

CHAPTER II

The Light Within as Experienced

WHEN A SO-CALLED "PUBLIC FRIEND" stood up to convince his hearers of the Truth, his objective was to persuade them to wait upon the Lord, to experience directly and immediately the life and power of God brought to bear upon their souls. This was the objective of the Friends meeting for worship to which he directed his hearers. The speaker pointed out the emptiness of outward forms, rituals, creeds, hymns, sacred books and sermons when they were not immediate and sincere embodiments of an inward spirit. These forms, when prescribed in advance and independent of the inward spirit, become a second-hand religion, that is, a religion based on the experience of others. An example of the type of preaching which created the Society of Friends is found in Margaret Fell's account of her conviction by George Fox who came to the church which she was attending:

The next day being a lecture, or a fast-day, he [Fox] went to Ulverstone steeple-house, but came not in till people were gathered; I and my children had been a long time there before. And when they were singing before the sermon, he came in; and when they had done singing, he stood up upon a seat or form, and desired that he might have liberty to speak; and he that was in the pulpit said he might. And the first words that he spoke were as followeth:

“He is not a Jew that is one outward; neither is that circumcision which is outward; but he is Jew that is one inward; and that is circumcision which is of the heart. And so he went on, and said, how that Christ was the Light of the world, and lighteth every man that cometh into the world; and that by this light they might be gathered to God, &c. I stood up in my pew and wondered at his doctrine; for I had never heard such before And then he went on, and opened the Scriptures, and said, “the Scriptures were the prophets’ words, and Christ’s and the apostle words and what, as they spoke, they enjoyed and possessed, and had it from the Lord”: and said, “then what had any to do with the Scriptures, but as they came to the Spirit that gave them forth? You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this; but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of Light, and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest, is it inwardly from God?” &c. This opened me so, that it cut me to the heart; and then I saw clearly we were all wrong. So I sat down in my pew again, and cried bitterly: and I cried in my spirit, to the Lord, “We are all thieves; we are all thieves; we have taken the Scriptures in words, and know nothing of them in ourselves.” So that served me, that I cannot well tell what he spoke afterwards; but he went on in declaring against the false prophets, and priests, and deceivers of the people.¹

In other words, the writers of the Scriptures possessed what they professed. Why do we lean on them when we might have the same experience for ourselves, when we might experience Christ himself who is the Light of the world? It is he who shines in our hearts.

The Protestants rejected the authority of the Church. Instead they set up the authority of the Bible as the source of religious truth. Over and gone, they believed, were the days of prophets

and apostles, when God spoke directly to man. Religious worship consisted of hearing what God had said long ago and of expositions of the inspired written word. The Protestant preacher exhorted the congregation to have faith in the truth of the Bible and to obey its commands. The service was essentially pedagogical, a kind of sacred school where a lecture was delivered on God's plan of salvation for men. Assurance was given that if that plan were accepted through faith, salvation would follow.

The Quakers had a different conception. The Spirit of God which gave forth the Scriptures was still at work, as they believed, in the human heart. It was more important to hear what He was saying directly to them than what He once said centuries ago. Worship consisted in waiting upon the Lord to hear His voice and to feel His power. Rituals, books, words and songs which were at one time vital expressions no longer for the most part retained their vitality. They were not necessarily expressions of the experience of the worshiper. Quaker worship was designed to prevent the substitution of form for Spirit by omitting forms established in advance of the time of worship and presenting an opportunity, in the silence of waiting, for the Spirit to appear in whatever form it chose to take. What that form would be no one could predict. "The wind blows where it wills and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes, so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

The public Friend, in addressing those of his hearers who were waiting on him and not on the Lord, could not appeal to an experience which they had not achieved. He could, however, appeal to the Scriptures which they for the most part accepted as supreme authority in matters of religion. There he could find much which was suited to his purpose. Both the religion of the prophets of the Old Testament and the religion of the early Christian Church were based, not on form and tradition, but, in the case of the prophets, on immediate experience of the voice of God in the soul, or, in

the case of the early Church, on the renewing and resurrecting power of the Christ Within. "The new man, Christ Within," was the central concept and experience which created the early Church. Whatever the first Christians may have believed about Christ's second coming in the flesh, the feeling that he continued with them in Spirit was the vitalizing, energizing factor which gave them life and power. It was to John and Paul that the Quaker preachers most often turned. John's doctrine that Christ is the Word of God by which the world was created, the Light that lighteth every man, the Bread of Life which comes down from heaven, the Way, the Truth and the Life, the well of water within springing up into Eternal Life, the Vine of which we are all branches, the Resurrection and the Life, these figures fitted perfectly into the Quaker theme. True religion is Life, not blind adherence to a particular doctrine or a special form. Paul's language was equally apposite; "walk as children of light"* (Eph. 5:8), or his word to the Thessalonians, "Ye are all the children of light" (I Thess. 5:5), gave the Quakers one of their names. "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9). "Because you are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts" (Gal. 4:6). "When it pleased God . . . to reveal his Son in me" (Gal. 1:15, 16). These texts were frequently used. Paul thought of this Inward Light as God or Christ or Spirit, not just one person in a Trinity. "Ye are the temple of the living God" (II Cor. 6:16). "God who commanded the Light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts" (II Cor. 4:6). "If so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you" (Rom. 8:9). "The manifestation of the spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (I Cor. 12:7).

