

FURTHER THOUGHTS ON LEEDS FRIENDS AND THE BEACONITE CONTROVERSY

In 1836 a paper published within Brighouse Monthly Meeting began: 'It will be known to most persons that a separation has taken place in Manchester, among this body.'¹ This 'separation,' known as the Beacon controversy, erupted with the publication of a book, *A Beacon to the Society of Friends*, by Manchester evangelical minister Isaac Crewdson in 1835. The resultant conflict polarized largely between conservative and evangelical Friends had implications for Quakerism nationally and, indeed, a national committee was established by London Yearly Meeting to investigate the source of disquiet in Manchester. A full account of the Yearly Meeting's Committee's work in Manchester, and its implications across the country, has yet to be published. Jean Mortimer, through the use of the Preparatory and Monthly Meeting minutes of Carlton Hill, has laid the foundation for a study of the controversy's impact in Leeds.²

It has been said that the Beaconite schism generally, 'was not so serious as has been thought and.. the verdict of history will be that in the final event it did not matter.'³ It is true that London Yearly Meeting remained intact and that Quakerism survived, as Mollie Grubb says, but the separation was serious for those individuals concerned and mattered very much to families torn apart by disagreement. For the Society of Friends too, it was important. When it is considered that such a small body of around 14,000 members suffered a loss of over two percent in a matter of weeks, the schism was significant. To those 300 or so Friends who were lost initially, must be added a steady trickle of young Quakers who either resigned or were disowned in later years because of the legacy they had inherited. At a time when the number of Friends were falling in real terms, such losses, often of talented individuals, were a heavy blow to early Victorian Quakerism.

Such was the case in Leeds, the largest constituent part of Brighouse Monthly Meeting. In the aftermath of the schism Brighouse Monthly Meeting, and especially Leeds, lost a number of disowned Friends and experienced a steady trickle of related resignations. The debate was followed keenly in Brighouse with a high profile, in a proliferation of pamphlets by interested parties and in publications like *The Christian Advocate*, facilitating an awareness of the debate's inconsistencies and

irregularities. This debate had been brought closer to home for Brighthouse as a result of some of the direct links which existed between the two large northern Meetings of Manchester and Leeds. There were, of course, strong family links. Most notably, though, Joseph Tatham, a Leeds Friend and Elder, was appointed to the list of Quaker worthies who comprised Yearly Meeting's investigative committee. Tatham's involvement in the scrutiny of evangelical ideas would have been observed closely by his own Meeting of Ministers and Elders.

Prior to the Beacon schism Brighthouse had been receptive to evangelical belief. This was evidenced by their adoption of a book by American evangelical Quaker, Elisha Bates, in 1828 as representing their own views.⁴ Again in March 1834, less than a year before the *Beacon* affair erupted, the Monthly Meeting recorded that Bates' book explained their religious principles.⁵ The *Beacon* schism, however, precipitated a crisis in the Meeting, for whilst Brighthouse had been receptive to some evangelical influences the views of the most fervent evangelicals within the Meeting did not sit happily with traditional Quaker principles like Friends' distrust of sacraments and sacerdotal sentiment. Events in Manchester and the public support of Crewdson by Elisha Bates forced evangelicals to examine their consciences and their position in the Meeting. Most stayed within the Society but a handful of the most active either resigned or were disowned. The struggles of these Friends provide an insight into the spiritual questions which prevailed within Meeting at the time.

Among Brighthouse Quakers, we are concerned principally with the views and experiences of schoolmaster Joseph Tatham, woolstapler John Jowitt Jr., and Maria Arthington school teacher, minister and wife of brewer Robert. The involvement of these three influential Friends was diverse. Joseph Tatham represented Brighthouse as an appointed examiner of *A Beacon*. We can see that he had definite views of his role. The Jowitt family was closely involved from the outset, writing to the committee on their first Manchester visit to urge a conciliatory approach.⁶ Jowitt family ties with the Crewdsons and the involvement of his own son ensured continued interest by father and minister Robert. He retained a high profile with contributions to the Yearly Meeting debates of 1836 and 1837. When members of the Yearly Meeting's Committee stayed at the Jowitt family home in Leeds at the end of December 1835, in order that they could attend the local Meeting for Ministers and Elders,⁷ they did not find unity; one minister, Maria Arthington, had decided already not to attend her appointed office.

