

# **Another Will Gird You**

A Message to the Society of Friends

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## **Another Will Gird You**

How shall Friends speak with the clarity that is needed, in response to the insights we have been given, in behalf of the cause we cherish, unless we bring our lives into line with what we say? The tone of the Quaker voice is grievously flawed because of the visible fact that, by and large, and taken as a group, we live as beneficiaries of a society, both national and international, both economic and cultural, that is in plain contradiction to our principles.

A hundred years and more before the Civil War, John Woolman and a handful of others came to see that the testimony of Friends against slavery was not clear as long as a single Friend kept a single slave; and through their patient faithfulness, the Society of Friends did get clear of this taint within its own membership before Pennsylvania, in 1780, became the first colony to abolish slavery. A few Friends also saw that war and economics were inextricably linked, and in his *Plea for the Poor*, written about 1763, John Woolman wrote: “Oh! that we who declare against wars, and acknowledge our trust to be in God only, may walk in the Light, and therein examine our foundation and motives in holding great estates; may we look upon our treasures, and the furniture of our houses, and the garments in which we array ourselves, and try whether the Seeds of War have any nourishment in these our possessions. . . .” But here there was no success to compare with the crusade that cleared Friends of slave-holding, and today our testimony against war and preparation for war is increasingly compromised by our being bound, and without much attempt to resist being bound, into a system to which war and poverty are both integral.

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A poet stood before an antique statue of Apollo and he made a sonnet. Line and plane, light and shade and surface of the statue are celebrated in the first thirteen and a half lines of the poem; then the final half-line falls like a hammer blow: “You must change your life.” There comes a time to every serious person – and who at some moment is not serious? God save us from missing our moment! –

when all beauty, all suffering, all innocence, all sin and degradation or ugliness, every impression that fully meets us, from without or within, brings with it such a hammer blow of insight. "You must change your life."

Each such meeting, whether it is with art, nature or fellowman, weighs us in a balance where we are found wanting. It brings us before the face of God. I think the Society of Friends, and with it Christianity itself, stands now before His Face.

History has brought us to this moment. It is not for us to sit in judgment and say the Friends of earlier times had fallen away from their first high witness, and have left us a legacy of error, or to try to point out where mistakes were made that have brought us to our present position. Maybe it would have been easier for us to make our lives a clear statement to our time if the Quaker principles had not, in other times, paid off in wealth and worldly honor. Perhaps we should find it easier to be faithful if several generations were wiped away, and our century were joined to the first century of Quakerism. Perhaps if we came straight out of a tradition of suffering and being slighted for our beliefs, instead of honored, we should be fit for the strong witness that is called for today.

But this we do not know, and even if we knew it, we could not change it. Nor should we want to part with any period of our history. There is much there that we can look to for strength. And our heritage of wealth, education, and respect, if it is partly a handicap, is also, and more, a responsibility. Everything can be used, everything must be

used, if we are to meet the charge of today in the spirit of the first Friends.

It is said that the climate of the 17th century was much like that of our time, though the material circumstances were so different. Early Quakerism spoke out to that time with clarion voice, and all attempts to silence it were resisted with a combination of steadfastness and meekness that has still to be equaled. The term “nonviolent resistance” was not known then, but the pattern of nonviolent resistance was made then. Of course it was not new. It had been formed in the earliest centuries of the Christian era, but the Church had long lost it, and when the Reformation burst into history, its hands were soon as red as Rome’s. Both before and after the Reformation, countless individuals and groups had suffered meekly and died at the hands both of religious powers, and secular powers acting in the name of religion. But it was the Friends who forged in persistent harmlessness and self-suffering an organized defence against injustice which we now call non-violent resistance. They felt they had it straight from the mandate of Jesus, and would have agreed with Gandhi’s name for it, which is *satyagraha*, or “laying hold of Truth.”

We stand at a turning point where we are called upon to claim this instrument, this tool, this weapon (if you like) which our tradition fitted to our hands, and to claim it this time not in behalf of our own Society only, but in behalf of threatened, beaten, angry and divided mankind.

Everybody sees that the old landmarks are being obliterated. Private wealth is going, class distinctions are

changing, separation of races will have to go, sovereignty of nations may be going. We do not yet know whether these changes are to come in an Armageddon of suffering, or are going to break piecemeal through stubborn barriers of last-ditch resistance, or are going to proceed peaceably through orderly stages of willing or enforced co-operation. We also do not know whether the forces of destruction which the last few years have let loose upon mankind will spare the race long enough for the work to be done that is required if we are to live together upon our planet.

