

# Elfrida Vipont Foulds *speaks*

Elfrida Vipont Foulds (1902- ) is widely known in England and in several other countries as a vivid writer, a dedicated and dynamic speaker, an authentic and lively interpreter of Quakerism (especially of its early history in the Northwest Country), and as a beautiful example of lives worth living.

Born in Manchester, England, into a Quaker family, with two older brothers, she obtained much of her education at the Manchester High School for Girls and at The Mount School—a Quaker institution in York. She was married to R. Percy Foulds, a research technologist, and to them were born four daughters. Today Eldrida Foulds, a widow, has 13 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

She is the author of over 40 books and many pamphlets—biographies, anthologies, novels, accounts of Quakerism, and publications on other religious themes. Many of her volumes have been written for children, such as *Colin Writes to Friends House*, *Blow the Man Down*, *The Lark on the Wing* (winner of the prestigious Carnegie Medal), and *Weaver of Dreams*. Her writings for adults on Quakerism include *The Story of Quakerism*, *The Birthplace of Quakerism*, *George Fox and the Valiant Sixty*, and *A Faith to Live By*.

Her travels abroad have included Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, where she has spoken in schools, colleges, and libraries; over radio and television; and to a wide variety of Quaker groups, bringing to those presentations a vibrant voice, an arresting eloquence, and vivid details from first-hand experience, scholarly research, and a highly creative mind.

To us she speaks meaningfully:

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## ON GEORGE FOX'S SEARCH FOR TRUTH

"Always the search for Truth begins with a question. Sometimes it is inspired by curiosity, sometimes by passionate protest, sometimes by personal suffering or discontent, but always there is a question, and after it, no rest. Great scientific discoveries, great masterpieces of art, great schools of philosophy have sprung from such questions, and men's souls have been restless with longing for the pearl of great price, the inner peace beyond all questioning."

"He (Fox) turned away from ministers of religion, whose lives so often belied their profession. Instead, he sought out little groups from the Puritan sects, questioning their leaders and their more thoughtful members, but none seemed to understand the difficulties. He was rapidly losing confidence in everybody, himself included, and yet he would not give in. The guide and comforter he wanted must exist somewhere, and he would know no rest until he found him."

## AND HIS DISCOVERY...

"'Then, oh then—'! he wrote afterwards, 'when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do,... I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition," and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy.'"

"The long search was over. The restless soul had found itself. George Fox had at last discovered, beyond all possible doubt, the living witness of the Christian gospel. 'Christ it was who had enlightened me,' he declared, and in Christ his hope and his courage were renewed.... From that time onwards he knew, with an ever-present, joyful certainty, whence his help would come, and whence the help for all who sought for a living faith as he had done, would come."

## ON FOUNDING A LIVING FAITH...

"It was left to George Fox to rediscover the seed of God in the heart, the light of Christ within, and on that rediscovery to found a living faith. The realization of the evil in the world bore down upon him, and he saw 'the ocean of darkness and death' which men had brought upon the world by their wrongdoings; but he did not stay in the darkness. He saw 'the infinite ocean of light and love' which flowed over the ocean of darkness and death, and knew it for the 'infinite love of God' which can work in and through the lives of all His children. In this vivid, mystical experience of fellowship with God, the whole world seemed changed."

## ON EXPRESSING ONE'S FAITH IN EVERYDAY LIVING...

"The experience of ecstasy was not something divorced from the business of everyday life; it was something which could raise it to another plane, so that it was God's business and the necessary work of His kingdom. When, a little later, George Fox tried to formulate his call to service, he did not only describe his urge to direct people to the light of Christ and that spirit of Truth, so that they might know that God was still working in men's hearts and reavealing fresh truths to those who would be faithful to His guidance. He wrote of the many practical ways in which... he saw that God's kingdom could be furthered."

## ON CLAIMING OUR INHERITANCE...

"To be true to its founder, it (the Society of Friends) must reproduce not only his seeking, but his finding; not only his visions, but his way of life and downright honesty; not only his steadfastness in suffering, but his loyalty in loving; and, above all, his triumph in the face of death."

## ON SWARTHMOOR HALL AS THE HOME OF QUAKERISM...

"...it must be remembered that Swarthmoor Hall was the home of a loving, united family before it became the home of Quakerism...."

"The love of Thomas and Margaret Fell, the unity of the home they created, the strength of their family life, all were big enough to stand the strain. They took in the new movement, giving it strength and stability and a haven from the storms of the outside world, and were themselves enriched thereby. The tolerance of Judge Fell, who never threw his lot with Friends, was something miraculous in his own or any other age and Friends have not always been prompt to remember the part that tolerance played in shielding the flame which has never ... been put out."

## ON JOY IN EARLY QUAKERISM...

"The early years of the history of Quakerism have about them an exuberance which sometimes wells up into extravagance, and a freshness which three centuries have not been able to dim. The excess of exuberance Friends learned, by bitter experience, to curb; the freshness is still there to be recaptured."

## ON THE CONSPICUOUS AND THE INCONSPICUOUS...

"The men and women who left their footprints on the sands of Time—George Fox, Margaret Fell, Francis Howgill, Edward Burrough, Richard Hubberthorne and the rest—could not have done it alone. Behind them stood the ones who have left no memorial; who are perished as if they had never been; men and women who snatched a scanty living from little hill farms, who kept small village shops, who tended sheep, and who were prepared to face the loss of all, to jeopardize everything they held dear, for the sake of an ideal; for a liberty which they themselves might never live to enjoy; for a victory which, for anything they knew, might never be won."

