformation, when various sects or bodies arose out of the fermenting life of that 'yeasty age' and helped by their preaching and writing to formulate the later doctrines of the Quakers. Chief among these was a body of Christians known as '*Collegiants*' or '*Seekers*' who had their origin in Holland and Germany. These Seekers, people of a mystical bent of mind, tried to return, as closely as they could, to the ways and customs of apostolic simplicity as described in the Acts and the Epistles of the New Testament.

As against the elaborate order and system of the Pre-Reformation Church, the Seekers had almost no organization at all. They refused to have trained or ordained ministers or pastors. They had no sacraments of any kind, no creeds or prescribed doctrines, and no defined ritual. They met together informally on Sundays for worship, and often sat for the most part in unbroken silence, except that now and then, as the Spirit moved them, one here or there might offer prayer or deliver a message which had been 'laid on his soul.' They believed that the visible church, as they had known it in the past—with its organization,

creeds, ritual, stated services, and sacraments—had lost touch with what they called the ‘inner light,’ which they claimed to be the right and privilege of every true Christian in the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, they were only waiting and ‘seeking’ for a new revelation which would bring in Christ’s promised Kingdom, when the Lord would return in power to His waiting and expectant people.

The Seekers soon spread from Holland and Germany to England in the expansive days of the early Commonwealth, and influenced many thoughtful people by their zeal, great simplicity, eagerness, good living, ways of peace, and democratic ideas. During the unsettled years of the Civil War and the Commonwealth, when keen religious discussion was general in every grade of society, and when men argued even in the taverns and the hedgerows about the foundations of Church and State, large groups of these Seekers went preaching and teaching over the land, advocating a return to the life and doctrines of the first century, and trying to practise in their own lives an apostolic form of Christianity in extreme simplicity of life and method.

Out of this spiritual climate and this religious background, the Quakers were born. One man of real power and genius gave them their start and their direction. The main religious ideas of the Quaker movement were undoubtedly already there ‘in the air’; but this man gathered up the diffused teaching and gave it coherence and form—George Fox, a man of quite peculiar power and passion, who has left his distinctive mark on the religious and political thinking of his day and ours.

George Fox was born at Fenny Drayton in the south of Leicestershire in July 1624. Though his origin was humble, he came of good yeoman stock. He had almost no systematic education, as we now count education ; but the greater school of keen religious and political discussion in those days was not in the class-forms but at every fireside and every village anvil. From early childhood he had a remarkable religious bent ; and he afterwards came to know his Bible as few have ever done. He could handle it with mastery ; and best of all, he was humble and keen enough to be handled by it.

It was an age of quite unusual discussion and debate, especially debate about the fundamental concerns of life and conscience. People were thinking strange and revolutionary thoughts. The whole basis of State, Church, and private life was under the searchlight. Truly a great formative age in which to be alive.

Perhaps because he was naturally shy, retiring, and thoughtful, young George Fox mulled all these questions of debate over in his mind and conscience. As he so diligently studied his Bible, there seemed to him to be such a gaping difference between the simple religion set forth in the New Testament and the elaborate system of the Church of his day with its formal theology, and especially between the apostolic ‘way of life’ and our more formalized modern habits. In his sensitive soul there arose serious mental strife, and as a result, in his nineteenth year, he left home, gave up his work, broke with his church connection, and went wandering from one place to another, with little more than his Bible in his hand, seeking help and guidance. He was out in the dark ; and unfortunately none of those who

by their training and vocation should have been able to direct him could give him the light or help he needed.

There can be little doubt that in his wanderings (by the way, he had a small competence of his own to support him) he came into close communion with some of the Seekers and other kindred sects. I do not imagine that it was possible for him in that fermenting age to travel far and wide as he did without meeting these widespread Seekers, and learning from them the arresting new doctrines they were preaching in every village and hamlet. As he heard their views and sympathized with their dreams, as they spoke to him of their belief in the 'inner light,' and as they talked of the nearness of God to a man's seeking soul, he felt that here indeed was the truth for him. It all came to him like a burst of sunshine in the freshness of a new morning. He almost felt as if he had *discovered* this new revelation for himself. There is no idea in this of what we nowadays call 'plagiarism'—anything, for instance, like the wholesale unacknowledged appropriation of 'Quimbyism' by Mrs. Eddy in her Christian Science. This new light came to Fox's harassed soul like a shaft from heaven. He did not refer to his debt to the Seekers for the simple reason that they were everywhere around him, and many of them actually became his first 'Friends' and the members of his 'Meeting.'

