Quakers in Victorian Scotland

Presidential Address to the Friends' Historical Society, 1969

A PAPER on this theme appeared in the *Journal* in 1954.[1] While that was concerned chiefly with the internal history of the Society in Scotland, this, with some unavoidable repetition, will concentrate on Friends' relations with the religious and social conditions and movements of the age. The chief difficulty lies in the paucity of material. Our own records are jejune, there are few references in the contemporary press; almost the only published accounts are in articles in this *Journal* by William F. Miller early in this century,[2] and his *Memorials of Hope Park* (the home of his family). Reliance has had to be had in the main on the files of the *Friend* and the *British Friend*; the latter, though published in Glasgow from 1843 to 1891, gave no special attention to Scottish affairs. I am indebted to the late Bernard Canter for several Scottish references in both.

Friends in Scotland were a feeble folk, and their short and simple annals have received and perhaps deserved little notice. Quakerism was prejudiced at the outset as an English import, particularly during the unpopular Cromwellian occupation. Its aversion to theology, despite Barclay's *Apology*, and its pacifism militated against it. It was at its lowest in the later eighteenth century, when organization broke down, and had to be restored by the intervention of London Yearly Meeting in 1786.

Calvinism had declined in Scotland, though having a partial revival in the present century in the neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth. It was upheld mainly by minorities which broke away from the national church, e.g. the Free Presbyterians, whose chief tenets appear to be Sabbatarianism and anti-Romanism, sometimes mistaken for characteristics of Presbyterianism in general. Calvinism at its best had asserted a social gospel, and since the abolition of the "Estates" with the

[1] *J.F.H.S.*, xlvi, 3–18.

[2] *Ibid.*, 1903–1917; especially vi (1909), x (1913); W. F. Miller, *Memorials of Hope Park* (1886).

Union of 1707, the General Assembly of the Kirk served, as it still does, some of the purposes of a Parliament. Presbyterianism even today is sometimes regarded as typically expressive of Scottish nationalism.[1] Though in practice it might often be true that "new presbyter was but old priest writ large", Presbyterianism was in principle hostile to sacerdotal claims of a clerical order. Contrary to the Weber thesis, Calvinism was in Scotland not identified with capitalism, which developed only as its influence weakened.

Evangelicalism had since the mid eighteenth century largely superseded Calvinism. Though logically incompatible, they were commonly confused in the popular expression of religious doctrine. Evangelicalism was largely responsible for the Disruption of 1843, and predominated in the "Free Church" then formed. The spread of similar "notions" among Friends enabled closer contacts. The *North British Review*, a Free Church organ, remarked that "Quaker ministry assumed a more Scriptural and Evangelical bias.[2] The spread of the Evangelical outlook in the Society is illustrated by the establishment of Scripture Reading and Gospel meetings.

Friends differed, however, from the Free Church, which was theocratic and objected to the Erastianism of the Established Church. They adhered to the Voluntarist position, "a free church in a free state", and had thus affinities with the United Presbyterians and with the "Continuing" United Free Church which declined to enter the Union of 1929. Friends supported the Disestablishment movement in vogue in the 1880s.[3]

Evangelicalism brought them closer to such sects as the Baptists, whom W. F. Miller calls "Anabaptists". Edward Cruickshank (1808–86), who had a well-known hosiery business in Edinburgh, left Friends for that body (1840), while proclaiming his adhesion to Quaker testimonies. He became President of the Baptist Union of Scotland in 1879. He published in 1871 a tract critical of Friends, but denied that his censure of "blind leaders of the blind" was of general

1 e.g. Ian Henderson, *Scotland, Kirk and People* (1968).
2 *North British Review*, xxii (1860), 333.
3 *British Friend*, 5th mo. 1844, 2nd mo. 1880, 5th mo. 1885.

