

THE BHAKTAS OF THE WORLD

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II. GEORGE FOX



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NOTE

WE are much indebted to Professor Rufus M. Jones for generously placing at our disposal some of his articles about George Fox and for allowing us to make such changes in them as are necessary to make them fit into this series. Dr. John W. Graham has, at short notice, contributed an Introduction; our hearty thanks are due to him.

The Publishers

GEORGE FOX

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INTRODUCTION

IT fell to me, during the cold weather of 1927-28, to spend five months travelling about India, staying at forty places between Lahore and Colombo, lecturing on Religion at colleges and universities and to audiences of educated Indians of the higher classes. I spoke once or twice a day, 138 times in all; and my audiences, which I always counted, numbered nearly 24,000 people altogether. Students, numbering from 250 to 750, crowded the aisles and the platforms, the windows and doorways in the Halls at the colleges I visited, and listened intently for an hour in uncomfortable positions to an address on 'The Divine in Man' or 'Symbolism in Religion' or 'The Religion of Ruskin' or 'Lamarckian Evolution and War' or 'The Purpose of Education' or some other subject. I was welcomed at all Government Universities, at the Moslem University at Aligarh, the Hindu University at Benares, at many Christian Colleges, from the Foreman Christian College at Lahore to the college at Alwaye in Travancore, at Arya Samaj colleges and at a Buddhist college in Ceylon; to Parsee, Theosophist and Brahma Samaj audiences I often spoke in Y.M.C.A. Halls. The students in Hyderabad, Mysore and Travancore, as well as in British India, seemed pleased to hear my gospel. I spoke oftenest on 'The Divine in Man.' Everywhere I had many deeply sincere private conversations with professors and students. On Sundays I preached every week at College Chapels or Mission Churches.

My gospel was not called Quakerism. It had no denominational aim, but it was actually the faith of the Quakers, more properly called the Society of Friends, that was my inspiration. Its simplicity and depth offended nobody, but had a willing response everywhere.

On account of this experience I have been asked to preface my friend Rufus M. Jones's *Life of George Fox* by a

statement of my views on the message of the Society of Friends to India.

Religion is the attitude of man to God. On this awesome and exciting relation have been built the elaborate edifices of faith and practice which we know as the Religions of Mankind. Helplessness and fear, the consciousness of the beauty of holiness and the shame of failure to reach it, reverence and adoration have led mankind to the building of churches, temples or mosques and the establishment of services so elaborate that their performance has become a task to be achieved by trained professionals. These have used their power over men, women and money to gain more. Wealthy institutions, gifted with the inevitable instinct of self-preservation, have become the visible organs of religion. The followers of Christ, Buddha, Krishna, Mohammed, Zarathustra, were led along different pathways of thought and worship and have become rivals, with memories even of bloodshed in their history and of alienation in their attitude to one another to-day.

Yet surely the relation of man to God must really be simple at bottom and be at that level the same always and everywhere. Man in this fundamental relation does not much change nor does God. No geographical nor linguistic separation can count as a divider in this deep universal experience, though the expression of it will always vary. As to religious superstructure it is true that man in every age and place makes God in his own image. But this partiality in thought and variety of expression cannot alter the basic truth about this Divine-Human relationship. At bottom religious experience has one and the same foundation in reality. Moreover this experience must be spiritual. The spirit in man is the only organ which can have touch with God. Therefore God is a Spirit too, and man and God are in communion in moving experiences in all religions. No vast temple, no sacred place, no priest could have any religious influence except through a spirit within man whose nature was able to response to the Divine approach.

Therefore there must surely be discoverable in each religion at its simplest, the absolute religion, devoid of all external apparatus of ceremony, owning allegiance to no theological system. Men of this religion will understand all religions and men of all religions will understand it.

Such is Quakerism, the popular name for the Society of Friends, the religious body founded by George Fox. (A.D. 1624-1690)

The Hindu's daily worship is in silence. He approaches God through meditation. No doubt *melas* and processions make at times a din that drowns silence; but on ordinary days worship is silent, even solitary. In the West generally there is a flow of words which never ceases throughout worship. Printed prayers, Bible Lessons, Hymns, Sermon—these constitute the means of worship. There is little time to absorb the significant, profound and moving utterances in the English Prayer Book. The service marches, at times hurries, on. This is really taking God's name in vain unless the great Name thrills every time. But the Society of Friends holds its meetings on a basis of silence, and Friends actually spend the larger part of the time silent. Indeed, in some places, regrettably, the silence is never broken at all unless by some visitor. Meditation, to a Hindu and to a Friend, is the heart of the matter. If anyone preaches or prays, the act rises out of the silence spontaneously and in no routine way, and it cannot be counted on beforehand.

Indeed the prolonged meditations of Hindu saints and mystics are not really comprehended by most Englishmen. How much of these is a sort of trance, hypnotically self-induced and rather psychical than spiritual in ordinary cases? I raise the question without answering it, for I do not know the answer. Nothing psychic or hypnotic, at any rate, is the method of the Friends' meeting. It is a normal and wideawake assembly, a practice ground for the athletics of the soul. The Friend only draws back that he may dart forward.

In one important point the English Friend has something to

teach the Hindu or the Moslem. Eastern worship is solitary. No one is consciously present but the soul and the Great Soul. Worship is individual purely. But Quakerism is not; it is a form of communion. Brooding over the silence, out of a group, the makings of a single 'personality' come into being. That is too strong a word, too definite if rigidly understood. But a shadow of personality, a suggestion of a multiple personality is often there. A kind of thought-transference takes place under the now acknowledged telepathic law. Souls enrich one another. It is wonderful, and it cometh not with observation; but no Friend doubts or denies it. Sermons akin to one another follow each other from the silent experiences of several sitting there. One subject pervades the meeting at times. I see no reason why this should not happen in Eastern longitudes too where telepathy is much commoner. But it will be a new lesson to learn.

The sense of the unity of all mankind is relatively feeble in India. The system of caste clearly and rigidly marks men off in separate levels. It denies equality and chokes sympathy. People with whom you cannot eat and whom you cannot marry and who are behind estranging barriers for life and for all future generations, cannot truly and fully be realized as one with you in the sonship of a common Father or as both alike spiritual elements in the Being of God, flowers on the same tree.

To feel that way about the depressed classes can only come from a recognition that God is in all men and all men in God—that we are elements in His being, cells in His body, shall we say in a parable? This faith is the central message of Quakerism, phrased in many forms. And it carries far. If all souls are equally partakers of the nature, actually or potentially, then there can be no untouchables and no twice-born.

Hindu and Moslem are fighting one another in a fog. In the light they could recognize a deeper kinship than the religions which divide. This overleaping of the barriers of race has always been one of the victorious feats of the spirit that is

among Friends. They have always made international friendships. They more than any other body freed the Negro slaves. They stand by every slave. Nothing but a religion which unifies mankind can undermine race hatreds.

What India needs, in the next place, is the elevation of its women to an equality with its men. It can never be a strong nation so long as one of its two hands is tied behind its back. One sex must cease to be regarded as a mere minister to the other. How can the equal presence of the Indwelling God be admitted, and the accident of sex be allowed to spell degradation and indignity? Women have always been equal with men in the Society of Friends. They preach as freely as men and probably more frequently. They form a part of all committees. They shrink from no publicity on the platform or in the press. And neither indecency nor impropriety nor the break up of families results. Divorce is all but unknown amongst friends; and marriages are unusually happy. Sex does not dominate thought. Personality does.

The unbending testimony against all war, which is the best known of all the Quaker deductions from their faith in the Divine in Man, is likely to be congenial to the mind of India, which is on the whole gentle and not prone to war. The ahimsa, harmlessness, taught by Gandhi is concentrated Quaker Ethics.

This brings Friends and Indians close together to begin with, in a civilised atmosphere of sanity, strongly reacting against the barbarism we call war, which intrudes from early days into a civilisation to which it only does harm, and may, in the end, bring ruin—a civilisation to which it is totally unsuited. Primitive nomads are the only people to whom fighting is a natural activity. A settled nation, living in homes, abhors it.

Though the Hindu and the Friend begin the way to God together at the right place they shortly go along different paths thence; or, at any rate, they lay their emphasis differently. The Hindu is a philosopher, the Friend is a practical philanthropist and business man. In India my college and university

audiences loved to get me off on to what seemed to me rather unimportant theories of the Cosmos; whereas I was anxious to make precepts into practices. Once a philosopher of philosophy at Madura asked me what was the metaphysical basis of Christianity, and in my unpreparedness I said it hadn't any. I believe that metaphysics, though an amusing and interesting form of discussion, is too much of a religious preoccupation in India. I know that we all have a metaphysic, whether we know it or not, and that it represents a guide post or even a guide within, and is of vital importance in a simple form. But as an absorbing mental elaboration it is far cheaper stuff than the conquest of the flesh or than truthfulness and integrity of act and word. Each people can learn from the other in this respect. There is no virtue in an ordinary Englishman's aloofness from philosophy, nor again in the lower popular standard of veracity and honesty in the East. We need more truth of both kinds.

Allied to this question of veracity is the fact that while, on the one side, the Hindu is above all things courteous, and dreads like poison the shock of impoliteness, is always suave, and will sacrifice as much truthfulness as cannot be included in a smooth talk, the Quaker has an extraordinary sensitiveness about the accurate and sincere use of words, perhaps hard to appreciate in India. The dread of taking sacred words upon his lips which may not be the genuine expression of his feeling at the moment leads a Friend to abandon the congregational singing of hymns. The soul in sorrow prefers not to use unfelt words of praise. The soul at peace cannot fitly pretend to be a penitent. God's name, Friends think, is apt to be taken in vain by every congregational vocalisation. That is why Friends use no liturgy. What is the good to God or men of prayers taken out of a printed book, unless they are sincerely made our own? In that case we could have done without the book. Prayer is not verbiage, it is communion. A Friend is embarrassed if suddenly asked to offer prayer aloud. It has happened sometimes to me. He cannot pray on demand. He

cannot use mere words in anything so awesome as an approach to God. What does God want with mere words? Or indeed with words at all? It is the inward exercise alone which makes prayer.

This sensitive truthfulness in the use of sacred words has several consequences. It produces a clear-cut concise literary style for one thing—the basis of good writing. Words are a necessary evil. We cannot as yet express much without them; but it is a vast relief to readers or listeners to have to wade through as few of them as possible on the way to a meaning. What a bore is an irrepressible talker. Now much talk is an Indian habit, if I may judge from my five months' travel up and down the country. A dose of Quaker simplicity of speech would be all to the good. Of course truthfulness often puts a Quaker into a little social difficulty. Tact is required to steer away from the shallows. And sometimes a certain blunt plainness, rather dreadful perhaps to an Indian, results.

Distrust of, and a certain contempt for, magnificence of outward appearance is a Quaker characteristic in England. But I think that if Quakerism were transported to India it would not carry this with it. There is no reason why an Indian should not have his durbars; and I think the jewels and the Sari of an Indian lady might still adorn her, though her English sister avoids fine or elaborate dressing. Not being a woman I speak diffidently. I hardly know whether the Indian mind would look at fine raiment just as we do in the West. I must leave this as a loose end.

