

## PERCY W. BARTLETT

BARTLETT, Percy Walter (1888, London, England – 1980, York, England).

**Career:** Secretary, British Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1924–36, International Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1938–56, Council of Christian Pacifist Groups, 1933–43, Embassies of Reconciliation, 1936–67; editor, *Reconciliation*, 1933–36; Society of Friends, Peace Committee, 1928–65, Meeting for Sufferings, 1924–51.

Percy W. Bartlett is a product of that rich Quaker tradition in Great Britain that has produced a disproportionately high number of men and women who have made significant contributions to international harmony. Bartlett joined the Society of Friends in 1911, and participated actively in its work for over 50 years. During World War I, he declared as a conscientious objector and was subsequently imprisoned. His pacifism was based primarily upon a deep religious conviction, although he did not ignore empirical and rationalist arguments. Following the War, the climate of opinion in Britain was highly conducive to peace work, and by the mid-1920s Bartlett was immersed in pacifist activity.

During his lengthy career, he held key positions in several peace societies, his chief contribution being administrative in nature. He served as general-secretary in a number of organizations, including the British Fellowship of Reconciliation, the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Council of Christian Pacifist Groups, and the Embassies of Reconciliation. Despite his modest education, he was a man of considerable abilities. Meticulous, conscientious, efficient and highly industrious, he eventually developed a wide network of contacts and became personally acquainted with many of the world's leading pacifists. Also important was his close relationship with Barrow Cadbury, a Quaker businessman keenly interested in peace, who generously funded enterprises administered by Bartlett. Although a man of profound faith, he was no dreamer or utopian. Pragmatic and realistic, Bartlett brought sound judgment to his job and avoided the naïve idealism that occasionally discredited the pacifist cause. In collaboration with his two closest friends, John Nevin Sayre and Friedrich Sigmund-Schultze, he helped make the International Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Embassies of Reconciliation two of

the most influential and respected peace organizations during the inter-war period. To emphasize Bartlett's administrative talents is not to suggest he was indifferent to pacifist theory or its propagation. On the contrary, he wrote unceasingly, usually small pamphlets and brief articles in peace journals, and collectively his writings represent a reasonable contribution to peace literature.

When World War II came, Bartlett remained true to his pacifist convictions and did not defect as did so many other well known British "pacifists" of the inter-war period. After the War, he still maintained his commitment to peace activity, but he gave relatively more time and energy to his ecumenical work. Ever since 1931, Bartlett had maintained a vigorous interest in ecumenicalism and often represented the Society of Friends at some of the more famous ecumenical conferences. Bartlett never drew a sharp distinction between being a Friend, a pacifist and an ecumenicalist, but regarded each as all part of the same *Weltanschauung*. He continued to work actively until he was almost eighty, when he finally retired. Because he modestly worked behind the scenes and allowed other pacifist personalities to receive the publicity and acclaim, it is easy to underestimate his contributions. In this respect, it might be said that he was one of the most important and least known of all British pacifists in the twentieth century.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Percy W. Bartlett was a prolific writer, but most of his writings were brief articles and essays. However, he did publish two lengthy works. *Quakers and the Christian Church* (London, 1942), sought to explore the relationship between the Society of Friends and the Christian Church within the context of an emerging ecumenical movement. *Barrow Cadbury: A Memoir* (London, 1960), traces the life and accomplishments of an important and influential Quaker. The book is not so much a conventional biography as it is a "tribute" or "testimony" to a friend whom Percy deeply respected.

Bartlett also wrote a number of pamphlets, some of which received reasonably wide circulation and popularity within Britain's pacifist community. Among the more important pamphlets are: *Friends and International Peace* (London, 1925); *Get Rid of War* (London, 1928); *The Renunciation of War* (London, 1928); *Freedom and the Community* (London, 1929); *A Call to No Man's Land* (London, 1931); *Disarmament: The Christian Demand* (London, 1931); and *The Economic Approach to Peace: With A Summary of the Van Zeeland Report* (London, 1938).

Percy Bartlett's tireless literary activity is perhaps best reflected by his brief articles, which number well over one hundred, and appeared primarily in religious and peace journals. The bulk of these articles can be found in *The Friend* and also *Reconciliation* (the name was later changed to *The Christian Pacifist*), most of which were published between 1924 and 1960.

Biographical information about the life and career of Percy W. Bartlett is scarce. His ecumenical activities are outlined in David C. Lukowitz, "Percy Bartlett and the Ecumenical Movement", *The Friends' Quarterly* XXII, no. 5 (Jan. 1981), 418–425. Following his death, tributes and memorials appeared in *The Friend* (Feb. 1980), 123–125; *Yearly Meeting Proceedings, 1987*, 200–203; and there is an entry in that most excellent reference work, the *Dictionary of Quaker Biography*. An American historian, Dr. David C. Lukowitz, Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota, is currently writing a biography of Bartlett. The Bartlett Papers, at present uncatalogued, are located at Friends House Library, London.

*David C. Lukowitz*