

**Swarthmore Lecture**

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**SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE**

**IN THE EXPERIENCE OF  
THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS**

**BY**

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## Preface.

THE Swarthmore Lectureship was established by the Woodbrooke Extension Committee, at a meeting held December 9th, 1907, the minute of the Committee providing for "an annual lecture on some subject relating to the Message and Work of the Society of Friends." The name "Swarthmore" was chosen in memory of the home of Margaret Fox, which was always open to the earnest seeker after Truth, and from which loving words of sympathy and substantial material help were sent to fellow-workers.

The Lectureship has a two-fold purpose : first, to interpret further to the members of the Society of Friends their Message and Mission ; and secondly, to bring before the public the spirit, the aims and the fundamental principles of the Friends.

The first lecture of the series was given by Dr. Rufus M. Jones, M.A., D.Litt., of Haverford College, Pennsylvania, at Birmingham, in 1908, the subject being " Quakerism : A Religion of Life."

The following lecture, in abridged form, was delivered by William Charles Braithwaite, B.A., LL.B., in Devonshire House, London, on the evening preceding the holding of the Friends' Yearly Meeting of 1909.

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**Spiritual Guidance**  
in the  
**Experience of the Society of Friends.**

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THE subject of spiritual guidance in the experience of the Society of Friends, which we are to consider this evening, forms a chapter, and an important chapter, in the great historic discussion as to the Seat of Authority in matters of religion. The contribution to this discussion by the Society of Friends is the more valuable because it has been made, not by thinkers along the lines of theology and psychology, but by disciples along the lines of experience. The Society of Friends has been a "Holy Experiment" in spiritual guidance, and has supplied abundant verification of its reality, and rich material for judging of the conditions which are necessary for its exercise. Accordingly it is from Quaker history and biography, and not with the help of doctrinal treatises, that I shall endeavour to follow out my subject.

I propose in the first place to refer briefly to the development of the Catholic idea of the church,—outward, visible, universal,—and to the change effected by the Reformation in removing the seat of religious authority from without to within, from the church to the Christian consciousness. The systematising of Protestantism has then to be alluded to, by way of preface to the vital experience which led Fox and the Friends to emphasise the authority of the Light within. My chief aim is to examine the strength and weakness of this position as shown in the early history of Friends, and to trace the hardening processes by which spiritual guidance became confined even in a church which based itself upon this guidance. Certain lessons of importance, not only to the Society of Friends but to the church at large, result from the experience of the past, and I have accordingly ventured a restatement of the question of spiritual guidance in the light of this experience and from the intellectual standpoint of the present day.

The unique witness of Friends on this subject and the rich suggestiveness of their experience should give this chapter of church history an interest to a wide circle of Christians.

**I.**

A vivid sense of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit marked the life of the Apostolic Age, as is apparent on every page of the Acts. This life was spontaneous, nascent, formative, in the highest degree, and had that wonderful freshness and vitality which, as history shows, commonly accompanies a new truth in the first period of its reception. Christianity, under the leadership of Paul, launched itself, with immense initial energy, against the Pagan world that lay in evil around it; and, when we see the church at the moment of impact, as in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, we are made conscious of thronging difficulties, but still more of varied life and victorious spiritual power. It was inevitable that the age of discovery should be followed by an age of settlement in the faith. The materials handed down respecting our Lord's work and teaching were given written form; the letters of the apostles, and especially those of Paul, were read in the churches as a compendium of authentic teaching; the rich deposit of faith which the first generation of disciples had left was regarded by the next as a unique and completed treasure unlikely to be increased; above all, the necessary development of organisation

was all the time tending to substitute outward government and external rules for spiritual guidance. Tradition and Authority began their encroachments upon the province of the Spirit. The church became more occupied with the preservation of the spiritual wealth handed down to it than with the fuller vision and the larger service, and could no longer be so readily moulded by the Spirit into ampler forms of life.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, the centre of authority for the Christian communities rapidly and naturally shifted to Rome, as the seat of world-empire, and as naturally at Rome authority aggrandised itself. For the imperial capital saw life through the atmosphere of law and well-ordered administration which her genius had created, and cast her influence on the side of creed and centralised church government, and against the speculations of the Gnostics and the enthusiasms of the prophets of Montanism. She thus kept the church from dangers on the right hand and on the left ; but she preserved it by relying on the forces of tradition and organisation, not by calling men to obey the inward authority of the Spirit. The hierarchy of the church became more and more the exclusive instrument through which the Spirit was

allowed to act. And by the third century we find the plasticity of Apostolic Christianity replaced by the rigid theory of the Catholic church. The historic institution of the church, outward, visible, universal, was conceived by men to be itself the one embodiment in the world of the divine grace, through whose system alone God communicated with man.

The spiritual life within the church at times, however, burst through all bonds and re-assumed its power. In the general ruin that attended the long death agonies of the Roman empire, the church survived, not merely through strength of organisation, but because, with all its faults, it was the one living, heroic institution left in Western Europe. Its vitality, however, brought it an immense access of authority : it filled men's imaginations as the one survival which continued the tradition of antiquity and the unity of the dismembered empire : in an age of ignorance it gained easy control over the reason, and was the supreme arbiter of morals and beliefs, while over the future life it wielded undisputed sway. During these dark ages, teaching was scarcely more than the transmission of orthodox tradition, and its methods had little in them of intellectual stimulus, for the

lay mind was treated as essentially childish. The approved beliefs on religion and morality were taught by rote, and in consequence had little hold on conduct, when they came into conflict with the passion and self-interest of a turbulent age. They were effective chiefly through use of another pedagogic method, the elaboration of a system of rewards and punishments, here and hereafter, as motives to right action. Penitential manuals are the chief ecclesiastical literature of the early middle ages. The reliance on authority and tradition to the exclusion of the reason could not fail to stunt the moral and intellectual growth of the clergy themselves. As Mr. Poole tells us, in words which apply also to certain periods of Quaker history, "The entire classical tradition, all learning in its large sense, was treated not merely as irrelevant to the studies of the Christian, but as a snare from which he was taught to flee as from a temptation of the evil one."<sup>1</sup>

The lamp of learning, suffered to languish at Rome, burned brightly however in remote Ireland, an outlying portion of western Christianity which had never been brought under the

<sup>1</sup> *Illustrations of the History of Mediæval Thought*, p. 6.



Roman yoke. From Ireland the liberal arts reached Northumbria and spread to France, where they again found a home in the empire of Charlemagne. This strange chain of events shows evidence of spiritual guidance at a time when the church as a whole left little freedom for its exercise. Patrick, as is manifest throughout his *Confession*, was a man led by the Spirit. A striking instance of this is to be found in the vision, so similar to Paul's, which came to him when a man of Ireland appeared and gave him a letter superscribed, "The Voice of the Irish." Moreover Irish Christianity, pursuing an isolated development, had moulded itself, in accordance with the national genius, into a loose and irregular organisation, which left its ministers free to choose their own work. The system, as we shall remember, was one of clans of clergy living among the Irish clans rather than of parochial clergy with a definite cure of souls. In these clerical clans a warm enthusiasm for learning burned; some Hebrew was known; Greek was cultivated; a school of splendid writers and illuminators of manuscripts sprang up; poetry and imagination and the classics were not discountenanced. While the rest of Western Christianity was in a condition of institutional

rigidity, with weak vitality and external strength, here there was a spiritual spontaneity which manifested itself in vigorous life. At the bidding of the Spirit, Irish monks were led to England and to Europe as missionaries and teachers, and their zeal and learning passed over to the continent in greater and greater waves. The debt of Europe to the Irish church is often forgotten because her weak organisation was so soon broken by the iron hardness of the Roman system ; but it was this very weakness which in her day of spiritual life and power had given her sons freedom for the mighty work that made them the heralds of the gospel to England, France, Germany and Switzerland. Indeed there was something akin to the spirit of the itinerating Quaker Publishers of Truth in many of these men. Thus the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, under date A.D. 891, tells us of " three Scots, who came to King Alfred in a boat without any oars from Ireland, whence they had stolen away, because they desired, for the sake of God, to be in exile, they cared not where." When we remember the passionate love of Erin shown by Columba and others of these missionary saints, we shall understand the dedication of heart which inspired their service.

The Catholic theory of authority received further emphasis as the result of the moral revival of the eleventh century. Hildebrand embodied the reforming zeal of the age, and in the plenitude of his success, shook the church free from secular control ; and then, greatly daring, claimed for it the temporal as well as the spiritual sovereignty of Christendom. In his conception, the spiritual force of Christianity was centred in himself, and, having authority to bind and to loose in heaven, he must evidently have *a fortiori* power over worldly things. Standing thus in the world as Vicar of God and fountain of divine grace and justice, he humbled the German king, Henry IV., in that ignoble scene of penance before the gates of Canossa (A.D. 1077), and asserted his pretensions with a worldly arrogance which discredited them. In its hour of revival the church had set up an outward Kingdom of God, ruled from the chair of Peter by a dauntless but fallible monk, who governed by the spirit of the world, not by the divine powers which had been the armoury of Christ and Paul and Patrick.

This hardening of the Papacy into a great world-power, concerned less with the progress of truth than with its own dominion, brought it into sharp conflict with the great enlightening

forces that were coming into the world. There was the development of legal institutions and the sturdy life of the towns, followed in the succeeding centuries by the renaissance of art and the revival of learning, and by the invention of printing and the maritime discoveries of the age. All these things made for freedom and intellectual growth: the church meanwhile continued to bind the mind and the soul of man in spiritual infancy. The Reformation was thus a natural and necessary movement of emancipation. The free citizen, in many parts of Europe, had already reached a position in which the tyranny of Rome over thought and belief had become intolerable, and had also, through his love of law and order, acquired a motive for conduct at least as high as that of the rewards and punishments by which the church sought to rule his life. Morally speaking a reformation of the church had become inevitable.

As a matter of history, the Reformation resulted from this moral need. Like Paul, Luther had learned that the observance of the external institutions of religion brought no peace to his heart, and had found salvation by the direct contact of his soul, apart from the church, with the grace of God. The outward system had

failed to satisfy the hunger of the soul, and with the insight of faith the Reformers had reached the spring of life in Christ Himself and found satisfaction there.

In other words, their faith, applying itself to the primitive teaching about Christ contained in the New Testament, won for their souls the inward possession of essential Christian truth. And thus, as the late Auguste Sabatier points out,<sup>1</sup> they established a new conception of religion by removing the seat of religious authority from without to within, from the church to the Christian consciousness. The Bible, and in particular the letters of Paul, had been the outward channel along which the light had reached their souls, but it had been a spiritual faculty in their own natures and not the external authority of the Book which had witnessed the light to be the light of God. As Calvin taught,<sup>2</sup> the proofs of Scripture, including the attestation of the fathers, were powerless and vain, unless accompanied by the inward attestation of the Spirit, the personal conviction born of immediate contact by the soul with truth. And truth

<sup>1</sup> *Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit* (English Translation), p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> Sabatier, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

made itself known by its intrinsic character, just as things black and white reveal their colour to our eyes, and things bitter and sweet their flavour to our taste.

Protestantism, it is true, soon developed its own dogma of authority,—the dogma of an infallible book,—but it has survived the tyranny of the dogma, and is now shaking its dominion off, because in Christian practice the Book and the believer have been brought together, and the simple message of the gospel has introduced the believer to a spiritual experience which, apart from all external authorities, has verified the message. The truth had only to be presented in its simplicity to be recognised by the seeking soul. Accordingly, side by side with the external reliance on the Book, there has been an inner response to the authority of the Spirit.