application to them.[1] Rev. Robert Macnair, a Scottish Baptist pastor who was among the essayists of 1859, charged Friends with holding a "stereotyped creed" and "bowing down to the shrine of George Fox".[2] Two other Cruickshank brothers joined respectively the Brethren and the Free Church. Walter Wilson of Hawick became a Congregationalist. The *Glasgow Examiner*, associated with Congregationalism made favourable reference to Friends.[3]

Moderatism, which became influential in the Church in the eighteenth century—e.g. Principal William Robertson and "Jupiter" Carlyle—continued to be typical of the *haute bourgeoisie*, particularly the Whig intelligentsia of the *Edinburgh Review*, dissatisfaction with whom led Thomas Carlyle to abandon Comely Bank for Craigenputtock. Macaulay's characterization of George Fox illustrates their attitude to Quakerism: "an intellect too much disordered for liberty and not sufficiently disordered for Bedlam." (This, together with his slanders on Penn, cost Macaulay the support of John Wigham at a critical Edinburgh election.) An early edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1810) stigmatizes Fox as "one of the most extravagant and absurd enthusiasts that ever lived".[4]

On the other hand, the High Tory Walter Scott, with his Quaker ancestor and friendship with the Waldies of Kelso, depicted Quakers sympathetically in *Redgauntlet*, and Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus* hailed "the Man in Leather Breeches" as "one of those to whom the Divine Idea of the Universe is pleased to manifest itself" and his appearance as "perhaps the most remarkable incident in Modern history". An anonymous article on "Quakers or Friends" in the *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia* (1830) has been attributed to him; it is a dispassionate review, giving "an account of their tenets nearly in their own words".[5]

Tributes to Friends' good works were frequently combined with facetiousness about some of their usages. Rev.

1 Minutes of Edinburgh Two Months Meeting, 12.iii.1840; *British Friend*, 8th & 9th mo. 1871; *J.F.H.S.*, x (1913); G. Yuille, *History of Baptists in Scotland* (1926), 127.

2 R. Macnair, *The Decline of Quakerism* (1860).

3 *British Friend*, 12th mo. 1844.

4 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 4th edition (1810), 584–588.

5 T. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (1906 ed.), 178; *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia* (1830), xvii, 289–290.

John Cunningham, afterwards Moderator, and Principal of St. Mary's College, St. Andrews, incurred special censure for his history *The Quakers* (1868), as being "tinctured with a satirical and ludicrous element". The *British Friend* indeed displayed excessive touchiness, belabouring in several issues the erring clergyman, much as humourless Humanists have ever since ponderously pummelled Bishop Wilberforce for his feeble jest anent Huxley's grandparents. Cunningham in a lecture the same year to Edinburgh Literary Institute suggested that Friends were fast dying out, but could "afford to disappear as a peculiar people for they have made converts of us all".[1]

The ministry of women particularly incurred the sarcastic censure of anti-feminist churchmen. Cunningham wrote: "the most excitable venture to preach, hence men generally sit and hear, while women speak." The *Edinburgh Review* (1848) affirmed that "Among Quakers the ministry has fallen into the hands of women . . . an evident token of a dying Society", while *Tait's Magazine* (1851) asserted: "Petticoat government prevails among Friends."[2] (Only in 1968 did the Church of Scotland accept the full ministry of women and ordain the first.) Sarah Smiley, one of the many Friends who travelled in the ministry in Scotland, was allowed to preach in a Free Church in Orkney (1869), for which the minister was rebuked by the Presbytery.[3]

A more serious charge, perhaps still relevant, was that already levelled by critics so different in outlook as William Cobbett and Frederick D. Maurice. The *Edinburgh Review* remarked in 1807: "A Quaker may suspend care of his salvation and occupy himself with business six days of the week"; and the *North British Review* (1860) affirmed: "A Quaker pursues the getting of money with a pace as steady as time and an appetite as keen as death."[4]

Puritanism also has been regarded as a seventeenth century import from England. In the popular sense of the term, which identifies it with Victorian prudery and pharisaism, it

[1] J. Cunningham, *The Quakers* (1868); *British Friend*, 10th mo. 1868 *et seq.*; *Scotsman*, 23.ii.1868.