One profound change must come over the thought of a Hindu who has absorbed Quaker ideas. From being a cosmic pessimist he would become a cosmic optimist. I told my enquiring professor that Christianity had no metaphysical basis. But if I had had time to think I should have said that Christians believed in the reality of the material world, in the pervading presence of a spiritual world which makes for good, in progressive evolution as a possibility, and in the idealist philosophy generally. They are heirs to Plato and Plotinus in this region.

A Quaker emphasizes this. He not only believes in a God of Love, in the reality of goodness, truth and beauty, but he believes that God is a part of himself and he an organ of God. The distinction between Divine and Human is not to him a real, an ultimate distinction. They are ontologically the same, differing only in degree, magnitude, range. Man is a part of God as a leaf is part of a tree, as a cell is a part of a living body. Thus every common bush glows, is alive with God. Quaker mysticism is alive, practical, drawing down deep that it may flow far forth; springing back, as I said before, that it may pounce the better.

The Hindu denies the reality of material things—they are *maya*—illusion. In whatever way various thinkers may vary the exact meaning of *maya*, this belief tends to paralyze effort, to chill enthusiasm, to produce the belief that nothing is worthwhile. To this, no doubt, some observable lethargy and some of the stagnation of India's institutions; agriculture, medicine, business, elementary education, is measurably due. A philosophical dictum, such as the unreality of matter, may poison a nation. This leads to the drawing of the mystical consciousness within, ever within, fleeing from the external world to a psychological fortress, with intent never to come out again. This makes hermits, turns holy men into beggars—and unfortunately, too often—beggars into holy men. Is five millions the number of beggars in India, men who have given up the battle of life, the disheartening struggle with matter, and, sheltering behind the rice of charity, mix what holiness they can manage to claim with the failure to overcome the earth, either as animal or as man? This is often called passive mysticism, and is universally deprecated in Europe, when it occurs there. We think that it is wrong for a man to turn inwards and exist only for himself, even if inward soul capacities of which the West knows little, are developed. We believe that men are members one of another, and exist, like all other things and creatures, in relation to other things and creatures. I sometimes think that

The happiness of any one's life may be tested, more correctly than in any other way, by the extent and the intensity with which he loves and is loved. And, apart from that supreme emotion, every other faculty depends for its use and ultimately for its growth, on the play between self and others. That is how we learn to talk and to laugh and (generally) to cry. That is how we become alert and ingenious, musical, cheerful. That is how we train our tempers and our self-control. I need not enlarge. Personality has little meaning without intercourse. We are members one of another by our nature, and we become rejoicingly so, eager comrades, by the grace of God.

It should not be forgotten in emphasizing the special points of Quakerism, that in England it is also Christian, and, like other missionary churches, is imbued with the Christian spirit, looks back to Jesus Christ, counts His Spirit still active among us, and hangs on His words.

But even here there is a note of distinction between Quaker Christianity and other forms of it.

The Quaker obedience to Christ when accepted is uncompromising. Friends will not interpret 'Love your enemies' to mean 'Kill your enemies'. So they refuse to touch war even indirectly. Jesus said 'Swear not at all' and made it quite clear that he meant a serious oath, not a profane vulgarity. Friends refuse to interpret this as 'Swear in a court of law'. They interpret our Lord's objection to vain repetitions in prayer, as an objection to voluminous prayer books.

But they are not Biblical literalists. It is not the letter of Scripture but the spirit of it that has led them to these uncompromising positions. In many of their early testimonies they appeared to be flying in the face of Scripture. They ignored the words in Luke, 'Do this in remembrance of me,' when they abandoned the sacraments. They ignored the practice of the early Church when they declined baptism. They encouraged the ministry of women, in spite of Paul's refusal to suffer a woman to speak in the Church. They did not appoint 'Bishops, priests and deacons'.

All this they did before modern study of the Bible was born. These positions are now easier to hold. Most scholars believe that the 'words of institution' were put into Luke from I Cor. XI and that Paul, not Jesus, originated the Lord's Supper in a simple form. Baptism turns out to be much older than Christianity and not made obligatory by Jesus. The limitations imposed upon respectable ladies in the Mediterranean countries two thousand years ago, are seen to be temporary. The organisation revealed in the Pastoral Epistles is now believed to be later than Paul—and in any case 'Bishop' means 'Overseer'. Also there were no Christian ordained priests till Cyprian's time about A.D. 250.

We accept the doctrine of evolution in biology and in morals. We seek for the dawn of historical truth among Jewish stories as we should among Greek or Indian myths. We treat prophecy and apocalypse by purely critical standards which leave them no modern value.

In the New Testament too, everything is dependent on properly sifted evidence, not on authority. The life of Jesus especially is the subject of free and reverent study, with no assumption in advance.

Nor does the Apostles' Creed nor the Nicene Creed, nor the Westminster Confession, nor anybody's theological system, have the slightest authority over us. There is no Quaker creed.

Nor is there in Quakerism any touch of Western ecclesiasticism. We meet in simple rooms, not in Churches. The idea of consecration of bricks and mortar is meaningless to us. Is it the outside or the inside of the Church that is holy? The open air is the best of all temples.

We do not ask Indians to change their miracles, myths, priests, temples, for Western miracles, myths, priests, temples.

Prof. Radhakrishnan of the University of Calcutta gave four lectures at Oxford in 1926 which have attracted wide attention in England. He emphasized repeatedly the eclectic,

the mixed content of Hinduism. 'When the Hindu found that different people aimed at and achieved God-realization in different ways he generously recognized them all and justified their place in the course of history By accepting the significance of the different institutions of reality and the different scriptures of the peoples living in India Hinduism has come to be a tapestry of the most variegated issues and almost endless diversity of hues Hinduism is therefore not a definite dogmatic creed, but a vast, complex, but subtly unified mass of spiritual thought and realization.'¹

This description refers, naturally, not to the idolatrous worship of popular Hinduism, with all its horrors, but to the most spiritual worship of its sons. As a Professor in India said to me after half an hour's beautiful conversation on the things of the spirit, when I asked him if he were a Christian, 'No, I am a Hindu, but a Hindu of 2000 B.C.' But I could not have distinguished him from a Friend. We began our interview at his request with a time of devotional silence. Prof. Radhakrishnan himself, introducing me as my chairman to an audience at Calcutta University, gave a description of Quakerism which could not have been bettered.

For his Hinduism and my Quakerism are both based on experience.

'Each religious genius speaks out the mystery of God, according to its own endowment, personal, racial and historical. The variety of the pictures of God is easily intelligible when we realize that religious experience is psychologically mediated. . . . If the personal equation does not vitiate the claim to objectivity in sense perception and scientific enquiry, there is no reason to assume that it does so in religious experience.'² 'Every God accepted by Hinduism is elevated and ultimately identified with the central Reality which is one with the deeper self of man.'³ That is the faith of a Quaker.

¹ Pp. 20, 21.

² p. 25.

³ p. 46.

Hindu religion has two central beliefs on Reincarnation and Karma. What would Friends say to these?

To Reincarnation Friends, like all other Christians, have nothing to say. Evidentially, there is nothing in favour of it, and nothing against it. It is beyond evidence. It cannot be proved or disproved; nor can ever any beginning be made towards proof or disproof. Arguments for it or against its probability abound. It offers its own reason for the unequal lots of men, why some have health and happiness at their feet while others have not. But that reason may not be the correct one. We leave the whole subject of past or future reincarnations off the map. There was no subject on which my Indian audiences were more eager to ask questions. But I gave them no good answers. My concern was with the present life of the spirit of man in God, of the spirit of God in man.

At the Pachaiyappa's College in Madras the Principal, in introducing me, said he was glad to do it because I had not come to tell them that they were heathens, but in a spirit of friendliness. At Bangalore my audience crowded around at the end to hear some more, because 'You have not come to attack other peoples' religions, as is so commonly done.' These utterances showed that my friends had detected in me the Quaker habit of mind. We approach the thoughtful Indian as brethren would, devoted to a common quest.

JOHN W. GRAHAM.

CHRONOLOGY OF GEORGE FOX

- 1624. BIRTH OF GEORGE FOX IN JULY.
- 1640. LONG PARLIAMENT.
- 1642. BEGINNING OF CIVIL WAR.
- 1643. FOX STARTS ON HIS QUEST.
- 1647. BEGINS PREACHING.
- 1649. EXECUTION OF CHARLES I. FIRST IMPRISONMENT OF FOX.
- 1652. PENDLE HILL EXPERIENC. DISCOVERY OF SEEKER GROUPS.
- 1658. DEATH OF CROMWELL.
- 1660. RESTORATION.
- 1664. FIRST CONVENTICLE ACT.
- 1669. FOX MARRIES MARGARET FELL.
- 1670. SECOND CONVENTICLE ACT.
- 1671-73. FOX VISITS AMERICA.
- 1673-75. LAST IMPRISONMENT (THE EIGHTH) AT WORCES-
TER, INCLUDING TRANSMISSIONS TO LONDON.
- 1677. FOX VISITS HOLLAND AND GERMANY.
- 1682. WILLIAM PENN FOUNDS PENNSYLVANIA.
- 1685. DEATH OF CHARLES II. AND ACCESSION OF JAMES II.
- 1688. ACCESSION OF WILLIAM AND MARY.
- 1689. TOLERATION ACT.
- 1691. DEATH OF FOX, JANUARY 13.
- 1702. DEATH OF MARGARET FOX.

GEORGE FOX

I

HIS LIFE

THOMAS CARLYLE, now nearly a hundred years ago, made a fresh discovery of Fox and with a few powerful strokes of his pen drew an immortal picture of him in *Sartor Resartus*: 'This man, the first of the Quakers, and by trade a shoe-maker, was one of those to whom, under ruder or purer form, the Divine Idea of the Universe is pleased to manifest itself; and, across all the hulls of Ignorance and earthly Degradation, shine through, in unspeakable Awfulness, unspeakable Beauty, on their souls: who therefore are rightly accounted Prophets, God-possessed.' Emerson, too, felt toward George Fox pretty much as Carlyle did. He puts him in his list of divinely gifted revealers of the Spirit and always refers to him with reverence as he does to Plotinus and Boehme. One would expect that Fox's experience would furnish good material for William James' religious 'varieties,' but James was not content merely to cite Fox as an interesting psychological 'case'; he goes farther than almost anyone had previously gone in extolling him as a spiritual prophet. He says: 'In a day of shams (the religion which he founded) was a religion of veracity rooted in spiritual inwardness, and a return to something more like the original gospel truth than men have ever known in England. So far as our Christian sects to-day are evolving into

liberality, they are simply reverting in essence to the position which Fox and the early Quakers so long ago assumed.'

George Fox never thought of himself as the founder of a sect. He was against divisions and parties and denomination, and he was for the one undivided and indivisible Church of Christ. He felt it to be his mission to help, *restore* and revitalize the Church, not to lead a separatist movement away from it. He called his group of followers a 'Society,' within the Church, for he wanted it distinctly understood that 'Friends' did not constitute another Church. He lived and worked and died in the belief that he was discovering and proclaiming to the world universal principles and truths, as essential for the life and power of the true spiritual Church as gravitation is for a physical world or as oxygen is for physical life. He must be viewed and judged, not as the founder of the Quakers, but as a prophet and reformer of Christianity which he seriously took himself to be and sincerely believed that he was.

