

QUAKER LANGUAGE

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THE wonderful process by which life and thought are expressed in words goes on for the most part without men noticing it or perceiving its significance. How strange a thing is this sacrament of human speech, by which a succession of articulated sounds may stir up in the hearts of the hearers such different thoughts and feelings, and be the vehicle on which men's minds may ride out across eons of time and even beyond the vast expanse of space itself! The language of men carries with it the story of the past, as do their bodies. We can trace the origin of abstract thought in words which once were simple pictures of physical processes, though now it may need an effort to realise it. We speak of grasping an idea, of forming a conception, of understanding something, of drawing a conclusion, without apprehending at the time that we are using symbols from the material world to describe something that may be actually more real to us in our experience than that world of physical reality itself.

Language grows with the race, and as our knowledge extends, new words come into being to express it. Thus in our own generation, apart from the immense vocabulary of science and technology, the invention of the motor car and the discovery of wireless have added a host of words to the repertory of quite ordinary folk and have filled old words with new meanings.

It would form a subject of deeply interesting study to trace the way in which the religious life of man has found expression in words and how the meaning of these words has changed and deepened in order to embody the higher needs of the spirit.

Sometimes, too, the new meaning which a word has won through its use to express some phase of religious life has been extended by a wider application. Thus the meaning of the word *call*, in such a phrase as 'Wilberforce felt a call to devote his life to the abolition of the slave trade,' may be traced to the story of the call of the child Samuel in the Bible, while it is often also used in a wider and shallower way with hardly any thought of its origin. Many words that are used to express aspects of religious life are not specifically Christian in origin; while others can be shown to owe their birth or their deeper significance to their use in the life of the Christian Church. Perhaps the most remarkable case of this kind is the new, richer meaning put into the word *ἀγάπη* in the New Testament to express the Christian experience of brotherly love; while the English language has shown an instance of the reverse process in the translation *charity*, which unhappily has lost in common use the noble depth and width of its earlier significance. When a man speaks of having a *cross* to bear, he hardly thinks of the august memories which that metaphor calls up when we consider its origin, or still less how that Divine act of sacrifice transformed an instrument of degrading torture to the noblest of symbols.

Naturally many of the great words of religion are of world-wide use beyond the bounds of the Christian Church, even though within its borders they may acquire a special significance. Such words are *worship*, *holiness*, *sin*, *sacrifice*. There are other words, like *faith* and *grace*, which have taken

a colour and a fulness that they had not before, but which we find for the first time in the New Testament ; while a multitude of words have grown up to describe offices and functions of the life of the Church, apart from the many technical words of ecclesiastical and theological use.

It is natural that any group of men and women bound together by a common religious life and trying to express that life in common worship and other collective activity should in the course of time come to the use of a certain common religious language. In proportion as their experience is of value and embodies truths not equally represented elsewhere, we should expect to find this reflected in some contribution to the development of the language in which religious life is translated. Let us try to test this in the case of the Society of Friends in the three centuries of its existence.

The deepest experience of the life of the spirit is in a region where differences of sect disappear. The mystics of all ages share a common language, for they share a common life. Again and again as we read them we may find in Fox and Penn, in Penington and Woolman, and in less known Quaker writers, passages through which there rings the same note that we have caught in the writings of Thomas à Kempis or St. Teresa, or it may be in some Eastern saint. 'Multae terricolis linguæ, coelestibus una.' But the one flock has different folds and there are distinguishing characteristics of the Quaker fold which are worthy of being noted.

The most obvious characteristic of Quaker language for over two centuries has now ceased to mark the daily life of the Society of Friends in the way it did a couple of generations ago, with the exception of the 'Conservative' Yearly Meetings in America, parts of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, and the little group of Fritchley Friends in England. The

plain language, which refused to address a single person in the plural and replaced the customary names of the months and of the days of the week by simple numerals, became very soon a distinguishing feature of the early Friends, along with refusal to doff the hat as a sign of honour or respect except in prayer to the Almighty. In the eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries the plain language, along with the traditional Quaker dress of later origin, which by that time accompanied it, were the invariable mark of the consistent Friend and were adopted, often after great inward struggles, by the converts to Quakerism as well as by a number of birthright members, who after a deep spiritual crisis had resolved to take up the cross, as they felt it, of this testimony, which became a symbol to them of the new way of life on which they were entering and also a sacrament of fellowship with those with whom they had cast in their lot. Luke Cock's beautiful sermon on the Weeping Cross gives an admirable example of the struggle of the newly convinced Friend to be faithful to the cross of the plain language :

“ But now my Guide began to lead me up another lane, harder than the first, which was to bear my testimony in using the plain language. This was very hard ; yet I said to my Guide : ‘ Take my feeble pace, and I'll follow Thee as fast as I can. Don't outstretch me, I pray Thee.’ ”¹

Faithfulness to a consistent use of *thee* and *thou* in addressing an individual had sometimes to struggle with a desire not to hurt the susceptibilities of the person addressed, and this led occasionally to the writer falling back on the use of indirect address in the third person. A charming

¹ A large part of this sermon is quoted by William C. Braithwaite in ‘ The Second Period of Quakerism,’ p. 552.

instance of the desire not to offend a beloved sister by the use of thee and thou, together with a careful avoidance of *you*, in the case of a recent Quaker convert is to be found, in the letter of Fanny Henshaw to her sister (1737), quoted by Stephen Hobhouse in his 'William Law and Eighteenth Century Quakerism' (pp. 138, 139), in which the writer concludes: 'I am my dearest sister's truly affectionate sister, F. Henshaw.' (A somewhat different case is the letter of Dr. John Fothergill to Lady Pennington, printed in 'The Journal of the Friends Historical Society,' vol. xx. p. 65.)