[2] J. Cunningham, *op. cit.*, 329; *Edinburgh Review*, 1848, p. 530; *Tait's Magazine*, 1851, p. 428.

[3] *British Friend*, 10th mo. 1869.

[4] *Edinburgh Review*, 1807, p. 30; *North British Review*, 1860, pp. 340–341.

was typical of Presbyterians and of nonconformists generally as much as of Friends. Singing, dancing and cards were taboo; the "pernicious tendency of music" was condemned. The General Meeting of Ministers deplored a tendency to seek "vain amusements" and called for "a decided stand against dancing and theatre-going".[1] Despite the hostility to the arts generally, William Miller (1796–1882) attained repute as an engraver, and Edward Walton became a noted painter of the "Glasgow School" and R.S.A.

Total abstinence was another manifestation, rather contrary to earlier association with brewing. It took one form as personal teetotalism. William Smeal's wedding (1845) was conducted "in strict accordance with the principle of abstinence". Crosshill Christian Association, in which Friends took a leading part, coupled personal abstinence with religious conversion as qualifications for membership. Friends were active in the Scottish Temperance Alliance and the British Women's Temperance Association.[2] In the further demand for legislative prohibition, Friends were associated with the "P.B." (Permissive Bill or Local Option) faction of the Liberal Party. In 1867 Edinburgh Friends sent a deputation to the licensing court, urging it to refuse new and to reduce old licences.[3]

A common phenomenon in mid-Victorian Scotland was the Hydropathic, originally an institution for the "Water Cure" by the internal and external application of cold water, designed by the German Priessnitz. It was a frequent outlet for investment, and was often conducted under religious auspices. Like the eccentric Edinburgh Professor J. S. Blackie, who wrote a pamphlet commending them, the *British Friend* "was pleased to hear of its rapid expansion" (1843).[4] Its advertisements included one of the "Science of Washing", by which, it was claimed, six weeks washing for a family could be done before breakfast at a cost of less than sixpence. The *British Friend* shared the fondness of the

1 *British Friend*, 5th mo. 1846; Minutes of General Meeting of Ministers and Elders, 7.v.1881.

2 *British Friend*, 10th mo. 1845, etc.; Crosshill Christian Association membership card.

3 *British Friend*, 5th mo. 1867.

4 *British Friend*, 7th mo. 1842, 9th mo. 1847; J. S. Blackie, *Water Cure in Scotland* (Aberdeen, 1869). (For John Stuart Blackie see *Dictionary of National Biography*.)

Radical press for unorthodox medicaments, e.g. "aperient digestive pills", "Brand enamel" for toothache, James's "tincture for tic doloreux" and Cadbury's "homoeopathic or dietetic cocoa".[1]

The Editor of the *British Friend*, at the outset in 1843, asserted that Friends should have "no squeamish aversion to politics" but share in the "advocacy of good objects by political means". Forty years later it was affirmed that "influencing voters in the right direction is work for Christians" and condemned the "reckless and unscrupulous nature of Tory politicians" (1885).[2] The Radical *Tait's Magazine* declared in 1844, that "Quaker politics were closely identified with the religion and politics of the New Testament".[3] The Smeals joined John Bright in opposition to the Corn Laws so as to "obtain for the poor a cheap and abundant supply of food". John Wigham presided at an anti-Corn Law conference in Edinburgh in 1842.[4] Friends were usually actively associated with the Liberal Party. John Henderson (1797–1851), a Paisley ironmonger, had been involved in the Radical agitation of 1820, and had to escape to America. In later life he edited a radical paper and became Provost of his burgh. He joined Friends in 1837. William Smeal was on Glasgow Liberal Committee, John Wigham jr., on that of Edinburgh. Stephen Wellstood (1811–1886) who sat as a Liberal councillor 1873–1876, was long associated with Friends before his convincement in 1885. Walter Wilson (1796–1890) was active in the Reform movement and became President of Hawick Liberal Association.[5]