An astonishing change now came over the man. From being shy and timid, he became as fearless as a man in armour. From being hesitant and often silent, he became a prophet, in houses, streets, churches, villages, and towns. Naturally, he aroused much interest, and also hostility. In his new faith he was

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prepared to break any law of man, if it contravened his idea of the Law of God ; and he was ready to suffer uncomplainingly, as he so often did, ‘the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.’ How often he was in gaol, it would be hard to tell ; but his frequent experience of gaol-life made him one of the first ‘prison reformers’ in history. He could speak from real and prolonged inside knowledge !

While I admire the man’s courage and consecration, it must be admitted, in justification of the average decent Englishman of that day, that Fox was often most tantalizingly indiscreet and intrusive. In many ways he brought much of his early persecution on himself. Here, for instance, is his account in his *Journal* of how he broke up a quiet orderly village service : ‘From Coventry I went to Atherstone, and it being their lecture day, I was moved to go to their chapel to speak to the priests and the people.’ He has the grace to add, ‘They were generally pretty quiet, only some few raged, and would have had my relations to have me bound. I declared largely to them, how that God was come to teach his people himself, and to bring them off from all their man-made teachers to hear his Son.’<sup>1</sup>

We can readily understand that many of these villagers thought him insolent. First of all, he openly interrupted and broke up their quiet service of worship ; secondly, he miscalled and decried their ministers (whom he always dubbed ‘priests’) ; and thirdly, he usurped their services to proclaim his own special ideas, claiming that he was directly speaking in God’s name. Listen to this again, ‘Then I went to Market-Bosworth, and there was a lecture there also. He that

<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, under year 1649

preached that day was Nathaniel Stevens, who was priest of the town where I was born. He raged much when I spoke to him and to the people, and told them I was mad. . . . So the people, being stirred up by the deceitful priest, fell upon us and stoned us out of the town ; yet they did not do us much harm.' <sup>1</sup> In fairness, we must admit that if an unaccredited person thrusts himself in this fashion into the quiet and orderly meetings of other worshippers and usurps the service for himself, he must be ready to take the obvious risks ! Thus many of these early persecutions were brought upon Fox by his own indiscretions and his lack of respect for others. The fact that he would never call a church a *church* but only a 'steeple-house,' has in it a smack of contempt that must have been gratuitously offensive to other good people, who rightly loved their own ways and customs.

## 3

The later persecutions, both of him and his followers—and these persecutions were frequent and terrible—came mainly from his opposition, on claims of conscience, to many of the Common Laws of his own day. For instance, he refused to pay any tithes even in the matter of rent. He was against all 'affectation' in dress or speech, forgetting perhaps that there may be as much affectation in an elaborate and differentiating 'simplicity' as in all the colours of the rainbow. Moreover his use of 'thou' and 'thee' in speech—which he claimed to be both good grammar and New Testament practice—seemed more of an affectation to ordinary people than we can now imagine. He

<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, under year 1649

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objected to oath-taking in court and 'swearing on the Bible,' basing his opposition on a too literal and mistaken interpretation of Christ's remark about 'Yea and Nay,' and overlooking the fact that the taking of oaths might be the only way in which certain kinds of witnesses could be solemnly impressed.<sup>1</sup> He objected also to all forms of art and music, not only in the Christian service of worship, but even in the common life of the people, as well as innocent amusements, games, and entertainments which he condemned as vanity and irreligion. All this must have irritated many good Christians whose outlook was more generous and spacious, and who believed that God could be worshipped and adored in all the works of His creation. Thus Fox might be justly criticized along two lines: (i) an amazing ignorance of this 'complex' we call human nature, which can play as well as work, and perhaps can only work best when work is balanced by play; and (ii) a failure to realize that the longing for music and art in all their good forms is as much a gift of God as any other human faculty, and that bareness and baldness are not the only way, or even the best way, of worshipping God.

I mention these things, which after all are only incidental to the great positive contribution of George Fox's message, not to excuse any of the intolerable sufferings and imprisonments which he and his fellows so unjustly suffered, but merely to point out how disturbing a strong man's conscience may be to the more genial and cultured people of his own day. But whatever befell George Fox, he bore it without whine

<sup>1</sup> Matthew v.37. The application is certainly too literal when we remember that Jesus Himself constantly stressed His Yea and Nay by the use of 'verily, verily,' i.e. by some assurance other than mere Yea and Nay.

or complaint. It was enough for him that he should be true to the 'inner light,' and be constantly doing the will of Christ, as he understood it. Thus every experience that befell him, no matter how bitter or undeserved, only served to strengthen his resolution and develop his fearless personality.

