Week 1 - 19th Century Quaker Women
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QUAKERISM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR QUAKER WOMEN: THE WOMEN ITINERANT MINISTERS OF YORK MEETING, 1780–1840

by SHEILA WRIGHT

IN York Monthly Meeting, women ministers were to become dominant by the end of the eighteenth century, having been outnumbered by men since the beginning of the century. The Meeting for Ministers and Elders appears to have degenerated between 1726 and 1768 under the stewardship of Nathaniel Bell and Daniel Peacock. At the same time, female influence in the Meeting suffered a hiatus, the Meeting ceasing to send female representatives to the Quarterly Meeting in about 1718. This situation continued until 1783, when women once again began to feature strongly in the Meeting of Ministers and Elders; they were appointed to the positions of elder and minister and resumed sending representatives to Quarterly Meetings.[1] From 1706 to 1775, York Meeting had 7 male ministers, of whom 4 were itinerant. There were 5 female ministers; 3 made more than one journey in the ministry. From 1775 to 1860 there were 11 male ministers, 2 being itinerant. There were 20 female ministers, of whom 11 made regular journeys in the ministry.

Quaker women's ministry had many similarities in style with that of its counterparts in Primitive Methodism and Wesleyan Methodism, but it also had some notable differences. To put the ministry of Quaker women into context, I want firstly to look briefly at some of these differences, and secondly to look specifically at York's women ministers and try to draw together some possible suggestions as to what might be the implications of such ministry for these Quaker women.

By the late eighteenth century Quaker women's ministry had little of its original verve and vigour. The ranter and prophecy element of the seventeenth-century ministry had given way to a more seemly and 'quiet' style of preaching.[2] The Quaker ladies, for ladies they were, undertaking

[1] Minutes of Meeting of Ministers and Elders 1709–1775, York Monthly Meeting, Borthwick Institute, York (hereafter B.I.), microfilm reel (hereafter MFR) 18.

[2] P. Mack, 'Women as prophets during the English Civil War', *Feminist Studies*, 8 (1982), pp. 19–47. Her comments on the idea that women are particularly receptive to God's word because of their natures must be as valid for late eighteenth-century Quaker women as it was for their seventeenth-century counterparts. But the expression of this receptivity is quite different, being more calmly and quietly expressed, and with the greater discipline required by a Society no longer welcoming prophetic preaching or what might be deemed the 'bad publicity' which might result from ecstatic female behaviour. Also for ideas of women's receptivity and spirituality, see A. Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England* (London, 1989).

work in the ministry in our period would no doubt have preferred to forget some of the earlier antics of their founding sisters. However, what did exist was of enormous importance both for the propagation and maintenance of Quakerism and for the important and official role it gave to women within the sect.

At the same time as Quaker women's ministry was expanding, the more working-class Primitive Methodists and the breakaway, West-Country-based, Bible Christian Connexion were also promoting the use of women as itinerant preachers. However, for Methodist women in general this was a period of decline. Though women preachers had been prominent in the early years of Wesleyan Methodism, by the 1820s the sect had become increasingly middle-class in its membership and subsequently had almost prohibited women's ministry. The effect was to marginalize the role of women in the sect, pushing them back into the more traditional female activities within their church.[3] In contrast, in spite of its growing middle-class bias, Quakerism made no attempt to diminish the role played by women. And in fact, in York, Quaker women's ministry was to reach a high point during this period.

Generally, women ministers in Wesleyanism and Primitive Methodism were as working-class as their audiences, who added their own verbal and vigorous participation to their meetings. These sects drew their ministers and supporters from the newly emergent working-class, particularly from labourers and poor cottagers in agricultural areas and the poor workers of the industrializing towns. Ann Carr of Leeds is just one example of the type of woman who was able to appeal to the labouring poor, dispossessed by industrial upheaval, and the failure of the Established Church to meet their needs.[4]

In contrast, Quaker women ministers by this period were increasingly drawn from the growing numbers of middle-class mechant families, and by the last two decades of the eighteenth century Quaker ministry would have held little appeal for an audience wanting spontaneous, participatory

[3] D. C. Dews, 'Ann Carr and the Female Revivalists of Leeds', in G. Malmgreen, ed., *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760–1930* (London, 1986), p. 71.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

preaching. Gone was the truly spontaneous, street-corner preaching of Ann Mercy Bell, one of York's early female preachers, who could collect large, emotional crowds to hear her in London in 1753. In its place were organized, often pre-arranged, indoor meetings, where quietness was desirable, if not always obtainable.[5] Quaker meetings were of two distinct types. Firstly, those held in their own meeting-houses for the consumption of their own members and, sometimes, a few interested followers who were non-members, and conducted in the usual Quaker silent manner, and, secondly, those held in public places for a public audience.

In theory, the right to minister was open to all women within their own meeting regardless of social position, but in fact, in York, all the women who were appointed ministers within this period were drawn from the leading families of the Meeting. Of the twenty women ministers in York Meeting between 1700 and 1860, all were connected to leading families within the Meeting. William Tuke was undoubtedly the most 'weighty' member of the Meeting in 1780, and both his wife, Esther, and his two daughters, Ann and Sarah, became prominent and active itinerant ministers. Later, in the 1840s, Sarah Backhouse, daughter of James Backhouse, and the wives and daughters of other leading members, Celia Wilcox, Isabel Richardson, Sarah Baker, and Esther Smith, all undertook ministerial journeys, which included visits to Dublin, Cambridge, Darlington, Lincolnshire, and America.[6]

Public Quaker meetings were held by itinerant ministers in all kinds of venues from town halls to barns, even sometimes in Methodist rooms and meeting-houses, indicating a degree of co-operation between the two sects. They often attracted large audiences drawn from all classes. Those attending the meetings ranged from tin-miners in Cornwall to 'some of the higher class' in Windsor.[7] We get some idea of what could be the

[5] Ann Mercy Bell's style of preaching was to hold impromptu meetings on street corners, often up to six or more a day. Preaching in Leadenhall Market her style was described: 'Entering in at the lower end of the poulterers Market, she went thro' calling for repentance as she passed, with uncommon force and solemnity; and coming to a convenient place in the Leather Market, after the people, who poured in at every avenue, were gathered round her, she had a large and favourable opportunity with them': Journal and Correspondence of Ann Mercy Bell, 1745–1786. York Monthly Meeting: B.I., MFR 13, p. 4.

[6] York Monthly Meeting. Meeting of Ministers and Elders Minute Book, 2, 1776–1856: B.I., MFR 18. Since all of the women ministers in York Meeting between 1780 and 1840 were drawn from the middle classes, it was they who could afford the servants, nursemaids, etc. to look after their children in their absence, and this in itself discriminated against women in less affluent circumstances taking up the work of a travelling minister.

[7] *Memoirs of Elizabeth Dudley*, ed., C. Tylor (London, 1861), p. 33. Her mother, Mary Dudley, was a notable minister in Clonmel Monthly Meeting, southern Ireland, having been

pattern of these meetings from a description of a meeting held by Mary and Elizabeth Dudley in Windsor town hall in December 1812, at which there were 1,000 people and 'several hundreds turned away'.[8] Firstly, the beliefs of the Society of Friends were stated, and then Mary Dudley spoke on 'the eternal, unceasing, unchanging love of God. Can there, she said . . . be a heart so hard, so insensible as not to love such a Saviour? . . . She then addressed the audience with much affection calling them her dear brethren and sisters . . .'.[9] Again, in 1817, the Dudleys, with Pricilla Gurney and Elizabeth Fry, were preaching at the Argyle Rooms, Westminster, to those 'chiefly of the description wished for, mostly titled, and some very high personages'.[10] However, not all meetings were held in such auspicious circumstances or with such august audiences, and more often they were in barns or a room at the local inn, to which the people of the neighbourhood would be invited. Ann Alexander held a meeting in a barn in Daventry on which she commented that it was

> greatly disturbed by the number being more than could be accommodated in a barn without almost any seats except a cart in the middle which only contained our two selves who were the principal and no doubt striking objects of not less I should think than 300 spectators.[11]

Under whatever circumstances the meetings were held, audiences were expected to maintain a degree of decorum and, in fact, if possible, silence. Mary Alexander, preaching in Douglas, Isle of Man, in 1805 commented that the meeting was large and to begin with noisy, suspecting that this was partly caused by the novelty of a woman preacher, but that 'in a short time they became much quieter and more attentive . . .'.[12]

In many respects, the style of these meetings was not exclusive to Quakerism. George Eliot's well-known description of the meeting held by Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede*, and the record of a meeting held by the

Convinced into Quakerism in 1773. Previously she had been a friend of John Wesley and a Methodist. Ann Alexander preached to tin-miners at Pyrden, Cornwall, in October 1794. Letter dated 22 Oct. 1794, Ann Alexander to Henry Tuke: B.I., Tuke papers, Box 17.

[8] *Memoirs of Elizabeth Dudley*, p. 33.

[9] *Ibid.* This report was by a member of the audience not a Friend.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

[11] Letter from Ann Alexander to Henry Tuke, 31 July 1797: B.I., Tuke Papers, Box 17.