When we remember the zest with which a spiritually starved world threw itself upon the new translations which gave the nations of Europe the Bible in their own tongues, and the wonderful moral transformation which attended this new study, we cannot be surprised at the position accorded to the Bible in Protestant theology. It became the Word of God, and was conceived of as being in form and matter,

ideas and words, a thing of supernatural dictation.

The growth of this dogma was probably due, beyond all other reasons, to the doctrinal tendencies of the age, the compulsion that lay upon the minds of men to construct a scheme of divine truth which should satisfy the intellect. Both in theology and in science the method of building up knowledge out of patient examination of facts was then unknown as the great means for the discovery of truth. And alike for the construction and the criticism of dogmatic schemes men appealed of necessity to the Bible as containing the authentic deposit of revelation.

The position that was taken up is sufficiently expressed for our purpose in the interesting Translators' Preface which is found in the Authorised Version of 1611. "What saving truth," they ask, "without the word of God? What word of God, whereof we may be sure, without the Scripture? . . . If we be ignorant, they will instruct us; if out of the way, they will bring us home; if out of order, they will reform us; if in heaviness, comfort us; if dull, quicken us; if cold, inflame us. . . And what marvel? the original thereof being from heaven, not from earth; the author being God, not man; the

inditer, the Holy Spirit, not the wit of the Apostles or Prophets; the penmen, such as were sanctified from the womb, and endued with a principal portion of God's Spirit."

In thus regarding Scripture as a unique external revelation, its attestation was made primarily dependent on the divine authority with which it had been promulgated, and not on the witness which the Spirit of God bore to its contents in the hearts of those who read its pages. Accordingly the crude teaching of much of the Bible was often accepted without question, because of the authority which invested the Book, or imposed itself, because of this authority, upon a conscience which would otherwise have rejected it. The effect of this was to relegate the conscience to a secondary place and so to atrophy to some extent its powers. Indeed where the enlightened conscience revolted against the teaching and yet accepted its authority, there was a cramping of spiritual life not different in kind from that which had attended the earlier dogma of the authority of the church. We need not then feel surprise that the doctrine of an infallible book has come into frequent conflict—and never more so than in the present day—with the cardinal principle of the Reforma-



tion, that every Christian has throned in his heart a sovereign conscience whose dictates he must obey. The Bible in Protestant countries has continuously been called upon to justify itself before the bar of this spiritual tribunal.

The noblest of the Puritans, while obsessed like the rest of their age with the necessity for an external infallible revelation, found in the Book a fount of new inspiration, as well as a treasury of old. They could say, as Pastor John Robinson said to the men of the *Mayflower* on their departure from Holland in 1620: "I am verily persuaded the Lord has more truth yet to break forth out of His holy word." But to most men of the time, the volume of inspiration was completed: God had spoken through patriarchs and prophets and apostles; He had declared Himself in the historic life of Jesus Christ, and would speak again in the day of judgment; meanwhile no further revelation would be made or should be expected. Nothing was more novel or abhorrent to the Commonwealth authorities than the belief of the Quakers in an immediate call. To them religious truth was a thing to be accepted on the faith of the Bible, and not because of any inward revelation to their souls. The time was ripe for the

re-assertion of the great principle of the Reformation, in its most spiritual form, by the ardent Quaker Publishers of Truth.

## II.

To George Fox, in his years of spiritual isolation, truth came in a series of "openings," through which, as he explains in his *Journal*,<sup>1</sup> conviction reached his soul by fellowship "with Christ, who hath the key, and opened the door of light and life unto me. . . . He it was that opened to me, when I was shut up, and had no hope nor faith." Fox found the life of Christ springing up in his own spirit, his own heart's experience assured him that the Saviour was not only in heaven, or in a place at a distance, but was present in the spirits of His disciples in seventeenth century England to teach His people Himself. And he saw that the rule of life for all disciples was to follow Christ, and obey His light shining in their hearts. Fox says,<sup>2</sup> "Now the Lord opened to me by His invisible power that every man was enlightened by the divine light of Christ, and I saw it shine through all, and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation

<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, l. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal*, l. 34.

to the light of life, and became the children of it ; but they that hated it and did not believe in it, were condemned by it, though they made a profession of Christ. This I saw in the pure openings of the light, without the help of any man, neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures, though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it.”

To Fox, then, religion was fundamentally the revelation in the heart of the living spirit of Christ, witnessed to and accepted by the spiritual faculties of man. On this basis of vital experience a new order in religion was established. All over the country there were groups of persons who were dissatisfied with the formal, dead way of worship then so often professed, and could not find rest in notions and doctrines ; and several of these groups received with joy the teaching which directed them to the grace or light of Christ which manifested itself within their hearts.<sup>1</sup> There were, no doubt, many other persons who knew something of this genuine spiritual experience without joining with Friends. It is significant that the first name taken by those who gathered together on the basis of this experience was “ Children of the Light.”

<sup>1</sup> *First Publishers of Truth*, p. 57.

It appears from documents that I have recently examined in the Library of the Society at Devonshire House,<sup>1</sup> that at Mansfield, in 1648, while Fox followed his trade of shoemaker, he joined in religious profession with a company of Separatists, who had formerly been Baptists, and this group, through his teaching, learnt to know the light of Christ as the guide to eternal life, and began to call themselves "children of the light." The name seems to have been used before by some continental Baptists,<sup>2</sup> and beautifully described the central experience out of which the new movement sprang. It also reminds us that the people of God commonly called Quakers had no sectarian name for themselves, but had, at the beginning of their history, a universal mission to the world, and used names that belonged to all true disciples of Christ.

Recently I came across a letter, which shows admirably how spiritual guidance was experienced by the first generation of these children of the light. It is written into the beginning of a collection of Quaker writings which a father is giving to his son. The father is

<sup>1</sup> *Children of Light* papers, at Devonshire House, Box A, Portfolio 10.

<sup>2</sup> Barclay's *Inner Life*, etc., pp. 262n, 273n.

Humphrey Smith, sufferer in the persecuting town of Evesham in 1655, then lying, in 1659, at the time of writing, in Winchester gaol. "This one thing, my son, art thou to know, even the Light of Christ in thee, which lets thee see thy rash, perverse nature, and every evil motion of thy heart and mind, and every evil word. The which light thou, loving and obeying, mayst come to have thy soul saved and receive the blessing of the Lord wherever thou art, and He will be thy comfort and thy help in time of need, and will . . . bring thee at last into the rest of the faithful, to end thy days with joyfulness and finish thy course in peace."<sup>1</sup>

This experience of the indwelling light of Christ came with the force of a supreme spiritual discovery to Fox himself, and to the groups of seeking souls in the North of England who drank in his message in the years 1652, 1653 and 1654. It involved the subordination of all external authority, however holy, to the inward teaching of the Spirit. Francis Howgill, who had been a preacher to the community of Preston Patrick Separatists, many hundreds strong, that received the message of Fox in

<sup>1</sup> Volume of Tracts belonging to Humphrey Smith's descendant, Gilbert Gilkes, of Kendal.

Whitsuntide, 1652, puts this necessary consequence in words of compelling truth : " If you build upon anything or have confidence in anything which stands in time, and is on this side eternity and the Being of beings, your foundation will be swept away, and night will come upon you, and all your gathered-in things and taken-on and imitated will all fail you. . . . Why gad you abroad ? Why trim you yourselves with the Saints' words, when you are ignorant of the life ? Return, return to Him that is the first love, and the firstborn of every creature, who is the Light of the world. . . . Return home to within : sweep your houses all : the goat is there, . . . and here you will see your Teacher, not removed into a corner, but present when you are upon your beds and about your labour, convincing, instructing, leading, correcting, judging and giving peace to all that love and follow Him."<sup>1</sup>

This experience into which the first Friends were led is usually spoken of by them as Truth, a word which gave them their other distinctive name, " Friends of truth " or " Friends in the truth." By truth they meant that which

<sup>1</sup> *A Lamentation for the Scattered Tribes, 1656:*

approved itself as true in life or teaching when brought to the test of the Light within. William Penn says, with an echo of Howgill's words,<sup>1</sup> "Some seek it in books, some in learned men, but what they look for is in themselves, yet they overlook it. The voice is too still, the seed too small, and the light shineth in darkness. They are abroad and so cannot divide the spoil; but the woman that lost her silver found it at home, after she had lighted her candle and swept her house. Do you so too, and you shall find what Pilate wanted to know, viz., Truth."

The Quaker Publishers of Truth told men that doctrine must be transmuted into experience, the Scriptures into words of power, the external institutions of the church into a living fellowship, before they could become food to the soul. It was in the heart of man himself that the truth of these things was to be borne witness to by the living spirit of Christ, and it was there also that the response of faith to the truth thus revealed must be made. And the multitudes who waited for the light and responded to it, found their lives aflame with a new fire. They entered into conscious possession of what they felt to be the life of Christ in their hearts.

<sup>1</sup> Preface to Fox's *Journal*, p. lx.

## III.

Now it is just at this point that, owing in the main to the intellectual outlook of the seventeenth century, certain perils associated with the doctrine of spiritual guidance began to assert themselves. A discussion of these perils and of the way in which they were sought to be overcome is of wide instruction to other branches of the church. As pioneers in spiritual guidance, Friends have had a unique experience, and this experience is of profound significance to all who are seeking to promote that movement away from externals to the authority of the Spirit which is the hope of Christianity. Spiritual guidance is still the fundamental factor in the lives of Friends, but as held to-day it is the product of a long and chequered history.

The early Friends, although they had reached a more vital religion than many of those round them, remained in many other respects the children of their own age. They accepted, for example, what is called the dualistic conception of the universe. As Dr. Rufus Jones has put it, "there were for them two worlds,—the world which they called 'natural,' and the world which they called 'divine' or 'supernatural.'



These two were sharply divided with a gulf fixed between. They held as rigidly as the Calvinists did to an undivine natural order, marred by the Fall, and now under the dominion of Satan.”<sup>1</sup>

The logical carrying out of this conception caused the Calvinistic sects of the day to insist that during this life there was no escape from the body of sin. The conception was in contradiction to the actual experience of an inner light and an inward divine perfecting which came to Friends, and they escaped from its bondage by regarding themselves as renewed up in nature, by the life of Christ within them, into the condition of man before the Fall.<sup>2</sup> They lived by virtue of a new principle of life, which they styled “the Seed,” or “the Seed of God,” and the result was, to use Fox’s words:<sup>3</sup> “Ye live all in the Seed, which is one, which keeps atop of the head of the serpent, and keeps his head down, and bringeth it under. So, feel the Seed of God in every particular” —that is, in each individual—“to be the head in the male and in the female, and then ye come

<sup>1</sup> “The Divine Presence in Human Life,” *Friends’ Fellowship Papers*, Feb. 1907.