Time with its perspectives foreshortens most religious leaders. Personality is not easily transmissible, the magnetism of personal presence cannot last. Ideas, too, are fragile things and often collapse under the pressure of the years. Contemporary judgements carry no finality. Only the stern sifting of the centuries can decide upon the measure of a man's real greatness, only the votes of many generations can give a sure verdict. George Fox has successfully lived out three centuries and is still a growing name. He is at this moment a more quick and vital influence than at any other time since his death in London in 1691. What he proclaimed as *truth* is still a live and kindling

force. The way of life upon which he ventured still attracts serious souls. He is regarded more and more with the flow of time as a major prophet. We know his flaws and weaknesses more clearly than his first followers did, but at the same time we can see the true greatness of the man and the significance of his spiritual contribution in fuller light than they could then. When his earthly life came to its close only the members of his fellowship lamented his death, the world at large hardly noted his going; now all types of Christians of all communions are interested in his life and message, while multitudes who do not choose to be of his Society nevertheless appreciate the heroic endeavours he made to free men from the weight of tradition and from the heavy oppression of senseless customs.

George Fox was born in 1624, the same year that his greatest immediate spiritual forerunner, Jacob Boehme, died. With all their differences they were strangely alike. They were both unschooled and yet both possessed penetrating and discriminating minds. They both lived much alone in the fields and woods, reading, seeking, thinking, meditating, finding. They both had similar psychological constitutions. They both had sudden illuminating experiences of divine invasion and they both were transformed physically and mentally by their new found organizing faith. They both revolted from the theological systems and the ecclesiastical structure that had been inherited from the Reformation, and both developed a simple, direct, vital, inward way of salvation and the simplest possible form of religious fellowship. They both endured merciless persecution, and both grew finer in spirit and richer in life through what they suffered.

Boehme was no doubt directly influenced by the earlier mystics; Fox was very plainly indirectly influenced by him, though the English youth probably knew the Silesian mystic's writings only slightly and had little consciousness of connexion with him.

They were in any case kindred in spirit, of the same household of faith, members in one mystic fellowship, and the torch that fell at Gorlitz in 1624 was caught up again and firmly held aloft by the man who was born in that same year in the English village of Fenny Drayton.

We have too little definite information in Fox's vivid and admirably expressed autobiographical account of his youth given in the *Journal*, to tell precisely and exactly 'how it was with him', to use his own phrase. He was obviously a 'peculiar' boy but there is no proof in sight to show that he was in a pathological condition. 'In my very young years,' he says, 'I had a gravity and staidness of mind and spirit, not usual in children, insomuch that when I saw old men behave lightly and wantonly toward each other I had dislike thereof raised in my heart and said within myself, "If ever I come to be a man, surely I shall not do so, nor be so wanton".'¹ His mother was pure and upright, 'of the stock of martyrs', a deeply religious woman, whose guiding hand and spirit did much to mould and shape the boy, but he himself implies throughout his vivid account of 'how it was with me in my youth and how the work of the Lord was begun and gradually carried on in me,' that the Lord taught him inwardly, guided him, restrained him and prepared him for his mission. 'When I came to eleven years of age I knew pureness and righteousness; for

¹ *Journal* (Bi-Centenary Edition, London, 1901), Vol. I, p. 2.

while a child I was taught how to walk to be kept pure. The Lord taught me to be faithful in all things, and to act faithfully two ways, viz., inwardly to God, and outwardly, to man; and to keep to Yea and Nay in all things. For the Lord showed me that, though the people of the world have mouths full of deceit, and changeable words, yet I was to keep to Yea and Nay in all things; and that my words should be few and savoury, seasoned with grace; and that I might not eat and drink to make myself wanton, but for health, using the creatures in their service, as servants in their places, to the glory of Him that created them.¹ He says that boys and 'rude persons' laughed at him, made fun of him, as they would be sure to do, but he let them go their way. It is not easy to parallel in any other religious autobiography Fox's freedom from conviction of sin, coupled at the same time with an intense sense of the awfulness of sin. In this respect he was totally unlike Bunyan.

There is no way of discovering just how much he means by phrases such as, 'the Lord showed me,' 'the Lord taught me,' 'the Lord said to me.' They may be used freely and loosely for the fact that he had an 'impression' or that it was 'borne in upon his mind,' or on the other hand he may mean, as he often does *seem* to mean, that he actually heard voices, what are known as 'auditions.' I am inclined to think that the first and simpler explanation is the right one at this early stage. And I see no reason for concluding that Fox had any marked pathological symptoms before he was nineteen, though he was evidently a boy apart from others, lonely, introspective and acutely conscientious, but there is no evidence that he was

¹ *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 2.

morbidity so. He was the kind of boy that would be deeply impressed, and probably oppressed, by the sermons of the Rev. Nathaniel Stephens, who came to be curate in the Fenny Drayton church in 1638, becoming rector of it in 1659. Fox would thus be fourteen before he heard this particularly intense brand of Calvinism, while his religious seriousness long antedates that period. It can, however, be said emphatically that the episode at the Fair which occurred when he was nineteen would not have produced such a mental upheaval if all had been well with him up to that day. In any case this episode marks a distinct epoch in his life. He had gone to a nearby town on business at a Fair with a cousin and another companion who was a 'professor,' i.e., a church member. They went to a public house and drank a jug of beer together. This seemed all right, as it was taken solely to quench thirst. But the other two men began to 'drink healths,' calling for more beer and saying that he who would not drink should pay the entire reckoning. Fox laid a small piece of money on the table and left them. 'I returned home,' he says, 'but did not go to bed that night, nor could I sleep, but sometimes walked up and down and sometimes prayed and cried to the Lord, *who said unto me*: "Thou seest how young people go together into vanity and old people into the earth thou must forsake all, both young and old, and keep out of all and be as a stranger into all".'¹

Then came 'a command of the Lord' to leave home and 'relations,' i.e., family, and to 'break off all fellowship with old and young.' He now became an exile and a wanderer, travelling through towns and hamlets, declining to talk even with kindly

¹ *Journal*, I, p. 3.

disposed 'professors,' being 'sensible that they did not possess what they professed.' He went through 'a strong temptation to despair' and had 'mighty troubles.' He kept solitary and apart from men and wondered why these experiences should have come to him, and he said to himself, 'Was I ever so before?'¹ Then he wondered whether he did right to 'forsake' his 'relations' and he searched his soul to see whether he had 'wronged any.' Powerful temptations beset him and he got the impression that Satan was laying 'snares and baits' to draw him to 'commit some sin.' This condition and state of affairs lasted three or four years; a good deal of the time he was on the verge of despair and in great trouble, but obviously not conscious of sin, as he is careful to say that he was only *tempted* to sin, without actually committing the sin. Then he had a period of 'looking to priests for comfort'—there was no comfort in them. Next he tried the Baptists in London, where his uncle Pickering lived. He found the Baptists 'tender', i.e. truly pious, but he was not free to impart his mind to them nor to join them, 'for', he says, in a significant and revealing phrase, '*I saw all, young and old, where they were.*'² None of them 'could speak to his condition'. One priest told his sorrows and troubles to servants and 'milk lasses', another advised him to marry, and a third recommended tobacco and song-singing. All were 'empty hollow casks'—'broken cisterns without the water of life.' The ground and basis of his mental trouble was pretty clearly the fixed idea that there existed in England—and so far as he knew, in the world—no genuine, vital, spiritual Christianity, no Christianity of

¹ *Journal*, I, p. 4.

² *Ibid* I, p. 4.

primitive, apostolic, *overcoming and saving* power. Not only was there nothing of that sort to be found, but furthermore he knew not how to inaugurate that type of religion himself. The old was hollow, formal and dead, and the new was not born yet. That is the source of his sorrows and his troubles. It has always been somewhat of a mystery why George Fox should have had such a marked crisis and should have passed through such a prolonged period of agony when he shows no personal conviction of sin in his own case.

I feel convinced, from the clues which the *Journal* supplies, that his 'shattering idea' was his discovery, which came, as so many of his ideas did come, in a revealing flash, that the existing Church in the world was apostate, wandering in the wilderness, out of spiritual life, truth and power. The Church instead of being the Seed of God, the living body of Christ, the corporate incarnation of the invisible Spirit, seemed to him to be standing still in the letter, in the external, in the legal. It seemed to him to be busy with theological debates and discussions, with creeds and notions, with dead, dull, external performances. It did not say to the lame man, 'Rise up and walk.' It did not set men free from sin. It did not demonstrate to the world that it was a reservoir of spiritual power. It worked no miracles. It revealed no conquering faith. In short it was no longer apostolic. Its authority and power were outside itself and not inherent. Fox was highly resolved to be churchless and shelterless until he should find somewhere, somehow, the germ, the nucleus, of a true, living, dynamic, spirit-endowed, apostolic Church—a Church of present power, faith and authority. That was his quest, that was his seeker-mission.

It is no doubt true that Fox overstates the dearth and famine of spiritual religion. The reformer, the radical, is never an accurate reporter of the *status quo*. He sees it in bad perspective. He is struck by its most glaring effects and these absorb his consciousness. He sweeps forward with generalizations which fail to count the weighty concrete exceptions. Then, too, these sudden flashes of insights such as he had, swift and conclusive for those who have them, are by no means infallible guides in matters of historical fact. The Church which came under Fox's immediate observation, the Fenny Drayton church, was almost certainly legalistic and uninspired. So, too, were many others in the surrounding neighbourhood and beyond. The Reformation had miscarried to a pitiable extent. There was much dullness, dryness, deadness, and endless talk, but truth and life were somehow missed out, as they too often are to-day. At the same time, however, there were great souls in England then, honest sincere teachers and doers of the truth, genuine apostolic men, if he had happened to find them, and if he had possessed the necessary insight to understand them.

After many travels that brought no results Fox returned home, since he was uneasy in mind over his separation from his family, and he spent about a year at this time in Drayton. He had talks with Priest Stephens, who used Fox's religious views to adorn his sermons. He tried other priests in nearby towns, but they were 'miserable comforters, hollow, empty casks,' all of them unable to 'speak to his condition.' At this period, when Fox was about twenty-three, appeared a striking symptom of his mental state. A priest in high account wanted to have him bled, in the hope, after the

practice of that period, that it would improve his physical condition, but Fox adds, 'they could not get one drop of blood from me, either in arms or head, though they endeavoured to do so, my body being as it were dried up with sorrows, grief and trouble, which were so great upon me that I could have wished that I had never been born, *or that I had been born blind, that I might never have seen wickedness or vanity; and deaf, that I might never heard vain and wicked words.*'¹ The first point to note in the narrative which I have underscored is the state of mind which still possesses him regarding the hopeless religious condition of the world, 'wickedness and vanity' in the lives of 'professors.' He would have preferred to be blind or deaf so that he might not have perceived it. On at least one occasion he was actually 'struck blind' and 'could not see' for a time.² Blindness from auto-suggestion is a well-known trait of persons in the condition in which Fox found himself during these years of agony.