## ON MISINTERPRETATIONS OF QUAKER HISTORY...

"For too many, Quaker history has consisted of George Fox and his leather breeches, the persecutions, and William Penn and the founding of Pennsylvania; then the lives of John Woolman and Elizabeth Fry—like two immortal steppingstones—and lastly, the modern Quaker relief work. An impression is created of 'live' periods and 'dead' periods, with the result that the former become romanticized, greatly to the detriment of their true worth and significance, and the latter become more lifeless than Ezekiel's valley of dry bones."

## ON THE SACRAMENTS...

"The word 'sacramental' has been defined as meaning 'the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace,' and according to Quaker belief, that 'outward and visible' sign is a life lived in absolute obedience to God, a revelation of His indwelling Spirit in the heart. This, of course, is an integral part of the Christian faith, the eternal truth behind all symbols and observances. But every section of the Christian Church has some special witness to uphold, and for over three hundred years the Society of Friends has testified to this sacramental conception of the whole of life."

## ON THE ADVICES, QUERIES, AND THE BOOKS OF DISCIPLINE...

"As the earlier generations passed from the scene, it became increasingly obvious that some kind of recognized Rule or 'Discipline' was needed for reference. On the other hand, it was clear, and has remained so, that no 'Discipline' can be regarded as final. The 'Advices' and 'Queries' in use today are not identical with those which were found helpful by eighteenth century Friends, but they are conceived in the same spirit; the same may be said of the modern Books of Discipline published by several Yearly Meetings."



## ON QUAKER STRENGTH, VISION AND POWER IN THE PAST...

"It is customary when describing the events of 1652 to start with the vision of Pendle Hill. A closer study of the words of George Fox's *Journal* suggests a different starting point: 'I was moved of the Lord.'"

"George Fox and Edward Burrough were endowed with physical strength above the average, but it was not physical strength alone that lay behind the living sacrifice. There was a sense of direction, a capacity for putting first things first...."

"The journey which starts with a 'moving of the Lord' in one sensitive human soul goes from the prophetic mount, striking its trail of fire amongst the seekers along the way...."

"That is the strength which cannot fail, the strength of the man or woman whose mind is stayed on God. And this inward strength gives to its possessor an outward calm which can be recognized and which seems to troubled and turbulent souls something infinitely desirable, like the shadow of a rock in a weary land. To live in the Kingdom of God is to know the peace of God which passeth all understanding, to possess the pearl of great price for which the merchants of the world would gladly sell all that they have, if they might only purchase it; but it is not a treasure lightly to be won. Those who possess it never fear the ocean of darkness and death which George Fox saw, and which we in turn have seen, because they never fail to see the ocean of light and love which will overflow it. They see the ocean of love and light, not because they are a prey to easy optimism, but because they themselves are part of that ocean of love and light and their strength is swallowed up in it, whether they live or die. They live as if the Kingdom of God had come, and they die strong in the still spirit that keeps them."

## ON QUAKER STRENGTH, VISION AND POWER TODAY . . .

"In the present time of international tension and danger, it is surely fitting for us to remember that the pioneers of Quakerism could not know for certain that victory would be theirs. Like the good farmers that so many of them were, they sowed their seeds without asking whether they themselves would reap the harvest."

"The spirit of the early days of Quakerism will not be fully renewed . . . until the full secret of that joy is rediscovered and expressed anew, and until we are indeed fully convinced that nothing, 'neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.'"

"To take up those challenges is not impossible. We may not be chosen to receive God's marching orders or to see the vision from afar, but we may well be the seekers, ready to be caught up in the net; from our homes, wherever they may be, the loving, uniting spirit of Swarthmoor may overflow into a hungry world; the sustaining friendship of the pioneers may warm our hearts; we too may be 'stiff as a tree and pure as a bell,' and break the hold of winter on a frozen world like the wild daffodils in the brambles; we too may know the strength which is bended after God, which puts the Lord's business first, which is founded on the still spirit that keeps us; ours may be the courage which can say, 'But if not, then will we lie down in the peace of our God and patiently suffer under you;' ours the faith which does not ask to see the harvest of its sowing; ours the joy that sings in the dark places of the earth because even they are filled with the glory of God. The challenges of 1652 are inescapable and they are with us now. 'Come from the four winds, O Breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live.'"

## ON FELLOWSHIP WITH OUR FRIENDS...

"It is possible to assure our friends that they are in our thoughts without meaning more than that we occasionally think of them with affection. But to hold our friends in our thoughts means more than that. It means a far more costly outgoing of the spirit, which can in very truth reach beyond human and physical limitations until we are indeed 'with' them. Such an exercise of friendship was possible amongst the early Friends. And such an exercise of friendship is an echo of the deeper exercise of the spirit which is prayer, which in its turn can reach beyond human and physical limitations until we may take knowledge of those who know the meaning of such prayer, that they have been with Jesus."

## ON QUAKER UNITY IN DIVERSITY...

"It is not only that the Friends' procedure is still adhered to for business meetings; it is something more subtle—a consciousness of a common spiritual heritage which survived all differences and divisions, and was expressed in later years in common service. Steadily, and not without growing pains, the Society of Friends has learned that it is possible to preserve unity in diversity."

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