

1946

and all memory of it and of those who worshipped and ministered within its walls faded away.

It has been impossible in the compass of this brief article to more than dip into the Butterfield Journal, which is deposited at Friends' House. To condense all the pages that appear in its yellowed pages would be tedious, yet nothing short of that can do justice to the hospitality dispensed for so many years by Rebekah Butterfield of Stone Dean.

ARTHUR L. HAYWARD.

T. Edmund Harvey

OUR QUAKER MINISTRY SINCE THE CESSATION OF RECORDING *

I have longed that we might have the opportunity at Yearly meeting for consideration of the Ministry in our Meetings, and of the sources of our deepest life, such as has not been possible in recent years.

Those of us whose memories go back 45 years or more can recall the time when Yearly Meeting was preceded by the Yearly meeting of Ministry and Oversight, when the spiritual problems of our Meetings were considered by Ministers, Elders and Overseers sitting together in a leisurely way, and when, in the course of Yearly Meeting itself, one or two sessions devoted to a consideration of the state of the Society gave the opportunity for any concerned Friend to raise questions connected with the inner life of the Society. It is true that sometimes this opportunity was abused in the sense that unnecessary or unhelpful words were spoken (as happens to-day); but it enabled any member of Yearly Meeting to bring forward his or her concern about the deepest issues of life. It also gave the opportunity to a prophetic soul such as John Wilhelm Rowntree to lay upon his fellow-members the burden of his thought and concern, which was of immense value. It is right that we should be facing the big social, international and economic problems of to-day, and have Committees exercising themselves in the carrying out of concerns for research and service: this is useful work; but "being" should come before "doing," not only in our individual lives but in Yearly Meeting itself.

It is because we need more opportunities for the consideration of the deepest issues that I am thankful that at least a few of us are able to come together to consider the position of our Quaker Ministry since the change which took place when the recording of ministers was given up at the Yearly Meeting of 1924.

I do not think that it would be profitable for us now to discuss the reasons for this decision, which was preceded by a

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gradual change in various parts of the country. Undoubtedly there were felt to be obstacles to the maintenance of healthy life in the Society which had, in the past, been associated with the special status of Recorded Ministers. At the same time, there was a good side to recording, in that it gave to the individual the sense of a call from the Society to devote himself or herself to this service. I myself can testify to this, for, although I was one of those who, at the time, did not like the system of recording, yet, when Westminster and Longford Monthly Meeting decided to make the minute of recording in my own case, I realised that it came to me as a call to dedication, and it caused me sometimes to put aside pieces of work which were good in themselves and which I should probably have undertaken otherwise, in order that I might have time to devote to concern for the work of the ministry.

When Yearly Meeting made its decision to cease recording it was careful to say that recording was a matter of machinery, and that whether recording was discontinued or not, much more responsibility for the exercise of the ministry should be taken by the Monthly Meeting. Its recommendations are contained in Part III. of our Book of Discipline, but unfortunately the great majority of our members do not read this—even Clerks of Monthly Meetings are sometimes lacking in knowledge of a good deal of it, and I would venture to say that there are a good many Elders who are not familiar with many of the passages in it dealing with the work which especially concerns them. There are in it extracts from the decisions of Yearly Meeting in 1924 which lay on our Meetings a definite duty with regard to the Ministry—and this duty we shall, I believe, have to admit has very largely not been carried out, though we may thankfully hope that the recommendation with regard to “a greater exercise of sympathetic eldership in our meeting, encouraging those who are beginning to speak” has been fulfilled in large measure. The section on Ministry continues thus:—

“The definite duty should be laid upon all Monthly Meetings of finding ways to show their interest in the Ministry and their sympathy with those called to this service. Though this is already the task of the Elders, it should also be shared by the meeting as a whole.

“It is not necessary that Monthly Meetings should adopt uniform methods of procedure in this respect, but in all cases they should be asked to find time for the consideration of questions affecting the Ministry and to endeavour in practical ways to express their fellowship with those who are called to undertake this service.”

How far has this been carried out? Do our Monthly Meetings regularly make it a part of their duty?

In the same section it is recommended that those who have personal experience of this service “should meet together from time to time, as informally as possible, for mutual help.” That, I believe, remains a dead letter in many parts of the country, there being no systematic arrangement for the meeting together of those who are called to the service of the ministry. I can remember attending in London some forty years ago the meeting of Recorded Ministers which was held at intervals, and which claimed to represent the earliest meeting of “Public Friends” in the 17th Century: I do not know whether it still continues; but that is almost the only gathering of Friends engaged in the service of the Ministry which I can recall from my own personal experience, in spite of the very definite instruction of Yearly Meeting encouraging everywhere this kind of fellowship.

There is no one who can give the same kind of help to young Friends coming forward into the ministry for the first time as Friends coming forward in the ministry for the first time as joy of this service: there are all kinds of simple, practical advice which those who are called to speak in meeting can offer to one another, and which cannot be given in the same way by those who never open their mouths in meeting and do not know from within what it means to do so. This is not meant to imply, of course, that Friends who help in this way must necessarily be those who speak constantly or frequently, far from it; but those who have had some personal experience of this service can be of immense help and offer the greatest encouragement.

