

# THE JOURNAL OF THE FRIENDS' HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## TENSIONS IN THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS IN ENGLAND IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

**T**he history of the Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, discloses many causes for tension within the structure of its belief. The zeal which characterizes any reforming movement and which in the early days of the Society united within its fold people of varying types of religious thought, is rarely transmitted in its original purity to succeeding generations. The causes of the tensions which developed within the Society in the nineteenth century have their origin in this early period, in the teaching of George Fox and the early Friends of the later years of the seventeenth century. Fox was not an early forerunner of nineteenth century biblical criticism and he approached the Scriptures with the literal and not analytical view common to the age in which he lived. In his own words he 'opened the Scriptures,' turned them upside down and turned his hearers round to an entirely different concept of their meaning. He used a principle of interpretation which was based on a particular understanding of figure, type and anti-type. The inner meaning of the intended sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, for example, by this method becomes a type or figure of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, the sacrament of baptism an outward figure of the true inward baptism by the Holy Spirit in the heart. The true message of

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the Scriptures could only be perceived by those who looked beyond the event portrayed to its inner significance and it is this stress on inner reality and outward form which lies at the heart of Quaker theology. The Inward Light in the heart, which is given to every man and woman whenever and wheresoever they may be born, is all that is necessary to lead humanity to the knowledge of God. Fox saw this inward experience of Christ as the substance, the edifice built upon the Scriptures by the church as but a shadow, and such a view of the Scriptures had enormous implications for the nineteenth-century crisis in the religious history of the Society.

About the year 1800 the evangelical movement started by the Wesley brothers in the early years of the eighteenth century began to make its impact on the Society and the means by which I propose to explore the tensions it created is principally by an examination of the epistles sent out to all members of the Society from the years 1800 to 1900. These epistles, which are lengthy source material, provide teaching, exhortation and advice and most accurately reflect the changes in religious thought throughout the century.

Hitherto it has been generally accepted that evangelicalism provided the religious direction for the Society throughout this period, but if that is so the question which demands an answer is - 'Why did the authors of these epistles feel it necessary to include the statements they did in fact make?' It is the purpose of this essay to show that, far from evangelicalism being almost universally accepted by the Society, the situation was very complex, and that up until about 1870 the epistles reveal an almost desperate desire to find refuge from the traumatic years of the early part of the century in a return to the principles and practices of early Friends. Such a return to the roots of a religious faith is not uncommon in a period of turmoil and was indeed characteristic of the seventeenth-century founders of the Society in their rediscovery of primitive Christianity.

The evangelical movement inaugurated by the Wesley brothers, which was making a noticeable impact on the Society about the year 1800, has been described by Rufus Jones as at that time having doctrinal significance, embodying a definite theory:-

of man, of Christ, of Scripture and of salvation. Man is a fallen and ruined being, devoid of spiritual capacity, totally depraved in his own nature and sundered by an infinite chasm of separation from God. Two bridges only span or have spanned that chasm, both of them in every sense supernatural images. One is Scripture and the other is Christ. Scripture is the word of God marvellously transmitted across the chasm of separation ... every word of this revelation is

divinely given and an infallible revelation. Christ the other supernatural gift is a wholly Miraculous Person who has come into the world to inaugurate a dispensation of Grace and to make human redemption possible.<sup>1</sup>

The doctrine of the depravity of man in the fall and his complete separation from God is familiar territory and can be found in proposition IV of Robert Barclay's *Apology*. But one of the most important differences between Barclay's theology and that of nineteenth century evangelical Friends lay in the position given to the Scriptures as a primary rule for faith and conduct as against the continued illumination by the Holy Spirit, traditionally held by Friends to take precedence. Early Quaker thought also spritualized Christ in the concept of the Seed which could enlighten the heart of every man who came into the world, whether or not he possessed scriptural knowledge of Christ, which Barclay explored in Proposition VI of the *Apology*, whereas in evangelical thought Christ is depicted in military language as the captain of salvation, the Christians as his army in continuing conflict between the forces of light and those of darkness. Those Friends who accepted evangelical doctrine had to disavow Proposition III of the *Apology*, which they were clearly prepared to do, having come to regard the prevailing Quietism of the latter half of the eighteenth century as a spiritual strait-jacket, a stultifying influence particularly in the meeting for worship. It is illuminating at this point to include a passage from the *Christian Advocate* of 30 May 1836, quoting Luke Howard, a leading evangelical Friend, as saying:-