But in this time of question and decision, the only stance that Friends can take is a radical stance: we have to shoulder the burden of hope. We believe that history is in the hand of God, but that within the Hand, man is given freedom and commission to act. We believe that mankind is at once an indivisible whole and inseparable from God. Christ was sent to act for God in history; each of us also is sent to act, according to our measure, for God and with our fellow men. "Discouragement," as Amiel said, "is an act of unbelief." Full in the face of unheard-of cause for discouragement, we are called to make our lives an act of belief.

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What comes first? "Be still and know that I am God." This is axiom; this is where we begin. Space must be cleared in our lives for being still; for this stillness will not happen by itself. But note that at last the "still point of the turning world" is to become available to us in the midst of action. This comes when worship and activity are perfectly aligned

and both turn round the same changeless centre. We have seen and heard of this in the lives of saints. We have even felt it in the moments of our own fullness, which are set gem-like and rare among our meagre days and years.

We begin by taking time, from even our most pressing concerns, to be still; but the change we long for is to know stillness as the very core and condition of activity. This is to have learned to “practice the presence of God,” to “know each other in the things which are eternal,” to “stand still in that which is pure.”

The second thing is to see ourselves in that Presence. George Fox said: “Stand still in that which shews and discovers, and there doth strength immediately come.” This is not easy or pleasant. We are tempted, and we are allowed, to postpone it all our lives. We wake early in the morning and there before we have time to ward it off stands the unrelieved image of ourselves. We must go back to sleep quickly or get up busily, lest we look at the image. Or we surprise it stark in a poem or book. Get on quickly with the story then, or turn the page. We will not look yet. And when we do look, how many aprons of fig-leaves must we not hastily stitch together and retreat behind before at length we can bear to stand before the mirror of that Eye in which we must see ourselves with our unused powers, and ulterior motives, and sneaking hopes for exception, and fears of failure, and bottomless indolence, and towering self-esteem, and crippling sense of sin and futility. Then our conscience smites us.

Conscience is often derogated as being *only* this or that, *only* our social conditioning, *only* the response of the collective unconscious. Whatever it is, whether the voice of God or something else, it has an authority that we ignore at the peril of our wholeness. Buber has said: “Each one who knows himself . . . as called to a work which he has not done, each one who has not fulfilled a task which he knows to be his own, each one who did not remain faithful to a vocation which he had become certain of – each such person knows what it means to say that his conscience smites him.

Out of the double exposure and the smiting of conscience, we then come to commitment. After that we are “owned men.”

Modern man is much concerned about freedom, and we study freedom from many angles. A recent Pendle Hill essay was entitled “Begin with Freedom.” If I understood it and its author aright, it could as well have been written Begin with Bondage, or Begin with Commitment. In one of his epistles George Fox exhorts his companions to “dwell in that which binds and chains and gives to see over the world.” The freedom the mature person, the whole person, longs for is freedom within a framework of law. He wants to know where he is going, where he belongs – in the existential phrase, “who he is.” He wants to know the laws of his own being and he wants to obey them. “Great peace have they which love thy law,” says the Psalmist.

The most fearful thing a person can know is the freedom that is utter separation. Freedom that moves within a



framework of commitment is the exact opposite of separation. Separation is the freedom to *flap*, and is no freedom at all; it is to be not-free, to be at-the-mercy-of. Who does not feel a breath of antique terror when even a wheel, which might have run thousands of miles on its axle, has come “free” and, exhausting the little momentum it brought with it, begins to wobble toward its fall? One recalls from childhood games a kind of tingling horror which came when the top had used up the impulse got from the string or the spring, and it hesitated and toppled, no longer the shining dynamic poised and weightless entity it had been, but a bit of poor painted wood or tin rolling at our feet, to be picked up and thrust into any dusty pocket.

One of the most gripping stories in the four Gospels is at the end of the Gospel of John. The disciples are having breakfast around a little fire on the edge of the Sea of Tiberias and the risen Lord joins them. After he has three times said to Peter: “Feed my sheep,” he says this also to him: “When you were young you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not want to go.” A parenthesis states what is meant by this; but since we are told that the story was added to the Gospel for reasons certainly not connected with historical accuracy perhaps we are entitled to make of it what we please. To me, it says that from now on the volatile and unreliable Peter, the “creative” Peter, if I may use the term this way, was to be girt up in the strength of a commitment that would deny him much that he would naturally have chosen, and carry him triumphantly through

much that he would naturally have shunned. Paul was to describe the form of this girding up as taking “the whole armor of God, that you may withstand in the evil day, and having done all . . . stand.” (Eph. 6:13) In this armor, Peter was no longer to be free as he had been before Jesus came, yet he was to act with immeasurably more freedom within the bounds of the new compulsion than ever he had when he was “free.” For him, the revelation of God in Christ was summons and sending.