The Irish Home Rule issue brought division. A leader of 1887 lamented that "rarely were Friends so divided . . . the Irish problem was unsolved"; the separation of Bright and Gladstone was deplored. Walter Wilson and Robert Bird (1855–1919), a recently (1883) convinced Glasgow lawyer, became Unionists; the latter became Secretary of Glasgow and West of Scotland Liberal Unionist Association, and later

1 *British Friend*, 12th mo. 1849.
2 *British Friend*, 2nd mo. 1843, 9th mo. 1885.
3 *Tait's Magazine*, 1844; *British Friend*, 12th mo. 1844.
4 *British Friend*, 1st mo. 1843.
5 "A Paisley Provost" in *Friends' Quarterly Examiner*, 1924; *Biographical Catalogue* (1888), 631–634, *William Smeal*, 1793–1877; *Scotsman*, 4.ii.1874; *British Friend*, 2nd mo. 1886; *Hawick Express*, 21.vi.1890.

supported Chamberlain's Tariff Reform campaign. No Scottish Friend appears to have been present at the Quaker anti-Home Rule Conference of 1893.[1]

Friends participated in the unsuccessful campaign of the 1870s for Women's Suffrage. Priscilla McLaren (1815–1906), sister of Bright and wife of his coadjutor Duncan McLaren, was President, and Eliza Wigham and Stephen Wellstood were members of an Edinburgh Society for women's suffrage.[2] Robert Owen's partnership with Friends at New Lanark is well known, as is their objection to his system of education for children attached to the mills, particularly the encouragement of dancing; William Allen complained that he violated the terms of partnership which stipulated religious instruction. On his retirement the mills were acquired by one of his Quaker partners, Charles Walker, whose family retained them until their sale in 1881 to Birkmyres, later (1903) Gourock Ropeworks, who still carry them on. Apparently no records of the Walker régime survive. The *New Statistical Account*, in the 1840s speaks of "instruction in the ordinary branches rather than in accomplishments". Charles Walker retained membership in Westminster meeting; he was censured by Edinburgh meeting for non-attendance, and for allowing "a system of education partly inconsistent with the Society". After about three years' exchange of views, he was left to Westminster to deal with. His eldest son "married out" in 1869.[3]

Robert Mason (1780–1861) a Lancashire Catholic became cashier at New Lanark about 1800, and was admitted to the Society in 1814; he left legacies for Quaker purposes.[4]

Friends were chiefly middle class. Obituary lists of male adults 1863–1928 may be summarized as: professional 27, manufacturers and merchants 22, shopkeepers 10, manual workers 10.[5]

Two who were by origin probably of the latter category attained local note. John F. Yule (1839–1924), formerly a

1 *British Friend*, 1st mo. 1887; *Glasgow Herald*, 9.ii.1890.
2 *British Friend*, 1st mo. 1888.
3 *Life of William Allen* (1846–1847), ii.239, 373–375; *New Statistical Account* (1845), vi.22–27; Minutes of Edinburgh Two Months Meeting, 1828–1831; G. Blake, *The Gourock* (1963), ch. vii; *Glasgow Herald*, 6.viii.1869.
4 *British Friend*, 6th mo. 1861; Edinburgh Two Months Meeting, 11.v.1861.
5 List of burials, in Archives, Friends' House, Edinburgh.

miner active in the Fife Union, who became a commission agent, was admitted in 1900 and started a Meeting in his own house in Dunfermline, which is said to have been attended by other workers.[1] William Cooper, a joiner active in the trade union movement, and town councillor in Aberdeen, is described in a local history as "a member of the Society of Friends". The only reference in Friends' records appears to be that he was recorded as an Attender, *c.* 1884–1890, applied for membership in 1886 and after lengthy consideration was rejected, on the ground that it was not desirable "to add to the Society at this time". This seems to confirm the statement of Alex Hay, a veteran member, that in his youth the Society was reputed, in Aberdeen, to be a "secret society".[2]

The Adult School movement, which in England brought Friends in touch with manual workers, did not reach Scotland until the twentieth century, perhaps because church gilds and similar organizations were common; it was small and short-lived. There is indeed reference to a "Friends' First Day School" in Glasgow in 1866, with about twenty members, engaged in reading and religious instruction;[3] but no other reference has been found.

