

# *Meditations Around the U.S.A.*

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## Preface

In the early days of Quakerism, some Friends kept *Journals* or spiritual diaries. Although intended for themselves, many of them were published subsequently and have been helpful to readers throughout the more than three centuries of the Religious Society of Friends.

In the hustle and bustle of life today, few Friends keep such spiritual account books, although *Journal* writing is done more today than in many years.

But there may be other ways, better suited to our times, which can be helpful. One such method may be the personal meditation, written regularly or intermittently.

Back in 1959, I published privately a pamphlet of meditations written in a period when I was doing a great deal of travelling, and in many parts of the world. That little collection of personal reflections and prayers seemed to meet with a good response and in 1979 that booklet was reprinted.

In more recent years I have travelled widely in the United States and have sometimes written similar meditations on the places I have seen or the experiences I have had.

Friends who have seen some of those reflections or heard messages in Meetings for Worship on them, have asked me whether I would have several of them printed in another booklet. So, *Meditations Around the U.S.A.* appears as a companion booklet to *Meditations Around the World*.

I trust that these personal accounts may prove beneficial to individuals and groups, speaking here and there to the condition of readers and even encouraging them to record some aspects of their spiritual journeys. It is in that hope that they are presented here.

Kendal at Longwood  
Kennett Square, Pennsylvania  
1984

## Table of Contents

On Our Minor Ecstasies . . . . .	3
The Spiritual Rings in Our Lives . . . . .	4
Becoming . . . . .	5
Raising the Level of Our Lives . . . . .	6
Caring . . . . .	7
Our Jobs and Our Lives: Rockpiles or Cathedrals? . . . . .	8
God Is There—Behind the Clouds . . . . .	9
Spiritual Interpreters . . . . .	10
Jesus—Man of Joys . . . . .	11
Peeling Away the Accretion of the Centuries About Jesus . . . . .	12
Take Up Your Bed—and Walk! . . . . .	13
Ye Are the Salt of the Earth . . . . .	14
Bridge-Builders . . . . .	15
The Importance of the Word “And” . . . . .	16
A Shoulder, A Hand, and a Shove . . . . .	17
The Conspicuous and the Inconspicuous . . . . .	18
A Symphony Orchestra and a Friends Meeting . . . . .	19
The Symbols of a Quaker Wedding . . . . .	20
On Viewing the Lincoln Memorial . . . . .	21
The Grand Central Station of The Underground Railroad . . . . .	22
The Lord is My Mountain Guide . . . . .	23
For the Beauty of the Earth . . . . .	24
The Mighty Mississippi . . . . .	25
A Quaker Mount Rushmore . . . . .	26
That Many-Faceted Man—William Penn . . . . .	27
Faith of Our Fathers, Living Still . . . . .	28
Ministry by Mail . . . . .	29
Demonstrating—With Others—For Peace . . . . .	30
They Will Overcome . . . . .	31
Here Am I, Lord; Use Me! . . . . .	32

## On Our Minor Ecstasies

In her Pendle Hill pamphlet on *The World In Tune*, Elizabeth Gray Vining refers to those few people who experience ecstasies, pointing out that even those rare individuals have such experiences infrequently. Then she goes on to write:

With such grandeurs . . . I am not now concerned. I am thinking of what I have learned to call minor ecstasies, bits of star dust which are for all of us, however limited our opportunities. Everyone has these moments . . . something seen, something heard, something felt, flashes upon one with a bright freshness, and the heart-tired and sick or sad or merely indifferent—stirs and lifts in answer . . . Exercising our faculty for minor ecstasies may actually increase the number of them we feel.

Today I have revelled in some such minor ecstasies as:

- . . . the geese overhead in their giant V-formation.
- . . . the bright red berries and the glossy green leaves of the holly bushes.
- . . . the squirrels playing tag in the trees.
- . . . a talk with a friend whom I had not seen for years.
- . . . the recorded music of the Mormon Tabernacle choir.
- . . . observing the helpfulness of some “seasoned citizens” to others who are less fortunate.

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*We are grateful, oh God, for the many minor ecstasies in our lives. Help us to relish them and to open ourselves to many more such experiences.*

Kendal at Longwood  
Kennett Square, Pennsylvania

## **The Spiritual Rings in Our Lives**

Ever since I was a boy, I have been fascinated by the rings in trees which are revealed when a sapling or a larger tree is chopped or sawed. Each ring is a record of the growth in a given year. Some of the rings are extremely narrow, revealing a lack of rainfall or of sunlight, or other conditions for growth. Other rings are wider, indicating much growth during the year. From those rings scientists can learn much about the conditions in a given period of time. In a sense they are the autobiography of a tree.

In our lives there are similar rings—spiritual ones—which reveal the amount of growth in a given year. Sometimes they are narrow, indicating little growth spiritually. Sometimes those rings are wide, disclosing greater development. That is to be expected, for spiritual growth is not uniform; we, too, have our years of spiritual drought as well as our times of heightened maturation.

Just as trees can be tended so that better growth is fostered, so we can cultivate spiritual development. Let us examine the conditions under which we seem to have grown and the conditions under which we have failed to mature spiritually, and expose ourselves to the best conditions for developing wide spiritual rings in our lives. And let us not be too discouraged when our growth is not as great as we had hoped it would be.