<sup>2</sup> Fox’s *Journal*, i. 31. <sup>3</sup> *Epistles*, No. 99, dated 1655.

to be bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh, and to inherit every one of you the promise of God in the particular, whereby ye may come to be inheritors in the Lord's strength, feeling it and possessing it in your own particulars. So the seed of the serpent being kept down with the Seed, which is Christ, in the particular, He brings to see over all that is contrary." Along this line of thought it became difficult to make any clear distinction of language between the human instrument and the inspiring presence of Christ within him, and, in point of fact, the charge which was most freely alleged against Friends in the first period was the charge of blasphemy. Fox suffered on this charge at Derby, was acquitted upon it at Lancaster, and suffered on it again at Carlisle, though never properly brought to trial. The Lancaster inquiry, in October, 1652, at Quarter Sessions, is the most instructive, because of the verbatim report of a great part of the proceedings that has been preserved, in the Cambridge edition of Fox's *Journal*, now in course of publication,<sup>1</sup> and because, in spite of answers that might easily have been misconstrued, Judge Fell, who was one of the Bench, was evidently

<sup>1</sup> See *Saul's Errand to Damascus*, etc., 1654.

satisfied as to the essential sanity of Fox's position. He was charged with having affirmed himself to be equal with God, and replied that he had not meant that he personally was equal with God, but He that sanctifieth and he that is sanctified are all of one: they are one in the Father and in the Son, of His flesh and of His bone, this the scripture witnessed. He and other early Friends evidently made a distinction between themselves as men and themselves as channels through which the life of the heavenly Seed within them was manifesting itself. Thus, for example, when Richard Farnsworth, a man of influence only second to that of Fox, is asked his name by the magistrate, he answered, we are told, "very mildly," and said "that as he stood in relation to God, in whom his soul lived; and as (he) were a witness of the immortal Seed, in the regeneration born of the Spirit and begotten by the eternal word, which endureth for ever, he said in that relation, as he there stood, he had a new name given him of God, which no man knows but he that hath it, and as he was in relation to man, he had a name given him by man, to be known by to man, according to the account of the world, called in the outward by the name, Richard

Farnsworth.”<sup>1</sup> In this way a simple introductory question served to explore the heart of Quakerism, in those earnest Commonwealth days.

The opposers of Friends did not always handle the matter wisely. In the view of Richard Sherlock, the chaplain to Sir Robert Bindloss, of Borwick, near Carnforth,<sup>2</sup> we must remember that in Scripture language to have the Spirit does not mean that His personal essence is bestowed, but only His qualifications, a position which he elaborates over many pages. But he says that if the new sect of Quaker enthusiasts is right, and the Spirit of God is abiding in them personally and essentially, then “this blasphemy must necessarily follow, that they are equal with God, in respect of the Spirit in them, as themselves affirm it, though not as George, Robert, etc.” A metaphysical argument of this kind gives away the case, and shows that in accord with the intellectual atmosphere of the time, other people, men of competent learning, would have expressed themselves as Friends did, if they had reached the same experience.

<sup>1</sup> *The Saints' Testimony finishing through Sufferings*, etc., 1655, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> *The Quakers' Wilde Questions*, 1654, p. 66:

It was, I think, only to be expected that, in the first exhilaration of the new experience, the spiritual life of which Friends were conscious should be felt by them as a power that took possession of the whole nature. In very many cases, the first convincement of a Friend had been accompanied by the tremblings and strange workings of the body, which in times of revival attend upon moments of spiritual crisis; and in many other cases Friends had found a similar condition coming upon them, when under an overmastering compulsion to witness for the truth. Farnsworth, for example, was asked to explain why he seemed in a trance when he began to speak;<sup>1</sup> and John Audland, when he spoke in the Earlsmead at Bristol, in those days of Pentecostal power in September, 1654, which attended the first preaching of Quakerism in that city, says, "All my limbs smote together, and I was like a drunken man because of the Lord and because of the word of His holiness, and I was made to cry like a woman in travail."<sup>2</sup> In such cases the mode of thought of the age regarded the Friends

<sup>1</sup> Devonshire House, *Samuel Watson* MS. Collection, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> Devonshire House, *A. R. Barclay* MS. Collection, No. 157.

as seized by the power of the Lord, and they accordingly furnished what the age considered cogent evidence of full possession of spiritual life. It should further be remembered that, in laying emphasis on the life of Christ within them, Friends were not doing so from any worldly motive of pride or conceit, but were simply bearing their witness to a power within them, which they felt it would have been treason to their Lord either to hide or to deny.

Having offered some suggestions in explanation of the way of thinking which thus put in the background the human side of the disciple's life, I am now in a position to examine its effect upon the practical question of guidance for the individual and for the corporate Quaker fellowship. The view, as we have seen, gave an over-emphasis to the inspiration of the individual, and naturally led to a doctrine of individual spiritual infallibility. It would be going too far to say that every Friend felt himself in possession of an infallible guide, but the men of spiritual power and initiative took this position in the early years of the movement, and had the forcefulness and also the mixture of unperceived error which result from such

a conviction, when given full effect in conduct. There was, on the one hand, the spiritual reliance which enabled the Quaker leaders to proclaim their message in the spirit of the Hebrew prophets, with "Thus saith the Lord," and flung them into confident opposition to the world's ways and worship. An invincible confidence in their call and their message carried the itinerant Publishers of Truth through prisonings and floggings to a success which covered England with groups of Friends between the years 1652 and 1656. Again, every detail of conduct was brought into obedience to the light, and a race of men was bred whose consistent life commanded the respect of their neighbours. But side by side with these great results, there was also an intolerance in controversy, a depreciation of the value of intellectual gifts, and a frequent extravagance of conduct under supposed divine impulse which caused the new movement to suffer from the defects of its qualities, as well as from its persecutors.

From the first the leaders of Quakerism safeguarded the question of guidance on its most important side. Their own craving after reality in religion had only been satisfied when

they had obtained a vital first-hand experience which transformed their lives and characters to the core, and made them consciously "children of the light." There could be no guidance of the Spirit apart from a walking in the light. Accordingly no conduct which fell short of an enlightened moral standard could proceed from the promptings of the Spirit. At a very early date the leaders set themselves against a disorderly life that did not correspond with the profession. The importance attached to the subject is shown by Dewsbury's letter in 1653, which was countersigned by Fox.<sup>1</sup> It directed Friends to choose persons in each place to take charge over the Flock of God, a principal part of whose work was to admonish those who walked in a disorderly way, so as to "minister to the pure in the consciences, to raise up the witness, to judge and cut down the deceit." If necessary such persons were to be publicly reproved when the church was met together, and in the last resort must be cast out of fellowship. The moral laxity charged against the Ranters was altogether alien to the Quaker principle of obedience to the light. As George Whitehead said<sup>2</sup>, in protesting against

<sup>1</sup>Dewsbury's *Works*, p. 1.   <sup>2</sup>*Christian Progress*, p. 43.



the Proclamation in 1655, which had coupled the Quakers with the Ranters, " We do utterly deny the principles and practices of Ranters, who from the Light of Christ which is pure in the conscience are turned into the liberty of the flesh, and into all uncleanness . . . and with the unclean nature which rules in them have we no unity nor fellowship. . . . But with such our unity is, who dwell in the pure power and dread of the Living God, and in His presence; where no flesh can glory nor uncleanness stand, but is judged and condemned by the Light, which doth the righteous justify and the wicked world condemn."

In other matters there was much greater difficulty in discerning between true and false guidance. The primary responsibility was rightly thrown on the individual himself. The perception of moral truth seems to depend upon a faculty of spiritual vision belonging to our human personality, an eye of the soul, on whose sensitised retina the truth images itself by virtue of its own light. Browning, in a well-known passage,<sup>1</sup> speaks of the aged disciple John as one whose spirit, " living and learning still as years assist," has worn "the

<sup>1</sup>*A Death in the Desert.*

thickness thin, and let man see," until John can say, I

hardly am withheld at all,  
But shudderingly, scarce a shred between,  
Lie bare to the universal prick of light.

It is upon this developed sensitiveness to spiritual light that Friends have always relied as the chief instrument for discerning truth. The sensitiveness was, I think, cultivated by the first Friends mainly in two ways, both of which under the changed conditions of our own time still retain all their old value. They sought to make their souls receptive and their vision clear, and, in the second place, they coveted not only a vision, but an experience. In other words, truth was perceived with the help of the retirement of soul and waiting upon the Lord, which finds its highest expression in a Meeting for Worship, and was held by being upheld in the witness of a faithful, consistent life. Quite naturally, by the inner necessities of the case, the meetings of the children of the light became times of creaturely silence and spiritual activity, in which all the disciples of the Lord who were present were united in the common privilege and responsibility of fellowship and worship. And it is difficult

to over-estimate the part which these retired meetings played in the consolidation of character and the training of the spiritual faculty. I know no finer exposition of the true nature of such a meeting than that given in an epistle of Alexander Parker, written in 1660.<sup>1</sup> "The first that enters into the place of your meeting turn in thy mind to the light and wait upon God singly, as if none were present but the Lord; and here thou art strong. Then the next that comes in, let them in simplicity of heart sit down and turn in to the same light, and wait in the Spirit; and so all the rest coming in, in the fear of the Lord, sit down in pure stillness and silence of all flesh, and wait in the light. Those, who are brought to a pure, still waiting upon God in the Spirit, are come nearer to the Lord than words are: for God is a Spirit, and in the spirit is He worshipped. In such a meeting there will be an unwillingness to part asunder, being ready to say in yourselves, it is good to be here: and this is the end of all words and writings to bring people to the eternal, living Word."

The continuous effort to refer all matters to the guidance of the Spirit gave Friends, just

<sup>1</sup>*Letters of Early Friends*, p. 365.

as it gave the Hebrew prophets, a wonderfully clear perception of moral issues. Fox, for example, at a time when the penal code was savage beyond belief, wrote to the judges about the iniquity of putting men to death for small thefts.<sup>1</sup> At Mansfield<sup>2</sup> he spoke to the justices against the oppression caused by their fixing a legal wage for the farm-labourers below what was equitable. He frequently spoke in markets against deceitful merchandise. As early as the year 1657, he wrote to the Friends beyond sea, who had blacks and Indian slaves, that all had their being in God, who was the God of the spirits of all flesh, and had made all nations of one blood. All men were to be loved, for Christ loved all. Friends were to have the mind of Christ and to be merciful, as their Heavenly Father was merciful.<sup>3</sup> These are only a few instances of the penetrative insight which came to our early Friends as they developed the spiritual eye, making them "friends of God, and prophets."

But the sensitiveness to divine light was also developed because Friends, with their intense moral earnestness, demanded an experience as well as a vision. Imperfect vision becomes

<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, i. 70.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, i. 27.    <sup>3</sup> *Epistles*, No. 153.

a true inspiration for life and work when the vision is allowed to transform the life. If we live up to the truth we see, each horizon reached is a base-line from which a further vision opens before us. As Isaac Penington beautifully says,<sup>1</sup> "All Truth is a shadow except the last,—except the utmost, yet every Truth is true in its kind. It is substance in its own place, though it be but a shadow in another place,—for it is but a shadow from an intenser substance,—and the shadow is a true shadow, as the substance is a true substance." If we are to understand any epoch of vital religion, we have always to recollect that the experience is primary and the words and writings secondary, these latter being such a statement of the experience itself as the intellectual equipment of the age made possible. Forms of doctrine begin by being forms of spiritual living. As Fox insists in one of his first epistles,<sup>2</sup> "No one is justified, breaking the commands of Christ; no one is justified, living in iniquity; and no one is justified, in professing only Christ's words, and the prophets' and the apostles' words, and living out of their lives. And no

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Elizabeth Waterhouse, *A Little Book of Life and Death*.

<sup>2</sup> No. 6.

one is justified, living in the first birth and nature, and false faith and hope, which doth not purify as God is pure. No man is justified, not believing in the Light as Christ commands, but with the Light is condemned: for the Light is the condemnation of all them that walk contrary to it. Therefore the power of God mind. No man is justified, acting contrary to that spirit which doth convince them."

The first division in the new movement,—that of Rice Jones and the Proud Quakers at Nottingham, about 1654,—arose on this point. "These people," we are told,<sup>1</sup> "have taken up a belief that they may keep their inward unto God, and yield their bodies to comply with outward things." They held the Quaker faith but shrank from the hardships involved in bearing the Quaker witness.

It is evident that nothing could develop the faculty of response to divine guidance more surely than the practice of unswerving loyalty to the requirings of the light. Truth revealed itself to the seeking soul and the obedient heart.