The plain language not only avoided the use of honorific titles to the living but also to the dead, and consequently the prefix Saint was dropped, even in place names; Friends referred to Albans, Ives, and Edmundsbury, and the names of streets were similarly treated (a strict London Friend would refer to St. Paul's Churchyard as 'Paul's Yard'), and it is said that some sixty years ago an elderly woman Friend from the country puzzled many passers-by in the City by asking if they could direct her to 'Mary Axe.' In using numerals to distinguish the days of the week and the months the early Quakers were simply carrying out an objection to survivals of paganism which was widely shared amongst seventeenth century Puritan reformers.² The use of the ancient names seemed to them to involve an act of reverence to the Sun and Moon, to Janus and Mars and other gods of a far off day; but to-day we no longer feel this inhibition, though for many of us the simple language of our forefathers has such fragrant memories, that we like to preserve it still in use, at least in our families and at Monthly

² This objection was supported by the injunction in Exodus xxiii. 13: "Make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth."

Meetings. But with this exception the plain language of address which early Friends so stubbornly maintained in an age of courtly shams and deceitful politeness has stronger claims to be maintained and handed on as a precious heritage. In the North of England it is in many parts still the general custom of simple folk to use thee and thou in familiar speech³; elsewhere, outside the Society of Friends, they are hardly used at all except in the language of prayer. It is a serious thing to keep an archaic ritual language for the highest and deepest form of human intercourse; it makes for unreality in religion. It is no longer necessary for us to object to the use of you to a single person as being an act of flattery, as it often was in the seventeenth century, when this was a form of respect paid by youth to age or by social inferiors to superior persons or those in authority, nor do we regard it now as untruthful, simply because we do not think of you as being necessarily plural. But if we still use thee and thou in our own families and amongst intimate friends, as is the case in some continental countries, the words have a richness of meaning and association which makes them a real link of friendship as we employ them in the gatherings of Friends. Friends from different lands, meeting for the first time and addressing each other in that old Quaker way, at once are helped to realise the tie that binds them as members of one family. Still more important is the sense of affection, of intimacy, and of reality which is given to the language of prayer, if we are able to use for it the language which is

³ In this dialect use of thee and thou there is still preserved something of the sense of degrees in social relationship which marked its use in the seventeenth century. It would be generally avoided in speaking to one considered to be a social superior. A lad might use it to a schoolmate, but not to older grown-up persons; an older workman would say thou to a boy working with him, while the same boy would be 'told off' sharply, if he were to use it in reply to the older man.

especially associated with the tenderest and deepest human relationships. If thee and thou disappear from the speech of daily life, it will be a loss to literature, but a greater loss to the language of devotion.⁴

Until recent years members of the Society of Friends were careful, in maintaining the testimony of plain language, to avoid the use of honorific titles of address. There was a democratic plainness in the way in which George Fox and the Friends of the first generation addressed noble and commoner, and treated the occupant of palace and cottage on the same human level. May it not be that we have allowed courtesies of form to come in at the expense of the simple frankness of earlier days ?

The plain language was associated too with the thought of truthfulness, and certainly we feel that the subscription : ' I remain, Thy assured friend,' rings truer than : ' I beg to subscribe myself, Sir, Your most obedient servant.' Fear of any shadow of untruthfulness, however, led Friends in the eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries to a certain circumspection and sometimes to a deliberate vagueness of language, which it is difficult to read now without a smile. Thus in answering the Queries, Meetings often made use of the phrase : '*Nothing appears but that,*' or '*So far as we*

⁴ In describing the plain language employed amongst Friends mention should be made of the curious development of an ungrammatical use of thee instead of thou in the nominative case, which is generally to be found to-day in America, but has never prevailed amongst Friends in the North of England, where the vernacular language of the countryside still preserves the popular use of the second personal pronoun. The use of thee for thou has, however, for several generations been common among Friends in the South of England, where the second person singular occurs less frequently, if at all, in dialect. It is sometimes accompanied by an incorrect verb in the third person : ' Has thee been in the village ? ' instead of ' Hast thou been ? ' It is curious to note the similar development in the language of address in Italian, where the accusative case of a pronoun of the third person is used with the third person of the verb in place of the second person in each case.

know,' instead of an unqualified statement; while in sending a certificate of removal on behalf of a Friend, a like caution was shown in the form of the certificate, which until quite recently was in general use when a Friend removed from his own part of the country to another :

“ John Brown, a member of this Monthly Meeting, having removed to John Street, Clerkenwell, in the compass of yours, and inquiry having been made relative to his conduct and respecting debts, nothing appears to prevent the issue of a certificate on his behalf. We therefore commend him to your Christian care, and remain, with love, your Friends.”

