

**THE PAST, PRESENT
AND FUTURE OF THE
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649274406

The Past, Present and Future of the Society of Friends by Various

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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VARIOUS

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Wm. P.



THE PAST,

PRESENT AND FUTURE

OF THE

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,

BY AN

INTERESTED OBSERVER.

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR.

1870.



A CANDID REVIEW AND CONCLUSION.

In a measure of that love which would gather all from their outward wanderings in search of the living among the dead, to the inward life and saving power of Truth, I would affectionately call our attention to that living way wherein our worthy forefathers were led to blessedness and peace, as well as to some of the causes which have operated in producing our lapsed condition, as a religious people professing, above all others, a quiet waiting, and humble dependence upon the enlivening, enlightening power of divine grace; which, it is testified, hath appeared to all men, as their inward, spiritual teacher, monitor, and guide.

It was their faithfulness to this essential duty of humble, dependent waiting upon God, that Christ his dear Son might be made unto them wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, that made our worthy forefathers that mighty *power* for good, in turning men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, which characterized them, as they truly were, the friends of truth; for they were united in the one faith, which works by love to the purifying of the heart, unto, and in co-operation with, the great and holy Head of the living church, who wrought *in* and through them, both to will and to do of *his own* good pleasure.

Being hereby *livingly* convinced that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men," these faithful servants of the living God were led out from all fleshly dependence, into that humble waiting, in the silence of all flesh—to the denial of *self* in all its appearances and suggestions—whereby they witnessed that increase and renewal of strength, which enabled them to rise above all dependence upon those "weak and beggarly elements,"

which were, and are, the reliance of all those whose glory and rejoicing is in the wisdom and sufficiency of self; not heeding the admonition, that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, yea, and things which are not (in the worldly estimation), to bring to nought things that are; that *no flesh* should glory in his presence."

Let us examine and see whether we, as their successors, are continuing "faithful in *waiting upon* the divine Word in our heart, to know sanctification *there*, and a thorough cleansing and renewing of our hearts and inward man," according to the following testimony regarding those whose faith we profess to follow, as being the faith of Christ once delivered to the saints, and which is our victory over the world, its religious, wisdom, and practices. "Thus," says one of these early and faithful friends of Truth, "things were opened wonderfully in us, and we saw not only common sins, which all confess so to be (though they live in them), but also the hypocrisy and sinfulness of the professors of religion, *even in their religion*, which was performed *out of the true Spirit of grace and life*, which in the *mystery* is the salt that every Gospel sacrifice is to be seasoned withal, according to the example in the figure.

"Therefore were we commanded to *withdraw and be separated in our worship*, and to *wait* to have our hearts sanctified, and the spirit of our minds *renewed*, that we might come before Him with prepared vessels; for we soon learned to see this, that it must be true in the substance as in the figure; all the vessels of the tabernacle were to be sanctified, consecrated, or made holy. Therefore did we *come out from among such in their worship*, who lived in uncleanness, (without the washing of regeneration, or spiritual cleansing by the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost,) and pleaded for sin, which made unholy, and we met together, and *waited together in silence*; it may be sometimes not a word was uttered in our meetings *for months*; but every one that was faithful, waited upon the living word in our own hearts, to know sanctification thereby, and a *thorough cleansing and renewing of our hearts and inward man*; and being cleansed and made meet, we came to have a *great delight* in waiting upon the word in our hearts, for the

milk thereof, which Peter speaks of; in our so waiting we received the milk or virtue thereof, and grew thereby, and were fed with the heavenly food that *rightly* nourished our souls; and so we came to receive *more and more* of the spirit of grace and life from Christ our Saviour, who is full of it, in whom the fulness dwells; and *in the power thereof we worshipped the Father*, who is a Spirit, and we waited upon the *teachings of his grace in our hearts*; and he taught us thereby to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, godly, and soberly, in this present evil world.

“Thus we came to know the *true teacher*, which the saints of old did witness, and therefore *wanted not a teacher, nor true divine instructions*, though we had left the hireling priests, and also *other high-flown notionists*, and sat down together in silence; for this was our desire *to have all flesh silenced before the Lord and his power*, both in our own hearts and from without. And as we came into true silence and inward stillness, we began to hear the voice of Him who said he was the resurrection and the life; and he said unto us, *Live*; and gave unto our souls *life*; and this holy gift, which he ~~has~~ *been* given, has been in us as a well of water springing up in ~~an~~ *eternal* life according to his promise; and therefore ~~hath~~ *professed* our delight all along to wait upon it, and draw nigh with our spirits unto it, both in our meetings, and also at other times; that we might both be *taught and saved by it*; for by it the saints were saved through faith, &c., as Paul wrote unto them: ‘By grace are ye saved through faith; and that *not of yourselves*; it is the gift of God; *not of works*, lest any man should boast.’

“Though formerly,” says another of our forefathers, “we ran, in our own time and wills, to preach and pray, not having such a due regard to the leading and moving of the Spirit of the Lord; yet I bless God, it is not so now. Many times, when I did arise from my knees in a formal way of prayer, a reproof was near me, ‘Who required this at thy hands? It is sparks of *thy own* kindling.’ ‘To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me? saith the Lord. When ye come to appear before me, *who* hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? When ye spread forth your hand, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear.’

