

The *Christian Appeal* of 1855: Friends' Public Response to the Crimean War

MOST religions distinguish between good and evil. This, of course, does not mean that every religious body is zealous in pursuing the good and avoiding the evil. Even when evil is eschewed, it is possible merely to perceive the good, yet say nothing about it, or to speak of the good without putting it into practice.

That the Society of Friends in the 1850s considered peace to be good and war evil is affirmed by the Responses of the various Quarterly Meetings to what was then the Ninth Query, namely "Are Friends faithful in our testimony against bearing arms, and being in any manner concerned in the militia, in privateers, or armed vessels, or dealing in prize goods?"¹ The scrupulous phrasing of the Responses, as listed in *Yearly Meeting Papers* for 1855, indicates that these Responses were honestly thought out, and not returned to Yearly Meeting by rote. In 1855, the Ninth Query elicited the following Responses:

I Affirmation, paraphrasing the Ninth Query exactly:

- (1) Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire
- (2) Berkshire & Oxfordshire
- (3) Buckinghamshire & Northamptonshire
- (4) Cumberland & Northumberland
- (5) Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire
- (6) Devonshire
- (7) Herefordshire, Worcestershire & Wales

¹ *Rules of Discipline of the Religious Society of Friends, with Advices* (London, 1834), p. 218. Although the Queries began to be circulated by Yearly Meeting to the Monthly Meetings in 1682, it was not until 1742 that a pacifist Query appeared. In that year, the eighth of eleven Queries became "Do you bear a faithful and Christian Testimony against the Receiving or Paying Tithes? And against Bearing of Arms? And do you admonish such as are unfaithful therein?" (*Yearly Meeting Minutes* (1742), p. 104). This Query was revised slightly in 1744, and in 1758, the year after the first legal provision for Quaker pacifists had been enacted (see "An Act for the better ordering of the Militia Forces . . .", 30 Geo. II, cap. 25, sec. 26, in *Statutes at Large*, Vol. VIII (London, 1770), p. 86), pacifism as an article of belief was proposed in a separate Query, now twelfth of thirteen. At the time of the Crimean war, the 1833 Discipline was in force. The Ninth Men's Query, cited above in the text, continued to be proposed in this form until 1861, when the Discipline was revised.

- (8) Norfolk, Cambridgeshire & Huntingdonshire
- (9) Suffolk
- (10) Westmorland.

II "We believe Friends are faithful, etc.":

- (1) Bristol & Somerset
- (2) Cornwall
- (3) Durham
- (4) Gloucestershire & Wiltshire
- (5) Lancashire & Cheshire
- (6) Sussex & Surrey
- (7) Yorkshire
- (8) General Meeting for Scotland.

III "Friends appear faithful, etc.":

- (1) Dorset & Hampshire ("No unfaithfulness has appeared . . .")
- (2) Essex
- (3) Kent
- (4) Lincolnshire
- (5) London & Middlesex
- (6) Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Rutland & Staffordshire.

IV Ireland: "With the exception of a young man having enlisted in the army and of a friend who is a magistrate having administered a military oath, friends appear faithful, etc."¹

The question is, How active was the Quaker "testimony"? As Margaret Hirst has pointed out, the early Quakers engaged in speaking and *personal* actions against war, but stopped short of mass action. They did not "organize for peace"². After the Napoleonic wars, however, and certainly by the 1850s, the evidence is that among members of the Society of Friends mass agitation and the widespread distribution of anti-war propaganda were common. Aside from our knowledge of the activities of such Quakers as

¹ Legally, the magistrate need not have administered the oath. See 42 Geo. III, cap. 90, secs 27, 33 and 50 in *Statutes of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. I (London, 1804), pp. 451, 452 and 456, for this and other provisions for Quakers, in effect at the time of the Crimean war.

² M. E. Hirst, *Quakers in Peace and War* (London, 1923), p. 45.

