

Travel Under Concern

300 Years of Quaker Experience

Presidential Address to the Friends' Historical Society, 1964

“THE North of Europe, Norway, Sweden, Russia, parts of Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, Rome, many parts of Germany and Spain, etc., were brought into view, as portions of the earth where I should have to proclaim the Lord’s redeeming love and power. Strong and awful was the impression made on my mind, that I could not enter into my Master’s rest till this work was accomplished.”¹

This passage from the writings of Stephen Grellet has gripped my imagination for many years. It has now provided the theme for this lecture; it might equally well have provided the theme for a book. Obviously, for the purpose of a lecture, some restriction is necessary. I do not propose to deal with travel under concern for the purpose of service overseas. With some reluctance, I have also excluded travel under concern to declare some specific testimony, or to undertake some specific task—for instance, the journey of William Robinson, Marmaduke Stephenson, Mary Dyer, and little Patience Scott to testify against “the law to put the servants of the living God to death,”² a road which ended for all save the child in martyrdom; or the journey of Emma Noble in 1926 when, having attended Yearly Meeting for the first time, she was so impressed by reports of the desperate state of things in the Welsh coalfield that she went home, packed her bag, and set off for South Wales, a road which ended both for herself and her husband in a lifework of social service. Colonizing journeys, too, must be regarded as outside the scope of this lecture. Our concern is to study this urge which makes so “strong and awful” an impression upon the mind, to see whither it has led those who can know no rest until their Master’s work has been accomplished, to investigate the results, whether transient or lasting, and to explain, if

¹ S. Grellet, *Memoirs* (1860) i. 329; 3rd ed. (1862) i. 292.

² *New England judged* (1661) Letter from Marmaduke Stephenson pp. 131-133; quoted in Rufus M. Jones, *Quakers in the American colonies* (1923) p. 83.

possible, the nature of travel under concern as experienced over three centuries.

The broad sweep of Stephen Grellet's vision—"strong and awful was the impression made on my mind"—occurs and recurs throughout three hundred years of Quaker history. It is to be found in the twentieth century as in the seventeenth. However, there is, and always has been, a price to be paid. Even George Fox's vision from Pendle Hill had to be won.

"I spied a great high hill called Pendle Hill, and I went on the top of it with much ado, it was so steep; but I was moved of the Lord to go atop of it; and when I came atop of it I saw Lancashire sea; and there atop of the hill I was moved to sound the day of the Lord; and the Lord let me see a-top of the hill in what places he had a great people to be gathered."¹

The moving of the Lord, the obedience to God's guidance, the "much ado," all had to come before the vision was revealed. The "vernal equinox of the spirit," as Rufus Jones never tired of reminding us, "does not come as lightning out of the sky." Nevertheless, it can appear to do so; the final revelation can come with so intense a clarity and illumination that the exact time and place can be remembered.

"In the beginning of the year 1655," wrote Marmaduke Stephenson, "I was at the plough in the east parts of Yorkshire in Old England, near the place where my outward being was, and as I walked after the plough, I was filled with the love and the presence of the living God which did ravish my heart when I felt it; . . . and as I stood a little still, with my heart and mind stayed on the Lord, the word of the Lord came to me in a still small voice, which I did hear perfectly, saying to me, in the secret of my heart and conscience, 'I have ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.'"²

James Nayler, on trial before the magistrates at Appleby in 1653, was able to convey the experience with such clarity that Anthony Pearson was convinced even as he sat on the Bench. "I was at the Plough, meditating on the Things of God, and suddenly I heard a Voice, saying unto me, 'Get thee out from thy Kindred and from thy Father's House.' And I

¹ *The Journal of George Fox*. Edited by John Nickalls (1952) pp. 103-104.

² *New England judged* (1661) Letter from Marmaduke Stephenson pp. 131-133; quoted in Rufus M. Jones, *Quakers in the American colonies* (1923) pp. 82-83.

had a Promise given in with it."¹ A little later in the interrogation, one of the magistrates asked him curiously: "What was the Promise that thou hadst given?" He answered: "That *God would be with me*: Which Promise I find made good every Day."²

The seventeenth-century testimony rings true, partly because it is so clearly and simply described, and partly because the experience is still typical, and valid, and unchanged. When a young American Friend began to describe his spiritual experience to me with these words: "When I was driving the tractor one morning . . ." he was at first surprised when I continued with ". . . meditating on the things of God . . ." but it did not take us long to discover that James in the seventeenth century and Jim in the twentieth were in the same tradition.

The experience recurs throughout Quaker history. Thomas Story records it in his *Journal*. "In the year 1693, towards the latter End of Autumn, as I was riding alone in an Evening in Cumberland, the Power of divine Truth moved upon my Mind, and my Heart was greatly tendered before the Lord; and the Word of the Lord opened in me, saying, 'Behold, my Visitation cometh over the Western Parts of the World, towards the Sun-setting in time of Winter . . .' From henceforth I was often tendered in Spirit in remembrance of the Western World, in a Sense of the Love and Visitation of God to a People there, whom I had never seen."³

In the next century, John Churchman, a Pennsylvanian Friend, is stirred in the silence of a meeting for worship by a message "uttered in a language intelligent to the inward man, 'Gather thyself from all the cumbers of the world and be thou weaned from the popularity, love, and friendship thereof.'" Not knowing whether this is a "merciful warning" of death, or a call "To stand ready for some service which would separate me from temporal business, and the nearest connections in life," he settles his affairs and later feels "an inward silence for about two or three weeks." Then "one day, walking alone, I felt myself so inwardly weak and feeble, that I stood still, and, by the reverence that covered my mind, I knew that the hand of the Lord was on me, and

¹ Besse, *Sufferings*, (1753) ii, 4.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Journal of the Life of Thomas Story* (1747) p. 147.