This spirit of circumspection showed itself also when it was necessary to express disagreement of view. Thus it is related of a Manchester Friend that, when a name of which he strongly disapproved was suggested in a Friends' business meeting for some appointment for which nominations were being asked, he rose from his seat and said : ‘ *That is a name which would not have occurred to me.*’ Similarly : ‘ *I cannot see the way clear to unite,*’ would generally be used in place of ‘ I strongly object,’ while sometimes the words : ‘ *I very largely agree with thee,*’ veiled in generous courtesy, at the close of a discussion, the larger measure of disagreement that was left unexpressed.

A similar diffidence of over positive statement would often mark private conversation, an extreme instance being the reply of a Friend to a query as to the health of his delicate wife : ‘ *Thank thee, I think I may safely say that she is much as she sometimes is.*’ As an example of Quaker caution in the accurate use of words it may be mentioned that some thirty years ago an esteemed ministering Friend had written a contribution to a Quaker periodical, and

shortly afterwards the editor received an urgent letter from him, in which he begged that, if it were not too late, the words 'it is possible that' might be replaced by '*it is not impossible that.*'

Yet, apart from such amusing instances of exaggerated caution, do we not need to-day a little more of this desire for truth in common speech?

A mark of the Quakerism of the quietist period is a reverent reticence in speaking of the deeper aspects of religious experience. The *Advices to Ministers and Elders*, first printed in 1783, contain a caution against 'too often repeating the high and holy name.' In speech and writing 'Providence,' 'Almighty Wisdom,' 'Best Wisdom,' 'Infinite Goodness,' 'Best Help,' and other forms of periphrasis were reverently employed, and even in private life these indirect expressions were often preferred to any direct use of the Divine name. I may quote as an instance part of a loving letter of advice, written about 1748 by an ancestress of mine, Hannah Firth, to her son :

"Often, yea very often, in my private retirement before the throne of grace thou art brought into my remembrance, where I humbly beseech His Divine Goodness to incline thy heart to seek after the knowledge of His ways, and become willing to walk therein more than to be rich or great in this world."

Many instances of periphrasis in place of the more direct use of the Divine name may be found in the eighteenth century Quaker correspondence preserved in Kendall's '*Letters on Religious Subjects*,' (1805). Thus John Thorp, in a letter written in 1783, uses the expressions: 'Infinite Mercy,' 'the great and good Shepherd,' 'the source of all good,' 'Omnipotence,' 'the Giver of every good and

perfect gift' (vol. ii. p. 126); while in various letters of Richard Shackleton occur the words: 'the Almighty Benefactor,' 'our Holy Head,' 'All-wise Providence,' 'our merciful Creator,' 'the omnipotent Author of all that is good,' 'our great Benefactor,' 'the great Creator,' 'the good Husbandman,' 'the great Husbandman,' 'our common gracious Parent,' 'the great Giver,' 'the wonderful Architect,' 'Infinite Wisdom,' 'good and beneficent Providence,' 'the Almighty Controuler of the Universe,' 'Omnipotence,' 'the great King,' 'the great Controuler of Events,' 'the Father of Lights and Spirits,' 'the great Master,' 'the Judge of all the earth,' 'the Holy One,' 'Divine Providence,' 'the Divine Hand,' 'his Majesty,' 'the Divine Being,' 'the great Giver of all good,' 'the Father of Mercies,' 'the great and good Husbandman' (vol. i. pp. 70-240). (The letters are not signed in the printed edition.)⁵

There is a beautiful side to this reverence, although it tended in time to become too formal and in its extreme form it actually resulted in a paper of advice issued in the early nineteenth century by Yorkshire Elders, recommending in the course of a plea for greater caution and reverence in language that if there were occasion to refer to the Devil, it might be well to speak of him as 'the Prince of the power of the air.'

'The great enemy of mankind' was another periphrasis for the name of Satan which was often used.

In comparing Quaker religious language at different periods we may observe that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had each its own characteristic note. We owe it to Alfred

⁵ Other Quaker periphrases which have been noted by Norman Penney include: 'Holy Help', 'Unerring Wisdom', 'the Gracious Hand', 'the Divine Fountain', 'the Fountain of Good', 'the Holy Hand', 'the Good Hand', 'the Holy Arm', and 'the Wing of Ancient Goodness'.

Neave Brayshaw's insight that we can now see how clear in the earlier period is the note of warm fellowship which emphasizes that our own spiritual experience is one in which we share together and help one another, and how in the age of quietism this is replaced by a more introversive and individualistic spirit.⁶

Yet for all these defects the spiritual experience of the Quakerism of the quietist period has lessons for us which are preserved in some of its characteristic phrases. The exhortations to *centre down* and to *dig deep* have still their message. The caution to beware of *creaturely activities* was too frequently made use of three or four generations ago : to-day, perhaps, we need reminding of the danger of allowing doing to come before being.

“ Let us not be anxious,” wrote Richard Shackleton in 1781, “ about branching and spreading ; but take root downwards in the hidden life ; so shall we stand against the dangers which attend both from sun and wind ; from popular favour and popular dislike.”⁷

Take root downwards in the hidden life puts into few words a counsel which is not for the eighteenth century only.

Closely connected with this thought is a practice which in our age of rush and hurry has been too often crowded out, but which was described a little over a century ago, by Clarkson in his ‘ Portraiture of Quakerism ’ as characteristic of the life of the Society in his day :⁸ the habit of *dropping into silence*, when a little group are met together and their thoughts are turned from speech to meditation, prayer and communion.