There is no single New Testament doctrine which designates just what this experience of Christ within, or God within, or Spirit

* The following quotations are taken from the King James Version as being in the form in which the Quakers used them.

within, meant in terms of systematic theology or philosophy. There are differences in the conceptions of John, Paul, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Synoptic Gospels, James, and the writers of the Epistles of Peter. Similar differences appear in the writings of the early Friends. They were not Trinitarians in the usual sense of that word. The word "Trinity" seldom occurs in their writings, except when they remark that it is not a word which is found in the Bible. In their thought God was not divided; God is One. He becomes manifest in various ways. In the Old Testament He appeared as Father, in the Gospels as Son and since the Gospel days as Spirit, revealing His will in the hearts of those who heed His voice. As Light Within He manifests Himself as Father, Son and Spirit. Barclay says:

By this seed, grace, and word of God and light wherewith we say everyone is enlightened . . . we understand a spiritual, heavenly, invisible principle in which God as Father, Son and Spirit dwells, a measure of which divine and glorious life is in all men as a seed which of its own nature draws, invites and inclines to God.²

Barclay's chapter on "The Universal and Saving Light" is an evidence of real scholarship. He draws not only on the Bible, but also on the Church Fathers and early leaders of the Reformation. As a treatise it is too analytical and systematic to give a full impression of how this Light was actually felt when it dawned upon Friends as they waited upon the Lord in silence. For them it was not an intellectual, theological concept, but a living experience. It was inevitable and necessary that in defending themselves against their enemies who left nothing untried to strangle the new movement, the early Quakers should have rationalized their experience and made an effort to explain it, but in writing to one another they spoke as they felt. Fox's pastoral epistles contain a convincing account of what the Light first meant to Friends.

All Friends everywhere in the Power of God dwell . . . for that brings all your souls into peace, into oneness, into God. [Ep. 104, 1655]

Keep in the Power and know the Power of God in one another that out of all dryness and barrenness ye may be brought. . . . And when ye are met together in the Light, hearken to it that ye may feel the Power of God in every one of you . . . ye that feel the Power of God, ye feel Christ for Christ is the Power of God. [Ep. 130, 1656]

It is this Power, Fox shows, which creates the Fellowship.

The Mystery of the Fellowship is known which is in the Power. . . . For want of the Power, the Gospel, in which is the Fellowship, hath Christendom been in heaps . . . and ye who are in the Power of God, ye are in the Mystery of the Fellowship. [Ep. 169, 1658]

In the Power of God is the Fellowship of the Cross which keeps over all the Fellowships in the world. [Ep. 216, 1662]

And to all Nations of mankind the Everlasting Gospel, the Power of God is to be preached, through which Life and Immortality shall come to Light, in which Power is the Fellowship. Therefore, this is the Word of the Lord God to you all. Those that are convinced by the Power of the Lord God and the Light, let them dwell in it, in which they may have unity. [Ep. 189, 1659]

Abuse not the Power, in which is the Gospel-Fellowship which will keep all in Unity. [Ep. 228, 1663]

And wait in the Light for Power to remove the earthly part . . . that with the Light your minds may be kept up to

God, who is Pure, and in it ye may all have unity who in the Light of Life do walk. [Ep. 49, 1658]

These passages reveal the secret at the heart of the early Quaker movement. In the group "standing still in the Light" (Ep. 10, 1652), there emerged fellowship, unity and power. As when carbon and oxygen are brought together and the temperature sufficiently raised, there is a sudden unification of the two and a great increase in energy, so in the gathered worshipping group when hearts were opened toward the Primal Source of unity, the members became fused together. There was a heightened sense of life, fellowship and power. The gifts of the Spirit, the charismata, are poured out upon the group which is able to realize the divine Presence. The Inward Christ is the unifying power. "In Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). "He is our peace who . . . hath broken down the middle wall of partition" (Eph. 2:14). Fox is never tired of repeating that in the Light there is Unity and out of the Light there is strife, discord and "jangling," to quote a favorite word.

[The Light is] the Word of Life, the Word of Peace, the Word of Reconciliation which makes of twain one new man and if ye do abide there, there is no division but unity in the life. . . . Therefore, in the Light wait where the Unity is, where the peace is, where the Oneness with the Father and Son is, where there is no Rent nor Division. [Ep. 115, 1656]

This is the whole basis of the peace doctrine of the Society of Friends, peace within the individual and peace in society.

In these Epistles of Fox we find many names for the Light. It is the Witness of God (Ep. 208), the Bread of Life (Ep. 211), the Royal Seed (Ep. 211), The Vine (Ep. 215), the Wisdom, sweet, cool and pure (Ep. 242), the Springs of Life opened to you (Ep. 38), the Truth's Voice (Ep. 222), your Habitation in the Power of

the Lord God (Ep. 246), that of God in every one (Ep. 182), that of God in all consciences (Ep. 114), The Heavenly Dignity (Ep. 313), that Love which bears all things (Ep. 336), Truth in the inward parts (Ep. 186)—the list could be extended indefinitely.