his presence round about: the earth was silent, and all flesh brought into stillness, and light went forth with brightness, and shone on Great Britain, Ireland, and Holland, and my mind felt the gentle, yet strongly drawing cords of that love which is stronger than death, which made me say, 'Lord! go before, and strengthen me, and I will follow whithersoever thou leadest.'"¹

The Australian travels of James Backhouse in the nineteenth century are often felt to have been in a more practical, down-to-earth category. A Friend with such definite aims in view regarding penal reform, investigation into the state of the aborigines, and encouragement of scattered members of the Society of Friends, might be held to need no mystical summons. Yet seventeen years before he set out, when he was about twenty years of age, the preliminary intimation came. "About this time," he wrote later, "I was first impressed with the belief that it was the will of the Lord that, at a future time, I should go on a gospel errand into Australia. The impression was sudden but very clear. It occurred as I was standing in the nursery ground at Norwich, not thinking on such subjects. I felt as though I could have sunk under it, but I dared not to oppose it, and I prayed in spirit that if it were indeed the will of God, He would be pleased to prepare me for it, and to open the way for it, both in my own mind and in the minds of my friends."²

Later in the same century, the veteran traveller, Isaac Sharp expressed his mystical summons in words which powerfully recall those of Stephen Grellet. In 1874, when he was sixty-eight years of age, he was so ill that some of his friends thought he could not recover. One of these visited him and must have betrayed his feelings. Isaac Sharp remained silent for a while and then said: "O my dear friend, my Lord has shewn me while I have been laid on this bed of sickness, that He has yet much work for me to do, and that I shall be raised up to do it. He has shewn me clearly a prospect of service at Cape Colony, including visits to the mission stations in the far interior. Thence to our Friends' missions in Madagascar. After this, extensive service awaits me in each of our Australian colonies and in New Zealand. I have further seen

¹ *An Account of the Gospel Labours and Christian Experience of a Faithful Minister of Christ, John Churchman* (1780) pp. 104-106.

² *Memoir of James Backhouse by his Sister* (1870) p. 13.

that the mighty Pacific Ocean must be crossed, and that I am to enter the United States of America by the Golden Gate of San Francisco."¹

Yet another concern for travel was laid upon Isaac Sharp when he was over eighty, for in 1888 he made an entry in his diary: "I have been permitted to glance at 1890 as a probable period—when on the verge of four score and four—for entering on this work of faith."²

Those who in recent years have heard Friend after Friend lay before Meeting for Sufferings their concern for travel in South Africa, often in face of what might seem to be almost insuperable obstacles, will recognize that the "work of faith" continues. And those who today feel the concern for far-flung travel will testify that the call still comes in exactly the same way.

From the earliest days of Quakerism, the validity of the *joint* concern for travel has been recognized. In 1655, Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill received independently and almost simultaneously a call to travel in Ireland. Edward Burrough wrote: "On the tenth day of the fourth month late in the evening, the movings of the Lord came upon me to go to Dublin city in Ireland. Upon the thirtieth day of the fourth month I submitted, and gave myself up to go."³ And Francis Howgill records: "The word of the Lord came upon me the seventh day of the fourth month about the tenth hour of the day near Islington a mile off London, as I was waiting upon the Lord, saying, 'Go to Dublin in Ireland with my servant Edward Burrough.'"⁴ It meant leaving work in London for which they were well fitted, but there was no doubt in their minds, or in the minds of Friends, that they must go.

Thomas Story, in 1698, confided to Roger Gill his concern to visit America, and asked him "if he knew of any ministering Friend concerned for those Parts, for I wanted a Companion; To which, being silent for some Time, he replied, 'It is now long since I was first concerned that Way, and the last Night,

¹ *Isaac Sharp: An Apostle of the Nineteenth Century*, Frances Anne Budge (1898) p. 77.

² *Ibid.* p. 157.

³ Friends House: Boswell Middleton Collection. Quoted by Elizabeth Brockbank in *Edward Burrough* (1949), pp. 67-68.

⁴ *Ibid.*

in my Sleep, was as if making all things ready for my Voyage.' To which I replied, 'Is it no more but a Dream yet?' and so we left it for that Time. Afterward, going to a Meeting at Enfield, he overtook me in the Way; and we, having some more Discourse on that subject, he told me it would be the Seventh Month at soonest before he could be ready; for he had his Wife and Family to put in a Way of Living, not knowing whether ever he might see them any more."¹ They sailed in the following November, and many Friends gathered to see them off, including William Penn, who prayed fervently "for the good and preservation of all."

In the following century, Sarah (Tuke) Grubb and Mary Dudley shared a concern to travel on the continent of Europe. Sarah saw clearly where she was to go; Mary knew only that she would be called to a foreign country, where people spoke a tongue she did not know. It was in the course of the resultant journey, accomplished with other Friends in 1788, that the little group at Congénies was first visited. Similarly, in the same century, the American Friends, Samuel Emlen and George Dillwyn, simultaneously laboured under a concern for travel, Samuel being quite clear as to his destination, and George only certain that he was preparing for service in some region yet unrevealed. Both attended a meeting in London, where they sat together, Samuel fully clear, and George in great uncertainty and distress of mind. At the close of the meeting, Samuel Emlen turned to his friend and said quietly: "Thou must go with me to Holland."²

Sometimes a joint concern does not necessarily involve shared travel; one may see the destination and the other be called to go. When the young John Richardson visited the veteran William Dewsbury, he was immediately directed to Coventry. The young man was unwilling to go; he had seen quite enough of Coventry, where "rude people" had flung stones at him. "But William was positive, and said, *I must go, for there was a service for me to do there.* Upon a deliberate Consideration of the Matter, and a seeking to the Lord to know his Will in it, I found my Way clear to go, and I had some Service and good Satisfaction, and left Friends nearer to one

¹ *Journal of the Life of Thomas Story* (1747), p. 150.