The extent of Tatham's involvement at Manchester is difficult for us to ascertain. No private papers referring to him survive, and he was one

of the few committee members not recorded as expressing an opinion on the issues facing them. That he had strong views generally there is no doubt. His *Considerations on the Holy Spirit* show him to have much in common with *A Beacon* with its emphasis on the necessary use of Scripture and of prayer to promote the work of the Spirit of Christ.⁸ Nor does Tatham use unscriptural language. But it is his views on Christian discipline which have a more direct bearing on the problem of Tatham's involvement or, as it seems, non-involvement in the *Beacon* issue.

He had a good deal of sympathy for evangelicalism but his examination of *A Beacon* was coloured by an allegiance to traditional Quaker views regarding discipline and 'waiting on the Lord.' Tatham may have disagreed with the way the Yearly Meeting's Committee conducted the *Beacon* affair but he stayed within the Society. His theology was rooted in Quaker principles and, despite evangelical leanings, he felt more comfortable worshipping within Quaker Meeting.

In a lengthy discourse Tatham outlined what he believed to be the necessary qualifications for Friends contributing to the exercise of Christian discipline in the Society.⁹ Qualifications were important as discipline had been seen from the earliest times as a vital component in the promotion of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God was itself a requisite, especially for those who sought to engender it in others.

Many amongst us, it is to be feared, are lamentably insensible of their insufficiency of themselves for this work, and therefore they feel not the necessity of waiting for the influence of that power which alone can qualify them for such service.

Tatham believed it was possible, with help, to identify the suitability of oneself and others for disciplinary work because the route to the Kingdom of God had been well mapped with recognisable landmarks. Those Friends who had an incomplete knowledge of the Kingdom of God should not fully participate in Meetings for Discipline. Tatham was emphatic that Friends active in the support of the discipline of the Society should be 'men of upright hearts and clean hands, rightly prepared for the service they undertake; if such an ability is not always present, they should, wait in humility to have their own spirits brought into a holy subjection to the spirit of Christ...'

Prophetically, Tatham warned that if an individual, ill-prepared for contributing to the Meeting, should exercise his acquired or natural abilities, then it would serve only to, "darken council," and bring

death over the Meeting.' In a similar vein, Tatham recounted the views of Minister and Elder Charles Marshall whose Heavenly Father showed him 'that in the sensual wisdom stands the strife, and out of that ground arise the exaltedness, haste, rashness, schisms, rents and sects, & co.' We may see the Leeds Elder's silence in Manchester as an indication that he believed discipline was being discharged by his committee in an atmosphere not conducive to healing division. It can be imagined that, in the spirit of his own guidance, Tatham had little truck with some of the private views expressed by his committee colleagues during their examination.

J.J. Gurney had chosen, for the time being, to overlook a belated realisation of the 'unsoundness' of 'the anti-Beacon tide.' He wondered instead if it would not be 'politic to cut (the pro-Beacons) off,' even though the Society would 'be left in an awful condition without them... and that it will require much steadiness to maintain... scriptural Quakerism against a tide which would go far to overturn it.'¹⁰ Clerk Samuel Tuke, heartily 'sick of religious controversy',¹¹ commented after the secession was complete that 'if our Lancashire committee have done wrong, let them (the Beaconites) suffer for it.'¹² Much later, Edward Ash confessed that the committee's precipitous actions had been a cause of secessions and conflicts in many parts of the country.¹³ How would Joseph Tatham have related these views to his own Meeting for Ministry and Oversight? This was hardly the inculcation of mutual charity for which Robert Jowitt sought.

In Leeds, well-prepared or not, Tatham's fellow minister Maria Arthington seized the opportunity of conflict across the Pennines to launch a crusade for the salvation of Friends. This religious crisis culminated in her disownment from Brighouse Monthly Meeting: her husband Robert remained an active Friend. With a campaign against authority and unscriptural Quakerism Arthington emerged as the leading local exponent of Beaconism in the Brighouse area recommending Crewdson's book, 'to the candid and serious perusal of every Friend...', believing it to be the best book ever in Quakerism and of infinite benefit to the Society.¹⁴ The extreme views expressed in her pamphlets became another thorn in the side of conservative and moderate opinion.