[12] *Some Account of the Life and Religious Experience of Mary Alexander late of Needham Market* (York, 1811), p. 143.

primitive Methodist preacher Ann Brownsword show a distinct similarity. In her journal Ann wrote that she preached in February 1820, in Ramsor: 'At two I preached at Botley Hill, out of doors, to about five hundred people'.[13] The style adopted by women preachers of the Bible Christian Connexion was also similar. Jane Bear Bird, who travelled throughout the south-west of England, describes her work on 8 July 1823:

> Last Sunday I was at Crediton. Before Meeting, I felt much tried: it appeared to me I had told the people all I knew. I went into the Meeting House with fear and trembling and attempted to speak from Jer. IX.1, 2. I felt much for the souls of the people and could scarcely speak for weeping and many wept with me.[14]

The quietness required at Quaker public meetings was hoped for by the itinerant preachers of these other sects, but usually not obtained. They clearly also had a similar inspirational nature. However, it is probable that there was more interjection, general excitement, and conversional vigour about Primitive Methodist preaching than would be a feature of a Quaker public meeting. Quakers were not actively seeking converts, but they were seeking approval and understanding of their beliefs. Whilst much of the style of Methodist, Primitive Methodist, and Bible Christian preaching was taken from Quakerism, it lacked the seemliness and respectability of women Friends' ministry. At the same time, Quakers had adapted their own style to suit the nature of public meetings; the long silences, normally a feature of Quaker meetings, were dropped and Gospel preaching adopted to maintain the attention of a non-Quaker audience.

Quaker women went through an equally fierce personal 'conversion experience' as did their counterparts in Wesleyanism and Primitive Methodism.[15] Conversion brought these godly women into closer contact with God, giving them equality and validity as ministers. It also gave them authority and, therefore, power. They acquired authority over themselves, allowing them to follow what they interpreted as God's will; this ability to interpret God's Word became an internal defence against the ungodly with whom they had to mix, and against whom they had to

[13] W. Swift, 'The women itinerant preachers of early Methodism', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 29 (1953), pp. 76–83. G. Eliot, *Adam Bede* (repr. Harmondsworth, 1980), pp. 66–76.

[14] *Bible Christian Magazine*, 2, 1823–4, p. 169.

[15] *Some Account of the Life and Religious Labours of Sarah Grubb* (London, 1796), pp. 2–4; *Life and Religious Experience of Mary Alexander*, p. 24; *Memoir of the Life of Elizabeth Fry with extracts from her journal and letters edited by two of her daughters* (London, 1847), 1, pp. 39, 89.

defend their actions. Through conversion they set themselves apart and above the 'normal' and acquired a natural authority over the unconverted, many of whom, naturally, were men. By using explicit signals of conversion these women could put themselves not only in a position of unrivalled authority over their own persona, but also that of the men and women they ministered to. Quaker women were not only drawn into the Ministry through the experience of conversion. There was an element in their 'calling' which was distinctly different from that experienced by women of these other sects. Quaker womens' ministry was a tradition which was often passed on from mother to daughter; daughters might almost be described as being 'apprenticed' to their mothers; often they undertook their first journeys together. Both Ann and Sarah Tuke and Elizabeth Dudley were 'trained' by their mothers.

York Meeting had three particularly active itinerant ministers between 1780 and 1840. Esther Tuke married William Tuke in 1765, when she was thirty-eight, and had two surviving children. Besides establishing a girls' school in the City and helping her husband with his numerous philanthropic activities, she also managed to find time to make several journeys in the ministry. In 1775 she made a journey to Tadcaster, where she held a public meeting in the Methodists' rooms, 'which was attended by many of the towns people', and then went on to Bradford.[16] Three years later, in 1778, she was ministering in Newcastle, Durham, and Shields, holding meetings in each town.[17] However, Esther's travels were minor compared with those of her stepdaughter, Sarah Tuke Grubb.

Sarah Tuke was born in 1756, second child of William and Elizabeth Tuke. In 1782 she married Robert Grubb of Clonmel, in southern Ireland, who was resident in York at the time of their marriage. By the time of her marriage she had already begun to make a name for herself as one of the Society's most successful women preachers; a reputation which was to grow throughout her lifetime. It was perhaps fortunate for the Society that she failed to have any children, otherwise her ministerial activities might have been curtailed.

For Sarah Tuke Grubb, and for other Quaker women ministers, marriage did not imply an end to ministering; the two were not mutually exclusive, and they could be combined with the practicalities of child-bearing and rearing. We get an idea of how Quaker women viewed

[16] Letter from Sarah Tuke Grubb to Tabbitha Hoyland 12 April 1774: B.I., Tuke Papers Box 14.

[17] York Monthly Meeting Certificates of Friends travelling in the Ministry: B.I., MFR 19, List of Members, 1790–1841.

marriage from Sarah Tuke Grubb, who, upon her marriage in 1782, wrote that marriage was 'a spiritual pilgrimage'; however, it was a 'pilgrimage' which was not to stop her work as a minister.[18] Two weeks after her wedding she left for a religious visit to Friends in Scotland, lasting over three months.

She first 'stood up' in the ministry in York Meeting some time in 1778, and, as she described it to her cousin Tabbitha Hoyland, it appears to have been a profound and even frightening experience:

> After such a conflict as I have cause ever to remember I ventured onto my knees and in a manner I believe scarcely intelligible poured out a few petitions that appeared and now I feel in such a state of humiliation and fear as I never before experienced and my strength, both natural and spiritual, so low that without making stability my labour to attain, the [*sic*] are ready to come upon me again.[19]

In April 1780 she was given her first certificate to travel in the ministry to the Meetings of Cumberland and Westmorland with her stepmother, Esther Tuke, and later in the same year she visited the meetings and families in Cheshire with her cousin Tabbitha.

Throughout her life Sarah Tuke Grubb pursued her work as a minister, visiting Friends throughout England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland. In 1788 she applied to the Yearly Meeting of Ministers and Elders in London for a certificate to accompany George Dillwyn (from New Jersey), his wife, and Mary Dudley of Clonmel Monthly Meeting, to visit France, Holland, and Germany. They held public meetings in Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Leyden, and Haarlem. She records that the Meeting at Amsterdam is very small and that the Friends here are 'despised amongst the worldly minded'.[20] They travelled on through Holland and into Germany and Switzerland, covering 2,500 miles across the Continent in four months. She set out on her last European journey in June 1790, returning in October. However, her health had suffered, and she died in December of the same year, aged thirty-four.

Sarah's stepsister, Ann Tuke, was another of the leading ministers of York Meeting. Ann was Esther and William Tuke's eldest daughter. In 1796, aged twenty-nine, she married William Alexander of Needham Market, in Suffolk, by whom she had two children, one of whom was to

[18] *Life and Religious Labours of Sarah Grubb*, p. 36.
[19] Sarah Tuke Grubb to Tabbitha Hoyland, 1788. B.I., Tuke Papers, Box 14.
[20] *Life and Religious Labours of Sarah Grubb*, p. 149.

die aged nine. William's sister, Mary Alexander, was also a celebrated minister.

Ann started travelling in the ministry with her mother in 1789. In August 1793 she went to southern Ireland for seven months, and in 1794 visited families and Meetings in London and Croydon, and went on to Hampshire, Wiltshire, Devon, Cornwall, and Bristol. Throughout the next years she was almost continually on the move, often joining up with her future sister-in-law, Mary Alexander. Her two sons were born in 1799 and 1801, but these babies do not appear to have greatly curtailed her activities, for as soon as she had weaned them, and before the children were a year old, she was once again travelling in the ministry, leaving them to the care of her husband and their nurse. In 1803 when her youngest child was two and the eldest four, she went to America, travelling as far south as South Carolina, and not returning until July 1805.[21] In 1808 the Alexanders moved back to York, and between 1818 and 1841 she was given certificates to travel on fifteen separate occasions, to places as far flung as Edinburgh and Suffolk, to Europe, including Pyrmont, in Germany, and to Dublin.[22]

For these Tuke women, as for other ministers in other sects, these journeys were undertaken under the guidance of divine inspiration. Sarah Tuke Grubb wrote in her journal: 'There is still a secret belief that the growth and cultivation of my views respecting a northern journey were by that hand from which I have apprehended my most important engagements have proceeded'.[23] The inspirational nature of their work 'cloaked' them with a respectability which allowed them to undertake the public exposure necessary to stand up in front of large, mixed-sex crowds of both Friends and non-Friends and, generally, not to meet with disapproval. As with women preachers in Primitive Methodism, who faced a barrage of eggs and stones, there were undoubtedly occasions when the women were not protected, and there was obvious prejudice against them.[24]

It is clear from comments in Sarah Tuke's journal that the reception she and her friends had received in Germany and Switzerland had not always been favourable, and women preachers were not always well received in these places: 'There was also in this place [Basle] and in most others where we stopped, a prejudice against women's preaching, which increased the

[21] Ann Tuke Alexander to Henry Tuke, various letters. B.I., Tuke Papers, Box 17.
[22] York Monthly Meeting Certificates of Friends travelling in the Ministry, B.I., MFR 19: List of members 1, 1790–1841.
[23] *Life and Religious Labours of Sarah Grubb*, p. 42.
[24] Swift, 'The Women Itinerant Preachers of Early Methodism', p. 80.

difficulty our minds often felt in obtaining relief amongst a people of a strange language'.[25] Henry Tuke, commenting on a visit to Oban, in Scotland, in 1797, wrote that there was prejudice against women preachers there:

> There is such a strong prepossession in the minds of the people in this country against women's preaching it makes it additionally difficult to my dear companions, who I apprehend are the first women Friends that have travelled in these parts in this line and in most places it seems necessary to obviate this difficulty.[26]

There were only a small number of Scottish Friends, so it is likely that people in remote areas had never encountered women's preaching before.[27] Whilst both these examples are from outside England, women preachers of any sect were a novelty and as such faced the possibility of persecution.

In fact, Quakers themselves considered that women's preaching was acceptable only so long as it was under 'divine inspiration'. Elizabeth Fry felt that she could speak only when 'much covered with love and power', and J. J. Gurney could approve of women speaking in public only when 'under the immediate influences of the Holy Spirit. Then and then only, all is safe'.[28] This was not inconsistent with the attitude of Wesley, who was very sceptical about the propriety of women's preaching, and in a letter to Sarah Crosby in 1761 he accepted it so long as it was done 'calmly and steadily'.[29] Unlike female preaching in Methodism, Quaker women's preaching was not to suffer a decline in the nineteenth century, nor did it come into conflict with the growing middle-classness of its membership.