Joseph Sturge and John Bright, there are many indications of the serious involvement of Friends in anti-war agitation.

An analysis of the list of delegates to the London Peace Congress of 1851 shows that of the 969 delegates attending, 207 were members of the Society of Friends.¹ According to John Stephenson Rowntree, Quakers in Great Britain numbered about 22,000 at the time.² The overall population of the British Isles, according to the census figures for 1851, was approximately 20,960,000.³ In other words, Quakers in 1851 accounted for only one-tenth of one per cent of the total population of Great Britain, but they sent twenty-two per cent of the delegates to the Peace Congress.

The Peace Society's basic series of tracts enjoyed a wide circulation in Great Britain throughout the mid-19th century. Of the eight identifiable authors of these tracts, four were Friends. They were Jonathan Dymond (1796–1828), *Observations on the Applicability of the Pacific Principles of the New Testament to the Conduct of States*; Joseph John Gurney (1788–1847), *An Essay on War and on Its Lawfulness under the Christian Dispensation*; Thomas Hancock (1783–1849), *The Principles of Peace Exemplified in the Conduct of the Society of Friends in Ireland, during the Rebellion of the Year 1798, etc.*; and Evan Rees (1790–1821), *Sketches of the Horrors of War*.⁴

But the most significant fact about Quaker pacifist involvement, is that it continued right through the Crimean war, in the face of the violent pro-war sentiments of most of the people of Great Britain. When most of the other members of the Peace Society and the Peace Congress movement fell silent, the Quakers spoke out. The Society of Friends was,

¹ See *Proceedings of the London Peace Congress*, pp. 83–104, in *Reports of the Peace Congresses* (London, 1861). The names have all been checked against the *Annual Monitor*.

² *Quakerism, Past and Present* (London, 1859), pp. 68–88.

³ *Parliamentary Papers* (1852), Vol. LXXXV, Pt. 1, p. clxvii. The exact figure for England, Wales, Scotland and the Islands in the British Seas is 20,959,477. For purposes of a better comparison with Rowntree, the figures for Ireland are not included here.

⁴ The stereotyped edition, which includes these and the other tracts in the series, was published by the Peace Society as *All War Antichristian, or the Principles of Peace as Contained in the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1840).

in fact, the only group of any size to speak out as a body against the war.¹

In 1855 appeared the pamphlet *A Christian Appeal from the Society of Friends to Their Fellow-Countrymen on the Present War*. The story of the commissioning, writing, printing and circulating of this tract serves as the best example of the Quaker pacifist position at the time of the Crimean war, and also gives us a good insight into the methods employed by the Society in its work for peace.² By consulting the Minutes of the London Meeting for Sufferings in Friends House Library, as well as the Minutes of several Monthly Meetings in the North, it has been possible to trace the progress of this quintessentially Quaker document.

After the declaration of war in March, 1854, the only immediate action taken by the London Meeting for Sufferings (which, as a permanent committee of Yearly Meeting, spoke on behalf of the Society of Friends in Great Britain) was the printing and circulating of the report on the deputation of Joseph Sturge, Henry Pease and Robert Charleton to Nicholas I.³ This was completed on April 7th.⁴ Perhaps it was symptomatic of the edginess of even the staunchest pacifists that the topic of the war was not brought before that body again until November 3rd. At that time, however, it was the leading item on the agenda and the suggestion is that a great deal of discussion outside of Meeting preceded

¹ The decline in support for the Peace Society can be seen in Henry Richard's journal, the *Herald of Peace*, where Richard deplores fair weather pacifists in such articles as "The leaking bottle; or principle with an exception", *Herald of Peace* (June, 1864), p. 61. The most costly defections were those of men like George Hadfield, Frank Crossley, Joseph Hume, John MacGregor and William A. Wilkinson, M.P.s who had, before the war, supported the Peace Society and the Peace Congress movement. For the pro-war speeches made in parliament by these men (respectively) see *Hansard*, 3rd ser., CXXX, (1854), pp. 1283, 910 and 1114; and *ibid.*, CXXXVIII (1855), pp. 1348 and 1027. Typical of the comments was that made by Crossley: "deprecating war as a great evil, still he admitted . . . that if the impending war should come, it ought to be prosecuted with vigour and rapidity" (*Ibid.*, CXXX (1854), p. 910.) Richard Cobden was in favour of peace, but did not put himself on record as did the Quaker, John Bright.

