

**NARRATIVE OF FACTS &  
CIRCUMSTANCES THAT HAVE  
TENDED  
TO PRODUCE A SECESSION  
FROM THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS**

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Narrative of Facts & Circumstances that Have Tended to Produce a Secession from the Society of Friends by Various

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**NARRATIVE**

OF

**FACTS & CIRCUMSTANCES**

THAT HAVE TENDED TO PRODUCE A SECESSION FROM

THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,

IN

**NEW-ENGLAND YEARLY MEETING.**

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LONDON:

C. GILPIN, 5, BISHOPSGATE WITHOUT.

1845.

## NARRATIVE.

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It is for the cause of truth, and for the information of those who from the want of a true understanding of the case, are liable to be deceived by unfounded and improper representations, that we feel called upon to set forth the following account of the secession from Friends, that has taken place within this Yearly Meeting.

In order to give a faithful history, it seems necessary to go back several years, and advert to some circumstances that then transpired; and unpleasant as is the duty, we are subjected to the painful necessity of exposing the course of an individual, formerly a minister in unity with us, who has been prominent as a leader in this schism, and, for the same reason, we are induced to state various other causes and circumstances that have tended to produce the secession which we are about to describe.

In the year 1832, John Wilbur was liberated to make a religious visit to Friends in Great Britain and Ireland. While absent on this visit, he wrote a series of Letters relating to the doctrines and practices of the Society of Friends, which were published, having evidently been

written for that purpose, without being submitted to the inspection of any body of the Society authorized to examine such publications; a procedure which he well knew was viewed by our Yearly Meeting as always improper, and contrary to the express provisions of our Discipline. As this publication was made but a short time before his return home, no action was taken in the case until he arrived; when the Meeting for Sufferings, feeling that a dangerous precedent had been set by a Minister, and former member of their body, thought some explanation was called for from him; and they named a committee of three Friends to have an interview with him on the subject; but that there might be no unnecessary exposure, no minute was made in the case. This committee sought an interview with him, and labored in tenderness and love to convince him of the impropriety of departing from the Discipline of his own Yearly Meeting, while travelling as a Minister with the requisite certificates of that Meeting, as well as of the hurtful tendency in an abstract point of view, of encouraging publications on doctrinal subjects, without the previous investigation and approbation of some authorized body of the Society. But so far from giving any satisfaction to this committee, he manifested a disposition to justify himself, and to call in question the correctness of the procedure of the Meeting for Sufferings in the case. After considerable delay and much ineffectual labour, as the publication had received but little circulation in this country, and as a desire was felt to exercise all tenderness and forbearance towards him, the subject was suffered to rest, so far as any official action was concerned. But we have reason to believe that this honest concern, and faithful labour in the case by his brethren, was not received by him in the spirit in which they were offered. A want of that charity, unity, and love, which so become brethren, was painfully observable in his conduct towards many

Friends, so as to cause uneasiness on his account, and to induce individual labour to be extended to him.

It was under the profession of supporting sound doctrines, that he pursued a course, and indulged in a spirit of detraction, tending to injure the religious character of divers Friends in our own and other Yearly Meetings, representing them as unsound in doctrine, and holding views inconsistent with those always held by the Society of Friends. Letters were written and circulated by him having this end in view, and intended to lessen the standing of individuals, and to obstruct their religious labours.

In the autumn of 1837, John Wilbur made a religious visit within the limits of New-York Yearly Meeting; and during the course of this journey he continued to indulge in this detracting spirit, both in speaking and writing, until he produced much exercise with well-concerned Friends,—Ministers, Elders, and others,—among whom he was travelling, and some of them treated with him on this account. In one of the conferences held with him upon this subject, he used the following language: "I consider the course I am taking in respect to the Friend from England and his writings, to be in the line of my religious duty, and this I hold to be more binding upon me than any rules of Discipline."

After his return home from this visit, he continued to manifest the same unwarrantable course, producing much uneasiness in the minds of those friends to whom knowledge of it came, and who felt the importance both of supporting our own Discipline, and of treating other Yearly Meetings with that christian confidence and regard, to which, as bodies in unity with us, they were justly entitled; and tender labor was bestowed on him by different individuals, to induce him to desist from his improper proceedings.