There was no society of Christians, in which the Scriptures were so miserably quoted, and so much misapplied, by public preachers as among themselves [Friends], the reason of which might be, that they have not the Bible before them for the context to be under their notice; nor were they accustomed to prepare themselves for a public exercise by previous meditation and study of the Bible.

But Luke Howard was criticized for taking a Bible into Tottenham Meeting and that, and the passage quoted, articulates the conflict between the use of the Bible as an inspiration for worship and the direct and sole reliance on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It was in these conflicting views that the roots of all the religious tensions of nineteenth-century Quakerism lay. The doctrine of the depravity of man does not make its appearance in the epistles until almost the close of the dark period of the 1870s, in the epistle for 1879, which contains the following statement:-

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We think it right once more plainly to declare that we have never acknowledged any principle of spiritual light, life or holiness inherent in nature in the heart of man. We confess, with the Apostle, that “we are by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Eph.2:3).

In the years before the 1870s the large body of middle-of-the-road Friends, to whom I have referred in my article on the *Beacon Controversy*, (*J.F.H.S.* vol.55: no.6) wanted neither evangelicalism nor eighteenth-century Quietism. Again and again, as the epistles will show, the emphasis is on a return to what is described as the simplicity and purity of the worship of early Friends and a desire to go forward unhampered by what many regarded as a betrayal of their religious convictions.

The phrasing of the epistle issued by London Yearly Meeting in 1832 articulates for the first time, in its careful choice of language, the difficulty of holding a balance between two conflicting lines of thought:-

let us bear in mind that it is only through faith in Jesus Christ that they [the Scriptures] are able to make wise unto salvation ... the evidence of the Spirit of God in our hearts most satisfactorily confirms our belief in the divine authority of these inestimable writings.

The epistle for 1835 bears traces of characteristically evangelical language, but such language can also be found scattered through the pages of the 1765 edition of Barclay's *Apology* and the epistle's insistence on the light of the Spirit of Christ as leading to a living faith, the assurance that the basic principles of the Society remained intact, highlights the dilemma in which the authors of this epistle found themselves. The epistle sent forth in 1836 contains the following passage:-

The declarations contained in them [the Scripture] rest on the authority of God himself, and there can be no appeal from them to any other authority whatsoever ... whatsoever any man says or does which is contrary to the Scriptures, though under the immediate guidance of the Spirit, must be reckoned and accounted a mere delusion.

This seminal epistle could be seen as a clear victory for the evangelical wing and it was no doubt influenced by the Beacon Controversy, but if it was a triumph it was short-lived, as subsequent epistles will show. The epistle issued in 1838, while accepting the testimony of the Scriptures, asserts that:-

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we therefore feel that it would be on our part a dereliction of duty, an abandonment of an open testimony to the power and all-sufficiency of the Holy Spirit, to countenance any change in the simplicity, which has uniformly existed, of holding our meetings for worship.

Perhaps a reference to Luke Howard and his Bible! We have here perhaps the first indication of a disavowal of the practice of Bible reading and hymn singing which grew up in some meetings for worship.

In 1839 the epistle reminded Friends of the reliance their fore-fathers placed on the 'continued influence of the Holy Spirit' and denounced any departure from the practice of early Friends as evil. The epistle looked back to the concept of Friends as a 'peculiar people', destined to be a source of light to the established church, a 'city set upon a hill, which cannot be hid', and the necessity that they should be faithful to the charge laid upon them.