For Quaker women marriage and ministering could be and were combined, and neither marriage nor child-rearing were considered obstacles to women carrying on their work.[30] It would appear that the

[25] *Life and Religious Labours of Sarah Grubb*, p. 159.
[26] Henry Tuke to William Tuke 8 August 1797: B.I., Tuke Papers Box 4.
[27] *Life and Religious Labours of Sarah Grubb*, p. 46. Also G. B. Burnett, *The Story of Quakerism in Scotland, 1650–1850* (London, 1952). He states that Quakerism in Scotland by the mid-eighteenth century was in such a state of decline that it almost died out. Scottish Friends sent no representative to London Yearly Meeting for some years. Efforts to revive the Society in the 1790s, which included this journey by Henry Tuke and George Millar in 1797, failed. Not until 1811, when a further effort was made, did the Society in Scotland see the beginning of a revival.
[28] L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle-Class, 1780–1850* (London, 1987), p. 138.
[29] Dews, 'Ann Carr', p. 68.
[30] See Dews, 'Ann Carr', for some ideas as to why female preaching and the growing

Society saw no clash of interests between the public and private spheres of women. However, there are some contradictions within Quakerism and its attitude to women. On the one hand, by allowing women to become ministers and to take on a public role, Quakerism gave women value by giving them an essential role within their Meeting and the Society, placing them alongside their fellow, male ministers and, in particular, emphasizing the role that women played in the propagation and protection of Quakerism. Women were at the centre of the household and kept men, who inevitably had to come into contact with the world, on the straight and narrow path, and by example helped them maintain their Quakerly ways. It was this role, as the protectors and propagators of Quakerism, which allowed women to be serious without accusations of being unfeminine. Quaker women, and not only ministers, were expected to be serious; their education and socialization did not include frivolous or time-wasting pleasures. Their time and efforts were to be channelled into worthwhile and productive activities. Frivolity and idleness was not an expectation that Quaker men held of their women. This was a more radical idea than it might appear, for by discarding frivolity as a female attribute, Quaker men were not reducing their women to adopting 'learned' depreciating attitudes or attributes. Because these women were encouraged in their pursuit of serious lines of religious, as well as secular, investigation and action, it is possible to suggest that Quaker women were being allowed to hold higher expectations of themselves, and consequently Quaker men held higher expectations of their women. But, on the other hand, by elevating their women to work in the 'public sphere' and enhancing their value, Quakers were not advocating any radical realignment of the traditional role or position of women. Whilst they undoubtedly held beliefs that embodied a greater degree of equality than was present in other male/female relationships of the period, there were definite areas beyond which their interpretation of their justification for holding women to be equal completely disappeared. Their organizational structure was strongly patriarchal; the Men's Meeting held all the real power; all decisions made in the Women's Meeting had to be sanctioned by the Men's, and the Women's Meeting had no control over the finances

middle-classness of Wesleyanism became incompatible, also D. M. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton, 1985), pp. 51–72, and O. Anderson, 'Women preachers in mid-Victorian Britain: some reflections on feminism, popular religion and social change', *HJ*, 12 (1969), pp. 467–84.

of the Meeting, its property, and so on. Theirs was also the traditional role of visiting the sick and caring for the poor. Sarah Tuke recorded her fear at the idea of going into the Men's Meeting to speak, and felt she needed 'divine inspiration' to do so, and Elizabeth Fry spoke vividly of the prospect of going into the Men's Meeting as an experience that was 'so awful, nay, almost dreadful'. To her and other women it is obvious that the Men's Meeting was the source of a power and separateness which could only be met with great feelings of trepidation.[31]

What did make Quaker women different was that within this patriarchal organization they were given a role which gave them the dignity of work and allowed them to function with the approbation and encouragement of their fellow members in a sphere far removed from the domestic. Not only were these women undertaking long and tiring journeys, they were also leaving home, husbands, and children to the care of relatives and servants with the approval and sanction of both husbands, fathers, and the elders and ministers of their Meeting. If there was any equality to be achieved by Quaker women it was in their role as preachers, which allowed them to transcend the 'normal' patterns of behaviour deemed appropriate for women. This ability to break through the restrictions of a patriarchal society was achieved through their experience of conversion. Conversion gave women a spiritual equality and authority, which was drawn from a shared experience; an experience not limited to men, but equally shared by women, and it alone was an equalizing factor.

Whilst their sisters in Primitive Methodism and the Bible Christian Connexion were also undertaking similar ministry work, marriage for most of them meant that they had to give up preaching.[32] In neither of these sects were women given an official role within the organizational structure of their sect. Quaker women were: their influence extended beyond that of being a preacher to being, in an albeit limited way, disciplinarians, organizers, overseers of morals, charity workers, and so on.

At the same time as Methodist women were being deprived of their preaching role within their sect, Quaker women were maintaining and

[31] *Life and Religious Labours of Sarah Grubb*, p. 34; also S. Corder, *Life of Elizabeth Fry. Compiled in her Journal, as edited by her daughters & various other sources* (London, 1853).

[32] Unlike Quaker women Ministers, who served for a lifetime, women preachers in the Bible Christian Connexion and Primitive Methodism served only for very short periods. Of 71 women ministers of the Bible Christian Connexion in 1819, 27 served for three years or less. By 1844 there were only 6 women preachers active on the B.C.C. circuit. The same is true of Primitive Methodism: of the 21 women listed as being active in 1821, only 5 served for up to 5 years; 3 for between 5 and 10 years, but the majority for 1 or 2 years. Marriage or ill-health seems to have been the main cause of their leaving the ministry.

strengthening theirs. This was probably due to the fact that Quakerism had gone through its own self-examination process at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and women's preaching being based on a fundamental belief, sanctioned by George Fox and deeply woven into the fabric of Quakerism, was infinitely more difficult to eradicate. Also Quaker women ministers were brought up in, and therefore more able to adhere to, the strict code of discipline required by the Society for its ministers. Certainly this was one reason given by Methodists for the abandonment of women preachers. Quaker women's preaching survived: clearly Quaker women were not deemed to be solely destined to operate within the domestic sphere, but were perceived to have the potential for a role within their Society which took them out of the home and into the public sphere.

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Janis Calvo , "Quaker Women Ministers in NineteenthCentury America," Quaker History, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Autumn, 1974), pp. 75-93

QUAKER WOMEN MINISTERS IN NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA

By JANIS CALVO*

In an introductory essay to *The American Woman: Who Was She?* Anne Firor Scott states:

> Nineteenth century Americans exhibited a good deal of anxiety about the question of 'woman's sphere.' What were the things appropriate for women to do? The most conservative view was that God had created women to take care of men and children and that whenever they took part in public activities they were being unladylike. Women were seen as gentle, pious, sentimental, emotional—and not very bright.[1]

Nineteenth century America was not a society that accepted the equality of a woman or offered her many alternatives to the traditionally domestic role. Roles which were defined as "male" were barred against her participation and she was labeled at best an anomaly, at worst an intruder, if she attempted to extend her abilities beyond her biologically assigned calling.

As one of the nation's major professional groups the ministry was no exception to this maxim. The Quaker ministry, however, was. Unique among their contemporaries, the Society of Friends not only permitted women to participate in the Society's business meetings, but to travel about the country or abroad as fully recognized ministers of the Gospel. Here, placed before the American Quaker woman, was an unparalleled alternative that carried the encouragement of her Society and the sanction of God, an alternative which allowed, indeed demanded, a direct assertion of her influence, her presence upon the "outside" world.

This often led to instances of "role strain," discussed by William Goode in his article "A Theory of Role Strain."[2] Simultaneous

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1. Anne Firor Scott, ed., *The American Woman: Who Was She?* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; Prentice Hall, 1971), p. 5.

2. William Goode. "A Theory of Role Strain," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 25 (August, 1960).

and at times conflicting demands beset the woman minister as she attempted to remain faithful to family as well as religious obligations, and it was her persistent problem to successfully balance both roles.

Goode states that the individual, in an attempt to meet the demands of multiple roles, is obliged to "role bargain," or to decide how much energy and resources he is willing to expend on one role at the expense of another. He writes, "The individual's problem is how to make his whole role system manageable, that is how to allocate his energies and skills so as to reduce role strain to some bearable proportions."[3]

The Quaker minister was able to keep her role tension within bearable proportions because of her self-concept of instrumentality, whereby she perceived herself a submissive instrument in the hands of God, and because of the part-time character of the Quaker ministry which permitted her to segregate her roles of wife/mother and minister, picking up one as she put aside the other.

While normally any deviation from the traditional "woman's sphere" brought varying degrees of social disapproval, the Quaker minister was, to an extent, able to absorb the consequent emotional stress, secure in the belief that her work was God's will, and her suffering of his sake. In addition, her acceptance of an alternative to her womanly role did not involve a direct confrontation with the mores of the wider society. So far as she and her Society were concerned, she was merely submitting her will to the Lord's, and what indeed was more consistent with feminine behavior than selfless submission? A potentially political stance on her part was thereby evaded through a religious setting.

Indeed, she was recognized by family and fellow Friends as divinely "gifted" and accorded a degree of respectful attention unknown to most women of her generation. Yet this conception of the Quaker woman's potential beyond the twin roles of housewife and mother did not necessarily imply acceptance of the equality of the sexes. The Quaker community was still very much part of a larger American community and evidence indicates that a traditional division of labor between the sexes was maintained.

In fact, the intrinsically unique nature of the Quaker ministerial role facilitated the maintenance of this traditional division, in that ministers did not form a select class of full-time participants but were farmers, tailors, merchants, housewives, etc. who periodically

3. *Ibid.*, p. 485.

preached when the Spirit called. Rather than a woman becoming a minister instead of a wife and mother, she accepted her preaching duties in addition to, not in place of, her regular "womanly" obligations. Such an arrangement maintained the dominant cultural mores of which sort of behavior was appropriate for a woman and which for a man, while allowing a measure of flexibility in the established behavioral prescriptions.