His own explanation of the failure to get blood from him is quite inadequate—there was no doubt a normal quantity of blood in him. The incident is a plain indication, a major symptom, of hysteria. Another incident which came somewhat later, but probably the same year, reveals still profounder symptoms. There was a man named Brown who on his death-bed prophesied much about Fox and had a 'sight' of what he was later to accomplish. 'When this man was buried', the *Journal* says, 'a great work of the Lord fell upon me, to the admiration (i.e. wonder) of many, who thought I had been dead (he evidently lay in a trance condition); and many came to see me for about fourteen days. I

¹ *Journal* I, p. 6.

² *Ibid*, I, p. 27.

was very much altered in countenance and person, as if my body had been new moulded or changed. While I was in that condition, I had a sense and discerning," i.e., he was telepathic and could read or at least get a glimpse of other minds in the room with him.

It is not difficult to parallel these experiences from the autobiographies of the great mystics and from the lives of other religious leaders, but no one who knows about such conditions would think of calling them normal occurrences. Fox alternated from experiences in the deeps to experiences on the heights. He says: 'I fasted much and walked abroad in solitary places many days, and often took my Bible and went and sat in hollow trees and lonesome places till night came on; and frequently in the night, walked mournfully about by myself.' 'I had some intermissions and was brought into such a heavenly joy, that I thought I had been in Abraham's bosom.'

During this long time of search and inward struggle the young man had many 'openings'. He means by the apt phrase that some truth was revealed as in a flash to his soul, so that he vividly saw that the truth was true. In a number of cases he uses the word, 'I saw,' so emphatically that he appears to mean that he visualized the experience. A passage like this illustrates it: 'They were discoursing of the blood of Christ, and as they were discoursing of it, *I saw*, through the opening of the Invisible Spirit, the blood of Christ. And I cried out among them and said, "Do ye not see the blood of Christ? See it in your hearts to sprinkle your hearts and consciences from dead works, to serve

¹ *Journal I*, p. 20.

² *Ibid*, I, p. 10.

the living God", and I had great openings.'¹ The most wonderful of all his 'openings' is a *vivid sight* of the reality of which he speaks: 'I saw that there was an ocean of darkness and death; but an infinite ocean of light and love that flowed over the ocean of darkness. In that also I saw the love of God.'² 'One morning, as I was sitting by the fire, a great cloud came over me, and a temptation beset me; and I sat still. It was said, "All things come by nature"; and the elements and stars came over me, so that I was in a manner quite clouded with it. But as I sat still and said nothing, the people of the house perceived nothing. And as I sat still under it and let it alone, a living hope and a true voice arose in me, which said, "There is a living God who made all things." Immediately the cloud and temptation vanished away, and life rose over it all; my heart was glad, and I praised the living God.' Walking in the fields one day he *heard* the Lord say: 'Thy name is written in the Lamb's book of life',³ and at another time: 'Thou art in my love'.⁴

Some of his 'openings' appear to have surged up into his consciousness when he was not thinking at all of the subject. The 'opening' seemed to be 'given' to him from the unseen beyond. Here is a good example of what I mean: 'The Lord opened to me that being bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ'.⁵ At another time the Lord 'opened' to him that only those who were born of God and had passed from death to life were *true believers*.⁶ Again: 'It was opened unto me by the Eternal

¹ *Journal*, I, p. 24.

² *Ibid.*, I, p. 35.

³ *Ibid.*, I, p. 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, p. 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, p. 47.

⁶ *Ibid.*, I, p. 7.

Light and Power, and I saw clearly therein "that all was done and to be done, in and by Christ".¹ Once more he says: 'The Lord opened to me by His Invisible Power that every man was enlightened by the divine Light of Christ. Now the Lord God opened to me by His Invisible power that every man was enlightened by the divine Light of Christ, and I saw it shine through all; and that they that believed in it came out of condemnation to the light of life, and became the children of it; but they that hated it, and did not believe in it, were condemned by it, though they made a profession of Christ. This I saw in the pure openings of the Light without the help of any man, neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures; though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it. For I saw, in that Light and Spirit which was before the Scriptures were given forth, and which led the holy men of God to give them forth; that all, if they would know God or Christ, or the Scriptures aright, must come to that Spirit by which they that gave them forth were led and taught'.² All these 'openings' had to do with truths that had already been proclaimed by 'the spiritual reformers' or by some of the small sects in England that had been inspired by these leaders. The truths were not *new*, but they came with fresh and living force into the consciousness of Fox and they possessed extraordinary meaning and driving power for him. The greatest of all these first-hand experiences and the most transforming of them all is the one that marked the turning point in his discovery of an apostolic Christianity: 'But as I had forsaken the priests, so I left the separate

¹ *Journal*, I, p. 14.

² *Ibid.*, I, pp. 34-5.

preachers also, and those esteemed the most experienced people; for I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. When all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do, then, oh, then, I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition;" and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give Him all the glory. For all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief, as I had been; that Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence, who enlightens, and gives grace, and faith, and power. Thus when God doth work, who shall hinder it? and *this I knew experimentally.*¹ Fox adds: 'I knew God by revelation as he who hath the key did open.'²

This experience of inward certainty was followed by a no less impressive one when he 'came up in Spirit through the flaming sword, into the paradise of God. All things were new; and all the creation gave unto me another smell than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness; being renewed into the image of God by Christ Jesus, to the state of Adam, which he was in before he fell. The creation was opened to me; and it was showed me how all things have their names given them according to their nature and virtue. I was at a stand in my mind whether I should practice physic for the good of mankind, seeing the nature and virtues of things were so opened to me by the Lord. But I was immediately taken up in spirit to see into another or more steadfast state

¹ *Journal*, I, p. 11.

² *Ibid*, I, p. 12.

than Adam's innocency, even into a state in Christ Jesus that should never fall.'¹

'The Lord opened to me three things relating to those three great professions in the world—law, physic, and divinity (so called). He showed me that the physicians were out of the wisdom of God, by which the creatures were made; and knew not the virtues of the creatures, because they were out of the Word of wisdom, by which they were made. He showed me that the priests were out of the true faith, of which Christ is the author—the faith which purifies, gives victory and brings people to have access to God, by which they please God; the mystery of which faith is held in a pure conscience. He showed me also that the lawyers were out of the equity, out of the true justice, and out of the law of God, which went over the first transgression, and over all sin, and answered the Spirit of God that was grieved and transgressed in man; and that these three—the physicians, the priests and the lawyers—ruled the world out of the wisdom, out of the faith, and out of the equity and law of God; one pretending the cure of the body, another the cure of the soul, and the third the protection of the property of the people. But I saw they were all out of the wisdom, out of the faith, out of the equity and perfect law of God.'² There were other flashes of the certainty of the love of God, and he came more and more into an abiding consciousness that he possessed the light and life and love and salvation of God in his own soul.

The steps by which he travelled across the chasm to his 'everlasting yea' are given in his own peculiar, but vivid and adequate, way in the *Journal*. It is obvious that much that would throw light upon

¹ *Journal*, I, p. 28.

² *Ibid*, I, p. 29.

the stages of his progress, if we had it, is omitted. The outward helps are hardly mentioned at all. He never does full justice to the outward. The suggestions which he got from Anabaptists and from other radical sectaries are passed over in silence, partly no doubt because he himself was unaware that he was being influenced by them. So, too, with the little books and tracts of the spiritual reformers, some of which he must have read; they are unnamed and unnoted. They worked upon him subconsciously, if at all, rather than overtly and explicitly. And when his new and constructive ideas were born they seemed to come to him without any preparation or gestation. They 'emerged,' and seemed to him to be given from above. He felt that real revelations were granted to him, and, however personal they were in their primary application, they all had to do with the basis and structure of a true, vital, apostolic type of Christianity. It is easy to see, though Fox nowhere says it positively, that his central revolt was against Calvinism, which was at the time the outstanding type of Protestantism both in Europe and America. He was violently anti-Calvinistic, though here again he probably was not *reflectively* opposing that system of religion. When, however, his own type of religion emerged it stood in sharp contrast at almost every point to that which the great Frenchman John Calvin had expounded in his *Institutes*, a hundred years earlier.

The Reformation had made *salvation* the dominant issue and it still was the fundamental concern of religion with all serious persons. The thing which Fox makes central for his type of Christianity is the continued presence of Christ as a living active Spirit in immediate contact with the inner

life of man, producing in the responsive soul a new creation. The salvation which he heard preached was forensic, legal—a transaction which took place centuries ago. The great fact of Christianity was the satisfaction of Divine justice through the death of Christ, and consequently everywhere the stress and emphasis in preaching were on that death, as though it were a terminus in itself. Fox maintained instead that salvation is *a vital process* wrought out in man's own life by a Divine indwelling presence operating there, which, after the manner of St. Paul, he calls by many names: 'Light of Christ', 'Divine Seed', 'That of God', 'the Spirit', or 'Christ in you'.

The first important constructive step in his faith had been his discovery that Christ was working and speaking within him precisely then when nobody else could help him, and it seemed convincingly clear to him that through this experience he 'knew God experimentally'. In one of his early epistles Fox wrote: 'Truth hath been talked of, but now it is possessed.' 'Christ hath been talked of, but now he is come and is possessed.' Fox thus belongs plainly enough among the mystics. God for him is not a First Cause, hidden away behind the creative processes. He is not off at the end of a rationalistic syllogism to be argued about. He is not an absentee Ruler represented here below only by a Book or an Ambassador or an Institution. He is Life and Spirit, and so unsundered from the Life and Spirit within us. That is the basic ground of Fox's Christianity. He arrived at it through a thrilling experience, and he believed that everybody could verify that basic fact in a similar experience.

This first-hand discovery of God, this apprehension that Christ was alive as truly now as ever

and a continuous presence within all of his recreated followers produced a profound change not only in Fox's spirit, but also in his entire psychological condition as well. He says himself that he was 'new-moulded', and the graphic phrase does not run ahead of the facts. We do not know, perhaps, why a certain unstable condition of brain and nerves, a slight tendency, it may be, toward disintegration or dissociation, should make a person more likely to become a genius or a mystic, but at least we do know that this is a fact. The tighter, compacter formation is 'safer'. Where the neurons of the brain are firmly bound together and the interlocking bridges—the synapses, as they are called—are solidly built up, there is not likely to be a new or dangerous or explosive type of character. Such an one has given hostages to fortune that he will keep the peace and walk the safe, level paths of life. It is the person strung like a Stradivarius violin, delicate, mysterious, unique incalculable—it is that kind of person who writes 'the Ancient Mariner', or who leads a new religious movement.

George Fox saw now that an apostolic Church could be produced as well in the seventeenth century as in the first, if men would obey the Light and become organs of the Spirit of Christ. To proclaim that Light, to interpret that Spirit, became henceforth the mission to which he dedicated himself. What he believed he had to do as his divine task was to *restore* the Church to its primitive power, to revive apostolic Christianity. He was a glowing optimist, as all men are who discover a new and undreamed—of energy, and he flung himself at his task with all the simplicity of 'God's little fool' of Assisi.