In 1648, at the age of twenty-four, he began those wide missionary journeys at home and abroad which really filled the rest of his very active days. All he asked of life and God was to be allowed to preach to all who would listen to him the great truths of the 'light within' which had brought peace and comfort to his own soul. I have spoken of his courage and daring, and hinted a little at his sufferings. In all—so it is estimated—he was brought *sixty times* before courts and magistrates, and he was imprisoned *eight times* for varied periods, sometimes over a year at one stretch, covering, it is said, about six years of a man's natural life. But even in prison, he was never silenced, but continued preaching to his fellow gaol-birds—and often to his governors! Seldom has there been a man of such consecration, devotion, personal heroism, and flawless loyalty to his own ideas of truth.

Slowly he gathered persons of like views around him, humble and great. Among them were men like Robert Barclay, a Scotsman of distinguished family, whose books gave the new movement a theological standing; Isaac Penington; Thomas Ellwood, who became John Milton's secretary; and William Penn, the author, scholar, and essayist, who afterwards made the famous 'Holy Experiment' of founding the Colony of Pennsylvania on lines of friendship and peace with the native Indians, of which experiment it has been said that no Quaker ever lost his life at the hands of the

Indians. By the principles of their faith, they treated the Indians with love, respect, and equality; and the Indians responded to their trust.

Fox visited Wales and Scotland, and after his marriage he made journeys to the Barbados, Jamaica, America, Holland, and parts of Germany. In these later travels he was accompanied by Penn, Barclay, and others. One of the greatest centres of later Quaker influence was America, where the Society of Friends, though relatively small, has been profoundly important for its widespread effects on great political issues, such as the rights of the poor, the relief of the oppressed, freedom, and questions of war and peace.

George Fox died on 13th January 1691, aged 67. Few men have influenced the ways of the world and the ideas of social and national life as he has done. His genius was undoubted. In spite of a limited early education he became a man of great personal power, strong judgment, fine philanthropy, and general culture. All who knew him, even his opponents and judges, bore ungrudging testimony to his personality, especially to his qualities of mind, his splendid integrity, the loyalty of his faith, and his gentle, loving, and Christ-like life. Should anyone want to meet this remarkable Christian gentleman and enter into his friendship, may I commend to him a reading of Fox's *Journal*? There we see him, like John Wesley, with the whole world for his parish, and with the same passionate care for the souls of men. We find him un-hasting and un-resting, gentle but always courageous, touched with the sorrows of the poor and the under-privileged, and capable of a glorious and cleansing indignation, a knight in home-spun who went out to slay dragons, but only with the sword of truth. In that

honest *Journal*, we shall also receive a more vivid picture of the age in which he lived than any formal history can give, the customs and manners of a bygone day, the sorrows of the poor and the sins of the rich. Best of all, we shall learn how he founded that great company of gracious people, our modern Quakers, who have done so much for the mingled sins and sorrows of the world. (Perhaps with Fox's *Journal*, we might jot down John Woolman's *Journal*, as the record of another great Quaker, who did similar liberating work in America.)

## 4

The Friends themselves claim that they differ more in the *spirit* than in the *letter* from other orthodox churches of the Protestant persuasion. They acknowledge for instance their full belief in the great fundamental facts of the Christian faith ; indeed they claim that their doctrinal ideas are similar to those of other evangelical denominations. In 1673 George Fox and other Friends wrote an 'Epistle' to the Governor of Barbados, which outlined and defined their Confession of Faith. It has no essential or even material difference from the Apostles' Creed, except that it is considerably longer, and deals more particularly with the inner workings of Christ's spirit on the soul of a Christian.

It cannot be said, of course, that all Quakers think alike ; and undoubtedly, like other active denominations, they have had their schisms and secessions, some of them still unhealed and unreconciled to this day. None the less, speaking generally, we may say that they hold the main evangelical doctrines and outlook of other reformed churches.

Here, however, we must add a caveat. By and

large, when the Quakers have stated their faith, they have not expressed it, as we commonly do, in their own words, but merely by quotations from the Bible. They have always used the words of Scripture, so far as that is possible, in stating the terms of their faith. This has three apparent advantages—(i) it gives a note of general authority; (ii) it avoids the disputes which so often arise when men choose their own words; and (iii) it seems to allow each person the right of private interpretation.

