

The Baptism of Maria Hack, 1837

An Episode of the Beacon Controversy

The letter printed below, in which Maria Hack describes her baptism by Isaac Crewdson needs some introduction on the situation in the Society of Friends which led to it. For permission to print the letter we are indebted to Mrs. Charlotte S. Hack, of Westbrook, Edna Road, Maida Vale, W. Australia. For notes and for much of this introduction we thank Lawrence Darton.

Isaac Crewdson (1780-1844), of Manchester, an acknowledged minister in Hardshaw East Monthly Meeting, published in January, 1835, *A Beacon to the Society of Friends*, in which he set forth his belief in the final authority of Scripture, to the belittlement of guidance by the Inner Light. The *Beacon* consisted largely of a refutation, by appropriate quotations from the Bible, of some of the writings of Elias Hicks (1748-1830), who had held an almost exactly opposite position.

The Society had long known both the experience of the Light and the value of the Scriptures, but these attempts to make either exclude the other troubled many who had never thought of them as antithetical.

In the evangelical atmosphere prevailing at this period, the *Beacon* precipitated serious disagreement among Friends, first of all in Lancashire Quarterly Meeting. Yearly Meeting of 1835 appointed a committee to restore unity, a difficult task which it failed to accomplish. It contained some Friends of markedly evangelical outlook, including Joseph John Gurney, and, without condemning Crewdson's teaching, nevertheless counselled him for "practical" reasons first to withdraw his pamphlet, and then to suspend his ministry. Both counsels were in turn rejected by him.

He and his wife and, within a short period, about 300 other Friends in different parts of the country seceded from the Society. For a time they called themselves "Evangelical Friends"; eventually most of them joined the Plymouth Brethren or the Church of England.

A large crop of tracts sprang up, mushroom fashion, almost overnight, and the controversy continued, conducted principally by quoting judiciously selected passages of Scripture and of early Friends' writings. It was a controversy between moderate and extreme evangelicals, and the anti-Beaconites were anxious to prove the orthodox Christianity of the early Quaker leaders. The argument came to relate not only to the authority of Scripture but also to the use of outward baptism and the Lord's Supper. A number of literal-minded Beaconites felt called upon to receive water-baptism. Among them was Elisha Bates (c. 1780-1861), of Ohio, a prominent ministering Friend on a visit to England. Another was Maria Hack (1777-1844), the writer of the letter printed below.

MARIA HACK was the eldest child of John Barton (1755-1789) of Carlisle, and Mary (Done) (1752-1784), his wife. Maria's mother came of a Cheshire family and was a birthright Friend, and her father joined the Society at about the time of his marriage, which was in about 1775. Her mother died in 1784, soon after giving birth to a son, Bernard, who later became known as the Quaker poet. Shortly before his wife's death, John Barton had given up the calico-printing business in Carlisle which he had inherited from his father and had moved to London. In 1787 he became a member, with Thomas Clarkson, of the first committee for the abolition of the slave trade and in the same year re-married, his second wife being Elizabeth Horne (1760-1833), daughter of Thomas and Mary Horne, Friends of Bankside and Tottenham. When Maria was 12 years old her father died and her step-mother took her to live at or near the Hornes' house at Tottenham. It was from Tottenham that in 1800 at the age of 23 she was married to Stephen Hack (1775-1823), a Quaker currier of Chichester, and son of James and Priscilla (Hayler) Hack of Chichester. Maria Hack had a family of four sons and six daughters, several of whom eventually left the Society of Friends. Her husband died in 1823, when her youngest child was three years old, and after continuing to live at Chichester for another ten years, she moved to Gloucester. At the age of about 35 or 40, she had begun writing books for children, and after some years she acquired quite a reputation as an author of educational works suitable for home use. Amongst the better known of these were *English Stories* (1820-5) and *Lectures at Home* (1834), and at least one of them, *Familiar Illustrations of the Principal Evidences and Design of Christianity* (1824), which was written in the form of a series of conversations, shows that her outlook was decidedly evangelical some years before the Beacon controversy. Her personal letters at the time of the controversy itself, however, reveal her religious attitude in greater detail. Writing to her son-in-law, Thomas Gates Darton (1810-1887) on 9th of Fourth Month, 1836, she says:

“Samuel Tuke's *Letter*¹ seems to be as tardy in showing

¹ *A Letter to John Wilkinson* (1836). John Wilkinson (c. 1783-1846), of High Wycombe, married to Esther Wilson (1781-1856) of Kendal, had been Clerk of Yearly Meeting from 1808-1814. On resigning from the Society in Second Month, 1836, he had published *A Letter on resigning his membership in the Society of Friends*, to which Samuel Tuke's *Letter* was a

itself as this most dilatory Spring, which has so long been tantalizing us. I shall be very glad to see them both—the *Letter* and the fine weather—and hope both may have a beneficial influence. For Samuel Tuke's judgment I feel much respect,¹ and as so much consultation has been held on the subject, suppose his *Letter*, when it appears, may be regarded as an *ex cathedra* statement. I have no connection with any Beaconites or any description of partisans in this controversy, and shall be glad if Samuel Tuke can show better reasons on his side of the question than I have yet seen. The phraseology unfortunately adopted by Friends so nearly resembles that used by Elias Hicks that, unless they will so far renounce it as to state in plain, modern English what their doctrine with regard to Immediate Revelation really *is*, it seems impossible to draw a clear line of distinction between the *tendency* of the two *systems*. . . . How can we account for the providential preservation of the Scriptures, so free from any material error as they are acknowledged to be by all Christians, but on this ground—that He who only knows the deceitfulness of the human heart has so preserved them that they might be The Rule, the definite standard to which amidst all our wanderings we might ever return? . . . A firm belief in the influence of the Spirit is surely a very different thing from the acknowledgment of a special, internal, individual *revelation* of the truth. I hope that Samuel Tuke will clearly state what Friends *do* believe on this point and also whether Friends of the present day do really go the same length as Robert Barclay. I have not now either time or space to state *why* I think Robert Barclay is mistaken in his opinion of the authority of Scripture and of *the distinction between the law and the gospel*,² but the latter is so palpable that I shall be much disappointed if Samuel Tuke does not acknowledge it and explain the Apologist's views, if they do admit of explanation. He is a clever man and, I believe, a sincerely good one, perhaps as likely as any to state opinions intelligibly, and I

reply. John Wilkinson had written of the necessity of "accepting Holy Scripture, not as a *secondary* rule, but as THE RULE of faith and practice"—a reference to Robert Barclay's statement in the Third Proposition of his *Apology* that the Scriptures are a "secondary rule, subordinate to the Spirit, from which they have all their excellency and certainty."

¹ Samuel Tuke (1784-1857) of York was at this time Clerk of Yearly Meeting. He had married (1810) Maria Hack's niece, Priscilla Hack.

² Robert Barclay, *Apology*, Third proposition, § II.

should hope he would not be inclined to attach undue importance to the opinions of the Fathers of our Church. Surely John Wilkinson has ground for his apprehension that there is too much of this deference amongst us. . . ."

Two or three weeks later, on 27th of Fourth Month, 1836, Maria Hack adds, writing to the same correspondent: "I am grieved and disappointed by some passages in Samuel Tuke's *Letter*, for from *him* I had hoped better things. Still, I would not despair, but look forward with anxiety to the approaching Y.M., trusting that a more humble, candid and at the same time *courageous* spirit may be manifested."

The Yearly Meeting of 1836 issued an Epistle which contained a statement on the Society's beliefs concerning the authority of the Bible—a statement which follows very closely the definitions given by Samuel Tuke in his *Letter to John Wilkinson* and by Joseph John Gurney in his *Strictures*¹, but omits all reference to Barclay's controversial "secondary rule."² In his autobiography, Joseph John Gurney says: "I ventured to state to the Yearly Meeting what I apprehended ought to be the substance of it. These suggestions were afterwards adopted; the declaration was brought in and passed, with the warm concurrence of the body at large. It formed a part of the general epistle, which was carefully drawn up by a judicious committee, and which I believe to be as clear and important a document, considered as a confession of faith, as was ever put forth by a body of professing Christians; and it certainly ought to be received as a sufficient reply to all doubters and cavillers on the subject of the Christian belief of the Society of Friends."³ The Yearly Meeting of 1836, in fact, confirmed the tendency of the Society to veer towards the general evangelical position, and did not of itself widen the split in the Society's ranks.

During the following twelve months Maria Hack appears to have come round to the view that outward baptism and the Lord's Supper were ordinances which were obligatory for all Christians, and in 1836 or 1837 before the Yearly Meeting of 1837, she became a "communicant." In Sixth Month, 1837, while the Yearly Meeting was in progress, she was baptized, and in the following Eleventh Month her resignation from

¹ *Strictures on . . . The Truth Vindicated* (1836).

² *Apology*, Prop. III.

³ Quoted from *Memoirs of Joseph John Gurney* (1854), ii, p. 58.

the Society was accepted by Gloucester Monthly Meeting, whose testimony of disownment refers to their not desiring "to cast uncharitable reflection on those who may conscientiously differ from us."

