

INTERCOLONIAL SOLIDARITY OF AMERICAN QUAKERISM

THE unity of Colonial Quakerism in America is not something to be taken for granted. A democratic, loosely knit, and newly founded religious movement, transplanted to a wide crescent of pioneer settlements on the coasts and islands of the New World from Newfoundland¹ to Barbadoes, meeting very varied social, political, and economic conditions without any easy, obvious or systematic method of communication—Quakerism under such conditions might easily have developed little semblance of solidarity. To indicate that this was not the case and why it was not the case is the purpose of this paper.

Already in Old England Quakerism had developed first a unity of belief and individual practice and then a regularity of group procedure. To a certain extent these features were inherited from Anabaptists, Seekers and other prior sects. To a striking degree they were spontaneous and independent. The same sort of coincident development marked much of the Quaker movement in America.

The leadership of English Quakerism was accepted from the first on both sides of the Atlantic and it provided of course a unifying influence from a common center. The first Friends in the West were in most colonies people of English origin though they had migrated before becoming Friends. Before the Quaker settlement of West Jersey from 1676 on, and of Pennsylvania in 1682, America was a land for Quaker missionary enterprise rather than for Quaker colonization, and those middle colonies were the only ones to receive many settlers who brought their Quakerism with them. In Pennsylvania the German or Dutch settlers were scarcely thorough Quakers before they emigrated, and both they and the Welsh immigrants had racial and language distinctions from the English and later Irish Quaker settlers. The older Dutch settlement in New York, the Puritan settlements in Massachusetts and East Jersey, and the more Catholic or royalist colonies in Maryland, Virginia, Carolina, and

¹ The evidence for Quakerism in Newfoundland appears to be as yet uncollected. It begins about as early as for any part of America. Very early also Quakerism was preached as far south as Surinam, but there is no record of resident Friends there.

the West Indies, were not hopeful soil for sowing the Quaker seed. In all these areas, however, Quaker meetings arose. Could any homogeneity be expected among them?

It was at first the missionaries who gave unity to the Quaker settlements. They maintained the link with England, and they helped unify the scattered new converts. Yearly Meetings were established more regularly and earlier in the New World than in England. They were representative each of a colony or local group of colonies,² and they cemented the Friends within accessible radius into a self-conscious and self-governing church organization. The oldest was in Rhode Island and is as old as 1661. It included not only the Quaker settlements in Massachusetts Bay and further eastward, but the Friends of Shelter Island, Long Island, and later Nantucket and the mainland of New York. The other early center of Quakerism was Barbadoes. Unfortunately we know very little of its story, but we know that it not only was the bridge by which Quaker travellers crossed from England to America but had a large and flourishing indigenous Quakerism.³ It too in 1661 was, as one called it, "the nursery of the Truth."⁴ Next to England itself it was a unifying center for American Quakerism.

The founding of Pennsylvania gave a new center for Quaker influence. Leadership of the Yearly Meeting held alternately at Philadelphia and at Burlington was never either claimed by itself or acknowledged by others, but there are evidences of specific deference to its judgment and of a special sense of responsibility on its own part. Its influence was of course great but not dictatorial. In it appears to have originated, probably in the statesmanlike imagination of William

² Even the Yearly Meetings covered too large an area for an annual gathering of Friends. There were in fact several Yearly Meetings in New England and New Jersey. In 1681 George Fox urged the Friends of the two Carolinas to hold a meeting "once a year or once a half year . . . somewhere in the middle of the country . . . as they have in Maryland and Rhode Island." *Epistles*, No. 371.

³ The listing of American groups in the earliest Epistles sent from London is of interest. Even if the order is often haphazard the prior mention of Barbadoes is significant: Barbadoes, Bermudas, Carolina, New England, Jamaica and other plantations in America (1684); Barbadoes, Pennsylvania, &c (1685); Nevis, Barbadoes, Maryland, Rhode Island, West and East Jersey, and Pennsylvania (1687); Barbadoes, Virginia, Maryland, Jamaica, Long Island, Rhode Island (1688); Barbadoes, New Jersey, Antigua, Bermudas . . . New England and other American parts (1690).