There comes, almost at once, a reorganization of his shattered physical system. He was not made over in a minute of course, but the integration becomes apparent as soon as the constructive discovery was made and he had found his marching orders. He was naturally a 'motor' type of man; he was not made for contemplation and beatific vision, but for action and for deeds. The *Journal* is a book of travel, of events, of activity. He did not *find* himself until he found his constructive idea—then he can shake the world. It must be said, however, that his first four years of ministry—1648 to 1652—were not very successful, and they brought upon him much brutal treatment. He did not yet find many prepared groups and he gathered only scattered followers. He was under constant strain and had terrible prison experiences, so that it is not strange that there were some recurrent symptoms of his old trouble, the Litchfield episode for instance.¹ But in 1652, he came upon the great groups of 'Seekers' in Yorkshire and Westmoreland, and they recognized in him at once the apostolic leader for whom they had been 'waiting'. There was an instant response and he had a large nucleus already at hand for his Society. These 'Seeker' groups supplied an important band of preachers, and they put Fox into contact with large groups in other parts of the country. From this time on the movement grew by leaps and bounds, and Fox saw the fulfilment of his hope becoming clearer every day.

He was surrounded by groups and individuals who were prone to be wild and chaotic. The small sects, especially the 'Ranters', of the period were enthusiastic and emotional. There are plenty of

¹ See *Journal*, I, pp. 77-79.

indications that he had to deal with many persons who had 'complexes' and that intense dreams and hopes surged about him, with much flattery, and adulation enough to sweep a man off his feet. But the fact is, Fox steadily grew in judgement, poise, balance, insight and control. He became ever more robust and virile and proved able to stand the brutal assaults of an unfriendly world, while he put through a schedule of labour and travel that would have broken down any ordinary constitution. William Penn could say: 'I never saw him out of his place, or not a match for every service and occasion'. He also says that Fox was 'unwearied and undaunted'. He wore a suit of leather because it was durable and well adapted to his rough out-door, horseback life, but his linen was always clean, he paid his way as he travelled, and he soon became the best known man in England, especially in rural England, as John Wesley was to be a century later.

All sorts and conditions of men came to regard him as a man to be respected. Judges and jailers were impressed by him; so, too, were his fellow prisoners. The students at Cambridge discovered that he had athletic prowess and could ride a horse as well as any of them: 'I rid through them in the Lord's power and they cried, he shines, he glistens!'¹ Many testify to the piercing feature of his eyes and no one can miss the magnetic character of his personality. Cromwell instantly took his measure and knew that he had met an unusual person. 'I spoke much to him (Oliver Cromwell) of Truth, and much discourse I had with him about religion: wherein he carried himself very moderately. But he said we quarrelled

¹ *Journal* (Cambridge Edition), Vol. I, p. 190.

with priests, whom he called ministers. I told him I did not quarrel with them, but that they quarrelled with me and my friends. "But," said I, "if we own the prophets, Christ, and the apostles, we cannot hold up such teachers, prophets, and shepherds, as the prophets, Christ, and the apostles declared against; but we must declare against them by the same power and Spirit." Many more words I had with him, but people coming in, I drew a little back. As I was turning, he caught me by the hand, and with tears in his eyes said, "Come again to my house; for if thou and I were but an hour of a day together, we should be nearer one to the other"; adding that he wished me no more ill than he did to his own soul. I told him if he did he wronged his own soul; and admonished him to hearken to God's voice, that he might stand in his counsel, and obey it; and if he did so, that would keep him from hardness of heart; but if he did not hear God's voice, his heart would be hardened. He said it was true.¹

'While I was in prison in Launceston, a Friend went to Oliver Cromwell, and offered himself, body for body, to lie in Doomsdale in my stead; if he would take him, and let me have liberty. Which thing so struck him, that he said to his great men and council, "Which of you would do as much for me if I were in the same condition?" And though he did not accept of the Friend's offer, but said he could not do it, for that it was contrary to law, yet the Truth thereby came mightily over him.'²

'Soon after we rode to London. When we came near Hyde Park we saw a great concourse of people, and, looking towards them, espied the Protector coming in his coach. Whereupon I rode

¹ *Journal*, I, p. 210.

² *Ibid*, I, p. 318.

to his coach side. Some of his life-guard would have put me away; but he forbade them. So I rode by his coach side with him, declaring what the Lord gave me to say to him, of his condition, and of the sufferings of Friends in the nation, showing him how contrary this persecution was to the words of Christ and His apostles, and to Christianity. When we were come to James's Park Gate, I left him; and at parting he desired me to come to his house. After a little time Edward Pyot and I went to Whitehall to see Oliver Cromwell; and when we came before him, Dr. Owen, vice-chancellor of Oxford, was with him. We were moved to speak to him concerning the sufferings of Friends, and laid them before him: and we directed him to the Light of Christ, who had enlightened every man that cometh into the world. He said it was a natural light; but we showed him the contrary; and proved that it was Divine and spiritual, proceeding from Christ the spiritual and heavenly man; and that that which was called the life in Christ the Word, was called the Light in us. The power of the Lord God arose in me, and I was moved in it to bid him lay down his crown at the feet of Jesus. Several times I spoke to him to the same effect.¹

Twice in his later life, once when he was thirty-five and then again when he was forty-six, he had serious recurrences of his nervous instability and possibly there was a third instance, though that is not certain, while he was in Barbadoes in 1671. Both of the cases which he reports with some degree of fulness were occasioned by profound mental distress over the existing state of affairs, in the first instance in 1659 when he was

¹ *Journal*, I, pp. 332-3.

deeply exercised over the state of the country, and the second time, in 1670, over the terrible suffering of Friends. Of the first recurrence he narrates: 'While I was under some travail at Reading, by reason of grief and sorrow of mind, and the great exercise that was upon my spirit, my countenance was altered and I looked poor and thin'. 'And then having recovered and got through my travails and sufferings, my body and face swelled, when I came abroad into the air'.¹

The second instance involved a much profounder transformation and was more like the occurrence in his early agonies of search. I give the narrative greatly reduced and shortened: 'Next day we passed toward Rochester. On the way as I was walking down a hill, a great weight and oppression fell upon my spirit; I got on my horse again, but the weight remained so that I could hardly ride. At length we came to Rochester, but I was much spent, being so *extremely laden* and burdened with the world's spirits, that my life was oppressed under them. I got with difficulty to Gravesend and lay at an inn there; but I could hardly eat or sleep.' Finally he got to Stratford at the home of a Friend named Williams. 'Here', he continues, 'I lay exceedingly weak, and at last lost both hearing and sight. Several Friends came to me from London and I told them "that I should be as a sign to such as would not see and such as would not hear the truth". In this condition I continued some time. Several came about me; and though I could not see their persons, *I felt and discerned their spirits*. Under great sufferings and travails, sorrows and oppressions, I lay for several weeks, whereby I was brought so low and weak in body that few thought

¹ *Journal*, I, p. 447.

I could live. It was reported both in London and in the country that I was deceased; but I felt the Lord's power inwardly supporting me.' A little later in retrospect he says, 'I was under great sufferings at this time beyond what I have words to declare. For I was brought into the deep, and saw all the religions of the world and people that lived in them and the priests that held them up.'¹

Here we are once more back under the *complex* of what he calls 'the world's spirits' and 'the religions of the world', the way people lived in them and the way priests held them up. For years his great constructive truth, his marching orders, had kept him unified and organized for his tasks, but worn out with labors, depressed over the suffering of Friends for the common cause, and weak in body and nerve, he falls once more under the old obsession and has a return of his disease. But underneath all his sense of suffering and of the weak and beggarly condition of religion in the world, Fox still *felt the Lord's power inwardly supporting him*, and he evidently expected to come into robustness of life again, as he eventually did do.

This is the last sure sign of his mental instability, though his illness on the ship on the way out to America and the relapse in Barbadoes may have had some connexion with the old trouble. Our first hand intimate accounts of his life and experiences come to an end about this time, as we have only scrappy memoranda for the closing period, from 1675 to 1691. All his life through, and especially in the early period of it, he was staggered by the discrepancy between the religion of the Gospel and the religion of the Churches. This was the shaft which shattered his life in the period of

¹ *Journal*, Vol. II, pp. 131-133.

his agony, and whenever he let the old 'complex' master his mind he fell into disturbance and instability, but for the most of his life a transcendent faith overmastered his fear—a faith that the 'Seed reigns'. That was in fact his last message, a triumphant message; 'All is well; the Seed of God reigns over all, and over death itself'.¹ This Seed of God for him means God revealed as the principle and power of a new and conquering life—God revealed in Christ and Christ revealed in a new spiritual body of men and women who reincarnate Him and propagate His Spirit. Nothing is better, after the storms and struggles of life, than to die, saying 'the Seed of God reigns'!

¹ *Journal*, II, p. 506.

II

HIS CHARACTER

It will be fitting to say a few words to gather up the character of the man himself. George Fox was by no means free of faults and defects. He was not always inspired; he was often dull and tedious. Though usually very humble and tender, he yet sometimes was overconscientious of his importance and he occasionally shared the tendency of his age to speak with an air of infallibility and finality. He felt undue satisfaction in the calamities which overtook his persecutors, though we should all admit that it is a very human trait. But when these and other necessary discounts and subtractions are made he still stands forth a true specimen of an apostolic man and heroic reformer, absolutely sincere, honest, brave, uncompromising, and with an eye single for the light of God in his soul. Once more William Penn's pithy sentence, exactly hits the truth of him: 'In all things he acquitted himself like a man, yea a strong man, a new and heavenly-minded man. A divine and a naturalist, and all of God Almighty's making'.

Intellectually he was not well qualified to be a reformer of Christianity. He had no clear comprehension of history. He did not understand the development of religious thought and Christian institutions, and he had slender capacity for sound interpretation of the meaning of Scripture. He knew almost nothing of the great spiritual literature of the ages. Those lacks mean, of course, a heavy handicap. He must not be judged or estimated in

the class of scholarly or critical reformers. He does not belong there. He belongs in the order of the mystical, or intuitional, prophets. He is the same general type as St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catharine of Siena and Jacob Boehme of Silesia. The rational, reflective element was slight in the case of all these leaders. They saw the way forward without knowing dialectically the grounds or reasons for their course. They had 'flashes' (that is Boehme's word) or 'openings' (that is Fox's phrase). By some swift and untraceable inward leap they came to their insight and knew, as all geniuses know, that they were right. When the 'flash' was on, when the 'opening' came, they were like Moses with his pillar of cloud and fire—they knew the way and they marched straight on toward their Canaan. Those who critically plot out every step and explain the grounds for every conclusion will never feel at home with this type of prophet, and they will never be satisfied with the prophet's contribution. They will list it in the class with superstition or fanaticism. It is one of those matters about which it is useless to argue. The prophet is not to be 'explained'; he is to be accepted as a genius, or peradventure be passed by as unimportant and negligible. Here in this type at any rate Fox belongs. He lacked some traits which St. Francis and St. Catharine had, but he was like them in type, though he was still more closely allied to Boehme.

