

## FRIENDS AND WAR, 1914-15<sup>1</sup>

In the first part of the summer of 1914, most British people were little concerned about the prospect of European war. If such a war did occur it seemed unlikely that Britain would be involved. H. Winifred Sturge, then headmistress of The Mount, the Quaker girls' school in York, later recalled: 'When the school broke up for the summer holidays in July 1914, none of us even suspected the coming tragedy. It was unthinkable to us that Great Britain would join in the continental quarrel.'<sup>2</sup> This sentiment was followed by the easy conviction that the war, once begun, would soon end in a victory for the allies, France, Russia and Britain. Certain people were wiser, among them Lord Kitchener, secretary of state in the contemporary Asquith government. So were at least some Friends. Ten days after British entry into the war *The Friend* printed a message from Meeting for Sufferings. It was issued in the name of the Religious Society of Friends and contained the warning that the war 'may prove to be the fiercest conflict in the history of the human race'.<sup>3</sup>

Friends were presented with a choice which, fortunately for ourselves, this generation has not had to make. One wonders how many British people in 1914 knew anything about Germany or could even find a map. Ignorance, however, was no bar to enthusiasm or fanaticism; quite the contrary. The public relations industry was in its infancy, but so too was public understanding of the nature of foreign policy. The brutality of German invading forces was unscrupulously exaggerated. Partly in consequence public enthusiasm became in some cases indistinguishable from hysteria. Beatrice Webb, the acute social scientist who was not an opponent of the war, stressed the importance of the German invasion of Belgium. Two days after British entry she told her diary: 'If this little race had not been attacked the war would have been positively unpopular - it could hardly have taken place'. Sybil Morrison was, like Webb, not a Friend but later became a leading peace activist. She recalled many years later: 'I went to the First World War driving an ambulance, and I think young people today will consider it extremely naïve of me to have believed that Britain was engaged in fighting a war to end all wars. Since I did believe this lying propaganda, it was natural that in 1914, at the age of 21, I should have thought that perhaps such an end might be worth the fearful sacrifice of Britain's youth'.<sup>4</sup>

Pressure to support the war grew steadily as the months progressed and Quakers, though treated relatively gently as

members of a known pacifist religious denomination, were not spared. Several examples may be given. Stephen Hobhouse, a prominent London Friend, distributed anti-war leaflets late into the evening of Britain's entry into the war. He recalled in his autobiography: 'In the Strand a gang of patriotic youths hustled me across the street, tore up my literature, and sent me home to a restless night'. Alfred Salter, was a doctor in a poor area in South London and later a Quaker member of parliament. He wrote a pacifist article at the start of the war which was indignantly quoted in the local press and resulted in widespread hostility towards a previously popular figure.<sup>5</sup>

May Rowntree, a York Quaker married to a member of parliament for the city, Arnold Rowntree, said in a lecture given in 1915: 'There was an appalling ignorance on the part of people of the country of other nations beyond our own ... We had to recognise that this war was a result of wrong thinking on the part of all the nations involved, and we were in it just as much as any other'. This rather fuzzy assertion stirred up a hornet's nest. May Rowntree was attacked in the *Yorkshire Herald* not only by letter writers but editorially for 'pro-German sympathies'. The paper claimed that 'members of the Quaker community ... search about for far-fetched theories and explanations to avoid attributing the war to its real and only cause, German greed and aggression'. Press indictment of Quaker pacifism, of which this is just one example, could be as intimidating as the physical attacks or attempts to dismiss opponents of the war from their employment which also took place. Alexander Cowan Wilson, a retired engineer and active Quaker received abusive letters at his Birkenhead home and his house was stoned. Later in the war Manchester City Council tried unsuccessfully to persuade the University of Manchester to sever its ties with John William Graham, a moderate and sometimes equivocal Quaker pacifist.<sup>6</sup>

The appeal to join the patriotic cause, in particular to defend Belgium, was more seductive so far as most young Friends were concerned than attacks on pacifism. Quakers could not be expected to stand aloof from the almost universal national sentiment fostered but not created by the fervently pro-war press, and it is not surprising that many Friends were either confused and undecided or wholehearted supporters of war. By 1914 the Religious Society of Friends, whose British membership stood at a little over 19,000 was no longer an exclusive sect, though its members tended to seek their marriage partners, friends and social associates within the Quaker community. Its leading members had important positions in their communities and some at least of them were more influenced by

their distinction within British society than by the established tenets of their faith. Despite the crisis of the South African War in 1899-1902, Friends tended to take their pacifist convictions for granted. They had made, in the words of the revered Quaker historian Rufus Jones, 'no adequate preparation' for a European war, an event which presented them with the severest test to their 'spiritual Christianity' which Quakers had had to face.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, to desert pacifist principles did not necessarily make them unworthy or inconsistent in their Quaker faith. Harold Capper Hunt, a pro-war Quaker administrator at the Retreat hospital in York, pointed out early in 1915: 'If the society stands for one thing more than another it is for liberty of conscience'. Over fifty years later his words were echoed by the historian John Rae, writing about the Quaker objector to conscription: 'The Quaker objector was inspired by his belief in the authority of the Inner Light, not by his adherence to a pacifist tenet'. Moreover, as Rae and other historians have pointed out, by 1914 Quaker pacifism was 'traditional rather than doctrinal'; Quakers were in many cases unwilling, Martin Ceadel points out, either to live by the peace testimony or repudiate it, disliking the choice between support for the war and outright opposition.<sup>8</sup> What some contemporaries missed was that the society was a religious organisation, not a secular socialist or pacifist society.