⁴ George Rofe's letter summarized in *Steven Crisp and His Correspondents*, by C. F. Smith, p. 30.

Penn, the suggestion for "a general meeting of Friends from New England to Carolina." William Penn and five others were appointed to make the arrangements "and inform London Yearly Meeting." This was in 1683. In 1684 the meeting was held in Philadelphia and was attended by representatives from Rhode Island and from Maryland. Again at that meeting all the continental American groups were asked to "send two or three for each province to our Yearly Meeting here being as a center or middle part that so communion and blessed union may be preserved among all."⁵

What prevented the full realization and continuance of this plan we do not know. Of course William Penn himself was not in Pennsylvania to promote it. Doubtless the physical difficulty of getting to Philadelphia "from these remote provinces" such as New England, Carolina and Virginia was too great. Whether such a federation could have created much greater solidarity in the eighteenth century or could have prevented the separations in the nineteenth may be doubted. The unity of American Quakerism in the last half century has found only partial organic expression. The official units today are separate mainly in geography, as they were in the days of Penn. The effort of 1683 is an interesting evidence of the very sense of community of interest which was felt both then and afterwards.

Beside the creation of Yearly Meetings, visiting Friends encouraged the formation of local meetings on the English pattern. The Quarterly Meeting, which in England included the county, and the quite local Monthly Meeting, were transplanted to pioneer communities, and women's meetings in spite of some opposition were established alike in America and in Old England. This organization was the particular concern of George Fox himself and was furthered by him both by repeated epistolary explanation and directly in his memorable visit to America in 1671 to 1673. In more than one community the oldest minute books were actually started at the time of Fox's visit. These gatherings, which became as time went on probably more democratic and generally attended rather than less so, were invaluable in producing unity. Their minutes often give the impression that this was done negatively by rebuke and even by disownments of offenders. But the positive side must have been important. Sharing at frequent intervals direct social fellowship and the same religious

⁵ *The Quakers in the American Colonies*, edited by R. M. Jones, p. 434 ff.

worship, the individual Friend was kept aware of the ever wider concentric circles of Quaker life which these meetings represented.

At these meetings an important rôle was played by the visiting "Publick Friend." The traveling missionary was at the same time an itinerant pastor. The unifying influence of these living epistles can hardly be exaggerated. The enemies of Quakerism were among the first to recognize the importance of these travelers. George Keith, the apostate Quaker, repeatedly refers to these "travelling preachers that keep the Quakers so strong in countenance." His associate, John Talbot, uses stronger language: "The Quakers compass sea and land to make proselytes; they send out yearly a parcel of vagabond Fellows . . . and [not are] content with this in their own Territories of Pennsylvania, but they travel with mischief over all parts as far as they can goe, over Virginia and Maryland and again through Jersey and New York as far as New England."⁹

The visitors did more than minister to personal religious life. Without obviously interfering they spread ideals of other groups of Friends. The precedent of Friends elsewhere as they could give it would be welcomed as suggestive if not authoritative. No doubt visitors from London Yearly Meeting were especially respected for what they could report as to the procedure of the "mother church." Each colony was politically accustomed to look to English authority. It was natural that the Quaker community should face in the same direction. In this way American Quaker unity was not distinctively American, it was merely a reflection of a common model across the seas.

Between the American colonies also the visitors brought real contact. Even those who coming from England traveled often with incredible difficulty and exciting adventure across from the West Indies to the Virginia coast and then from settlement to settlement through the wilderness or by frail canoe through Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Long Island, and New England, carried news, ideas, and experiences from one Yearly or Quarterly Meeting to another.

But the intervisitation was American as well. Friends in America

⁹ Letter of Sept. 1, 1703, in *Collections of Protestant Episcopal Historical Society* (1851), I. p. xlf. A "yearly sending" of Quaker missionaries is mentioned by another member of the S. P. G. writing from North Carolina a few weeks later; *N. C. Col. Recs.*, I. 571 ff.

not only permanently changed their residence from one area to another, but in much greater numbers visited under religious concern their brethren in other parts of the continent, encouraged thereto by letters from England.⁷ This practice, regularized and safeguarded by an elaborate procedure, is writ large in the minute books of local meetings, which recorded either the minute of release for the visitor for his services or the welcome on his arrival. The journals of such travelers are extant in great numbers, many of them in print. They are often very informative at least on the problems of Quaker unity.