But, while Friends from the first safeguarded spiritual guidance by disowning all pretended

<sup>1</sup> Wm. Smith, of Beesthorpe.

guidance that was divorced from a high moral standard, and cultivated sensitiveness on the part of the individual both by their practice of waiting upon God and by their lives of faithful witness, their failure to give its proper place to the intellect and to allow for the mixture of human weakness which remained even in their renewed natures, led them into frequent error, which was afterwards guarded against, but with fresh dangers, by calling in the spiritual sense of the community as a corrective to the aberrations of the individual. An examination of these causes of error is of great assistance in gaining a correct conception of guidance as we may experience it to-day.

Fox included human learning with other forms of creaturely activity, and saw no good in hireling priests who spoke a divination of their own brain, using their knowledge of tongues and stealing the words from their neighbours.<sup>1</sup> Neither he, nor any other of the early Friends, so far as I know, shows any adequate perception of the value of ripe scholarship as an instrument for the discovery of truth. Although free from the bondage to the letter of the Bible in which Puritan England lay,

<sup>1</sup> e.g. *Epistles*, No. 42.

Friends received illumination as to the meaning of Scripture from the light within, and hardly at all as the result of reverent intellectual study. They show indeed a certain eagerness for fuller Scripture knowledge, although without any critical power in the use of their materials. Thus we have a Quaker tract which reprints the spurious epistle to the Laodicæans, and gives a few corrected or alternative translations,<sup>1</sup> and we find one Friend, Thos. Lawson, purchasing a Hebrew lexicon and a Greek Testament, reporting that he has seen the Testaments of the twelve Patriarchs and wondering if Enoch's writings, which hint much against the lying priests, could be recovered from the Jews in Holland.<sup>2</sup> But Lawson was a botanist and an exceptional man. We also have the crudest exegesis of Scripture passages, a use of the book of Revelation largely in accord with the notions of the time, and a basing of arguments on what we now know to be spurious passages, such as that in the First Epistle of John concerning the three heavenly witnesses. Spiritual guidance

<sup>1</sup> *Something concerning Agbarus, etc.* Some of the corrected translations are also given at the end of Fox's *Great Mystery, etc.*, 1659.

<sup>2</sup> See Devonshire House *Swarthmore Collection*, i. 241, 243, (1657.)



did not exempt Friends from the intellectual limitations of their age.

Fox, indeed, at one time claimed a strange kind of spiritual omniscience, telling us<sup>1</sup> that in his renewal of nature, the creation was opened to him, and he saw the nature and virtues of things so clearly that he was at a stand in his mind whether he ought not to practise physic for the good of mankind.<sup>2</sup> In another famous passage he says, "All languages are to me no more than dust, who was before languages were." This sentence occurs at the beginning of that most curious of all Quaker books, the "Battle-door" (or Horn-book)<sup>3</sup> for teaching, from the example of other languages, the right use of the singular and plural, "you" to many, "thou" to one, in which, amongst other things, a sentence of Fox's respecting the Inner Light is exhibited in a number of foreign languages. He seems in some way to have regarded himself as possessing a spiritual counterpart to human learning, which took him above and beyond it.

<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, i. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *First Publishers of Truth*, p. 278.

<sup>3</sup> Often called "battle-door" from its shape. The Horn-book contained an Alphabet, The Lord's Prayer and a few short syllables. In several cases the matter is printed by Fox in a Horn-book shaped frame.

The "Battle-door," prepared by his direction in 1660, resulted from this conception, but happily the experiment was not repeated.

This distrust of learning was only in matters relating to the life of the Spirit, and did not mean that Friends set a low value on education in itself. George Fox, with his practical sagacity, advised in 1667 the setting up of the boy's school at Waltham and the girls' school at Shacklewell, for instructing them, as he says,<sup>1</sup> "in whatsoever things were civil and useful in the creation." A good many schools for the children of Friends were set up, which gave a useful, plain education according to the standard of the time. But there was no encouragement given to the use of intellectual powers in ministry or in religious teaching.

The serious results which attended the failure to give a proper place to the intellect were masked for a time by the fact that the First Publishers of Quaker Truth were men of matured character and education, who brought to their service with Friends an equipment which in many cases made them the intellectual equals of the paid ministers whom they attacked. Farnsworth, for example, could write: "I am out

<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, ii. 89.

of all friends and creatures, whatsoever, and live only by faith in the sense of the love and power of the Lord, and read in the Revelation much, and often that is the book that I preach out of. I am as a white paper book, without any line or sentence but as it is revealed and written by the Spirit, the Revealer of secrets."<sup>1</sup> But, being a man of good education, who had been an ardent Bible-reader and sermon-taker, his well-furnished mind could not fail to affect his ministry, and qualify him for the public religious discussions in which he delighted.

Distrust of "humane" learning was to prove a source of permanent weakness to Friends. The other difficulty with respect to guidance,—the fact that the treasure filled an earthen vessel,—disclosed itself at an early date, and was overcome with more or less success by bringing the concern of the individual under the control of the community.

We shall remember that when dealing with problems that beset the church at Corinth, Paul laid it down that "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets."<sup>2</sup> Fox, as early as 1651, repeated this advice, and

<sup>1</sup> *Devonshire House Swarthmore Collection*, iii. 51.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 32.

from the first there was undoubtedly a strong personal leadership exercised which, while it could be maintained, carried forward the whole body in a common testimony, and sought to check disorder by methods of personal influence rather than by church organisation.

During this period, however, the leaders themselves held, as we have seen, a high doctrine of spiritual guidance, which preserved indeed a pure standard of morality, but took no account of the infirmities of judgment and the gusts of impulse and nervous exaltation which seem to be the besetting dangers of the religious life. They condemned pretended guidance that resulted in laxity of life, or led up into imaginations which they called "whimsies," or into self-willed extravagance which they called an "airy spirit," but they allowed or approved a good deal of conduct which certainly did not proceed from the light, without admixture of earthly influences.

Take first the practice of attending churches and testifying in them against the hireling priests with the object of directing the congregation to the light of Christ. On one Sunday in 1653, a letter to Margaret Fell<sup>1</sup> specifies

<sup>1</sup> Devonshire House, *Swarthmore Collection*, III. 15.

visits by nine Friends to nine "steeple-houses" in a district in Durham, and in the first years of the movement the concern for this service came to hundreds of Friends. While we should remember that until 1656 the law only punished disturbance of a preacher during his sermon or while actually celebrating divine service, and that speaking by others after the sermon was not unusual, it is evident that the violent language often used showed a want of charity, which was only to be excused because the Quaker was convinced that he was infallibly right. Others felt with Cromwell, in his proclamation of February, 1655, that religious freedom should not go "beyond those bounds which the royal law of love and Christian moderation have set us in our walking one towards another, or to the disturbance or disquiet of any of their brethren in the same free exercise of their faith and worship."<sup>1</sup>

A tendency to indulge in prophecy caused Fox much exercise of spirit at the end of 1652, and he saw his way to condemn this and to distinguish it from such a service as testifying in churches. "To speak of truth," he says, "when ye are moved, it is a cross to the will ;

<sup>1</sup> See *First Publishers of Truth*, 349-351.

if ye live in the truth which ye speak, ye live in the cross to your own wills. For that which joins with the earthly will, goes out from God, and (from) that which is pure, and so makes a place for the enchanter and sorcerer and the airy spirit to lodge in.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, a kind of working rule emerges, according to which guidance which crosses the earthly will is true, but guidance which accords with the will is false.

This working rule was applied in another class of case, which soon exposed its insufficiency. The intense moral earnestness which characterised the movement led Friends, after the example of the Hebrew prophets, to declare their message by signs as well as by words. The word of the Lord burned within them, and they could not forbear. Thus Richard Sale, the Chester constable who turned a Friend, goes, in 1655, through the town in sackcloth, with a leathern girdle about him, sweet flowers in his right hand, stinking weeds in his left, and ashes on his head. He says,<sup>2</sup> “ My countenance was as fierce as a lion, which was dreadful unto the wicked ; and when the lion

<sup>1</sup> *Epistles*, No. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Devonshire House, *Swarthmore Collection*, iv. 211.

roared through the streets, the beasts of the field began to tremble, and many faces gathered paleness."

Fox in Kendal market in 1652 had silver in his pocket, and was moved to throw it out among the people in sign that his life was offered up amongst them.<sup>1</sup> Thos. Aldam in 1655 cleared his conscience to Cromwell, and rent a linen cap in sign that all the Protector's covering and counsels should be rent in pieces.<sup>2</sup> But there were other signs, of a more repellent nature,<sup>3</sup> which were frequently practised by a few of the Quaker Publishers of Truth, and were sanctioned, as they supposed, by the example of the Hebrew prophets. These were justified by Friends, partly because of the strong call under which they were exercised, but mainly because they were contrary to the Friend's natural inclinations, and so involved a very real taking of the cross. They undoubtedly gave offence to tender-hearted people [who were not Friends, and ought to have been discouraged.

The extravagant sign which James Nayler enacted, and which occupied the attention

<sup>1</sup> Devonshire House, Fox's *Short Journal*.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Early Friends*, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> *First Publishers of Truth*, pp. 364-369.

of Parliament and the nation in the autumn of 1656, stands apart from these repellent forms of sign-bearing, and was of worse tendency because open to a blasphemous meaning which was, I am satisfied, far from Nayler's own intention. He was a man of singular spiritual attractiveness, who had suffered his judgment to be clouded by the adulation of foolish followers, and finally, as we shall remember, allowed himself to be made a sign of the central Quaker message—Christ's coming and being revealed in the saints,—by entering Bristol, amid a group of worshippers, in the character of the Messiah. In this case Fox himself, and the whole body of Bristol Friends, had condemned Nayler for other unwise proceedings. Accordingly, as Captain Bishop tells us in a contemporary letter,<sup>1</sup> their innocency appeared, even to their enemies, and begat in these a good savour and much moderation, and a secret joy that Friends were clear. Nayler himself, within a few months of his fall, came to see the false position into which he had been led, and the pure gold of his character again shone forth, refined in the crucible of shame and suffering. During the brief residue of his life, he lived in "great

<sup>1</sup> *Devonshire House, Swarthmore Collection*. I. 188.



self-denial, and was very jealous of himself.”

This culminating case undoubtedly left its mark on the other Quaker leaders, and under the chastening hand of experience, Friends seem to have realised that spiritual sensitiveness had its own special tendencies to error. They accordingly abated a good deal of the over-emphasis which had been given to the inspiration of the life that possessed the Spirit of Christ, and the individual judgment was increasingly controlled by the ripe judgment of the men who stood out as leaders and by the corporate judgment of the community.

The manner in which this control by the leaders or by the community was at first exercised, is a matter of interest. Farnsworth styles some very early advice of his, “An order to the church given forth by the Holy Ghost.”<sup>1</sup> The important counsel issued from Balby in November, 1656, by a meeting of approved Friends from a group of northern counties, is “given forth from the Spirit of Truth,” and ends with a sentence which shows that the authority invoked is the witness of the Spirit. “Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by,

<sup>1</sup> Devonshire House, *Samuel Watson Collection*, p. 36.

but that all with the measure of light which is pure and holy may be guided, and so in the light walking and abiding, these may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.”<sup>1</sup> It is evident from a Durham document of 1659,<sup>2</sup> that at that time any authority that went beyond this would have been resented. The letter is addressed to the General Meeting that was to be held at Skipton, and asks that liberty may be maintained, and especially “that no footsteps may be left for those that shall come after, or to walk by example; but that all they may be directed and left to the truth, in it to live and walk, and by it to be guided.” After referring to the divisions in Christianity about forms and ways of discipline and church-government, resulting in a setting-up of human policy and a worldly religion, and in the usurpation of men one over another, the letter desires “that none may exercise lordship or dominion over another, nor the person of any be set apart but as they continue in the power of Truth,” so that Truth itself in the body may reign,

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Early Friends*, pp. 276-282. The date and place are supplied from a copy made from the records of Marsden Monthly Meeting.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Early Friends*, pp. 288-292.

not persons or forms. All this is by way of preface to a carefully thought-out programme for dealing with the relief of sufferers, and of the poor, and for arranging finance so as to allow time in the General Meetings for weightier concerns. It shows with how much care any question of human arrangement had to be approached.