Quaker theology held that each man contained the Light of God within him capable of guiding his way to salvation if he would but wait upon God and cooperate with the leadings of the Inner Light. Each man was called to salvation, a perfection which could be experienced in this life by walking in the Light and conforming one's life to its direction. In a sense, each man received an individual call from God.

Ministers, however, were those who were called in a special way, those who were not only called but gifted to extend guidance and relay divine messages to others—to be chosen instruments of God among his creatures. More clearly stating the Quaker belief, Robert Barclay wrote,

> We do believe and affirm that some are more particularly called to the work of the ministry, and therefore are fitted of the Lord for that purpose; whose work is more constantly and particularly to instruct, exhort, admonish, oversee, and watch over their brethren; and that . . . this is something more incumbent upon them in that respect than upon every common believer.[4]

Those called to the ministry were called to exercise a God-given gift, not to occupy a man-made office. Quakers made no status distinctions between clergy and laity and enlisted no human qualification for their ministry. All was in God's hands and it was left to him both to select and to sanctify his chosen instruments. Thus, Quakers of the early nineteenth century built no seminaries for training ministerial candidates and recognized no university course to prepare them. In attempting to explain the Quaker ministry after a frosty reception which his borough extended to two Quaker female ministers, Henry Fry quoted John Milton's comment on a trained ministry. Calling upon Paul's "How shall they preach unless they be sent," Milton responded, "But by whom sent? By the University or by the Magistrate? Neither, surely!"[5]

4. Robert Barclay, quoted in Dean Freiday, ed., *Barclay's Apology* (Elberon, N.J.: Society of Friends, 1967), pp. 214-215.
5. Quoted in Henry Fry, *A Brief Account of the Lately Intended Visit of Two Female Preachers of the People Called Quakers to the Inhabitants of the Borough of Orton* (London, 1810), p. 10.

Since the chosen are instruments of God, he will supply any individual lack and provide sufficient grace for the accomplishment of his will. Thus, before embarking upon ministerial endeavors, individuals were expected to experience a divine call "in their own feelings; and that purification of heart which they can only judge by their outward lives."[6] In this way, the Quaker community did not create its own ministers, but merely acknowledged those already chosen by God as having received the gift.

Given the Quaker ministry, therefore, the practice of recognizing women ministers of the Gospel becomes understandable. In fact, sheer force of logic made the practice a necessity. If the grace of the Spirit upon the individual soul were the only necessary requirement for the ministry, then women were as likely to be the objects of that grace as men, since all human beings possess a soul. The key word here is object, for it was this impersonal conception of ministry which paved the way for female participation. As a malleable instrument in the hands of God, anything, however weak, fragile, emotional, or in need of stronger surveillance, could be chosen to suit his purpose and entrusted to his refining care. It was the message, not the messenger that was important and such revelation was not to be dismissed "merely because it comes through the medium of the female sex."[7] Women were simply souls in another variety of body. "The soul of the woman in his sight, is as the soul of the man," wrote Joseph J. Gurney, whose wife Eliza was also a minister, "and both are alike capable of the extraordinary as well as the general influences of his Spirit. . ."[8]

Even while arguing for an equal role in the ministry, however, Quakers did not base their arguments on the equality of the sexes. They argued for the right of a woman to be a minister, not her right to be anything she wished to be. J. Martin, in explaining his interpretation of Paul to the Corinthians,[9] argues that Paul was addressing himself to women who spoke out "of their own

6. Thomas Clarkson, *A Portraiture of Quakerism* (Indianapolis: Merrill and Field, 1870), p. 26.
7. Henry Fry, *A Brief Account of the Lately Intended Visit of Two Female Preachers of the People Called Quakers to the Inhabitants of the Borough of Orton* (London, 1810), p. 16.
8. Joseph J. Gurney, *On the Ministry of Women*: being the eighth chapter of J. J. Gurney's *Observations on the Distinguishing Views of the Society of Friends,* 1872, p. 4.
9. I Corinthians xiv 34, 35: "Let your women keep silence in the churches . . ."

wills." Acceptable to Paul would have been women who spoke as vessels of the Spirit but not

> from a presumption of their own knowledge or abilities, to assume or take upon them, to be teacher or instructors of the congregation, for these things would have had too great an air of standing upon even ground with the men, and would not have well comported with the subordination which God, for the sake of order, has instituted in the world . . .[10]

In concisely summarizing the Quaker attitude toward a female ministry, Martin writes, "We say, women are to keep silent in the Church, until the Lord, by his Spirit shall move upon their hearts, and open their mouths."[11]

Quakers, in essence, defended a male and female ministry on the twin levels of Scriptural precedent and theological consistency, yet retained a noticeable measure of that attitude which was characteristic of their time. Therefore, while Samuel Bownas' advice to a young female preacher probably very much resembled the advice he would have given to a young man, he offers his early experiences in the ministry as examples that

> thy public engagements appear in the beauty of the Spirit, without any mixture of the flesh, or that weak and womanish part which, in both sexes, ought never to be uncovered to speak in the congregation of the saints . . .[12]

Having briefly surveyed the philosophical rationale underlying Quaker policy, we should now explore the problems and experiences encountered by the female preacher as reflected in her own writings.

Since the Quaker female minister of early nineteenth century America was almost unique among her contemporaries, the question of self-identification is raised. Did she identify herself primarily as a woman with all the attendant duties of her sex (particularly if married) taking precedence over ministerial duties or did she think of herself as a minister of the Gospel first, with any attendant womanly obligations falling to secondary importance?

According to William Goode, the individual has at his disposal certain techniques for dealing with competing roles. As one set of mechanisms which regulate if and when an individual will take up a given role, compartmentalization is a technique which allows the

10. J. Martin quoted in William Rawes, *The Gospel Ministry of Women Under the Christian Dispensation* (London: Wm Phillips, 1801), p. 26.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
12. Samuel Bownas, A Letter to a Female Friend on the Subject of Ministry (Philadelphia, 1833), pp. 3-4.

individual to "set aside" the demands of one role in order to fulfill the obligations of another.[13] It was this method by which the Quaker woman minister fulfilled her added role obligations. When at home she fulfilled the role of wife and mother, observing the proper limits of her sex; however, when she experienced the periodic call to embark upon a religious visit and was duly freed by her monthly meeting, her former obligations were temporarily laid aside and all was submitted before the will of God.

This method of compartmentalization was facilitated by her concept of instrumentality. Despite any reservations she might consciously have held concerning this temporary abandonment of household, God's will was to be trusted as ultimately for the best and she thereby stood absolved in her own eyes and the eyes of her Society of any willful disruption of her home life. Sarah Hunt wrote in her journal,

> I know there are duties required of me and when called to fulfill them may I ever obey my Lord and Master lest I lose the reward promised to such as leave all to follow Him.[14]

James Emlen, in encouragement of his itinerant Sarah, wrote to her,

> . . . And so my dear S. just sink down at all times into the Master's will and thou wilt find that he has allotted time sufficient to pass along in the peaceful accomplishment of every duty. It is only a mixture of our own wills with the divine will that clogs our chariot wheels.[15]

Frequently, in accounts of or by these women mention is made of their initial reluctance to accept the responsibility of preaching, and the inner conflict endured by their uncooperativeness which finally ends in peaceful submission to the divine call. Recalling this period in her life and the encouragement she received from fellow ministers, Hannah Field wrote,

> He who knoweth all hearts knows that I did not withhold through wilful disobedience, but from the natural timidity of my disposition . . . and I verily believe, had it not been for the encouragement that I sometimes re-

13. William Goode, "A Theory of Role Strain," *American Sociological Review,* Vol. 25 (August, 1960), p. 486.
14. Sarah Hunt, *Journal of the Life and Religious Labors of Sarah Hunt* (Philadelphia: Friends Book Association, 1892), p. 34.
15. Letter, James Emlen to Sarah Emlen, September 19, 1819, Swarthmore College, Friends Historical Library, Emlen Papers. (Hereafter cited as F.H.L.)

ceived through the Lord's faithful servants, I should have sunk and given out, even after I had given up to appear in the ministry.[16]

Even with such resignation and encouragement a memorial written by Friends reports that for several years after this, her religious engagements were still "not frequent and expressed in few words."[17]

Far from being the last spiritual struggle of the minister, this same initial trial was repeated numerous times throughout her life each time it was given her to speak at worship meetings. The central question was always, What is God's will in this case? Is this "opening" really from God or am I merely indulging my own pride? Sometimes, as the minister began to think about what had entered her mind, she was given to question its relevance or to worry over its consequences. Elizabeth Collins recalled that

. . . sitting in a meeting at home under exercise, a few words presented to express, but for want of attending singly to the opening, I gave way to reasoning and put off, which has too often been the case until the meeting was nearly over; when this language was intelligibly spoken to my inward ear, if thou art not more faithful, the gift shall be taken from thee . . . In fear and trembling, I arose and expressed what was before me.[18]

Similarly, in the 1852 London Yearly Meeting Elihu Burritt observed Sybil Jones and later wrote of her

state of half-suppressed emotion, as if demurring to the inward monitor of the Spirit that bade her arise and speak to such an assembly. She seemed to struggle involuntarily with the conviction of duty . . .[19]

Enshrouded in the cloak of instrumentality, the minister avoided all direct and explicit expression of her individual personality. The ideal identity sought was that of an empty cup to be filled to whatever capacity or with whatever substance the Deity chose. Emphasized was the extreme lowliness of the creature contrasted with the glorious omnipotence of God and one frequently finds self-descriptions of these ministers as "poor worm," "poor vessel," or "poor instrument." Sarah Emlen, in speaking of herself during a religious meeting at which she preached, said, ". . . verily the poor creature

