

**A BRIEF EXPOSITION OF THE
ESTABLISHED PRINCIPLES AND
REGULATIONS OF THE UNITED
SOCIETY OF BELIEVERS CALLED
SHAKERS**

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A brief exposition of the established principles and regulations of the United Society of Believers called Shakers by Shakers

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SHAKERS

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A

BRIEF EXPOSITION

OF THE ESTABLISHED

PRINCIPLES AND REGULATIONS

OF THE

UNITED SOCIETY OF BELIEVERS,

CALLED

SHAKERS.

The power of Truth is great, it must and will prevail,
When false reports shall cease, and sland'rous tongues shall fail.

IMPROVED EDITION.



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Dr. S. A. Green }
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THIS small publication has a twofold object. *First*, to exhibit the people commonly called Shakers, in their proper character, as citizens of the Commonwealth, and under the influence and operation of its laws. In this view, it is presented to the statesman, whether legislator, lawyer, judge or jurist. *Second*, to solve the many questions proposed by the religious world, concerning these singular people, as a religious community. For this purpose, it is offered to professors of religion of all societies, and all candid inquirers.

The *EXPOSITION*, in its first form, was hastily written for the purpose of obviating a defamatory bill presented to the Legislature of New York. It is now somewhat abridged, in order to comprise in few words, the main points in question, and afford room for a more full and free discussion of those points, which may afford satisfaction to the intelligent and candid reader.

## EXPOSITION.

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MANY erroneous opinions are entertained concerning the people generally known by the name of Shakers, which are calculated to mislead the public mind, in respect to the true character of this Society. Many false reports and incorrect statements have been circulated respecting the principles and practice of the Society, which have no foundation in truth. With a view to correct these erroneous opinions, and as far as in our power, to remove prejudices and false impressions, we are induced from a sense of duty, to lay before the candid public, a brief statement of facts respecting the principles, government, temporal order, and practical regulations of the Society. This duty we owe to ourselves and to our fellow creatures, for the correct information of the public, and the benefit of all concerned: that all who are governed by the spirit of candor, and wish to know the truth concerning these things, may no longer depend on the vague and inconsistent reports in circulation, from which they can gain no correct knowledge nor just information.

Although the Society has published considerable respecting their faith and principles, yet an opinion seems still to prevail, especially among strangers, that no person can be admitted as a member of the Society without first surrendering all his temporal property, and wholly divesting himself of the government of his family, and the care of his children, if he have any, and subjecting himself and all that he possesses to the arbitrary control of the Elders and leaders of the Society. Nothing can be more erroneous and incorrect than such a supposition. Those things are no more required to obtain admission into this Society than into any other. We

believe that no institution, nor any system of government could be established which would be more compatible with man's free agency, or more consistent with truth, justice, reason, and all our national rights, civil and religious, than the system adopted in this Society. The following primary principles constitute the basis on which this Institution is founded, and by which all its movements and operations are directed.

FAITH AND PRINCIPLES OF THE SOCIETY.

1. A life of *innocence* and *purity*, according to the example of Jesus Christ and his first true followers; implying entire abstinence from all sensual and carnal gratifications.

2. LOVE.—“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another.—Love is the fulfilling of the law.” This is our bond of union.

3. PEACE.—“Follow peace with all men,” is a divine precept; hence our abstinence from war and bloodshed, from all acts of violence towards our fellow men, from all the party contentions and politics of the world, and from all the pursuits of pride and worldly ambition.—“My kingdom [said Christ] is not of this world.”

4. JUSTICE.—“Render to every man his due.—Owe no man anything, but to love one another.” We are to be just and honest in all our dealings with mankind, to discharge all just dues, duties, and equitable claims, as seasonably and effectually as possible.

5. HOLINESS.—“Without which no man shall see the Lord.” Which signifies to be *consecrated*, or set apart from a common to a sacred use. Hence arises all our doctrines and practical rules of dedicating our persons, services and property to social and sacred uses, having adopted the example of the first gospel Church, in establishing and supporting one *consecrated* and *united* interest by the voluntary choice of every member, as a sacred privilege, and not by any undue constraint or persuasion.

6. GOODNESS.—Do good to all men, as far as opportunity and ability may serve, by administering acts of char-



ity and kindness, and promoting light and truth among mankind. "Whatsoever, ye would that men should do to you do ye even so to them."

