

“Gospel Order and Discipline”

BY the kindness of George Vaux, of Philadelphia, we are able to print *in extenso* a very interesting manuscript, dating from the days of the Keithian Controversy, which bears the following title:—

GOSPEL ORDER AND DISCIPLINE
in
MEN AND WOMENS MEETINGS of FAITHFUL FRIENDS of TRUTH
for ye

EFFECTING a MORE PERFECT SEPARATION FROM YE WORLD.

The transcription sent over, from which the type has been set, was made from a co-temporary manuscript in George Vaux's possession.¹ It should be considered in connection with the Keithite *Discipline*, printed in 1693, copies of which are in the Libraries of Haverford College, Pa., and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Although the views held by George Keith and his followers did not meet with the approval of the general body of Friends, Keith being disowned by both Philadelphia and London Yearly Meetings, an attentive perusal of the following paragraphs will yield much of value even for the present day. The need for spiritual discerning and a definite confession of faith is emphasized; the value of the training of children for reception into the Society will impress us when birthright membership has been abolished; the date of “Spiritual Birth” is to be recorded, as well as that of “outward birth”; *all* Friends are urged to attend Church meetings; the duties of Elders and Deacons are set out.

The headings placed between brackets do not appear in the manuscript.

There is a reference to Keith and these queries in *Quakers in the American Colonies*, 1911, p. 449.

[DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE TRUE AND THE FALSE.]

1. Seeing y^t in divers places many are crept into y^e form & profession of Friends' way, who are not realy friends of Truth and have taken up the s^d outward profession not from any true inward Convincement by y^e Spirit of God in y^r hearte nor having y^e Glory of God, and y^e Salvation of their Soule as y^e End why ye have assumed y^e s^d profession, but some worldly interest or advantage &c.? Is it not necessary y^t some note or manner of distinction as to the outward should be made betwixt faithfull friends of Truth and all such hypocrites & empty & formal professors?

2. Is there not an outward Separation as well as an inward to be made betwixt y^e faithfull and y^e world, and who are y^e world but all hypocritical professors of Truth as well as y^e rude and profane multitude

¹ Since the *Gospel Order and Discipline* has been in type another transcription has been received, which appears to be somewhat more exact as to spelling and contractions. This will be preserved in D.

of all sorts? And is not this plainly implied in that parable of Christ concerning the net that being cast into the Sea, did draw to land many fishes; some good and some bad, and the good were gathered into vessels but the bad were cast away?

[AN OPEN DECLARATION OF FAITH.]

3. Did not y^e faithful generally in y^e days of y^e apostles joyn together in a body or Society of people, not only by feeling an inward knitting and uniting of y^r hearts and Soules together by the power and Spirit of X^t inwardly revealed in y^m which indeed was y^e Main, but by some open declaration & profession of y^r faith in y^e most principal & necessary Doctrines of Xtian religion either before the Church, or some faithfull Witnesses? And was it not a comon practice in y^e Church in y^e days of y^e Apostles for everyone to give a solemn Confession to y^e Truth believed by y^m, and make an open profession of y^r faith in X^t Jesus before ye were received into y^e number of y^e faithfull? And were ye not received into y^e Church by this s^d open profession of y^r faith as it was felt by a Spirituall discerning in y^e faithfull to be real and sincere, with the faithfull giving unto them the right hand of fellowship, and allso with exortation and prayer frequently attending the s^d practice? And though water baptism was then comonly administered after confession yet seeing it was but a sign or figure of the Spirituall Baptism and no gossell precept is ceased and y^t we see no need nor service to renew the ceremony of it, yet whether Confession be not a necessary and serviceable thing to be continued in the Church as it was practiced in the days of Christ when in the flesh and in the days of the Apostles? for which see the following Scripture. Math. 10. 32 Luke 12. 8 Math. 3. 6 Acts 18. 19 Cap. 9. 26 Rom. 10. 9 10 Cap. 14. 11 2 Cor. 9. 13 1 Tim. 2. 10 Cap. 6. 12 Heb. 4. 14. 10. 23.

4. What is that profession of faith frequently mentioned in the New Testament which the faithfull are required to hold fast, and wherein doth it consist? Doth it not consist in an open declaration and Confession of y^e Truth believed by y^m as well as in External practices of Temperance Righteousness and Godlyness? And as ye were to believe with y^r hearts unto righteousness, so were ye not to confess with y^r mouths unto Salvation?

[A SEPARATED PEOPLE.]