16. Hannah Field quoted in *Friends Library, Memorials of Deceased Ministers of the Society of Friends,* Vol XVI, p. 76.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Elizabeth Collins, "Memoir of Elizabeth Collins," *Friends Library,* Vol. XI, p. 452.
19. Quoted in Rufus Jones, *Eli and Sybil Jones: Their Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1889), pp. 116-117.

has nothing, nothing of itself,"[20] and expressing the same conviction, Ruth Pyle exclaimed of divine guidance, "O happy state and one that requires every particle of self to be subdued."[21]

Following such logic, it was reasonable to conclude that the minister was not responsible for anything she said publicly, for her messages were not of herself but her Master. One finds instances in which the minister will speak a message and have no idea of why she said it or to whom it applied. Elizabeth Newport recalled such an occasion,

During Seventh day's services there were occasions to give forth strong unwavering testimonies in boldness and fearlessness. The language at the close of one address was this wise: 'Sell what thou hast, give back the price, giving usury for usury if it be required.' The cause for this I feel no anxiety to know—sufficient for me is the answer of peace.[22]

Priscilla Cadwallader had similar experiences and on one occasion, at the conclusion of her sermon, said,

Why these things are given me to deliver I cannot tell but I wish you may examine yourselves and see if there is not something wrong.[23]

Being the lowly instrument through which God deigned to accomplish his work among men was a responsibility of which the minister was ever aware and to which she strove to be ever sensitive. It was the minister who was employed to call men's attention to those things which they might otherwise willfully disregard or inadvertently overlook—to "sound the Gospel Trump."[24] Being, in effect, a conduit through which the divine was revealed to the human, it was important that this divinity be revealed in its purest, most unadulterated form. Sarah Hunt frequently meditated "how solemn, how weighty, how responsible is the charge committed to an ambassador for Christ! What need of constant watch lest they

20. Sarah Emlen, *Journal of a Visit to Friends of the New York and Rhode Island Yearly Meetings, August 20, 1825-November 3, 1825.* (MS in F.H.L.)
21. *Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Memorials, 1828-1876,* p. 203.
22. Elizabeth Newport quoted in Ann Townsend, *Memoir of Elizabeth Newport* (Philadelphia: John Comly, 1874), p. 53.
23. Priscilla Hunt Cadwallader, Sermon Delivered April 27, 1824. (Manuscript).
24. Rebecca Turner, *Journal, December 21, 1850-February 21, 1851.* (Manuscript).

mar the work by self-activity."[25] All human considerations bowed before the Lord's gift whose leading was ever to be trusted as something "separate from man and all human contrivance."[26] Even a journey which seemed unrealistic or formidable must be undertaken if it were perceived as God's will. Thus Rachel Barker of New York who hesitated before a prospect of visiting the Southern states was in due time made to see that

> if I would be a chosen vessel to bear his name that I must submit to his... power, being willing to go at his bidding, or at the same to stand still... in short that my will must be entirely surrendered unto his and then he would put forth and go before, that I need be careful for nothing...[27]

It is this constantly recurring demand of submission that is most consistent with the behavioral model endorsed by nineteenth century moralistic writers. The ideal woman was meek, selfless, and dedicated to the service of others. In the case of the Quaker minister, her service was to God and her will subordinate to his, in effect unconventionally asserting herself in the conventionally unasserting manner.

Gospel labor frequently involved absence from home for as little as a few days to as much as a few years, depending on the distance and scope of the mission. Some ministers, such as Sarah Hull, confined their travels to their own or neighboring meetings, while others, like Priscilla Cadwallader, bore the distinction of having visited every Friends' meeting in the United States as well as several in Canada. Sometimes, particularly when both husband and wife were ministers, as in the case of Eli and Sybil Jones, a woman would travel with her husband (God obligingly having called both to the same direction). Small children, however, were frequently left at home, leaving the minister to arrange the best provisions she could for their care since her monthly meeting provided no formal arrangements for itinerant mothers. In fact, very little evidence is available as to what exactly was done with the children, and on this point letters, as well as journals, reveal an uncharacteristic vagueness. Those instances in which child care is explicitly mentioned reveal an improvisational approach to the problem, trusting God to keep them safe in their parent's absence, and ready in any case to resign oneself to his will. Thus, when Sybil Jones of Maine left her two children, ages five years and eleven months, to journey to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, she wrote, "Above all, we have a humble trust that He who never slumbers will keep them."[28]

25. Sarah Hunt, *Journal of the Life and Religious Labors of Sarah Hunt* (Philadelphia: Friends Book Association, 1892), p. 44.

26. Letter Sarah Emlen to James Emlen, March 9, 1834, F.H.L., Emlen Papers.

27. Letter, Rachel Barker to Rebecca Turner, August 17, 1843, F.H.L., Turner Papers.

One option for the minister, of course, was to rely on friends to see to children while she worked for the Lord. Elizabeth Collins, though concerned at being called away from her rather sickly infant, was greatly eased by the help and concern she received from friends. She wrote,

> It was a considerable trial to me to give up to this service, having a young child about four months old and weakly, but my friends' kindness toward me was very great in taking care and making way for me.[29]

On this service, in which she confined herself to the families of her own monthly meeting of Upper Evesham, New Jersey, she also left a four-year-old and a two-year-old to neighbors' care besides two children from a previous marriage, the oldest of which could not have been more than ten years.

In other instances when a suitable individual could be found, a housekeeper was employed to act as surrogate mother. Sarah Emlen of Pennsylvania opted for this alternative during an approximately five month absence to meetings of the New York and Rhode Island Yearly Meeting. She at this time had five children aged one and a half to nine years and wrote in a letter to her husband,

> I was pleased with MG's appearance, as also with my interview with her, and that I felt a hope she would be a Mother to our dear little children.[30]

However, Sarah seems to have relied chiefly upon her husband to care for their offspring during her absences, with some reliance upon outsiders or friends while they were younger and a great deal of reliance upon the oldest daughter in later years. Thus, in 1825 she mentions "the burden and care of so large a family, devolving

28. Quoted in Rufus Jones, *Eli and Sybil Jones: Their Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1889), p. 42.

29. Elizabeth Collins, "Memoirs of Elizabeth Collins," *Friends Library,* Vol. XI, p. 451.

30. Letter, Sarah Emlen to James Emlen, August 8, 1825, F.H.L., Emlen Papers.

chiefly now on my dear J.E. . . ."[31] (James Emlen), but from Washington, D.C. in 1831, she writes,

I am very glad to learn that you are getting along so cleverly and that dear little Mary is womanly enough to lay hold of the family concerns with so much energy.[32]

Mary, at this time, was almost fourteen years old with five younger brothers and sisters aged three to twelve years. Interestingly enough, a very traditional note is sounded in the same letter indicating a commitment to the conventional patriarchal family by a woman labeled most unconventional by the wider society. She hopes her daughter "to be very attentive to her dear father and anticipate all his wants as much as may be, and thus comfort him, all that is within her power."[33]

In any case, for the woman minister, separation from her children was a trial and regarded by her as a major sacrifice for the Lord. In reading their letters and journals, one is left with the impression that only a Supreme Deity of the Universe, before whom all creatures are as nothing, could have taken these women from their homes. Consequently, any anxiety as to the propriety of their itinerancy was allayed only by their conviction of divine mission. Sybil Jones poignantly expressed her feelings:

What tongue can tell my soul's anguish as the tears flowed fast from each child's almost bursting heart; had it not been for the gentle accents of a Savior's love, 'It is I, be not afraid; leave thy children with me,' I could not have left them.[34]

When assistance was not available, however, there were most likely many times when a minister found herself in the position of Elizabeth Collins in 1793, 'much confined at home with the care of young children.'[35]

Separation of husband from wife was also a difficulty eased only by the shared religious faith of both spouses that it was a sacrifice for the Lord that brought greater rewards in the next life. But it

31. Sarah Emlen, *Journal.* (MS in F.H.L.)
32. Letter, Sarah Emlen to James Emlen, December 29, 1831, F.H.L., Emlen Papers.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Quoted in Rufus Jones, *Eli and Sybil Jones: Their Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1889), p. 80.
35. Elizabeth Collins, "Memoirs of Elizabeth Collins," *Friends Library,* Vol. XI, p. 453.

remained a very human situation that undoubtedly provided a magnetic homeward pull despite the fact that a minister could only return home when she felt "released" from the Lord's service, or "clear" of a place where she had accomplished his work. Thus, at one point during a religious journey, Rachel Barker, although not feeling released to return home, had hoped to arrange a meeting with her husband, Caleb, along the way. Her companion, Rebecca Turner, writing to her own husband, said, "Caleb writes that he thinks the trial at parting again might be more severe than before and thought it would not be best."[36]

Sarah Emlen's letters and journal are filled with professions of homesickness and longing for a release from faraway service, yet always somewhat guiltily for fear of complaining in the Lord's commission. While away in 1825 she wrote,

How glad I shall be, to be permitted to reach my peaceful home once more, and to stay there—but do I murmur at my Gift? O no. I crave a more perfect willingness to be faithful, and more perfect resignation . . .[37]

or later recording

Am I of all creatures the most selfish? Oh I hope it is a pardonable weakness to think so much about and to feel so nearly interested for my dear husband and sweet precious little children.[38]

One can readily imagine the invaluable importance of an emotionally supportive husband who understood his wife's calling and accepted the attendant sacrifices along with his ministering spouse. James Emlen, an elder in the Society of Friends, would often send along spiritual advice to his wife encouraging her in her evangelism. In 1845, during her religious visit to Great Britain she apparently encountered greater difficulties than usual and looked increasingly homeward. He wrote to her,

I do hope thou wilt not now even desire to be excused and run home before thy dear Master's commission is fully and faithfully discharged—the work is no doubt often very hard, but are not the wages good also—and then look beyond the grave where thy name is registered.[39]

36. Letter, Rebecca Turner to Joseph Turner, November 19, 1843, F.H.L., Turner Papers.
37. Sarah Emlen, *Journal of a Visit to Friends of the New York and Rhode Island Yearly Meetings, August 20, 1825-November 3, 1825.* (Manuscript in F.H.L.)
38. *Ibid.*
39. Letter, James Emlen to Sarah Emlen, January 30, 1845, F.H.L., Emlen Papers.