At the end of 1837, after leaving the Society, Maria Hack published a short tract entitled *The Christian Ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, and "addressed to the Society of Friends," in which she opposed the arguments advanced by Joseph John Gurney in his *Observations on the Religious Peculiarities of the Society of Friends* (1824) against the Christian use of these ceremonies. "I wish," comments her brother, Barnard Barton, "my dear good sister would betake herself to her old vocation of writing far pleasanter tomes than her recent polemical tracts. Giving her credit as I do most sincerely for the best of intentions, I cannot help being doubtful of her benefitting others or herself by her new line of authorship."¹ Bernard Barton himself, in spite of the secession of nearly all his near relatives, remained faithful to what he called "old-fashioned Quakerism." "I might say," he writes, "that I felt quite unable to define what the belief or doctrine of our seceders were; or to what extent they differ from us, except as to what they term *ordinances*. But a difference on this point alone, is not in my view a little one. I have no sort of controversy with the good and the pious of other sects who have always thought it their duty to participate in such rites; I have no desire to dispute with those who, amongst us, thinking such things to be essential, quietly leave us and join in religious profession with those who practise them. But I have an abiding, and for aught I can see, an interminable controversy with those who would still hold their membership with us by forcing on us the observance of these rites, and mixing them up with our simpler and spiritual creed as part and parcel of a new-fangled system which they are pleased to call Evangelical Quakerism. I get puzzled and bewildered among these nondescript novelties; a sprinkling, or water-sprinkled, sacrament-taking Quaker is a sort of incongruous medley I can neither classify nor understand."²

Soon after leaving the Society of Friends, Maria Hack

¹ Letter to Thomas Gates Darton, 30th of Fifth Month, 1838.

² Letter to Mrs. Sutton, quoted undated in *Selections from the Poems and Letters of Bernard Barton* (1849), pp. 48-9.

joined the Church of England. At the end of 1841 or the beginning of 1842 she moved from Gloucester to Southampton, where she died on 4th of First Month, 1844.

The letter which follows was written just after Yearly Meeting, 1837, while she was staying at Catherine Court, near the Tower of London, to help during the confinement of her daughter, Margaret Emily Darton (1814-1886), the wife of Thomas Gates Darton.

Stephen Hack (1816-1894), to whom the letter was addressed, was Maria Hack's youngest son, who with his brother, John Barton Hack (1805-1884), had left England for South Australia in 1836. The two brothers were amongst the first Friends to arrive in this new colony, which they reached in Second Month, 1837, six weeks after it had been proclaimed. They were partly responsible for the erection in 1840 of the Adelaide Meeting House, a prefabricated wooden building which was subscribed for and sent out by Friends in England and is still used by Adelaide Friends as their Meeting House. Both brothers afterwards left the Society of Friends, John Barton Hack to become a Methodist and Stephen Hack to join the Church of England.

Catherine Court, [London].
17 June, 1837.

My dearest Stephen,

. . . If dear Margaret's disappointment with regard to Mary Capper had not occurred,¹ I hardly think I should have come to town. . . . Still, being here, I felt very anxious to avail myself of any opportunity that might be put in my way, especially as I was in some measure *under dealing*, having been visited by the Overseer of Gloucester Meeting on account of having received the Lord's Supper. . . . The obligation of baptism had also much engaged my thoughts, but there seemed to be difficulties in the way of receiving it, as I have so little of sectarian feeling that I rather shrink from any overt act which might pledge me to membership with any other Society lest thereby I might become entangled with some other yoke of bondage. At least, I determined *first* to use the opportunity this journey to London presented for learning whether our seceding Friends are likely to remain a

¹ Mary Capper was to have assisted during Margaret Emily Darton's confinement.

distinct body of Christians and whether, if so, I could so fully unite in their views as to consider myself a member of their association. It has happened, and I trust ever gratefully to acknowledge the goodness of Providence in so ordering events that, without any particular difficulty from which my natural shyness would probably have made me recoil, way has opened far beyond what I could have anticipated. For instance, the very first meeting I attended after coming to town—that for Worship on 4th day at Devonshire House—Anna Braithwaite,¹ to whom I should hardly have ventured to introduce myself from the persuasion that she would not know me, came to me after Meeting, addressed me very kindly, said she particularly wished for an opportunity of having some private conversation with me, and invited me to go home and dine with her the next day, to which I gladly consented.