On the other hand, it has this disadvantage—that it *conceals* the amount of active difference which may have existed among individual Quakers in their *interpretation* of these Scripture passages. If we are all content to say, ‘Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world,’ there may be an apparent and yet unreal harmony; for it is only when we begin to define more or less exactly what that sentence implies, that differences are apt to arise. However, by their policy of not stating their creed in our common language but only using quotations from Scripture, the Friends have evidently allowed their members a considerable latitude of private judgment, and have saved themselves from many possible divisions and schisms.

The main emphasis of the Quaker faith is *the continuous and valid revelation of God’s will in the soul of every honest seeker*. Fox believed that there is a ‘direct illumination’ from God within a man’s inner being, and that this illumination is as real and important as any traditional body of truth given to us by the external Church. The deep secret is the ‘inner light’; there is always a light from God in every soul, which acts as a moral searchlight in the heart and conscience to show the path of righteousness and truth beyond any

mistake. Fox was led, at the outset, to state this as a counterblast to what he called 'outward and formal religion,' where Christians are expected to take their guidance from other people, say, under the authority of a Church court, a Papal decree, or a binding creed. The individual soul can have full and satisfying personal communion with God; it can have direct light from God to enable it to make every important decision; it does not need anything outward, traditional, or authoritative, either a minister, a church, ordered services, spiritual exercises, sacraments, formal creeds, or even a book. In the final issue, true religion rests only in the personal communion of a man's soul with God.

Most of us accept this as true—with reservations. In the first place, we cannot help pointing out that the Quaker theory sets up a needlessly false contrast. It is not a question of one *or* the other: it may actually be one *with* the other. It is not the 'inner light' *against* authority; it may easily be the inner light *with* authority. Most Christians believe with the Quakers in the personal illumination of God in the seeking soul. But need that exclude the place for the authority of the Church, which, let us remember, is only built on the direct experience of other Christians—in fact, a consensus of their inner experience and light? The point to observe is that a belief in the inner light need not debar us from a respectful use of the official teaching of the Church.

Further, I am convinced about three important points: (i) The Quaker theory of the full inner illumination can apply only to *some* people, perhaps to many people, but not to all people. There are many good Christians, perhaps not greatly gifted, who in my experience can only walk with crutches. Surely it is

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better that they should use these crutches than not walk at all. Dr. Rufus Jones, the historian of the Quakers, in speaking of this doctrine of the sure 'inner light,' remarks: 'He [Fox] made it more specific, concrete, and detailed than most of us find it to be. He thought that the organ of revelation in us was like a new sense that opened up a whole new world of life, and the scenery and circumstance of it, in minute detail, could infallibly come through to us. *He made communication easier and more common than the facts will warrant.*'<sup>1</sup> (Italics mine.)

### 5

This doctrine of the 'inner light' is undoubtedly an essential religious truth which has been verified in every generation. All experienced Christians believe that God readily gives illumination thus to the seeking soul. But while it is a truth, it is only a *part* of the whole truth. On the one hand, it is true only for gifted and exceptional people. It cannot possibly apply to the general body of simple Christians, those who are untrained, ill-educated, inexperienced, and especially little children, who constantly need the help of wise leaders and guides, and who can only live a full life under the shepherding of the Church and the teaching and guidance of a creed. We may regret that this is the case, but we have to face facts.

On the other hand, the admission made by Dr. Rufus Jones is equally true, even as applied to gifted people—that Fox and many of the early Quakers tended to make this communication of God with the human soul '*easier and more common than the facts will*

<sup>1</sup> Rufus Jones, *The Quakers' Faith and Practice*, London, p. 28

*warrant.*' Sometimes, on their own testimony, the inner light has failed them in a crisis. Meanwhile we believe that in our complex and busy world the organized church can alone provide constant guidance and sure authoritative teaching for those who can make no claim to any private illumination, especially the busy workers, or those who are ungifted, or people of simple ways and mind.

If such people were to depend on this personal and precise illumination, they would be as mariners without compass or chart. In other words, I am of opinion that as things are, and especially as the bulk of men and women are, the doctrine of the inner light as taught by the Quakers can only be for a select few, for the saints and the initiates, and for those who are spiritually responsive. But for the great majority of ordinary Christians, I can see nothing to replace, and certainly nothing better than, the organized church which provides some authoritative standards, a doctrine of values, a code of Christian conduct, some plain statement of the will of God, and in particular, some good means for constant, graded, and progressive teaching.