⁶ See A. Neave Brayshaw : ‘ The Quakers : Their Story and Message,’ ch. viii, especially p. 99, note.

⁷ John Kendall's ‘ Letters.’ vol. ii. p. 62.

⁸ Vol. i. pp. 173 seq. The whole passage is of great interest.

Such times of waiting together in silence, especially when they occurred during the religious visits frequently paid to the families of Friends by ministering Friends, were often spoken of as *opportunities* or *family sittings*. Note the characteristic way in which understatement is preferred to overstatement in avoiding the use of a word which necessarily connoted prayer. The use of these phrases was sometimes as bewildering to non-members as the practice itself. On one occasion some sixty years ago two brothers had to explain to their schoolmaster, who was not a Quaker, the reason why they were late to school. "Please, we've had a family visit." "A what?" "Please, it was an opportunity." "Whatever do you mean?" "Please, we had a visiting Friend with us." It took some little further explanation before the puzzled pedagogue understood what had happened.

It may be noted that in the eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries a curious periphrasis was often employed in speaking of ministry. A Friend who spoke in meeting was said to have *appeared in the ministry* or, if he offered prayer, to have *appeared in supplication*. As late as the middle of the nineteenth century an aged Friend, inquiring about a meeting at which she was unable to be present and being told that a certain woman Friend had appeared in the ministry, inquired: "Did she appear upon her feet or upon her knees?"

When Friends *travelling in the ministry* engaged in *family visits* (both of these, be it noted, distinctively Quaker phrases), they would often *speak to states*. There are many remarkable instances preserved both in memory and in print of the way in which ministers were enabled to *speak to the condition* of their hearers, and the journals of the ministering Friends of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries contain records of their exercise of soul while engaged in this difficult task,

as well of the deep exercise occasioned by their service in meetings for worship. *The springs of ministry were low ; I had deep wading ;* are expressions of the travail of spirit preceding the vocal ministry. " It proved, as at many other places," writes Thomas Shillitoe, of a meeting at New Garden, in Pennsylvania, " a time of close labour and travail to come at the spring of Divine life."⁹

In these and other expressions of the exercise of spirit involved in the work of the ministry it is needful to have some inward experience to be able to translate the meaning aright. Very significant is the ancient Quaker caution to ministers against *grinding with the water that is past*, repeating a message which was once a living one when the sense of prompting is no longer there. Another notable phrase was one of caution against *going before thy Guide*. Noteworthy too is the wise warning against *running out into words*.

It would be possible to collect a great number of instances of the characteristic figurative language in which the Quaker ministers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries gave expression to their labours in meetings for worship. Typical examples may be found in Job Scott's ' Journal' :

(1786). " In the forenoon I attended Market Street meeting [Philadelphia] and soon feeling a very weighty concern resting upon my spirit, I stood up in the fresh openings of life, and began to express what I had in commission ; but keeping carefully to the Divine Guide, I soon felt all to be shut up again, whereupon I immediately sat down, rejoicing that I was preserved from proclaiming without life what just before was opened in the life : so I sat quite easy, being delivered from the great weight and exercise which I had felt, until towards the close of the meeting and after

⁹ ' Journal' : vol. ii. p. 252.

another Friend had well declared the truth among us, I again stood up and very fully cleared my mind.—I left this meeting in the true joy of heart, and rejoiced in the Lord, my gracious Preserver, who is learning me to depend on and attend to his *shuttings*, as well as his *openings* ; and this is the only way of safety.”¹⁰

Or again :

“The way having thus opened to go to Germantown, . . . it now seemed clearly to open to go forward to Chester, where, through deep wading, and a living travail of soul, life rose into good dominion ; though I had to labour some time, even after I stood up, under much depression of mind, looking carefully to see the way and find the stepping stones : but the meeting ended well, and truth reigned.”¹¹

Sometimes an unexpected military metaphor may occur :—

“I went to the monthly meeting at Horsham, and, after viewing the camp a while in silence, had to lift up my voice like a trumpet and sound an alarum among them, wishing them to feel for themselves, lest ere they were aware, and while sitting carelessly at ease, the enemy should surround them and lead them captive away. After this I sat in a low suffering state through the whole transactions of their business ; but just at the close my trumpet was again prepared to sound ; and feeling strength to arise out of great weakness, and light out of obscurity, I so renewed the alarm among them, as to feel quite easy and comfortable in my mind—blessed be the Lord who helped me ; for I sensibly felt, that had not his power arose for

¹⁰ ‘ Journal ’, 1798 ed. p. 130.

¹¹ Id. p. 128.

my deliverance, I must have sunk down under a load of distress, and gone away burdened in spirit, having no might nor ability to throw my heavy load off myself."¹²

The language is quaint, but it indicates a deep spiritual experience. The metaphor of the Gospel Trumpet was a favourite one. Thus on 23 vi. 1761, Dr. John Rutty records in his 'Spiritual Diary': "At meeting, a sweet, comfortable drawing to the filial fear: also a right Gospel alarm from a young Trumpeter, which was comfortable."¹³

The peculiar basis of Quaker worship has naturally led to great attention being paid to the meaning of silence. *A living silence* is a phrase often used by Friends to express that silence which is much more than outward stillness and rich with life and meaning, that can but partially find expression in words. '*A covering of silence,*' '*a solemn covering was over the meeting,*' '*the meeting separated under a covering of solemnity,*' are characteristic Quaker phrases, hinting at the effect of such living silence. Very expressive of the Quaker view of the ministry too is the simple statement that words spoken have been *in the life*.