A more complete impression of the amount of this intervisitation is provided by the extant lists of the actual Quaker visitors to a single community over a series of years.⁸ In the old Salem, Massachusetts, minute book the ninety persons listed in the "memorandum of Friends' names that have travelled in the work of the ministry and that have been here at Salem" were apparently nearly all before 1700. In Nantucket in the seventy five years before the Revolutionary War the visits of "Publick Friends" from other parts were about three hundred and fifty.⁹ In Philadelphia Yearly Meeting during the same period visitors of this sort from England and Ireland only averaged at least one a year.¹⁰ Their influence was far from superficial. They did not merely pay a flying visit to some annual conference. They stayed weeks in each place visiting as it came along each of the Quarterly and Monthly Meetings and often spending months in household visits to the majority of the Quaker families before they returned home or went on into the next field of labor. A comprehensive visitor to American Quakerism from England required fully a year and often stayed several. Joshua Fielding reported to London Yearly Meeting in 1729 that during his visit to America he had traveled twenty-one thousand miles, to four hundred and eighty meetings, in nine hundred and fifty-two days.¹¹

⁷ E.g., George Fox in 1684 urged Friends to visit Virginia and Carolina (MS. at Swarthmore College); James Dickinson in 1699 solicited American Friends to "visit remote parts that want help; as Virginia, Carolina, New England, Barbadoes, Jamaica, Antigua, Nevis" (*Friends Library*, XII. 398).

⁸ The fullest records of this sort known to me come from New England where a list, originally started at Newport, seems to have been copied and continued in several different places.

⁹ L. S. Hinchman, *Early Settlers of Nantucket* (1926), 317 ff.

¹⁰ Jones, *op. cit.*, 540 ff.

¹¹ Minutes of London Yearly Meeting cited in Bowden, *History of Friends in America* (1854), II. 237.

Correspondence between Yearly Meetings formed a conspicuous and regular linkage. From the days of Fox Friends in London included all parts of Quakerdom in their parish by annual epistles addressed to Friends everywhere, and to the Yearly Meeting at London or its representatives Friends of the several provinces wrote in return. This correspondence was partly general and hortatory. Reading these formal epistles today one can get little warmth or inspiration from them. No doubt they were more effective at their own time. But there was also much definite discussion carried on between English and colonial Friends. George Fox himself carried much of this burden after his return from America until he asked "all Friends in all the world who used to write" to him to address the London meeting. Through the medium of English correspondence the colonists consulted with the home country and even with each other. Thus in 1688 when the consistency of the slave trade and slaveholding was first questioned in American Quakerism, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting refused to settle the question without asking London: "It was adjudged not to be so proper for this meeting to give a positive judgment in the case, it having so general a relation to many other parts, and therefore at present they forbear it."¹² Twenty-four years later Philadelphia still was attempting to deal with the "other parts" through London Friends, to whom they write: "Friends being more concerned with negroes in divers other provinces and places, than in these, we thought it too weighty to come to a full conclusion therein; this meeting therefore desires . . . that you would be pleased to take the matter into your weighty consideration, after having advised with Friends in the other American provinces, and give us your sense or advice therein."¹³ Direct epistolary correspondence between American Yearly Meetings was only somewhat less regular than that with London. These epistles too were often very general religious advice. Though they may now be read only in the original minute books or contemporary copies and are hard to summarize I have the impression that they were really more hearty and sympathetic than the transatlantic correspondence. That they were supplemented by more specific letters is quite certain. Just how such letters were exchanged in the earliest days except by personal messenger is hard to say. But by

¹² [Nathan Kite], *A Brief Statement of the Rise and Progress of the Testimony of the Religious Society of Friends against Slavery and the Slave Trade* (1843), 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 10 f.

the end of the seventeenth century the developing public postal system had already begun.