The variety of these designations shows that George Fox had no consistent system of philosophy or theology into which he could fit his doctrine of the Light Within. Surprisingly enough, nevertheless, he had more of a philosophy than a theology, though his philosophy was arrived at by feeling and intuition rather than by systematic thinking. To Fox, the universe apparently consisted of two kinds of existences, variously designated—Substance and Shadow, Eternity and Time, Unity and Multiplicity, or Life and Form. The object of religion was to bring men out of the second into the first, or “up to” the first, as Fox usually expressed it. The Light was the Life which went out of Substance, Eternity, Unity down into Shadow, Time, Multiplicity and by its uplifting Power drew men to the higher type of Being which existed before the lower type of Being existed and which would continue to be after the lower had disappeared. There is much in Fox’s letters and other writings to indicate that he was master of some such philosophical view of the universe. As prophet, Fox followed the Hebrew tradition, bearing witness to the personal God whose prophets are instruments through which He utters his voice and works His will. As philosopher, Fox followed the Hellenic tradition, apprehending the inner Unity which exists beyond time and space, *Real* as compared with the phenomenal world, *One* as contrasted with the multiplicity recognized by the senses. It is this inner Unity which generates in the outer world of strife and disunity whatever there is of peace and harmony. When Fox first declared in 1650 that he lived in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars,³ he meant that his life was centered in this Eternal Being:

And central Peace subsisting at the Heart
Of endless agitation.

So established, he was clear of the world of haste, struggle and contention.

In his early letters Fox speaks of the Light as that "which guides out of many things into one Spirit," advising his friends "to keep in the Oneness . . . to guide and preserve all in the Unity of the Spirit and the Bond of Peace" (Ep. 24, 1652). "The Light of God is but one" (Ep. 25, 1653). Friends never used the term "spark" for the Inward Light as some other mystics have done. Spark or Sparkle might imply that the Light was divided, a part being in one person and part in another. There was but one Light. The nearer all come to it, the nearer they come to one another, like radii of a circle when they approach the center, to use a figure from Plotinus. Fox writes in his *Journal* for the year 1648, near the beginning of his ministry:

Great things did the Lord lead me into and wonderful depths were opened unto me beyond what can by words be declared; but as people come into subjection to the Spirit of God and grow up in the image and power of the Almighty, they may receive the Word of Wisdom that opens all things and come to know the hidden unity in the Eternal Being.⁴

Coming to know this "hidden unity" is to come into the state in which Adam was before he fell. The fall of Adam was a fall from unity to multiplicity. As for George Fox, he felt that he had come to know "a more steadfast state than Adam's innocency," even the "state in Christ that should never fall." Adam's sinless state was based on innocency. When he was tempted he fell. But Christ's sinless state was based on resistance to temptation. This, therefore, remains stable. To reach that state Fox had come "up in the

Spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God." He had reached the center of things from which he says, "The creation was opened unto me."

This "unity in the Eternal Being" is substance as compared with the external changing world of shadow.

See if you do find something in your understandings made manifest, which is Eternal, to guide your minds out of all external things which wither away and fade. [Ep. 19, 1652]

In that dwell which doth bring out of the Shadows, types, traditions. [Ep. 72,1654]

So over all the world ye may stand in the Light which doth it comprehend and condemn, and with it ye may witness to the end of shadows. [Ep. 73,1654]

All Friends take heed of running on in a form lest ye do lose the Power, but keep in the Power and Seed of God, in which ye will live in the Substance. [Ep. 173, 1659]

All know one another in Him who is the Substance. [Ep. 166, 1658]

And so ye living in the unchangeable Life and Light, ye see Christ, that does not change, but ends all changeable things, types, figures, shadows Therefore in the Power of the Lord God . . . live in which is the perfect fellowship which was before imperfection was. [Ep. 221, 1662]

In the inner world there is an eternal and changeless aspect to life, mind and spirit.

In that live that doth not change, the unchangeable Life, the unchangeable Mind, the unchangeable Spirit and

Wisdom, and the unchangeable worship and church of which Christ is the unchangeable head. [Ep. 200, 1661]

This existed before our changeable world of strife and shadow and will exist after it. Fox seldom mentions the Light without bringing out its priority in time to the created world. It was the Light or Word by which the world was created (John 1:1).

Stand fast in the Unchangeable Life and Seed of God which was before all changings and alterings were and which will remain when all that is gone. [Ep. 76, 1654]

Ye that be turned to the Light walk in the Light . . . that never changeth, ye may come to see that which was in the beginning before the world was, where there is no shadow nor darkness. [Ep. 105, 1655]

For this Light was before Time and is in Time. [Ep. 111, 1656]

Receive the living food from God to nourish you in time with that which was before time. [Ep. 122, 1656]

In that live which was before enmity was. [Ep. 147, 1657]

Keep your minds in the strength of the Almighty and not in Weakness nor in the infirmities but in the Lord's Power which was before weakness and infirmities were. [Ep. 159, 1658]

Out of such passages we can construct a fairly consistent philosophy of the Inward Light. No other early Quaker writer is so explicit, unless perhaps Isaac Pennington, who also compares the Light to substance as contrasted with shadow.⁵ At the heart of things there is a Being whose characteristics are Unity, Substance, Life, Peace, Power, Light, and who is eternal and changeless. From Him there streams into this temporal world of shadow, strife, multiplicity and change His own Unity, Life, Peace, Power, Light (to use

but a few of the names) in order to transform this lower world into His own likeness. Christ is this "Power of God" (Ep. 184, 186), this "Wisdom of God" (Ep. 247), the Way, the Truth and the Life, which continually goes out from God to create and redeem this world. This became fully embodied in Jesus of Nazareth.

He is your prophet, your shepherd, your bishop, your priest in the midst of you to open to you and to sanctify you and to feed you with Life and to quicken you with Life. [Ep. 288, 16721]

These are the main outlines of the picture as it seems to have existed in the mind of George Fox, but something more must be emphasized to complete the delineation. The Dark World is beneath the World of Light. This Dark World does not lack reality, as is the case in some systems of thought which bear a certain resemblance to the system which Fox worked out, but which may be said to be less realistic. The phrase "shadow world" might be used, but, as Penington points out, "the shadow is a real shadow" and no illusion of the mind. Throughout Fox's writings there appears a constant reference to that which is contrary to the Light, a real opposing power which man is free to choose instead of choosing the Power which comes from God.