To be *in a gathered state* describes the condition of spiritual concentration and calm which is appropriate to silent worship and the epithet *gathered* is accordingly similarly used both of meetings and of individuals.

Sometimes the old phrases with which ministering Friends of a century ago indicated their sense of call to service have a quaint charm to our ears to-day: "I *felt a draught* in my mind towards America."¹⁴ On one occasion a Friend,

¹² Job Scott's 'Journal': 1798 ed. p. 126.

¹³ 'A Spiritual Diary,' vol. i. p. 316.

¹⁴ cf. 'Feeling drawings of Gospel love towards some parts of the seashore about Cape May.' Stephen Grellet (1798): 'Memoirs,' vol. i. p. 40.

laying before the Yearly Meeting his concern to go with a message to the Women's Yearly Meeting, expressed it in the words: 'I feel a draught of love towards the Women's apartments.' *To feel drawn towards* a service is the early stage of a process which may end in the service being *laid upon* the minister; while a characteristic Quaker expression for the corresponding inhibition is *to feel* or *find a stop in the mind*. These phrases are still in general use among Friends.

Perhaps the most remarkable of Quaker phrases used in connection with the inward call to a definite duty is the word *concern*. It has a depth of meaning which is hardly to be found in its use in writers unconnected with the Society of Friends. A Friend may be interested in some work and giving much time and thought to it without this reaching the point of a concern. He may be invited to undertake some piece of service and may feel attracted by it, and yet after a pause he may conclude by saying that he does not feel a concern for it. A concern may be both individual and collective, and very often we may note the use of such a phrase as: 'The meeting feels a concern for the present industrial situation,' or 'This meeting shares the concern of our Friend for the reform of the penal system.' It is especially used to connote some definite religious service, which, after a fitting interval of thought and prayer, has become to a Friend so clearly a duty to which he must be faithful, that he seeks the help and encouragement of the fellowship of the Society and 'lays his concern before the meeting.' A derivative of this word is the phrase, *a well-concerned Friend*, which is applied to one with whom the welfare of the Society and the promotion of its principles and way of life is a matter of living concern.

A weighty Friend is one who not only has such a concern,

but whose experience and judgment are such as to make his counsel of special value.

A *convinced Friend* is not used, as might be supposed by outsiders, to signify any Friend who has a thorough understanding of and belief in the principles of the Society, but one who has joined the Society from without by conviction, in contradistinction to those who have been brought up as members of the Society and are spoken of as *birthright members*. In this connection we may remember that Joseph Bevan Braithwaite was once asked: 'How many generations does it take to make a weighty Friend, two generations or three generations?' 'Regeneration,' came at once the apt reply.

The method by which the Society of Friends conducts its business and the usages which have grown up as its organisation has developed have naturally given rise to expressions and turns of phrase which are distinctive in character. Perhaps the most significant of these is *the sense of the meeting* by which, and not by counting heads, the clerk has to be guided in recording his minute of the decision arrived at.

The practice of having Elders appointed to encourage and advise those taking part in the vocal ministry in meetings for worship is a wise provision for good order in the midst of freedom. In the later eighteenth century and throughout a considerable part of the nineteenth century the function of the Elders was far too largely a negative one of caution and repression, and hence the colloquial Quaker phrase: 'She gave her friend a good *eldering*,' might in a different circle be rendered as 'a good *wigging*'; to say that so and so needs *eldering* always, I am afraid, implies that it is not encouragement that is required.

The office of Overseer has given rise to no similar usage, but it is interesting to note that in its origin at the time of

the revival of discipline in the middle of the eighteenth century it was regarded as a very formidable and onerous office and in some places the utmost difficulty was found in getting even one or two Friends to undertake the duty.

Thus, in Dublin, Dr. John Ruddy records in 1754 (Twelfth Month, 6th) :

“ See our weakness as a people : a new office, under the denomination of overseer, was appointed, but expired in one year ; men to succeed in the post could not be found. Such a discouragement of a care truly Christian inclined me to conclude, it was a pity the institution had been ever made.”¹⁵

Or, again, in 1755 (Third Month, 18th) :

“ On giving up the office of overseers, a degree of zeal, courage and honesty. The present times will hardly admit of the continuance of that office.”¹⁶

To-day Overseers are so much concerned with the assistance of the poor, making provision for the education of children, and the visitation of the sick, and with keeping in touch with distant members, that the severer duty of timely dealing with delinquents tends to sink into the background.

The Society of Friends emphasises its view of the corporate responsibility of all its members under the leadership of the Spirit of Christ by avoiding the offices of Moderator, President, or Chairman in its business meetings and making use instead of the services of a *clerk* and *assistant clerks*, whose title emphasises the underlying thought that the meeting itself has the deciding authority, and that its

¹⁵ ‘ A Spiritual Diary ’, vol. i. p. 29.