The circulation of the same literature among Friends tended to stereotype the reading and thinking on certain subjects throughout the colonies.¹⁴ There was no Quaker periodical before 1827 and indeed no important printing of Quaker books in America until a century before that. Up to that time Quaker books, and at first propaganda tracts rather than substantial books, were the Quaker reading matter. It was their enemies who mostly mentioned the Quakers' dissemination of their "erroneous books and hellish pamphlets." What English publications were most widely read we may guess by the titles of the earliest important American reprints: Sewel's *History* (Philadelphia, 1728, and Burlington, 1774), Robert Barclay's *Apology* (Newport, 1729), and *Anarchy of the Ranters* (Philadelphia, 1757), and *Catechism* (Philadelphia, 1726, 1752, 1753, Newport, 1752, New York, 1752), William Penn's *No Cross, No Crown* (Boston, 1747), and *Fruits of Solitude* (Newport, 1749), George Fox's *Instructions for Right Spelling* (Boston, 1743, and Newport, 1769). For these the market was never exclusively local and the most ambitious of them were undertaken only with the guarantee of support from Friends in several colonies. Only at Philadelphia could any printer undertake with hope of remuneration the publication of original American productions like Estauigh's *Call to the Unfaithful Professors* (1744), Chalkley's *Journal* (1749 and 1754), or the writings of Woolman (1754 and later). Some non-Quaker authors had a wide circulation among colonial Friends. Just as after the Revolution Quaker printers in several different centers reprinted an almost identical line of works, so before the Revolution a pretty consistent uniformity of reading matter, still largely imported by local Quaker booksellers, gave a kind of cultural identity to the members of different Yearly Meetings.

It would be impossible to deal fully here with the other ways in which Friends in America cultivated their solidarity, both within the communities and between the communities. In November, 1702, George Keith and six others in a report on the State of the Church

¹⁴ The first Friends Library was probably that established in 1741 in Philadelphia. Unfortunately Friends, unlike the early Puritans, left few lists of their private libraries. That of Francis Daniel Pastorius is hardly typical.

of England in America included under twenty-four different headings the ways in which the Quakers support their Meetings and Schools.¹⁵ These heads, many of them, are as suggestive and as accurate as though they had been recorded by a more friendly hand. Mention is made of their organization, uniformity of discipline, circulation of literature, and active missionary enterprise. There is noted further their collections of large sums of money by gift or legacy to a common Stock by which they financed their printing and missionary propaganda, the building of "diverse and fair structures for their meeting houses." Two other items suggest their unity through exclusiveness:

4. By keeping their Trade within themselves and maintaining a strict Correspondence and Intelligence over all parts where they are.

11. By suffering none of themselves to marry but with those of their own profession.

That the Quakers traded locally with their own people is natural, but probably it was by no means so exclusive as their Episcopal critics suggested, nor is it evident that between colonies they showed particular leanings to patronize their co-religionists in trade. Independent and even rivals in the same trade would be a better description of them. In both New Bedford and Nantucket Quakers were engaged in the whaling industry, in both Philadelphia and New York in the import trade. The business letters of Quaker merchant firms in the colonial period show that clients and agents of their own sect were numerous among their correspondents in other colonies as well as in England. But they also dealt with others.

Their strict requirement of intermarriage within the Society is well known. How far it led to intercolonial unions would be difficult to estimate. Individual instances are known. Between New York and Philadelphia,¹⁶ between Pennsylvania and New Jersey, between Rhode Island and Massachusetts, they were especially numerous.

The family kinship between Quakers in different parts of America has long been proverbial. Already before the Revolution it was due in part to migration. In this migration the Friends were often following

¹⁵ *Collections of the Protestant Episcopal Historical Society* (1851), I. p. xix f. For the date see Keith's Journal, *ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶ "New York Marriages from Friends' Records of Philadelphia," in *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, III (1852), 51.

contemporary movements of population, but the full Quaker records of membership minutes received and sent by each meeting give for the Society of Friends data unmatched for other American migrant groups. There were several waves southward. In the seventeenth century new settlements in Maryland were made by Pennsylvania and New Jersey families, in Virginia by Pennsylvania and Maryland families, in North Carolina by Pennsylvania and Virginia families, with a large later influx from Nantucket. Of the later expansion Westward and into Canada, only certain slight hints appear before the Revolution in the establishment of new meetings in central Pennsylvania, Nova Scotia, etc. The new groups of Friends were really outposts of the older settlements. Their close connection would naturally be maintained.