Arthington's contempt for traditional Quaker practice is revealed in her long held 'opinion that the constitution of our Society is radically wrong...' She called into question the practice of automatic birthright membership, and attacked the status of ministers. She believed them unable to understand, teach or preach a clear view of the gospel dispensation and the doctrines of the Saviour owing to a preoccupation in business. In an unequivocal call for a more professional ministry she

went on to say that those who are unsuccessful in business bring discredit on the Church. With such a lack of commitment it was small wonder there were so few missionaries, she thought.

The vigorous debates generated by the *Beacon* controversy were a golden opportunity for Arthington. Some timidity still showed in the anonymity of her work, though it is unlikely that her identity remained concealed for long. It will comfort many, she said, that 'a more evangelical day is dawning, and that we shall experience a revival of religion amongst us.' Arthington had drawn sufficient comfort by January 1836 to anticipate some direction to the 'revival' with a much longer pamphlet bearing her name. Though she was 'aware that all who treat in any degree upon faith and doctrine are subjected to censure from one source or another,'¹⁵ her address assumed a more public leadership:- 'It is known to many of you that I am not an indifferent observer of what is passing around us in the religious world.'

She moved to an openly partisan position in response to anti-*Beacon* writers, 'who think they are doing God a service by disparaging the scriptures; who even think them a "dead letter." Ah! that these did but know that the deadness is in themselves.'

In the face of an anti-*Beacon* tide which had gained further impetus with the publication of Henry Martin's *The Truth Vindicated*, to which Arthington here refers, she felt it necessary to chart more clearly the path to salvation lest Friends mistakenly repeat the error of the conservative reaction. Arthington was unsparing in her denunciation of this school of thought and clear in speculating about their likely fate. God knew that the motives behind the vocal elements in conservative circles were born from sensual wisdom and that there could be no hope for them if they remained unconverted by divine grace. The anti-*Beaconite* could have no conception of the Kingdom of heaven, 'until new motives and new affections are implanted in the soul...' Arthington wondered what the final condition would be of those, 'who have not only refused the offer of mercy for themselves, but who, "handling the word of God deceitfully," have perverted the way of truth, and have kept others from laying hold of the alone means of reconciliation?'

Yet her work was full of practical and positive advice aimed at younger Friends especially to draw them towards evangelicalism and away from the dangerous heresies which Crewdson believed had led to Hicksism. Advice dwelt on the heartfelt faith for Christ's offering of body and blood necessary to deliver us from our natural and condemned state. Faith, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, was necessary to come to a realisation of scriptural truth and the promises therein. Prayer would give the help of faith and the spirit. In her earlier work she called on

Friends to bend their knees in humility both morning and night.¹⁶ It was these simple steps which Arthington believed some had ignored, leading them to err in their religious views by seeking a conformity to the doctrines of Christ without being possessed of the requisite faith.

For many Quakers, the invective of Arthington's pamphlets was an invidious attack on established Quaker principles; her vitriol was anathema to conservative Friends. Even for some with evangelical tendencies, Arthington's extremism realised an innate horror of ritual and mechanistic religion. But the high profile of her argument could not be ignored easily; many Friends were led to a painful re-examination of their religious principles.

By June 1836 persuasion had given way to a more rebellious gesture as Arthington resigned her ministry, an office normally held for life.¹⁷ Records reveal that by the previous June she had ceased already to take part in the proceedings of Brighouse's Quarterly Meetings for Ministry and Oversight.¹⁸ It may be that Arthington had seen the writing on the wall in Manchester as the evangelicals' relationship with the Yearly Meeting's Committee and their own local authority deteriorated, especially after April 1836 when the visiting Quakers revived previously discarded scriptural objections to *A Beacon*. Arthington certainly pre-empted the resignation of some in Manchester by many months. By removing herself from an acknowledged status with the Monthly Meeting Arthington obtained greater freedom to speak her mind.