² The printed version of the *Appeal* may be found in Friends House Library, *Tracts*, Vol. G/118.

³ See Stephen Frick, "The Quaker deputation to Russia: January-February, 1854", *J.F.H.S.*, LII (1969), 78-96.

⁴ *London Meeting for Sufferings minutes*, Vol. XLVI, p. 401.

the formal discussion of the war in Meeting. "A desire has been cherished", the Minutes state, "that we may be found faithful in upholding our Christian testimony against all wars by carefully guarding in our conversation as well as in conduct against all participation in the spirit of war or in rejoicing for victory."¹

At the next meeting, on December 1st, the concern was made more explicit. In view of "the continuance of the cruel warfare in which this country is engaged and under an impression that it is our Christian duty to prepare a statement setting forth our religious feelings and sentiments upon this momentous subject", the Meeting appointed a committee of twenty to set down "the views of our religious Society upon the subject, as they see best".² It took only a week for the committee to draft the *Christian Appeal*. Presented at a Meeting on December 8th, the order was given that it be printed and circulated "in as extensive a manner as . . . expedient".³

The *Christian Appeal* did not attack the war on political grounds, but on Christian ones—"Who will venture to say that Christianity affords any authority or justification for war?"—and stressed the need to apply the lesson of Jesus Christ that one's enemies must be approached with "forgiveness, forbearance and love". It pointed to "the vast amount of physical and moral suffering inflicted on the wounded and the dying, and on innocent widows and children" and (in words similar to those being used by the Congregationalist minister, Henry Richard, in his *Herald of Peace*) to the offensive spectacle of "professing Christians of one nation engaged in deadly conflict with their fellow Christians of another nation, in the presence of the infidel".

As stated in the *Appeal*, the committee was aware that the government had its difficulties in trying to bring the war

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 442.

² *Ibid.*, p. 445. Those appointed were John Hodgkin, Josiah Forster, Samuel Fox, J. Bevan Braithwaite, Thomas Norton, Samuel Gurney, Robert Alsop, Peter Bedford, Joseph T. Price, John Candler, Grover Kemp, Thomas Hodgkin, Thomas Binns, Richard Barrett, Robert Forster, Joseph Neatby, Samuel Sturge, Samuel Cash, John Kitching, and Henry Russell.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 447-53. The final handwritten form of the *Appeal* appears in the *Minutes*. The first draft was discovered in a long-disused box of Meeting for Sufferings papers and it has been interesting to compare it with the final version. The changes made were minimal, arguing for a remarkable unanimity of opinion among a committee of twenty.

to a close, but they believed that the way to achieve the desired end (cessation of all acts of war) was to trust in God and to take "humbling views of our national sins" and to make "a temperate estimate of our own position". With what must have been seen as gross naïveté by the "realists" who were pursuing the war, the committee urged that those in both houses of parliament "remember that that which is morally or religiously wrong cannot be politically right". They were aware that these sentiments would be "unpopular at a crisis like the present", in view of the "mighty torrent of martial excitement in the public mind". Still, they pleaded that their fellow-countrymen would "examine their present position and duties calmly and temperately . . .".