So we have before us these three, in this order: the revelation of God which is the binding to our true centre; the revelation of ourselves just as we are, yet called to an “impossible possibility”; and then the commitment, in which only there can arise true freedom. “All revelation,” says Buber, “is summons and sending.”

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Are we Friends fit to answer the summons of our time? Are we fit to be sent on the missions that must now be accomplished?

Let us look at ourselves. We have some virtues; we are perfectly aware of them so we need not dwell on them. We have some consecrated and alert leaders who march in front of us and present us to the world in a good light. They are too few for the work we load upon them and we wear them out, unless they are too wise to be used up by others’ indolence. If some of our members show great gifts while they are still young, we sometimes push them beyond what they are ready for in their inward life, and some of these

may break and fall to the rear. Oftener, they will plod on, working on the momentum of an exhausted inspiration; they may be efficient and faithful, but if their burning bush is extinguished, how can they lead us out of Egypt?

The mass of us shelter behind these leaders, quieting our conscience with hurried good works; giving away some of our surplus; going to meeting regularly or sometimes; occasionally giving a little time to private prayer. For the most part, we are busy with ourselves, cultivating our talents, improving our mind and our property, rising in our profession, beautifying our premises, educating our children, consolidating our gains, laying up for our old age. None of these is nefarious activity. Every one of them is right and necessary in some degree.

It is often said that the influence of the Society of Friends is far out of proportion to its numbers. We well know that it is a dim shadow of what it could be if, as a body, we moved with the commitment that is inherent in our principles and has been shown us by our greatest leaders.

I do not claim to know what should be done so that life and power may again stream through the body of the Society and our influence be as radical as our principles are. But I have this to say: that in our time the great principles of Quakerism are dimmed and diminished by worldliness which has crept up on us in disguise and is now hung round our necks like an incubus that we in no way know how to shake off. I have often been asked to join groups in discussions about “simplicity.” I believe with all my heart in the sincerity of these groups, even as I believe in the

reality of my own concern about the subject; but I have usually come away feeling that we had wasted our time. Nothing but a titillating gnawing of our conscience can result from such inquiries unless we perceive that there is no compromise we can make with worldliness, if we hope to offer a central ministry to the need of our time.

Someone has said that if God is not of supreme importance He is of no importance. This is suggested in Matthew 30: “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.” It is said unequivocally in Matthew 6: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

It isn't Friends only who have to face this choice or else betray their principles. The very government of our country has reached the place where it must find a way to implement and live by the highest principles it was founded upon, or lead mankind into self-annihilation. Tradition has tied us to violence as the ultimate method of settling conflicts. It was never an effective method. It was just as effective at perpetuating as at removing or redressing wrong. In fact, right often became indistinguishable from wrong, when both had begun defending or advancing themselves in war. But now the game of violence is quite literally played to the end. The next move of violence on the international board could be the last move. The problems are unsolved, injustice is still rampant, resentment and ambition are at the boiling point from pole to pole. Nations that have always claimed that fire must be

fought with fire are confronted with the fact that whoever lights the first nuclear fire, in whatever cause, is the enemy of the race. We are either at the opening of a new age of man, or it is the end of all the ages.

From their early years, Friends proposed another means of defence, the method of resistance with love and reconciliation, which convinces the oppressor by acceptance of suffering, and draws him into a bond of collaboration with the resister, and so ends a new solution more right for both opponents than either of the separate solutions had been for either. In their seventeenth century struggle Friends became seasoned in this method. In our own century it was Gandhi, not a Friend and not a Christian, who brought the method into use in a struggle between two great peoples, developed its corollary disciplines, and set it firmly into modern political thought. In our own country, and in this decade, it was the so-called “inferior” race who, in the Montgomery bus strike, carried through against civil injustice a non-violent campaign that caught the imagination of the world.

The last two or three years of our stupefying international dilemma have brought from unexpected sources serious proposals for learning the application of this method on a world scale. A British naval commander has proposed that Britain disarm unilaterally, down to internal police force, and train her people in non-violent resistance, to be used in case of aggression from other nations.

We Friends believe that the method of non-violent resistance is indissolubly compounded with justice. Taken

up in the cause of righteousness, it is, as Gandhi said, the weapon of the strong, the strong weapon of an unassailable cause; taken up in defence of special privilege, oppression, aggression, white supremacy, it is, by its very nature a broken reed. Cecil Hinshaw in *Non-Violent Resistance: A nation's way to peace*, says: “. . . this is not merely a technic of defence – it is fundamentally a way of life. Such a defence would go ill, for example, with a practice of racial segregation such as is now all too common in our country.”

