

# Howard Brinton *speaks*

The death of Howard Brinton in 1973, at the age of 89, marked the passing from this life of one of Quakerism's greatest scholars, historians, interpreters, and practitioners.

Born into a Quaker family on a farm in Chester County, Pennsylvania, he attended the Friends School in West Chester and then Haverford College. He received his Ph.D. from the University of California in physics and philosophy.

Following that event, he taught mathematics at Guilford College, physics at Earlham College, and religion at Mills College. In 1936 he and his wife, Anna Cox Brinton, moved to Pendle Hill, the Quaker graduate center for study and contemplation, he as Director of Studies and she as Director of Administration, positions in which they complemented each other. In the 1950's they retired as co-directors, but continued living at Pendle Hill and participating in its activities. After Anna Brinton's death, he married Yuki Takahashi, a long-time friend of the family and formerly his able and devoted secretary.

Howard Brinton was known to many people as a beloved teacher and wise counsellor; he was known to many more as a writer of Quaker history, as an interpreter of Quaker thought, and as a lecturer on a wide range of subjects, including interpretations of Asian religions. His most widely known book was *Friends for 300 Years*. Among his other volumes were *Quaker Education, Creative Worship and Other Essays*, *Quaker Journals*, and *The Religious Philosophy of Quakerism*. He was even better known for his Pendle Hill pamphlets, such as *A Guide to Quaker Practice*, *The Nature of Quakerism*, and *Light and Life in the Fourth Gospel*.

A glimpse into his thinking is provided in the passages which follow as he speaks:

## ON THE NATURE OF QUAKERISM . . .

"The primary doctrine of the Society of Friends declares that the Presence of God is felt at the apex of the human soul and that man can therefore know and heed God directly, without any intermediary in the form of church, priest, sacrament, or sacred book. God is for man both immanent and transcendent; immanent because He is not mechanically operating on man from without but sharing in his life; transcendent, for the Divine Life extends infinitely beyond and above all human life."

"This doctrine is neither trinitarian nor unitarian but to some extent both, being based on the nature of personality both human and divine."

". . . Primitive Quakerism, like primitive Christianity, was a synthesis of mystical and evangelical elements in which each modified the other. For primitive Quakerism the historic Christ and the Inward Christ were one, the historical Christ having been the incarnation and complete revelation of the Inward Christ."

"The best type of religion is one in which the mystical, evangelical, rational and social are so related that each exercises a restraint on the others. Too exclusive an emphasis on mysticism results in a religion that is individualistic, subjective and vague; too dominant an evangelicalism results in a religion which is authoritarian, creedal and external; too great an emphasis on rationalism results in a cold, intellectual religion which appeals only to a few; too engrossing a devotion to the social gospel results in a religion which, in improving the outer environment, ignores defects in the inner life which cause the outer disorder. In Quakerism the optimum is not equality in rank of the four elements. The mystical is basic."

## ON THE QUAKER MEETING FOR WORSHIP . . .

"In the meeting for worship there is no pre-arranged program. Worshippers wait in silence, endeavoring to make themselves as open as possible to the inflowings of the Divine Life and as sensitive as possible to the whisperings of the still, small voice. They cultivate not only awareness of God, but also awareness of their fellow men. The hard shell of self-centeredness is dissolved and life flows inward and outward, both Godward and manward. Lonely separateness is lost in a greater life which is both personal and more than personal."

"Workers in a laboratory are not always separate searchers. One may aid another, especially if all are working on a common project. So it is in a Quaker meeting; individual seekers are not searching independently of one another. Their search is a group search in which those who are further advanced help those who have not gone so far."

"The most satisfactory ministry in the Quaker meeting of today arises out of a flash of insight, felt in the silence and delivered with brevity and a deep sense of concern."

"The highest vocal exercise in a meeting for worship is spoken prayer . . . nothing so effectively lays a covering over the meeting as the humble utterance of sincere prayer. Many are grateful for words which they themselves feel unable to utter."

"The attender at a Friends meeting must accustom himself to hearing much that he feels is unprofitable, at least to himself. His forbearance in respect to speakers who are struggling, perhaps blindly, toward the Light and missing the way, is in itself a valuable exercise."

## ON THE QUAKER MEETING FOR BUSINESS . . .

"Among Friends the meeting for the transaction of church business is as distinctly a religious exercise as is the meeting for worship."

"... the meeting for worship concerns *being*; while the meeting for business concerns *doing*. What is implicit in worship becomes explicit in action."

"In the meeting for business the Society of Friends makes its decisions regarding its own affairs and its work in the world around it. The only official is a clerk whose duty is to record the decisions of the meeting. There is no voting. Matters before the meeting are discussed in a spirit of submission to the Divine ordering until unity is reached."

"At its best the Quaker method does not result in a compromise. A compromise is not likely to satisfy anyone completely. The objective of the Quaker method is to discover Truth which will satisfy everyone more fully than did any position previously held."

"The principle of corporate guidance, according to which the Spirit can inspire the group as a whole, is central."