(ii) My next important point is this—we must be chary of considering this private inner light, which at times may be self-deceiving, as if it were something *superior* to the historic teaching of the Church. At times the Quakers have not been guiltless of this, and might even be charged with a touch of spiritual pride, as if they regarded other Christians as living on a lower plane. Actually the opposite is true. Those who are following the recorded teaching of Jesus and His apostles—given in the Bible, detailed in our Confessions, and mediated in our rites and sacraments—are living on the highest possible Christian plane :

no higher plane can be imagined. After all, we live by a definite ‘revelation,’ given once for all in Jesus Christ and enshrined in the Bible and the Church. This is our final source of spiritual life. Thus, it is interesting to note that the Church gives the *Scripture* a unique place, not always accorded to it by the Quakers, who again and again have stated that the inner light does not depend upon the Book at all. Further, as against the tendency to exaggerate the value of this inner light, we maintain that the highest type of Christian life comes from the guidance and training of a man’s conscience through the Bible, the Confessions of the Church, and rites and ordinances of our faith. I stress this, not by way of controversy, but only to state the Church’s great case—that there is a ‘constant illumination of conscience’ through the Scriptures and the creed of the Church which no private and personal inner light can possibly better.

(iii) A further point seems to me important. The Quakers speak as if it were enough to wait in silence for the inspiration of the Spirit, *with little or no effort of our own*. But this does not apply to the attainment of any other kind of truth : and I cannot see how it should apply to *religious* truth. In one of his great phrases of real insight, Walter Pater speaks of ‘the hiddenness of perfect things’<sup>1</sup>—a hiddenness that can only be unveiled by the unending and deliberate search of the soul. In the same way, when John Bunyan brings his pilgrim to the House of the Interpreter, where the Holy Spirit illumines his mind, Bunyan pictures the pilgrim as needing to ‘*knock over and over*’ : and then he adds, ‘*at last* one came to the door.’ Spiritual illumination does not come by any means in intuitive flashes

<sup>1</sup> Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, chap. vi.

to an empty mind : it is rather the reward of severe thinking and deliberate meditation. It is difficult for me to imagine that God should have a different, indeed an *opposite*, method for *spiritual* illumination as compared with all other types of illumination in His ordered world. Concentration, search, and patient inquiry seem to be rewarded everywhere in God's world. Why not in the kingdom of the spirit ?

From this doctrine of the supremacy of the inner light in every man's soul through prayer and private communion, all the other beliefs and practices of the Quakers naturally and even logically flow. Unfortunately I have neither time nor space to discuss these points in their great interest and variety, as I should like to do with respect and due appreciation. The best I can hope to do is to select a few of the beliefs and practices which have been stressed in Quaker theology and custom, and examine them in the light of the common experience of the general Church.

## 6

First of all—mainly to clear the ground—we ought to notice how frankly and openly modern Quakers have given up most of the ancient peculiarities of habit and manner which formerly made them so distinctive and, unfortunately, so much an object of foolish ridicule to thoughtless observers and critics. Among these things are the emphasis they laid on simple and unadorned dress, which arose from a desire to free our life from needless complexities and frivolities ; the similar emphasis laid on plain and unadorned speech, with their ' thou ' and ' thee ' ; their refusal to use our common names of Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, etc., for the days

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of the week, or our names of January, February, etc., for the months of the year, alleging that all these were pagan relics; their refusal to take oaths, asserting that a man's 'yea' should be 'yea,' and 'nay' 'nay,' and that should be enough. (This reached its highest point when some Quakers refused even an oath of loyalty to the king on any appointment or on taking office.) But most of these customs, which made them seem a peculiar people, 'the queer folk called Quakers,' and marked them out for offence or persecution, have either been given up voluntarily by them as a result of their own developing wisdom and experience, or have been altered in their favour by Acts of Parliament—for instance, the question of taking oaths in a public court. It is to their honour that they were ready to adjust themselves to developing wisdom, and to align themselves with more modern ways.

Forgetting these discarded customs, which bulked too much in the public eye in past days, let us consider the 'constant things' in Quaker theory which still remain.