5. Did not we separate from other Societye, not only because of bad doctrine contrary to the Holy Scripture received and held by them, but allso, and that especially, because of the vicious life and evill conversation and practices which were to be found among many of them, though some had a measure of sobriety and tenderness of hearte, yet were and yet are among them; but because we found them too generally vitious in their life and practice, having a form of Godlyness, but denying the power thereof, and could not look upon them to be a pure Church, but rather a mixed multitude, therefore we found it o^r duty to separate from them, y^e which separation we did witness to be countenanced and blessed unto us of the Lord, ought we not therefore to do o^r utmost diligence to be a separate people still, and to purge out all the old leaven that we may

be wholly a new lump? and should not y^e Church of X^t be as a Garden enclosed where no weeds nor tares should grow, although both are to be suffered in the great fields of the World to grow until the Harvest, yet Should not a plain and open distinction be made even outwardly in y^e sight of the World, betwixt y^e Church & y^e World as well as inwardly in y^e sight of God, and y^e sight of those who see with an inward and Spirituall Eye and Discerning?

[A SPIRIT OF DISCERNING IN REGARD OF PROFESSIONS OF THE TRUTH.]

6. And if we use all due endeavor and diligence to make a more thorough and perfect Separation from the World have we not ground to expect that God will more and more endue the faithfull among us with a spirit of discerning, whereby to be able to judge who are indeed worthy to be received into our number, and who are not worthy? And seeing we judge fitt openly in the face of the World to deny them who are openly vitious though they keep in some outward form and profession why should we not be duely careful to receive none into our number, but such whereof we have some proof that they have y^e due and necessary qualifications of Good Xtians, the which proof is to be given by some open declaration of their faith in y^e most necessary and weighty Doctrines of Xtian Religion, accompanied with a Godly sober and righteous Conversation and practice; the which if sincere will be savoured and discerned infallibly by faithfull friends.

7. Have not all faithfull friends good experience of a very precious living & savory discerning of such, who are indeed in the Truth and live and walk in it, so that both the words and works of such have a precious scent and savour of Life; and y^e face and countenance of faithfull man and woman hath a living Image, beauty and glory of Truth shining in it sufficiently discernable to the Spirituall eye of the faithfull, whereby y^e living Epistles writ in y^e heartes of one another? And seeing God hath given to faithfull Friends such a pure and precious discerning, whereby to put a difference betwixt the faithful and the unfaithfull, y^e precious and y^e vile, the clean and the profane, the green fresh and living branches, & dry dead and withered branches why should not faithfull Friends make more use of their Spirituall discerning sense and judgement y^t God hath given them, whereby first to prove Men before they own them as fellow members of Christ's body, and not suffer themselves to be deceived by a fair outside show, though contrary to the Spirituall discerning that God hath given. And is not the spirit of discerning that God giveth in some measure to all the faithfull, (though to some more abundantly) that measuring line that is to be stretched forth whereby the true Xtians and true Xtian worshippers are to be measured according to:—Jer. cap. 31. 39 see also Mal. 3. 18 Ezek. 22. 26. If these things be granted as I judge they will I do in the next place propose it to Friends serious consideration:

[ALL FRIENDS TO MAKE OCCASIONAL CONFESSION OF THEIR FAITH.]

1st. Whether it is not convenient that all faithfull Friends of every meeting who have good knowledge and discerning one

of another as being truly and livingly united together in the Truth, declare themselves every one in a few words, more or less as God shall enable them, to be one people and Societye, in the Truth, and give a pure and holy Confession unto the Truth in the most principall and necessary Doctrines of y^e Truth commonly and generally received by Friends ?

[A DECLARATION OF CONVINCEMENT TO PRECEDE RECEPTION INTO THE CHURCH.]

2nd. That none be newly received into the number and Society of Friends untill ye give some open confession and declaration of their real convincement of the Truth & the most comon and generally received principles of Christian doctrine by Friends, & that in the Men's Meeting or some other Meeting appointed by Friends, or before some faithfull Friends who may give a faithfull account of y^e same [to] Friends in case a larger meeting of Friends may not be had on every such occasion, and if any have not utterance fully and sufficiently to declare their Convincement and what God hath wrought in them, that ye may answer to some few plain and easy questions, proposed unto them by some faithfull Friends concerning y^e most comon and necessary principles of Doctrine received generally by Friends, by y^r answering to each question yea or nay according to the nature of the question ?

[RECEPTION BY HAND-GRASP, EXHORTATION AND PRAYER.]

3rd. If Friends be satisfied with their declaration & Confession to Truth so given and have a Spirituall discerning of y^r sincerity in any measure though never so small, that ye extend and express y^r Christian Love unto them by taking y^m by y^e hand or giving y^e hand unto y^m, and as God shall move and enable any of the faithfull to give y^m a Godly exhortation and pray unto the Lord for them, that God may be pleased to give more of his spirit unto them, and to Confirm and establish them in the Truth & cause them to grow and increase in it ?