There were twelve Quaker members of parliament in the opening months of the war, all but two of whom were Liberals. In this early period they were subdued or, they hoped, non-controversial in their public utterances about the war. This was a stance which cannot be explained simply by the appeal of party loyalty. The two cabinet ministers who resigned at the outset of war did not include Joseph Pease, the Quaker President of the Board of Education. It is difficult to read the statement of Meeting for Sufferings, issued in early August 1914, as anything other than support for British participation in the war: 'We recognise that our Government has made most strenuous efforts to preserve peace, and has entered in to the war under a grave sense of duty to a smaller State towards which we had moral and treaty obligations ... We hold that the present moment is not one for criticism, but for devoted service to our nation'. The statement went on to ask Friends to 'banish thoughts of bitterness, harsh judgements, the revengeful spirit' and to urge that 'the war should not be carried on in any vindictive spirit', demonstrating a marked, perhaps inevitable, incomprehension of the nature of war in the twentieth century. It did admit, however, that the war 'spells the bankruptcy of much that we too lightly call Christian'. Three weeks later a leading article in *The Friend* was even more supportive of the

war: 'Never before has this country shown such unity and singlemindedness, and profoundly though we all regret being concerned in this awful enterprise there can be little or no doubt that the events which are happening make our action in some senses a defence of our very existence as a nation and as an Empire'. Edward Grubb, a leading Friend was later oppose conscription with great courage and resolution,<sup>9</sup> but at this early stage, writing in the same issue, he put a non-pacifist view. 'Theoretically, we agree wholly that war is wrong; practically, it seems that *this* war has been forced on us by circumstances, and we do not see how our country's share in it could have been avoided except by refusal to fulfil her obligations of honour'.<sup>10</sup>

Meeting for Sufferings tried to remain faithful to historic Quaker principles without expressing outright opposition to the war. It was a difficult balancing act. A proposed message of goodwill to the peoples of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey was referred to the Peace Committee which prevaricated. 'We are of the judgment that all who have conscientious objection to war should be urged to stand by their faith', Sufferings decided in September 1914. This was far from being a clarion call. A leaflet was issued opposing war in general terms but acknowledging: 'We can all understand the appeal to noble instincts which makes men desire to risk their lives for their country'. In June 1915 young men were urged to train for non-combatant service, including relief work at home and abroad and service in the Friends Ambulance Unit, though it also advocated participation in peace propaganda.<sup>11</sup> In short, Sufferings, faced with enormous pressures, equivocated, opposing war in general but urging humanitarian participation in this war and 'understanding' of Friends who enlisted.

It is not surprising that many young male Friends should have volunteered to join the armed forces. One such was Walter Ingleby, a York Friend who wrote to his monthly meeting in January 1916 that he had volunteered to join the army: 'My reason for enrolling was that I felt it to be my bounden duty, that I could indeed do no less ... My early training [as a Friend] drew me in one direction, my conception of duty to another'. In the end his sense of duty 'overwhelmed all other considerations'.<sup>12</sup> This kind of sentiment was widely shared among young Friends, whether or not they took the same action. On the other hand traditional Quaker pacifism was not forgotten. London Yearly Meeting was told in May 1915 that well over two hundred locations had held Quaker peace meetings which had been reported to the national Peace Committee. Some of the meetings were part of a series or held at several different localities in

the same town. Details were provided but 'a spirit of sympathy and earnest enquiry has prevailed' and the events were said to be free from disruption and opposition.<sup>13</sup>

To join the armed forces met with widespread expressions of public approval, while opposition was a lonely option, 'lonelier month by month',<sup>14</sup> and liable to lead to open or subtle intimidation of various kinds. The Quaker writer and activist Elizabeth Fox Howard wrote shortly after the end of the war with considerable understanding of the unenviable choice which faced those eligible for the armed forces:

It was perhaps natural that a considerable number of Friends should have been swept off their feet by the rising tide of popular feeling, and that many young men should have joined the army, feeling the call to this particular form of sacrifice stronger than the principles in which they had been brought up ... To stand aside when others were offering their all to their country's cause, to be misunderstood and to seem to have chosen the coward's part - all for the sake of a great and perhaps impossible ideal, - this strain proved too much for any whose Quaker principles were not rooted in something far deeper than mere tradition or inherited beliefs.<sup>15</sup>

Her account was later echoed by Maude Robinson, a prolific Quaker author: 'It was not pleasant to be regarded as a shirker; it was not pleasant to open an anonymous letter and find it contained a white feather, but we can hardly realise now how bitter the war spirit was in those sad days'.<sup>16</sup> It was natural that pacifists should seek support in each other's company. Bertrand Russell, who was to be imprisoned in 1918 for an article stemming from his anti-war convictions, recalled: 'When we were all together we felt warm and cosy, and forgot what an insignificant minority we were'.<sup>17</sup>

The editor of *The Friend*, Edward Bassett Reynolds, gave full rein to his readers to express their views and the result was to demonstrate that Friends were sharply divided on the issue. An editorial note commented in April 1915 that many more letters were received from readers than considerations of space allowed to be published, but insisted that those printed were a 'fair representation' of those received.<sup>18</sup> Analysis of the 79 letters on the war received before 9 April 1915 shows that 41 either supported Britain's participation or opposed disowning young Friends who had joined the armed forces. In the first year of war 52 of the 116 published letters on the subject were in support of the British government position or of Friends who had volunteered.