In 1840 an extract from the epistle speaks of -

our sense of the spiritual character of the reign of Christ, and of the inadequacy of these forms [church ritual] to satisfy the soul, and we continue to feel ourselves conscientiously restrained from uniting in any of those modes of worship which others think it right to adopt ... In the experience of past and present times it has been felt, and we believe by the waiting soul it continues to be felt in our meetings for Divine worship, whether in time of silence, or under the exercise of ministry, or vocal offering in prayer, thanksgiving and praise, that the words of the apostle are applicable: we are those who "worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Jesus Christ, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. iii:3)

In 1842 a reference reminiscent of George Fox is made to the apostasy of the church and the light given to early Friends, the true heirs of the Reformation, and in these recurring references in the epistles to the roots of Quakerism can be seen the urgent desire of the leaders of the Society to find a way forward between the Scylla and Charybdis of Quietism and evangelicalism in a return to the faith of their forefathers. In 1843 the epistle exhorts Friends:-

constantly to remember, that exalted as the standard is which is set before us, Christ hath left us an example that we should follow in his steps ... we believe it to have been given to us to uphold Christianity in its primitive purity ...

In 1845 great emphasis is laid upon the Quaker 'peculiarities' of simplicity in speech, dress and manner of life, reaching back into the teaching of George Fox and which had been valid since the beginning of the Society and this epistle also hints at the Society's inner tension:-

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We think that with a right sense of the inestimable value of religious truth no truly conscientious man could join in supporting rules and practices which he believes contrary to the law of Christ, and the spirit of his religion ...

While in 1846 the epistle, despite the slightly evangelical colour of some of its language, refers to early Friends with approval:-

It was to this experimental knowledge of Christ that our early predecessors were engaged to gather all men, that they might really know their bodies to be prepared, sanctified, and made fit temples for him to dwell in. By one Spirit they were baptized into one body; and, rooted and grounded in love, they were, through the help of their Lord, united one to another in upholding an open and decided testimony to the Gospel in its primitive purity.

In 1847 Friends felt themselves, in relation to early Friends, 'encompassed with a cloud of witnesses', whose example should quicken their souls to a more fervent zeal. They were concerned that as a religious Society they did not live up to their calling and that through the help of the Holy Spirit they should be enabled to be a source of peace and usefulness among mankind. In 1849 the ground of the Society's testimony and worship is described as a belief in the immediate teaching of the Holy Spirit, which inspired early Friends, in the gathering of the Society, to bear testimony to Christ as 'their Redeemer, and Mediator, as their Prophet, Priest and King', language unacceptable to either the Quietist or evangelical wing of the Society.

In 1850 the work of the Spirit is described as an 'inward work' often gradual in its progress, to be waited for and sought in prayer. The Scriptures, recognized as invaluable and precious, are described as a revelation of the will of God, to be accepted in the simplicity of faith, to be studied under 'the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit', by which they may be opened (as they were to George Fox). The phrase 'to be accepted in the simplicity of faith' is interesting and foreshadows the Society's later reaction to nineteenth century biblical criticism.

In 1852 the epistle affirms that 'it is only as the heart is, in very truth, quickened by the Spirit of the Lord, that any can be made truly alive unto God through Jesus Christ,' while that for 1854 contains the following message:-

It is only they who are washed, who are sanctified, who are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God, who can enjoy the unspeakable privilege of membership of this spiritual Israel. No rite, no outward membership in any church can suffice to make us children of Abraham. There must be circumcision of the heart, the putting off of the old man which is corrupt ... and the putting on of the new man which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness ...

The thought in this passage goes straight back to George Fox, in pages 76 and 77 of the 1871 edition of his *Journal* and also to Proposition VII of the *Apology* (p.181 of the 1765 edition). In its closing sentences it raises several questions, among them the extent to which early Friends identified themselves with the Jewish roots of christianity and also the problem of justification.