² Rufus M. Jones, *Later Periods of Quakerism* (1921), p. 227.

another than when I first met them; for there had been a misunderstanding amongst Friends in that City."¹

Akin to this type of joint service is *prophetic* sharing. Aunt Peace lifts the new-born infant, Rufus Jones, in her arms and prophesies: "This child will one day bear the message of the gospel to distant lands and to peoples across the sea."² The prophecy may not be fulfilled in the way she imagines as she utters it, but the influence of the words will be lifelong, and in all the far flung travels of Rufus Jones, the prophecy of Aunt Peace will be remembered.

The joint concern and prophetic sharing both involve an acute sensitivity which has been characteristic of travel under concern throughout Quaker history. Thomas Scattergood visits Rebecca Jones in 1793, when the yellow fever is raging in Philadelphia. His mind has long been exercised with a concern to visit Friends and others in Great Britain and Ireland, but he is not clear that the time is ripe and he has shared his thoughts with none. Rebecca Jones, almost too ill to speak, looks up at him: "Go and the Lord go with thee!" she says. Later in the day, when he visits her again, she explains: "I alluded to thy going over great waters. The Lord has in some instances entrusted me with His secrets, and I have not betrayed them."³

Sometimes the concern for travel overseas appears to have been influenced by prophetic dreams, and it is a relief to find that even the worthiest and weightiest Friends were sometimes sufficiently human to forget them on waking. John Yeardley, destined to go to Germany in 1822, was greatly distressed four years previously, when he had a vivid dream about places in Germany which he would be called to visit, yet could not remember any of the names on waking. John Yeardley had three prophetic dreams in two years, but what really confirmed his faith was a message from John Kirkham of Essex who, when worshipping with the family, said: "We cannot be faithful to the vision of another man, we do not know it except it be revealed to us; but we must be *faithful to our own vision*."⁴

¹ *An Account of the life of the ancient servant of Christ, John Richardson* (1774), pp. 35-36.

² Elizabeth Gray Vining, *Friend of Life* (1958), p. 17.

³ *Memoirs of Thomas Scattergood* (1859), p. 122.

⁴ *Memoir and Diary of John Yeardley* (1859), p. 57.

Possibly the most striking instance of the prophetic dream as affecting travel under concern is Lindley Murray Hoag's dream of the Roldal Valley. This was described by John William Graham in his *Psychical Experiences*, but there is also a contemporary record dictated by Knud Knudsen Botnen, and preserved in America by the descendants of the original Roldal group, who kindly made it available to me. I quote the manuscript in full.

These are a few remembrances concerning how the Lord's servant, Lindley Murray Hoag, came to our help when we were in our land of birth, Norway, 1853.

About 1849, I, Knud Knudsen Botnen, and a few with me did not see it right for us to be united any longer with the Lutheran Church. Although we were not acquainted with any other meeting for religious expression, we felt it right for us to come together on First Days to read the Bible and spend some time in silence to wait upon the Lord.

It continued for more than two years. Through it we realized a soul's peace and tranquility in our inner mind. Although tale-bearing and persecution by our brothers of the Lutheran faith often was our part, we thought that an unusual new trial was over us when two of our little group declared that they thought it right for them to unite in marriage with each other. We did not know of any other than the priest, who had the right to perform the marriage ceremony, and that would mean reinstatement with the Lutheran Church which was contrary to our views. One day it clearly came to me that I should say to them that they should wait and the Lord would in His time send some people who could help us. It was an assurance that our leading was from the Lord, when Lindley Murray Hoag came to us.

Lindley Murray Hoag came from America by way of London to Stavanger accompanied by James Backhouse of England. At this time "Quakers" were totally unknown to us. He was called to preach Christ's truth in different places in the country and surely we could say that had not the Lord been their leader they would have passed us by.

Friends in Stavanger directed them around in our land where they knew of others. Lindley felt that his work was not yet fulfilled, for there was a place he had not found. He added, "There is a valley in between the mountains where there are some people that I must visit and if I do not, my journey from America will be in vain. That valley was shewn me in a dream when I was in my home in America. There was a lake and it seemed I ate fish that a man had caught there and gave me."

Where was this place that none of the Friends could give him direction? A map of Norway was given him and he pointed with his finger to a place that was eighty-five miles from Stavanger.

They set out on the journey. As they approached the place they met Tormod Botnen coming from the lake carrying a few

fish (trout) that he had caught. They were their first meal in Roldal, the name of the valley. These men though strangers soon became most beloved and dear to us.

They soon appointed a meeting and the truths that were interpreted to us were so in harmony with our feelings and spiritual knowledge that we felt we could say yea to all they declared, and also to what we read in the Friends writings which came into our hands for the first time.

Before they departed they performed the marriage in a meeting appointed in my house which was attended by a large number of people.

There was persecution and imprisonment for not taking up arms and the taking of property for the priests tithes. Our members increased and regular meeting held. A Meeting-House and School-House were established. In 1869 we felt it right for us to emigrate to America and unite with some Friends that had come before. These families composed Stavanger meeting near Le Grand, Marshall County, Iowa.

Dictated by Knud Knudsen Botnen to his sister's son, Helger Thompson, in 1885.¹

It is good to remember that for Knud Botnen, Lindley Murray Hoag was none other than "the Lord's servant," for on his first visit to England, in 1845, an eloquent and handsome widower, he created such a sensation amongst susceptible women Friends that it was considered advisable for him to return home, at least for the time being.

Truly the treasure is in earthen vessels, and we are constantly reminded of the fact. Many Friends went to view the ships on which they were to travel, but it took a John Woolman to reject the proffered accommodation as too luxurious and elect to travel steerage. Some Friends would have forebodings of ship-wreck and disembark, to record later that the vessel had been lost with all hands; it took a Mary Pryor deliberately to choose an old tub, in spite of the protests of her friends and relations, and through her faith and courage, maintained by constant prayer, to be the means of saving all who sailed in her.

The very fact that the treasure is in earthen vessels renders the records more credible. We might feel inclined to doubt John Richardson's "little white horse," which he dreamt about during his voyage to America in 1700, afterwards seeing the identical little horse "near a great house in

¹ MS. copied by Wilmer L. Tjossem from records in the possession of the Thompson family of Iowa and made available through the kind offices of Joe and Teresina Havens of Northfield, Minnesota.