[TEST OF MEMBERSHIP SPIRITUAL NOT OUTWARD.]

4th. That though y^e speaking of y^e playn Language and denying y^e comon and vain Salutations of y^e World & coming to Meeting are good things ; being sincerely performed and a part of our testimony, yet y^t ye may not be esteemed by Friends as any full test or Touchstone of Tryall or mark of distinction whereby to own any to be members of our holy Society, because of y^e outward practice of these things, but y^t y^e only full Test and Touchstone received by us be y^t, we find men in the Truth to live and walk in it, and being in the Spirit and form of Truth, not in some part of it but in all the other parts generally received and practiced by faithful Friends as God hath revealed it unto us, y^t is to say, in y^e form of sound words of Doctrine according to y^e holy Scripture & all holy outward practices of a holy sober, & righteous Life & Conversation in all honesty, Righteousness, Temperance and other Xtian virtues ?

[CONVINCEMENT AND RECEPTION OF CHILDREN.]

5th. That all Friends having children come to years of discretion whom ye have instructed in y^e principles & way of Truth & y^t ye find God

hath blessed their pious Labours in y^t respect, so y^t ye have a sense of y^r Childrens inward state, y^t God hath opened y^r understanding and begun his good work in y^m, y^t ye further labour with y^r Children to be instrumental to have y^m made willing and desirous to be received into the number and Society of Friends in the manner above mentioned, which thing may prove a great good to their children, and especially of their preservation from y^e Spirit of y^e World and Defilements thereof.

[NO MARRIAGE WITH NEWLY-RECEIVED FRIENDS.]

6. That no Friends joyn in marriage with any but such as are received into y^e Society of Friends by a solemn Confession of y^r faith & profession of Truth in manner aforesaid sometime before they bring their intentions of marriage before a meeting of Friends.

[DISOWNMENT AND RESTORATION.]

7. That all professing the Truth who are known to be vicious in y^r Life and Conversation be openly denyed & disowned without all partiality & respect of persons & y^t none so denyed be received again into unity and fellowship with Friends, as members of their holy Society untill faithfull Friends be satizfyed by an inward Spirituall discerning of their real and sincere repentance & returning again to y^e Truth in faith & Love, and that all such who do so return give an open declaration by word of Mouthe before Friends in a Meeting, as well as by writ to be recorded of y^r sincere repentance.

[REGISTRATION OF CONVINCEMENTS AND CONVERSIONS.]

8. Whether it may not be convenient y^t y^e names of all true and faithfull Friends belonging to every Meeting, who are received into the number of Friends of y^t meeting by y^e comon consent of Friends be writ and recorded in a book belonging to y^e Monthly Meeting which may prove a witness & evidence of y^e faithfulness of such as continue in y^e Truth & of the unfaithfulness of such if ye depart from it, which will be the greater agravation and lay y^e greater load upon y^m, when ye are put in remembrance, if by y^r own consent or Subscription y^r names were enrolled into y^e number of faithfull Friends, & so in its place may be made use of in the wisdom of God to move them either not to depart, or having departed to return; for some having professed Truth in part & departed from the same when dealt with to return, have said they were never in the same profession with Friends, so excusing their departing; whereas their names standing on record by y^r own consent or by y^r own Subscription would witness against them, and too many Children of Friends who were reckoned Friends and practiced the form of Truth in some things, have left off the form of Truth and left off coming to Friends meetings, and have gone to the priests and to the vain customs and ways of the World denyed by Friends, and when blamed by their parents & others, they have excused themselves by saying they were never convinced of the Truth of Friends religion but did only some outward things or come to Meetings to please their parents. And seeing Friends think convenient to insert the names of y^r Childrens outward birth and the time thereof

in a Booke, is it not of greater weight and as tending more to the comfort both Parents and Children y^t y^e day of y^r Spirituall Birth be recorded in Friends book to witt how soon it is felt or understood y^t God hath begun his good work in them and hath begot in them the true knowledge & Love of y^e Truth & Friends of it by which they have been made willing and desirous to declare their being united and joynd with Friends but not as y^t a great necessity is to be laid of recording Friends names in a Book only that it may have a present conveniency.

[MEETINGS OF ALL FRIENDS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDANCE.]