In the 17th century, and right on into the 18th, it was the practice of older ministers to take with them, when visiting Meetings, younger Friends only just beginning to come forward in the ministry. There is a beautiful letter written by John Fry which is quoted in very small part in Robert Barclay’s “Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth,” and more fully in William Charles Brathwaite’s “Second Period of Quakerism.” He wrote it to the Morning Meeting in 1765, and recalled in it the Meeting of Ministers held forty years previously and the way in which it used to meet regularly week by week to consider how it could best serve the different Meetings, arranging for visits to one or another of them, when usually an older Friend would take a younger one with him. This is an instance of the kind of mutual help and sympathy which can be given in such fellowship: it was advised by Yearly Meeting, but has not been carried out by Friends as a whole. I pray that Elders generally may exercise themselves in this way, and hope that the time may come when Yearly Meeting will make a further effort to encourage more active fellowship of this kind.

Then, too, Yearly Meeting recommended application being made to Monthly Meetings for Minutes of Service. These are becoming far too rare. They afford the means whereby not only the Friend who is to undertake the service may be supported but the Meeting as a whole may be helped by joining in fellowship with the service. I think it would be a very sad thing for the Society if all visitation work were undertaken by Committees alone (useful as their service is), and if we never had individual Friends approaching their Monthly Meeting saying that they were drawn in their minds towards a certain service, feeling that it was a burden of duty laid upon them. It is in such cases that the Meeting as a whole can rise in an act of fellowship and associate itself with the service; and the Friend who goes forth with a Minute of liberation or encouragement does so with a strength that is far more than his own: it is an immense encouragement to anyone, when times of difficulty and discouragement come, as they must do, to realise that behind him there is the thought and prayer of a number of Friends.

These recommendations of Yearly Meeting are still part of our Book of Discipline, and Committees on Ministry and Oversight, as well as the Elders of the Monthly Meeting, are encouraged to report to their Monthly Meetings from time to time on the vocal ministry in the Meetings under their care. Probably few of us here present can remember any such report being made to a Monthly Meeting. It is extremely difficult to do it, and that is, perhaps, the reason why it has been shirked. It might be better, perhaps, for the report to come to a larger body, like the Quarterly Meeting, where there would not be any sense of criticism of the ministry of particular Friends such as might be felt in a report to Monthly Meeting.

Behind any difficulties of this kind, however, and whether or not the method suggested by Yearly Meeting is the best one, there remains the thought that Monthly Meetings ought to give time to considering the question of the ministry. Some may ask: "Why should we worry about the ministry? After all, it is a comparatively minor matter: the great thing is the way of life." It is true that the way of life is of immense importance, and if that be not faithful no ministry by itself can do what is wanted; but the ministry of the word remains as a unique instrument for the service of the Kingdom of God. If it had not been for the ministry of the word in the early days both of the Church and of our own Society, the Christian community in general and the Society of Friends in particular would not have been gathered together. It needs backing up and translating day by day by the ministry of life; but we must not rest content with that silent ministry of every day. We need in our meetings not only the ministry of watering, good though that is, but the ministry of

planting. We have in our Meetings for Worship valuable service being given from a wide source for edification and for the building up of life in different ways; but do we have sufficient of that prophetic ministry which comes to men with a profound and stirring influence, reaching down into the hearts of the hearers? We can all remember occasions when we have come across such ministry, and the profound effect which it has had. This is needed in the world of to-day, and it is not just in the Meeting for Worship that its influence should be felt—we ought to find ways in which the ministry of the word may reach those who never go to a place of worship. It is, however, needed in our Meetings too, because every one of us has to make personal decisions affecting the great issues of life, and unless we can feel that power in the ministry which comes from the impact of eternity breaking in upon us, how can we make that supreme dedication which is needed if discipleship is to be real and effective? We cannot make any formal provision for a ministry of this kind, but must pray for the baptism of fire which alone can bring the touch of the highest which we need.

If, however, we carried out the recommendations in our Book of Discipline, we should be doing a great deal more than we are doing as a community to help those who are called to this service. I feel that we ought to consider whether we should approach Yearly Meeting and ask it to take steps to see how far these recommendations are being carried out by the Meetings upon which they have been laid. Such an inquiry would, I think, show the lack of provision for a consideration of these great issues, and might lead to a further step being taken towards the encouragement and help of the ministry in our Meetings and the unfolding of fellowship which is part of the service which we can each render to one another. Meetings might be recommended sometimes to pass a Minute encouraging certain Friends to devote more of their time to this service, without their being given any special status. Such a Minute of encouragement might make all the difference in the allotment of time and thought which such Friends might give to the work. We need for the service of the ministry the best thought and effort of which we are capable. The study of the Scriptures, of the history of the Christian Church, the lives of the saints (canonised and uncanonised), the story of our own Society, the study of nature and of human life—all these things are the source of messages which may be passed on in ministry to others, if with them there comes that sense of call which is needed before we can feel that a particular message is not merely prompted by our own effort, or meant for our own edification alone, but is given to us to share with others. Above all we ought to ask, surely, that Yearly Meeting would recommend its subordinate Meetings to set aside more time for a consideration of the issues of life which underlie all their activities, and in that way

open the door towards deeper prayer and thought and towards a truer and richer fellowship.

On a tombstone of the 18th century there is written in praise of a noble lady: "She was religious without enthusiasm." I am afraid there is a danger that some of us Friends may make that the epitaph of our lives. We need to have a deep enthusiasm for the Kingdom of God behind our work and our worship; and the true ministry which we long for in our Meetings will be the ministry which knows what that enthusiasm means.

T. EDMUND HARVEY.

Swarthm

THE WARRANT

by Jc

Man, Society and Religion

Planning for Freedom

The Law of Liberty

The Undivided Mind

The Trustworthiness

Democratic Leadership

Religion and Culture

Towards a New Man

Our Response to God

Christ, Yesterday and

Science & the Unseen

Creative Worship

Democracy & Religion

The Light of Christ

Christ and the World

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