The Anti-Slavery movement is probably that which most evoked the enthusiastic support of Friends. The "Smeal Papers" in Glasgow Mitchell (Public) Library are almost entirely concerned with it. The subject has been studied by Professor George Shepperson of Edinburgh and his student C. Duncan Rice, now of Aberdeen. William Smeal was Secretary of Glasgow Anti-Slavery Society, founded 1822; after abolition in the British dominions, this became the Emancipation Society (1833). In Edinburgh Ladies Emancipation Society, Eliza Wigham was prominent. She wrote a pamphlet *The Anti-Slavery Cause* (1863), which was commended by the *British Friend*, but criticized for her use of titles and heathen names of days and months. The Freedman's Aid Society was formed in 1864. The Free Church was condemned for its acceptance of money from slave owners, and Irish Friends on one occasion similarly. Friends sup-

1 *Friend*, 8.iv.1924; Edinburgh Two Months Meeting, 1.xii.1900.
2 K. D. Buckley, *Trade Unionism in Aberdeen*, 24, 114; Minutes of Aberdeen Preparative Meeting, 1884–1890.
3 *British Friend*, 4th mo. 1866.

ported the more extreme faction of George Thompson and W. L. Garrison, who received the Freedom of the City on visiting Edinburgh in 1867. Dr. John Maxwell of Glasgow, and Harry Armour (1789–1867), an Edinburgh printer with "a rare knowledge of his art" were active in the cause.[1]

"Protection of Aborigines", including Indians, was stated in its opening number to be an object of the *British Friend*.[2]

Friends adhered to the traditional peace testimony, although their convictions were little tested during the "Century of (relative) Peace", 1815–1914, when apart from the Crimean and Boer wars, hostilities were mainly "colonial" and fought by "armies of mercenaries". There was no conscription and militia assessments became obsolete. At a Peace Congress in Edinburgh in 1853, William Miller presided and Henry Wigham was secretary. William Smeal was a member of Glasgow Peace Society, and William J. Begg (d. 1922), a "convinced" lawyer was secretary of Glasgow Peace and Arbitration Society about 1890. Among the infrequent public statements issued were those condemning the Sudan and Zulu wars in the 'eighties.[3]

The Testimonies against capital punishment and oath taking were observed. The outstanding examples come from Edward Cruickshank after his resignation from the Society. As a town councillor 1842–1847, he refused to take the "Burgess Oath" and proposed a resolution condemning the death penalty. His speech was printed in a pamphlet (1845) in which he invoked "the dispensation of grace, not to destroy lives but to save them". The *Edinburgh Review* (1831) credited Friends with "amiable and persevering zeal" in the cause. Their position on oaths was accepted in the Scottish Affirmation Acts of 1862 and 1865. They had sent a memorial to the Queen regarding a bank clerk, not a member, but apparently a son of Harry Armour (not yet a member) who

[1] G. A. Shepperson, "Free Church & American Slavery" (*Scottish Historical Review*, v, 27, 1958); C. D. Rice, "Anti-Slavery Mission of G. Thompson" (*American Studies*, i.13–31); *British Friend*, 8th mo. 1845, 8th mo. 1863, 3rd mo. 1867, etc.; *J.F.H.S.*, x (1913); Smeal Papers (Mitchell Library, Glasgow), *passim*.

[2] *British Friend*, 1st mo. 1843.