Maryland," were it not that, being a matter-of-fact Yorkshireman, he offered £5 for it, when its owner had asked him for £8. "The Man's Wife coming up the Passage, heard what I had offered, and she said to her Husband, *It is enough*: So I had him, and a good Horse he proved, and carried me, by a moderate Computation, four thousand Miles."¹

John Richardson may have been a visionary at times, but he was very shrewd, and the story in his *Journal* lives. He disputes with a minister in Virginia, "a topping brisk Man, his Temper in this case not unsuitable to his Name, which was Sharp."² When in Flushing, Long Island, he stayed with Samuel Bowne at the Bowne house, which is still standing. As he was about to leave, he saw clearly the treatment which would heal Mary Bowne's sore breast, and returning hurriedly to the house, he told her what to do. Afterwards he heard that the treatment had been successful, "so it is good to mind Truth and the Workings of it in all Things. I met with the great Doctor (as he was esteemed) who had it under hand, and he said, *I was a bold fellow*: I said, *It proved well*. He answered, *It was well for me it did*."³

Sometimes travel under concern involves a clear message which must be given. After the vision on Pendle Hill, George Fox knew that he must tell "the great people to be gathered" that "Christ was come to teach people himself by his power and spirit and to bring them off all the world's ways and teachers to his own free teaching, who had bought them and was the Saviour."⁴ On the other hand, Mary Fisher made her incredible journey over sea and land to the Grand Turk not knowing what she had to say to him, save that she brought a message from God. She waited in silence and the message came. Similarly James Nayler declared: "I was commanded to go into the West, not knowing whither I should go, nor what I had to do there, but, when I had been there a little while, I had given me what I was to declare, and ever since I have remained, not knowing today what I was to do tomorrow."⁵

Sometimes the traveller knew clearly what he was to do

¹ *An Account of . . . John Richardson* (1774), p. 63.

² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁴ *The Journal of George Fox*. Ed. John Nickalls (1952), p. 104.

⁵ Besse, *Sufferings*, (1753) ii, 4.

tomorrow. James Backhouse, during his travels in Australia from 1831-41, visited convict settlements and prisons, studied laws and regulations, advised governors and officials. Daniel Wheeler in Russia carried out formidable practical undertakings, the draining and reclaiming of the Crown Lands near Petersburg. On the other hand, it was possible even for the same traveller to set out on another occasion with apparently no definite aim in view. Daniel Wheeler, when laying his concern for travel in the Pacific before the Morning Meeting in 1832, could only say, when asked what he expected to do in those distant parts, that no specific line of duty was pointed out to him, in this early stage of the business.

Many who travel under concern experience the frustration of delay. John Richardson recorded that when the time drew near for his voyage to America, "having had a Sight of it about Ten years before . . . it sounded in my Ears several Days and Nights, *Now is the Time, Now is the Time.*"¹ John Churchman "saw" his journey to England "near fifteen years in a very plain manner, and at times, for ten years, thought the concern so strong upon me, that I must lay it before my friends for their advice, but was secretly restrained; being made to believe that an exercise of that sort would ripen best to be kept quiet in my own heart, to know the right time, by no means desiring to run without being sent. To see a thing is not a commission to do that thing: the time when, and judgment to know the acceptable time, are the gifts of God."² Similarly, Isaac Sharp wrote to his daughter in 1890: "Four years ago *I* was ready, but the dear Lord said *not yet*, and moreover gave the charge, the imperative charge, *tell the vision to no man*. I have faith to begin this long journey, and faith to leave the issue, and here is my stronghold of rest and peace."³

The right time for the sharing of the concern is followed by liberation to carry it out. Friend after Friend records this stage in the carrying out of the concern. William Edmundson writes: "In the year 1671, I had movings upon my spirit to travel to the West-Indies, which thing had remained with me for some time before; so I went to the Half-years-Meeting at

¹ *An Account of . . . John Richardson* (1774), pp. 59-60.

² *An Account of . . . John Churchman* (1780), p. 106.

³ Frances Anne Budge, *Isaac Sharp: an Apostle of the Nineteenth Century* (1898), p. 165.

Dublin in the third month, where I acquainted Friends with my intended journey, who had unity therewith, and the Lord's presence and power appear'd mightily among us, to our great comfort, confirmation and satisfaction."¹

John Richardson described the exact procedure of liberation to an enquirer in Bermuda in 1702:

I opened to her the Case of such Journeys and Services, how we proceeded, and how the Meetings were constituted in which we did so proceed, and from whence we had certificates, from Monthly, Quarterly, or Meetings of Ministers to which we belonged, and from Friends in several Provinces and Islands where we travelled, if we desired them . . . She craved to see some of those certificates: I shewed her them, beginning at the first, wherein Friends of Kelk, now Bridlington Monthly Meeting in Yorkshire, to Friends in America, shewed not only their full Unity with this my present Journey, but also with my Service for the Truth, and Conversation to the same, where I had lived and travelled; and that I had settled my outward Affairs to Friends' Satisfaction, under many Hands variously writ.²

Liberation is no mere matter of form, even in the case of well-known Friends and seasoned travellers. During the Yearly Meeting of 1803, the Meeting of Ministers and Elders could not at first unite to liberate Thomas Shillitoe, who was concerned to visit parts of Holland, Germany and France. Thomas Shillitoe was a much-loved Friend whose service when travelling under concern had been deeply valued and richly blest. Nevertheless, on this occasion the liberating body had to meet a second time, and even then many Friends expressed doubts. Richard Cockin records that Thomas Shillitoe then

informed the meeting, how he continued to feel respecting the subject. He said that since the preceding meeting, he had endeavoured to feel whether the trial of his faith in communicating the concern to the meeting would not have been accepted as the ram for the sacrifice, but in his endeavouring to feel after the will of his heavenly Father, he could not witness his mind to be released, without still casting his burthen upon the meeting, for it to dispose of him, and if the meeting should come to the conclusion not to set him at liberty, he should regard it as a great favour, he having done what he believed to be required of him, as he would not take one step therein without the unity of his friends. It felt to me like deep calling unto deep, and for a considerable time sufficient light did not appear to shine upon it, so as the meeting could move

¹ William Edmundson, *Journal* (1715), p. 52.