During the interim I heard that Isaac Crewdson, though no longer a member of [the] Society, was in town *and baptizing*. I thought, if this were really true, my difficulties might be overcome, and on enquiry of Anna Braithwaite the next day found the report was correct [and] that Rachel Howard,² who is at Tottenham, to all appearance in the last stage of consumption, having told [her father] that she believed it her duty to obey in this particular the ordinance of Christ, Luke had written to Isaac Crewdson requesting him to come and administer the ordinance to his daughter. When I heard this, I asked Anna Braithwaite if she would be so kind, seeing I was quite a stranger, [as] to state my wishes on the subject and ask Isaac Crewdson to appoint some time and place where I could have the opportunity of speaking to him. With some difficulty arising from his being out of town, this was accomplished.

I had a private interview with Isaac Crewdson at Clapton³ that very evening, and I can hardly tell you how much

¹ Anna Braithwaite (1788-1859) was the daughter of Charles and Mary Lloyd of Birmingham, and wife of Isaac Braithwaite of Kendal. She was a prominent Minister of extreme evangelical outlook and had visited the United States during the Hicksite Controversy in which she had strongly supported the "orthodox" side.

² Rachel Howard (c. 1803-1837) was the author of *Lessons in Scripture History* (1834) and daughter of Luke Howard (1772-1864), the well-known meteorologist, and editor of *The Yorkshireman* (1833-7).

³ Presumably at the house of Isaac Crewdson's cousins, Hannah Messer and her husband, where Maria Hack was later baptized

comforted I was to find him a very superior kind of man to the idea I had conceived of him. I expected meekness, humility and simplicity: one could not read *The Crisis*¹ without receiving that impression of his character. I expected also from his benevolence that I should meet with kindness and Christian sympathy. But I was not prepared for so much dignity, nor for the *cautious* enquiry into the progress of conviction as to this ordinance. At length he professed himself satisfied and appointed the next day but one, requesting me to bring with me any persons I might desire to have as witnesses. This I declined, preferring to leave the whole arrangement to him. As you well know, I could not have asked such a thing of the Dartons,² indeed of any one I know about London.

Well, I went again to Clapton on the 7th day (yesterday fortnight) and, by Isaac Crewdson's request, was immediately shown upstairs into a room where he seemed to be waiting for me, with a Bible open on the table before him in which I saw many slips of paper. He received me with more than kindness, with affection, and again entered on the subject of religious belief, especially with regard to what is called the Trinity and the Atonement. I told him that, with regard to the latter, I thought the reasons I had given for desiring to receive the Lord's Supper must fully explain my feelings; but that I was not so sure my view of the Trinity would to *him* appear satisfactory; however, that I would unequivocally explain what it *had* been and what it now *is*. Having done so, I had the comfort of finding that my sentiments fully accorded with his own.

After perhaps half an hour's conversation, he proposed joining the company in the drawing-room. As we were going downstairs he stopped, and turning round to me, said that though no doubt remained on *his own* mind, yet as most unjust and . . . [illegible] reports of the proceedings of himself and his friends had been industriously circulated, he hoped I would not think he asked *too much* if he requested

¹ *The Crisis of the Quaker Contest in Manchester* (1837).

² This refers either to Thomas Gates Darton or to his father, Samuel Darton (1785-1840), who was at the time Clerk of Devonshire House Monthly Meeting. Although Darton and Harvey, of which Samuel Darton was senior partner and in which Thomas Gates Darton was an assistant, had been one of the joint publishers of the first edition of the *Beacon*, thereafter the firm published no pro-*Beacon* literature.

that before the ceremony I would explicitly state my belief in the Divine nature and the Offices of the Saviour, *lest it should be said he had baptized a Unitarian*. This was no small trial to me, but knowing that even of late years some Unitarians have spoken of me as belonging to them, I could not refuse a request so reasonable; and Isaac Crewdson most kindly made it easier by adverting to the obligation every one ought to feel, in receiving Christian baptism, to look upon it as an open profession of faith in the Divine Saviour, etc., etc. (He had previously read the passages from the New Testament into which he had put marks of reference, and spoken of the *intent* of the ordinances, etc.) I shall not have room to go into all the detail, but you will perceive how greatly this manner of introducing it lessened the trial to me. After I had said what was needful, Isaac Crewdson prayed that the Divine blessing might accompany the ordinance about to be administered; and subsequently made some observations upon the circumstances—upon his own apprehension that it was a duty required of him as a Christian minister, and one in which he requested the prayers of those present that he might be enabled to perform rightly. He then put something for me to kneel upon, and taking some water from a bowl on the table, poured it on my head, holding his hand upon it while he repeated very solemnly, “I baptize thee in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.” After this he prayed again—particularly, dear, good man, for the Divine blessing to rest upon me—and then there was a shaking of hands as is usual after one of Friends’ religious opportunities. Altogether, the ceremony appeared to me more solemn and impressive than the way in which the ordinance is administered in the Church of England, where the questions and answers are all prepared. Here everything arose out of the circumstances, and though it was not only trying, but really very awful to be called upon as I was, yet the very singularity of the thing seemed to bring it more home to the conscience, and surely it was *right* it should be so.