Maria Arthington's official and, now, unofficial ministry served to exacerbate the uncertainty in the hearts of local Friends. Were the Society's principles correct; did they lead to salvation? Such questions became more pressing when the *Beacon* separation in Manchester eventually came in November/December 1836. Whatever the theological outlook of local Friends, the national separation was the realisation of their worst fears. Bradford evangelical Minister Esther Seebohm recorded in her diary in December:

It is indeed a day of deep humiliation to the members of this society; the whole head is sick, the whole heart faint... 'Heal us, Emanuel!'¹⁹

But for many evangelicals the solution to the Society's difficulties lay more immediately in their own hands. For those evangelicals who sympathized with, or had seceded with, Crewdson the foundation principle of justification was to lead to expressions of faith which conflicted with traditional Quaker practice regarding the sacraments. For the schismatics this course, however, painful, was the only route to

truth and freedom. Relatively unencumbered by established peculiarities the self-styled Evangelical Friends blazed a path for others to follow. The alternative Quakers held Yearly Meetings in London, published a journal, and began building a meeting place which more resembled a chapel with its communion table. Its cost of several thousand pounds and seating capacity of 600 reflected their belief, albeit to prove mistaken, in belonging to a growing concern. With a characteristic sense of urgency Evangelical Friends began the promotion of Water Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The relevance of these practices became the most tangible focal point around which Friends now began to argue. Now that so many related events had been brought to bear on these questions, together with an evangelical revival generally, they assumed a profile unprecedented in the Society.

Brighouse Friends, especially, had a reason to be troubled. As we have seen already, Brighouse Monthly Meeting adopted the thoughts of evangelical Elisha Bates in 1828 as representing their own views. Five hundred copies were purchased shortly after this time:-

... with a view to there being presented to serious inquirers after our religious principles, or to be occasionally handed to persons to whom it might be thought desirable to communicate information respecting the religious principles and practices of our Society.²⁰

In the book, written in 1825, Bates upheld traditional views on the ordinances. However, in 1836 he changed his mind and became baptised. His reasons were set out in an open letter to the Society published in September and printed, amongst other provincial towns experiencing the Beaconite influence, in Leeds.

I am... desirous of correcting in my own works, everything which may appear to demand it. To mislead... one single inquiring, or unsuspecting mind, would be a circumstance greatly to be lamented.²¹

Until the book, of which Brighouse still had many copies, could be either revised or superseded Bates believed it should be suspended. Many Friends in Brighouse did not know where they or the Society stood.

Bates admitted to them that over the centuries baptism had been corrupted from that practiced by the primitive church, but he no longer saw it as an inheritance of an outdated superfluous observance. Bates had undergone a conversion which had led him to re-appraise his earlier thoughts on justification. An increased awareness that Christ had died for him made baptism not only a desirable option, but an essential requirement.

As a powerful supporter of Crewdson, Bates argued the case of the Evangelical Friends in a journal whose publication he had transferred to England from Ohio. His *Miscellaneous Repository* raised further the profile of the changing theological scene. Bates had had no intention of leaving the Society of Friends but on his return to Ohio, Short Creek Monthly Meeting maintained the criticism levelled at him by English Quakerism;²² he was forced into resignation in February 1837.

Young Friends in Brighouse needed examples for living. Writing in May 1836 on the night before his wedding in Kendal, our third Friend John Jowitt Jr. related his conversion experience:

Here when sorrow drove me to the Throne of Grace, deeply conscious of my sins, I found pardon and peace in the Gospel. Oh, how well I remember... when the first gleam of light shot across my mind that if I only and simply and merely from my heart DID BELIEVE, I was justified by faith, and might have peace with GOD.²³

Peace would only come by giving practical expression to new perspectives. At some time between his conversion and February 1837 John Jowitt Jr. and five like-minded Leeds Friends became baptised. The overseers of Leeds Meeting felt that 'however painful the circumstances,' they must report to the Monthly Meeting, 'that a few of their members have embraced the Doctrine of Water Baptism and submitted to that ceremony.'²⁴