² *An Account of . . . John Richardson* (1774), pp. 171-172.

forward, but in time the cloud gradually appeared to disperse, till at length Friends became so unanimous as that the Clerk could form a minute recording that the meeting sweetly united in liberating our beloved Friend.¹

In 1891, London Yearly Meeting was faced with the decision whether to encourage Isaac Sharp, then eighty-five years of age, in further travel under concern. "What saith the Master?" wrote Isaac Sharp, before the meeting. "From Him I catch no bugle notes from the heavenly armoury to surrender, to lay the armour down."² The Yearly Meeting could not resist his gallant spirit, and Frederick Andrews is said to have returned to Ackworth resolved to inspire the young people there with this example of undaunted faith.

There have been times when liberation has involved plain speaking. The concern of Herbert Sefton-Jones "for religious service amongst Friends in Australia, New Zealand, British Columbia and elsewhere" received loving support from his Monthly and Quarterly Meetings, and from Meeting for Sufferings, but the Monthly Meeting minute states clearly that "our Friend's point of view on some important matters differs from our own and from that expressed by our Yearly Meeting,"³ and the Meeting for Sufferings minute is even more explicit: "Although our Friend has not been able to agree unreservedly with our Yearly Meeting in its testimony concerning war, yet, having known his unwearied service amongst Friends, his sincerity of speech, and his warm sympathy, we gladly unite in wishing him every blessing on his journey, and in the desire that he may constantly experience the guiding hand of God."⁴ Herbert Sefton-Jones faithfully presented this minute to all the groups of Friends he visited; the liberating bodies had spoken the truth in love, and their action had inspired neither chagrin nor resentment, but a grace of acceptance which enhanced the value of the original concern.

After liberation comes the opening of the door. This may come through the sudden offering of an opportunity. For instance, in 1657 eleven Friends were waiting in London for a passage to America, rendered almost unobtainable

¹ *Pen Pictures of London Yearly Meeting*, ed. N. Penney (1930), pp. 86-87.

² F. A. Budge, *Isaac Sharp* (1898), p. 178.

³ Minute 4 of Westminster and Longford Monthly Meeting held at Golders Green 14.vi.1923.

⁴ Minute of Meeting for Sufferings, 5.x.1923.

owing to the penalties imposed on ships' captains conveying Quakers to Boston. Their opportunity came when Robert Fowler of Bridlington sailed up the Thames in the *Woodhouse*, a vessel which he had felt it laid upon him to build "in the cause of truth." To take a later example, Thomas Hodgkin had for years felt concerned to visit Friends in Australia, so that when, during the Yearly Meeting held at Leeds in 1905, an appeal was made for such a visit to be paid, he nearly responded, though he was approaching seventy-four years of age. It was not until three years later that the way suddenly opened. A sea voyage was recommended for his daughter Violet's health. "The question came to me in the night watches, 'What if this means for us that visit to Australia which we talked of and abandoned three years ago?'"¹ He laid his concern before Newcastle Monthly Meeting in October 1908, and set off with his wife and daughter and one of his sons in January, 1909.

Sometimes the opening of the door comes through the unexpected solving of the financial problem. The post brings a letter promising financial help and the concern, dormant for many years, flares up as the way is opened. Sometimes a wise older Friend discerns a growing concern in one too young or too modest to give way to it. Ormerod Greenwood, in an article in the *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society*, describes how, early in the eighteenth century, John Hunt prophesied in an Irish country meeting that there was one present who would "go forth to publish the glad tidings of the gospel." Among those who heard him was young Susanna Hudson, who had been called to the ministry, "as from the milking pail," at the age of seventeen. "Recalling the occasion forty years later as she lay dying, Susanna remembered that 'Friends remarked that there was nobody for it but Susie—which exceedingly humbled me.'"² Isabel Richardson, who later travelled widely in the ministry, was first encouraged in 1795, when she was a young and timid girl, by an older Friend who pointed to her in Durham Women's Quarterly Meeting and said: "I do not know the name of that young Friend, but I should wish her to be one of our representatives at Yearly Meeting." Riding home behind

¹ Louise Creighton, *Life and Letters of Thomas Hodgkin* (1918), p. 288.

² "John Woolman and Susanna Lightfoot," Ormerod Greenwood, *Jnl. F.H.S.*, xlviii, 148.

her father on a pillion, she told him the names of the older women Friends who had been appointed, and then added: "And me, Father!" "What, *thee*, bairn!" exclaimed her father in astonishment.¹ Travelling in the ministry was no light duty in Isabel's day. It is recorded that once, when on a ministerial journey with Ann Jones, she expressed a wish to return home to her sister Sarah's wedding. Ann Jones was made of sterner stuff. "Let the dead bury their dead!" she replied.²

Even when the concern is unmistakable and the way apparently clear, the opening of the door by another hand is sometimes needed. In 1850 Sybil Jones, an American Friend, felt a concern to visit Liberia and Sierra Leone, with her husband, Eli, but

so deep was my sense of frailty and entire inability to do the work that I could not believe that the Master would select me to go on such an important embassy . . . I thought unless some person would come to me and tell me that the Lord required it, and would fit me for the work, I would not take a step. I thought I could not receive it but from someone clothed with gospel authority; and in looking over this class I selected dear Benjamin Seebohm, who I knew was somewhere in America . . . Our Monthly Meeting day arrived and, though my health was so frail that I had gotten out to meeting but little for some time, I felt an almost irresistible impression to go. I accordingly went. As I entered the door, almost the first person I met was Benjamin Seebohm. I could not have been more surprised at the appearance of any person. In a moment my request rushed into my mind, and thought I, "I am caught now; I have done wrong in asking this sign, and may the Lord forgive me and in mercy overlook this presumption, and not grant the request unless it is His will, in condescension to my low estate." The meeting gathered under a solemnity. It seemed to me that this weighty service fell upon it, and after a time of very solemn silence dear Benjamin arose and took up an individual case, and so exactly described my feelings at the service that no doubt remained that the Most High had sent him with this message to me.³