"The search for truth and unity is sometimes a long and difficult one, requiring much love and tolerance, but the goal when achieved is worth the patient effort."

"The Quaker method is likely to be successful in proportion as the members are acquainted with one another; better still, if real affection exists among them."

"As in all life, the whole is more than the sum of its parts."

## ON THE LOCAL MEETING AND "COMMUNITY" . . .

"The Society of Friends has never put forth a blueprint of the structure of an ideal society, having the same reluctance in this respect as in putting forth a religious creed. Nevertheless the meeting itself should aim, however short it may come of attaining its ideal, at a pattern of human relations between its own members which could be considered as ideal for society as a whole."

"In the meeting for worship, in the meeting for business, in the study group, and in social gatherings, Friends should endeavor to treat one another according to the way of love as developed in the teachings of the New Testament and in the traditions of their religious society. To the extent to which they succeed in so doing, they will make an actual beginning of the kingdom of heaven on earth."

"The organization of the Society of Friends is admirably suited to this purpose."

"To give primacy to the inner spiritual condition of the individual or the meeting and second place to action directed toward the world may seem to be a selfish or self-centered procedure. But the history of the Society of Friends shows that as a result of seeking the divine leading and through corporate decision carrying out that guidance in action, Friends have been pioneers in a variety of social causes."

"From another point of view the meeting becomes both a laboratory and a training ground for a better social order. All the social doctrines of Friends are first practiced within the meeting. . . . Those who have learned these lessons in such a seed-bed can there become strong enough and resourceful enough to continue similar practices in the world outside."

## ON SOME BASIC TESTIMONIES OF FRIENDS . . .

"At the price of over-simplification . . . let us outline the Quaker social doctrines under four heads—community, harmony, equality, and simplicity."

"Community within the meeting becomes manifest as an attempt of the members to share with one another spiritually, intellectually, socially, and economically. Outside the meeting it is manifest in attempts to increase the harmonious interdependence of men everywhere, in order to reduce self-centeredness and conflict."

"Harmony is used here instead of pacifism, the latter word having come to mean, for many persons, simply an unwillingness to take part in war. . . . We need some such word as integrality to designate the function which any part exerts in an integrated whole. This function is such that no part of the social organism imposes violence on any other part, but all work together in harmony. Those who hold the peace testimony seek to reconcile all individuals to one another so that a society will exist in which co-operation supplants conflict. We can . . . find no better term for this effort than the Biblical phrase 'the ministry of reconciliation'."

"Equality, expressed as a Quaker social testimony, means that all men have equal worth in the sight of God and that their personalities must be held equally inviolate. . . . It means that distinctions arising from sex, race, economic status, nationality, and education are unimportant in comparison with the fact that all men are temples of the Holy Ghost, and equally worthy of reverence."

"Simplicity . . . means in general sincerity, genuineness, avoidance of superfluity."

## ON QUAKER EDUCATION . . .

"The goal of Quaker education has been, as its history shows, perpetuation of the Quaker way of life."

"This view (of modern education) is accepted in the Quaker theory of education which holds that the school should be a community which prepares for a greater community outside itself by being like it. But there is an important difference . . . . The Quaker school prepared, not for the great secular world all around it . . . but for a special kind of life which was to some degree embodied in a special community—the Society of Friends. . . . Their schools did not prepare for the society that is, but for the society that ought to be."

"They (Quaker schools) have resulted in definite educational policies as follows: *A—Community*: Development of a sense of belonging to the Quaker community, a religious guarded education, and dedicated and concerned teachers; *B—Pacifism*: Non-violent discipline and methods, appeal to the inward sense of rightness; *C—Equality*: equal education of both sexes and equality in education of races and classes; *D—Simplicity*. Moderation in dress, speech and deportment, scholastic integrity, and emphasis upon practical subjects. . . ."

"The early boarding schools usually planned and sometimes managed to include real physical work on the part of students."

"The school must again become a training ground for a specialized community which lives according to a way of life different from that of the world around it, but serving as a goal or model which indicates the direction of advance. Such a school will probably not be of the conventional type of today."

## ON QUAKERISM, CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER RELIGIONS . . .

"When at their best, the great religions of the world have taught not only that the results of war are always evil, but also that war itself is an evil regardless of its results. Religion at its highest teaches that there is another way than war, which will secure results of another and better kind. Religion does not appeal to physical forces working upon man from without, but to spiritual forces working within him. It teaches that these spiritual forces are, in the long run, the only ones which can produce the right results. Man is a spiritual being. He can be changed only by spiritual forces. The Supreme Being does not work in the world as one physical force among other forces, but as an invisible power which produces understanding, cooperation and love. Real religion therefore always makes for peace."

"We are all branches of the same vine, to use a figure from the Christian New Testament. We are all radii of the same circle and however far we may be apart at the circumference, we are all one at the center. . . . Friendship, good will, and love—these are not just ideas but represent a real power which draws men together because it comes from the one Life which we all share."

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