¹⁶ Id. p. 44.

servants' duty is to interpret and record the sense of the meeting. Until recent years the same procedure held good in the case of Friends' Committees, and it is perhaps to be regretted that latterly our large permanent committees have replaced their clerks by chairmen. In the Five Years Meeting of American Friends the office of clerk is rightly retained, but the duties are subdivided between the presiding Clerk, who guides the discussions, the recording Clerk, who frames the minutes, and the reading Clerk, who reads them, gives out notices and attends to minor duties.

Any one who wishes to go back to the Quaker language and Quaker atmosphere of four generations ago and to realise its charm would be well advised to attend a sitting of the Ohio (Conservative) Yearly Meeting at Stillwater, near Barnesville, Ohio, where he can still see the plain dress of old days and hear about him the old plain language. Everything is conducted with dignity and simplicity and with the utmost deliberation and absence of hurry. When names for the appointment of a committee are desired, there is a pause, and then at decent intervals one Friend or another will arise and say: *I feel free to propose the name of John A,* or *I am free to submit the name of David B.* Even in the printed Minutes of the Yearly Meeting one can notice the characteristic circumspection of language which prefers understatement to the risk of a general assertion which might not in every case be truthful. Thus in the summary of the answers to the Queries from the Quarterly Meetings for the year 1927 we read:

“First: with the exception of four meetings for worship all our meetings for worship and discipline have been attended, but meetings in the middle of the week are neglected by some. Unbecoming behavior nearly

avoided, with some exceptions in instances of sleeping. The hour for assembling mostly observed.

Second: We believe most Friends maintain love towards each other in a good degree becoming our Christian profession. Tale-bearing and detraction discouraged but not avoided as much as would be best. Some care has been taken to end differences, although way has not opened to act in all cases.¹⁷

And so on through the rest of the eight Queries. Similar answers are given by the Women's Yearly Meeting, who report: 'Tale-bearing and detraction measurably discouraged. Endeavours are used to end differences when they arise.'¹⁸

Doubtless in old days, when similar answers were prepared by meetings of Friends in England too much time was spent on weighing the relative merits of the particular qualifying adjectives in the record: to-day our danger lies in a very different direction.

There are many good English words which, while not altered in meaning, have a special colour and content in their use in Quaker corporate life. Instances of such are to be found in *the discipline, the state of the Society, the Queries, the Advices, testimonies concerning deceased Friends, disownment, convincement, liberation, liberating minute, returning minute*.¹⁹

There remain, however, two words and their derivatives which deserve a longer notice: the words *Friends* and

¹⁷ Minutes of Ohio Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1927, p. 8.

¹⁸ Id. p. 37.

¹⁹ A *minute of liberation* or *liberating minute* is one granted by a Monthly or Quarterly Meeting, by the Meeting for Sufferings, or by the Yearly Meeting, to a Friend travelling in the Ministry; the *returning minute* is the minute given to him on the completion of his service by the Meeting in whose area his service has lain, to be laid before his own Meeting when he returns his minute of liberation.

Quakers (for the derivatives one must consult the Oxford English Dictionary : they are very numerous, from quakerly, unquakerly, Friendly and Unfriendly, to Quakerish and Quakerdom, quakerization, quakerize, quakership, quakerly, quakeress, quakerism, quakery).²⁰ Of these we may note that the word Friends grew gradually, naturally, and unconsciously to be applied by the people called Quakers to each other, and it was associated not only with the personal tie of affection that united them together, but with the thought that they were the Friends of Truth.

The name Quaker was first applied to George Fox by Justice Gervase Bennett, of Derby, in 1650, 'because,' as Fox says in his 'Journal,' 'we bid them tremble at the word of God.' The name was evidently in popular use at the time to describe some emotional religious enthusiasts, as the Oxford English Dictionary quotes a letter of information in the Clarendon MSS., No. 2624, written from London in 1647 :

"I heare of a sect of woemen (they are at Southwarke) come from beyond sea, called quakers; and these swell, shiver, and shake, and when they come to themselves (for in all this fitt Mahommets holy-ghost hath been conversing with them) they begin to preache what hath bin delivered to them by the Spirit."

How much George Fox himself disliked the name can be seen in the long letter of protest printed for the first time in the Cambridge 'Journal' (pp. 5-8), and probably written in 1653 (when Bennett was a member of the Barebones Parliament). By the time this letter was written its evidence shows

²⁰ 'Quakerage' (a word which does not occur in the Oxford English Dictionary) is the name given to the house at Nanking in which reside the missionaries from the Yearly Meeting of Ohio (meeting at Damascus).

that the appellation Quakers had 'spread over the nation' and been made mocking use of by the scornful populace.

In his answer to works by Jeremiah Ives, Fox indignantly denies the assertion of Ives that 'the Quakers give that name (a quaking) to themselves, and others do not give it them as a nick-name.' Fox says :

"The first that ever I did hear them called *Quakers*, and the name given to them of *Quakers*, was one *Gervase Bennet* in *Darby*, a persecutor called a Justice of Peace, though many years before the power of the Lord was witnessed, yet I never heard them have that name of Quakers given, before that corrupt Justice gave it to them, and misnamed them so, and in scorn called them so, and thou art one of his scholars; and *Quaking* and trembling we own, though they in scorn calls us so, and the salvation wrought out with fear and trembling we witness."²¹

In contrast to George Fox's dislike of the name we find James Nayler replying to another book of the same Jeremiah Ives, called 'Quakers Quaking', in a pamphlet entitled: 'Weaknes above Wickednes, . . . which is the Quaker's Defence against the Boaster and his deceitful slanders, . . .' (1656). Here on his title page Nayler uses the name of Quakers without protest, and he passes by the point to which Fox raised objection :

"Thou begins about our Quaking, whether we may be so called or no, about which I shall not contend, what Names we receive from the world, whether they call us that which is true, or that which is not true, the thing to me I pass by. . . ."