And let us not deceive ourselves. It would also go ill with rich living while multitudes of our brothers starve. It would go ill with sitting soft in beautiful houses, schools, and churches while our brothers are unhoused, untaught, and unhelped. It would go ill with making toys of our shining cars while our brothers walk upon bare feet. It would go ill with pampering our children's whims while our brothers see their children wither and die and cannot help them.

Do not think this is a message only to the rich or the semi-rich. Let me say also: it would go ill with idolizing and pursuing the American standard of living, whether attained or not. If Friends are to be able to contribute their insight and leadership to the effort to find a substitute for war – if they are to make their ancient testimony existential – we shall individually need such purification of life as Friends made when they set their slaves free. Corporately, we have never known, since Friends were first out of the early persecutions, such a purification as we shall need now.

What is this worldliness which I say is throttling our witness and giving the hollow ring of pretension to what we say? It is chiefly characterized by our uncritical and insensitive attitude toward our insatiable material wants. Insatiable as these wants are, we put their claim to satisfaction in the place where God's claim belongs. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me"; but we make a god of the American standard of living, with its implications of competition and oppression, its dependence on preparation for war, not to say mongering of war, and with its effect of speeding up our lives, dispersing out attention, squandering our powers.

I have used the expression *standard of living*, but it is an inaccurate phrase. *Scale of consumption* would be a truer phrase. A high standard of living can go hand in hand with a scale of consumption that we Americans – and we Friends – would call substandard. I think it was the Greeks who made the phrase, "plain living and high thinking"; our public is on the way to attaining high living and no thinking.

This phenomenon has received much attention in recent years from thoroughly secular points of view. The best-seller lists for some time have nearly always had books analyzing, sometimes almost lampooning, our frenetic pace of manufacturing, selling, and using up. We have had *The Hidden Persuaders*, *The Status Seekers*, *The Affluent Society*, *The Organization Man*, *The Lonely Crowd*. We read these and laugh at ourselves, but still the spiral rises. And it is not really humorous, Even in this richest country, never enough nurses, doctors, teachers, social workers,

household helpers; never enough mothers to man the homes where young children are growing up: – everybody busy making, advertising, selling, and consuming the objects and services that we call our standard of living. And of course the outstanding single item in that frenzy of making and using up is armament, from which nobody derives even the most temporary or selfish joy. Never before such widespread luxury; never before so little leisure. And all over the world, fear. And in two thirds of the world, stark want.

I quote here from *The Affluent Society*, a study by Galbraith, a Harvard economist: “We are led, as a nation, by our present preoccupations, to adopt numerous of the least elegant postures of wealth. Though we have much, and much of the remainder of the world is poor, we are single-mindedly devoted to getting more. This is for the satisfaction of wants which our well-being has induced or which – and the advertising art is not one which by its nature can be concealed – we have synthesized. And we are, on the whole, rather solemn about the whole process.”

Thomas Traherne, a contemporary of George Fox but not a Friend, had already three centuries ago noted this phenomenon of insatiable wants and pseudo-religious zeal in satisfying them. “The riches of darkness,” he says, “are those which men have made during their ignorance of God Almighty’s treasures. That lead us from the love of all, to labor and contention, discontentment and vanity. The Works of Darkness are Repining, Envy, Malice, Covetousness. Fraud, Oppression, Discontent, and Violence. All which proceed from the corruption of men



and their mistake in the choice of riches; for having refused those which God made, and taken to themselves treasures of their own, they invented scarce and rare, insufficient, hard to be gotten, little movable and useless treasures – yet as violently pursued them as if they were the most excellent and necessary things in the whole world. Oh how they are ready to sink under the burden of devised wants.”

Then Traherne tells a story and brings us an example from a still earlier time: “Socrates (came) once up into the Exchange at Athens, where they that traded asked him, ‘What will you buy? what do you lack?’ After he had gravely walked up into the middle, spreading forth his hands and turning about, ‘Good gods,’ saith he, ‘who would have thought there are so many things in the world which I do not want.’ And so left the place under the reproach of nature.”

The question of beauty always arises when the standard of living (scale of consumption) is challenged. I remember one who said – and there was real suffering in her voice for hers was a sensitive soul – : “I cannot live without beauty. I need good materials, good colors, good designs.” But is quality, as the world of commerce uses the word, so closely equivalent to beauty? Surely we have only to look about us anywhere to see that, not beauty but style – more exactly, fashion – is the criterion of quality in dress, furniture, cars.