The part played by the family circle in the opening of the door cannot be overlooked. It is always a shared service. John Banks expressed this most clearly in a letter written from Warwick in 1668 to his wife, Ann, at home in Cumberland. "In my heart I reach forth a hand unto thee; give me

¹ Anne Ogden Boyce, *Records of a Quaker family: the Richardsons of Cleveland* (1889), pp. 53-54.

² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³ Rufus M. Jones, *Eli and Sybil Jones* (1889), pp. 72-74.

thine and let us go along together, in heart and mind, in the work and service of the Lord."¹ William Edmundson wrote of his wife after her death in 1691:

When I was called to travell in the service and labour of the gospell of our lord and saviour Jesus Christ, she never opposed me, but gave me up, and with all readiness would provide things nessesary & suitable to my journey . . . to make things as easy to me as she could, and my labours without charge to others. I was three times in the West Indies in Truth's service, and the least was a year and a half from her, and my expence much, which she knew was supplyd mostly by her endeavors, and I never heard her mention the charge in way of reflection . . . She tooke the charge of our outward concerns & famely upon her in my absence, and stood in her testemony against tithes, and the Lord increased things under her hand beyond ordinary.²

In remembering thankfully the missionary labours of those who bore the message of Quakerism out into the world, we too easily overlook those who remained behind and made their service possible. It was a shared service in the material sense; it was a shared service in the spiritual sense; it was a shared service that sprang from the very heart of the love between husband and wife. After Gulielma Penn died in 1694, William Penn, remembering her who was the love of his youth and much the joy of his life wrote: "She would not suffer me to neglect any Publick Meeting, after I had my Liberty, upon her account, saying often, 'O go, my dearest! Don't hinder any Good for me. I desire thee go; I have cast my care upon the Lord: I shall see thee again.'"³

Throughout three centuries of travel under concern, this "shared concern" has been apparent. In 1769 Rachel Wilson of Kendal wrote from America to her husband, Isaac, who with the help of their eldest daughter was caring for their large family during her absence: "My mind was never nearer united to my dear husband than now."⁴ Isaac confesses in one of his letters that "I cannot help being anxiously concerned on thy account, and many pensive, musing moments occur; though I keep these to myself, and we go on as well as one could expect, our children that are grown up

¹ John Banks, *Journal* (1798), 2nd ed., p. 59.

² From William Edmundson's *Testimony* to his wife after her death in 1691 (*Jnl. F.H.S.* xxxiii (1936), 32-33).

³ William Penn, *Works* (1726), i, 231.

⁴ John Somervell, *Isaac and Rachel Wilson* (1924), p. 72.

being very dutiful and ready to do all in their power, to make things as easy for me as possible."¹ In modern times, with little or no domestic help, not only "children that are grown up," but younger ones than these have their part to play. "We haven't much money to give," said one of Amy Lewis's younger children when the family agreed to release her for Friends' service. "So I think we ought to lend Mum for a while!"

Sometimes the opening of the door comes when a load of care is divinely lifted. Marmaduke Stephenson testified before his martyrdom that when in 1658 he was "required of the Lord" to go to Barbados, "the Lord said unto me immediately by his spirit, that he would be as a husband to my wife, and as a father to my children, and they should not want in my absence, for he would provide for them when I was gone."²

Thomas Shillitoe, in 1790, felt concerned to travel "in the Lord's work," but could not see how he could possibly leave his wife and family and his tailoring business, especially as his assistant was very unreliable. He had almost given way to despair when suddenly the door opened.

One day, when I was standing cutting out work for my men, my mind being again brought under the weight of the service that had thus been before me, these discouragements again presented themselves . . . but my tried mind, in adorable mercy, was so brought under the calming influence of divine help, as I had not often if ever before known. And as I became willing to yield in its holy operation, the power of the mighty God of Jacob was mercifully manifest to the subduing the influence and power of the adversary; holding out for my acceptance and help this encouraging promise, which was addressed to my inward hearing, or the ear of my soul, in a language as intelligible as ever I heard word spoken to my outward ear,—"I will be more than bolts and bars to thy outward habitation . . . more than a master to thy servants . . . more than a husband to thy wife, and a parent to thy infant children." At which, the knife I was using fell out of my hand; I no longer daring to hesitate, after such a confirmation.³

Such an experience more than justifies the aged Isaac Sharp's declaration to London Yearly Meeting in 1894: "Bear in your hearts that when the Lord has service for his

¹ *Ibid.* pp. 84-85.

² *New England judged* (1661) Letter from Marmaduke Stephenson, pp. 131-133; quoted in Rufus M. Jones, *Quakers in the American colonies* (1923), p. 83.

³ *Journal of . . . Thomas Shillitoe* (1839), i, 10.

people, He can enable them to do it. There *is* a Providence over us. Bear this in mind, when your eyes are holden, *the Lord reigneth.*"¹

The closing of the door comes in due course with an equal certainty. Sometimes it closes because the work has been accomplished, and as much sensitivity is required for the discernment of this as was needed for the acceptance of the original concern. Robert Fowler of Melksham wrote to Samuel Capper, in 1818: "I have often found that it requires deep watchfulness to step forward at the right time after the seal is opened, and to stand still when it is divinely shut."² The intimation can come with a clearness of fulfilment, or it can be impressed upon the mind with a sudden loss of inspiration, or even of the extra physical strength granted to the traveller for the required period.