Fox had, as St. Francis also had, a large gift of humour. It was not a designed and conscious humour. It was a fundamental, native trait of personality as it was to such a marked degree in that old Greek prophet, Socrates. Fox always felt the humorous aspect of situations in which he found

himself. Take as a specimen his account of sitting for hours in silence on a haystack with a great throng of 'professors', i.e. nominal Christians, waiting for him to speak. 'I sat on a haystack and spoke nothing for some hours; *for I was to famish them from words.* The professors would ever and anon be speaking to the old priest, asking him when I would begin and when I would speak.'¹ Here is another good passage: 'One whose name was Cock met me in the street and would give me a roll of tobacco, for people were then much given to smoking. I accepted his love but did not receive his tobacco.'² On another occasion he accepted a Ranter's offer of tobacco, as he says: 'to show him that I was in unity with the creation'³ When he was in Derby Jail a conjurer in the jail threatened to 'raise the Devil and break down the house,' so that the jailer was afraid. Fox says: 'I was moved of the Lord to go in His power and rebuke him, and to say to him: "Come, let us see what thou canst do; do thy worst." I told him the Devil was raised high enough in him already; but the power of God chained him down, so he slunk away from me.'⁴ At another time an opponent of his doctrine cried out: 'What must be damned?' And Fox says: 'I was moved immediately to tell him that that which spoke in him was to be damned!'

The outstanding impression which the *Journal* gives is the uncompromising bravery of the man. He could not be frightened or thrown into a panic. In this trait he is like Luther, who was determined to go to Leipzig, 'even if it rained Duke Georges nine days running'! Fox was sixty times brought

¹ *Journal*, I, p. 94.

² *Ibid*, I, p. 116.

³ *Ibid*, (Cambridge Edition) I, p. 44.

⁴ *Ibid*, I, p. 72.

before the courts and eight times imprisoned in jails, prisons or castle-dungeons. He was the victim of many mobs and frequently endured brutal treatment at the hands of cruel gangs of persecutors. In no instance did he show any fear nor did any threat ever induce him to change his line of procedure when he was obeying what he believed to be a call of duty. On one occasion a man rushed at him with a naked rapier. Fox looked steadfastly at him and said calmly: 'Alack for thee, poor creature! What wilt thou do with thy carnal weapon? It is no more fo me than a straw.'¹ After Fox had received a most terrific handling by the mob at Ulverstone, a soldier, with his sword by his side, came up and said to him. 'Sir, I see you are a man!'² The more he was threatened and challenged in any town or region the more he felt moved to go there and deliver his message. 'There were', the *Journal* reports, 'great threatenings given forth in Cumberland that if I ever came there they would take away my life. When I heard it I was drawn to go into Cumberland!'³ In Beaumaris, for example, people told him that if he went into the street again the magistrates and governor would imprison him and they urged him to stay quietly in his inn. 'Upon this', he says, 'I was moved to go and walk up and down in the streets!'⁴ Sir Jordan Croslands, Governor of Sarborough Castle, said of him: 'He is as stiff as a tree and as pure as a bell'.⁵ Fox felt himself to be sent forth on an apostolic mission and he firmly believed that on occasions he was granted miraculous power. He frequently refers to the 'wonderful power' which

¹ *Journal*, I, p. 49.

² *Ibid.*, I, p. 159.

³ *Ibid.*, I, p. 133.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, p. 379.

⁵ *Journal*, II, p. 70.

attended his labors or which 'broke forth' when he was speaking. On one occasion he says: 'The power of God thundered among them'; and again: 'There was a mighty dread amongst the people'. In a famous passage he declared: 'The Lord said unto me that if but one man or woman were raised by His Power to stand and live in the same spirit that the prophets and apostles were in who gave forth the Scriptures, that man or woman should shake the country for ten miles round,'¹ and there can, I think, be no doubt that he believed himself to be a man of that type. He told the priests at Swarthmore very emphatically that he had received a message and word from the Lord as the prophets and apostles of old had done, and then he asks, 'Can any of you say you have ever had a command or word from the Lord immediately at any time?'² In connexion with an early visit to Mansfield-Woodhouse he declared: 'Many great and wonderful things were wrought by the heavenly power in those days; for the Lord made bare His omnipotent arm, and manifested His power, to the astonishment of many, by the healing virtue whereby many have been delivered from great infirmities.'³

One of the most touching of all his accounts of the display of power is the one which tells how a mason who was a 'professor' struck his hand with a rule-staff such a blow that the hand seemed ruined and incapable of any further use. 'But,' he says, 'I looked at it in the love of God (for I was in the love of God to all that persecuted me) and after a while the Lord's power sprang through me again, and through my hand and arm, so that in a moment

¹ *Journal*, I, p. 109.

² *Ibid*, I, p. 127.

³ *Ibid*, I, p. 45.

I recovered strength in my hand and arm in the sight of them all.'¹

The thing that saved Fox from over-exaltation and from exaggerated claims was this genuine spirit of love which abounded in his soul and a deep-seated common sense with which he was endowed. He sometimes ran close up to the border line of danger, and some of his followers crossed the line, but he himself weathered the storms and testings which beset his life and his mission. He preserved his balance and sanity, and for the most part he was not only valiant and daring, but serene and wisely tempered.

¹ *Journal*, I, p. 133.

III

HIS TEACHING

George Fox's place in religious history is among the Spiritual Reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some of the most important of them were Denck, Franck, Schwenckfeld, Castellio, Coornhert, Boehme, Everard, Dell and Saltmarsh.¹ They have been little studied and the importance of the movement has been inadequately grasped. The early leaders, who were contemporaries of Luther, were qualified scholars and men of noble aims. They were in sympathy with the mystic's type of religion. They were strongly influenced by Erasmus. They wanted a Church as little organized as possible in which each Christian could have a wide area of freedom and personality. They wished for a return to the way of life of the Galilean, the gospel of the Sermon on the Mount, the practice of the kingdom of God. They abhorred technical theology and hoped to realize a faith born of experience and freshly fed and guided by the immediate presence of the Spirit. They were not much gifted with organizing craft and they were for the most part content to interpret their personal faith, their experience of the Spirit, their devotion to Christ, their membership in the invisible Church, and to 'wait' for God to inaugurate the visible Church, if He would, through some new prophet who had not yet appeared. Out of this line of thought and hope finally emerged the groups of

¹ See R. M. Jones' *Spiritual Reformers of the 16th and 17th Centuries*. (London, 1914.)

'Seekers' in Holland and England and kindred fellowships of eager but unsatisfied men and women.

Fox belongs, by disposition, mental experience, and mental preparation, with this interesting movement. There can be no question, I think, that he had seen and read some of their little books, which existed in large numbers and were being circulated and passed from hand to hand in his youth. The 'Black Spread Eagle' Press was doing a risky but a very successful business in the publication of this new sort of spiritual literature, and busy translators were digging it out of German, Dutch and French originals. Fox must have met many of these 'liberals' as he wandered about from county to county seeking for someone who could speak to his condition. The *Journal* gives many half clues, but it supplies provokingly little exact information until 1652, when Fox comes upon great bodies of prepared 'Seekers' in the northern counties and later around Bristol and in other places. He *saw* them before he found them. 'From the top of Pendle Hill', he says, 'the Lord let me *see* in what place he had a great people to be gathered.' 'The Lord opened unto me and let me see a great people in white raiment by a river side, coming to the Lord.'¹ Here he found around Wensleydale and Sedburgh the nucleus of his new Society. Wherever his message spread and his truth took hold of people we discover signs of previous preparation for it. He imparted what men were seeking. He had what they wanted. The God, the Christ, the Spirit inwardly revealed, was the quick and powerful note of his preaching and he showed seekers how to find. 'This is He, this is He, there is no other,' cried Isaac Penington, the mystic

¹ *Journal*, I, pp. 109-110.

and seeker, on some great convincing occasion, 'this is He whom I have waited for and sought after from my childhood; who was always near me, and had often begotten life in my heart, but I knew Him not distinctly, nor how to receive Him, or dwell with Him.' 'Some', he continues, 'may desire to know what I have at last met with. I have met with my God; I have met with my Saviour: and He hath not been present with me without His salvation but *I have felt the healings drop upon my soul from under His wings.*'¹

This passage from Penington is a good introduction to a brief study of Fox's central idea. He called his dominating principle the divine Seed, or inward Light. This plainly means that the divine Life can propagate itself in the life of a man, can come to birth in a human soul, so that in a real sense a man can become a temporal revealing organ of the Divine Nature. 'I directed them to the Divine Light of Christ, and His Spirit in their hearts, which would let them see all the evil thoughts, words, and actions that they had thought, spoken, and acted; by which Light they might see their sin, and also their Saviour Christ Jesus to save them from their sins. This I told them was their first step to peace, even to stand still in the light that showed them their sins and transgression.'² Fox's phrase is used throughout his writings without much definition and he seems to have taken it for granted that all his contemporaries knew what he meant. So, too, they did. The Spiritual Reformers had already made the idea familiar, for they proposed to pass over from the outward authority of Scripture, Church, creeds, rules, laws and ecclesiastics to the authority

¹ *Works of Isaac Penington*, Vol. I, pp. 37-38.

² *Journal*, I, p. 121.

of the Spirit of God revealed within man. Fox, of course, arrived at his position not by reading, reflection and logical inference, but rather as he usually arrived, by a flash of insight, an experience, an 'opening'. He suddenly found God as a living presence within.

At this point he broke with the prevalent Calvinistic system. He did not think of *man* as that system did. His own account, it is true, is not carefully formulated, as the Calvinistic account is, and then, furthermore, Calvinism, which was everywhere in the air, quickly made inroads into the fold and very early coloured Quaker conceptions. But Fox himself, left to his own simple directness of thought, arrived at a position which was at sharp variance with the theology of the time. Both Calvin and Fox insist that there is a 'native' seed in man, brought hither from 'yonder'. For Calvin the 'seed' is a seed of sin—a perverse and diabolical propensity inherited from a degenerate, infected and fallen first ancestor. This seed rapidly ripens and fructifies and, like the leaven in the meal, invades the whole being. For Fox the 'seed' is a seed of God. It is something of His own divine nature implanted in the soul. It is a Godlike endowment and it links the new born child in unsundered kinship with the life of God. As the retina of the eye, to all intents and purposes a piece of the brain itself, attached to, rather than separated from, the brain by the optic nerve, instantly feels and responds to the light whose slightest vibrations affect it, so, Fox would hold, the sensitive palpitant soul-centre in us feels God and is natively responsive to His 'openings'. The black squares which are only too obvious in our later lives are nevertheless on a white background and not, as Calvin would hold, the white squares on a black background. Or, to

put it another way, winter can be thought of as the 'natural' state of Nature. This is Nature when you see it in its true naked state. So Calvin sees man as a wreck, a moral ruin, a being stripped of loveliness, beauty and moral goodness. Yes, but the amazing thing about winter is its potential life. In the midst of the ruin there are the buds with their promise of spring. That is George Fox. He sees the buds!

There can be no question, I think, that Fox's position is in harmony with the message of the Gospels, and it is equally true that his brave interpretation of man's spiritual nature is an important contribution to the modern world.