[3] *British Friend*, 10th & 11th mo. 1853, 4th mo. 1885, 11th mo. 1890; *Glasgow Herald*, 13.iv.1922.

was dismissed and imprisoned for refusal to take an oath as a witness in court (1847).[1]

Friends' concern for social work was exemplified in John Wigham's proposal (1851) for schools for the destitute, especially juvenile offenders, perhaps inspired by a visit of Elizabeth Fry. The outcome was an Orphans and Destitute Children's Emigration Home in Glasgow, in which Mary White (1837–1903) and Agnes Bryson (1831–1901) were prime movers; reports of progress were frequently made, as also of a Prison Gate Mission with which they were concerned.[2] In Edinburgh Eliza Wigham, the last of her family to reside in Edinburgh and to wear the old Quaker garb, was a moving spirit for 37 years of the undenominational Women's working Society or Mothers' Meeting (1860) and the Penny Bank (1859) in the Newington district of Edinburgh. Her labours are commemorated in a biographical sketch by Elizabeth Mein and an account of the district by a local city missionary James Goodfellow.[3]

Concern for sufferers from war and famine was displayed in hospitality to Polish refugees after the unsuccessful revolt of 1830, and in collections for relief of famine in the West Highlands around 1850 and recurrently in the Shetlands, *c.* 1869–70 and 1886. Visiting Friends had been welcomed in these islands.[3]

The earlier schools in Aberdeenshire had closed, and Scottish Friends obtained in 1819 a share in the management of that at Wigton. William Miller and Stephen Wellstood were on the committee of the Lancasterian School in Edinburgh. An Edinburgh Friends' Literary Society was founded in 1848, with William Miller as president, and was active in the 'seventies when "Essay meetings" were held. The Meeting in the Pleasance kept a lending library, of which the borrowers' book for the century 1835–1935 has been preserved. The volumes chiefly favoured in early years seem to have been

1 Th. Russell, *Capital Punishment* (Edinburgh, 1845); *Edinburgh Review*, January, 1831, 408; *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 5.xi.1842; *British Friend*, 9th mo. 1841, 5th mo. 1847, 4th mo. 1865; *Annual Monitor*, 1868.

2 *British Friend*, 12th mo. 1851, 1st mo. 1872 *et seq.*; *Friend*, 3.i.1908.

2 E. M. Mein, *Eliza Wigham*; J. Goodfellow, *The Print of His Shoe* (1906), 72–78.

3 *Friend*, 9.i.1953; *British Friend*, 8th mo. 1852, 5th mo. 1864, 12th mo. 1869 *et seq.*

the Journals of travelling Friends; the last entry records the loan of the *Little Plays of St. Francis*.[1]

The rigid attachment to creed of which Friends were accused has some substance if it is applied to conduct rather than to doctrine. The *British Friend* opposed the relaxation *c.* 1860, as contravening "matters of principle", and some Scots were involved in the Fritchley secession. Insolvency and "marrying out" or "irregularly" were the chief offences penalized by disownment. Despite reluctance to admit and readiness to disown, membership grew steadily during the period from 144 to 357. In 1884 out of 193 members, fully half were in Glasgow.[2]

The Rev. Dr. George Burnet, the Presbyterian author of *The Story of Quakerism in Scotland* (1952) wrote: "The Quaker movement in Scotland was a notable epic for the most part . . . But it was ill-timed in the century which gave it birth, and probably would have been so in any succeeding generation. For neither the psychological nor the spiritual climate of Scotland suited it . . . But it may be that the Quakerism of our own times will get a chance in Scotland which the Inner Light of the past never enjoyed."[3]

In the present century progress in numbers and activities has continued. A future historian of Quakerism in twentieth century Scotland may verify this prophetic hope.

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1 Minutes of Scotland General Meeting, 31.viii.1819; *British Friend*, 2nd mo. 1867, 10th mo. 1879.

2 *British Friend*, 5th mo. 1857, 5th mo. 1858, 5th mo, 1861; Minutes of Scotland General Meeting, *passim*.

3 G. B. Burnet, *Story of Quakerism in Scotland* (1952), 192–193.