All ye whose Minds are turned with the Light towards Jesus Christ, from whence it comes, in it wait that with it ye may all see Jesus and all that condemned which is contrary to it. [Ep. 90, 1655]

My dear hearts in the Seed dwell . . . that all the contrary may be kept under. [Ep. 95, 16551]

Beware of striving in thy own will against Eternal Providence and Power which is now working invisibly, cross and contrary to all the Powers of Darkness. [Ep. 97, 1655]

In which Seed shine, answering the Witness of God in every one which bruises the earthly part under . . . and all the contrary. [Ep. 109, 1656]

All men's and women's strength is in the Power of God which goes over the Power of Darkness. [Ep. 208, 1661]

In His Life wait to receive Power to bind and chain all down which is contrary to Truth. [Ep. 156, 1658]

Therefore, keep in the Power of the Lord which will keep all the contrary down and out. [Ep. 180, 1659]

A word often used by Friends for this "contrary" was "Deceit," because it was contrary to truth.

Confound the Deceit and bring the Truth over the heads of the heathen. [Ep. 87, 1655]

That the dread and terror of the Lord may be among you and Deceit confounded. [Ep. 96, 1655]

And ye all walking in this Light, it will bring you to all plainness and singleness of speech which will make the Deceit to tremble. [Ep. 111, 1656]

The Lord God of Power give thee Wisdom, Courage, Manhood and Boldness to thresh down all Deceit. [Ep. 113, 1656]

That . . . ye may be carried along to minister to all the Spirits imprisoned by the Deceit. [Ep. 114, 1656]

Gervase Benson writing to George Fox from London in 1653 says:

Pray to the Lord for me, that I may be kept in all faithfulness; with boldness to bear witness to the Truth against all deceits.⁶

The nature of Deceit is also made clear in a letter from Anthony Pearson:

I find my heart is full of deceit, and I exceedingly fear to be beguiled (as I have been) and to be seduced into a form without power, into a profession before I possess the Truth.⁷

Deceit is a state of form without power. The Quakers believed that the Christian Church of the seventeenth century had slipped into that condition. To be dependent on outward forms—baptism, communion, singing, “preaching by the clock,” and the formal acceptance of creeds as a condition of salvation, was to remain in the shadow world of time, change and all that is contrary to the Light. This world of form was a real world, but it was a “deceit” in the sense that the form did not represent what it professed to represent. The common Quaker designation of Christians who did not wait upon the Light was “professor” in contrast to “possessor.”

This contrast is an ancient, ever-continuing differentiation made by prophet, mystic and reformer who lay the emphasis on the inward life rather than on the outward form. “To obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams” (I Sam. 15:22); “Incense is an abomination unto me” (Isa. 1:13) are examples of a cry which goes out from the prophets all through the Old Testament. And Christ’s complaint of the Pharisees as whited sepulchers inwardly filled with dead men’s bones renews the same indictment. The world of appearance and the world of reality, however we may distinguish between them from a metaphysical point of view, are different. Deceit arises when appearance *takes the place* of reality instead of being a genuine and sincere expression of it. In preaching this doctrine, the Quakers were delivering no new message. What was new was the creation of a religious practice in which the form was more unlikely than usual to take the place of the reality. To wait upon the Lord in silence can, of course, become formal, but silent waiting commits no one to any action

or expression which is not a sincere outcome of inward life and thought. If silent waiting becomes a form, the participant generally knows it, especially if, as sometimes happens even in the best Quaker meetings, he should fall asleep. As Barclay says of Quaker worshiping:

It is impossible for the enemy, namely the devil, to counterfeit it so as for any soul to be deceived or deluded by him in the exercise thereof. . . . He can accompany the priest to the altar, the preacher to the pulpit, the zealot to his prayers, yea, the doctor and professor of divinity to his study. . . when the soul comes to this silence and as it were is brought to nothingness as to her own workings, then the devil is shut out.⁸

Barclay admits that the devil "is not wanting to come to our assemblies" but he has a more difficult task in a Quaker meeting than elsewhere, for there is no set form of activity which can be gone through in a routine way and so take the place of inspired activity.

The phrase "up to" or "on top of" which Fox often uses in speaking of the Inward Light, refers, not to any position in space, but rather to the Light as highest in nature, value and power. In one of his earliest openings he says:

I saw . . . there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love which flowed over the ocean of darkness.⁹

A few quotations from the *Epistles* will indicate this quality of the Light as being "over" or guiding "up to."

Wait in the measure of the Spirit of God to guide you up to God, and keep you all in peace and unity. [Ep. 70, 1654]

That which is new, that mind to guide all your minds up to the living God. [Ep. 77, 1654]

Walk in the Truth and the love of it up to God. [Ep. 79, 1654]

Keep a-top of that which will cumber the mind. [Ep. 86, 1655]

Take heed of being hurried with many thoughts but live in that which goes over them all. [Ep. 95, 1655]

As the Life of God doth arise, it will lead you up to God. [Ep. 114, 1656]

Keep your feet upon the top of the mountains and sound deep to the witness of God in every man. [Ep. 195, 1660]

Mind the Light and dwell in it and it will keep you a-top of all the world. [Ep. 203, 1661]

Let your minds and souls and hearts be kept above all outward and visible things. [Ep. 283, 1670]

In Fox's *Journal*, whenever he encountered an obstacle his effort was to get "a-top of it." This sense of the Light as an elevating, uplifting Power was primary. Frequently it is referred to as the Topstone (Ep. 84, 109, 121, 164).