The report implied that the Preparatory Meeting in Leeds had known of the baptisms for some time. The overseers may have feared that the knowledge would set in motion a train of recrimination as in Manchester and Kendal. In the first instance, though, their confession suggested that Quakerism's hierarchical structure could be ineffective. The Monthly Meeting did not know what to do with the knowledge and turned to Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting. The next step would have been to seek advice at the impending Yearly Meeting in London but the Quarterly Meeting declined to make this move, preferring instead to pass this problem back through the Monthly Meeting to the overseers of Leeds Preparatory Meeting.²⁵ Effectively, the Quarterly and Monthly Meetings refused to take the matter onto their books, and local Quaker leaders in Leeds were forced back onto their own initiative. It was not that Quakers felt disinclined to shoulder responsibility; they genuinely felt they had insufficient official guidance to exercise care or discipline; indeed, they did not know which of the two was appropriate or if they need be mutually exclusive. A three month gap followed in the minutes of the Preparatory and Monthly Meetings. With Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting unprepared to commit itself, Brighouse Friends would have

looked toward the general proceedings of Yearly Meeting to see if any light were shone their way.

In contrast to Yorkshire, Westmorland Quarterly Meeting had addressed the similar, if larger, problem of its Monthly Meeting and appealed to Yearly Meeting. Their queries inspired debate on 27 May on cases of members having received the Lord's Supper and Water Baptism. Did, 'an individual partaking of either of these rites render(s) himself amenable to the discipline of the Society; and if so, what course... to pursue?'²⁶ There was much argument and no clear indication. This was the reaction of Isaac Wilson of Westmorland who, 'could find no rule to authorise them to bring the case on the minutes of the Monthly Meeting.' These were not cases of delinquency. In a clear reference to Brighouse Monthly Meeting, he said:-

The same circumstances had occurred in the largest Monthly Meeting in Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting... the judgement come to was, that Friends must now be left to proceed as they thought best... yet when they did so they were reflected upon.

Wilson did not like to see those reflected upon who had endeavoured, 'to act up to the spirit of the discipline,' and tried to do their duty; he reminded Friends that those who had submitted to rites did so in the belief that it was their Christian duty under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In spite of strong arguments that Monthly Meetings should deal with individuals uniformly, the collective judgement of Yearly Meeting decided not to accept it. The clerk, Samuel Tuke of York Meeting and also clerk of the visiting committee in Manchester, 'thought that the absence of written rules should not prevent overseers from dealing with any member... nothing should prevent their bringing the matter before the Monthly Meeting.' The Christian care of the overseers was the Monthly Meeting's discipline. After three hours of discussion it was the judgement of the Meeting that the proposition be sent back to Westmorland without being recorded in the minutes. Isaac Wilson complained that Friends had been 'lashed unsparingly.'

On the following Tuesday, in response to a proposition that Westmorland were in need of assistance, that Meeting narrowly escaped the fate of Manchester. With evident relief one Friend rejoiced, 'that Westmorland Friends were not likely to be punished by the appointment of a Yearly Meeting's Committee.' Commonsense saw that if disciplinary proceedings, and ultimately disownment, were taken to their logical conclusion:

It would have led to (and he spoke it reverently) our Saviour himself, and his apostles and disciples, if now on earth, being considered as 'disorderly walkers'... unfit to be members of the Society of Friends, because they had submitted to Water Baptism and partaken of the Supper of bread and wine.

At that the Meeting was called violently to order by the clerk.

For those Monthly Meetings looking for a lead on discipline from the May Meetings there was little illumination. They were left fumbling in search of answers to difficult questions largely without antecedent. Yearly Meeting Epistles at this time, offered little practical guidance to local Meetings beyond prescribing the authority of Scripture.

Brighouse concluded eventually its Leeds Preparatory Meeting overseers unequal to shouldering the whole burden and took the case on to the Monthly Meeting books by naming names in July. The deviant members emerged as John Jowitt Jr., his wife Deborah, Rachel Jr. and Elizabeth Jowitt, Margaret Tennant and Maria Arthington. The Meeting maintained 'its firm adherence to the well known views which our society has always upheld on the Spirituality of Christian Baptism,'²⁷ but a further two months elapsed before any sort of policy became apparent. A committee was appointed in September comprising Joseph Tatham, manufacturers Benjamin Seebohm, Newman Cash and William Harding.²⁸ Tatham's inclusion is especially interesting. This time, his principles may have been able to persuade Friends to 'wait' on a decision. This would help to explain the longer than usual delays in bringing the errant Friends to account or otherwise. The evangelical Seebohm would have been receptive to such counsel having seen for himself, over the summer, the damage done in Lancashire.²⁹