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*Dear God, send our roots rain. Help us to expose ourselves to the sunshine of Thy love. Help us to cultivate the soil that we may grow to greater maturity. Encourage us in our times of discouragement. Amen.*

New London, Indiana



## Becoming

What a wonderful verb that is—to become. It doesn't shout at us. It doesn't shove us. It doesn't threaten us. In a quiet way it persuades us, entices us, encourages us. It is a verb of growth and development.

As Shakespeare wrote, "We know what we are, but not what we may be."

And as Oliver Wendell Holmes, the lawyer and justice on the Supreme Court wrote, "It matters little where we stand; what matters most is the direction in which we are moving."

From time to time we need to make an inventory of ourselves—our strengths and our weaknesses, our present state and our potentialities—a kind of State of the Individual report, like a Quaker Meeting's annual State of the Society. Sometimes it helps to have a close friend, or more than one, assist us in that inventory.

Then we need to see where the next steps are. Not giant strides, but tiny steps in most instances.

That is as true of our spiritual selves as of our vocational selves, our family selves, and our community selves.

Undergirding us, strengthening us, encouraging us should be our prayer life and our worship, individually and corporately. There is power there "to become." As John says in Chapter I, Verse 12:

But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God . . .

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*Help us, oh God, to see ourselves frankly and honestly. Help us to see our strengths as well as our weakness. And help us to see what we can become. Strengthen us in our resolves and undergird us with Thy power. Amen.*

Brooklyn, New York

## **Raising the Level of Our Lives**

How impossible it seemed from the shore for that large boat to move from the lower lock to the higher one. It looked as if a huge derrick would be needed—and there was no derrick around.

But ever so slowly the water level in the lower lock was raised so that it reached the level of the higher lock.

Then the ship was able to move from one stage to another and proceed on its journey.

Aren't our lives a little like that?

Often we seem stuck at a low level of living. We need to have the water raised so that we can reach new heights—and proceed on our journey.

In the case of the locks of the Sault Sainte Marie there was only one way of doing this—through an engineering feat. Fortunately, there are many ways for us as human beings to raise the level of our lives:

- ... through the reading of biographies, novels, poetry, and plays.
- ... through working in the garden or with our cherished plants, or strolling through the woods or fields.
- ... through a vast array of experiences with family members and close friends.
- ... through listening or taking part in musical events.
- ... through painting or sculpturing or some other use of our hands.
- ... through private prayer and public worship.
- ... and in other ways.

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*So often we seem stuck, oh God, at a low level of living. Help us to find the means by which we can raise the level of the water around us and feel our tiny vessels lifted. Help us to raise the level of our living. Amen.*

Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan



## Caring

One of the most clear, concise, crisp, and challenging statements about Christianity is the comment of Baron von Huegel, who wrote: "Caring is the Christian thing. Caring is what matters most."

Yes, that is what Jesus did. Upon a couple of occasions he fed the thousands and at other times he spoke to large groups. But a glance through the accounts of His life will reveal that His primary emphasis was upon individuals. He cared for them. He loved them. He communicated confidence to them, releasing their full potentialities. And what a curious collection of human beings they were:

- ... a leper
- ... an epileptic boy
- ... a poor woman and her "mite"
- ... Mary Magdalene, the harlot
- ... Zaccheus, the young publican
- ... a rich young man
- ... the sick servant of a centurion—and other sick individuals
- ... a blind man
- ... the mercurial Peter
- ... the doubting Thomas
- ... and others

Perhaps that is the main purpose of our sojourn on earth—to love, to care, to communicate confidence—placing crowns above the heads of the people we know—just high enough that they can stretch and reach them.

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*Help us, oh God, to be secure enough in ourselves that we can reach out to others, loving them, caring for them, communicating confidence in them. In Thy name, Amen.*

Brooklyn, New York

## **Our Jobs and Our Lives—Rockpiles or Cathedrals?**

As a boy, living in Washington, D.C., I often visited the St. Alban's Cathedral, usually with visitors whom I was showing the sights of the nation's capital. In those days the cathedral was only partially completed and I sometimes thought about how slowly the cathedrals of Europe were constructed, over a period of decades.

Today I saw that glorious cathedral again—and it is nearing completion. A strenuous attempt is being made now to complete it before the generation of Italian stonecutters who work on it, dies.

And as I viewed St. Alban's, I thought of the story of the three stonecutters who were asked by a visitor what they were doing. One said that he was earning so much money per day for his work. A second replied that he was shaping stones. A third answered that he was helping to build a cathedral.

I thought, too, of the arresting title in one of Rachel DuBois' books—"Our American Culture: Rockpile or Cathedral?"

What a vast difference our philosophy of life, our personal credo, our outlook on life makes.

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*Help us, oh God, to think of our jobs—and our lives—not as mundane, ordinary, common, but as extraordinary, uncommon, releasing. Help us to realize that cathedrals are built slowly, stone by stone. Help us to insert windows in our lives which will let in the Light.*

Washington, D.C.

## God Is There—Behind the Clouds

As we sat in the Meeting for Worship at Kendal this morning, we could see nothing through the clear-glass windows, outside. The fog was so thick that it seemed as if we were taking a huge bubble bath or riding through the clouds in an airplane.

Somehow that triggered the recollection of a memorable experience I had had with fog years ago in Switzerland. I had taken a week's vacation from my work in Paris with UNESCO in order to visit some parts of Switzerland I had never seen, especially the Matterhorn, rising abruptly above the hamlet of Zermatt.