I know not, my dearest Stephen, whether my account of this will seem tedious to thee, but as thou wilt probably read a little paragraph which some officious person foolishly put into the newspaper (and I hear it has been copied into another), I should like you to know what really did pass on that occasion. It is true, as the paper states, that Luke

Howard himself was baptized, *not* when I was, but at seven o'clock in the morning of the same day. There were a good many, perhaps twenty, witnesses present with me, among them Esther Wilkinson. I am not sure about John Wilkinson; I do not recollect seeing him till sometime afterwards; the folding doors were open and he was probably in the adjoining room. He came and sat by me on the sofa and we had much interesting conversation. Tea was brought in and there was much coming and going in Y.M. fashion, though the Messers at whose house this took place have resigned their membership.

I returned to town in the evening by the stage with Robert Jowitt¹ of Leeds, who very kindly accompanied me to Catherine Court. He adverted to his schoolboy days and to the kindness he had received from me and Aunt Lizzy² when he used to come as a schoolboy to dine at Grandfather Horne's.³ He joined our company at tea-time and, I believe, was not aware of the ceremony that had taken place. During our ride to town he adverted to the changes taking place among Friends. I assented to or differed from him as it happened, but quite in a general way; having read his pamphlet on the subject of water baptism and, notwithstanding the sentiments therein expressed, feeling great esteem for him and his ministry, I should have been very sorry to wound his feelings by any unguarded remark.

I do sincerely love and esteem really pious Friends and I do believe that such, if they could only think themselves at liberty to examine the obligation of baptism and the Supper on purely *Scriptural* grounds, without referring at all to the judgment of *early Friends* on these points, (that they) would see the thing in a very different light from that in which they now view it. My reason for thinking so is this. It is not a matter of *opinion* in which men may from various circumstances arrive at opposite conclusions, and are perhaps allowed to entertain different views while they cultivate an

¹ Robert Jowitt (1784-1862) was the son of John and Susanna Jowitt of Leeds and brother of Elizabeth (Jowitt) Crewdson, Isaac Crewdson's wife. He had married (1810) Isaac Crewdson's sister, Rachel (1782-1856). He was, however, no Beaconite and in 1837 published *Thoughts on Water Baptism*, a tract which supported the Society's traditional views on baptism.

² Elizabeth Barton (1779-c. 1838), Maria Hack's sister, who joined the Church of England in 1837.

³ Thomas Horne of Tottenham, Maria Hack's step-mother's father.

humble spirit and regard the opinions of others with charity. But in this case, we have plain injunctions as to matters of fact—things to be done. . . . All Christians agree that our Lord promised the Holy Spirit to his Apostles, adding that he should *guide them into all truth and bring all that he had said to their remembrance*. No one disputes this, or that the promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. How then can we suppose that the Apostles, when filled with the Holy Spirit, that infallible guide and remembrancer, could possibly *misunderstand* the parting injunction of their Lord to go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, etc.? Their conduct plainly shows that they believed *water* baptism to be what they were enjoined to practise, and the Lord was pleased to confirm their word by signs following, i.e., by the evidence of miracles. What awful presumption does it then seem for a set of men 1,600 years afterwards to imagine that they could have a more full and clear understanding of the commands of Christ than was possessed by his own Apostles! The power of God *is understood by the things that he has made*. Deists are willing to acknowledge him as the universal Father, but this is only a *part* of the Divine character, of which our unassisted reason can assure us. He has revealed himself to be also our Redeemer and our Sanctifier, and ordains this simple rite as the acknowledgment that his fallen, sinful creatures gladly and thankfully accept his offered mercy, and believe in and receive him as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. By doing this they glorify him before men, they give an evident *token* of their faith. I am sure it is far, very far from my wish to condemn the *intentions* of our early Friends, but I do believe they fell into a great but specious delusion, the participation and effects of which will long be lamented.

I was much interrupted while writing the above and fear it will not appear so intelligible as I could wish. I hope to send thee Isaac Crewdson's little tract on baptism.¹

¹ *Water Baptism an Ordinance of Christ* (1837).