The phrase in question is based on Ephesians 4: 22-23 and Fox's words - "the putting on of the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness" - rest on the theological concept of justification articulated by Luther, in the dictum that righteous deeds can only be performed by the man who has achieved righteousness, in opposition to the Aristotelian concept of righteous deeds producing righteousness. God creates the new man *ex nihilo*; the old man, whose sin has reduced him to the state of nothingness implicit in a non-relationship with God, is destroyed and the new man is born by the grace of God, in "righteousness and true holiness", capable of performing righteous deeds and justified in the sight of God. Justification, therefore, is an act of God and although it may issue in good works they cannot be its cause. This was the position held by Robert Barclay:-

Thus then, as I may say, the former Cause of Justification is not the works ... they being but an Effect of It ... <sup>2</sup>

This was the position held by Friends; there is no reference in the epistles before 1870 to good works, although they are thereafter enjoined as a Christian duty and obligation.

A further pointer to the preoccupation of the majority of Friends with the beliefs and practices which characterized the early years of the Society is the extent to which the writings of early Friends were republished in this period. In 1851, after a lapse of nearly 200 years, a memoir to Edward Burrough, *A Faithful Servant of Christ and Minister of the Gospel*, was reprinted, a memoir of John Camm was reprinted in Philadelphia in 1841, *Some Account of the Exercises of Francis Howgill* in 1842 and James Nayler's *A Candle lighted to give the sight of the Good old way* was reprinted in 1840 without his name. *The Works of Isaac Pennington* were reissued in four volumes between 1861 and 1865 and *Primitive Christianity revived* by William Penn was republished in Philadelphia in 1857.

In 1864 the epistle contained the following statement, reflecting orthodox Quakerism in the teaching of early Friends:-

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Having, as a religious Society, maintained, from the first, our belief in the reality of the continued immediate presence of Christ in the church, we recur with thankfulness to our no less constant acceptance of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, as the authentic record of the Spirit in past ages, divinely preserved as “the great record of truth” (William Penn); “able”, now, as ever, “to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 3:15).

The great end of the Old Testament Scriptures, like the word of the Spirit which inspired them, is to testify to Christ ... Receiving their authority from the inspiration of Him “with whom there is no variableness”; the works of the Spirit, as truly submitted to, will ever be found to prepare and incline the heart to receive their teaching. In proportion as any become taught of God, “rooted and built up in” Christ, “and stabilized in the faith”, in that proportion will the Scriptures become precious to them, and be made efficacious for the ends for which they were given.

Throughout the 1860s the epistles continued to dwell on the theme of the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of the Scriptures, but in 1859 an anonymous Friend instituted an essay competition on the state of the Society. It was won by John Stephenson Rowntree, the son of Joseph Rowntree and an active younger Friend, with an essay entitled *Quakerism Past and Present*. This essay took as its point of departure the view that the Society’s ills stemmed from its adherence to the teaching of early Friends and was deeply critical of their denigration of the part the intellect could play in the religious life, of their emphasis on the spiritual significance of Christ at the expense of his outward appearance as Jesus of Nazareth, of their extreme condemnation of the sacraments and ritual and of their view of the arts as a means merely of perverse sensual delight, a view which had failed to make Quakerism acceptable to those whose response to the divine was emotional rather than intellectual. The fact that Rowntree thought it necessary to take this line is a clear indication of the extent to which the beliefs and practices of early Friends were espoused by some sections of the Society.

The mixed reception which the essay received reflected the division within the Society. The favourable review in *The Friend* for 1 January 1860 expressed the desire that the Society might go forward unhampered by the testing of faith by reference to the views of individual Friends and the author proposed a ban on the publication of all works by Friends, ancient and modern, including those of Fox, Barclay, Penn, Joseph John Gurney and other later writers, a catholic sweep of the board. The author of this review went even further than Rowntree in condemning the views of early Friends, who in his opinion presented a picture of Jesus at variance with the simple truths of Holy Scripture. The *British Friend* of 1 February 1860, hinting at the

evangelical sympathies of the adjudicators, was, as might be expected, deeply critical of Rowntree's essay. The author of the review firmly maintained the position of the founders of Quakerism and regarded any decline in membership of the Society as due to a lack of conviction as to its spiritual nature. If Friends were to fulfil their mission 'it can never be by departing from the original purity of the Christian profession, but by a faithful adherence to it' and he criticized the desire in some quarters for the introduction of Bible reading and hymn singing into meetings for worship.