The committee met with the Meeting again on December 13th, at which time a memorial was drafted to the prime minister, Aberdeen, and to the other members of the government.¹ A letter was also prepared to be sent to the Monthly Meetings, explaining the action of the London Meeting for Sufferings in drawing up the *Appeal*, and suggesting that "diligent efforts be made within the districts of the respective Monthly Meetings, for its wide distribution by Friends, both in their immediate neighbourhood, and in all other quarters to which their influence may extend". The Monthly Meetings were also warned that it was especially important that members of the Society

be careful not to seek or accept profit by any concern in the preparations so extensively making for war; for how reproachfully inconsistent would it be to refuse an active compliance with warlike measures, and, at the same time, not to hesitate to enrich ourselves by the commerce and other circumstances dependent on war.²

During the months that followed, large quantities of the *Christian Appeal* were sent to the Monthly Meetings for distribution. It is true that the different Meetings responded with varying degrees of enthusiasm. While Preston M.M. (Minutes of January 17th and February 8th, 1855) ordered and distributed 500 copies of the *Appeal*, the records of Marsden M.M. reveal no action taken to promote the

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 453-56.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 457-58.

pamphlet.¹ Warwickshire North M.M. (Minutes of January 7th and 10th and March 14th, 1855), reported that 6,450 copies had been received and circulated, 3,800 in Birmingham and 2,650 in the environs, chiefly among the middle and upper classes.² London & Middlesex Quarterly Meeting distributed the pamphlet, about 42,000 copies, on behalf of the six London Monthly Meetings. The Monthly Meetings, however, requested and distributed a further 17,500 copies.³

All told, about 125,000 copies of the *Christian Appeal* were sent from London and circulated by the Monthly Meetings. Hardshaw East and Darlington M.M.s had editions printed at their own expense, totalling, respectively, 20,000 and 5,000 copies.

By the end of April, 1855, the Society of Friends in Great Britain had circulated 210,000 copies of the *Christian Appeal*. The pamphlet was translated into French and German.⁴ It was also recorded that "great exertion appears to have been successfully made by Friends in many parts of the kingdom to obtain the insertion of the *Appeal* in the provincial newspapers".⁵

The final action taken by the Society concerning the pamphlet came with the appointment, on October 5th, 1855,⁶ and report, on January 4th, 1856⁷, of a committee set up to study the comments which the *Appeal* had elicited around the country. According to the Minutes of London Meeting for Sufferings for January 4th:

The Committee appointed in reference to the printed comments upon the *Appeal* issued by this Meeting on the

¹ Records for both the Marsden and Preston M.M.s are kept at the Lancashire County Record Office, Preston.

² Records for Warwickshire North M.M. are kept at the Society of Friends, Bull Street, Birmingham.

³ Minutes of London & Middlesex Q.M., March 27th, 1855, pp. 100-101.

⁴ *London Meeting for Sufferings minutes*, Vol. XLVI, p. 501 (French) and p. 504 (German). Neither translation is actually included in the *Minutes*, but the one in French may be found at Friends House Library in *Tracts*, G/118a. In the Meeting for Sufferings papers for 1855, there is a bill, dated October 20th, for 5,000 copies of an unnamed tract; and another, dated January 26th, 1856, also for 5,000 copies of an unnamed tract. It may reasonably be assumed that these refer to the French and German translations of the *Appeal*. This would bring the total number of copies to around 220,000, far more than the "about 50,000" mentioned in Hirst, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

⁵ *London Meeting for Sufferings minutes*, Vol. XLVI, pp. 475-76.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 508.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 517.

subject of War have presented an interesting report thereon containing an analysis of their contents which is directed to be preserved.

It would be very useful to have this particular document, but, unfortunately, a thorough search of the records at Friends House has failed to discover it, and it must, therefore, be presumed lost.

The Society of Friends drafted the *Christian Appeal* at a time when the expression of any anti-war sentiment was an extremely unpopular act. They then distributed it, via the Monthly Meetings, throughout Great Britain. Finally, the results of the operation were analyzed. At least in terms of its mechanics, the circulation of the *Christian Appeal* was the most successful pacifist propaganda effort of the Crimean war.

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