Not less important than the prophetic insight itself were the practical conclusions which Fox drew from it. It was an emancipating discovery. It carried with it a new estimate of man. If he is only a wreck, or at best only a poor dust-worm, it does not matter much how he is treated during his few and pitiable years of life. If, however, he is allied with God and a precious potential child of His, big with eternal destiny, it matters very much indeed how he is treated, whether he is warped and twisted by the external systems that are evil or whether he has good occasions and chances to find and obey his higher destiny. As his direct experiences multiplied and as he meditated upon them in the light of great passages of Scripture his faith took settled form, something like this: God and man are essentially connected. Man's soul is a potential centre of revelation, it is 'a candle of the Lord'. The soul is the most like God of anything in the universe, and just as the wrist or the temple of man reveals the throbbing pulse-beat of the human heart, so the soul of man is where the moral and spiritual will of God palpitates and breaks

through. Some persons are more sensitive to the pulse of the divine heart than others are. The great eternal revelations in Scripture have come through those men who possessed extraordinary nearness to God and who let His will come through with the least hindrance, but revelation is not a matter of date or geography. He was a valiant exponent in his day of the view that the revelation of God is continuous and unbroken. This was his worst 'heresy' in the eyes of his opponents. For them revelation was a closed and finished affair. It occurred only in a limited 'dispensation' and then came to a sharp and decisive end. It is confined to a Book, and that Book is in every phrase and sentence the Word of God, the revealed will of God for all time. It contained, they held, all the spiritual truth that man will ever need to know or ever can know. Fox quietly set that view on one side as hopelessly untenable. It fitted neither the truth of God's nature nor the truth of man's nature as Christ had revealed them. It was to him nothing but a man-made theory. In place of this static and finished system Fox believed that the day-dawn is continually coming and the day star is for ever rising in men's hearts. Truth is always being born, new light breaks forth from age to age, as men become responsive organs of the mind and will of God. The revelation of the past is not a shackle to bind men to the thoughts and beliefs of primitive times; it is rather an inspiration and guide to bring men to that Spirit which gave forth the Scriptures and who has promised to lead into all truth. 'Love the truth more than all,' he used to say, 'and *go on* in the mighty power of God.'

This is an extremely important attitude. It is a position which enables religion to meet the discoveries of science and history without fear or

anxiety. It rests the whole case of religion on the ground that God is present here and now in the world, a living God, a life-giving Spirit. He speaks now as truly as in other dispensations. He works now as in the creative dawn. His sacrificial and redemptive love is not confined to a single event; it is eternally revealed.

The healing of His seamless dress
Is by our beds of pain.
We touch Him in life's throng and press
And we are whole again.¹

If George Fox had done nothing else but drive that point into the consciousness of his readers he would have rendered service enough for one man's life. That central Quaker view is a precious badge of freedom and it marks at the same time the sharpest break with the Calvinistic system, against which Fox's whole life was a profound revolt. At the same time he joined with this new position of his the profoundest appreciation of the ancient Scriptures. He loved the Bible, studied it devoutly all his life, practically knew it by heart, proved his own faith by it and never for a moment implied that his own 'openings' attained the same level of revelation, but he was deeply convinced that God still speaks and that the soul of man is still a revealing place for the Spirit. Man is equally equipped for two worlds, with special senses for the outside world and with spiritual faculties for correspondence with the inside world. The outside world may and often does become all-absorbing and it can so completely occupy and dominate a person that he may,

Forget the glories he has known
And that imperial palace whence he came.²

¹ John Greenleaf Whittier's 'Our Master'.

² Wordsworth's 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality'.

but the fact remains that the realm of the Spirit is always near and the soul of man is always a possible organ of the life of God. Fox belongs obviously enough in the circle of the mystics, and those who responded to his proclamation were usually of this same mystical type. He worked out no metaphysical basis for his faith and he was innocent of psychology, but he kept close to the well marked path of his own illuminating experience and it carried him forward with a pretty sure tread. There was bound however to be a different situation when the high-tide experience waned and when the inward Light became a dry, abstract theory, as it did. In the naive and unquestioning stage, while the throbbing pulse could be felt, there was little trouble, but the explosive controversies of a later period were always latent in the famous phrase. Even now the only way to appreciate fully what Fox meant two hundred and fifty years ago is to feel once more the invading Life of God and to be flooded with the vital energies of the living Spirit. There is no magic in a word, there is no alchemy in a phrase. The bones of a prophet are a poor substitute for his living spirit. We cannot conquer now with the slogan of an ancient battle. If we want to prove that Fox really struck a jet of living water, we ourselves must tap that same fountain.

One of the outstanding features of the Christianity of George Fox was his revolt from the theological systems and the ecclesiastical forms of his time. As a religious revolutionist he was more extreme than Luther. He took the farthest possible logical step towards complete reformation. Luther remained entrenched in a conservative theological position, which was quite inconsistent with his battle-idea, and the protestant tendency for the

century following Luther had been in the direction of hardening doctrine into a rigid system and of making it essential to salvation. In fact doctrine became far more important than it had been before the Reformation. Preaching in Fox's youth was in the main a tedious exposition of doctrines, and the Fenny Drayton boy had more than enough of it from the Reverend Nathaniel Stephens. From the beginning of his mission Fox set forth an un-theological type of Christianity. He was not always consistent in this matter. He wrote a letter once to the Governor of Barbadoes which contained a heavy cargo of theology and not always very good theology at that, but with the exception of rare and occasional lapses he stood strongly against the patois and jargon of the theological schools. He felt as much repugnance for doctrines and dogmas as Luther did for indulgences and for masses. It seemed to him that Christianity had become an elaborate set of theories, to be discussed and debated. He called these constructions 'notions,' and, like Boehme before him, he ridiculed the whole undertaking as a new method of 'Babel-building,' an attempt to climb up to God on a tower built of texts and doctrines. He saw even in his youth how easy it was to hold and affirm all the doctrines in the orthodox archives and yet to be the width of the sky from the kingdom of God. There seemed to him to be no practical connexion between believing dogma and being a follower of Christ; between holding a creed and living a holy life. In fact it was fatally easy to make the former a substitute for the latter. He resolved therefore to bend all his energies to the real business of restoring the Christianity of the gospel, of producing a religion of life and practice—and so he refused the fatal substitute.

For him salvation was not believing a doctrine of the atonement; it was a living, triumphant deliverance from sin and the love of it, and the formation of a new and Christlike nature and spirit within. Instead of mystifying and confusing the mind with logical complications about the trinity, he focussed his attention on the important business of getting an effective *experience* of God, finding Him revealed as a loving Father, a forgiving, sacrificing Christ, and as an inward, invisible, transforming, spiritual presence. Instead of constructing a dogmatic theory about the Scriptures he filled his life with their truth, he saturated himself with their message and spirit, and he strove faithfully to translate them back into their original language, the language of life.

He took the same effective attitude toward the ecclesiastical structure, with its sacerdotalism and its ritual. It seemed to him an over-elaborate, man-made construction, charged with controversial explosives. He proposed to return as far as possible to the simple basis of the New Testament, to put life and fellowship in the place of system and organization. The sacraments seemed to him to be a subject of endless contention. They had accumulated around themselves a vast amount of tradition and superstition and, like other sacred symbols, they had too often been made substitutes for the realities which they professed to symbolize. Fox proposed to translate them also back into their original meaning as inward and living realities. Baptism and communion should be, he felt, genuine spiritual *operations*, not something put on or put into the body, but a vital process within the soul. He felt no interest *in* an ordination by external hands, but he was immensely interested in the ordination of the 'pierced hands,' the transmission of divine

unction by the inward work of the Spirit. 'I was to bring people off from Jewish ceremonies, and from heathenish fables, and from men's inventions and worldly doctrines, by which they blew the people about this way and the other, from sect to sect; and from all their beggarly rudiments, with their schools and colleges for making ministers of Christ—who are indeed ministers of their own making, but not of Christ's; and from all their images, and crosses, and sprinkling of infants, with all their holy-days (so called), and all their vain traditions, which they had instituted since the apostles' days, against all of which the Lords' power was set: in the dread and authority of which power I was moved to declare against them all, and against all that preached and not freely, as being such as had not received freely from Christ.'¹

His Christianity was fundamentally lay-religion, as beyond question Christ's was. In Fox's conception religion is wholly a matter of experience, a vital process, a spiritual relationship—an attitude and spirit. Pious schemes, devices, systems remain forever just what they are—pious schemes, devices, systems. They shift no levels, they raise no dead, they alter in no way the eternal nature of things. Holding an official position, belonging to a so-called sacred order, going through with an ancient ceremony effects no miracle. A man is what he is. Asking him to say something, to believe something, to think something, to perform some act will furnish him with no medicinal balm for his soul. He must find a new source of life, a new dynamic, a new spring of power, a new inward resource. He must undergo a new creation and become a new person. He must come into new relation with God and into

¹ *Journal*, I, pp. 37-38.

new fellowship with men. This process, this power, this creation, this relationship, this life, is Christianity. It is not a creed, it is not a scheme, it is not an organization; it is a life. With all this in mind, George Fox undertook as far as possible to let the new life, which he had found for himself and into which he had brought many others, take its own free and untrammelled course of development. He shunned rigid moulds, crystalized forms and static systems. He had felt the Spirit blowing as it listed and he wanted the new instrument of the Spirit to be as sensitive and responsive to that Spirit as the head of a man is to the man's will. For that reason he refused to head a new sect, or to start a new denomination, or to begin a new Church. He would not build up an organization of any kind. He left the life free and fluid to shape itself. At first his movement remained a simple fellowship, the members of which called themselves 'Children of the Light', somewhat as the first Christians called themselves 'those of the Way'. Gradually and almost unconsciously they began to call themselves 'Friends', the term 'Society' being used as we should now use the word fellowship or group, a social organism rather than a systematic organization. The world at large gave them in sport the name of 'Quakers', because they literally 'quaked', that is, they were moved with emotion and trembled in their meetings and especially when they prayed. William Penn says of Fox: 'The most awful, living reverent frame, I must say, was his in prayer', and the people, too, seemed sometimes to feel the place shake when he prayed, because without doubt he himself first shook and trembled. This Society, which emerged from the preaching and personal leadership of Fox, had no clergy, no 'officials', in the technical sense, no rule of faith and doctrine,

no outward sacraments, no sacred order of procedure, no infallibilities.