In the 7th month, 1839, a minister and aged elder



sought an interview with him, the progress and result of which are thus described by the latter :

“ The manner in which John Wilbur had spoken of a Friend, when about to visit this country as a minister, having the approbation of his friends at home, and by them liberated in the usual way, gave some of his friends concern on his account; and after the friend arrived in this country, John Wilbur being then out on a religious visit to Friends in some parts of the State of New York, continued to manifest his aversion to the friend and to his writings, as I understood. In the course of the following summer, I believe in the 7th month, a friend from New Hampshire called on me to accompany him on a religious visit to the meetings of Friends in South Kingstown Monthly Meeting. I bore him company; and after having dined at John Wilbur's, we asked for a personal and select interview with him; this was readily granted, and the subject of the good order of the Society in reference to the manner in which ministers travelling abroad on religious concerns, in the authority of the Church, ought to treat each other, was brought into view, and contrasted with the course he had pursued while out on a religious visit to Friends in the State of New York. We endeavoured to convince him that his manner of treating the friend above referred to, both in speaking and writing respecting him, was not only contrary to the express scriptural injunction of doing to others as we would that others should do to us, but was likewise contrary to the injunction of our own Discipline. He appeared disposed, and repeatedly attempted to shield himself by alleging that the writings of the friend were unsound. We as often unhesitatingly assured him, that our concern to have an interview with him had no reference to writings, but that our object was to persuade him to refrain from pursuing such a course. The friend was here recommended to us by a meeting with which we were in unity; should he advance any thing unsound in public or in private, or otherwise conduct himself disorderly, he would become a subject, like all other ministers travelling among us, over whom the care of the Society ought to be extended.

“ The conversation was open and free, and he was repeatedly enjoined not to blend our concern for him as

having any connection with, or reference to the writings of the friend. And we again assured him that it was a concern growing out of, as we believed, a clear conviction in our own minds that his past course in reference to that individual, would ultimately, if persisted in, be productive of serious loss to himself and injury to the Society.

"It may not be improper here to remark, that I did not converse with an individual member of South Kingstown Monthly Meeting on the subject, that did not manifest regret at the manner in which J. W. was conducting himself towards the minister referred to."

In the following winter, 1839-40, John Wilbur having obtained a certificate from South-Kingstown Monthly Meeting, to enable him to visit some of the meetings in this Yearly Meeting, a committee then under appointment from the Yearly Meeting of Ministers and Elders, were tenderly concerned on his account, and a few of their number were deputed to have an interview with him previous to his leaving home to enter on this engagement; but failing to effect their object, they addressed to him the following communication, through one of their number. The letter is dated 1 mo. 6, 1840.

"Having written thee a few days ago, and forwarded it by mail, at the request of some of the Select Yearly Meeting's committee, proposing an interview with thee at our house on the fifth inst., the few friends referred to came at the time appointed, but as thou wast not present,—which we readily admitted may have been occasioned by reasonable causes—it was proposed that I should again address a few lines to thee, pointing out in some measure the subjects of concern that induced the committee of the Select Yearly Meeting assembled from various parts of the Yearly Meeting—twelve in number—to seek an interview with thyself as proposed, and named a few friends for this purpose. Such an interview was more desirable than correspondence, and would probably have been further attempted, but from uncertainty of thy being at home, and from the expectation of those friends that were here, of leaving their several homes to-day or tomorrow, to go in a different direction.

“ I feel it to be a very delicate situation to be placed in, that of being the instrument to convey the religious impressions and views of the Committee; and probably I should have at once excused myself, had not the committee named me as one of those who were requested to have such interview. ” If I should be found incorrect, my apology to them and myself must be, that I was not present with the committee in their deliberations, and have not rightly comprehended their concern; but as I understand the subject, the committee in taking into consideration the state of the Ministers and Elders in this Yearly Meeting, and the duties that devolve upon them as members of the Select Yearly Meeting’s Committee, became tenderly regardful of myself, knowing that thou hadst been liberated by thy Monthly Meeting for the purpose of visiting the Quarterly Meetings, and that thou hadst commenced the fulfilment of thy prospect. And trusting that thou wilt kindly receive the manifestations of their tender regard for thy welfare and that of the church, in bringing into view in this way, a portion of ancient Discipline to which we doubt not thy own judgment and religious experience will readily assent—‘ That ministers be very tender of one another’s reputation, neither giving ear to, nor spreading reports, tending to raise in the minds of others a lessening or dis-esteem of any of the brotherhood. That by circumspect walking in all holiness of life and conversation, they may become living examples of the purity and excellence of the advices they recommend.’ This advice was intended, no doubt, for all practically to regard, and it appears to have specially in view those travelling in the ministry; and I understand the committee felt themselves constrained in Christian love to bring this subject before thy view at the present time, from a persuasion that in time past there had not been that circumspection and care on thy part, which are the fruits of that charity that is the Christian’s ornament, and the bond of our religious communion; in that as they believe thou hast indulged thyself, and countenanced in others, both in conversation and writing, the saying of many things tending to close up the way in Friends’ minds to the reception of the labours of one who like thyself apprehends that he has a religious duty to discharge, and in the order of Society is endeavouring to accomplish