²¹ Fox : 'The Great Mistery,' 1659, p. 61, and cf. p. 110.

Robert Barclay explains in his 'Apology' (Eleventh Proposition, § 8) the origin of the name in the exercise of the spirit breaking forth in a meeting and leading to a trembling of body :

"From this the name of Quakers, *i.e.*, tremblers, was first reproachfully cast upon us, which though it be none of our choosing, yet in this respect we are not ashamed of it, but have rather reason to rejoyce therefore, even that we are sensible of this power, that hath often-times laid hold upon our adversarys and made them yield unto us, and joyn with us, and confess to the Truth, before they had any distinct or discursive knowledg of our doctrines. . . ." (1678 edition).

William Penn speaks in one passage of 'the honest title of Quaker'; and in 1673 he published a defence of Friends' views under the title of 'The Christian Quaker and his Divine Testimony stated and vindicated, from Scripture, Reason and Authority.'

In 1673 Penn issued another work: 'Quakerism: a new nick-name for old Christianity'; and in 1674 a reply to an opponent, which was entitled: 'The Counterfeit Christian detected and the real Quaker justified'; and in the course of this work Penn frequently uses the popular designation of Quaker without qualification.²²

George Whitehead was another Quaker leader who did not hesitate about the use of the name of Quaker. In the

²² For the name 'Quaker' see Norman Penney's note at p. 395 of vol. i of Fox's 'Journal' (Cambridge Edition). Also A. Neave Brayshaw: 'The Quakers, their story and message': pp. 32, 33; and W. C. Braithwaite: 'The Beginnings of Quakerism': pp. 57, 58, which cites as an early use of the name in print: 'We have many sects now abroad, Seekers, Shakers, Quakers, Ranters (and now Creepers)' in 'The Pulpit guarded with XVII Arguments' (London, 1652).

titles of various works of his it repeatedly recurs. Amongst them may be instanced: 'Truth defending the Quakers and their principles': 1659 (by G. W. and G. Fox, the younger); 'The Quakers no deceivers': 1660; 'The Christian Quaker and his Divine testimony vindicated': 1673; 'The Real Quaker a real Protestant': 1679; and other works.

It is interesting to note, however, that in the closing decade of the seventeenth century, Sewel, the Dutch historian of Quakerism, states, in his little Latin book of animadversions on Gerard Croese's 'Historia Quakeriana,' that the name of Quakers was not accepted by Friends themselves without qualification, but was always accompanied by some words showing that it was given to them in contempt by others.³³

³³ His statement is as follows: "Cum varia ab initio in hos homines conficta fuerint nomina, irrita tamen cuncta, donec quidam Judex Bennet in Darby, audiens Foxum, Anno 1650, ipsum et alios alloquentem: *Tremite ad verbum Dei*; eos Quakeros vocare ausus. Etiamsi autem hoc vocabulum Anglice ob notam significationem tam horridum non sit, quam apud peregrinos propter ignotam significationem ipsiusque sonum; quia tamen haec appellatio non ita evanescebat, uti praecedentes onnes, sed firmiter ipsis adhaerescere, adeo ut eam abigere impossibile fuerit, nihilominus hanc tam simpliciter, etiam distinctionis saltem gratia, non admisere, sed semper, uti erat, per contemptum ipsis datam esse ostendebant, et in scriptis quoque suis Anglice ita exprimebant: 'in scorn'; seu 'scornfully'; sive 'of the world called Quakers'; id est, per contemptum, seu contemptim; seu a mundo vocati trementes; Etsi unquam quoque unus vel alter tremore quodam ob certas rationes [de quibus Barcl. in 'Apol.' p. 231] correptus fuerit, qua fiducia tamen Autor de omnibus his dicere potuerit, quod vel raro uni vel alteri accidit? scribit enim: Nomenclaturam illam et rem ipsam adeo non refugiunt, et detestantur, ut reantur utramque sano sensu, suo quodammodo jure se convenire. Et fatentur enim se esse tremulos, neque diffitentur, dum suis operantur sacris, &c. saepe intremere, &c. et postquam redeunt ad se et se recolligunt (hisce quasi Enthusiastae exhibentur, a quibus tamen ipsi testante autore ipso in sequentibus ibidem verbis se longe separant) "supervenienti laetitiae vix se posse temperare, et hinc sequi quandoque" (non ut antea: *saepe*) tremulos modos animi et corporis.

"Si enim a tali particulari ad universale auctori concludere placuerit ipse novit absurdam esse consequentiam, et ita propte M sen, de quo dicitur Act. 7: 32, ipsum tremuisse; et propter Davidem et alios,

From this time the name Quaker gradually became accepted by Friends as the name by which they were known to others ; while in more recent years it has been used by them themselves with an affection in which the original note of scorn has passed away ; so that during the last thirty or forty years many of the books explaining Friends' views and telling the story of the Society of Friends have borne in their titles the name of Quaker or Quakerism.