On the other hand, the door can close temporarily owing to human fallibility. Samuel Bownas, whose life and service are always of personal interest to me because his first concern was "to visit a neighbouring meeting called Yelland"³ (my own meeting), experienced many difficulties and discouragements during his early travels in the ministry. His companion was Isaac Alexander, and both were young and inexperienced. Samuel felt himself to be completely outshone by Isaac. "I thought [he] had very fine service, so much superior to mine, that after him I was afraid to lessen or hurt what good he had done; and before him, I was afraid to stand in his way."⁴

Samuel had yet to learn that there are diversities of gifts, and that those who travel under concern must learn to use their own, instead of envying or trying to imitate those of others. However, no sooner did he begin to gain confidence, than he experienced another setback. During one of his visits to Yorkshire, an older Friend encouraged him and assured him that God would enlarge his gift. "*And when thou findest it so, said he, don't value thyself upon it, but give the honour of it where it's due, and keep humble, and God will bless thee, and make thee a useful Member in his Hand.*"⁵

Carried away by the praise of less discerning Friends, Samuel

¹ Frances Anne Budge, *Isaac Sharp* (1898), p. 259.

² *Memoir of Samuel Capper* (1855), p. 13.

³ *An account of the life, travels and Christian experience in the work of the Ministry of Samuel Bownas* (1756), p. 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

all too soon forgot this good advice, only to undergo a shattering experience at Swannington. "I had not stood above fifteen, if so many Minutes, until all was shut up, and it seemed as though both the Sun and Air were darkened. I sat down under a great Cloud, to think what I should do, appealing to God, as having no ill Design, but much otherwise, and earnestly in secret desiring Help; and immediately as though a Voice had spoken intelligibly, 'Thou runs, and God has not sent thee; thou speaks, but God don't speak by thee; therefore thou shalt not profit the People.'"¹ The lesson was learnt in all humility, until it might well have been said of Samuel Bownas, as it was of an earlier Friend: "God made him and his service a blessing to many."

Even those whom we love and honour as the saints of Quakerism felt the need at times to examine their hearts and make sure that the door was indeed divinely opened. Amidst the perils of his Indian Journey, John Woolman wrestled with himself one night for fear lest, in persisting with his plans, he might be giving way to pride.

I thought that, to all outward appearances, it was dangerous travelling at this time; and was, after a hard day's journey, brought into a painful exercise at night, in which I had to trace back, and view over the steps I had taken from my first moving in the visit; and though I had to bewail some weakness which, at times, had attended me, yet I could not find that I had ever given way to a wilful disobedience: and then as I believed I had, under a sense of duty, come thus far, I was now earnest in spirit beseeching the Lord to show me what I ought to do. In this great distress I grew jealous of myself, lest the desire of reputation, as a man firmly settled to persevere through dangers, or the fear of disgrace arising on my returning without performing the visit, might have some place in me: Thus I lay, full of thoughts, a great part of the night, while my beloved companion lay and slept by me, till the Lord, my gracious Father, who saw the conflicts of my soul, was pleased to give quietness; then I was again strengthened to commit my life, and all things relating thereto, into his heavenly hands.²

Sometimes a door which seems divinely opened closes, because the concern has been laid upon another; the willingness was all that was required. Thomas Shillitoe long felt a concern to visit Australia, but other leadings proved stronger.

¹ *An account of . . . Samuel Bownas* (1756), p. 14.

² John Woolman, *Journal*, (1794), pp. 156-157; cf *Journal and essays*, ed. A. M. Gummere (1922), p. 257.

James Backhouse records that when he approached him in his old age, on his return from a visit to America, and offered to be his companion, Thomas Shillitoe, alluding "to his own advanced age, and that of his wife, signified that he did not now know how it might be with him in regard to this service. It proved, however, that the further steps I took in the matter the more the burden was removed from his mind. Thus our good Lord and Master saw meet to take the burden off the shoulders of his aged servant and to lay it upon one who was younger."¹

Sometimes the closing of the door was sensed more clearly by Friends other than those immediately concerned. In 1849, in spite of failing health, Hannah Chapman Backhouse laid before her Monthly Meeting a concern "to pay a visit, in the love of the gospel, to Friends in Van Diemen's Land and parts of Australia." After a time of silence, a Friend prayed that "as it was with Abraham, the sacrifice might be accepted, and a ram provided in its stead." Her sister Katherine reminded the meeting of "a passage in the life of the Patriarch David, when he told the prophet that it was his intention to build a house for the Lord his God. The prophet immediately answered: 'Do all that is in thy heart, for the Lord thy God is with thee!' but after he was gone, the king received a message from the Lord forbidding him to do it; *but that it was well that it was in his heart.*" Friends trusted that in this instance the will might be accepted for the deed, and that it might prove to be an encouragement to some other Friend to undertake the service. "This was evidently the mind of the meeting," recorded Hannah Chapman Backhouse. "I then thought I might conclude by saying that I now felt satisfied and could rejoicingly accept the judgment of my Friends."² Hannah Chapman Backhouse had been a much travelled Friend and must have had a dry sense of humour, for an early entry in her diary records: "dined at George Stacey's: after the ice was broken, which among Friends is very thick, I enjoyed the dinner."

A feature of travel under concern to which Friends have borne witness down the centuries is the peace of mind which accompanies acceptance. Elizabeth Hooton wrote in 1662:

¹ *Memoir of James Backhouse by his Sister* (1870), pp. 41-42.

² *Extracts from the Journal and Letters of Hannah Chapman Backhouse* (1858), pp. 287-288.

“My going to London hath not been for my own ends, but in obedience to the will of God . . . and the Lord hath given me peace in my journey.”¹ Two centuries later, James Backhouse wrote: “Often afterwards, even when sunk very low through unfaithfulness in other respects, if I turned to this subject in the same confiding state, the feeling of heavenly peace attended it.”² From this peace of mind, all subsequent action springs.