Pro-war Friends often expressed themselves vehemently. J. Wilmer

Green, who was to resign his membership in April 1915, wrote from Penmaenmawr that if Britain did not fight 'we should be assisting wrong to triumph over right'. Walter S. Rowntree, a Brighton teacher, asserted: 'The one urgent matter is how to save Europe and humanity from the catastrophe of German domination, with all that that stands for'. He went on to ask: 'If such a common-sense proposition seems to clash with our Quaker principles, why not take courage and revise our principles?' Albert Wilson, a London medical man who served with the French Medical Corps, insisted: 'It is a Christians' war, - a war against rape, massacre, cruelty, hate, injustice and every kind of vice we can mention. May God bless our troops and our Allies.' Some Quaker women took a similar line. Mary Deborah Scott Moncrieff, another Londoner, wrote that in the past leading Friends, including John Bright, had judged each question of war and peace on its merits: 'We others know that we, too, have consciences; and, for us also, the Society is our home. We do not think it right that it should become the Peace Society. And especially just now'. For Bernard Ellis of Leicester: 'When a man fights a mad beast at the door of his house, it is not meet for those inside, whose lives he protects but who are not willing to help him, to discuss what to do with the skin'.<sup>19</sup>

Bedford Pollard went so far in an article in the *Friends' Quarterly Examiner* as to declare: 'The Quaker doctrine of non-resistance will never find a sympathetic acceptance' and to praise acts of 'saintly service' carried out on battlefields and in military hospitals. 'And yet we decide that war is wicked, stupid and futile!' Edward Lloyd Pease, a Darlington coalowner, wrote in the same issue of the same journal that decisions about war and peace were questions about which individuals must be free to make their own decisions, a view which found widespread acceptance within the society.<sup>20</sup>

It was only in Quaker journals that divisions among Friends about the war were aired. Francis Ransom, who could trace his Quaker ancestry back to the seventeenth century, told Bedfordshire Quarterly Meeting in Hitchin in November 1914: 'Belgium had been overrun by barbarians ... The views of the Society of Friends were very divided.' He expressed his approval of the meeting's chairman who, though a Friend, had spoken at a recruitment meeting in the town. He later repeated his support for the war in a letter to the *Spectator*, the most prominent of the weekly journals, stressing that many Friends took the same view. A week later the editor of the journal expressed pleasure that there were 'still some young Friends who can answer all this [anti-war] sophistry with a plain "Give me a rifle"'.<sup>21</sup>

Arthur Rowntree, headmaster of the Quaker Bootham School in

York, tried to be circumspect but was anxious to point out that many Quakers played their part in the national crisis by both military and humanitarian activities. He wrote to the *Birmingham Gazette and Express* in January 1915 to say that he knew of 65 of his former pupils who had joined the armed forces, about 30 of them members of the Society of Friends. Thirty-five more were working with the FAU in Dunkirk, while others were assisting war victims in devastated areas of France. The record of nonconformist public schools, he wrote, 'is one of which they have every reason to be proud'. The following May the *North Star* (Darlington) printed a letter from a reader who described her/himself simply as 'a Darlington Quaker: 'The present war ... was forced upon us.' It was 'regarded by most of the Friends as a necessary evil and one which must be continued until the military Hun is stamped out forever'. Anti-war sentiment among Quakers was, the correspondent asserted, the view of a minority of so-called leaders. In August Henry Marriage Wallis, a prominent Friend who held strong pro-war views, wrote to the *Westminster Gazette*, an influential London evening paper: 'Quakers of unimpeachable principles go saying that this war is different, and the only thing is to conduct it to a stable and satisfactory peace.' Quakers, he claimed even more damagingly, were 'a bewildered, disunited, discouraged company of well-meaning folk conscious of being up against circumstances too imperious for antiquated doctrines to deal with ... Upon the main question of forcible resistance in arms the Quakers are radically divided'.<sup>22</sup>

The period was one of relative statistical darkness, but Friends kept careful records and it is disappointing that there are no definitive figures for Quaker participation in either of the twentieth century world wars. It is generally accepted, however, among others by the authoritative Quaker historian Thomas Kennedy, that about a third of members supported the Great War. Kennedy cites Quaker sources which state that over 200 young Quakers enlisted initially, that altogether nearly a thousand, a third of all male Friends of military age, served in the armed forces, and that over a hundred of them died. London Yearly Meeting was told in May 1915 that fifteen Friends were engaged in recruiting for the armed forces and some fifty resignations had been received from members who supported the war.<sup>23</sup>

Both contemporaries and historians have concluded that those Friends who supported participation in the war usually came from Quaker families. Their faith was assumed to be based, in Elizabeth Fox Howard's words on 'mere tradition or inherited beliefs' and they were usually not active Friends. Meeting for Sufferings was told in

May 1915 that 'the greater number of those who had enlisted had previously manifested little interest in the Society'. They were 'only nominal Friends', the committee on Friends and Enlistment concluded hopefully. Kennedy challenges this view, citing evidence from East Anglia which suggests that many of those who volunteered to fight were active young Friends.<sup>24</sup> The question is not susceptible of a definitive answer. What seems certain is that the long years of peace had dulled the opposition of many Friends to war until a crisis arose and in such circumstances they did not all arrive at the same decision. Kennedy's conclusion, perhaps somewhat oversimplified, is that attitudes to the war among Friends who remained at home were a generational matter. Older friends, he writes, were 'caught between their historical traditions and their patriotic impulses', while the 'leaders of the next generation had concluded that the only legitimate stand for Quakers to take was not just to oppose the war but to attempt to stop it'.<sup>25</sup> It is certainly true that some of the older generation were torn between their religious traditions and conventional patriotism and sought a means of satisfying the former without outraging the latter.