The committee's decisions, after a three months delay, seemed tailored to the individual. Margaret Tennant had in any case gone to live in Tottenham; Friends there were requested to visit her. She sent her resignation to Leeds.³⁰ John Jowitt Jr. was seen as the key to the rest of the Jowitts, who were not discussed until the following month, and the longest report was concentrated on him. The Brighouse committee believed that he had 'acted under an apprehension of duty founded on what he conceived to be the doctrine of Scripture upon the point,' but, 'earnestly recommended to him a serious reconsideration of his conduct and the sentiment which led thereto.'³¹

A report in the same month on Maria Arthington did not share the same hopes of reformation; this was hardly surprising in view of her lengthy and public avowals. The committee found, 'her views so little harmonizing with those of the Society of which she is a member,' and recommended her disownment the following month. On the face of it, it did not look as though Arthington was to be afforded the same choices

as Jowitt, but it is more likely that Leeds Friends had had far longer with Arthington to arrive at the conclusion that she simply was not going to change her mind. The decision to view submission to the ordinances as a case of delinquency was not, as we have seen, a straightforward recourse to the Society's rules of discipline, it was more a reflection of how local Quakers felt the importance of, 'maintaining inviolate the testimonies which our Society has always upheld on the spirituality of the Gospel dispensation.'³² Maria Arthington had established herself as too vocal an opponent. She came in for particular scrutiny after her short-lived intention to appeal to the Quarterly Meeting against Brighthouse's decision became public knowledge.³³ J.J. Gurney, now in America, was kept well informed of some of these practical consequences. A correspondent alluded to two or three Monthly Meetings which, after waiting for some time, had proceeded against members. In reference to Arthington it was stated that:-

Such persons who set forth conscience for (*sic*) adopting the outward rite seem to me too much to forget that the religious society to which they wd (*sic*) still clung, also had a conscience in this matter of faith, and therefore it seems incumbent on them and honest too (having been the first to break the pale of our faith) to resign their membership.³⁴

The Jowitts, who were to cling to the Society for a few months more, had been recommended to consider their conduct and sentiments. It was surely a forlorn hope that their baptism had been no more than a gesture or a form of registration. Yet it is unlikely that Friends who wished to remain connected with the Society, as the Jowitts apparently did, would want to become associated with any other body. Mistakes could be rectified. It was reported in August 1840 that Ann Lees of Huddersfield, after attending the Established Church, 'identified herself with that body by undergoing the ceremony of sprinkling... without having given the subject a proper consideration; and said that were it not done she thought that she would not now do it.'³⁵ She was not disowned. A preferable alternative for the Leeds Friends, sincerely desirous of sealing their commitment to Christ, would have been a baptism by Crewdson. The journal of the Evangelical Friends, the *Inquirer*, recorded that the first public baptisms performed by them did not take place until 25 January 1838; it did state, however, that previously some had been baptised more privately.³⁶ Such was the experience of Maria Hack in June 1837, who found that Crewdson's execution of the rite retained elements of 'Friends' religious opportunities.'³⁷ It is probable that the Leeds Friends would have found such a ceremony more

congenial than that offered by the Church of England whose practice of the sacrament at this time could be very insensitive.

Whatever the circumstances under which Leeds Friends were baptized, developments were to underline their deepening religious fervour. Brighouse Monthly Meeting minutes in February 1838 recorded that the four Jowitts had received the Lord's Supper. Friends reacted with characteristic suspicion believing the ritual to be, 'inconsistent with the spirituality of the Christian dispensation, in which Friends believe "no shadows have any place."' ³⁸ But a revised belief in the Atonement had led the Jowitts to new interpretations of the Lord's Supper with less spiritual, livelier and more visual representative reminders of the ultimate sacrifice. To add to Brighouse's problems another Jowitt, Susannah, became baptized in the same month.³⁹ An April report on the Jowitt's submission to the Lord's Supper recorded that they had found 'satisfaction.'⁴⁰ But again, the Jowitts had a chance to return to the fold. A decision to disown them was delayed until July. Then, with deep regret, the text of disownment of the five Jowitts recounted that they had effectively withdrawn themselves from religious fellowship with the Society and could, therefore, no longer be considered members.⁴¹