Another characteristic of the Light is its bestowal on each man "in a measure." This does not mean that the whole Truth is not accessible to every person, but rather the obvious fact that some persons apprehend more of the Truth than do others. Returning to Fox's letters as our primary source, we find such expressions as the following:

Mind the pure Life of God in you according to your measures to guide you up to God. [Ep. 69, 1654]

All Friends wait in the measure of the Spirit of God to guide you up to God. [Ep. 70, 1654]

Friends in the measure of the Life of God wait to guide your minds up to the Father of Life where there is no shadow or changing. [Ep. 77, 1654]

Wait in the measure of the Life of God, in it to grow up in Love, in Virtue and in Immortality, in that which doth not fade, which joins and unites your hearts together. [Ep. 77, 1654]

Dwell in the measure which God hath given you of himself, in which is no Strife but unity. [Ep. 94, 1655]

Let no Friends go beyond their own measure given them of God, nor rejoice in another man's line made ready to their hands. [Ep. 118, 1656]

If we are faithful to our measure of Light, we shall be guided up toward God, and up to a greater measure of the Truth. To go beyond our measure and imitate persons who have a greater measure than we have, is to be deceitful and to represent ourselves as something more than we are.

To take a specific example of the use of this conception, the Quakers have all along considered participation in war to be unchristian. Nevertheless, if a man feels that his conscience urges him to fight, he must be faithful to the measure of Light he has, however small this may be. If he is really faithful and if he waits upon the Lord so as to sensitize himself to the reception of more Light, a greater measure will be given him. He will eventually come to see the error of all fighting. In his first state he would be a coward if he did not fight; in his second state he would be a coward if he did fight.

Another characteristic of the Light, which is realized more by actual experience than by any theory about it, is indicated by the use of the word "answering," which often occurs in Fox's writings. To Friends in Barbadoes he writes:

Be faithful and spread the Truth abroad and walk in the Wisdom of God answering that of God in every one. [Ep. 186, 1659]

Elsewhere, he encourages "Friends beyond the Seas":

Do the work of the Lord faithfully and ye will feel it prosper, answering that of God in every one. [Ep. 182, 1659]

And to Friends in New England who had opportunities to preach to the Indians:

Answer the Witness of God in every man, whether they are the heathen that do not profess Christ, or whether they are such as do profess Christ that have the form of godliness and be out of the Power. [Ep. 292, 1672]

The most famous passage in which this concept occurs is found in a letter written from prison to "Friends in the ministry":

This is the word of the Lord God to you all and a charge to you all in the presence of the living God: be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.¹⁰

It was the responsibility of the Quaker preachers to "answer that of God in every one," that is, to appeal to the same Light of God in their hearers which they felt in themselves, confident that this Light would lead them to the same Truth. Fox says of his ministry that

He took them to their guide and left them there." For him, preaching was to bring "people to the end of all preaching."¹¹ According to the Quaker theory, it would be impossible to convince anyone of the Truth unless he already had the divine Seed of Truth within him. That of God in the hearer must answer that of God in the speaker. If this does not occur, the response of the hearer is "in the form but not in the power."

This "answering that of God in every one" is the basis, not only of the Quakers' welfare work in general, but of their whole theory of social behavior. We cannot "answer that of God in every one" by any form of violence, physical or psychological, for violence moves only the external flesh and not the internal spirit. But if we feel that even in the most evil of men there is that of God, we can appeal to it, and we may, though we are never sure of success, reach it and set in motion a process of transformation from within.

Fox's epistles, formless, and rhapsodical though they often are, present a reasonably consistent theory of the nature of the Light and the way in which it operates in man, a theory obviously derived from experience rather than from any process of logical reasoning. The Light, as experienced in personal form, may appear as Father, Son or Holy Spirit—God is not divided. In a less personal form it appears as Truth, Substance, Life, Power, as opposed to Deceit, Shadow, Form without Power. As Truth and Substance, it shines down from a world higher than our world of Deceit and Shadow, and guides us up toward itself. This higher world is eternal. It existed before our world of time and will outlast it. The higher world is a world of unity and peace as compared to our lower world of multiplicity and strife. The Light is a principle of unity which creates the fellowship of those who expose themselves to it. More than that, the Light, in proportion to the measure of it which is granted, is a source of Power by which those who follow it may create unity, not only in their own fellowship, but by "answering that of God in every one."

Notes

1. Testimony of Margaret Fox, *Journal of George Fox*, II, 1891, 512. BiCentenary ed. All future references to the *Journal* are to this edition, except where otherwise noted.
2. Robert Barclay, *Apology*, pp. 137-38.
3. William Penn, *Journal*, I, 68.
4. Penn, *Journal*, I, 29.
5. See, for example, Isaac Penington's essay entitled *The Jew Outward*, 1659.
6. *Letters Etc. of Early Friends*, edited by Abram Rawlinson Barclay, 1841, p. 2.
7. *Letters*, p. 12.
8. Barclay, *Apology*, pp. 370, 871.
9. Penn, *Journal*, I, 19.
10. Penn, *Journal*, Cambridge, 1911, I, 321.