The word Quaker passed into the German language as Quäker in the seventeenth century, and into French at first in the gallicised form, Couacre ; while it has also passed into Italian, Danish, Latin, and other languages. The great work of child feeding in Germany, carried out through the

qui trementes fuisse in sacris perhibentur, imo ob mandatum Pauli Philipp. 2 : 12, *Cum timore et tremore vestram ipsorum salutem conficite*; tam facile ac necessario concludere cogereetur, omnes fideles, et ita eum ipsum, si fidelis ipse, debere esse tremulos. Ast non dubito et ipsi quoque notum esse, hunc tremorem, quamvis divinum, nunquam apud ullos, et ita quoque neque inter hos, ut aliquid essentielle ac necessarium verae fidei fuisse aut etiamnum esse. Vid. hac de re plura in den Erinnerungen über Joh. Winklers Predigern in Hamburg 3. Predigten, p. 30, seqq."

(Dilucidationes quaedam valde necessariae in Gerardi Croesi Historiam Quakerianam editæ a Philaletha, Amstelodami, 1696, pp. 9-10).

I have quoted this passage at length, as the work in which it occurs is scarce and not easily accessible. The opening sentences may be rendered as follows :

"From the beginning various names were invented for these people, yet all to no purpose, until a certain Justice Bennet in Derby, hearing Fox bidding him and others *tremble at the Word of God*, dared to call them Quakers. But even though this word is not so uncouth in English, on account of its meaning being known, as it is amongst foreigners on account of its meaning being unknown and of its very sound, yet in view of the fact that this appellation did not disappear, as all other preceding ones had done, but stuck more firmly to them, so that it was impossible to drive it away, nonetheless they did not admit it without qualification, even for distinction's sake, but always showed that it was given to them in contempt, as was in fact the case, and in their own writings too they expressed this in English thus: 'in scorn,' or 'scornfully,' or 'of the world called Quakers'."

service of American Friends in the years that followed the War, gave the word a new interest to millions, to whom the 'Quäkerspeisung' brought a practical message of friendship and goodwill ; and it has been recorded that a little German lad, coming home glowing with pleasure after the meal thus provided, expressed his feelings by coining a new verb in his satisfied exclamation : ' Ich bin gequäkert.'

Looking back across the centuries, we may be thankful for the thousands of simple folk unknown to history, the impress of whose lives has gradually changed a nickname of scorn and contempt into an honourable name, of which many of us may feel ourselves to-day unworthy.

We have noted that it was only gradually and probably unconsciously that the name of Friends became used by the people called Quakers as their own name for themselves. In the earliest days the name of *Children of Light* had been so employed, its use bearing witness to their distinctive message of the Light of Christ within the hearts of men. Thus in 1655 was printed a leaflet, entitled : ' A Declaration from the Children of Light (who are by the world scornfully called *Quakers*) against several false reports.' As late as 1674 we find the phrase still in use in an epistle of Thomas Taylor, entitled : ' A loving and seasonable advice to the Children of Light.'²⁴ Before that date, however, the word Friend, so brief and yet so full of content, had come into general use, and has remained to this day the name by which the people called Quakers are known to one another and to a very large extent to the world about them. How deep is the meaning of the word we may not always realise, but we can find an indication of it in the close of an early writing of George Fox, addressed in 1655 ' To all the rulers of the Earth,' in which he subscribes himself ' A Lover of all your Souls

²⁴ MS. Minutes of the Morning Meeting : 30 ix. 1674.

and Your Eternal Good, and a Friend to the Creation and the Truth, and them that be in the Life of God.’²⁵

The name *Religious Society of Friends*, which has for over a century been in official documents and pronouncements by Friends, appears to occur for the first time in the later eighteenth century. Perhaps the earliest instance of its official use may be found in the Address to King George the Third in 1793. (In the Address to the King in 1789 the phrase *the People called Quakers* is employed.) In the General Epistle of the Yearly Meeting of 1781 occurs the phrase ‘every member of our *religious society*.’

It is no accident that the Society of Friends retains the appellation of *Society* rather than that of *Church*. The word *Church* is indeed frequently applied both in Quaker literature and in the ‘Christian Discipline’ of the Society with special reference to the Quaker portion of the whole body of Christian disciples, but there is a danger that the idea of the Great Church may become dim, if that great name is identified with its partial embodiments. Too often to-day the very name of church is repellant to men who misjudge the Christian ideal because of the caricature which poor copyists have made of it: for such men the word ‘society’ may carry a meaning which ‘church’ at present cannot bring.

A good name may be a watchword and a word of cheer. In the name of Friends the people called Quakers have set before them a great ideal. Men are separated one from another by ignorance, by selfishness and by fear; the Light and the love of Christ draw them together to become a society of friends.

²⁵ See George Fox: ‘Doctrinals’: 1706: p. 33. An instance of the use of the word Friends for Quakers is to be found in the title of the earliest Quaker Bibliography, by John Whiting: ‘A Catalogue of Friends’ Books: written by many of the People called Quakers from the beginning or first appearance of the said People.’ (London, 1708.)