"They believed," says he, "that men may have a literal knowledge of the Scriptures, and yet remain in error, because they know them not *as they ought to do*, nor the power that was in the holy men that gave them forth; so I may say, as Christ said to the Jews, 'You err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.' Matt. 22:29. So that which gives a *true* knowledge of God, and a *right* understanding of the Scriptures, is *the power of God*. And as men and women come to mind the true light, that is, the Spirit of God, and to obey it, they shall come to the comfort of the Scriptures," and through this, and patience, to *experience* and hope.

It is testified of Martin Luther, that he being asked the question that is so often, and perhaps unprofitably discussed in our day, and in our midst, "What is the best method of *studying* the Scriptures?" replied, "As yet you have only asked me things that were in my power, but to direct you in the study of the Holy Scriptures is beyond my ability. It is certain that we cannot attain to the understanding of Scripture, *either by study or by the intellect*. There is no other interpreter of the words of $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omega\sigma$ than their Author, as He himself has said, '*They shall form the taught of God.*' Hope for nothing from *your own labors*, ~~use~~ your own understanding: trust *solely* in God, and in the influence of his Spirit. Believe this on the word of a man who *has had experience*."

"No *literal* reading of the Scriptures," says another, "can give a man that *spiritual* knowledge of divine things which leads to life eternal. Men of deep Scripture learning, know frequently *less of spiritual* Christianity than those of the poor who are scarcely able to read the Scriptures."

Oh! this fundamental *distinguishing* doctrine of the *inshinings* and *teachings* of the divine light and Spirit of Christ in our hearts, and the necessity, the inevitable necessity, of *waiting* and depending upon *it* for wisdom, sanctification, and redemption! how are these being regarded, advocated, and upheld by us? Are they highly or lightly esteemed; faithfully and fearlessly, or negligently and cringingly held and promulgated—as by those *ashamed* of the humility and meekness of pure wisdom, which is justified and honored of all her true children—without finching or compromise, shame or reserve?

“To Friends, as a Society, certain views of Gospel truth have unquestionably been intrusted by the great Head of the Church, and these views have ever been features in the profession of Friends, *distinguishing them from* other Christian denominations. Gradually, however, it would seem as if this had become very much *lost sight of*, and in place of *setting their light upon a candlestick*, it might almost be said the effort has been to show that there is little, if any, difference at all between Friends and their neighbors. Not only are *doctrinal differences kept much in the background*, but the *minor external marks of our profession have been largely abandoned*; in short, the aim apparently *uppermost with many is, not to be known for Friends*—indeed, they appear to be *ashamed of their profession*.

“Were it the case that the distinguishing views of Friends concerned matters of *minor import*, such *concealing* of them might be of *less consequence*. The differences, however, between Friends and others, we maintain, *are of essential importance*, and in as *great need* to be pressed upon the attention of the Christian world as when they were revived by George Fox and his contemporaries. Where, it may be queried, is the use of Friends maintaining a separate organization *if there be no material difference* in their profession from that of others? We confess we can discover *none*. But *is it so in reality*, that no difference in essentials exists? Is the doctrine of Scripture respecting the *universality* of Divine Grace, and its *immediate teaching*, any more recognized than two centuries ago, by the Christian world? Is the one-man system of ministry less prevalent, or its pecuniary maintenance seen to be unscriptural? Is the system of worship less formal? Are outward rites and ceremonies less trusted in? Is religion yet sufficiently recognized as *the regulator of the whole every-day life*? Is a testimony more conspicuous than ever *against the fashions and maxims of a corrupt world*? Is the unlawfulness of all war entertained by *any one denomination besides Friends*? Till these inquiries can be truly answered in the affirmative, surely the mission of Friends has been anything but accomplished.

“Here is the work—to every one the command is, ‘As ye go, preach;’ not that *all* are expected to do this *verbally*, or leave their homes and lawful callings to ‘go into all the

world and preach the Gospel;' but some in word and doctrine, and the rest in life and conversation, *as they go are to preach*, to be instant in and out of season in making known that which has been intrusted to them—the knowledge of the truth in its primitive simplicity and spirituality, as revived by the early Friends."

In connection with, or comment upon the foregoing, it is remarked by the writer, "I admit that it (prescribing the line and measure of exercise for the ministry) is very delicate ground to tread upon in this day of many departures and *painful unrest*, yet it behooves Friends to be very careful in liberating for religious service *beyond* our own borders, seeing the high ground we take for the Gospel ministry and its exercise; remembering that there is much religious enlightenment and spiritual perception beyond the pale of our Society, godly men and women who *can* discern the grounds of true ministry, whether in the life or not, and who are *wearry of mere human wisdom*. I believe there never was a period when there was a greater yearning after the simplicity and purity (*the life and power*) of the Gospel, than in the present day, or where the Scriptural and simple mode of our meetings for worship *would* be more appreciated. I much fear that we are more in danger of *lightly esteeming* it, than it is of being rejected *by those without our borders*."

"It is no impossible or unheard of thing for a minister to *mistake* his line of service. We may *hesitate* to assert of any one engaged in holding meetings for the public that he has so mistaken; at the same time the fact is *not to be denied*, the distinguishing views of Friends are for the most part in such meetings *kept very much in the background*. The query hence will arise, Is it right that this should be the case? Strange, very strange, we say, if it is. We say there are no views worth holding, if they are not worth promoting."

If those who are ashamed of and would ignore or deny our peculiar doctrines, testimonies, or practices—who are disaffected because of the recommendations and requirements of our discipline, or the *practices* of consistent members of our religious organization (professing to have a testimony to bear against these)—were so far imbued with a sense of propriety and due consideration, as to be willing either to withhold