CHAPTER III

The Light Within as Thought About

THAT THE LIGHT FIRST APPEARED TO FRIENDS in terms of feeling and experience is best shown in George Fox's epistles. It was inevitable and necessary that, before long, this experience should be rationalized and fitted in with other accepted beliefs. What relation has the Light to Scripture, conscience, reason, the historic Christ, the Fall of Man, and his salvation? The task of rationalization fell mainly on two of the younger converts, Robert Barclay and William Penn. Both had been trained in theology in France. Both could bring to the defense of Quakerism a wide knowledge of Christian thought and history. Barclay was the more systematic thinker in the realm of theology, while Penn excelled in political thought and government. Both insisted that thinking about religion was far less important than immediate experience of it. To take two examples of this attitude, Barclay writes in his treatise called *Universal Love*:

Friends were not gathered together by unity of opinion or by a tedious and particular disquisition of notions and opinions, requiring an assent to them, and binding themselves by Leagues and Covenants thereto; but the manner of their gathering was by a secret want, which many truly tender and serious souls in divers and sundry sects found in themselves which put each sect in search of something beyond all opinion which might satisfy their weary souls.

William Penn writes similarly in *A Key Opening the Way*:

It is not Opinion or Speculation or Notions of what is true; or assent to or Subscription of Articles or Propositions, though never so soundly worded, that . . . makes a man a true believer or a true Christian.

Yet, in spite of assigning a secondary role to doctrine, Barclay and Penn were fully aware of the importance of a consistent system of ideas, without which religion is vague, and incapable of propagating itself. The Inward Christ is not only the Power of God, but also the Light of God, and Light is knowledge.

The following outline of Quaker thought is, in some of its parts, an interpretation as well as an exposition. The conflicts of the nineteenth century were produced by some extreme positions which are not described in this chapter.

The Scriptures

The relation between the Light Within and the Scriptures was a matter of continued debate between Quakers and Protestants. For the Protestants, the Scriptures were primary and the Holy Spirit secondary as an aid to their understanding. The Bible was *the* Word of God. Nothing could be added to it nor subtracted from it by any further revelation of religious truth. For the Quakers the Light Within or the Spirit was primary and the Scriptures *a* word of God, that is, secondary, confirming and clarifying the revelations of the Light Within.

According to Quaker doctrine, the Light or the Christ Within was, as in John's Gospel, *the* Word of God which could reveal further truth according to the words of Jesus: "When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). Revelations through the Spirit are progressive in scope according

no man's ability to receive them. The Old Testament cannot be accepted now as a full revelation of Truth for, though it came from the Spirit, it reveals only what man was prepared for according to his measure, at a time when he was emerging out of the ways and thoughts of primitive life. No Christian accepts all of it. We accept "Thou shalt not steal" but we do not accept "Neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woolen come upon thee" (Lev. 19:19). Did not Jesus himself have one message for the multitude and a deeper, though not a different, message for the inner circle of his disciples? God speaks through symbols and figures, and the parable which the multitude takes literally reveals to the enlightened soul a profound spiritual truth. If, as all Christians agree, the Bible was produced by the Spirit of God, could not the same Spirit be trusted as a source of Truth today? Friends might tend to agree with the commentator on the *Bhagavadgita*, "To the illumined one who hath known the Indweller all the Sacred books are as useless as a reservoir in time of flood."¹

Barclay points out that the Bible we now have was produced by a process of selection on a basis of spiritual discernment subsequent to the writing of the various books. How did it come about, he asks, that we have this particular selection of canonical books rather than a different selection, or these particular renderings of Greek and Hebrew texts rather than others, except for the spiritual insight of those who made the selection? What is there in the Epistle of James, for instance, to indicate that it is authentic? Does it not contradict Paul on the primacy of faith? Nowhere in the Scriptures is it declared that the canon is complete. It is not a new gospel we plead for, says Barclay,² but a new revelation of the old gospel. "As for the Scriptures being a filled canon, I see no necessity in believing it."³ Samuel Fisher⁴ wrote several hundred pages to show that all versions of the Bible were corrupt and uncertain.⁴ Such a critical view of the Scriptures is common today, but it was a bold innovation in the seventeenth century.

To the Protestants of that time this doctrine of the primacy of the Spirit over the Scriptures appeared dangerous and anarchical, opening the way for almost any heresy or idiosyncrasy to be proclaimed as divine truth. But the Quaker logic was irrefutable. How, they asked, is any Truth sincerely accepted except on the basis of an inward willingness to accept? If there is no such inward acceptance, inspired by the Spirit of Truth, then acceptance is formal and may be hypocritical. Isaac Pennington writes:

If I receive a truth before the Lord by his Spirit makes it manifest to me, I lose my guide and follow but the counsel of the flesh, which is exceedingly greedy of receiving truths and running into religious practices without the Spirit.⁵

Yet the Quakers were fully aware of the dangers of pure individualism and subjectivism. As we shall see, apparent revelations of the Light need to be checked and rechecked by the Scriptures, by revelations to other persons, and by the writings of authors who are accepted as sincere lovers of the Truth.