Two or three days passed and it was still foggy. So I inquired at the desk of the small hotel where I was staying about the weather forecasts and my chances of seeing the Matterhorn. I was told that the only chance would be around 4 a.m. when the clouds might separate and reveal that famous mountain peak.

Disturbing as that thought was to a late riser, I roused myself the next morning and, camera in hand, went outside around 4. Fortunately the clouds rolled aside like the parting of a stage curtain at a play. And there it was—the mighty Matterhorn. And what a spectacular sight it was!

Perhaps our views of God are something like that experience. We seldom “see” God, yet we know that He is always there—somewhere behind the clouds.

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*We are grateful for the fleeting glimpses we have of Thee in our lifetime. And we are sustained, comforted, and exhilarated by our constant realization that Thou art there—somewhere behind the clouds. Amen.*

Kendal at Longwood  
Kennett Square, Pennsylvania

## Spiritual Interpreters

Among the most remarkable people in the world are the interpreters in international organizations and at international conferences who translate the speeches or discussions instantaneously into another tongue. To do so, they must know the two languages thoroughly, including the specialized vocabulary of many world problems or topics and the unique idioms of the two cultures. Imagine, for example, having to translate on the spur of the moment the American phrase, "pie in the sky," into French, which a superb interpreter I once knew did by referring in French to "cheese on a cloud."

In a sense, all of us adults are spiritual interpreters—translators of God to children, translators of Christianity to non-Christians or even lukewarm Christians. How well do we do this? In what areas of life do we need to improve our interpretations?

Perhaps we all are interpreters, also, of Quakerism to those around us. For some strange reason, people almost always know when a person is a Quaker. As James Michener, the well-known writer, once wrote in the *Friends Intelligencer* (now the *Friends Journal*), he travels almost everywhere on "a Quaker passport." On a lesser scale and in a more limited area, many of us are similarly identified. How well, then, do we represent the Religious Society of Friends at its best? How good a sample are we of Quakerism? In what respects could we improve as interpreters of our beloved Society?

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*Help us, oh God, to become better spiritual interpreters to others. Help us to translate into our daily lives the two great commandments and the broad-based ideals of the Sermon on the Mount. In Thy name we ask for such growth. Amen.*

After a day at the  
United Nations headquarters.

## Jesus—Man of Joys

From time to time I like to pick up a little pamphlet by A. Barratt Brown which has been out-of-print for many years. I re-read it and enjoy it because it portrays Jesus as I have always pictured Him.

Granting that Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, as painted by so many artists, Brown stresses the fact that He was also a man of joys, acquainted with joy and even laughter. Obviously He enjoyed the common things around Him—corn and vines and the lilies of the field; yeast and bread; flax and cloth; fig trees and fair weather. He enjoyed, too, His friends and extended family—the Disciples. And He seems to have experienced joy in working with those who came to Him and whom He counselled or healed.

His message was Good News, good tidings of great joy. To Him the Kingdom of God was one of justice and peace and joy. Did He not say, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh." He even went to His death "for the joy that was set before Him."

So, instead of the grim Jesus to whom so many of us have been introduced, this is Jesus as a man of inner peace, serenity, the enjoyment of other human beings, . . . and joy.

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*We are grateful, oh God, for the life of Jesus and its revelations of the nature of God and of human beings. We recognize that He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. But we rejoice in the fact that He was also a man of joy. Help us today to grow just a little in our spiritual stature—to be just a little more like Him. Amen.*

Brooklyn, New York

## **Peeling Away the Accretion of the Centuries About Jesus**

For many years I have lived near the old Dutch Reformed Church on Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn, passing it frequently. Often I have reflected on its history, dating back to colonial times. But I have also been repulsed by the dirty yellow stucco daubed over the original structure.

Then, a short time ago, the stucco was removed and the original building revealed—a structure of marked simplicity but of great beauty, constructed from the grey fieldstone of the surrounding countryside.

It seems to me that there is some similarity between the history of that building and the story of Jesus. Over the centuries so many legends have developed about Him. So many stories have grown. So many myths have been concocted. If we could only peel away the accretions that have accumulated over the intervening years and recover the simplicity and beauty of His life 2000 years ago.

Perhaps the best way to do that is to pick up a New Testament with the original words of Jesus (or what we presume were His original statements) printed in red. Reading those passages might bring us a little closer to that remarkable person who roamed the fields, traversed the river valleys, and meandered through the villages of ancient Palestine. In that way we might come a little closer to understanding, appreciating, and marvelling at the simple yet beautiful life of Jesus of Nazareth.

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*Help us, oh God, to peel away the myths and traditions which have accumulated over the centuries about Jesus and to recover the simple, selfless, and beautiful life He led in ancient Galilee. Amen.*

Brooklyn, New York

## Take Up Your Bed—and Walk!

In both Mark and John there are references to the injunction of Jesus to “Take up thy bed—and walk!” or in more modern translations, “Take up thy mat and walk.”

Like so many phrases and sentences in the New Testament, this one is brief, terse, and packed with meanings, inasmuch as we all have “beds” or “mats” which weigh us down and which we should—and can—pick up. Some of them are sleeping bags. Some are cots. Some are big, heavy, four-poster iron or wooden beds.

There are the beds we bear as single-parent families.

There are the beds of tensions between husbands and wives.