However, all of these women were beset with the multiple demands of roles that sometimes conflicted and it was difficult indeed to attempt to meet them all. While admittedly straining, it appears that loyalty to neither role (housewife nor minister) was sufficient to cause the abandonment of the other and Quaker women continued to travel in Gospel labor to the amazement and chagrin of nineteenth century America.

When one hears of Quaker itinerant ministers, one may at first think that such women roamed the wilds of city and country alone and unescorted, left to find their way as best they may. However, the Quaker community had developed an unofficial companion system whereby a minister customarily selected or was appointed one or more traveling companions. It appears that female ministers in most cases traveled not only with a female companion but a male companion as well, for in a culture where ladies were usually looked after by protective males, a male companion was often deemed necessary as well as useful.

It seems to have been customary during this period, however, for a female minister not to travel alone with a male companion. She was almost always accompanied by another woman and I have discovered only isolated instances in which a male companion and a female minister traveled together, unless they were married. One of those was Elizabeth Collins's visit to families within her own monthly meeting accompanied by Richard Dell who was a socially acceptable seventy-seven years old at the time.

Of course, while traveling, ministers could also depend upon Friends along the way to informally escort them from house to house and from meeting to meeting. Sarah Emlen, in a letter to her husband written while she was visiting Friends of the Ohio Yearly Meeting, said

> Miammi friends are very kind and much interested in our comfortably getting along—one man friend has offered to stay with us till we get into the settlement of friends when we shall be attended from one settlement to another.[40]

It should not be assumed, however, that ministers found escorts at every destination. There are times when no pilots at all are mentioned or when the minister mentions directions prepared by a Friend or given by strangers along the way. The very fact that

40. Letter, Sarah Emlen to James Emlen, September 11, 1819, F.H.L., Emlen Papers.

Sarah Emlen makes such a point of "Miammi Friends" indicates the quality of the escort service was not everywhere the same.

Accommodations in well settled areas were, for the most part, quite comfortable, even gracious, and a very definite level of hospitality seems to have been expected by the itinerant preacher. Sarah Emlen wrote to her husband from New York,

> George regrets that his house will not afford us a comfortable retreat while here, but that he has no housekeeper at present, none but his servants and himself in the house.[41]

When trails were wilderness and Friends scarce, however, ministers were obliged to "take tavern fare,"[42] to provide for themselves with wagon and campfire, or simply to depend upon the goodness of non-Quakers. Hannah Yarnall and her companions "dined sweetly on a log upon good roasted chicken . . . and other good things while our horses eat their oats off the ground by us in the wilderness."[43] Tavern fare, while usually acceptable, could not always be trusted to guard the religious as well as social sensitivities of ministering women. Rachel Coope was appalled at the "rude company" at a Milton tavern whose "drinking and fighting most of the night" caused her tears.[44]

When neither Friend nor tavern was available, a minister might simply ask for entrance at the first house which came along. On their way to York, Hannah Yarnall and her companions

> . . . came on night call at a small house . . . where we had to beg for entrance. Lodged on the floor on straw. The people did as well as they could for our horses and were disposed apparently so to be kind to us also after we had an entrance granted us . . . but they were poorly off for necessaries and conveniences.[45]

While traveling among Friends (and even hospitable non-Friends) the itinerant minister could depend upon food, lodging,

41. Letter, Sarah Emlen to James Emlen, August 9, 1825, F.H.L., Emlen Papers.
42. James Walton quoted in *Memoir of Priscilla Cadwallader* (Philadelphia: T. Elwood Zell, 1862), p. 40.
43. Hannah Yarnall, *Journal of a Visit to Canada, 1803.* (Manuscript in F.H.L.)
44. Rachel Coope, *Journal of Life Among Indians on the Allegheny May 20, 1805 to June 14, 1805.* (Manuscript in F.H.L.)
45. Hannah Yarnall, *Journal of a Visit to Canada, 1803.* (Manuscript in F.H.L., Richardson MSS.)

proper direction, and company. The minister's visit helped to knit distant communities of Friends and always generated great interest within the community, as evidenced by the number of people who dropped by the house at which she lodged for ministerial counsel or just pleasant conversation. The few lines of approval she carried from her monthly meeting were sufficient to obtain help and protection among strangers. In a sense, when a minister of the Gospel undertook the Lord's work, she did not bear it alone. The entire Quaker community participated in her ministry.

One may well contend that many of the complications these women faced were shared by their male colleagues as well. Admittedly so. There were, however, certain physical complications which were spared the men—such as childbearing. Sarah Emlen found this no reason to suspend her work for the Lord and journeyed throughout the Ohio Yearly Meeting until into the fifth month of her pregnancy. She was not completely oblivious to the hazards, however, and hoped for an early release:

> It would be my desire to return before a great while, as my situation will be peculiarly trying, to ride over these rough, racking crossways, which we have to in some places for some miles together . . .[46]

Her husband agreed and wrote, "I should be glad to be informed when you will be likely to get through."[47]

The general rule was clearly adaptation, not retreat, and it is typical to find these women riding miles in "rain and all"[48] or meeting snowstorms with a simple decision "to push on."[49]

Certain travel hazards, unfortunately, were not so successfully met and, despite herculean efforts to the contrary, sometimes resulted in consequences beyond an interesting mishap to be recorded in one's journal. On occasion, itinerant ministers literally risked, and even lost, their lives. Such were the fatal consequences for Ann Edwards, a minister, and her companion Esther Collins, an elder, when they attempted to cross the frozen Delaware River in

46. Letter, Sarah Emlen to James Emlen, September 19, 1819, F.H.L., Emlen Papers.
47. Letter, James Emlen to Sarah Emlen, September 19, 1819, F.H.L., Emlen Papers.
48. Letter, Sarah Emlen to James Emlen, December 29, 1831, F.H.L., Emlen Papers.
49. Rebecca Turner, *Journal, December 21, 1850- February 21, 1851.* (Manuscript).

a wagon in February of 1820. Esther's cousin Elizabeth recalled,

> . . . when little more than half over, the horses broke through . . . The horses, wagon, and the . . . two dear women, Ann and Esther, were soon out of sight under the ice. Great exertions were used to find them, but in vain. After being in the water twelve days, dear Esther was found in the wagon-body, opposite Philadelphia . . . Dear Ann's corpse was found on the Pennsylvania shore, having been in the water about seventy days . . .[50]

Perilous conditions were a minister's occupational hazards to be met with Christian resignation and an "eye single to him who knoweth what is best for us."[51] It was the quiet assurance of one who became a willing instrument, confident that whatever use her Master made of her would be to the greater glory of his work. It was possibly this faith and its consequently unique self-perception that made many of these women appear uncommon, even to men of their own Society. When James Walton accompanied Priscilla Cadwallader and Rachel Johnson on a 2,400 mile journey through Pennsylvania, New York, and Canada, he observed,

> I may say that these women exceed anything I have any knowledge of; they rode over bridges and causeways, where there were holes so large as if the horses had made a mis-step they would have gone in up to their bodies and consequently thrown their riders. Here they rode with as much composure as though they were sitting in a house.[52]

Further evidence of their unique flexibility is the fact that they limited themselves to audiences of no particular sex or denomination. Their mission was to all men; all souls were spoken to. Therefore, in addition to attending regular Friends meetings, public meetings were frequently held in schoolrooms, courthouses, private homes, even Baptist and Methodist meetinghouses. The reaction to these women ranged from one of complete acceptance within the Quaker community to friendly curiosity or instances of hostility among non-Quakers, many of whom were listening to a woman preacher for the first time.

To ensure the proper publicity of an impending meeting the minister employed the most pragmatic, though sometimes quite secular, channels at her disposal. When Rachel Barker and her

50. Elizabeth Collins, "Memoirs of Elizabeth Collins," *Friends Library,* Vol. XI, p. 466.
51. Rachel Coope, *Journal of Life Among Indians on the Allegheny May 20, 1805-June 14, 1805.* (Manuscript in F.H.L.)
52. Quoted in *Memoir of Priscilla Cadwallader* (Philadelphia: T. Elwood Zell, 1862), p. 34.

companions were informed that the courthouse was not available for a public meeting at the time they desired because of the performance of a "ventriloquist and his learned dog" which had "the whole town . . . in commotion," they decided "the best mode of giving invitation to our meeting was through those assembled from town and country at the Exhibition, which was considered the most effectual."[53]

It was at such proposed public gatherings that women preachers were frequently, if only temporarily, put on the defensive. They seemed to have attracted great crowds of the curious, especially in areas where female preachers were a most singular oddity and often spoke for more than an hour at a time to hundreds.

Sarah Emlen spoke at a Baptist church of New Hartford to an audience of at least fifteen hundred (according to her own estimation), attributed to the fact that "a woman in the Pulpit is a curiosity in this place."[54] When Rachel Barker spoke at Battletown, South Carolina, "the people generally left the Baptist preacher with but a few of his members to listen to him" in order to hear her preach. They reasoned "the Baptist minister they could hear every evening . . . but a lady preacher they might not be able to hear again."[55] She addressed a literally standing room only crowd.