There are three ways of dealing with Biblical events and doctrines which often follow one another in personal experience in three consecutive stages. The first is a naïve, uncritical acceptance of every statement at its face value. This may be followed by a critical appraisal in the light of scientific facts and historical research. The result of such an analysis is usually a rejection of parts of the Bible and sometimes an attitude of complete skepticism regarding Biblical religion in general. A third stage may then follow which, while retaining the critical attitude, makes possible a return to belief with an understanding of the deeper meanings inherent in the words of the Bible. At this stage we are not so much concerned with historical validity or rational consistency with our scientific or philosophical outlook as we are with the inner significance of history, myth and symbol. Symbol is a language of religion but it must never be a substitute for religion. All living theology grows out of

personal experience. Accordingly, each Biblical text, to be of real value, must have spiritual relevance to the inner religious experience of the reader or hearer. This third stage may be understood as interpretation of the Bible through the Light Within. The importance of this to Friends is illustrated by Catherine Phillips in her account of a sermon which she heard on shipboard while on her way to America in 1758:

The parson, observing that in our ministry we spoke extempore, told me that he could preach extempore and we should hear him if we pleased the next Sunday. Accordingly, when the day came we were all seated in the great cabin and he preached without notes. His subject was the transfiguration of Christ which he found a wonder (miracle), expatiated upon it as a wonder—and left it a wonder; without entering into the spirituality of the text; indeed I doubt he did not understand it.

Conscience

The Light Within is not to be identified with conscience. Conscience is not the Light in its fullness but “the measure of Light given us.” The Light illumines conscience and seeks to transform an impure conscience into its own pure likeness. Conscience is partly a product of the Light which shines into it and partly a product of social environment. Therefore conscience is fallible. But conscience must always be obeyed because it reflects whatever measure of Light we have by which to form our moral judgments. This measure of Light in the conscience may be increased; as this occurs conscience becomes more sensitive to moral Truth.

Spiritual growth was often described by Friends as a process of becoming more “tender.” The word “sensitive” did not then bear its modern connotation. One object of the meeting for worship

was to make the conscience more tender, or sensitive. As the measure of Light in the conscience increases, we are, in Fox's words, "guided up to God." We become more and more able to see Truth with the eyes of God.

To use an analogy from science, the physical world is not known to us completely, but, as our scientific instruments become increasingly sensitive, we can learn more and more about it; similarly, moral truth may not be known to us completely, but as our consciences become sensitive, we can learn more about it. The Light is the Absolute to which man's relative conscience gradually approaches as the physical world is the Absolute to which our relative scientific knowledge gradually approaches.

Reason

The same considerations hold in respect to the relation between the Light and reason. As conscience gives us our judgments about good and evil, so reason gives us our judgments about truth and error. Friends did not give attention to the relation between the Light and aesthetic judgments. Probably the same considerations would hold true in this realm as in the case of conscience and reason. There is an illuminated reason and a darkened reason. Barclay shows⁶ that the worst persecutions in Christian history were based on careful reasoning.

Reason must start with certain premises which it does not itself produce. If these premises are bad and are carried to their logical conclusions, the worst evils result. An example can be drawn from the doctrine of the supremacy of the state as carried out by Hitler. An enlightened reason as contrasted with a darkened one will start with the right premises, and the Light itself, being the Truth, will guide reason into further truth. As Barclay says, "Because the Spirit of God is the fountain of all truth and sound reason, therefore, we

have well said that it cannot contradict either the testimony of Scripture or right reason."⁷

A great deal is said in Quaker writings about the inability of reason to reach religious truths unless the Light, or the Scriptures or other writings inspired by the Light, furnish it with the right premises on which to work. The same is true in science. Scientific truths are not produced by reason alone, but by reason operating on physical facts previously ascertained through experiment.

The Universality of the Light

No Quaker belief aroused more opposition than the doctrine that the Light of Christ has been given to all men everywhere, since the beginning of the human race. This concept was especially repugnant to those Protestants who believed that only the elect would be saved. Fox, writing in his *Journal* for the year 1656, makes this comment: "Great opposition did the priests and professors make about this time against the Light of Christ Jesus, denying it to be universally given." He puts out a leaflet showing that the prophecy is being fulfilled: "I will pour out my Spirit upon *all* Flesh and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." (Joel, quoted by Peter in Acts 2:17). A wealth of Biblical texts follows, including these favorite Quaker quotations: "For the Grace of God has appeared for the salvation of *all* men" (Tit. 2:11). "I will also give thee for a Light to the Gentiles that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isa. 49:6). This Light is the inward gospel "preached to every creature under heaven" (Col. 1:23), a statement clearly untrue of the outward gospel. Paul, who did not know Christ "after the flesh," was converted by the Inward Christ. The same possibility is open to every man. Paul clearly held that the Eternal Christ was known long before the historical Christ. He says of the Israelites in their wilderness journey, "For they drank

from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ" (I Cor. 10:4).

To the objection of opponents that "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), Barclay replies: "I confess there is no other name to be saved by, but salvation lieth not in the literal but the experimental knowledge."⁸ He goes on to show that many persons who have never heard of the historic Christ have had experimental knowledge of the Christ Within. William Penn goes furthest in defending this doctrine which was sometimes referred to as "Gentile Divinity." In his *Advice* to his children Penn concludes with the words:

That blessed principle the Eternal Word . . . by which all things were at first made and man enlightened to salvation is Pythagoras' great light and salt of ages; Anaxagoras' divine mind; Socrates' good spirit; Timaeus' unbegotten principle and author of all light; Hieron's God in man; Plato's eternal, ineffable and perfect principle of truth; Zeno's maker and father of all; Plotinus' root of the soul; . . . the divine power and reason, the infallible, immortal law in the minds of men, says Philo; the law and living rule of the mind, the interior guide of the soul and everlasting foundation of virtue, says Plutarch.