One of his most important contributions to religion is his discovery, or rediscovery as it was, of the spiritual value of silence. Silence had largely dropped out of protestant Christianity and in its place had come an excessive emphasis, an over-emphasis, on talk, theological discussion, preaching and vocal prayer. The exposition of doctrine was carried to extreme lengths. To worship usually meant to listen to a discourse. 'Divine Service' was hearing a sermon. Fox felt that it was part of his mission to 'famish' people 'from words', to call them back from talk to meditation, to inward communion, to the spiritual fructification of their own souls. This is why Carlyle appreciated him so highly. Fox believed that communion could best be attained in sessions of hush and quiet; when the soul was withdrawn from things and happenings, from exposition and discourse, and was being vitalized by the circulation of divine currents within its own interior depth. He discovered that this mighty work in the soul went forward much more effectively in a group than it did in solitary silence and he brought to light the immense value of corporate silence, where all the eager expectant worshippers fused together in one spirit enhance and augment each individual worshipper's sense of the eternal presence. The meetings for worship, around which the whole movement centred as a temple does around a holy of holies, usually began with reverent hush and silent communion, for no one dared or cared to speak until he had first listened and heard. The whole conception of worship rested upon a sublime faith in the real presence, which means that it is not necessary to go somewhere to find God, nor to call upon Him to come down hither from a remote

heaven, but only necessary to attain a tender, sensitive, palpitant, responsive state of soul. He is not farther away from the soul than the radic undulations are from the instrument that receives the music, but the instrument receives only that for which it is 'keyed'. The music of a hundred cities sweeps the air but only one concert of one city, reports itself at a time through the vibrant box. Living communion, the inflow of the healing forces and the vital energy of the divine Life, and a joyous human response to it formed the essential feature of the meeting. Public speaking and prayer were free and spontaneous, though it was expected that no one would break the silence unless some word of life, message of truth, communication of comfort and edification, or supplication, were impressively laid upon the mind of the speaker. There was a certain awe about it which acted as a wholesome restraint, and the sensitive group was quick to feel whether the message was 'in the life' or 'out of the life', and very soon the speaker himself would know, too.

It was an interesting experiment in universal priesthood and on the whole a fairly successful attempt to 'crown and mitre' the entire membership. The business affairs of the Society, too, including the care of those who suffered persecution, as well as those who were in want, and the extensive work for the propagation of their truth, the building of new meetings, the publication of literature, were managed in the most democratic fashion, each question, each problem, being settled by the unified corporate judgement of the group, which they called 'the sense of the meeting,' gathered up and expressed by the clerk in a Minute of decision. This simple method of course expanded and adapted itself to the growing needs and complex

situations, as the Society enlarged, but it always remained democratic in principle and was kept adjustable to new occasions and to new issues.

It will seem to many no doubt that Fox's conception of the Church is far too fluid, disembodied and unsystematic to be effective. It will be felt that he stresses only one aspect of religion and is nearly oblivious to other aspects which are essential for a full, rich and rounded religious life and communion. It is true that he himself tended to increase the amount of organization and system required in his own Society, as he learned wisdom from actual experience. But it must be added that he expected to see many concrete types of religious Societies formed within the inclusive Church, each one adopting the organization best adapted to the needs and aptitudes and tastes of the component groups, while all these societies would be spiritually fused together into one organic and living Church—one flock with one divine Shepherd. This complete Church would then be the body of Christ in the world, the growing, expanding Kingdom of God, continuously coming in the lives of true Christians.

IV

HIS SOCIAL WORK

In spite of the fact that George Fox was a mystic and that he laid so much stress on the inward way, he was nevertheless of all things a man of action and concerned with the practical tasks of life. His religion was fully as much outward as it was inward. His Divine Light was a principle of unity. It bound into one whole the two diverse attitudes of his nature and he was following his bent alike when he sat on a haystack unmoved for three hours in silence and when he rode through the English counties, or the American forests, preaching and creating meetings. From the first his religion took a practical turn. He did not think of religion primarily as a way to win a peaceful refuge in the world beyond. Having dropped his burdens of theology as Bunyan did his burden of sin, he lost at the same time the habit of considering salvation as a title to a mansion in heaven. It became for him at once a way of living in the world now, a programme for the actual pilgrimage we are engaged in. Fox seldom uses the word through which Christ expressed his central programme—the Kingdom of God—but in a rough and general way its ideals are his ideals. He wants God's will done on earth, where conditions are difficult, as it is now done in heaven, where conditions are easy. One of Fox's apostolic men, Francis Howgil, bears this fine testimony: 'We often said to one another, with great joy of heart, "What! Is the kingdom of God come to be with men?"'

For the present age the most important thing about Fox's mission in the world is not his theory, but his practical way of life. Truth for him was always something a man can not only think but be. To discover a truth involves the apostolic task of going out and doing it. Fox, like St. Francis and like their greater Master of Galilee, believed absolutely in the conquering power of faith and love. Swinging away as he did from the prevailing theories of human depravity he went far over to the other extreme and took a strikingly optimistic view of man. Set man free from tyranny and oppression, liberate him from false theories of life, draw out his potential capacities by a true education, awaken him to a consciousness of God within him, and there are no limits to his spiritual possibilities. The one great method of ending the old way of life and inaugurating the new is the practice of love. Act with honesty and sincerity under all circumstances, meet everybody with an understanding mind as well as with trust and confidence, reveal a spirit of spontaneous and unfeigned love and there will prove to be pretty nearly nothing in the world that will successfully resist that impact.

Notwithstanding these early years of solitude and withdrawal Fox was by disposition a social-minded man. He *saw* and *felt* wrong social conditions as unerringly as he saw and felt the nearness of God. Before he had even set forth to preach his message of the Light he had an impression that he ought to go to the Justices and tell them to consider the condition of servants and to see to it that these servants had fair wages. 'At a certain time, when I was at Mansfield, there was a sitting of the justices about hiring of servants; and it was upon me from the Lord to go and speak to the justices, that they should not oppress the servants in their

wages. So I walked towards the inn where they sat; but finding a company of fiddlers there, I did not go in, but thought to come in the morning, when I might have a more serious opportunity to discourse with them. But when I came in the morning, they were gone, and I was struck even blind, that I could not see. I inquired of the inn-keeper where the justices were to sit that day; and he told me, at a town eight miles off. My sight began to come to me again; and I went and ran thitherward as fast as I could. When I was come to the house where they were, and many servants with them, I exhorted the justices not to oppress the servants in their wages, but to do that which was right and just to them; and I exhorted the servants to do their duties, and serve honestly. They all received my exhortation kindly; for I was moved of the Lord therein.¹ He was always concerned for toilers. He was deeply distressed by the excessive drinking in taverns. He was shocked as soon as he saw the way men and women lived in jails and prisons. He was convinced that the prisons where people were supposed to be 'corrected' were inhuman instruments. He knew that capital punishment was wrong. He was certain that the entire method of correction was on the wrong basis and defeated itself. 'As I walked towards the jail, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "My love was always to thee, and thou art in my love." And I was ravished with the sense of the love of God, and greatly strengthened in my inward man. But when I came into the jail where those prisoners were, a great power of darkness struck at me; and I sat still, having my spirit gathered into the love of God.'² He saw in Negroes and North American

¹ *Journal*, I, p. 27.

² *Ibid*, I, p. 47.

Indians, in the unfavored races everywhere, moral and spiritual possibilities which others had hardly suspected. He had an unlimited faith in education and he was an unceasing advocate of it. He wanted boys and girls to study 'everything civil and useful in creation.' It is useless to expect that he would by miraculous insight have the sound principles of sociology which our scientific age is slowly building up. The important fact is that again and again he rightly diagnosed the trouble and put his finger on the diseased spot. With a swift intuition he pronounced against evil customs which had gone unchallenged for centuries, and with the same sure insight he suggested a new way of action. He had, as I have said, a great stock of trust and confidence in man. His foundation theory of man, as a being possessed of something of God, taught from within by direct illumination, made him hopeful and persistently expectant.

Even his most odd and bizarre convictions and peculiarities had reference to his passion for a better social order and for a truer relationship. The use of 'thee' and 'thou' had its origin with him in a determination to treat all men alike. It was a badge of human equality. He would not say 'thou' to the laborer and 'you' to the magnate. As in his boyhood use of 'verily,' so here, he proposed to make language a medium of truth and sincerity. His lips should utter only what his heart and mind endorsed. If formal etiquette expected him to say to a man what he very well knew was not true, then he resolved to have nothing more to do with formal etiquette till the end of the world! Some of his points of social reform are trivial and hair-splitting, no doubt. He sometimes makes a mountain out of an ant-hill. But his basic principle was a high and significant one. Truth and sincerity were the two

guardian angels who attended Fox's steps. He was a fallible man, like the rest of us, and he was not always wise, but this can be said: He minded the Light in his soul and he *did* what he dared to dream of.

He attacked the most gigantic problems in the same spirit in which men have since set forth to conquer the poles of the earth or to climb Mt. Everest. He had a dash of that same divine folly which was raised to such a height in 'God's little fool' of Assisi. He took quite literally the saying that there are no mountains which can successfully resist a well-grounded faith. War had always existed. It was as old as fear and hate. It was due to the thrust of immemorial instincts. And men said then, as was said two thousand years before: 'What has been is what shall be.' 'No,' said Fox, 'war is wrong; it is immoral, it is inhuman and it shall not be. There is a spirit which conquers it and abolishes it, and I propose to incarnate that spirit and to practise it and to call others to that way of life until we girdle the world with men and women who live in "that life and power which does away with the occasion for all war!"' The seed of God reigns, and is atop of the Devil and all his works; 'I told them I knew whence all wars arose, even from the lusts, according to James's doctrine; and that I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars. Yet they courted me to accept of their offer, and thought I did but compliment them. But I told them I was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strifes were.' Again people said: 'What has been done is what shall be done.' But once more this

¹ *Journal*, I, p. 68.

² *Ibid.*, I, p. 68.

simple knight of God rode forth with no other strength than his faith that *what is eternally right can in the end be done*. He did not live to see the new world which his faith forecast. We do not altogether see it yet, after the flow of three centuries. But he has pretty well demonstrated the truth of his famous saying that 'one man raised by God's power to stand and live in the same spirit the prophets and apostles were in can shake the country for ten miles around'—yes, for ten thousand miles, and for three centuries. He has made it easier for us to believe in the triumph of ideals, and he has verified the fact that the way of faith and love is a real way to the achievement of good ends; and it may even turn out to be the only way. His impact on the world has been, what he would have wished it to be, slow and gradual, the gentle influence of spiritual forces. He was, as William Penn said, 'a heavenly minded man'; and after his long, hard, honest fight for truth and goodness, he had some right to speak those last dying words of his: 'I am clear, I am fully clear.'

George Fox's world was a very different one from our world to-day. His ideas and his hopes have such a different setting and such a peculiar fringe and background that it is not easy to dissociate them from their climate and to envisage them in the transformed light and atmosphere of this new age. Even when a man is 'ahead of his time' his thoughts and projects are all coloured by his age and are to be appreciated and valued in terms of its strivings and conflicts, not in the perspective of later centuries. The struggles, the changes, the spiritual achievements of these three centuries since George Fox learned to say 'thou' have no parallel in any other three-century span of history and we must calmly recognize the

fact that he belongs in the seventeenth century, not in the twentieth. He would feel far from home if he were suddenly 'dropped down' into the labyrinth of our complicated life and if he found himself confronted with the maze of our 'modern' questions and problems. And yet he has made a real contribution to the world of to-day; he has a vital message for it; his spirit and his religious insight speak in no uncertain way to our present condition and we are at many points immense debtors to him. Not the least among his contributions to us are his personality and his own experience. George Eliot finely said :

The greatest legacy a hero leave his race)
Is—to have been a hero.

George Fox's overcoming life, his conquering faith, the depth and conviction of his own experience outweigh any words he spoke. He reveals the freshness, the vitality, the staying quality of a real man. His human qualities and his odd humor are precious traits. His tempered optimism is a splendid tonic and his inward sense that 'the seed of God reigns and is over all'² stirs us with thanksgiving even yet.

² *Journal*, II, p. 506.