The right co-ordination of the spiritual guidance of the individual with the spiritual discernment of the community occasioned the chief internal difficulties of early Quakerism. It is not possible here to detail the history of the Perrot division, nor of the Story and Wilkinson controversy. John Perrot had suffered in the prison for madmen at Rome, and while there had received, as he believed, an express command from the Lord to bear a testimony against the custom and tradition of taking off the hat by men in prayer. Fox dealt with the matter very sensibly,<sup>1</sup> pointing out that "they that have a fellowship in keeping on their hats and observing of meats, those outward things lead them from the power, and so to no profit, but into strife and jangling and vain disputes." The tendency of the action of Perrot was to

<sup>1</sup> *Epistles*, No. 199.

criticise the leaders, and to cry out against Friends as dead and formal. There was a great show of humility and self-denial, and an expectation of a more glorious dispensation than Friends had yet known, and it is not surprising to find that many were led away, as Galatian Christians had been in a like case, especially ardent young converts like Thos. Ellwood and Charles Lloyd,<sup>1</sup> who regarded the teaching as leading them into a greater spirituality. The division reached its height about 1663, and caused much grief to Friends. Dewsbury, a man of most tender spirit, cleared his conscience to Perrot to this effect :<sup>2</sup> " John, thou wilt wound more hearts and cause more trouble of spirit than when the temptation entered dear James Nayler. It is not my nature to be found striving with thee or any upon the earth, but having declared the truth to thee, I will return to my rest in the Lord, and let every birth live the length of its day, and time manifest what is born of God, for that spirit that stands up in self-striving will weary itself and die and end in the earth." The

<sup>1</sup> Both these men were only under the Perrot influence for a time.

<sup>2</sup> Dewsbury's *Works*, p. 220.

division led to an important pronouncement from Friends met in London in May, 1666, which marks a stage in the control by the community of the individual concern.<sup>1</sup> It is there laid down that the elders and members of the church, which keep their habitation in the truth, ought to judge matters and things that differ, and their judgment ought to stand good and valid. And, if any will not admit to be tried by the church, nor submit to such judgment, if it is manifestly according to truth, and consistent with the doctrine of ancient Friends sound in the faith, and agreeable to the witness of God in His people, then they ought to be rejected. Here we have the control of the community fully asserted, and a disposition shown to restrain the action of the individual within the limits of what had been already approved among Friends.

During Fox's prolonged imprisonment at Lancaster and Scarborough, from the beginning of 1664 till the autumn of 1666, he was, as he puts it, "as a man buried alive."<sup>2</sup> After his release he had meetings in London, lasting whole days, with those who had been led

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Early Friends*, pp. 318-324.

<sup>2</sup> *Epistles*, No. 244.

away by Perrot,<sup>1</sup> and his wonderful personal influence restored many to unity with Friends. He now set himself to establish a more definite system of church-government than had previously existed, beginning his task in London, desolated by fire, and stricken, so far as Friends were concerned, with persecution without and division within. London Friends, from about the year 1655, had held a fortnightly meeting of men Friends for matters of business, and for "hearing and considering of things fitting for the advancement of truth." This meeting also sought to compose differences between Friends, saw to the recording of births, marriages and burials, attended to the needs of the poor with the help of a women's meeting established some years afterwards, and collected accounts of sufferings.<sup>2</sup> It was concerned entirely with what Friends called "outward things," but the account of its origin, from the pen of Edward Burrough, contains such an admirable description of the Quaker methods of church action at their best, that I cannot forbear to quote. The meeting, he says, is

<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, II. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Burrough's account, dated 1662, in *Letters of Early Friends*, pp. 294-310.

to proceed in the wisdom of God, not in the way of the world by hot contests, by seeking to outspcak and over-reach one another in discourse, as if it were a controversy between party and party, nor deciding affairs by the greater vote, but submitting one to another in lowliness of heart "by hearing and determining every matter coming before you, in love, coolness, gentleness and dear unity, as one only party, all for the truth of Christ," and to determine things by a general mutual concord in assenting together as one man in the spirit of truth and equity, and by the authority thereof. And if any matter arise which is not within the judgment of the Friends assembled, then judgment is to be suspended till more Friends (anciently grown in the truth) have understanding thereof, so that all things may be ordered in all verity and soundness of judgment for the honour of the Lord and the happiness of His people.

The Monthly Meetings, which after 1666 rapidly sprang up over England at the instance of Fox, had a much wider scope, exercising from the first a great deal of church discipline. They were called into being to remedy a certain tendency, which Fox deplored, to division and

deterioration from the first purity of conduct. He speaks, for example, in one letter,<sup>1</sup> dated 1667, of Friends who have gotten into the earth and settle their nests there at ease, and cry against meetings, saying, Away with your forms, and of Friends who sometimes will not shake hands, and sometimes will keep their hats on in prayer; and of some who cry Away with your laws, we will have none of your laws. Fox addressed to these meetings a number of precise directions, which constitute a considerable body of discipline.<sup>2</sup> There can be little doubt that the institution of these meetings had at the time a bracing effect upon the Society, and gave it the strength that comes from a well-devised organisation. Fox had a statesmanlike understanding of the need of the time. But the natural result was not merely to co-ordinate the discernment of the community with the spiritual leadings of the individual, but to enlarge continuously, by the successive encroachments with which a system of organisation aggrandises itself, the area of conduct over which the community exerted absolute sway. The spiritual responsiveness, which had been the glory and the peril of the

<sup>1</sup> *Epistles*, No. 251.    <sup>2</sup> *Epistles*, pp. 276-293.



first age of Quakerism, slowly died down, and a conformity to the authority of the community tended to take its place. Unity with the practice of Friends more and more displaced the older and more vital fellowship in the truth. The strong organisation, passing up through men's and women's Monthly Meetings to Quarterly Meetings, which grouped together the Monthly Meetings of each county, and from these again to the Yearly Meeting of the whole Society, at first assisted the leaders to level up the conduct and testimony of the whole body to their own high standard. At a time when the community was harried by persecution, and was holding its meetings week by week in defiance of the law, its leaders languishing in prison or the premature victims of their labours and sufferings, the members of necessity drew together, and were intolerant of any spirit of division in their midst. If the emphasis on conformity had only lasted during the stress that required it, and while the men of large vision and hope were in command, its effects would have been almost entirely good; but the very success of Fox's measures made the laying of this emphasis a permanent habit of the Society.

The standard of the leaders was preserved, but not their spirit, and the attention given to the purity of the Society, as an end in itself, directed into a narrow groove of tradition the energy which should have been given to wider service and fuller vision. The spiritual liberty of the individual Friend was henceforth only granted him along those lines of guidance which were approved by the not always very spiritual judgment of his fellow-members.

Within these narrowed limits it continued to be a real thing, since the Society maintained its ancient testimonies, and especially its testimony to the inner light and the individual responsibility to obey its leadings. Only in practice it insisted that the leadings should be along certain well-beaten paths. Under these conditions it was always possible for a man of great spiritual force such as John Woolman to express his message,—for with such men the smallest opening makes the opportunity—, and it was also possible, as the last century's history shows, for the altered atmosphere of the age to change the Society, and bring in freer conditions. But, apart from events of this order of importance, the student finds a recession of life and a stereotyping of spiritual guidance

that corresponded closely with the hardening of the discipline and with the substitution of tradition for the authority of the Spirit.

The establishment of strong church-government led to the serious division in the Quaker church which is associated with the names of John Story and John Wilkinson, two of the First Publishers of the Quaker message, and William Rogers, their stalwart supporter at Bristol. I cannot here do more than refer to the points in the controversy which directly affect the conception of spiritual guidance.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to opposing Fox's influence and authority, the Separatists objected to a centralised system of church-government, such as Fox had introduced, and stood for the right of each congregation to deal with its own affairs, uncontrolled by any central body. They chafed under the discipline that was being administered by the new church-meetings, and, like the "Proud Quakers" of an earlier day, showed a tendency to compromise on matters which laid Friends open to persecution. Their jealousy

<sup>1</sup> The controversy called forth some important literature, especially Barclay's *Anarchy of the Ranters*, 1676; Wm. Penn's *Liberty Spiritual*, 1681; and on the other side Wm. Rogers' *Christian-Quaker*, 1680-1682.

of Fox made them bitter against the itinerating ministers who moved about, largely under his direction, and against the Women's Monthly Meetings, which they regarded as useless, and the share these had in liberating marriages.

The controversy raged from 1673 to the beginning of the eighteenth century, and was decided by the necessities of the times, which forced Friends into close association, and by the personal qualities of the leaders on both sides. There is no evidence that the problem of spiritual guidance would have been worked out by the Separatists in any satisfactory manner. They owned no outward authority or representation of government over them, except that of the state, and rejected leadership, believing that Christ's government was not represented by any person, but by the power of His Spirit in the heart.<sup>1</sup> They insisted, in fact, on an individual spiritual government, dependent entirely upon the soul's responsiveness to the power of the Spirit, and deriving no strength from any outward association of Friends in congregational life. The congregation would organise itself indeed, so far as outward arrange-

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., the beginning of Wm. Rogers' *Quakers a Divided People Distinguished*.

ments were necessary, but must not assume the government of the individual soul, which belonged alone to the Spirit.

When we remember the quenching of the Spirit, so like the case of the Early Church, which attended the substitution of Quaker discipline for Quaker faith, we cannot help feeling that a more wisely directed criticism might have materially improved the church-system which Fox set on foot. Fox himself before his death in 1691 was conscious of an ebb in the life of the Society, which he attributed with much justice to the easier circumstances of Friends, but which was also in part due to a loss of spiritual spontaneity. Eight days before his death, he attended the Second Day's Morning Meeting, "encouraging Friends that have gifts to make use of them, mentioning many countries beyond the seas that wanted visiting, instancing the labours and hard travels of Friends, in the beginning of the spreading of truth in our days, in breaking up of countries, and of the rough ploughing they had in steeple-houses, etc. ; but now it was more easy, and he complained of many Demases and Cains, who embrace the present world and encumber themselves with their own businesses, and neglect

the Lord's, and so are good for nothing, and said, They that had wives should be as though they had none, and who goeth a warfare should not entangle himself with the things of this world."<sup>1</sup> The Founder of Quakerism retained to the last his fire and his width of outlook, but he failed to realise that, alongside other influences, the system he had built up to meet the needs of the Society in 1670 was in some respects cramping the spiritual growth of those who would be his successors.

The Separatists regarded themselves as maintaining the primitive principle and practice of Friends. But their jealousy of all leadership contradicted this claim. The early Friends believed in leaders, but not in a system; the Friends of the second period in leaders and a system; the Friends of a later period were content to have a system without leaders; but the Separatists believed neither in leaders nor a system. By revolting against Fox and the itinerating ministers who were the great personalities of the church, both for aggressive service and for the inspiration of the membership, they were severing themselves completely from the early period, which had shown itself

<sup>1</sup> Fox, *Doctrinals*, John Bowater's Testimony.

wonderfully responsive to an inspired leadership. Indeed, the problem of controlling a church by the Headship of Christ requires a full recognition of spiritual gifts exercised under that Headship. It is through men that the Spirit of Christ manifests Himself: this human personality of ours is the divine instrument for the use of the church alike in its work of building up its own members, and in its wider service of advancing the kingdom of God.