Some Friends, conscious of the suffering which war brought in its wake, sought a means of mitigating its effects by participating in activities which would help to save lives. The Emergency Committee for the Assistance of Germans, Austrians, Hungarians, and Turks in Distress sought to protect and where possible repatriate citizens of what had become enemy countries. The War Victims' Relief Committee carried out work in stricken areas especially in France but also and increasingly in other countries.. More controversial and even more dangerous was the Friends Ambulance Unit. The FAU was established after a letter in *The Friend* on 21 August 1914 by Philip Baker, later as Philip Noel-Baker well known for his Labour politics and work for peace. Baker, the son of the Quaker Liberal MP J. Allen Baker, was encouraged in his initiative by older Friends who wanted to assist the war effort without overtly supporting military action. He wrote: 'Some members of the society with whom I have been in correspondence feel strongly that in this crisis in public affairs they want to render some service more commensurate with their powers and opportunities than is involved in the administration of war relief at home ... It has therefore been suggested that young men Friends should form an Ambulance Corps to go to the scene of active operations, either in Belgium or elsewhere'.<sup>26</sup>

The unit was controversial from its inception. Corder Catchpool, an FAU member who turned conscientious objector after the introduction of conscription and served more than two years in

custody in army camps and prison, told a court-martial in May 1917: 'I went out longing to relieve the suffering caused by war, to show sympathy with men who had obeyed a call of duty different from my own, and, in a labour of love, to share the dangers and hardships to which they were exposed'. Thomas Kennedy points out that many Friends looked on the FAU as 'the crowning jewel' in Quaker efforts to provide an opportunity for young men to serve the nation without openly supporting the war. Others disagreed. Henry Mennell, a businessman and social worker, wrote from Croydon in immediate reply to Baker: 'The organisation and equipment of a Quaker Ambulance Corps to go to the seat of war and to form an essential and necessary part of the fighting force, as an ambulance most certainly is, seems to me to need most careful consideration, and to be scarcely consistent with what I have always understood to be the views and principles of Friends'. The unit was also criticised by ardent supporters of the war. A letter appeared in the *Yorkshire Herald* from a reader who acknowledged Friends' 'admirable ambulance work in France'. She went on: 'It is splendid work, but it is work that any neutral might do ... Helping to repair damage done is not the same thing as sharing in the essential suffering of the war, because it is not helping our country to win'.<sup>27</sup>

It is difficult to assign the FAU to the peace or the war party. Its members refused to fight and saw their role as being to save lives. *The Friend* carried regular reports of their activities (and those of other Quaker groups) under the heading 'the peace service of the Society of Friends'. Unarmed FAU members risked their lives; over twenty members died on service and others soon after the war ended. It seems clear, however, that the unit was at least indirectly involved in the war effort. Its members wore khaki, it worked closely with the military authorities and many members received French military decorations (They were not normally eligible for British decorations). The FAU was a kind of half-way house, consisting of men and more than a scattering of women who refused to engage in open warfare, but its members cannot be counted without qualifications among those who followed the Quaker testimony against participation in war. In view of its close connection with military authorities it remained an independent organisation and was not an official Quaker body. More than half its membership of over 1,500 consisted of non-Friends. Even so, it was the source of periodic controversy within the society between outright pacifists and those who were not willing to fight but were prepared to engage in non-combatant service.<sup>28</sup>

The pro-war Quaker tide probably reached a peak in May 1915

with the publication of a collective letter organised by E. Harry Gilpin, a London Quaker manufacturer, and signed initially by over 150, then by over 2,000 Friends.. The letter was couched in restrained terms, presumably to attract the maximum number of signatures. Addressed to those young Quaker men who had joined the armed forces it stated: 'Not all who sign this letter would have seen fit to do as you have done, though many of us are in complete sympathy with your action. We all, however, believe that great diversity of personal opinion and conduct is necessarily found in our Society'. The addresses were urged not to resign their membership. 'We urge you ... to consider that the Society of Friends has never been entirely agreed in matters of personal opinion or conduct. It would not be a living body if it were'.<sup>29</sup>

No such restraint was shown by the Quaker cabinet minister Joseph Pease in a letter to Gilpin which was printed with the circular letter and its signatures:

Those ... who know the facts, realise how every possible step was taken to avoid the present war, for which Germany has long made definite preparation. She intended to *force* her own military domination on the world irrespective of her own word or the rights of other Nationalities ... Our testimony to Peace principles and their value will ... not be promoted by letting others actively work for [an enduring peace by military means], knowing all the time that our homes, our children's lives, and the honour of our women are safe-guarded by their efforts.

Reynolds declined to publish the Gilpin letter in *The Friend* on the grounds that it would be misunderstood or controversial, although, he wrote, 'almost everybody would wish to send a greeting of friendship and goodwill to our members who have deemed it their duty to enlist'. His decision was endorsed many years later by Gilpin's pacifist son Tony, who was born in 1913. 'I can appreciate the position of the editor of *The Friend* ... Any such publication would have inevitably weakened the position of Quakers who upheld the essential peace testimony'.<sup>30</sup>

The majority of Quakers remained faithful to the society's traditional belief in peace, despite the pressures to which they were submitted. North Warwickshire Monthly Meeting received and endorsed a committee report in December 1914 which asserted that those young Friends who had enlisted had 'gravely compromised' the Quaker peace testimony. Their action was 'incompatible with true membership in the Society of Friends'. Stressing that those who had gone to war were a minority group within the society, the committee insisted that 'we cannot permanently retain as members

those who demonstrate by their action that they differ from us in a matter so vital'. London Yearly Meeting, held between 19 and 26 May 1915, necessarily gathered together Friends with strong contradictory opinions on the burning issue of the day. What Rufus Jones soon after the end of the war termed 'the hard collision of ideals'<sup>31</sup> could not be avoided. It required good luck, strong leadership and the general realisation of members that their most important priority must be to ensure that the society remained united, to prevent a catastrophic split.