Their fate produced reaction outside the Monthly Meeting minutes. At the 1837 Yearly Meeting John Jowitt Jr.'s father, Robert, made a plea for even-handedness, anxious that those who believed it was their duty to:-

uphold the Society in its present views... should not be spoken of as entertaining unscriptural views of the Gospel dispensation... On the other hand those Friends who... were anxious to bring every opinion to a scriptural test, and were convinced that certain views which the Society held were not binding upon Christians... should not be spoken of with bitterness, and as wishing to subvert the Society.⁴²

Anxiety did not prevent this prosperous woolstapler from publishing the results of his own deliberations on baptism in 1837, which brought him down on one side of the debate.⁴³ It is likely he felt moved to defend the spiritual views of baptism soon after it became an issue in the Monthly Meeting from February. It must have been difficult for Robert Jowitt to side against the evangelicals as he sympathized with so many of their aims. For example, at 1839 Yearly Meeting Jowitt could be heard arguing against the retention of birthright membership.⁴⁴ In advancing the peculiar views of Friends on baptism Jowitt repeated much of what Bates had said 12 years earlier, though some of the arguments were better developed and more concerned with refuting the belief of some

evangelicals that baptism was a necessary and saving act. It was painful for Robert Jowitt to view the baptism of his son and business partner as deluded.

The controversy facing Friends also generated interest outside the Society in Leeds. A long pamphlet by 'Bereus' appeared in 1838, 'for it is notorious that there are amongst you some who are relinquishing the doctrines and liberty of your spiritual religion, and voluntarily subjecting themselves to the bondage of "weak and beggarly elements..."'⁴⁵ The author's pseudonym was a parody of the use by Friends, particularly the evangelicals, of the Macedonians of Berea who were commended for their diligent search of the truth, 'for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures each day to see if what Paul said was true.' (Acts XVII, II). Though Bereus was not a member of the Society he shared the traditional spiritual views of Friends as regards baptism and wanted to defend them. By 1838 however, there was little to add to the debate and Bereus' conclusions offered nothing fundamentally new.

The great weight of opinion for and against the ordinances had affected the Monthly Meeting on all sides. For all who considered these issues in the wake of Beaconism they entailed a disturbing re-appraisal of Quakerism's first principles. The great delay in disowning the Jowitts was partly as a result of 'waiting on the Lord.' Yet for Friends like Tatham and Seebohm with known evangelical sympathies it was also a sign of Brighthouse's reluctance to proceed against Friends whom they knew were doing what they saw as their Christian duty. There was no convincing Friends like the Jowitts that the terms of their renewal could be fulfilled spiritually; the external pull of the evangelical revival was too strong. In clinging to membership for so long, the Jowitts were exceptional. They had not the intention to resign and the Meeting felt disinclined to disown them out of hand. It is likely that, by courting a disciplinary decision, they wished to bring the debate about evangelical worship to a head.

The fate of these Friends is a well documented result of a schism which promoted the belief that Quaker modes of worship were no longer appropriate to a conversion experience. This trend of thought, of which the secession was a significant, if not an original, part, can be seen reflected in figures relating to resignations and disownments. Figures show that for this Meeting the Beacon controversy was a serious matter. The resignation of Maria Nevins of Leeds in February 1831 was the first resignation the Monthly Meeting had experienced since 1814. There followed one more in 1831, two in 1832, four in 1833, one in 1835, two in 1836, three in 1837, seven in 1838, three in 1839 and seven in 1840.⁴⁶

A steady trickle continued after this date but such numbers were not to be seen again until the decline of Quaker evangelicalism in Leeds in the early 1890s. The great majority of resignations in the 1830s were for avowed religious reasons or were from people whose surnames marked them out as being sympathetic to those who had been baptised. For example, Susannah Arthington of Leeds resigned in October 1836 feeling it, 'her duty to attend upon the regular preaching of the Gospel and that feeling of comfort and benefit.'⁴⁷ John and Mary Jowitt of Leeds sent in the resignation of themselves and their six children in July 1838.⁴⁸ The Monthly Meeting refused to accept the resignation of the children who were considered too young to make a responsible judgement. There were 23 resignations between 1835, the year of the *Beacon's* circulation, and 1840. The resignations were confined initially to Leeds but spread to Bradford in 1838 and 1840. No other Meetings in Brighouse were affected. Overall, 16 resignations occurred in Leeds and seven in Bradford.