There are the beds of disputes and harsh words between children or teen-agers and their parents.

There are the beds of misunderstandings between adults and their elderly parents.

There are the beds of frictions with neighbors.

There are the beds of unhappy human relations on the job.

There are the beds of discouragement, self-deprecation, and even despair.

There are the beds of physical infirmities.

There are the beds of alcoholism, gambling, and sex.

No matter what our “bed” may be, we need to be aware of it, to examine it as frankly as possible, and to pray for strength to pick it up—and walk—sometimes alone and sometimes with the help of others.

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*We yearn for assistance, oh God, in becoming aware of the “beds” we carry. Help us to examine them as dispassionately as we can. Help us to seek help when that is needed. Grant us the strength to lift our burdens—and walk. Amen.*

Brooklyn, New York



## Ye Are the Salt of the Earth

Yesterday I saw that magnificent film on Gandhi, and since that time I have been thinking about many aspects of the life of that remarkable man, especially of his historic march to the sea to make salt as a gesture of defiance of the British. Sensitive to the importance of symbolism, he chose salt-making because of its historic importance, for salt has been rare and therefore expensive and often controlled by governments. It has been used as money, as pay for soldiers (hence a man is worth his salt), and as a part of the baptism of infants. And in high society, one's importance was often judged by the place where a person was seated—near the elaborate saltshakers—or farther away.

Jesus, too, used salt as a symbol when he said "Ye are the salt of the earth."

So I have reflected on the uses of salt

- ... as a preservative, before the days of ice boxes and then of refrigerators.
- ... as a cleanser—for medicinal uses.
- ... as a healer in illnesses.
- ... as a condiment or spice, for seasoning.
- ... as a mild irritant.

And I have asked myself to what extent I am "the salt" in the various circles in which I move—being a preserver, a cleanser, a healer, a spice—and a mild irritant.

In what respects are you "the salt of the earth?"

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*We pray for guidance in finding our own particular ways of becoming "the salt of the earth." Help us, oh God, in our search and in our application of our findings. Amen.*

New York City

## Bridge-Builders

As I have criss-crossed the United States, I have seen a good many bridges, admiring many of them as monuments to the engineering genius of their designers and the careful work of their builders.

Some of those bridges are huge and often awe-inspiring—from the Verrazano and George Washington bridges on the east coast to the San Francisco-Oakland and Golden Gate bridges here in the west.

But there are other bridges, too. Hundreds of them. Thousands of them. Old covered bridges which are still standing. Small bridges across rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds. And even tiny bridges which people have made by placing a log or plank across a narrow stream.

As I thought about bridges, I realized that we are all bridge-builders:

Bridge-builders in our families.

Bridge-builders in our friendship circle.

Bridge-builders in our neighborhoods and communities.

Bridge-builders in our Quaker Meetings and Friends Churches.

Bridge-builders in the world of nations.

And I wondered on which bridges I should be working now—and what materials I needed for such work.

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*We are aware, oh God, of the many crevasses and chasms which need to be bridged—from the rifts between family members to those between nations. Help us now to choose carefully the few bridges on which we should be working and to choose wisely the right materials to construct them. Give us patience and persistence and joy in our work. Amen.*

San Francisco, California

## The Importance of the Word "And"

How often in life we use the tiny word "or" when we should have used the word "and." At first this may seem like a small matter. In reality it represents a very great difference in one's philosophy of life.

In Christendom people have argued for centuries over whether it is faith that matters, or good works. Bitter arguments have often ensued; schisms and separations have sometimes been the result of such differences. Fortunately Quakers have tried strenuously to link the two, as exemplified magnificently in the title of our Book of Discipline—*Faith AND Practice*.

In other aspects of the Religious Society of Friends it is important to stress the word "and" rather than the word "or." For example, silence *and* the spoken word, the ocean of darkness *and* the ocean of light, the Friends General Conference *and* the Friends United Meeting *and* the Evangelical Friends Alliance.

It should be the same in many other aspects of life. For example:

It should be men *and* women *and* children.

It should be Jew *and* Gentile, Christian *and* non-Christian, *and* those of other faiths.

It should be white *and* black, *and* those of other colors.

It should be rich *and* poor.

It should be the educated *and* the uneducated.

It should be the dreamers *and* the doers.

It should be the past *and* the present *and* the future.

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*Help us, oh Divine Guide, to reach out to others, to draw large circles rather than small ones, to be inclusive rather than exclusive in our daily contacts.*

Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania

## **A Shoulder, a Hand, and a Shove**

The Italian gardener who comes from time to time to help me was here today. He does not speak English and I do not speak Italian. Yet we have learned to communicate through the international sign language and the expressions on our faces.

Suddenly I found myself today at the back of the house. I needed to get down to the ground quickly, but the distance between the back door and the earth was greater than I could maneuver, for I had never replaced the back steps after I discovered they were an aid to robbers who used them to gain entrance when I was away.

My Italian friend saw my dilemma and came quickly to my aid, giving me his shoulder to use as a support and his hand to steady me as I jumped the short distance to the ground. Then, when I needed to get back into the house, he gave me a strong shove from the back.

It wasn't much—but it was just what I needed—a shoulder, a hand, and a shove.

In Meeting today I pondered whom I could help this week in a similar way. Perhaps you, too, can consider who needs these small but important aids this week—and pray that you may be ready to extend such help to them.