Friends were in no doubt of the historic importance of this yearly meeting. *The Friend* noted accurately: 'The Yearly Meeting of 1915 will long be remembered as one of the historic gatherings of the Society - for it has been held at a time of extraordinary national crisis, a crisis closely affecting the position and principles of the Society ... The Society itself', it pointed out, 'has not been without its own severe and searching trials'<sup>32</sup> In general sentiment was expressed seriously, at times emotionally but not abusively. As reported, discussions were more conciliatory, more couched in Christian terminology and more inclined to pacifism than the published letters previously cited.

Yearly Meeting was exceptionally well attended, 'the numbers swollen doubtless', *The Friend* observed, 'by a sense of the special importance of the issues to be considered'. About 1,600 people were reported to be in attendance at the Swarthmore lecture and a 'much larger' number than usual was present at the business sessions. It was clearly fortunate for the society that the clerk of this Meeting was John Henry Barlow, businessman, social and temperance worker and secretary of the Bournville Village Trust, who had been clerk of Yearly Meeting since 1913 and continued in post until the beginning of the Meeting in 1920. He won golden opinions. *The Friend* said immediately after Yearly Meeting that he had 'shown wisdom and patience in accord with the best traditions of his office'. Maude Robinson in her memoir of the war years called him 'that magnificent clerk' and claimed that he had been 'assuredly given to the Society for that emergency'. Kennedy gives him credit for keeping the society faithful to its pacifist tradition.<sup>33</sup> Barlow gave the opposing factions the opportunity to express themselves fully, prevented disagreement from turning into public rancour, carried out successfully the business of the week and did much to ensure that the society remained, however uneasily, a united body.

Soon after the Meeting a letter was sent to him by Henry Lloyd Wilson, who had recently completed a lengthy spell as clerk of London Yearly Meeting. It expressed gratitude to Barlow and added:

'I don't think we were really on the brink of a precipice'. His choice of words, however, is surely significant. J.B. Hodgkin of Darlington wrote to say that he had heard from many sources high praise of Barlow's conduct as clerk. After Barlow's death in 1924 his widow received numerous letters of sympathy which recalled in glowing terms his years as clerk. Robert Marsh, who had told Yearly Meeting in 1915 that it was the armed forces which allowed Quakers to maintain their pacifist principles, wrote: 'In the hands of a weaker man, or in the hands of a strong man without John's absolute impartiality, the Yearly Meeting and the Society of Friends would have collapsed with a crash between 1914 and 1918'.<sup>34</sup> Horace Alexander, a young Friend who had been a strong opponent of the war, wrote to John Cash Barlow recalling his 'wonderful memories of your father, especially of the way in which he helped us all through the war years'. Barlow's home Meeting in Warwickshire recalled after his death his 'invaluable service ... during those troubled and perplexing years when feelings were often strained and patience nigh to breaking point'.<sup>35</sup>

War and peace were the principal topic of the Meeting, sharpened by the need to decide whether Friends should endorse the disownment of those members who had enlisted in the armed forces. Two points are prominent in the published proceedings. The first, already mentioned, was that views were expressed emphatically but without the intolerance which had been seen in the letters pages of *The Friend*. The second was that the majority of Friends, if attendance and spoken participation in Yearly Meeting were representative, remained pacifists despite pressure from pro-war Friends and the outside world. Most of those who participated in discussions urged the society to oppose war but there was a minority which thought otherwise and some as reported were equivocal. Ormston Pease cited the 'Belgian horrors' to ask if Quakers should not take part in resisting wrong where it occurred. John William Graham, the influential Manchester Friend, pointed out that Quakers paid taxes and could not escape the ramifications of the war. On the other hand: 'We could not outrage the Christ within'. Quakers must stand for 'the higher loyalty, the eternal law of love'.<sup>36</sup>

The discussion, if restrained, was still emphatic. It reached a crisis when Louis Dell spoke on behalf of his two soldier friends and forty other relatives in the army. He and his sons had been workers for peace, 'but they had had a rude awakening. Such things had happened in Belgium and France as would happen in England but for those who, like his and other people's sons, had gone out to risk their lives'. It may have been Dell to whom Maude Robinson referred

when she wrote: 'Yes, it was a terrible time, and few blamed the well-known Friend who, with chalk-white face, pleaded that Friends should not hinder young men from entering the army'. After he spoke Barlow called for a few minutes' silence, a 'period of devotional waiting' in the words of *The Friend*, and Robinson recalled that afterwards the meeting continued calmly.<sup>37</sup>

What was to be done about those Friends who had joined the armed forces? The discussion at Yearly Meeting as reported in *The Friend* was clearly in favour of deferring any disciplinary action until the war had ended, which in the event meant that there would be no disciplinary action. Barlow admitted that 'the Meeting could not arrive at unanimity'. Some Friends favoured a clear stand which implied disownment, but they were in a minority. The tone was set by William Littleboy, one of the founders of Woodbrooke and subsequently a co-warden there, introducing a session on the peace testimony of Friends. He insisted he was a convinced pacifist but that he was not 'sitting in judgement: if a Friend had joined the army not unthinkingly, but having sought, pleaded, wrestled long for light and leading, it was not for us to utter a harsh verdict. God accepted the spirit rather than the letter of our service'. Frederic Taylor, a full-time Quaker worker speaking for Bedfordshire Quarterly Meeting, 'thought that it was important that Friends should not proceed in the matter now, when the requisite detachment of mind was not possible'. William Noble, a temperance worker, 'trusted the matter would be deferred'. E.H. Gilpin 'thought the majority of the Society were not disposed to discuss the matter now'. Rosa Hobhouse, a social worker married to Stephen Hobhouse, 'hoped the question would be deferred'. John Ashworth, though a member of the Friends' Peace Society, 'thought the subject should not be discussed'. J.W. Graham told the meeting that the Northern Friends Peace Board wanted 'no disciplinary measure [to] be taken'. T.P Newman, a long-term peace worker, 'thought there was strong ground for postponement'. Bevan Lean, headmaster of the Quaker Sidcot School, 'regarded it as unthinkable that the Society should deal in a disciplinary way with these members just now'. John Morland, a Somerset Friend, claimed to be a strong advocate of peace but 'it yet seemed to him unthinkable that Monthly Meetings should disown any member now absent, possibly when he was in extreme danger'. Ormston Pease supported Morland. Several Quarterly Meetings and the Peace Committee took the same line.<sup>38</sup>