At those times when opposition was encountered, the minister felt compelled to address herself directly to the hostility in justification of the right of her sex to preach the Gospel. I encountered no instance however when a minister in this situation preached equality of the sexes per se, or questioned in any way the overall role of women in American society. Elizabeth Newport's companion recalled a rather challenging reception they received in Salem, Ohio:

> . . . men sat opposed her, who with look of scorn and derision appeared to be determined, for a time, to face her down; but ere long their heads were bowed under the powerful testimony and affecting appeal. . . .[56]

Challenges of a milder tone were sometimes extended by non-

53. Letter, Rebecca Turner to Joseph Turner, December 7, 1843, F.H.L., Turner Papers.
54. Sarah Emlen, *Journal.* (Manuscript in F.H.L.)
55. Letter, Rebecca Turner to Joseph Turner, November 29, 1843, F.H.L., Turner Papers.
56. Sarah Pierce quoted in Ann Townsend *Memoir of Elizabeth Newport* (Philadelphia: John Comly, 1874), p. 22.

Quaker clergymen who would approach the Quaker minister and attempt to convince her of the unnaturalness of a woman in the pulpit, calling upon Scripture and God's eternal order. She would argue the opposite with an equally rationalistic approach. While in Wilmington, North Carolina, Rachel Barker encountered a very polite minister who enquired into the religious beliefs and practices of Friends, particularly that of preaching women. In a discussion which lasted more than an hour, Rachel brought

> such an ammount (sic) of scripture evidence to substantiate my position that the poor fellow was thrown completely off the foundation and was compelled to abandon the ground he had taken . . .[57]

At a first-day meeting at Wilmington, Delaware, in which a great number of non-Quakers were present, Priscilla Cadwallader stood before "a number of persons present who disclaimed the authority of a woman to preach." Sensing this, she spoke of a woman's right to preach the Gospel, based upon Scriptural evidence and Quaker philosophy, explaining the error of the long held misapplication of Paul's prohibition to the Corinthians. A Friend who witnessed the sermon wrote,

> She then remarked that she knew not why she was thus led; it certainly was not intended as an apology for her preaching, for she considered it beneath the dignity of a gospel minister to apologize for what she had to communicate.[58]

The Quaker woman minister was somewhat of a phenomenon in nineteenth century America, not only because of her extradomestic activities, but because of her very access to an acceptable role option. The ministry provided an available alternative without the necessity of openly or consciously questioning the validity of the traditional role or the unsettling inference of social, from spiritual, equality of the sexes. It coincided with the values of her primary reference group, the Society of Friends, and carried their unconditional approval and support, as well as a promised eternal reward for those who left all to follow Christ. Indeed, in terms of emotional orientation, the Quaker ministry was not radically different

57. Letter, Rachel Barker to Rebecca Turner, December 30, 1843, F.H.L., Turner Papers.
58. Quoted in *Memoir of Priscilla Cadwallader* (Philadelphia: T. Elwood Zell, 1862), p. 22.

from the attitudinal pattern familiar to the nineteenth century's prescribed role for women; quiet submission and subordination of self.

Whether some of these women consciously perceived the ministry as a refreshing change from day to day domesticity or, as it more likely appears, subconsciously widened their role in the only socially permissible way their Society provided, remains at present, and perhaps forever, a matter of speculation. However, their rather straddled, yet balanced, existence in two different worlds is a certainty that invites further attention and research for it is often the unique and unusual which silhouettes most sharply the ordinary and familiar.

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From Pilgrimage to Discipleship: Quaker Women's Ministries in Nineteenth-Century England

Dale A. Johnson*

The lead editorial in *The Friend* for September, 1876 was titled "The Ministry of Women." Its impetus came from an essay by the journalist Frances Power Cobbe[1], but soon turned to a question related to the Friends. "We have observed," the author stated, "a readiness to take up a lamentation over a supposed decline in the numbers of women preachers amongst Friends. We doubt the reality of the fact." He noted that in the latest five-year period, the ratio of persons recorded as ministers was three men to two women; and looking for a "fitting relative proportion," he went on, "drawn from the obvious fitness of things, from the facts of the New Testament history (where all the Apostles were men), or the facts in the first generation of Friends, sixty percent of men to forty of the other sex does not seem an undue preponderance of men."[2]

The author unfortunately mingled "fitting relative proportion" with real numbers and looked only at the most recent period. He was thus mistaken in doubting that the numbers of women ministers in the Society had declined. Leaving aside the question of what would be a fitting proportion, both the numbers and the proportion of women ministers declined significantly over the course of the century. Behind the statistics, which can be pieced together from several sources, stand more substantive issues concerning opportunities and attitudes relating to Quaker women's ministries in the nineteenth century. What, for example, might have contributed to such a decline? Is there any connection between numbers and the character of women's ministries in this period?

I

Accepting the distinctiveness of Quaker religious organization, it is widely recognized that its ministry (non-professional and non-remunerative, and dependent on the testimony of divine inspiration affirmed by a local meeting) was, from its seventeenth-century beginnings, open to women as well as to men. While the only substantial study of the movement in the nineteenth century, Elizabeth Isichei's *Victorian Quakers*, does not discuss the particulars of women's ministries extensively, it does note that "for

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Victorian Quaker women the ministry filled an obvious latent function. . . . The ministry offered a magical escape, for an able woman, from the narrow confines of domesticity. It enabled her to speak in public, and travel abroad, with the approval, indeed the deference, of her co-religionists."[3]

At the same time as such opportunities were available for women, decision-making within the movement was clearly done by men. A separate Women's Yearly Meeting, established at the end of the eighteenth century, continued to 1907, but always had limited responsibilities in the Society. This separation became the focus of increasing concern to women members in the latter part of the nineteenth century.[4]

While the fact that Quakers were divided into several theological camps in the nineteenth century is not directly relevant for the investigation of this particular topic, it is helpful to understand the basic distinctions. A quietist element that drew especially from early Quakers such as Robert Barclay, stressed a person's mystical experience with God, and encouraged followers to live in isolation from the wider society, was gradually superseded by the 1830s by an evangelical spirit that took the Bible as its chief authority, emphasized the doctrine of the Atonement and the need for conversion, and encouraged a wider range of philanthropic activities in the world. Later in the century, this was, in turn, succeeded by liberals who were shaped by modern science and the rise of biblical criticism and who combined an optimistic understanding of human nature with a notion of progressive revelation.[5]

Joseph John Gurney's important 1824 volume, *Observations on the Religious Peculiarities of the Society of Friends*, encouraged the growth of an evangelical consciousness within the Society. It contained a final chapter entitled "On the Ministry of Women," setting forth boundaries of activity that could have worked for quietists as well. While he readily affirmed the Quaker contribution "freely and *equally* to allow the ministry of both sexes," he added two "reflexions of a practical nature" at the end of the chapter. The first, that the authority for women to speak in public assemblies for worship came not from one's person but from divine instruction "dictated by the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit," came from the letters of Paul and was confirmed, declared Gurney, "by our own experience." This undergirded the view that speaking in worship could not be used as a foundation for participation in church governance, since that "would have usurped an improper authority over their brethren."[6]

Gurney's second point would have been less supported by the quietist group. It addressed his concern that whereas in early periods of Friends' history the ministry was much more the work of men than of women, in his day "the ministry of the women is found rather to preponderate in the society over that of the men." That, he added, "can by no means be deemed a favourable sign."[7] While Gurney's interest was to encourage what he called "the stronger sex" to become less devoted to secular objects and more open to be called into the ministry, his statement carried with it a clear judgment regarding perceived decline in the body as a whole, in part the result of having fewer men than women in the ministry. Thirty-five years later John Stephenson Rowntree's prize-winning essay on the subject of decline in the movement reaffirmed Gurney's judgment with the comment, "there will hardly be a dissentient to the soundness of [his] statement."[8]

Although careful records were not kept until late in the century, some benchmark statistical information helps to provide a larger framework. A handwritten list early in the century gives 141 women out of a total of 229 registered ministers in England, or 62 percent; of the areas with the most ministers, London and Middlesex had 74 percent women and Yorkshire had 70 percent (28 of 38 and 31 of 44, respectively). Another from 1837 gives 160 women out of a total of 250, or 64 percent. Two 1844 correspondents agonized in *The Friend* over the fact that the proportion of female to male ministers had reached 2:1, whereas in the early period associated with George Fox the ratio had been twelve men to one woman. While they worried over the economy of God's purposes and wondered whether men were simply not responding to the call, one did suggest a simpler explanation: "men ... have, generally speaking, to provide for the temporal wants of themselves and their households. . . . I believe care is far more deadening to our best sensibilities than labour."[9] By 1867, however, women made up just under 50 percent of the recorded ministers in England (127 of 256), and by 1884 that number had dropped to 42 percent (135 of 320).[10] Statistics compiled by Edward H. Marsh in 1912 showed that this percentage continued to decline, but only slightly (to 40.5 percent in 1901). This time, however, Marsh represented the growing interest in women's equality by saying that with respect to this office, "women had scarcely more than half of the representation they are entitled to if we accept the supposition of complete equality of the sexes rather than equality of opportunity." Despite an increase in the activities of women Friends from 1890 to 1910, he thought it could be said that instead of using their gifts in the ministry of the Word and having the Society record them as ministers, they were now developing their faculties in other directions, such as sitting on borough councils, serving on educational committees, or working as guardians of the poor. His sharply-worded conclusion declared, "the result of equality of opportunity is that the conduct of large public meetings is almost entirely entrusted to men."[11]

In the 1860s a few people commented on the situation for women

ministers, noting some concerns about declining numbers. Sybil Jones spoke to the Yearly Meeting of 1867, expressing "some fear lest there might at the present time be a tendency towards a discouragement of women Friends devoting themselves to public ministry." Others followed her to declare "the value of public spiritual gifts of women, for which they feared the education now received by the daughters of Friends is somewhat unfavourable." An editorial the following year in *The Friends' Quarterly Examiner* called attention to the shift in gender representation: "while we rejoice in the large increase of men in the call to ministry," it declared, "we desire that this circumstance may never lead to a lessening of the number of women thus engaged."[12]