Upon the whole, the student of spiritual guidance cannot feel that the question was rightly handled by the Separatists, nor that it was adequately dealt with by the main body of Friends. There was, no doubt, a necessity for the establishment of some simple and effective type of church-government, and, taken by itself, the method of Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly Meetings was well devised, and has worked in practice. There was also, we may admit, under the circumstances of the time, the need for some rules of conduct, though these were multiplied beyond all necessity, and were too often enforced in a merely external way. The evil was largely one of exaggerated emphasis, and lay in the fact that the Society devoted itself to its discipline instead of to the

raising of spiritual leaders and the aggressive work of the church. Its energy was turned into a *cul-de-sac*. It should have realised that the greatest of its needs was a succession of men of wide vision and first-hand experience; it should have sought development by the vital processes of fellowship and discipleship rather than by the mechanical and deadening processes of membership and discipline. The same parting of the ways has presented itself to other religious movements. It seems safer to inculcate the tradition of the fathers and exact a conformity to it, instead of confronting the new generation with the truth itself, and leaving that truth to do its own work and shape a fresh first-hand experience, according to the new needs of the time. We place the divine gift in safe deposit and have not faith to use it in the perilous adventures of service for the King. We prefer the security of stagnation to the dangers and the glory of vigorous life.

A profound change in the temper of the Society resulted from the distrust of learning and the neglect of the weighty affairs of truth in favour of tithing the mint and anise and cummin of discipline. There was from the nature of the case no proper cultivation of the



soil requisite for growing leaders, and it followed that the human harvest in this respect was bad. The young people were there, but no adequate appeal was made either to their minds, or for their service. The need was, it is true, perceived. In 1704, for example, the Yearly Meeting encouraged young Friends in the attendance of Monthly and Quarterly Meetings, so that they might be qualified to succeed others, and in the same year Middlesex Quarterly Meeting reported that several of the Monthly Meetings had special meetings with young Friends once a quarter to wait upon the Lord, when advices were read and counsel was given to walk in plainness of speech and apparel, and in all other respects as Truth required. Even in this excellent effort, the over-emphasis on outward conformity is apparent. A strong stimulus was also, no doubt, given at many of the General and Circular Yearly Meetings of a religious character, which it was the practice to hold.<sup>1</sup>

When Samuel Bownas was a young man, about 1695, his condition and that of many other young Friends of his day was well described by the young woman who said, "A traditional

<sup>1</sup> See A. N. Brayshaw's account of these meetings in *Handbook to the Yearly Meeting*, 1908, p. 55.

Quaker thou comest to meeting as thou went from it, and goes from it as thou came to it, but art no better for thy coming, what wilt thou do in the end?" Thomas Story, under date 1733, says<sup>1</sup> of a large Yearly Meeting at Kendal, "consisting for the most part of young people," that their state was like that of the Samaritans who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but had not received the Holy Ghost. "So likewise these our younger sort of Friends, having believed the same things concerning the coming of Christ in that administration, as also the general doctrines published among us at this day, of His light, grace or Holy Spirit, yet the Spirit Himself is not fallen upon many of them as a sensible and experimental dispensation of life and power, which is properly the gospel, and the former is rather previous and introductory." Traditionalism increased throughout the whole of Bownas's life. In 1751, he wrote one of those frank letters which becomes a document of rare historical interest.<sup>2</sup> "The young generation of this age," he says, "don't seem to come up so well as could be desired. The church seems very barren of young ministers

<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, p. 689.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal of Friends' Historical Society*, I. 121.

to what it was in our youth, nor is there but very little convincement to what was then. It seems to me,—and I have been a minister fifty-four years,—that I had more service, and better success in my ministry the first twenty years than I have since had for a long time. I do not find any fruit or good effect of what I do that way, and yet what I am concerned in seems to be very acceptable and well received by others, but they don't to my observation have that good effect, as I could desire they should. I have closely examined where the fault is, but don't find it out."

The question that puzzled Bownas can be answered now. In passing from an era of vigorous but ill-regulated life to an era of discipline, the Society had been too anxious for its standards, and too little concerned to maintain a succession of standard-bearers. The days of frenzied enthusiasm with its attendant dangers were past, the high doctrine of individual infallibility was gone, the question of pruning the excrescences of spiritual guidance was no longer of more than occasional difficulty. A wise foresight would have seen that the problem before the Society had profoundly changed. The matter of urgency now was to re-awaken spiritual responsiveness on the part of the

individual, to give the young men vision and service, to fix the thought of the church not on itself but on its mission, so that both in the body as a whole and in its several members the call of the Lord might be known and obeyed.

Under the conditions which prevailed it was inevitable that as the large-hearted leaders died, authority passed into the hands of smaller men, who permeated the Society with petty conceptions. The great spiritual truth for which Friends stand makes it especially incumbent on them to remember Emerson's fine sentence, "Everything great must be done in the spirit of greatness." Quakerism demands a succession of prophets, and you cannot raise prophets out of pigmies.

In this time of low life, the depreciation by Friends of human faculties re-acted most unfavourably. In his excellent book on *Authority and the Light Within*,<sup>1</sup> Edward Grubb points out that in divine worship the ideal became the cessation of thought in order that the Spirit might come in and take possession. "This," he says, "brought forward persons of a certain psychical temperament—whose sub-conscious life, lying near the

<sup>1</sup> p. 85.

surface, was readily brought into play. Hence the ministry tended to become rhapsodical, and while not infrequently it searched in a wonderful manner the hidden depths of the hearers' hearts, it appealed but little to their minds. The idea became prevalent that all that was needed, in the way of religious teaching, would be supernaturally provided; and the third and fourth generations of Friends were left, to a very large extent, to grow up in ignorance." The way was thus prepared for the period of theological destitution in the Society, which had its natural fruit in vagueness of religious experience and the intellectual confusion of what is called the "Hicksite" controversy.

The Society, however, did not rest for any long period in the trough of the wave. Already, by the close of the eighteenth century, there were in some directions signs of revival. Dr. John Fothergill had founded Ackworth School, and Friends were being interested in education; while John Woolman, with heart enlarged towards mankind universally, had led the Society into the regenerating paths of service for others. A vision and a service once more began to appear, and a new succession of leaders arose. It would be out of place to attempt

here any detailed statement of the history of Friends in the nineteenth century. The lowering influences were still in evidence, but they were gradually being eliminated, especially as a result of the Bible teaching so powerfully fostered by Joseph John Gurney. The life of the Society was allowed more and more to depend upon vital fellowship and discipleship, and many of the tests by which outward conformity had been enforced fell into disuse. We recognise that it is not our business to reproduce in any mechanical way the experience of the first and second periods of our church-history, —even if those periods had been free from all elements of weakness. What we have to do is to re-express, under the greatly altered intellectual, moral and social conditions of our day, the spirit of Christ, in the power of which the early Friends lived, profiting by their mistakes and assured of the reality of spiritual guidance by the experience of it in our own lives.

#### IV.

Before attempting any re-expression of the question of guidance in the light of these two-and-a-half centuries of experience, we do well to remind ourselves that while some of the

factors in guidance have been variable—and these we have been chiefly considering—, others have continued almost unchanged. The condition of spiritual responsiveness has greatly varied; the place given to the intellect in the apprehension of guidance has altered, the recognition of the human fallibility of the saint has been made, and the area of life which the Society has left free for individual guidance has at one time been circumscribed and at another enlarged. But some of the deepest factors have been nearly constant. The Society from first to last has affirmed that the spirit of man is the place of all others in which the Spirit of God can shine. It has always borne witness to this Light of the Spirit as a gift offered to all men, and able to be received by all men, in virtue of an essential kinship between the spiritual side of human nature and the divine Spirit. It has always insisted that each individual is responsible for obeying this light, and that the whole of life ought to be brought under the dominion of the Spirit. And, throughout a chequered history of strength and weakness, it has promoted retirement of heart and waiting upon the Lord as among the surest means for renewing spiritual strength.

The result has been to produce a type of character which is probably the chief enrichment of Christianity hitherto made by Quakerism,—the man or woman who goes through life endeavouring to decide every question as it arises, not by passion or prejudice, nor mainly by the conclusions of human reason, but chiefly by reference to the light of God that shines in the prepared soul. In the early days we have this reliance on spiritual guidance exhibited again and again in its extremest form. The relation of the voyage of the *Woodhouse* to Rhode Island in 1657, with a party of Friends who were carrying the Quaker message to the stern Calvinists of New England, enshrines this abandonment to divine guidance in passages which are classical in Quaker literature.<sup>1</sup> The master of the ship, a Bridlington Friend named Robert Fowler, says, “Thus it was all the voyage with the faithful, who were carried far above storms and tempests, that when the ship went either to the right hand or to the left, their hands joined all as one, and did direct her way; so that we have seen and said, we see the Lord leading our vessel even as it were a man

<sup>1</sup>See the “relation” in Bowden’s *History of Friends in America*, vol. 1., pp. 63-68.



leading a horse by the head; we regarding neither latitude nor longitude, but kept to our Line, which was and is our Leader, Guide and Rule,—but they that did failed.” Isaac Penington writes to his children (1667), “ There is somewhat in you, which will teach you how to do well, and how to avoid the evil, if your minds be turned to it. And the same thing will witness to you, when ye do well, and against you when ye do evil. Now to learn to know. this, to hear this, to fear this, to obey this, that is the chief piece of learning that I desire to find you in.”<sup>1</sup> Sixty years later, in 1725, the essential experience is still the same. Here is a sentence from Thos. Story:<sup>2</sup> “ As the light of the sun carries along with it the power and virtue of the sun, wherever it shineth in its unclouded rays, even so doth Jesus Christ manifest Himself in the soul, into whom by the rays of His divine light He introduceth and dispenseth the influence of all divine heavenly virtue, into them, I mean, who believe and obey in the day of small things. Love God, love His judgments and reproofs in your hearts, which are all in love, in order to the manifestation of Himself.” Thirty years later (1763) we have

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Early Friends*, p. 397.    <sup>2</sup> *Journal*, p. 654.

the same sense of dependence, as in this prayer of John Kendall, of Colchester :<sup>1</sup> " Lord, not my will, but Thine be done. Take from me all that is unsuitable for me, or any way hinders me in my progress towards Thy kingdom. I am weak and infirm, not able to distinguish the safest way for me to take, but ready to embrace my enemies as friends : do Thou watch over me, and suffer me not to fall a prey to my enemy. Favour me with secret intimations of his snares ; let me always ask counsel of Thee, and make me willing to follow Thee, whithersoever Thou leadest." The early part of the nineteenth century shows no difference in the experience, though in Stephen Grellet, whom I am about to quote, it reached a wonderful intensity. " (The Lord) indeed led me about and instructed me and brought me so under His discipline, that in those days He was felt to be the life of my soul and the spring of my thoughts. . . . My enquiry was not so much whether I had retired from the world to wait upon the Lord, or whether I had retired from God's presence to harbour worldly thoughts. These were days of close discipline, days of deep trial, but days of great joy also, in which the Lord had so

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 80.

warmed my heart that my spirit was absorbed in the love and the things of God.”<sup>1</sup>

One illustration from times still nearer our own may be allowed. John Bright, we may remember, retired from the Liberal Government in 1882, when the bombardment of Alexandria was ordered. In justifying his action, he stated his reliance on inward guidance in terms which I venture to think the voice of the Society of Friends to-day would fully endorse. “For forty years at least,” he said, “I have endeavoured to teach my countrymen an opinion and a doctrine which I hold,—namely, that the moral law is intended not only for individual life, but for the life and practice of states in their dealings with one another. . . . Only one word more. I asked my calm judgment and my conscience what was the part I ought to take. They pointed it out to me, as I think, with an unerring finger, and I am endeavouring to follow it.” This chain of passages, taken from successive periods of our history, could be lengthened indefinitely. It will, however, serve to show the habitual reference to the guiding hand of God which has been the stay of Quakerism.