Faced with such a groundswell of opinion it was impossible for Yearly Meeting to proceed to decisive action and it was decided simply to record the receipt of relevant reports and minutes from

Quaker committees and meetings. The decision not to condemn the Friends who had joined the armed forces won the approval of the *Friends' Quarterly Examiner*, whose editor, Sir George Newman, a leading figure in the movement to promote the health of children, chaired the Friends' Ambulance Unit. As such he cannot be unambiguously classed as an anti-war Friend and he had an influential journal in which to express his views: 'To condemn these young men unheard was obviously impossible ... We are all implicated in the war, directly or indirectly, and nothing is to be gained by condemnation or recrimination. We cannot judge these matters fairly or wisely in the midst of the battle'.<sup>39</sup> Although membership matters including disownment were under the jurisdiction of monthly meetings, not the Yearly Meeting, there was now much increased pressure for Friends at all levels to suspend judgment on the issue.

It would be misleading to conclude that a strong expression of the Quaker peace testimony was quid pro quo for inaction over enlistment in the armed forces. Rather it should be stressed that the majority of Friends who attended London Yearly Meeting in 1915 and probably those who remained at home were convinced of 'the way of life that cannot accept the methods of war', though they felt unable to condemn those of their number whose inner light had taken them in a contrary direction. The epistle issued at the close of the meeting acknowledged that some Friends supported the war. But 'we claim that there is a better way, and that Love alone can avail to find and follow it ... It has been an encouragement to us at this Meeting to know that the bulk of our young men are prepared to refuse military service of any kind. We have also been stirred by the outspoken willingness of many women Friends to accept all the consequences involved in taking our position'.<sup>40</sup> Many Friends who continued to support the war were still advocates of peace as an ideal and some at least must have been prepared to acquiesce in the sentiment of the epistle since they had won their point over disownment.

Dissension amongst Friends about the rights and wrongs of the war did not end with Yearly Meeting in May 1915. John S. Hoyland a Quaker missionary with the Friends' Foreign Mission Association, wrote from India in July: 'The threat of schism is heard' and James Henry Doncaster expressed the view in November that there was 'an almost irresistible impulse' on the part of pro-war Friends 'to leave the Society ... This impulse is very widespread'.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, after Yearly Meeting disagreement was generally expressed in more moderate terms than previously. There was a perhaps belated

realisation on the part of many Friends that nothing mattered to them so much as the preservation and unity of their religious denomination. There were also significant external factors. The war was dragging on interminably, dashing hopes of a quick resolution and resulting in horrific slaughter. It was doing, many Friends felt, irreparable damage to the values for which it was allegedly being fought. Even more urgent was the threat of military conscription, which was finally introduced in January 1916 and which Friends could unite to oppose.<sup>42</sup> Conscription was repeatedly mentioned at Yearly Meeting 1915. T. Edmund Harvey, Liberal MP for Leeds West, warned that it was 'almost certain to come'. His Liberal parliamentary colleague J. Allen Baker, however, hoped that 'no such proposal would be made, and very much doubted whether it would. It would divide the House and the nation from top to bottom'. Baker on two occasions that summer assured Meeting for Sufferings that the government had no intention of introducing such a measure.<sup>43</sup>

In early January 1915 a sub-committee within London Yearly Meeting began to meet regularly to discuss how to put forward more effectively within the society the case for pacifism. It lasted until the end of the year when it was absorbed by the main Peace Committee. Late in September A.S. Eddington, professor of astronomy at Cambridge, wrote to Horace Alexander, its secretary, with what Alexander recalled nearly three-quarters of a century later was effectively his resignation from the group. Eddington wrote: 'At the time we started, pacifism seemed to be in a bad way and the testimony of friends against war was very shaky. Now the movement is much stronger'.<sup>44</sup> Eddington gave no reasons for his conclusion, but all the above factors must have played their part.

Baker's assurance, though it may have seemed plausible at the time it was made, was soon to be falsified by events. Conscription was much on the minds of Friends in summer 1915. On 11 June a leader in *The Friend* argued that it would 'introduce in England [sic] the beginnings of the very vice against which we profess to be at war, namely Prussian militarism ... The human family cannot afford to allow this great freedom to perish from the earth'. Meeting for Sufferings appealed to parliament in early September 1915 not to introduce conscription. It was, they insisted, a violation of the right of freedom of the individual conscience for which the Society of Friends had always stood. In discussion it was emphasised that compulsion would also be opposed by many others outside the Society.. It was not until 19 November that the first letter in *The Friend in* explicit support of conscription was published. This was from the irreconcilably pro-war Bernard Ellis. 'The State has and must have

the right to compel sacrifice ... Are the young men of the Society of Friends to be amongst those who [by refusing to enlist] force conscription on the country?<sup>45</sup>

Two related matters which concerned Friends that summer were whether young Quakers should claim exemption from conscription on the privileged grounds of their religion and what attitude Friends should take to the national register of all persons aged 15-65 which parliament approved in July 1915. This measure was declared by the government not to be a precursor to conscription and Meeting for Sufferings advised Friends that month that they should register. Among those who urged compliance was William A. Cadbury, a leading member of the Birmingham chocolate manufacturing family and a local politician, who urged that Friends should be willing to 'serve our country in any capacity short of killing or preparing to kill our fellow men'. In India, he added, 'British pluck and common sense' had contributed to success 'against great odds' and that British soldiers were 'trusted and sometimes beloved by the native races by whom they are surrounded'. Charles Edward Gregory of Evesham, an indefatigable anti-war campaigner took the opposite view, writing that registration was the likely precursor of 'fasten[ing] the fetters of this hateful system' of conscription.<sup>46</sup> He was to be fined three times for refusing to complete the register.