Perhaps the most striking evidence of Quaker solidarity is to be found in a comparison of the special "concerns" or testimonies in American Quakerism as they developed in the several colonies. It would be wrong to suppose, for example, from the slavery issue of the nineteenth century, that the Quaker opposition to slavery had a very different history as between the Northern and the Southern colonies. Gradual and difficult as was the advance of conscience from questioning the slave trade to abolishing all slaveholding within Quakerdom, it progressed *pari passu* in Quaker communities from Dover, New Hampshire, to Charleston, South Carolina. The epistles from London Yearly Meeting no doubt gave a certain slow and reluctant synchronizing in this process, and these epistles came independently to each Quaker group. More stress is usually laid on the travels of John Woolman. At a crucial stage in the evolution of the Quaker conscience his personal visits no doubt had similar effects everywhere from Perquimans to Piscataquay. To a very large extent, however, the growth of Quaker conscience worked independently but uniformly. Early antislavery tracts were written independently by Friends in Nantucket, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina. When during the Revolution Anthony Benezet organized and instigated antislavery legislation he found willing coöperators among leading Friends in each colony.

Quaker education had a very similar development in all the colonies. In North Carolina and New England as much as in Penn-

sylvania and New Jersey,¹⁷ the waves of interest in establishing schools follow much the same course and at much the same time.

The pacifism of the Society of Friends, inherited from the early days in England, met very similar testing in the several colonies. To maintain it at all was difficult under the new circumstances of responsibility for government, and in several colonies the Quakers had that responsibility. It is the more remarkable that in each Yearly Meeting the official attitude was about the same. We hear of individual Friends who justified defensive war.¹⁸ On the other hand, we hear of the ultra-scrupulous who criticized all holding of office or receiving of civil commissions by Friends as involving compromise because of its actual or potential implication in war, through the sworn (or affirmed) allegiance to the crown, through the exercise of police power, and through the voting of supplies. Independently in several colonies there was a rumbling of the Quaker conscience that threatened to taboo payment of all taxes on the ground that part even of the general civil budget was used for military purposes. Without justifying the precise line which Quakerism ultimately followed we can at least remark the difficulty of making distinctions of this sort and hence the evidence of unity when we discover that from Maine to Carolina practically the same working policy was pursued by Friends. We may summarize this *via media* as follows. Defensive war was not condoned, civil office was accepted, Friends who refused general taxes as including military uses were sympathetically understood but their course was not required by discipline nor their sufferings entered in the official records of strictly Quaker persecution. Affirmations of officeholders were not objected to in general, but special tests in time of war were deemed inconsistent for Quakers. On the other side, Friends labored for conciliation with the Indians in practically every one of the colonies. With slight exception we may say that on the frontiers from New Hampshire to Georgia as far as the Indians were concerned the Quakers lived uniquely unarmed and uniquely unharmed.¹⁹ They

¹⁷ The printed studies by Woody and Klain of Quaker education in these four areas make this quite plain. A companion volume on Maryland and Virginia written by William C. Dunlap has just been issued (1936).

¹⁸ Most notably James Logan, whose letter on the subject to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1741 was published in *THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY* (1882), VI. 402-11.

¹⁹ Cf. R. W. Kelsey, *Friends and the Indians, 1655-1917*, Ch. iv.

refused special war taxes regularly and in spite of their sympathies with the American cause they very generally and faithfully maintained their opinion that war was wrong and wasteful, that governments ought to be neither overthrown nor established by force of arms, and that participants in war must be excluded from Quaker membership.²⁰

It is evident that the unity of Quakerism was essential for its survival of the Revolutionary War. In the fervor of popular military patriotism the Society of Friends lost much of its prestige temporarily. Its unity was known to the patriots only to make them suspicious. To the continental congress it was a sinister fact that Friends "maintain a correspondence and connection highly prejudicial to the public safety in the respective states of America." But Friends found solace and support in their mutual sympathy which expressed itself in the usual religious epistles exchanged, in the visits of traveling Friends, which continued, except for the absence of English visitors, throughout the war years, and by coöperative work for relief of civilian distress. This last undertaking—an interesting precedent to the great Anglo-American work for war victims during and after the World War—was financed by Friends in London and Philadelphia and administered by Rhode Island and Boston Friends working without and within, respectively, the lines of the besiegers of Boston in the winter of 1775-6.²¹ American Quakerism emerged from the war with no new sectionalism.