The first obvious difference between the worship of the Quakers and other Christians is their idea of the usual weekly meeting. They gather for worship on Sundays very informally, with no official leader or minister, and no prescribed order or form. The meeting begins, and may continue, in strict silence. No music or singing of any sort is allowed. There is no programme of study, and no prepared address, exhortation, or prayers. The meeting-place itself is generally without any art or decoration, with of course no pulpit or even platform, the idea being to show that all worshippers are equal. By the nature of their meeting, there is no graded or continuous instruction: anyone who feels the movement of the spirit may

either read, speak, or pray. The main point to observe is—and it is the main point of their theory of worship—that all preparation of any kind, except preparation of one's soul, is artificial, mechanical, and limiting, limiting especially to the Holy Spirit's free and spontaneous working in men's hearts.

Ideally this theory of worship seems excellent. But I claim that it is only excellent where you happen to have excellent people. Where there are merely a few ungifted folk in a small meeting, I cannot see that this 'chancy' and fortuitous form of worship will help much to edification of the uninstructed or to any progressive teaching.

Moreover, the theory of inspiration implied in this type of wholly unarranged and unprepared service seems to me to be open to serious criticism. Why should it be presumed that 'inspiration' will come more readily to unprepared people sitting together than to these same people preparing some message which seems important to them in their own homes and in their study? I am reminded of a certain type of preacher who leaves his message to what he calls 'the inspiration of the moment'—which is more likely to be desperation than inspiration! Why should we imagine that God is less likely to inspire a man at his desk, at the full stretch of his powers, amid the prayerful elevation of his mind and soul, than when he stands up unprepared to speak or pray? Unless we think that God speaks best into a vacuum, or into an empty mind, I do not see how we can claim that inspiration is more likely to come to an unprepared and empty heart than to a devout Christian at his desk, who seeks by prayer, study, and communion to find the Will of God. This type of theory, 'that we must empty ourselves before

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we can be filled by the Spirit,' is, when reduced to its lowest terms, a dangerous glorification of ignorance. In the past, God has always used the richest minds, and when they were at their richest, and He has blessed those most who have been most loyal to their opportunities and gifts.

The danger of this unprepared meeting is two-fold : (i) that the silence should so often become, not a living silence, but a dead silence, which paralyses both thought and spontaneity ; and (ii) that since there is no preparation, no message on any special theme, no expectation of making an utterance, worshippers might come with a vacant mind. ' It implied that God could use a person best when he was a hollow tube. It indicated that the inward gains, accumulations, and riches of a life-time of experience are of no value, and must be 'suppressed' before God can work advantageously. It was a dull, flat, mechanical view which fitted the climate of the eighteenth century. Fortunately the best ministers of the period rose in practice far above their theory, and while holding it, transcended it, though it did clip their wings and shorten their range and circuit.'<sup>1</sup> The same writer adds further, 'It doomed many meetings to almost perennial silence. They did not have in their group people who ever had such "movings." It naturally tended to limit ministry to one peculiar type of person, the psychic, prophetic type.'

### 7

Further, let us consider the grounds on which the Quakers refuse to celebrate the common sacraments of the Church—Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

<sup>1</sup> *The Faith and Practice of the Quakers*, p. 59, by Rufus Jones

I can understand their suspicion of what they call machinery, officialism, symbolism, or sacerdotalism. Believing so strongly in the sufficiency of the inward light, they find no need or place for any outward forms. They regard the sacraments as being mainly relics of early 'magic.' They even question whether Jesus asked His people to institute these rites. No doubt, in early days and among superstitious people, many magical ideas did actually gather around the sacraments, and some Churches seem to regard the sacraments as the *only* means of salvation. The Quakers' protest was two-fold : (i) a refusal to countenance anything formal or mechanical, and (ii) a firm belief that the only perfect communion of man's soul with God lay in personal inward communion, unhelped or unhindered by any tangible symbols.

It seems to me that in this particular the Quakers are asking the impossible—a *spirit without a body*, a body to be the spirit's organ and manifestation. A rite enshrines an idea ; and sometimes, for most people, the rite is the only helpful way in which the idea can be grasped. This applies especially to simple and inexperienced people ; indeed, for them, without the rite, the idea might be incomprehensible. If the rite only *enshrines* the idea, and never merely *buries* it, I do not see any objection on religious grounds to the good use of helpful forms or sacraments.