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*Keep us alert, oh God, to the small but significant aid we can give others. Keep our hearts and heads in readiness for the needed shoulder, the needed hand, and the needed shoves. Amen.*

Brooklyn, New York

## **The Conspicuous and the Inconspicuous**

On the eastern and western fringes of Richmond, Indiana, are two statues. They are very different in subject matter, yet each is unique.

On the campus of Earlham College, in West Richmond, is a replica of the statue by Sylvia Judson that was erected in 1959 on the south lawn of the Massachusetts State House, overlooking the Boston Common, as a tribute to Mary Dyer, the Quaker who was hanged on the Common in 1660 as a martyr to her faith. In that statue, Mary Dyer is sitting erect on a Meeting House bench, dressed in her simple 17th-century Quaker dress, blouse, and small cap.

On the eastern edge of that city, in the Glenn Miller Park, and within sight from the Old National Road, is a statue of a Pioneer Mother, similar to others located at various points along that famous roadway, and a tribute to the thousands of nameless women who made the trek to what is now the middle west. In the folds of her copious skirt and in her arms are a boy and a girl, reminding us of the children who made that long and hazardous journey.

Thus, one of those statues is to a conspicuous person; the other to an inconspicuous individual.

How appropriate that both are honored. How gratifying that these two statues in Richmond are to non-military persons, since so many of our civic tributes are to the military. How fitting that both are to women, since so few of our public statues are to representatives of that sex. And how proper it is to have two statues to women in the city of Richmond, founded by Quakers.

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*We praise the well-known, oh God. Help us also to praise the little-known and the unknown who have contributed to the life of our country and our world. Help us to pay tribute to the non-military whose contributions to our country have been so often neglected. Help us to cherish and extend the role of women in our beloved Religious Society of Friends. Amen.*

Richmond, Indiana

## **A Symphony Orchestra—and a Friends Meeting**

What a magnificent concert that was—with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Seiji Ozawa, and with the Tanglewood Festival Chorus and the Boston Boy Choir to fill the cup of enjoyment to overflowing.

Individually each of the instruments in such an orchestra can produce spine-tingling sounds, haunting tones, beautiful music—after years of practice by the player. But it is when they are played together that the heights of music are often achieved. And only when each instrument is carefully tuned, the players are constantly and acutely aware of each other, and each person is responsive to the moods and directions of an able conductor.

As they played, and in the Meeting for Worship this morning, I thought of how a Friends Meeting at its best can be something like a great symphony orchestra.

In almost any Friends Meeting there are people who resemble all or most of the instruments of an orchestra. There are several violins, a few cellos, fewer bass viols. There are the piccolos, the flutes, and the oboes, the clarinets, and the bassoons. And there are some English horns, saxophones, trumpets, French horns, trombones, and tubas. Yes, there are even snare drums and bass drums, an occasional xylophone, chimes, and harp. And I would not dare identify the people I know who might be compared to each of these instruments.

Sometimes we sound in committee sessions and Meetings for Business like an orchestra tuning up. But at our best, usually in the Meeting for Worship, we become a symphony orchestra, with our instruments in tune, our awareness of each other acute, and sensitive to the moods and directions of The Invisible Conductor—the Christ in our Midst.

But behind our production of great music lie years of practice in attuning ourselves to The Great Conductor.

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*Help us, oh Divine Conductor, to learn to use the instrument we have been given, superbly. Help us to be aware of the other instruments. Sensitize us to Your divine directions. Amen.*

Boston, Massachusetts

## The Symbolism of a Quaker Wedding

Some people say that Quakers have no symbols. I'm sorry, but that isn't so. We have fewer symbols than most religious groups and we try to keep them authentic. But we have them. Today we should be aware of such symbols in this simple but meaningful service.

First there is the Meeting House, with its simple but beautiful architecture.

Then there is the symbolism of "passing Meeting" or being approved by the Clearness Committee and upheld by the Monthly Meeting, as a sign of fellowship in our group.

There is also the fact that our friends have taken their vows themselves rather than having someone perform the ceremony for them.

And there are the words of the marriage ceremony—"In the presence of God and before these our friends"—and the "promising with Divine Assistance."

At the close of this special Meeting for Worship we will clasp hands—another symbol of group friendship and fellowship—a way of saying "Amen" to this service.

And there is the symbolism of each of us signing the marriage certificate at the close of our common worship.

Each of these is filled with meaningful symbolism. Each is a sign of spiritual fellowship, good will, and love.

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*God bless these, our friends. May their marriage be lifelong and filled with love and service. And may we support them, each in his or her own way. Blessed be the ties that bind our hearts in Christian love. Amen.*

Brooklyn, New York



## On Viewing the Lincoln Memorial

To me one of the most impressive sights in the U.S.A. is the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. I have been there scores of times but each time it is a rare experience, something akin to worship.

By day it is beautiful and awe-inspiring. But by night it is even more striking—with that giant statue of The Great Emancipator brought out of the darkness around it by the floodlights—and the carved statements of the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural barely visible on either side.

It is appropriately simple, almost overpowering.

It is a nation's tribute to a remarkable personality, a great man, yet a human one, with faults, like yours and mine.

Often as I approach that statue, I think of his simple statements about his faith.

When asked why he did not join a church, he replied, "Because I have found difficulty, without mental reservations, in giving assent to their long and complicated confessions of faith. When any church will inscribe on its altar the Savior's condensed statement of law and gospel, 'Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and love thy neighbor as thyself'—that church will I join with all my heart."