If we could admit that “quality” and beauty are necessarily congruent values, they still might not contain the last criterion for us. Let me take an arbitrary example. Long after Friends had lost their testimony of plainness in dress,

they still held out against jewelry. Now we see nothing wrong with wearing it. But here, if we apply again the test of “quality,” it soon means precious stones. The *Friends Journal* recently had a jeweler’s advertisement for a ring set with a topaz and twenty-four diamonds, price \$2,500. Does this jeweler have reason to think it worth even the small amount that a *Friends Journal* ad costs to offer such a ring to Quakers? Is there anywhere a Friend to buy such a ring while the pitiful faces of the world’s orphaned children are upon the pages of even the most worldly magazines?

It is not, in fact, beauty nor true quality that is in question here. Beauty will not be laid hold on through the anxious cultivation of the five senses, nor through bedecking our bodies and our houses with precious gems, costly fabrics, or rare objects. “Beauty is gathered like the rain on hills”: it will thrust itself on us in the glory of the creation. As Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote:

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out like shining from shook foil.*

Topaz and diamond are formed through aeons of creation. They are beautiful and right in themselves. Someday we may find out the right way to enjoy them. I am suggesting that we have not yet found it.

Beauty will not be laid hold on through snatching beautiful objects into our possession. It will not be garnered in the house, or clutched in the hand.

*Go not too near a house of rose.*

*The depredation of a breeze  
Or inundation of a dew  
Alarm its walls away.  
Nor try to tie the butterfly,  
Nor climb the bars of ecstasy.  
In insecurity to lie  
Is joy's insuring quality.*

Emily Dickinson

This brings us to distinguish love of the world from worldliness. Worldliness is a form of world-denying. World-affirming means the full acceptance and enjoyment of the creation, and we do not rightly praise the Creator unless we enjoy and rightly use his creation. He is praised in the delight of sound and taste and form; the hearable, tastable, tangible things of the earth are good and worthy to be praised, and not just works of nature but the handiwork of man too. Rilke says even the Angel would be astounded by the things that man has made: house, bridge, fountain, gate, pitcher, windows and pillars and towers.

*He will stand more astonished; as you stood  
Watching the ropemaker in Rome, or the potter in  
Egypt.*

But praise leaves off as soon as we take more than we need, and use up more than we can make use of, desecrating the creation by surfeiting ourselves. This is worldliness. But worldliness is also there when one wants and strives for unneeded possessions and satisfactions, even though he never acquires more than enough to meet his bare needs. Worldliness is there when we increase our wants to match

the possessions of others. Someone else may need what is sheer ostentation for me.

Friends have a testimony of simplicity. But worldliness and simplicity cannot dwell together; simplicity cannot dwell where there is luxury, or greed, or envy and ambition, or vanity. Worldliness and destitution may dwell together. Worldliness is often nourished by scarcity, but not so often as it is by luxury and ease. Worldliness is there as soon as we claim comforts while others lack necessities. “The presence of the poor in any society,” says Father Régamey, “is a call to it to lower its standard of living.” The phrase, “in any society,” now means anywhere in the world, for we are no longer ignorant of it when there is need in far places. But no city has to look any farther than its own back streets to become aware of the presence of the poor.

Worldliness begins where we seek, through insuring and “laying up,” to provide for ourselves a security that is not to be had except through accepting insecurity. Job on his ash heap cried out in nostalgia for the security he had thought he had: “Then I thought, I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand, my roots spread out to the waters, with the dew all night on my branches, glory fresh with me, and my bow ever new in my hand.”

Worldliness is unrelatedness. It was against worldliness that all the social testimonies of Friends were directed. George Fox wrote: “. . . our religion lay not in meats, nor drink, nor clothes, nor thee nor thou nor putting off hats, nor making curtses. . . . Our religion lies in that which brings us to visit the poor, and fatherless and widows, and

keeps from the spots of the world.” The religion of Friends was not in the testimonies themselves; but the testimonies were to implement that total relatedness in which we cannot but care for the poor, deal gently with the enemy, and keep ourselves “unspotted from the world.” The testimonies grow out of the relatedness, but on the other side they are also the means by which we clear the path to the relatedness, by which we sweep and garnish the room and make it ready so that the Presence may dwell with us.

How much of the dullness and secularity which we often feel in our meetings for worship is to be attributed to the encroachment of worldliness? How can we come into the presence of the Lord and wait quietly upon His word, if we rush in straight from reaching and striving, accumulating and consuming? “Getting and spending, we lay waste [literally lay waste] our powers.”

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In the light of these considerations, let us examine briefly the institutions we cherish most, our meetings for worship, our schools, and our homes.