Penn holds that, with Christ's coming, "The Spirit that was more sparingly communicated in former dispensations began to be poured forth upon all Flesh."⁹

This principle of universality was undoubtedly derived, not only from Scriptures, but also from the tender sensibilities of persons who could not endure the thought that any man should be condemned by a God of love because of unavoidable ignorance. Were not the Protestants hardhearted and inconsistent in attributing Adam's sin to every man, even though many had never heard of Adam, while failing to attribute Christ's saving grace to every man,

even though many had never heard of Christ? It was not difficult for Quaker writers to find in pre-Christian writings many statements about an inner, divine Guide and much that supported the chief Christian virtues. Barclay¹⁰ quotes Justin Martyr, Clement and Augustine to show that they believed in a pre-Christian Christianity. History clearly shows that the measure of Light given to men was greatly increased after the coming of Christ, but it also shows that the great men of antiquity were not without some measure of it, as can be ascertained from their writings. What we recognize in the case of those who were articulate must also have been true of the unlettered faithful.

This doctrine of the universality of the Light was also based on Quaker experiences with non-Christians. Josiah Coale writes, "We found these Indians more sober and Christian-like toward us than the Christians so-called."¹¹ Fox, by questioning an Indian, proved to the governor of an American colony that the Indian possessed the "Light and Spirit of God."¹² Elizabeth Newport, in visiting the Indians in the Cataraugus Reservation, found them divided into "Christians" and "Pagans." The "Pagans believed," she said, "in Quaker worship and the guidance of the Spirit while the Christians seek information of the missionaries."¹³

The Biblical concept of God as Creator was in itself sufficient to support the universality of His Light. In the Bible there are two accounts of creation. In Genesis it is written, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," and John's Gospel begins with the Word through which all things were made. This Word is God Himself as Creator. "The Word was with God and the Word was God." As Creator, God is also "the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."* (John 1:9). Barclay calls this "the Quaker text." Taking the chapter as a whole, even in a

*The Standard Revised Version reads, "The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world."

more modern translation, it is still possible to use this verse in defending the universality of the Light. The Light which enlightens *every man*, since it is the creative principle in the Universe, was coming into the world personified in Jesus Christ. It is fair to comment that the theology of the Society of Friends is essentially Johannine theology. As Creator, God is the Spirit through which man is born again so that in reality a new Life is created in him (John 3:3). But before Christ came, the full nature of this Creative Word was not known. "He was in the world and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not" (1:10). And then, says John (1:14), "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth. We have beheld His Glory." The world process reached its goal when the Word became fully revealed in a person, though it had been partially revealed since the beginning in every creative act.

The Eternal Christ and the Historic Jesus

Taking the Bible as a whole, we can detect three main stages in the creative or evolutionary process through which God gradually reveals Himself. When "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," the world of nature came into being; when God breathed his Spirit into Adam, man came into being; and when the "Word became flesh," there was then and there a new mutation, a new dispensation of the Spirit which lifted man up to a higher level of life. Christ is, therefore, more than a revelation of the nature of God, more than a teacher, more than an example for us to follow. He is a source of saving power. The history of mankind since his coming shows that "to all who received him . . . he gave power to become children of God." (1:12).

But even before Christ's coming, God had never been without a witness. He has appeared in nature—"ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity

Notes

1. Commentary on *Bhagavadgita*, 1882, II, 46.
2. Robert Barclay, *Apology*, p. 91.
3. Barclay, *Apology*, p. 92.
4. Samuel Fisher, *The Testimony of Truth Exalted*, 1666, p. 197.
5. Isaac Penington, *Works*, p. 239.
6. Barclay, *Apology*, pp. 58-62.
7. Barclay, *Apology*, p. 62.
8. Barclay, *Apology*, p. 184.
9. Penington, *Works*, 1771, p. 759.
10. Barclay, *Apology*, pp. 192-93.
11. James Bowden, *The History of the Society of Friends in America*, 1850, I, 125.
12. William Penn, *Journal*, II, 185.
13. Elizabeth Newport, *Memoirs*, compiled by Ann A. Townsend, 1878, p. 99.
14. Penn, *Journal*, I, 350.
15. Penn, *Journal*, I, 24.
16. Barclay, *Apology*, p. 357.
17. John Burnyeat, *Works*, 1691, p. 11.
18. Barclay, *Apology*, p. 206.
19. Barclay, *Apology*, p. 256.
20. Barclay, *Apology*, p. 243.
21. Burnyeat, *Works*, p. 11.
22. Job Scott, *Journal*, p. 116.

23. George Fox, *Journal*, I, 56.
24. *First Publishers of Truth*, edited by Norman Penney, 1907, henceforth abbreviated F.P.T., p. 332.
25. That the early Christians were perfectionists can be shown by many quotations from the New Testament, including Matt. 5:48, 19:21, Eph. 4:13, Phil. 3:15, Col. 1:28, 4:12, 11 Tim. 3:17, Heb. 12:23, Jas. 1:4.
26. See Howard H. Brinton, *Divine-Human Society*, Chap. II, "The Fall of Man," 1938.
27. Barclay, *Apology*, p. 29.
28. Barclay, *Apology*, p. 145.
29. William C. Braithwaite, *Second Period of Quakerism*, 1921, p. 635.
30. Braithwaite, *Second Period*, p. 396.
31. Braithwaite, *Second Period*, p. 397.
32. Braithwaite, *Second Period*, p. 398.
33. Brayshaw, A. Neave, *The Quakers, Their Story and Message*, p. 52.
34. Braithwaite, *Second Period*, Introduction, p. xxxviii.
35. Barclay, *Apology*, p. 141.
36. Barclay, *Apology*, p. 143.
37. Barclay, *Apology*, p. 149.
38. Barclay, *Apology*, p. 206.