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, by Benjamin Seebohm, vol. 1., p. 32.

Inward guidance, as I have already pointed out, has, during a large part of our history, not been allowed full operation. It has been hampered especially by the over-emphasis on conformity to tradition and by the distrust of learning. Accordingly its best expression has at these times been found, first, in the private affairs of men's lives, where the difficult choice between the right and the wrong path depends, in the experience of Friends, upon a single-hearted discerning of the light and obedience to its leadings; and secondly, in the enlightened judgment on broad public issues of righteousness and oppression, which demand for their right understanding not the learning of the scholar, nor the skill of the specialist, but a sober judgment and an alert conscience.

## V.

We are now in a position to attempt to draw together the experience of the past, with the object of gaining a clearer conception of inward guidance, as it is to be known to-day.

There are, in the first place, great conclusions, which have only been verified more and more completely with the passage of the years, especially the conclusion that truth manifests

itself by its own light and is received by virtue of a faculty of perception which seems to belong as normally to the spiritual side of man's nature as the sense of vision does to the physical. This conclusion involves two postulates,—a continuous revealing disposition on the part of the divine, and a faculty of response on the part of the human. The first postulate is verified by the long record of revelation and receives its supreme proof in the entrance into our limited human life of "The Word become flesh," and in the revelation which His passion to seek and save the lost gave of the Father's seeking love. The second postulate, which in the days of Fox was in amazing contradiction to the current doctrine of human depravity, is not difficult of acceptance now;—indeed the insight of Fox has been verified along the lines of science as well as in the experience of the soul. We are coming to recognise that the gradual development of man out of lower forms of life made him, at the appropriate stage of that development, responsive to a higher form of consciousness than other animals possess: he became an organ through which the universal consciousness could express itself as mind and spirit. I may quote again from Edward

Grubb's suggestive book:<sup>1</sup> "The Light within is just as much a human faculty as is reason in its widest sense ; it is the power of a self-conscious person to enter into communion with God. It is also divine, for it is God revealing Himself within us. In the depth of every person the divine and the human meet ; as Dr. Rufus Jones has said, ' Our souls open inwardly into God.' "

Again, we also must lay emphasis, as our forefathers did, on the sovereign authority of truth. The spheres of duty, which perplex life by their apparent discordance, are in reality concentric, all included in the one supreme duty of seeking first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness. In thus living a man will of necessity be discharging in the highest way the duty he owes to himself and to his family, and also those wider duties of citizenship and patriotism which he owes to the community round him. Nor will he fail in the duty he owes to humanity as a whole, for " Divine love," as Woolman puts it, " enlarges the heart towards mankind universally." If we would shoot straight in the difficult archery of life, we must feast our eyes with the central glow of truth's

<sup>1</sup> *Authority and the Light Within*, p. 93.

gold. An absolute loyalty to truth, a following of conscience when the whole tide of opinion has run the other way, has been the great means of spreading the light. We have not to aim at success or at influence, but at enlightenment and obedience. If Jesus had thought of influence, he would never have consorted with publicans and sinners, nor have washed the disciples' feet; the thought of influence would have kept Francis of Assisi rich and fashionable, and caused George Fox to accept a captaincy. It is this simplicity of intention which gives consistency to life.

His faith and works, like streams that intermingle,  
In the same channel ran :  
The crystal clearness of an eye kept single  
Shamed all the frauds of man.<sup>1</sup>

This is a day of opportunism in religion as in politics,—opportunism that is largely due to the complexity of the problems of our highly organised modern life. It is easy to be broad but shallow, and full of expedients but empty of experience. There is nothing better able to clarify the confused half-light in which we seem to live than the resolute application of that inward light which shines in the waiting.

<sup>1</sup> Whittier's *In Remembrance of Joseph Sturge*.

heart. The man who follows the light is learning all the time to put faith in truth and to accept its dominion over the whole area of life. And by his following he wins certain convictions, which are not mere fashions of life caught up from the men round him, but are part of life itself, so as to be that form of truth which we call character. It is on the sure foundation of these convictions that the man's service is built : it is by their help that he tests the fresh light that presents itself for acceptance : it is along their paths that he walks confidently amid mists and darkness : it is by loyalty to truth that he feels his own human life is being shaped into nearer conformity with the divine Spirit whose light shines in his heart.

Further, the conviction of our fathers that opportunity must be made for cultivating the faculty of spiritual vision is a matter of still greater moment in the crowded life of our twentieth century. The modern world, like Athens in her old age, suffers from a form of *paralysis agitans*, and "has leisure for nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing." "The world is too much with us, late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers." Meditation was, perhaps,



a luxury in more deliberate days : it is a necessity in ours. The lover of truth finds time for gazing upon it till the image is fixed in his soul. We are too often satisfied with being mere copyists or impressionists,—copyists because accomplishments and information are cheap substitutes for knowledge; impressionists, since prejudice is an easier guide than principle, and gushes of enthusiasm and sentiment than firm-rooted purpose of heart. But the true wisdom needs deep ploughing and much silent and patient germination. It needs also that stillness of the flesh, which allows the sediment of worldly influences to settle, and gives time for the soul's apprehensions of truth to cohere and crystallise. Times of quiet worship and seasons for private retirement and prayer have a place of high value in the Christian life, though our Society in its devotion to these has at times neglected other human ministrations by which the hunger of the soul is aroused and satisfied.

Friends then, throughout their history, have shown an understanding of the function of God as a Revealer of His truth, and of human personality as the receiver of truth, and they have acknowledged the claims of the truth that is thus revealed to sovereign dominion over

every part of life. They have also insisted on the responsibility of each individual to keep his soul continuously sensitive to the light, so that it may be received and transmitted. But, while this consistent experience with respect to guidance greatly assists our conception and practice to-day, it does not cover the whole ground, and in particular the altered intellectual atmosphere and the fuller sense of corporate life which we possess make it possible for us to see our way in regions of spiritual guidance which our ancestors of the seventeenth century failed to traverse. We have already seen that they did not co-ordinate the intellectual and spiritual sides of our nature, and solved in a faulty way the problem of the relation of corporate and individual guidance. A discussion of these two questions will indicate the main advances in the conception of guidance which have been made since the days of the first Friends.

The early Friends were right in regarding moral truth as a thing to be perceived rather than proved: they were right in laying the emphasis on experience rather than on doctrine, and on spiritual wisdom rather than on human learning. But they failed to realise that the

whole of human nature, if dedicated to the highest ends, has its part in the service of God. Owing to their acceptance of the current dualistic conception of the universe, they regarded themselves as transplanted or renewed up into another nature rather than as transformed by the renewing of their minds. This led, on the one hand, to an unconsciousness of their human fallibility, and on the other to a neglect of the intellect. They lived in the light and by the light, and in the radiance of the experience felt themselves to be beings of light. The exhilaration of feeling that attended the new truth of the inward light gradually passed away, but, very naturally, Friends were jealous lest the light of reason, mingled with passion and prejudice, should be exalted in rivalry to the pure guidance that came to the waiting soul. They no longer denied the place of reason, but they distrusted reliance upon it. Founded by men of competent learning for the most part, and enriched in the second period by scholars such as Penn and Barclay, the Society failed to breed a succession of trained and disciplined minds. There were, however, and this is a significant point, several notable exceptions in the new experimental sciences, in which the attitude of the mind

towards nature has always shown close analogies to the attitude which makes the soul receptive to spiritual light. The advance of material knowledge dates from the day when man abandoned his metaphysics and his theories, and took up the attitude of teachableness towards nature. This search for truth by the patient way of humble-minded inquiry, purified from prepossessions, open to fresh light from any quarter, and distrustful of short cuts and foregone conclusions, has brought our processes of scientific research into line with our processes of spiritual perception. And as during the nineteenth century these methods have established themselves in the fields of historical and literary study, the reason is being more and more exercised in ways analogous to those by which the children of light have perceived spiritual truth. This makes it increasingly easy to conceive of all truth—spiritual, philosophical, artistic, scientific—as a unity, and to realise that the intellect and the soul are not rivals, but partners.

Indeed, we are coming to recognise that the intellect is rather a province of man's spiritual nature than something apart from it: we are feeling

That mind and soul according well,  
May make one music as before,  
But vaster.

Accordingly, while on the one hand we are acquiring knowledge largely through the exercise of moral qualities, on the other we are learning the place of intellectual processes as aids to the understanding of spiritual truth. We appreciate a beautiful picture primarily by the faculty of artistic taste : but for the discernment of its detailed lovelinesses, and the appraising of its place in relation to other pictures, there is abundant room for the use of intellectual and critical processes. The mind confirms the quick perceptions of the cultured artistic sense, and makes those perceptions palpable to the less cultured artistic sense of others. So it is with the perceptions of the soul : the mind cannot supersede the necessity for these perceptions, but it can do much to explain and to verify them.

There is a noteworthy passage in Barclay's *Apology*<sup>1</sup> which recognises this, in the same section in which he has confined the sphere of the reason to what he calls " things natural." " Even as the moon borrows her light from the sun," he says, " so ought men, if they would

<sup>1</sup> Prop. vi. s. 16.

be rightly and comfortably ordered in natural things, to have their reason enlightened by this divine and pure light. Which enlightened reason, in those that obey and follow this true light, we confess may be useful to man even in spiritual things, as it is still subservient and subject to the other; even as the animal life in man, regulated and ordered by his reason, helps him in going about things that are rational." Bacon, we may remember, in his Essay on "Truth," regards all light as coming from the one divine source. "The first creature of God in the works of the days was the light of the sense, the last was the light of reason, and his Sabbath-work ever since is the illumination of the Spirit. First He breathed light upon the face of the matter or chaos; then He breathed light into the face of man; and still He breatheth and inspireth light into the face of His chosen."

The consequences of this recognition, that the faculty which perceives truth has close relations with the light of reason as well as with the light of the Spirit, are far-reaching, and enable the individual for himself to allow for and correct in some measure the elements of human error which distort spiritual guidance.

(1) In the first place, he realises that intellectual limitations largely affect the inspiration that is received : " the disciple may listen full loyalty to his Master's voice ; but that does not ensure his receiving the exact purport of the Master's thought, as it lives in the larger and more perfect mind. In all hearing there is an element of interpretation, of colouring that comes from the hearer's own mind."<sup>1</sup> He will expect to have to be continually on the watch against these disturbing elements, and will have his critical faculties alert to separate away these things which belong to the medium through which the light shines but are not part of the light itself. And he will admit the necessity of submitting the inspiration which comes down to us from other ages to the same sifting process.

(2) Secondly, he learns to approach scientific and moral truth in the same way, and to understand in consequence that there is no dividing line between the truth that is proved by reason and the truth that is perceived by the soul. He learns to look for a certain harmoniousness between all forms of truth, and if he does not at present find it, he awaits with confidence the

<sup>1</sup> I quote from a suggestive paper by J. Vernon Bartlet called "Mission from God, a Meditation on Conscience," *Broad Plain House Papers*, No. IV.

discovery of some underlying truth which shall reconcile the conflicting positions. To the man who thus realises the solidarity of all truth, the fitting on of new truth to old, by way of harmonious and orderly enlargement, is the surest confirmation of both. We seek truth across perpetually receding horizons; we climb the height by ascending spirals; but each horizon, each spiral has served its part, and was a stage in the journey. Milton, in a well-known passage of the *Areopagitica*, tells us "They are the troublers, they are the dividers of unity, who neglect and permit not others to unite those dissevered pieces which are yet wanting to the body of truth. To be still searching what we know not by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it,—for all her body is homogeneal and proportional,—this is the golden rule in theology as well as in arithmetic, and makes up the best harmony in a church."