*The Meeting.* Friends early insisted upon a distinction between the church as a building, and the Church as the body of worshippers, the Body of Christ. The building they called simply the meeting house, and were not dependent on it. Barclay records that “when sometimes the magistrates have pulled down their meeting houses, they have met the next day openly upon the rubbish. . . .” (*Apology*, Prop. 4 Sec. 6) Nevertheless, Friends did try (and

were soon able) to provide themselves with simple permanent meeting houses. Some of these old buildings still stand. Sometimes we unprotestingly allow people to laugh at the old-fashioned plain, silent Quakers who built those houses and worshipped in them, and to accuse them of knowing nothing of beauty and joy. But these old meeting houses can usually stand scrutiny. They set a standard in the same way that the steady joy with which early Friends endured prison and persecution and maintained their loving communities puts the acid test to any joy that has to proclaim itself with continuous music pouring out of boxes; with intemperate eating, drinking, smoking, dancing; and with deadly speed on the roads. “Now Friends,” wrote George Fox, “who have denied the world’s songs and singing; sing ye in the Spirit, and with Grace, making Melody in your hearts to the Lord.”

Those beautiful old meeting houses do not now meet our whole need. Nevertheless, we should look a little critically at some of our building programs. Some new Meetings have patiently gone on for years using rented quarters, and when these get meeting houses suited to their number and needs, we are glad. But when we are planning meeting houses or additions to them, surely we must remember that simplicity is a permanent value, not to be outmoded or superseded. Here and there one sees signs of what one Friend calls denominationalism, and sometimes something like competition with other suburban churches. Some meeting houses have elegantly appointed social rooms and capacious First-day School buildings filled to overflowing during First-day School hour, while the following or

preceding Meeting is a handful of old people. This is a dire condition.

In so far as the First-day Schools or social occasions draw people bodily and spiritually into the worship of the Meeting, they are beyond price. In so far as they replace the Meeting or merely align us with the neighbors, they are usurpers. Handsome buildings and large attendance at First-day Schools can weaken instead of strengthen the Meetings, if they foster a spirit of worldliness rather than worship. The devotion of teachers cannot counterbalance this effect, if we do not know what to teach in our First-day Schools, and often teach what is more, and often what is less, than children are ready for, or teach what we do not ourselves “know experimentally”; or if we only entertain or take children off their parents hands for an hour.

In the old plain meeting houses, children were members of the congregation, and attended Meeting not just for a few minutes, or bringing toys and books with them. Many of us, even some of us who have afterward gone through years of rejecting the meeting for worship, can look back upon childhood hours in Meeting as true beginnings of growth. Many a modern child, if he were brought to Meeting from infancy, would learn to sit quietly by the time he could talk, and even before school years would begin something within himself, as he sat between worshipping parents, and among other adults and his playmates. Of course he will not feel that numinous quantity which the older Friends called the “covering” of the Meeting, if it is not there; if it is there, a child will seldom miss it. It is then that

*A door opens, a breath, a voice  
From the ancient room,  
Speaks to him now. Be it dark or bright  
He is knit with his doom.*

A.E.

Harold Loukes, the English psychologist, in his book *Friends and their Children*, has said: “At first glance it seems acutely difficult to offer children any experience of silent worship, and it is tempting to give them their hymns and carols and prayers and addresses, to tide them over until they are mature enough for the full rigour of a silent meeting. But this position is only tenable if the hymns and prayers mean nothing to children except a pleasant noise: if their meaning is to come home to children – and surely it often does – then it may be better to expose them only to the silence. For the worst that can happen in silence is boredom and meaninglessness, while the dangers of grappling with adult religious experience in ritual and hymn may be disturbing and bewildering. In the silence the child is at least safely left to himself, and if religious ideas begin to stir, they come from his inward life.” (p. 24)

Unless the meeting for worship is the center of the Quaker community – and that means of the child’s as well as the father’s and mother’s, as well as the older people’s, community – community is non-existent, the Meeting is peripheral, and the Society of Friends just an organization with a membership list. If we must let in worldliness in order to bring people, even children, to our meeting houses, then we do indeed need to take a fresh look at ourselves. Let us be careful that our meetings for worship keep their



integrity and our meeting places the simplicity that belongs to that integrity. Only so can they set and check the standard for our other, even more embattled, institutions.

*Schools and Homes.* I never believed more than I do now in our Friends' schools; never was there greater need for what they can offer. Worldliness has invaded childhood through many avenues, adolescents are hurled into an adulthood for which it is harder than ever to prepare them. Our schools can stand as a bastion between our children and the worldliness that already assaults them in their unformed years.