And I think of his statement on prayer—"If the Lord did not answer prayer, I could not stand it. And if I did not believe in a God who works His will with nations, I should despair of the Republic."

And of the Bible he said, "Take all of this book upon reason that you can and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a happier and better man."

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*We marvel, oh God, at the growth of this great human being through trials and tribulations. We are astounded by the potentialities of human beings as demonstrated by the life of Abraham Lincoln. Help us, also, to grow and to live up to our possibilities as human beings. Amen.*

Washington, D.C.

## **The Grand Central Station of the Underground Railroad**

During the recent sessions of the Friends United Meeting at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, I visited the Levi Coffin House in nearby Fountain City. Purchased in 1967 by the state of Indiana, it is now a National Historic Landmark, honoring Levi Coffin (often called the “Superintendent” of the Underground Railroad), his wife Katie, other local Quakers, and some freed slaves and Wesleyan Methodists.

The Coffins were North Carolina Friends who had migrated to Indiana because of their abhorrence of slavery. Their home in Newport (now called Fountain City) is a sturdy, two-story brick house on the main street, reflecting his success as a businessman.

But their concern for the abolition of slavery led the Coffins to give leadership to the Underground Railroad movement. It is said that 2000 or more slaves passed through that one building over a period of a few years, on their circuitous and dangerous flight to freedom.

My visit to the Coffin House made me reflect again on the courage of those Quakers. Generally they were law-abiding citizens, but on this issue they were obeying a Higher Law to which they owed their first allegiance.

I also wondered what Friends today were doing to aid Blacks—and other minority groups—and what more I should be doing; we dare not live on the laurels of the past; we need to reclaim, renew, and extend our inheritance.

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*Help us, oh God, to find the concerns for our day, as many Friends in other times have discovered the tasks for which they were called. Keep us ever sensitive to Thy Higher Law. Amen.*

Fountain City, Indiana

## The Lord Is My Mountain Guide

For years I have been trying to find a modern equivalent to that ancient and much-beloved phrase from the 23rd Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd."

I have thought it might be my psychologist or psychiatrist, my pilot, my foreman, or my closest friend. But none of these was satisfying.

Perhaps today I found a better symbol, a more descriptive phrase, a more apt illustration.

Watching from the airplane, I could see a group of mountain climbers (in this case "mountains" of ice, a glacier) scaling the cliff together. But there was a leader who knew the way, as he had been there before. Obviously he was chosen for his strength, his stamina, and his skill. He led the way and the others followed, listening (I assume) to his directions. And they were tied together firmly by a heavy, sturdy rope.

Could that be the metaphor I have been looking for—The Lord is my mountain guide? He has been there before; He knows the way. He is concerned with my safety and success, but I must listen carefully for His instructions. He has strength and stamina and many skills.

If I follow Him carefully and yet make my own way, I can scale the mountain. But I, too, must be well prepared, with the right gear, and use it well. And I can feel more secure because I am tied to other mountain climbers in this hazardous but yet exhilarating life of mountain climbing.

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*We find it difficult to think of names for Thy Presence, oh God. Help us not to worry about the names but instead to feel Thy Nearness, Thy Help, Thy Concern. Help us, however, to be fully prepared for climbing the mountains of life—and to revel in the views from the heights we attain. In Thy name, Amen.*

Juneau, Alaska

## For the Beauty of the Earth

Amazing! Magnificent! Overpowering! Those were some of the words which leaped into my mind as I saw for the first time the Grand Canyon in Arizona. I felt with J. B. Priestley that "It is useless to try to describe the Grand Canyon. Those who have not seen it will not believe any possible description; those who have seen it know that it cannot be painted in either pigments or words."

Carved by the Colorado River, this tract of 1000 square miles is filled with canyons and gorges, banded walls of rock, shafts of light which change like a kaleidoscope, and here and there a gnarled old tree. Surely it is one of the wonders of the world.

Yet there are other kinds of beauty, in every part of the U.S.A. and in every nation on our planet.

It is spring and the ferns are beginning to push through the warm, wet soil at Westtown School. The skunk cabbages are beginning to unfold their green and yellow furls—with tiny red lines on them. The pussy willows are appearing and the Dutchman's britches shooting above ground. The blue gentians are almost out and the trillium will soon appear. Meanwhile the tiny buds on those magnificent copper beeches are venturing out. And the mountain laurel will soon be in bloom.

All this is less spectacular than the grandeur of the Grand Canyon. But it is beautiful here, too.

And, as a prayer, I hum the hymn:

*For the beauty of the earth,  
For the glory of the skies,  
For the love which from our birth  
Over and around us lies,  
Lord of all, to Thee we raise  
This our hymn of grateful praise.*

Grand Canyon, Arizona; and Westtown School, Pennsylvania

## The Mighty Mississippi

Could that possibly be the headwaters of the mighty Mississippi river, I asked the friends who had taken me to this spot. There was scarcely enough water and enough movement to call it a stream. But I was assured that it was really the start of that mighty river which drains over a third of the United States and is responsible in part for the mighty Bread Basket of the vast middle west.

Then I recalled the African proverb which says that "A river is made great by its many streams."