One result of the tension existing at this time was the withdrawal of a small number of Friends, who had remained faithful to the Quietist tradition, from the main body of the Society and in 1863 they established themselves as an independent group at Fritchley, where they maintained a separate existence until 1967. But apart from this minor separation there was no open breach in the ranks of the Society and while in the 1870s the tone of the epistles gradually underwent a subtle change, the epistle for 1870 still contained the following passage:-

The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the authentic record of the revealed will of God, and of the purposes of his grace towards fallen man. They are they which testify of Jesus. With our predecessors, we accept this blessed testimony ... It is as the Gospel of the grace of God is received in faith, that it works to the saving of the soul; and this faith can only be wrought through the quickening operation of the Spirit of God. This work of the Spirit leads to a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and to a more reverent subjection to his work and reign.

This affirmation of the place of the Spirit in the work of salvation is in complete accord with Proposition II of the *Apology*, which states that 'these Divine Revelations are not to be subjected to the Test, either of the outward Testimony of the Scriptures, or of the Natural Reason of Man,'<sup>3</sup> and in 1872 strictures on the use of reason in relation to religious faith open with words strongly reminiscent of Deuteronomy 6:4 - "The Lord our God is one Lord". Why was this particular text used? Deuteronomy goes on to enjoin the "Love of the Lord your God" upon the Israelites and this could perhaps be seen as an attempt to affirm unity within a religious group threatened with fragmentation. Quaker language, both of this and earlier periods, contains much Old Testament usage; there are references to Zion and to Quaker women ministers as 'mothers in Israel' and there was strong identification with the Israelites as a people chosen by God, but it would be a mistake to see the quotation from Deuteronomy as an attack on trinitarian doctrine, about

which Barclay has nothing to say.

The 1872 epistle continues in a way which once again hints at the unease caused by nineteenth century biblical criticism:-

it becomes us reverently to watch, that, in our meditations upon Him, we in no way attempt to limit his infinite perfections by our own reasonings, or permit ourselves to dwell upon any one of his attributes to the exclusion of others ...

The epistle also contains a condemnation of 'amusements' which became a feature of the religious thought of the 1870s and the early 1880s. The Christian is enjoined:-

to abstain from costly and worldly amusements; and as his inducements to large expenditure are thereby diminished, it becomes his religious duty to keep down accumulation by a course of wise and large hearted benevolence ...

John Stephenson Rowntree's Essay, liberal in its view for its time, may have temporarily ruffled the surface of the Society but it failed to stir its depths. There was in earlier tendencies towards evangelicalism, as for example in the baptism of Maria Hack in 1837, a sense of peace, of gentle spiritual reassurance, but the epistles of the 1870s move steadily towards the austere and earnest piety of late Victorian England. The Quaker no longer walked cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one. He was obsessed with a sense of sin and guilt, of the utter corruption of mankind in the Fall, whose only hope lay in the salvation offered through Jesus Christ and everlasting bliss in the kingdom of God in the life to come.

How is it possible to account for this apparent triumph of rigid, judgemental evangelicalism? The 1860s and 1870s were years which saw not only the outbreak of war in America but also conflict between two major European powers in the Franco-Prussian War of the early 1870s, closely followed by the Russo-Turkish War. In 1872 the authors of the epistle wrote as follows:-

Our attention has been again directed to the enormous evil attending the spirit and practice of war ... Scarcely have two of the principal nations of Europe emerged from one of the most awful conflicts of modern times, than we see them again arming, in seeming preparation for fresh struggles ...

and in 1877 this was followed by a further denunciation of all war as:-

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inconsistent with the spirit of his Gospel ... [and] it is with feelings of distress, mingled with solemn awe, that we mark the commencement of the conflict now raging between the widely extended empires of Russia and Turkey.