But will our schools bear being measured against the standard of simplicity? If it is true, as I am sometimes told, that the pressure for conformity to the scale of consumption is even heavier in our suburban High Schools than in Friends' schools, that makes not less but greater our responsibility to set and uphold a standard of simplicity.

Year after year, our schools and other educational institutions have to put on campaigns to raise money to meet the rising costs: to provide more scholarships for those who cannot afford to pay, raise salaries of teachers, and improve buildings, libraries, athletic facilities. We want our children to have what is *best*, in the strictest sense of the word; we want all children who attend our schools to have that *best*. We also know that we ought not to ask teachers to live on a scale altogether lower than that of the schools' patrons. In so far as we draw our student bodies from the groups who can afford to pay our bills, we get young people who are already used to comfort, or even

luxury. To meet this disparity of standards, we make still further physical improvements in the schools. So the bill for a “religiously guarded” education goes up and up.

Yet there are remedies, and one remedy is an intentional simplicity on the part of the schools. Garfield said that you had a university in a log hut when you had Mark Hopkins on one end of a bench and an eager student on the other. Somebody went further and said you had a university on a log when you had Mark Hopkins on one end and a student on the other. Between such complete dependence on inspired teaching and our dependence on immense plant and equipment to supplement the teaching, there must exist some happy medium. Have we given up hope of finding it?

We are pleased if we can raise enough endowment for scholarships so that no Friend need be turned away from our schools. But what of the Friend, or any other parent, who knows that when he has accepted the scholarship and sent his child to the school, he cannot (and possibly feels that he should not) provide the allowance, the wardrobe, the accessories, the trips home and elsewhere that are standard for the pupils of the school? He knows that if he cannot afford, or does not feel easy, to provide all these things, his child must suffer in that school the sense of inferiority to his fellows which psychology has taught us to fear. He does not always know beforehand whether or not his child is one of those who will thrive in spite of difference from others, or whether he will defend himself with a deforming attitude of superiority, or by cringing away from full contact with the others, in order to hide his difference. I have not lived for a dozen years in the midst of

one of our schools without having seen children who meet difference in all these ways. Some indeed blossom and thrive in spite of any sort of handicap.

We do honestly and deeply, all of us, want our children to have and our schools to offer *the best*. But our definition of *best* slips easily over into exactly what the fond parent means who says: “I want my child to have everything.” Everything! – everything he wants? everything that his parent wanted and did not get, as a youngster? everything that his schoolfellows have? everything that can make him more beautiful and bring out more gifts and talents in him? everything that will make him more likely to succeed? everything that money run wild in a technological civilization can procure for him?

For the school, this means continual increase of all its facilities. For the parent, it means constant petty – and not so petty either – expenses after the school’s bill is paid or the scholarship applied to it. It means, for example, continually changing wardrobes, because – as if the growing of young bodies did not provide for sufficient change – styles change even faster than children grow. It means hair-dos, and corsages, and skates and skis, and the costumes to wear while using them. At day schools it may mean cars. It will mean tickets to shows, exhibitions and concerts, and train or taxi fare – or again cars – to go there. Nothing but the limited hours in the day can limit the things one person can want to do or have, and want badly to do or have, and be hurt and afflicted at being unable to do or have, when all the others are doing or having them. And most of them will be innocent and upbuilding, or even

educational, things to do, and harmless and graceful things to have. But taken all together, they pile up the cost of education, and at the same time they set our children apart as a preferred class in society.

Is this the best we can do to carry out and pass on to our children the Quaker testimony of simplicity? Is this the best we can do to make our children know their oneness with a humanity that not only does not have these cultural advantages, or these pleasures and graces, but is hungry and cold? “Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to thee?”

I have spoken as if we were spending too much on education. As a nation, in proportion to our other spending, we spend too little on it. We live in a country which spends, according to 1958 figures, less than half as much for education as for preparation to kill human beings; less for education than for cars and gas and oil to run them; less for education than for tobacco, alcohol, and cosmetics; far less for education than for clothing and shoes.

Where are our children to learn to judge values, where are they to learn responsibility and compassion, if they do not learn them in our Friends’ schools and First-day schools? No teaching or telling will be effective, while the practice proclaims that we feel we have a right to be far above the average of our countrymen, in comfort and security and opportunity; and beyond that to be, as a nation, set apart from the whole world by our average consumption.

Do Friends' homes set the standard for the schools, or the schools set it for the homes? Neither, of course. Each pushes up the standard of the other, as it raises its own. Could they not support and strengthen each other in a drastic limiting of the scale of consumption? Many individual Quaker families do in fact support and strengthen each other in such intentional limitation. In earlier times, the Society of Friends was a separate community, forced to be so by the testimonies it bore and sometimes by the persecutions it endured. Within the enclosed community, the support of each other in carrying out convictions was easier than it can be now in the time of dispersion. But such support would not be impossible even now if we believed it to be important. Such mutual support between schools and homes, between family and family, between Meeting and Meeting, and between school and school, could be a more important factor in procuring for our children, and for their parents and teachers, what is *best* in life, and the conditions in which that *best* can prosper, than all possible generosity of well-to-do Friends toward our schools and other institutions.