Yes, there had to be a start somewhere. But it was by the joining of the waters from many places that a mighty river arose. There would be no mighty Mississippi without the waters from the Missouri, the Upper Mississippi, and the Ohio, the 40 major tributaries, and the thousands of streams and rivulets over a large part of our continent. Or the snows from the Appalachian and Rocky Mountains.

Perhaps there is a lesson in this experience for all of us. An organization, a movement, even a new Friends Meeting has to start somewhere—and that may well be with us.

Alone we can do some things. But it is when we join with others that we are more likely to become powerful, influential, and persuasive.

So let us not be afraid to start something which is needed. And then seek others who will join us. And let us lend our support in all the ways possible for us, to the movements in which we believe—more justice for minorities here and abroad, more help to developing nations, more disarmament, better education and for more people, aid to the battered and oppressed, protection of the environment—and any other cause in which we may be interested.

But let us remind ourselves of John Woolman's injunction "to turn all we possess into the *channel* of universal love," rather than trying to sprinkle deserts.

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*Help us, oh God, to learn these lessons from the mighty Mississippi.*

Minneapolis, Minnesota

## A Quaker Mount Rushmore

What a remarkable sight this is—with the heads of four Presidents of the United States carved on the side of a mountain in the Black Hills of South Dakota. How huge those faces or busts are—visible on clear days from 50 to 60 miles away.

Then I began to think about a memorial to four Quaker leaders and to wonder whom I would include.

Personally George Fox does not greatly appeal to me, but I must admit the centrality of his role in Quakerism with his rediscovery of the authenticity and vitality of first-century Christianity and his remarkable creation of such unique Quaker methods as the Meeting for Worship, the Meeting for Business, and the Queries and Advices. Yes, he would be one.

Personally I admire William Penn, primarily because of the scope of his interests—from the founding of Pennsylvania as a religious democracy, to his planning of the city of Philadelphia, to his interest in improving the lot of prisoners, to his concern for good relations with the Indians, to his plan for a federation of Europe 250 years ahead of his time. Yes, he would be a second.

Probably no one in Quaker history has exemplified the combination of spiritual insights and social consciousness better than John Woolman—the nearest we have to a Quaker “saint.” Yes, Woolman must be there, too.

And Lucretia Mott would be my choice for the fourth—largely to have women represented as a central aspect of Quakerism.

There are many more I would like to have in that Quaker monument, but I must confine myself to four.

Who would you include in such a Quaker memorial?

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*We are grateful, oh God, for these outstanding individuals and for the lives they led. And we are grateful for the lives of many persons who were less conspicuous. Help us in our own ways to emulate them. Amen.*

Mount Rushmore, South Dakota

## **That Many-Faceted Man—William Penn**

Yes, there he was, still standing atop City Hall in the center of Philadelphia, looking over his “greene country town” as he referred to the City of Brotherly Love.

I thought about him again as I neared the center of the city and marvelled at how much he had meant, and means, to that city, that state, the United States, the world—and the Religious Society of Friends.

Of course he had his faults, his shortcomings, his failures. He was not able to pass on to his children his abilities and beliefs, and one son in particular caused him untold pain and suffering. He was probably too trustful of his subordinates, and that nearly cost him the loss of the colony of Pennsylvania.

But he was certainly a great man. And a part of his greatness lay in the fact that he was interested in so many aspects of life, contributing to all of them in a unique way. He was famous as a real estate promoter, an ecologist, a city planner, a champion of civil liberties and minorities, a prison reformer and opponent of capital punishment, a pioneer in education and in just treatment of the Indians, a voluminous and sometimes splendid writer, and an internationalist far ahead of his times—with his proposal for a Parliament of Europe.

And he was a religious leader as well—producing, for example, his *Fruits of Solitude* and his *No Cross, No Crown*, as well as that moving tribute to George Fox in his Introduction to Fox’s *Journal*.

What an amazing man he was!

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*We are thankful for the life of this many-talented servant of God. Help us in our smaller ways to carry on some of the work in which he excelled. Amen.*

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



## Faith Of Our Fathers, Living Still

Today I made my annual pilgrimage to the Riverside Church in Manhattan, a visit I have made many times since worshipping there as a student at Columbia University, when Harry Emerson Fosdick was the minister and probably the most powerful preacher in the U.S.A. at that time.

The beauty of that building and especially of the sanctuary is magnificent and moving. And the music is superb.

Early in the service we sang that classic hymn—Faith of Our Fathers. Soon I was lost in meditation, contemplation, and prayer, missing much of the skillfully-planned service as I held my own Quaker Meeting, pondering the words of that hymn, thinking especially about the Quaker groups which are being tested today in several parts of our planet.

There are the Friends in Uganda whose lives were uprooted by the heavy hand of Idi Amin and whose worship has been publicly banned.

There are the Friends in what was once Palestine who are trying to live lives of reconciliation in a region beset by prejudice and violence.

There is that tiny group of Friends in Seoul and South Korea, whose leader—Ham Sok Han—has been imprisoned repeatedly for speaking out for civil rights and religious freedom.

And there are Friends in Southern Africa—black and white—who do not lead easy lives because of the separatist views of the government—which they oppose.

I know that that hymn is not just one for the past, but for the present—and possibly the future, and I prayed:

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*We are thankful, oh God, for the courage and steadfastness of these Friends and of others whose lives are testimony to the fact that the faith of our fathers is living still—in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword. Amen.*

Riverside Church, New York City

## Ministry by Mail

For many years I have followed with interest the hobby of a neighbor of mine who writes short, crisp letters to various newspapers on current affairs—letters which are frequently published. Her work has made me aware of something quite different, but using letter writing as a method. That is the ministry by mail.