(3) The consciousness that our subjective impressions of guidance need correction to allow for the personal factor, and the sense that truth of all kinds and in all ages is harmoniously related, naturally point to the great advantage of co-ordinating the light that has come to our



souls with the light that has come to others in our own day or in past ages. This is not the same thing as merely relying on tradition or accepting an experience second-hand, nor does it mean that we refuse to accept any guidance which goes beyond the experience of others,—it means simply that over the country we have to traverse there are many paths already trodden, along which we may have safe and speedy passage. It means supremely that we shall seek to fill our lives with the spirit of Christ's pattern life, and shall distrust all guidance which leads us away from His example. The voice of Christ's Spirit can never contradict the true meaning of the Master's life.

The application to revealed truth of these three processes of separating away the human element, unifying new truth with old, and co-ordinating individual experience with general experience and the convictions of the present with those of the past, has made the Bible a new book, and the record of church history a new inspiration. Criticism has often been in the hands of men who have laid undue emphasis on the intellectual processes they have used, and have too little cultivated their faculty of spiritual vision, and the results, as must be the

case during an age of rapidly enlarging knowledge, have been subject to perpetual revision and restatement. We have gained new instruments of wonderful potency for the verification of truth ; we expect more from them than they can accomplish, but shall learn by experience the limits of their use. When the well-assured results of this work of criticism, unification and co-ordination emerge, the revelation of God, in history and in the souls of those who have been His friends and prophets, will be set in clearer light and fuller sequence, shining more and more unto the perfect day.

Much of this work has already been carried to the point of yielding assured results ; much awaits further light and verification ; but, meanwhile, the work itself has already effected one great change in our habits of thought,—it has given men an intellectual courage in the pursuit of truth, a confidence that truth can face the fullest inquiry, a certainty that when the dross is purged away, pure gold will remain.

The other department of guidance, which we can explore with surer steps than our early Friends, is the relation between individual guidance and what I have called corporate guidance. On the intellectual side, as we have

just seen, the perception of the harmoniousness of all truth, and the necessity for correcting the distracting personal factor by the experience of others, have established a close relation between the guidance of the individual and of the church catholic. But the help that comes in this way is chiefly useful by way of confirmation. It must not be allowed to limit our faith: we have our own course to steer, and in face of fresh problems must launch out for ourselves into the deep, as the Captain of our salvation may direct. This fresh service involves an experience of new truth to those who undertake it, and an education in new truth to the rest of the church. And it is with individuals rather than with communities that new truth originates. As Joseph Sturge has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> "It seems to be the will of Him who is infinite in wisdom that light upon great subjects should first arise and be gradually spread, through the faithfulness of individuals in acting up to their own convictions." Accordingly, while corporate guidance is of great value in controlling individual extravagance, it is a source of great danger to the church if it is opposed to a genuine individual concern, for in such a case it is a

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs*, by Henry Richard, p. 415.

control of the more enlightened by the less enlightened. John Wilhelm Rowntree, in discussing the relation of individual and corporate guidance, says,<sup>1</sup> "The difficulties of the doctrine of Inward Guidance are, as James Nayler's experience reminds us, serious and practical. I would suggest that the solution lies in a deeper interpretation of the person and message of Jesus Christ. Apart from the thought of God as we see Him set forth in Jesus, and the common consciousness of truth as revealed in lofty souls who have been touched by His spiritual fire, it is not evident how the faults of individual interpretation are to be corrected. . . . (But) with Jesus as the Gospel, witnessed in the conscience of a civilisation infected by His Spirit, I see the balance-wheel to the doctrine of the Inward Light."

It is only under conditions such as these that the church becomes illuminated and illuminating. Its leadership of men depends upon its inspiration. Its business is to bear witness to its Master, and resolutely to apply the Spirit of Christ to the changing needs and occasions of the age. It should be concerned not with its privileges, but with its duties; not with its

<sup>1</sup> *Essays and Addresses*, p. 244.

limitations, but with its life; not with its methods, but with its message. The living church has a prophetic function,—the duty of using its faculty of spiritual vision so as to penetrate below the surface of life to its inner meaning. Its insight should lay bare the issues of good and evil that underlie the conventional morality and the current conduct of the time. Its faith should give it the courage to judge these issues from the standpoint of righteousness, not by worldly policy or the promptings of self-interest. The ideals of the Master are often regarded as impracticable in our unbrotherly world. But the church is their natural guardian, and has the mission of vindicating and realising them. As the writer of the *Epistle to Diognetus* says, "What the soul is in a body, this the Christians are in the world." The church cannot ally itself with militarism or injustice, or the pride and greed of men, without becoming a false prophet and misrepresenting its Lord. But as the champion of forlorn hopes, as the inspired Mentor of national life, it has again and again triumphed, not by compromise, but by faithfulness.

When we contrast the devastating effect upon Christianity of a worldly church with the

high prophetic power of a church that is inspired with its mission for the Kingdom of God, the influence for good or evil of the corporate guidance given by the Christian community comes painfully home to us. And we understand how the first work of a Christ-like spirit such as John Woolman's lay in rousing his own church to a sense of the oppression which burdened his own soul.

Is it possible then to suggest how the corporate guidance of the community can be applied so as to conserve its wonderful helpfulness and avoid as far as possible the dangers that attend it? The line of safety lies, I think, in maintaining our churches as fellowships rather than as institutions. Our Lord Himself gathered a discipleship, which was to spread by vital processes comparable with the leaven in the meal or the seed that brought forth its hundredfold. Surely, in harmony with this teaching, the church should devote itself to guidance along channels of vital relation, and should accordingly subordinate methods of authority and discipline to methods of education and illumination. It is the business of the church to foster open-hearted intercourse, united prayer and study, loyal comradeship,

communion in worship and in service,—all those human channels along which education and illumination come. Chiefly does it need to promote leadership and comradeship,—leadership strong in teaching and in high example, comradeship rich in study and in service. No student of Quaker history can doubt that the close association of the itinerating Publishers of Truth with one another was of great value. The movements in our Society and in other churches which afford scope for the development of this group-spirit are of the highest promise. In the intercourse of friendship and the unity of common work, the personality becomes exalted and enlarged.

## VI.

The life itself comes into our individual spirits from the wide realms of the Spirit. And it may also, as we have seen, through our spirits reach the spirits of our fellows. The problem, therefore, is one of opening our hearts to its entrance and giving it free course through our lives along the channels of brotherly service. No processes that fail to vitalise can be of use here. Broadly speaking, what the church requires is to replace mechanical methods of instruction by the vital

force of an education which develops character, organisation by fellowship, the upholding of an ancient standard by a life of self-renouncing love. It is by drawing out the faculties of mind and soul that we shall multiply men of vision ; it is by fellowship that we shall promote that enrichment of experience which is the special reward of friendship ; it is by service that we shall express with living power the truth we hold.

Many of us believe that the Society of Friends in this country has already begun development along these lines, and will not turn back. We see in the history of a short hundred years, how an era of discipline has given way to an era of ever-expanding service for others, and we feel ourselves on the brink of a new era in which the spiritual needs of those we have helped, and the larger social consciousness with which the service has enriched our lives will expand the narrow limits of our Society into a wider fellowship. The Adult School movement is the greatest result of this era of service, and in its organic plasticity and its strength in leadership, education and fellowship, has shown us the type of Society that the Quaker spirit, if allowed free action, creates for itself to-day. With the addition of appropriate meetings



for worship, and for the publishing of truth, such a type of fellowship will, we may hope, more and more form the Quakerism of the future.

A Society maintaining its relation with the realms of spiritual life along the lines of education, fellowship with Christ and with one another, and inspired leadership will embody in itself the chief lessons that are to be learnt from our study of guidance in the experience of Friends. We have seen the need for the sensitised soul and the well-trained mind; we have recognised the supreme necessity for a whole-hearted following of Christ; we have noted the added strength of insight that comes from fellowship, and the high place of inspired leadership; and we have seen also the deadening effects of authority, tradition and organisation where they are allowed to become the primary methods for maintaining a church. We have realised for the individual the fundamental necessity for the sensitive eye and the obedient heart, the special value of meditation and waiting on the Lord, and the place of the well-furnished judgment and the trained intellect.

We have noted these things chiefly as they affect that holy experiment in spiritual guidance,

known as the Society of Friends. But it should be evident that the conclusions we have drawn have their validity for every section of the church universal that recognises the freedom and fulness of a life renewed from generation to generation by the living Spirit of Christ. Let each section of the church apply the lessons to its own case. The effort of Friends to maintain a church and to fulfil a great spiritual mission by reliance on vital processes—by fostering life and then giving that life free course—, may well arrest the attention of others. For ourselves, it should bring with it a resolve to maintain, by a fuller dedication of life to the divine will, the high level of voluntary service which the church of Christ, in any true conception of it, demands from all its members. And this fuller dedication will be possible if we all learn one great lesson—that the Divine Personality with whom our spirits have communion, reveals Himself along the common ways of life and with the help of the natural faculties of man. We wait for some phenomenal manifestation of the Spirit : if we would consult our own hearts in the silence of all flesh, we should become aware that the Spirit is manifesting Himself in the humble and seeking soul

as a presence continually at work if we will receive Him, who enlarges our faculties, strengthens our characters, purifies our vision, calls forth our service, and gives us a foretaste of what Woolman calls "the true felicity of man in this life and in that which is to come," namely, "being inwardly united to the Fountain of universal love and bliss."

May we not all, as churches and as individuals, join in the noble prayer of Boethius, as rendered by the saintliest of our kings, Alfred: "Grant now, O Lord, to our minds that through the difficulties of the world they may rise to Thee, and from our daily work come to Thee, so that with our minds' open eyes we may see Thee, who art the noble Fount of all good things. Grant us, we pray Thee, sound eyes of our mind to fasten on Thee, and drive off the mist that now hangs before them, and enlighten them, O Lord, with Thy light. For Thou art the brightness of the true light, and Thou art the quiet rest of the righteous, and Thou causest them to see Thee. Thou art of all things beginning and end. Thou bearest all things without labour. Thou art both the Way, and the Guide, and the Place that the way leads to."



## Notes.

Readers who desire further information regarding the history and beliefs of Friends, will find the following books useful :—

The first Swarthmore Lecture :—

QUAKERISM : A RELIGION OF LIFE. By  
Rufus M. Jones, M.A. 1s. net.

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THOS. ELLWOOD'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY. 1s. 6d. and  
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JOHN S. ROWNTREE : HIS LIFE AND WORK. 6s. net.

JOHN WOOLMAN'S JOURNAL. Introduction by  
J. G. Whittier. 1s. 6d. and 2s. 6d. net.

THE RISE OF THE QUAKERS. By T. E. Harvey,  
M.A. 1s. 6d.

THE STORY OF QUAKERISM (for young people). By  
E. B. Emmott. 1s. and 3s. 6d. net.

QUAKER STRONGHOLDS. By Caroline E. Stephen.  
1s. and 2s. 6d. net.

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THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS : ITS FAITH AND PRACTICE. By J. S. Rowntree. 6d. and 1s. net.

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- A DYNAMIC FAITH. By Rufus M. Jones, M.A. 6d. and 1s. net.
- ESSAYS AND ADDRESSES. By John Wilhelm Rowntree. 5s. net.
- THE GUIDING HAND OF GOD. By J. Rendel Harris, M.A. 1s. 6d. net.
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