To the Quaker, to whom the whole life and teaching of Jesus was a continued testimony against war, the horror expressed in these epistles at the total renunciation of the Gospel hope may perhaps account for that of 1874, which asserts that the world is a place of horror and wickedness, from which he stands apart. The epistle for 1873 contains the words:-

The true Christian is not of this world. His life is a continued warfare, calling for constant vigilance against the wiles of his unwearied enemy [the Devil] ...

and in 1874:-

We are called upon to testify that we are not our own, and to realise the fulfilment of the Saviour's words, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" [John 17:16].

In these words Jesus commends his disciples to the care of his Father and we see here the close identification which early Quakers felt with the apostles and the first Christians, carried forward into nineteenth century conservative Quaker thought.

But during the 1870s a situation had arisen in Manchester, home of the Beacon Controversy, which may throw additional light on the Society's preoccupations during this period, and for information relating to what is known as the 'Manchester Difficulty' I am indebted to the recent research of Professor Tom Kennedy. <sup>4</sup>

In 1861 David Duncan, a Scotsman who became a Quaker by conviction, was invited to lecture to the Manchester Friends Institute. He took as his subject a series of essays and reviews, written by seven Broad-Church Anglicans, insisting that the bible, in the light of modern scientific and historical discoveries, should be treated like any other book written by human beings. Duncan felt that 'these so-called "seven against Christ" had been unfairly judged and determined to use the Friends Institute as a forum for putting the questions they raised into proper perspective' (Kennedy). The evangelically biased *The Friend* barely took notice of Duncan's lecture; the *British Friend* the 'sounding board of traditional Quakerism' (Kennedy) found nothing in the lecture to criticize and much that met with approbation. The attitude of *The Friend* reflected the current attitude of the Society towards biblical

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criticism and three decades were to pass before the Society could accept the more liberal view and open its mind to, and accept, the full implications of such criticism.

The controversy over David Duncan's lecture rumbled on in Manchester into the 1870s and rippled through the Society to such an extent that in the epistle for 1879 it was felt necessary to re-affirm the evangelical view of the Bible as the premier source of the revelation of religious truth and it is perhaps in this unease, so close to the heart of the Society's belief, rather than in the contemplation of conflict abroad, that the bleak insistence on sin and depravity of the epistles of the 1870s have their roots. In 1879 the Society stated its position as follows:-

We have ever accepted the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the authentic record of the truth of God, given by his inspiration and able to make us "wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Jesus Christ" (2 Tim.iii: 15) ... To the Christian the Old Testament comes with the solemn and repeated attestation of his Love ... The great Inspirer of Scripture is ever its true Interpreter.

All these epistles reflect the Quaker sense of destiny as a 'peculiar people, chosen by God', and exhibit a high moral tone in keeping with the spirit of the age. There is emphasis on 'mission' and 'good works' as a Christian obligation and duty. But the final triumph of the kind of evangelicalism described by Rufus Jones reinforced a way of life in which the intellect as applied to religion was rejected, the aesthetic spirit which gives grace to life was stifled and all the rich variety of gifts with which mankind is endowed were confined within the denying ordinance of a rigid and narrow understanding of all that religious faith can give to the human spirit.

The work of the Holy Spirit was not completely lost sight of. It was referred to occasionally, but with a subtle shift of emphasis as to its purpose. Whereas to earlier Quakers it had represented the illumination of their whole lives and ministry, in 1894 it comes to have a narrower understanding, being almost completely confined as follows:- 'It is the work of the Holy Spirit of God to convince us of sin; to show us our need of a Saviour to free us from its guilt and bondage.'

But the century had not finished with Quakers. As the epistles move through the 1880s they reveal the Society forced at least to face the twin problems of evolutionary theory and the development of biblical criticism. If the Bible was not in its entirety the revealed word of God, where did religious belief stand? The leaders of the Society continued to close their minds and in 1879 affirmed their position as follows:-

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To the Christian the Old Testament comes with the solemn and repeated attestation of his Lord ... The great Inspirer of Scripture is still its true Interpreter ... Such a knowledge as this is still the true antidote to that speculative unbelief which under the character, it may be, of "advanced science" or "higher culture", pervades so much of the popular reading of the present day. For the Truth there is nothing to fear; it is safe in the keeping of God.