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There is one answer to the question of simplicity that I do not want to leave unmentioned. During a recent discussion, one Friend said very humbly that sometime ago he had found himself brought into that perpetual sense of the presence of God which is simplicity. In this Presence, he knew what work or travel he had to undertake, and what to lay down or leave for others; and when called on to do work beyond his strength, he found the strength to do it.

There is no answer beyond this. Here that “sharp dart of longing love,” at which we often feel we are whittling fruitlessly, suddenly sharpens and goes home to its target. And then we know our way and know what we need to keep or to acquire, and what we can do better without.

This is simplicity indeed, whether in poverty or plenty; and it is freedom. But perhaps this definitive release to freedom rarely comes without rigorous effort to see what is our individual and corporate, right and responsible, and true, attitude toward all that our modern society offers us, as well as all that it claims from us, and all that it threatens us with.

The demand of testimony still stands. Those testimonies that we are called on to make today will not take the same forms as earlier ones. But they will have to go as drastically contrary to the main currents of the times as earlier testimonies did, if we are to move with the strength that present need calls for, or are even to bear our inherited share in reinforcing movements that are now being initiated from several other sources.

Do Friends always have to be different from other people? Is not this world full of good and admirable and lovable people who do not go contrary to the currents of the times? Do they not live comfortable lives and sleep well at night? Do we think we are better than they that we should be called to harder tasks?

After Peter had been told that another would gird him and carry him where he did not wish to go, he turned quickly –

human, all-too-human – to another disciple and asked the Lord: “What shall this man do?” The answer he got is the answer to us, ringing straight through the centuries: “. . . what is that to thee? Follow thou me.”

## **About the Author**

Mildred Binns Young was born in Ohio and attended Friends’ schools and Western Reserve University. With her husband and three children, she lived for some years at Westtown School, where Wilmer Young was Dean of Boys. They left there to work for nineteen years in the South, under the American Friends Service Committee. Since finishing their project in South Carolina in 1955, they have been in residence at Pendle Hill.

This pamphlet was first given as a talk at Pendle Hill’s 1959 Midwinter Institute.

## **Pendle Hill**

Located on 23 acres in Wallingford, Pennsylvania, Pendle Hill is a Quaker study, retreat, and conference center offering programs open to everyone. Pendle Hill’s vision is to create peace with justice in the world by transforming lives. Since Pendle Hill opened in 1930, thousands of people have come from across the United States and throughout the world for Spirit-led learning, retreat, and community.

At the heart of Pendle Hill is a residential study program which encourages a step back from daily life for reflection and discernment in preparation for deeper engagement in

the community and wider world. Because spiritual experience is essential to Quakerism, Pendle Hill's education is experiential, or experimental, at its core. Adult students of all ages come for a term or a year of education designed to strengthen the whole person – body, mind, and spirit. The Resident Program captures the earliest vision for Pendle Hill while responding to the call of the world in which we exist today. Program themes include:

- Quaker faith and practice
- Dismantling oppression
- Spiritual deepening
- Leadership skill development
- Ecological literacy
- Personal discernment
- Arts and crafts
- Gandhian constructive program
- Building capacity for nonviolent social change.

Programs are offered in a variety of formats – including term-long courses, weekend workshops, and evening presentations. Those unable to come for a term or a year are encouraged to take part in a workshop or retreat. Information on all Pendle Hill programs is available at [www.pendlehill.org](http://www.pendlehill.org). Pendle Hill's mission of spiritual education is also furthered through conference services – hosting events for a variety of religious and educational nonprofit organizations, including many Quaker groups.

The Pendle Hill pamphlets have been an integral part of Pendle Hill's educational vision since 1934. Like early Christian and Quaker tracts, the pamphlets articulate



perspectives which grow out of the personal experience, insights, and/or special knowledge of the authors, concerning spiritual life, faith, and witness.

A typical pamphlet has characteristics which make it a good vehicle for experimental thought. It is the right length to be read at a single sitting (about 9000 words). It is concerned with a topic of contemporary importance. Like words spoken in a Quaker meeting for worship, it embodies a concern, a sense of obligation to express caring or to act in response to a harmful situation.

To receive each Pendle Hill pamphlet as it is published, order an annual subscription. Please contact:

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