9. Whether y^e Body of y^e Mens Meeting should not consist of all faithfull men Friends, likewise y^e Womens Meeting of all faithfull women Friends & whoever whether men or women come not to the Mens and Womens Meetings, (except in case of necessity y^t may hinder y^m) their not coming if they frequently abstain giveth not just occasion to faithfull Friends to judge them negligent & worthy of reproof when once it is understood y^t it is y^e unanimous judgement of faithfull Friends y^t all should come to these meetings ; for in the days of the Apostles we find it y^t when y^e waighty affairs of y^e Church required not only the Elders, but the Church did together with the Apostles and Elders assemble together to consult & resolve in y^e Wisdom and Spirit of God what was fitt to be done as doth plainly appear from : Acts 15. 22. 26 and there is great cause why it should be that all the faithfull should meet together in such meetings y^t concern y^e good of y^e whole, first because though all the faithfull are not Elders ; yet ye are all members of Christ's Body and every true member of y^e Body hath a measure of y^e Spirit of X^t and therefore every member may have a service in the Church ; y^e younger in their places as well as y^e Elder in their places, and it may please God sometimes to reveal to y^e younger what at first is not revealed to y^e Elder even as David said he knew more than the antients, Secondly though all do not help with outward testimony allways of Words, yet by the Life and Virtue that is in every faithfull member the whole assembly is y^e more refreshed, and y^e Elders are allso thereby more helped, strengthened and encouraged in the work and service of Truth. Thirdly because what is done in all mens and womens Meetings is to be judged as done by the whole Church in that place and therefore should have y^e consent of y^e whole Church : which cannot be unless they be present to signifie it either by word or silence, nor is it enough to say the Elders are representatives of y^e Church ; & therefore whatever y^e Elders do ought to be binding and obliging to the whole as in Nationall and Provincial Assemblies. Those who are commissioned by the people represent the people, and the commissioners act is the peoples act ; for as the Church of God in other respects doth greatly differ from worldly Governments, so in this for we find that even the Apostles of the Lord did not these things without the Consent both of the Elders and Church assembled together, as in the place above mentioned doth plainly appear Acts 15 compared with Math. 18. 17 and so the Spirit of Loue Judgement and discernment is promised and given to all faithfull, why should any be excluded from what is their just right ?

[APPOINTMENT OF ELDERS AND DEACONS.]

10. Whether there should not be Elders and Deacons chosen apoynted and named by y^e Church, as were in y^e Church in y^e Apostles days who are known by name to do these services in y^e Church that are proper to them, for though in most Meetings there are faithfull Men who by a living growth in the Truth are grown up from a state of Children & Babes in X^t to be both Fathers and Elders in the Church, whom the holy Spirit of Truth hath made overseers in the Church, and that they are well known and owned so to be in the Church, yet for order sake and for the cause of those who are but weak and short of y^t present discerning & who are ready to say as some have said these Men take too much upon y^m and assume a rule over us without our consent, Is it not fitt and convenient that though these Men are indeed Elders in the Church and Deacons, be nominated by the consent of y^e whole Church with the help and assistance of some able Friends of the ministry who labour among them in Word and Doctrine. The proper service of the Elders being to oversee and inspect into y^e orderly walking of all under the profession of Truth, and seasonable to exhort, advise and reprove as occasion is given and allso to have an authority over the younger in y^e Spirit and power and Life of Truth not lording it over their consciences but watching over y^m, y^t they may be preserved from all the snares of the enemy, who ought to be worthyly esteemed for their works sake by the whole Church. And y^e proper service of the Deacons being partly to assist the Elders and partly to gather the collections of the Church, and by the Churches advice to dispose of them to the poor and other pious uses.

[INFALLIBLE GUIDANCE FOR CHURCH ORDERING.]

11. Though we are not to place infallibility upon any Man or number of Men in all things and cases and especially in things not manifestly revealed, yet whether faithfull Friends assembled together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and feeling his presence in the midst of them may not expect his infallible guiding & direction & an infallible discerning in such particular things and cases which are altogether needful for the good and preservation of the Church and for keeping and establishing good order among them ?

[SOUND KNOWLEDGE AND SPIRITUAL ABILITY TO PRECEDE MINISTRY.]

12. Whether some great care is not to be taken by able and faithfull Friends of the Ministry to whose faithfull Labours God hath set his seal and greatly blessed with success together with the Elders and Church to prevent that disorder which sometimes happeneth when some raw and unseasoned persons have presumed to speak and to pray in Meetings, who are not sound in knowledge and have not received a true Spirituall ability and discretion for such a Work ; and therefore whether (unless in some extraordinary case which may be seen & understood) Men should not give some proof of their sound knowledge experience & Spirituall ability to their Elder Brethren & to y^e Church before they presume that Liberty to preach & pray in open Assemblye.

The MS. is endorsed : " Articles of George Keith for his proselytes to signe before they receive admittance into his church fellowship."