So far as the Church is concerned, this question is settled by the plain facts of history. In the first place, the sacraments are deeply embedded in the New Testament—and that from the earliest days, and under the direct sanction of the Apostles. Secondly, as one definite instance, we know that Jesus Himself underwent the rite of baptism ; and undoubtedly He also

made use of the Passover Feast for the purpose of linking it with His coming death. Whether He intended the rite of what we now call Communion or the Lord's Supper to be continuously observed, may be a matter of argument. But that it was immediately and constantly observed by the Apostles and the early Christians is no matter of argument whatever. (iii) There is no reason to discredit the belief of the Disciples that they were called to go into all the world and 'baptize' in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. At least, in that belief they constantly practised the baptism of believers.

From the New Testament therefore the following points are definitely clear. (i) From the earliest days, as in the case of the Ethiopian convert, *baptism* was practised as a usual and accepted rite. (ii) As for the Lord's Supper, it is undoubted that Jesus partook of it with His own Disciples. (iii) Following His example, Christians met together in the Agape, or Love-feast, to which continual reference is made in the New Testament. Even Dr. Rufus Jones, the most engaging apologist of the Quakers, admits, 'There is no question that the Apostolic Church had sacraments. They are plainly in evidence throughout the New Testament period.'<sup>1</sup>

Let us honour the Quakers' keen desire for the 'spirituality' of Christian worship. They had reason to be afraid of anything superstitious, magical, mechanical, or formal : for alas ! history has constantly shown us how often and how easily the outward symbol may come to dwarf the spiritual idea which alone gives it meaning. But surely, the only good way to prevent this is not to deny or outlaw the Sacraments given us

<sup>1</sup> *The Faith and Practice of the Quakers*, p. 83

by the sanction of the Apostles, but to see that these Sacraments are kept pure and simple, and as free as possible from superstitious and magical contexts.

The Friends commonly assert that Jesus never instituted any rites or indulged in any symbolism. Is this claim true? Even if I were to admit—which I do not—that Jesus did not expect the Disciples to celebrate communion ‘in remembrance of me,’ I wonder what the Friends make of that very symbolic rite where our Lord took a towel and girded Himself and washed His disciples’ feet. Surely this is one of the most striking symbolic acts in the New Testament—an acted drama—in which Jesus purposely used an outward rite to shadow forth a spiritual message.

In summary of this point, we may agree with the Friends that all religious rites should be sparingly used, and should be kept as simple and pure as possible, in case the rite should come to be honoured for its own sake, and not for its spiritual message. But much as I admire their honourable intentions, I cannot see how the Quakers are justified in their total rejection of the Sacraments, either from the angle of history or for the ends of spiritual fellowship. Even if we admit the danger of formalism, the true Christian sanity is not to abolish what the Church has so long observed, but to watch the more closely that our rites and sacraments are kept pure and spiritual.

## 8

No account of the Quaker contribution to Christian thinking and practice can be adequate without some thankful reference to the heroic testimony, both in example and precept, which the Friends have borne

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to social needs—especially to peace, brotherhood, love, and the rights of man. In this prolonged testimony they have been leaders and pioneers, and often they have had to suffer for their convictions. Their peaceful protest has been a reproof and an inspiration to every other Church.

At the outset, it is worth noticing that the Quakers are not adequately described by the hackneyed word ' pacifists ' or ' passivists. ' They have never been, and never are, merely ' passive ' or silent about any injustice or social wrong that demands a Christian solution. It is their belief—which most of us now share—that there will be no end to war and aggression so long as we are content to allow the conditions to exist which cause and breed strife and hatred. Let us be fair enough to admit what the Quakers really try to do. They seek to remove the fundamental injustices, the wrongs and passions of the social and international order, which are the main causes of war. They believe not merely in ' stopping war, ' but, more so, in removing the economic and international inequalities from which all wars spring. Thus, their policy is not merely negative—to stop wars : but positive—to remove the common sources of war and strife, thus making any war unlikely. First and last, it is the hatred, the unbrotherliness, the envy and the passion they want to change. Their remedy is like that of a good doctor. It is one thing to cut out the growth or tumour once it has come ; but it is another, a better, ideal so to alter the health and the tone of the body that no disease will come at all.

The average pacifist is often content just to stop war at any cost by refusing to take a personal part in it or in its works and results. Many pacifists are pleased

merely to prevent war, but they are equally pleased to leave the rotten causes of war untouched. It is only *war* they object to, not the terrible inequalities and injustices which cause wars to happen. Thus a man may well be a pacifist, and yet live quite contentedly in the present un-Christian world.

