

Meeting for Sufferings

An Eighteenth Century Criticism

The document printed below was recently given to the Library Friends House, by Rachel and Catherine Braithwaite.¹ The MS. was sealed and addressed to the Clerk of Yearly Meeting. No reference to the matter has been found in the minutes of the Yearly Meeting or of the Meeting for Sufferings. The writer, whose identity is unknown, writes under some concern, with what justification we do not know, but the period was one when the discipline of the Society was weak.

[Address]

To

John Willson Clerk
to the Yearly Meeting for the year 1743.

The State of the Meeting for Sufferings in London humbly submitted to the serious Considerations of the Yearly Meeting.

Tho' the Meeting for Sufferings, in London, was, at the Institution thereof, absolutely necessary, & still continues so to be in a lesser Degree ; yet since its Members, as Correspondents for Counties, &c. esteem themselves Deputies of the Yearly Meeting, & regular members thereof, & as, for many Years, sundry worthy Elders, of the first Rank, deceased, whose Memories are precious, & Others, who still survive, have expressed great Uneasiness with the Speeches & Appearance of some Correspondents for Counties, &c. both in the Meeting for Sufferings, & in the Yearly Meeting, as being inconsistent with that of Gravity, Humility and Plainness which adorned our worthy Elders in the Beginning, & so far deficient that some remain yet unconvinced of our Christian Principles in particular Points, & have not conformed their Practice thereto; who, by unsavoury Discourses, protract Time in both Meetings, & instead of alleviating the conscientious sufferings of faithful Friends, do, both by plea & Practice, aggravate them: For, 'tis rational to suppose that he who solicits for the Enlargement of Prisoners for non-payment of Tythes, for the Relief of such as suffer

¹ MS. Vol. 101. (6)

for refusing to take up Arms, or for such who can't, in Conscience, actually comply with the Laws in other Respects, can do it with the same Zeal & Sincerity as if he had been, or probably might, in time, be One of the Number. Nor can such Solicitation be expected to be as successful in the Hands of a Person apparently deficient, as in his who is faithful in his Testimony, when the Person applied to, knows, & can distinguish the One from the Other.

Moreover, when the Trade & Commerce of a Correspondent is dishonourable, & his Conversation reproachful, he is certainly unsuitable for a Member of the Yearly Meeting.¹

'Tis apprehended, that such unqualified Correspondents in London, have often been Traders to & Travellers in the Country, & have sometimes persuaded those they deal with, who have influence on their Quarterly Meeting to Nominate them for Correspondents, which Meetings sometimes have, too precipitately, & without due Enquiry into their Qualifications, assented to & approved of such Nominations. 'Tis likewise evident, that some Correspondents who, at the Time of their Nomination, were qualified, may, in a series of years, thro' Declension of Zeal, of Substance, or of Health, become otherwise. Others, for private Reasons improper to be divulged, may desire to be excused. And, another Class, for their Remissness & Non-attendance, ought to be discarded.

For the Remediying of these Inconveniencies & to prevent Umbrage to particular Persons, it is, with a sincere Desire for the Good of the whole Community, humbly offered, that the present Meeting for Sufferings be dissolved & that the Business thereof, for the Time being, be transferred to the Men-ministers & Elders belonging to the Morning-Meeting of London, to be, by them, & the Clerk to the present Meeting for Sufferings, managed with such Assistants as they may find necessary to call in.

For the new Election of Members properly qualified to act in the Meeting for Sufferings & for the better regulating the same, it is proposed, that each Quarterly, or other, Meeting, which has a Right of Nominating Correspondents in London, do write, or depute a Committee to write to the Monthly

¹ Y.M. was not at that time attended by the membership at large.

Meeting, the Friend intended to be nominated as its Correspondent is a Member of, for a Certificate recommending him, under the Qualifications hereafter inserted ; which Certificate let such Meeting immediately send to the Quarterly Meeting, or its Deputies, that the next ensuing Quarterly Meeting may send the Name of its intended Correspondent, to the Meeting for Sufferings, constituted as aforesaid, for the Time being, in Order that, in a New Book, for that purpose provided, under the Title of the Correspondent Book, it may be entered ; or, otherwise, that the said Quarterly Meeting may have Time to present the Correspondent to the ensuing Yearly Meeting, & have his Name inserted as above.

In case the Monthly Meeting can't justly certifie the Person to be so qualified, then that the said Meeting, without Delay, send a negative Answer to such Quarterly Meeting, or its Deputies, wherein let all due Tenderness be used to the Credit & Character of the Person so certified of, & all particular pointing out of any Deficiency, or Default of his be wholly avoided, & upon the Receipt thereof, let the Quarterly or other Meeting, proceed to a fresh Nomination, in like Manner as proposed before.

The Certificate is proposed to be signed by a competent Number of reputable Friends, as the Yearly Meeting may direct, & to contain Articles of like Import with the following :

1. That the Person nominated is of good Conversation & Character, both among Friends & Neighbours.
2. That he is a constant Attender of Meetings of Worship, & a zealous Promoter of the Discipline of the Monthly, & Quarterly Meeting to which he belongs.
3. That he keeps his Family, as much as possible, in Humility & Plainness of Speech & Habits, & is sound in the Persuasion of our Christian Principles.
4. That he stands faithful in his Testimony against receiving, or paying Tythes, &c.

If the Yearly Meeting don't see meet at this juncture, to dissolve the Meeting for Sufferings, it is hoped, a Minute may be made recommending these, or such like Qualifications, as necessary for Correspondents in Future Appointments, & that such who are not qualified as aforesaid, may be placed by their Constituents, & the preceeding Method, of requiring Certificates, be put in practice in every future Choice of Correspondents.