A steady trickle of resignations was to continue in later years as the children of those affected by the 1830s reached maturity and left the Society. For example Jane Arthington, who was baptised in 1844 and resigned in 1850, had regularly attended the Independents up to resignation.⁴⁹ Maria Esther Jowitt, who also resigned in that year, had for some time believed in baptism and the Lord's supper before being baptised recently by the Congregationalists believing the outward ordinances to be, 'of Divine appointment.'⁵⁰ There were 34 disownments by Brighouse Monthly Meeting between 1835 and 1840, representing a peak not seen before or after in the nineteenth century. Not all were connected specifically with evangelicalism. Many were expulsions for marrying non-members and cases of delinquency, the reasons behind an increase of which is hard to explain. What is clear, though, is that membership growth in Brighouse Monthly Meeting suffered a significant reversal in the wake of Beaconism, with a steady increase in membership suddenly faltering in 1836 and not really recovering its losses until ten years later.

Looking specifically at Leeds Preparatory Meeting the significance of these losses can be seen quite clearly. The number of resignations together with disownments related to religious disaffection, totalled 23 exits between 1835 and 1840 inclusive. This may appear to be a very small number but actually represents about five per cent of the average membership in the Leeds area in 1839-1840. The percentage loss of active Friends was actually a good deal higher when it is considered that membership totals included children and non-attenders. As active evangelicals, the Friends that were lost were often quite talented. For

example, Brighouse Monthly Meeting Minutes reflect that Quaker First Day school provision, exclusively an evangelical concern, collapsed as a result of the loss of its teachers. The school room, much enlarged at the end of the eighteenth century, stood empty for several years. This loss was keenly felt by evangelicals when they remembered that as recently as 1830 there existed only five such schools in England.⁵¹ In his recollections of this period J.H. Barber, then an apprenticed architect in Leeds, lamented this loss of teaching talent:- ‘... when the Crewdson split came, it took away Friends not a few good people, like the Jowitts of Leeds, whom the society sorely missed...’⁵²

The story did not end with those who left the Society. Evangelical Friends like Barber who retained Quaker membership were racked initially with doubt and indecision when considering the correct expression of their intensely held beliefs. They had heard the ministry of Maria Arthington and seen the outcome of Quaker oversight in various Meetings. One such Friend, Joseph Sewell, was an apprentice miller in Kirkstall, Leeds, 18 years old at the time of the Jowitts’ disownment in 1838. He felt that Friends, ‘appeared to be lacking in vitality, to be living on a past reputation rather than fitting themselves for usefulness in the present.’⁵³ He did not see the Society being able to fulfil his growing needs as a believer, and moved to the opinion that Water Baptism was essential to a Christian confession. It took a deal of counsel from Robert Jowitt and Benjamin Seebohm, reflected in anxious letters to his father, to reinforce traditional beliefs. Delay did settle Sewell’s mind as to the soundness of Friends’ views. In 1842 he wrote to a cousin in similar difficulties:-

How well I can remember the conflict that passed in my own mind when, just before I had intended to be baptised, I (saw) that I was only walking in my own wisdom, and whilst pretending to be acting in obedience to the Divine will, I was in fact walking after my own will. Oh, if I may give thee counsel, it will be to lie low at thy Saviour’s feet, till He altogether make darkness light before thee and crooked places straight.⁵⁴

The *Beacon* controversy, then, had a notable impact on Leeds Friends and Brighouse Monthly Meeting. Membership of the Meeting fell significantly. Following Bates’ recommendations, established policy towards potential members was undermined. Family and friends were divided. Not least of all, with the loss of young and fervent talent, the growth of Quaker evangelicalism in Brighouse Monthly Meeting was for a time arrested as a result of Beaconism.

Mark A. Ellison

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