No one can say this about the Quakers. Every fair man must gladly bear testimony to the fact that they have taken an active part in all social and international reform—from slave-owning, the abolition of slavery itself, prison conditions, penal laws, factory conditions, cruelty to children, up to all forms of free political democracy. It is of the essence of their faith that true Christians must live in the mind and spirit of Jesus, and that a good faith must be crowned by good works—the removal of all the economic injustices which cause strife and hatred.

Further, while like other so-called pacifists they refuse to bear arms or take part in any preparation for warfare, they will yet adventure out among the combatants to feed, help, clothe, and comfort all the people, friend or foe, who have suffered in war. My own congregation gladly joined with the Friends of our city in sending hundreds of bales of clothes to the sufferers of Europe during the World War, and we found nobody with whom we could work so well or so happily. They hate war: but they never hate any of the sufferers from war, no matter on what side they are. The Quakers are the true internationalists, not because they despise their own country, but because they recognize, first and last, the greater Kingdom of God.

They believe that there is only one supreme remedy in the world, *love*—love that comes from God through

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Jesus Christ. They assert that Jesus never employed force. (Such a remark, of course, is questionable : Jesus certainly used force when He drove the bargainers from the Temple with a whip of cords.) But the Friends believe that love will always win, and that even triumphant and insolent evil will be restrained and shamed by love. I take this striking quotation from *The Faith and Practice of the Quakers*, by Dr. Rufus Jones : ‘ The problem of how to deal with the thug—and incidently, as I have shown, the Quakers have dealt with that problem on many occasions very successfully—offers no real parallel to the method of war. Nations are not thugs. They are bodies of intelligent people. Their claims and causes and charges are either just or unjust. They would practically never push their claims, causes, and charges to extreme issue if they were met with kindness, intelligence, and wisdom by the nation with whom they are in dispute.’<sup>1</sup> This is a very noble statement, and I should like to believe it. But unfortunately, that sentence was written before 1939. Since then, the world has learned that nations *can* be thugs. We have learned also with bitterness that with some evil men we may indulge in all possible appeasement, love, or sacrifice, and yet may avail nothing—except to embolden and harden the heart of the thug.

Fortunately I am not called upon to argue this question here and now. My duty is more simple, to state as fairly as possible the claims and beliefs of the Quakers. As a summary of their views on peace and war, I quote again from Rufus Jones : ‘ The important question, as Phillips Brookes used to say, is whether, in our admittedly checker-board world of black and

<sup>1</sup> *The Faith and Practice of the Quakers*, p. 169

white, the black squares are on a white background or the white squares on a black background. It is a deep-seated Quaker faith that the permanent background is white, not black, and that the ultimate nature of the universe backs the aims that are true, and things that are good.'<sup>1</sup> If some of us think that this creed is too high, may it not be a splendid folly to err with the highest?

## 8

I find it difficult to criticize the Quakers; my respect for them and their faith is too deep and sincere. Even where I differ from them, I value their historic testimony on two grounds: (i) they have been a healthy corrective to our more organized churches, with our detailed creeds, our rites, and orders, and our more formalized life; and (ii) they have proved that a high faith can be lived out in a high life, and that a quick conscience and a doctrine of gentleness can be applied to the common ideals of ordinary business and social plans.

I have been frank in showing that I differ from them in some points which seem really essential to me—for instance, the conduct of ordered worship, the need for progressive teaching, the spiritual function of the sacraments in Christian history and thinking, and the help and guidance of a specially trained, educated, and ordained ministry. But none the less, I envy them the qualities of devotion, and especially of life and practice, which have made them great. Long may they thrive to give the world their signal service. The main pity is that they are so small in numbers, if not in influence. *Is this due to the bigness of the ideal which*

<sup>1</sup> *The Faith and Practice of the Quakers*, p. 169

*they set before men, or, in part, to the defects of their own qualities?* Rufus Jones (my copy of his book was published in 1928) says that there are less than 150,000 members of the Quaker Church in all the world. Does this suggest that by their very nature and outlook they cannot hope to evangelize the world, or even offer an appeal to the ordinary, struggling Christian who needs a light and a help that is not in himself? Must they always remain only a ‘select body of excellent people,’ who leave the mass of mankind untouched except in indirect ways?

In any case, for their living faith and their personal religion, for their witness of the indwelling God in the human soul, and most of all, for their joint-suffering with Christ in the service of mankind, I bless their work and honour their testimony.