Such a ministry is usually to persons at a distance. But it can also be to persons close by.

Usually such messages will be short, sometimes on a greeting card or even a postcard. But what a wealth of messages such correspondence can carry.

There are the messages to those who are ill.

There are the messages to the home-bound, whether ill or not, and to the lonely.

There are the messages of congratulations—to high school or college graduates, to the newly-married, to those finding new jobs, or those honored in other ways.

There are the messages to those for whom we care but to whom we find it difficult to convey our thoughts in spoken words.

There are the messages to those we miss at Meeting and/or at other occasions.

And there are the messages of concern, written with great care, expressing the hope that they will find the right way out of a difficult situation.

Sometimes the addition of a Christmas or Easter stamp or the seal of some organization can bring an added message.

Is this a ministry in which you are engaged now? Could it be extended? Is it a ministry in which you have never engaged and could now start?

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*Help us, our Heavenly Father, to consider the possibilities in the many kinds of ministry by mail and to use them to express our love and concern for others. Amen.*

Brooklyn, New York

## Demonstrating—With Others—For Peace

It was a spectacular sight—that crowd today (June 12, 1982) in Central Park. As far as one could see there were people protesting against nuclear arms and war and pleading for a nuclear freeze and peace. There were babies on their parents' backs or in strollers. There were children and young people. There were adults of all sizes, shapes, and ages including several "seasoned" or "senior" citizens. Many carried home-made signs: War Is Insane and Sick, No More War, Children's Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

Some said there were 700,000 people there; others estimated an even larger crowd. But everyone agreed that it was the largest demonstration that had ever taken place in the park.

They came from all parts of the U.S.A. and from many places abroad.

So often we feel helpless as individuals in making our voices heard, our opinions public. But here, in a mass protest, we were heard and seen. Television projected our protests around the world. Newspapers, too, carried our pleas for peace to the far corners of our planet. By joining with others we made a significant impact, at least in alerting political figures to our intense desire that the madness of an arms race be stopped or at least curbed.

During the afternoon I hummed more than once the song made famous by Pete Seeger:

One man's hands can't break a prison down.  
Two men's hands can't break a prison down.  
But if two and two and fifty make a million  
We'll see that day come round.  
We'll see that day come round.

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*We are grateful, oh God, for the labor of those who really care. Help us to pursue our crusade for peace, despite frustrations. Help us to realize that if there is to be peace, it must begin in us. Amen.*

Central Park, New York City (1982)

## They Will Overcome

As a boy I recall seeing tiny pictures which Francis Jenkins, a Friend from Richmond, Indiana, working in Washington, had made. They were his early attempts to develop television. But I could not comprehend then what he was doing. I did understand, however, the banner in his laboratory, which Dad described to me. It read: "They said it couldn't be done. But Jenkins, poor fool, went ahead and did it."

Isn't that true of so many movements in history?

For centuries human sacrifice was commonly accepted. But Abraham had a vision from on high of a better way of honoring God. And human sacrifice was eventually eliminated.

For centuries duelling was a commonly accepted practice. Even our good Friend, William Penn, took part in a duel in Paris before he became a Quaker. But eventually duelling was abolished.

For centuries human slavery was accepted as an institution. But then people began protesting against it, and after many decades it was eventually outlawed.

For centuries lynching was fairly common in the U.S.A. I even recall such incidents when I was in college. But slowly it has disappeared in our nation.

For centuries the rights of women were ignored—and many still are. But there has been a great deal of progress in this regard, especially in recent years in the U.S.A. and in several other countries.

It is easy to become disheartened, discouraged, disillusioned. It is easy to expect immediate results from our efforts.

Change does not come easily or quickly. Perhaps "we" shall not overcome . . . but someday—"they" will.

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*We are thankful, oh God, for those whose faith and steadfastness have brought about changes. Keep us from discouragement, we pray in His name. Amen.*

Washington, D.C.

## Here am I, Lord; Use Me

One of the favorite passages in the Bible for many people is found in Isaiah 6:8 when he has a vision and receives a commission:

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

That is a glorious passage of dedication and one should not downplay it. There are times and people to whom such a call comes to travel to some distant place and preach the Gospel or render some special service. Their call and their commission is often clear and commendable and they merit our encouragement and support.

But I have long wished that there were a similar passage in the Bible which read, "Here am I; use me." It is certainly in the spirit of the Old and the New Testament and there may be such a passage, but I do not know of it.

Sometimes it even takes more courage to stay at home than to go somewhere abroad. Fridtjof Nansen, the great Norwegian explorer and internationalist, recognized that when he dedicated his account of *The Norwegian North Polar Expedition, 1898-1906* "To her (his wife) who christened the ship and had the courage to remain behind."

My parents had such courage when they were invited by Friends to go to Ram Allah in Palestine, to work. It would have been the capstone of their useful lives. But they felt called to stay behind to care for their elderly parents in Indiana.

At home, as well as abroad, there is work for all of us to carry out with loving concern and dedication.

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*Lord, may we hear Thy call—whether it is to be sent somewhere or to stay at home. Wherever we are, may we be sensitive to Thy still, small Voice. Amen.*

New London, Indiana