²⁰ When during the Revolutionary War both parties required of citizens affirmations of allegiance, the spontaneous unanimity of Friends in minor matters is well illustrated. The Meeting for Sufferings in Philadelphia writes June 15, 1780: "We also find that Friends in those parts [the Southern governments] are subjected to difficulties of the like nature with us on account of the tests or declarations of allegiance now generally required, on which subject an union of judgment and practice prevails among the solid body of Friends on this continent though separated from each other and have not consulted together thereon."

²¹ The report from the original MS. of Moses Brown was published in *THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY* (1877), I, 168 ff. The MSS. of the Meeting for Sufferings in Philadelphia contain complete accounting by families and individuals helped. The beneficiaries were not primarily Quakers. Philadelphia Friends were called upon to help financially their co-religionists in New England, often and for many purposes, in 1706 to defray "the charge that our Friends have been at in Old England to get the law repealed made in Connecticut colony against the Quakers," in 1725 for John Hanson of Dover, N. H., "whose wife, four children and a servant were carried off by the Indians and he had to ransom them at a great price," etc.

Before the Revolution as after it there was plenty of friction between the American colonies. For this disagreement of policy the Friends must bear their share of blame. Notably in the matter of military defense against the Indians the Quaker colonies were severely criticized by the militant colonies, much as a nation today might be criticized for refusing to join other nations in military measures on behalf of "collective security." But the Quakers had a definite policy of their own and they could as justly complain that the non-Quaker colonies and the British crown foolishly rejected their policy of just dealing toward the Indians, disarmament, and peace. The border disputes added to the centrifugal or divisive forces in Colonial America. In 1697 Penn definitely proposed a consultative union of two representatives from each colony to work out these problems.²² His plan was not followed out then or later. Quakerism's contribution to the general unity of colonial and national life must be found in cultural life and ideas rather than in political organization. There were many forces working in the same direction in other groups of the colonies.²³ The Quaker contribution is merely a single self-conscious aspect of a wider trend.

The colonial unity of Quakerism gave elements of unity to the cultural inheritance of the new republic. In spite of their objection to the method of war, the revolutionary tendency which was the negative bond of the colonies in their struggle against Great Britain owes much to Quaker non-conformity and independence. By more peaceful means the Friends of Pennsylvania, for example, had perhaps more than any group resisted the English insistence on slavery, the quarrel with France embroiling the Quaker colonies in French and Indian war, and the claims of absentee proprietorship. In several colonies, by their example of toleration when in power and of martyr-like suffering when persecuted, the Quakers had helped lay the broadest basis of religious toleration. Due to their long protest, the option of affirma-

²² I. Sharpless, *A Quaker Experiment in Government* (1898), 188. The few modern historians who mention this "publication" do not give its source or circumstances. While the northern colonies were already disputing about such a union, a written memorandum was submitted in person by Penn to the Council of Trade and Plantations, Feb. 8, 1696/7. For the text (wrongly dated 1698) see *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of New York*, IV. 296 f. Cf. *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies, 1696-1697* (London, 1904), Nos. 694, 695.

²³ See the suggestive monograph by Michael Kraus, *Intercolonial Aspects of American Culture on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York, 1928).

tion for oath was provided in practically every state constitution. Their pioneer work for education underlies in many states the later public school system, while at the same time the secularization of education and life in the colonies met firm resistance from the persistent religious emphasis of the Quaker movement. Higher education and organized religion were very limited in their outreach in colonial America. In the hard days of scattered pioneer life when ignorance and irreligion tended to grow without benefit of clergy and without the culture of learning, the lay preaching, the democratic worship, and the general education of the Society of Friends contributed some modicum of that Yankee sense and good character which are traditional in American life.

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