7. TRUTH.—This principle is opposed to falsehood, lying, deceit and hypocrisy ; and implies fidelity, reality, good, earnest sincerity, and punctuality in keeping vows and promises. These principles are the genuine basis of our institution, planted by its first founders, exhibited in all our public writings, justified by Scripture and fair reason, and practically commended as a system of morality and religion, adapted to the best interest and happiness of man, both here and hereafter.

#### MANNER OF ADMITTING MEMBERS.

It must be obvious to every reasonable person, that the foregoing principles are, in many respects, very contrary to the carnal and selfish nature of fallen man, and doubtless more so than those of any other religious society. Therefore, there is little danger to be apprehended of any person's being flattered or inveigled into this Society, or of joining it from any other motive than purely from the operations of faith and conscience. This, of itself, is the most powerful guard that can be set against the deceptions so often reported to be practised by the Society in procuring members. Indeed it precludes the possibility of such deceptions to any alarming extent. To this it may be truly added, that all reasonable precaution is used against admitting any person to membership while ignorant of our real faith and principles, or of the following *General Rules* :

1. All persons who unite with this Society, in any degree, must do it freely and voluntarily, according to their own faith and unbiased judgment.

2. In the testimony of the Society, both public and private, no flattery nor any undue influence is used ; but the most plain and explicit statements of its faith and principles are laid before the inquirer ; so that the whole ground may be comprehended, as far as possible, by every candidate for admission.

3. No considerations of property are ever made use of by this Society, to induce any person to join it, nor to prevent any one from leaving it; because it is our faith, that no act of devotion or service that does not flow from the free and voluntary emotions of the heart, can be acceptable to God as an act of true religion.

4. No believing husband or wife is allowed by the principles of this Society, to separate from an unbelieving partner, except by mutual agreement; unless the conduct of the unbeliever be such as to warrant a separation by the laws of God and man. Nor can any husband or wife, who has otherwise abandoned his or her partner, be received into communion with the Society.

5. Any person becoming a member, must rectify all his wrongs, and, as fast and as far as it is in his power, discharge all just and legal claims, whether of creditors or filial heirs. Nor can any person, not conforming to this rule, long remain in union with the Society. But the Society is not responsible for the debts of any individual, except by agreement; because such responsibility would involve a principle ruinous to the institution.

6. No difference is to be made in the distribution of parental estate among the heirs, whether they belong to the Society or not; but an equal partition must be made as far as may be practicable and consistent with reason and justice.

7. If any unbelieving wife separate from a believing husband, by agreement, the husband must give her a just and reasonable share of the property; and if they have children who have arrived to years of understanding sufficient to judge for themselves, and who choose to go with their mother, they are not to be disinherited on that account. Though the character of this institution has been much censured on this ground, yet we boldly assert, that the rule above stated has never, to our knowledge, been violated by this Society.

8. Industry, temperance and frugality, are prominent features of this institution. No member who is able to

labor, can be permitted to live idly upon the labors of others. All are required to be employed in some manual occupation, according to their several abilities, when not engaged in other necessary duties.

#### MANNER OF GOVERNMENT.

It must be obvious to every reflecting mind, that the government of this Society cannot be of a tyrannical and arbitrary character. Nor can any government which is not just and equitable in itself, long exist in it; because the faith and principles of the Society can support no other, as no government can be maintained in it but by the faith and general approbation of the members: besides, the liberal principles held forth in the constitutions and general laws of the land, would be an insurmountable barrier to a government of any other character. And even if this barrier were insufficient, it is well known that the world presents to the view of the natural mind, enjoyments much more pleasing than those contained in the principles of this Society. It would therefore be impossible for a government, which should prove itself tyrannical, and exercise unjust powers, ever to sway the faith of the members, and shut the avenues to the world, so as to prevent them from withdrawing, and seeking the more naturally pleasing enjoyments which it affords.

The rules of government in the Society are adapted to the different orders of which it is composed. In all (as far as respects adults) it is spiritual; its powers and authorities growing out of the *mutual faith, love and confidence* of all the members, and harmoniously concurring in the general form and manner of government established by the first founders of the Society.

1. The effective basis of the government so established, and which is the support of all its institutions, is the the faith, voluntary choice, union and general approbation of the members. It is an established maxim in the Society that any member who is not reconciled to the faith, order and government established in it, is more injurious than beneficial to it; besides the loss to himself of his own