The problem about claiming exemption to conscription as Quakers was that many other potential conscientious objectors opposed conscription, usually on political grounds. Unlike Quakers these objectors had no privileged status from which to argue their case. An ad hoc conference of young male Quakers attending Yearly Meeting in 1915 met three times and agreed that they did not want exemptions for Friends alone but for all those who objected to the war on grounds of conscience. The conference soon evolved into the Friends Service Committee, the most uncompromising advocate of Quaker pacifism.<sup>47</sup> Friends, urged J.R Maynard of Selly Oak, should 'lead others in maintaining freedom'. This point of view met vehement opposition, though generally expressed without bitterness. Not only supporters of the war as such, but also those who feared that Friends would be grouped by public opinion with militant socialism, deplored confusing Quaker Christian pacifism with purely political opposition to war. Another argument against associating Friends with others was voiced by Sir John Barlow, a Quaker Liberal MP and cousin of the clerk of London Yearly Meeting. Barlow maintained that Quakers who refused to use their membership of the society as a means of exemption from conscription would do nothing to help non-Quakers in the same situation. His letter urging that

Friends should 'maintain our hardly won privileges' was warmly supported by others.<sup>48</sup> Meeting for Sufferings debated the matter at length, finally deciding that exemption should be urged for all conscientious objectors to taking part in war, but if that claim failed exemption for Friends alone should be accepted.

At the end of 1915 the Quaker community remained in a fragile state but was at least nominally united. Yearly Meeting in May had exposed stark differences but faced by the reality of a devastating, apparently unending war and the threat of conscription, the instinct for survival had prevailed. In the even greater crisis of 1939-45 the government, press and public opinion were markedly more tolerant and so were Quakers despite the renewed presence of differing views within their ranks. In consequence the Society has not subsequently faced a similar test over a fundamental matter which threatened to be irreconcilable. In 1914-15 there was an unprecedented and unique threat which was successfully though narrowly overcome.

*David Rubinstein*

I am indebted for invaluable assistance to Josef Keith of Friends House Library, who has provided me with many essential sources. I have benefited in particular from the scrapbooks of cuttings kept in the library. I am also grateful to Anna Kerr for allowing me access to the private papers of her grandfather, John Henry Barlow, to Special Collections in the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, and as any historian of the subject and period must be, to Thomas Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860-1920* (Oxford, 2001).

#### FOOTNOTES

1. I have used certain of my own writings in partial preparation of this article. They are the following: *York Friends and the Great War* (University of York Borthwick Paper, 1999); 'Quaker opinion and the Great War, 1914-1918', *Quaker Monthly* February 2000, pp. 38-42; *Faithful to Ourselves and the Outside World: York Quakers during the twentieth century* (York [2001]).
2. H. Winifred Sturge and Theodora Clark, *The Mount School York 1785 to 1814, 1831 to 1931* (London, 1931), p.237.
3. 'To Men and Women of Goodwill in the British Empire', *The Friend*, 14 August 1914, p.599.
4. *The Diary of Beatrice Webb, vol. 3, 1905-1924*, eds Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, (London, 1984) p.214; Sybil Morrison, 'The

- Question Why', *The Pacifist*, December 1971/January 1972, p.7. I am grateful to William Hetherington for providing publishing details of this article discovered in the archives of Friargate (York) Quaker local meeting.
5. Stephen Hobshouse, *Forty Years and an Epilogue; an autobiography (1881-1951)* (London, 1951), p.142; Fenner Brockway, *Bermondsey Story: the life of Alfred Salter* (London, 1949), pp.48-50 Salter's article, originally published in the *Labour Leader*, was reprinted in John W. Graham, *Conscription and Conscience: a history 1916-1919* (London, 1922), pp.46-50.
  6. *Yorkshire Herald*, 14, 15 January 1915; A.J. Peacock, *York in the Great War 1914-1918* (York, 1993), pp.328-9; Stephen Wilson, *Alexander Cowan Wilson 1866-1955 (Journal of the Friends Historical Society, supplement no. 35, 1974)*; *Manchester Guardian*, 14 July and 2 August 1917 (scrapbook WW, Friends House Library).
  7. Rufus M. Jones, *The Later Periods of Quakerism*, vol. 2 (London, 1921), p.757.
  8. *Yorkshire Herald*, 18 January 1915; John Rae, *Conscience and Politics: the British government and the conscientious objector to military service 1916-1919* (London, 1970), p.73. See also Keith Robbins, *The Abolition of War: the peace movement in Britain, 1914-1919* (Cardiff, 1976), pp.32-3; Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945: the defining of a faith* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 24-7, 41-3; *idem*, *Semi-Detached Idealists: the British peace movement and international relations 1854-1945* (Oxford, 2000), pp.190-2.
  9. Bertrand Russell, who was not temperamentally sympathetic to Quaker ways of thinking, recalled that Grubb was 'very quiet, very averse from publicity, and very immovable ... He acted on behalf of the young men in prison with a complete absence of even the faintest trace of self-seeking'. (*The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell vol. 2, 1914-1944*, London, 1968, pp.39-40).
  10. *The Friend*, 14 August, 4 September 1914, pp.599, 644, 646.
  11. *Minutes of Meeting for Sufferings*, September 1914-June 1915.
  12. Quoted in Rubinstein, *Faithful to Ourselves and the Outside World*, p.36. Walter Ingleby remained a Friend. At the time of his death in May 1958 he was attending Acomb meeting, York.
  13. *Yearly Meeting Proceedings 1915*, p.11; *The Friend*, 28 May 1915, p.401. Peace meetings, however, could be an opportunity for pro-war Friends to express their point of view.
  14. Leigh Tucker, 'The English Quakers and World War I 1914-1920', University of North Carolina Ph. D, thesis, 1972, p.39 (Friends House Library).