When the inspiration has been experienced and the concern nurtured and shared; when the door has been opened; when the heavenly peace is known; the carrying out is in God’s hands. The Friends in the *Woodhouse* “were carried far above storms and tempests, and we saw the Lord leading our vessel as it were a man leading a horse by the head.”³ William Edmundson, lost in an American wilderness, records: “I had eaten little or nothing that day, neither had I anything to refresh me but the Lord.”⁴ It was enough.

There are, of course, practical difficulties, but these are never allowed to weigh in the balance. Mary Fisher serenely sets off in her fantastic journey to visit the Grand Turk and eventually—she gets there. The clue to the explanation probably lies in peasant hospitality. Friends struggle desperately with the pangs of home-sickness. “As thou canst, an opportunity to write to us, it will make me glad.” writes Edward Burrough to Margaret Fell. “The face of one Friend would rejoice my soul.”⁵ Thomas Scattergood, in 1799, reaches a point where he can hardly bear the long separation from his home and family any longer. Yet even after five years of service he does not feel free to return to America. He can only find consolation at Ackworth School. “I awoke this morning with greater quietness and sweetness of mind than frequently has been the case, and in this humble, quiet frame, my will was resigned up to the divine will. I have spent some weeks in this place, and do not know that there has been so much health of body experienced, for the same length of time, in this land.” He visits the classrooms and tries his hand at teaching; he walks with the boys and girls and chats with

¹ Emily Manners, *Elizabeth Hooton* (*Jnl. F.H.S.* Suppl. 12), p. 36.

² *Memoir of James Backhouse by his Sister* (1870), pp. 13-14.

³ Rufus M. Jones, *The Quakers in the American colonies* (1923), p. 50.

⁴ William Edmundson, *Journal* (ed. 1829), p. 60.

⁵ *Letters of Early Friends*, ed. A. R. Barclay, p. 264.

them; also, one is glad to know, he "plays with them a little at times."¹ When the burden becomes too great for him, it is always to Ackworth that Thomas Scattergood's steps turn.

The travellers are constantly upheld by Friends at home. "You are all dear to me," wrote Margaret Fell to some of the Valiant Sixty, "and you are all present with me, and are all met together in my heart."² Friends constantly bear witness to this fact. They draw strength from the home meeting for worship; they feel the sustaining love of their fellow-members. In recent years two Friends travelling overseas from the same meeting have testified to the unfailing help given to them in times of difficulty by one woman Friend—"I knew that she was praying for me."

The results of all this richness of endeavour are difficult to assess. In some cases they are obvious; in some they are never known; in others they are discovered by chance. In 1846, Isaac Sharp and Barnard Dickinson felt called to visit Fair Isle. With difficulty they secured a passage on a whaling or sealing vessel, travelling in great discomfort, their cabins "foul with the oil." Next morning they walked through the cornfields to hold a meeting in the little church. It was not until fifty years later, when on his deathbed, that Isaac Sharp discovered that one of his hearers had received a life-long blessing from attending that meeting. George Edmundson worked for some time in Russia with Daniel Wheeler, but only a chance encounter with some Russians many years later revealed to him what had resulted from those toilsome years. "These hands helped to make the first drains!"³ he said.

In 1920, an American Friend visited Quaker meetings and families in England and met with a somewhat discouraging response. "Plough up the fallow ground!" he pleaded during a visit to one family, and the apparently frivolous young people did not seem to be impressed. He never knew that the words would linger in the mind of a rebellious fifteen-year-old boy, never knew that they would haunt him for the rest of his life. Had he lived to meet Reginald Reynolds again he might not have recognized or perhaps even appreciated the

¹ *Memoirs of Thomas Scattergood* (1859), p. 378.

² William Charles Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism* (1912; 2nd ed. 1955), p. 162.

³ Jane Benson, *Quaker Pioneers in Russia* (1902), p. 108.

result of his handiwork, yet surely those hands helped to make the first drains and many have received a lifelong blessing as a result.

Once, on a visit to a Friends School in 1957, I suddenly realized that for my evening address I must speak on another subject than the one I had prepared. This is always a somewhat trying experience, especially when the new subject is not immediately revealed to one. Suddenly I discovered what it must be. Three hundred years previously, in 1657, Mary Fisher had set out for the East, the *Woodhouse* had sailed for America, and Thomas Loe had visited Ireland—a memorable year in the history of Quakerism, and of travel under concern. How can we assess or compare the value of these three journeys? Thomas Loe fired the heart of the boy William Penn. The voyage of the *Woodhouse* scattered precious seed which has flowered gloriously in American Quakerism. Mary Fisher's journey left no known trace save in the hearts of men and women all down the centuries. It is not for us to judge, but to be thankful. We may do well to remember another journey undertaken during that same eventful year, for in 1657 John Camm returned home to Camsgill to die. The conviction of Thomas Loe was the one solitary fruit of his failure at Oxford. He must have brought about hundreds of convictions during his successful campaign in Bristol, but God used his failure to pave the road to Pennsylvania.

Like all work done in God's name, travel under concern is deeply sacramental. John Woolman gives us the key to it. "Love was the first motion, and thence the concern arose."¹ It is the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace, or it is nothing. It is because of this that the cost is so great. We love to take a quotation out of its context and talk about George Fox telling us to "walk cheerfully over the world." The full passage is too hard for us.

"And this is the word of the Lord God to you all, and a charge to you all in the presence of the living God, be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them. Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one;

¹ John Woolman, *Journal* (1794), p. 152; cf *Journal and essays*, ed. A. M. Gummere (1922), p. 254.

whereby in them ye may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you.”¹

There is only one source from which we can draw strength for such an undertaking as travel under concern, only one source which will enable us to walk cheerfully over the world. It is a source which has never failed. “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”²

ELFRIDA VIPONT FOULDS

¹ *The Journal of George Fox*. Ed. John Nickalls (1952), p. 263.

² *Joshua*, chap. 1, v. 9.