In 1884 the epistle contained the following passage:-

there is another and very different danger to which some are exposed at the present day. Weary with speculation and longing for rest, men think the mysteries, by which they are surrounded, impenetrable. ... Christianity has claims which they would not deny, but which they decline to admit ... The Bible has not created these problems, but it offers for our acceptance the one solution in which believers have, in all ages, found peace and consolation. That solution is not presented in the form of mere theory, but in a series of facts which are imbedded in the history of the world. These facts cannot be set aside by declining to grapple with them. The character of the Holy Redeemer, as portrayed in the pages of the Evangelists, is one impossible to have been conceived by man's unaided thought. The portrait proves its original divine; and it is vain to think of being neutral in such a presence.

and in 1888:-

As a church gathered under the presidency of our one crucified Redeemer ... we dare not disclaim any portion of those testimonies which are set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as to his person, work and reign ... as a church we have ever accepted these testimonies in their plain and obvious meaning ...

It took ten more years for the Society to open its mind to biblical scholarship and to a vindication of the intellect which would have been approved by John Stephenson Rowntree. An extract from the epistle for 1898 reads as follows:-

We rejoice at the increased attention which is being given amongst us to the careful and thoughtful study of Holy Scripture. The Book and its story must ever be a profoundly interesting theme, even in respect of the literary form and historical development of that Divinely inspired library which is the Bible. We accept with reverent thanksgiving every fresh light thrown by modern investigation and discovery upon the sacred pages which record how "men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost"; we would lovingly remind all those who have entered upon this research, that, valuable as is the intellectual study of Scripture, the truth which it contains will only be fruitful, as regards the heart and life of the student, in so far as he yields himself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In this extract there can clearly be seen the shift away from the evangelical emphasis on the absolute authority of the Scriptures to an acceptance of the view that historical criticism, the use of reason, may throw new light on the truths which they contain, but which can only be truly understood by the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man. The evangelical position, for so long a cause of spiritual conflict and distress, has finally been abandoned, to give place to the supremacy of the Holy Spirit, not conceived in precisely the same way in which it was held by early Friends, but as the Light by which the outcome of historical research may be judged and accepted.

To the epistles of the 1890s also belongs a movement of thought away from the obsession with sin and guilt, the depravity of man before God in a judgemental concept of the relationship of man with the Divine, to a rediscovery of the freedom of the human spirit in the concept of the love of God for his creation. Love had no place in the dark period of the 1870s; duty and obligation were the key words which inspired good works. But in the acceptance of the love of God, as opposed to his judgment, there lies the corollary of love for one's fellow, a more hopeful view of the world and the inspiration of all true service.

It is more than likely that this shift in thought, the freer, easier tenor of the epistle for 1898 owes much to the influence of younger, intellectually gifted Friends such as John Wilhelm Rowntree, Silvanus P. Thompson and Edward Grubb, all active participants in the 1895 Manchester Conference. The final admission that intellectual exploration, even in matters concerning religion, was valid, together with freedom from the burden of guilt inherent in evangelicalism, led inevitably to the death of the movement, with all that this implied for the easing of tension within the Society. The *British Friend* ceased publication in 1913; in the liberal climate of the opening years of the twentieth century its role had disappeared. In the event, the kind of evangelicalism outlined by Rufus Jones at the beginning of this essay had a comparatively brief flowering, if indeed so grim a view of religion may be said to flower at all.

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Jones, Rufus: *Later Periods of Quakerism*, 276.
- <sup>2</sup> Barclay, Robert: *Apology*, 1765 ed. Prop. VII, 172.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid*: Prop. II, 4.
- <sup>4</sup> See also Roger C Wilson: *Manchester, Manchester and Manchester Again*, Friends Historical Society, Occasional Series No. 1, 1990.