15. Elizabeth Fox Howard, *Friends' Service in War-time* (London [1920]). pp.10-11
16. Maude Robinson, '*Lest We Forget*': a memory of the Society of Friends in the war years, 1914-1918 (London [1932]), p.8; reprinted from *Friends' Quarterly Examiner*, First and Fourth Months (January and April) 1932). For a recent study of the use and impact of white feathers see Will Ellsworth-Jones, *We Will not Fight: the untold story of the First World War's conscientious objectors* (London, 2007), pp.46-53.
17. Russell in Julian Bell (ed.), *We Did Not Fight: 1914-1918 experiences of war resisters* (London, 1935, p.330).
18. *The Friend*, 2 April 1915, p.250.
19. *Ibid.*, 16 October, 6 November 1914, pp.770, 825; 5 February, 12 March, 21 May 1915, pp.109, 206. 393.
20. Bedford Pollard, 'The Drastic Medicine of War', Edward Lloyd Pease, 'The Peace Ideal', *Friends' Quarterly Examiner*, Fourth Month (April) 1915, pp.198, 200, 228-35.
21. *Bedfordshire Examiner*, 19 November 1914; *Spectator*. 19 and 26 June 1915 (scrapbook WW, Friends House Library).
22. *Birmingham Gazette and Express*, 14 January 1915; *North Star*, 18 May 1915; *Westminster Gazette*, 5 August 1915 (scrapbook WW, Friends House Library).
23. Thomas Kennedy, *British Quakerism 1860-1920* (Oxford, 2001), pp.313-14; *The Friend*, 28 May 1915, p.409. The figures are not reliable. London Yearly Meeting was told in May 1915: 'There were not more than 5,000 men of military age in the Society' (*The Friend*, 28 May 1915, p.409) a figure which, if accurate, would reduce 'military Friends' to no more than a fifth of those eligible.
24. *The Friend*, 14 May 1915, p.362; *Yearly Meetings Proceedings*, 1915, p.30; Kennedy *British Quakerism*, p.313.
25. Thomas Kennedy, 'What hath Manchester wrought? Change in the Religious Society of Friends, 1895-1920', *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, vol. 57, 1996, p.289.
26. *The Friend*, 21 August 1914, p.626.
27. Corder Catchpool, *On Two Fronts: letters of a conscientious objector* (London, 1918; 1940 reprint, p.132; Kennedy, *British Quakerism*, p.331; *The Friend*, 28 August 1914, p.640; *Yorkshire Herald*, 19 January 1915.
28. Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, p.157; Kennedy, *British Quakerism*, pp.315-16, 331-3.
29. E. H. Gilpin, war letter 1915, Friends House Library, tract box 239; reproduced by permission. Gilpin was much more outspoken in a letter to *The Friend*, 16 April 1915, pp.295-6.

30. *The Friend*, 28 May 1915, p.399; Tony Gilpin to author, 2 July 1998.
31. *The Friend*, 18 December 1914, p.932; Jones, *Later Periods*, vol. 2, p.757.
32. *The Friend*, 28 May 1915, p.395.
33. *Ibid.*, 28 May 1915, pp.397, 400; Robinson, 'Lest We Forget', p.7; Kennedy, *British Quakerism*, pp.318-19.
34. Marsh became president of the Friends Historical Society in 1916.
35. Letters and tributes are from the Barlow Papers.
36. *The Friend*, 28 May 1915, pp.401-05.
37. *Ibid.*, pp.411-12, Robinson, 'Lest We Forget', pp.7-8.
38. *The Friend*, 28 May 1915, pp.401-2. 408-10.
39. 'Editorial Notes', *Friends' Quarterly Examiner*, Seventh Month (July) 1915, p.293.
40. Jones, *Later Periods*, vol. 2, p.757; *The Friend*, 4 June 1915, p.434.
41. *The Friend*, 2 July, 5 November 1915, pp.507, 845.
42. It is not clear that once introduced conscription was a more effective means of producing manpower than voluntary methods had been (Denis Winter, *Death's Men: soldiers of the Great War* (London, 1978; 1979 edition, p.29). More recently Cyril Pearce has examined variable recruiting statistics in Huddersfield and cited the view of A.J.P. Taylor that conscription was a political gesture rather than a practical need (*Comrades in Conscience: the story of an English community's opposition to the Great War* (London, 2001), pp.133-8).
43. *The Friend*, 28 May, 11 June, 9 July 1915, pp.419, 422, 461, 531.
44. Horace G. Alexander, 'A nearly forgotten chapter in British peace activity 1915', *Journal of the Friends Historical Society*, vol. 55, 1987, p.143. Alexander lived to be a centenarian, dying in September 1989.
45. *The Friend*, 11 June, 10 September, 19 November 1915, pp.455-6, 696-7, 873.
46. *Ibid.*, 9, 16, 30 July 1915, pp.531, 563, 598.
47. Kennedy, *British Quakerism*, esp. pp.318-48 and 357-60.
48. *The Friend*, 4, 18, 25 June, 9 July 1915, pp.441-2, 484, 503-4, 543.