II

The language of Elizabeth Dudley (1779–1849), "to remember that we are but strangers and pilgrims upon the earth," is representative of the narratives of many women ministers in the first half of the century.[13] The most notable aspect of women's ministries in this period was the activity of preaching, and it continued to be defended throughout the century, no doubt in relation to the critique of the broader religious culture.[14] But that was not necessarily the most important activity, which was the extensive activity of pastoral care that so many undertook, in such forms as visitation, spiritual counsel, attention to the poor and the imprisoned, words of encouragement and rebuke, and the like. Because the Friends' ministry was unattached to a community, it varied considerably, depending on time available, one's sense of call, interests and abilities, and perception of issues or concerns that needed to be addressed. Women's ministries in the first half of the century had this variety, but a kind of common purpose as well. Sarah Lynes Grubb (1773–1842) represented more of the older model, where women preached in the open air on market days as well as visited Quarterly Meetings, prisons, and families. In a twenty-two-month period at the end of the eighteenth century, she travelled to 79 towns from London through the West Midlands, several more than once, upwards of four thousand miles. She was even moved to preach at her own wedding in 1803. In later years she continued to travel, but apparently spoke less in public markets. Accounts of the travels of Ann Crowley (d. 1826) were published after her death as "another testimony to the power of Divine grace, in qualifying for the service of the church, and supporting, under varied trials and lengthened illness, those who trust in the Lord"; in one period of 1804 she visited eastern and northern counties, traveling some three thousand miles, holding 241 meetings, and visiting 627 families. Anna Lloyd Braithwaite (1788–1859), who married at age twenty and was acknowledged as a minister in her late twenties, made

three visits to the United States in the 1820s when she had seven children, all but two of them very young, the first trip being without her husband. Elizabeth Robson of Liverpool (1771-1843), who traveled more than once to the United States, left diaries of her travels in England. In one six-week visit to the families of Friends of the Manchester Meeting in 1833, she and her colleague Abigail Dockray listed 258 sittings with a total just short of six hundred people, from six to ten visits per day.[15]

Other women, less well known because of more limited travel, nonetheless engaged in useful ministries in the first half of the century. The Birmingham Quaker Mary Capper (1755–1845) was a minister for fifty-five years, her traveling confined mostly to her own and neighboring Quarterly Meetings. Capper regularly held up the standard of purity and holiness of life in her ministry, as expressed in a letter of 1833: "According to my observation, we are not the plain, unfashionable people that, if faithful, we should be; we are too generally intermingled with the manners and maxims of the times." Maria Fox (1793–1844), a minister in the last twenty years of her life, was so deeply conflicted over fear of speaking without a sufficient sense of a renewed anointing that, as she once wrote, "my poor body seems scarcely equal to sustain it." She spoke about the various dispensations allotted "to the Christian traveller in his spiritual progress," and saw her life as a clear example of that. Lydia Ann Barclay (1799–1855) was also a minister in her last twenty years; she never married, understood her vocation in terms of the "peculiar testimony to plainness and simplicity, both in dress, and furniture, and manner of living, [that] would be required of me," and worried about ministers and elders who "are examples of shaking hands with the worldly spirit."[16] Memoirs, collected letters, or biographies reinforced such images and provided role models, especially for women, in the denomination.

These are merely a few of the many examples of Christian vocation played out in speech and activity. Mary Capper's concern after her Quarterly Meeting in 1820 that "our religious assemblies may be felt a gathering Power, that would help us in our Christian pilgrimage, and increase our knowledge in Divine truths, settle, stablish our Christian faith, and sanctify our hearts, with all our affections," and Maria Fox's sense of the Christian life as a warfare and "of the necessity to seek for all the weapons of this warfare from the Lord, who only can supply them," each testify to the consistent sense of alienation from the world in its multiple dangers and temptations.[17]

Although the theme and tone as well as the venues of women's preaching in the first half of the century varied from person to person, a consistent emphasis on separation from the world links many of these efforts. Elizabeth

Dudley spoke of "those who travel as gospel missionaries" and, correspondingly, often held meetings in Baptist, Independent, or Methodist chapels for anyone who would come. One of her sermons took up the theme of "patiently waiting for Christ," encouraging her audience "to make our calling and our election sure before we also go hence" (to their heavenly home), and she spoke of the vocation as one in which those who served the Lord would "speak often one to another, and, in the spirit of Christian love and sympathy, seek to animate each other as fellow-pilgrims."[18] Elizabeth Fry emphasized "the unbounded love of God," affirmed "that we are all children of one heavenly Father" (at a Wesleyan chapel), and declared the possibility of remission of sins so that "poor halting spirits may go straight on their way."[19] Sarah Grubb preached some of her most prophetic sermons (and gained a significant reputation in the process) to her own community, with a persistent warning of troubles to come. To the 1820 Yearly Meeting she declared that "we were going backwards, going down that hill instead of up which she believed we had been design'd to stand upon." Although many were backsliding, she thought, there would still be a remnant; yet she feared for those who "so mingled with the people that we should think there was no occasion for this query" and for those who "might be a little alter'd so that by and by we shall think there is no occasion for any discipline at all." Grubb was featured in four sermons in an 1832 collection, in which similar themes were announced: a jealous God who warns against those who love the world and the things of the world, a God who will have "a people simple hearted, simple in their attire, simple in their houses, simple in their language, avoiding all things approaching to idolatry and every thing that is opposed to the native purity of the gospel."[20]

III

The late 1850s could be seen as the most pivotal period in the century for the Friends, where advocates of change confronted the forces of conservatism on issues relating to marriage, dress, language, and the like, and won. In the 1858 contest on "Causes of Decline in the Society of Friends," Rowntree's winning essay spoke plainly about declining membership over the previous century and cited a number of what he thought were reasons for it. Some of those could be summarized in his phrase, "the fruitless attempt at isolation from the world."[21] The proportion of women ministers and the character of that ministry were not part of his discussion, but it is useful to connect them because of the differences in the two halves of the century. Much of the energy, devotion, travel, and view of the faith of so many women in the first half, heroic as much of it was, emphasized difference and isolation as themes in their religious pilgrimage. In 1856 Katharine Backhouse wrote,

> Some think that it is no longer necessary, nor even desirable, to vary from the practice of other Christian professors, in language and attire; but I may acknowledge that, although these are not things essential, they are, in my view, useful as outworks; and the humiliation attendant on the observation of them is, I believe, often salutary, as tending to prevent conformity to the spirit of the world.

The path we should be treading, she added, "is that of the denial of self, and of cross-bearing."[22] Another entry in the 1858 contest, this by Sarah Alexander, was entitled *A Voice from the Wilderness*, and cited several letters of Sarah Grubb to show disquiet about the state of the Society. One of those letters (1832) declared, "The world seems to gain much ascendancy in the present day, among us as a people, both with parents and children, so that little room is left for the simplicity, purity and meekness of the Gospel of Christ."[23]

The larger relevance of this collection of views, as represented in preaching, letters, and diaries, is that, irrespective of theological position in the movement, women ministers would best represent the pattern of Quaker distance from the world. It was entirely focused on their vocation—not gainfully employed, living a life of pilgrimage in a world hostile to the purity of the faith. The fact that they represented nearly two-thirds of its ministers is entirely congruent with this model.

One of the foci for such a concern was dress. When Martha Braithwaite (1823–95) assumed Quaker dress at the age of seventeen, she took it as an outward sign of willingness to give up the things of the world and take up her daily cross as became a disciple of Jesus. It was, she wrote, "as a hedge and a guard around us, shielding us from the many evils and many sins, in which, were we to follow the fashions of the world, we should be looked upon by that world to take part." Despite the changes of the 1860s in the denomination, this issue continued to receive attention for at least the next decade, clearly focused on the roles of women. "An Address to Christian Women" in 1870, written by a man, attempted to refute several statements used to defend relaxation of traditional patterns of dress. He contended that "We know whosoever will be a friend to the world is an enemy of God, and we are told that Christ came to 'sanctify unto himself a peculiar people.'" In a reversal of roles, Alice Alexander's 1872 tract, "An Appeal to Christian Men on the Subject of Female Attire," urged keeping simple dress for women because its absence tended to divert one's attention from the more serious tasks of the faithful life.[24]

When one recognizes that ministers functioned as role models in the Society in a much larger way than the focus on preaching might suggest, one can see how such an issue as dress might continue to be regarded as serious.

As one commentator put it in *The Friend* in 1858, advocating better distribution of ministers across the meetings,

> how few there are to whom the young disciple feels that he can resort for that advice and encouragement of which he often thinks he stands in need. . . . [W]e shall find that we look more or less to the ministers in our Society to supply this need, and why should we not? believing as we do they are those whom the Lord has specially gifted to edify and exhort.[25]

IV

With the exploration of topics related to women and religion in the past generation, Quaker women have received renewed attention in both Britain and America. In this process, the connection between Quaker understandings of gender equality and the emergence of a feminist perspective on social and political questions has tended to become a standard assumption.[26] Further investigation has suggested that it was growing activity in moral and social reform movements that encouraged Quaker women to raise questions about their position within the Society of Friends, not the reverse. Sandra Stanley Holton and Margaret Allen contend, for example, that "the legacies of a founding liberal theology proved not in themselves sufficient cause for the adoption of an advanced position on women's rights."[27] A broader look across the century would also be useful, since the transition from Gurney's evangelicalism to a more liberal theology was not in itself a crucial factor for Quaker women. A greater problem was that the entire construct of women's ministries and the very attitudes and strategies employed by women ministers themselves could not offer a bridge to a different form of interaction with the world. Thus, the decline in the proportion of women ministers in the second half of the century is itself a sign of larger but perhaps less documentable changes occurring in the relationship between the denomination and the culture.

Sarah Smiley of Baltimore, who came to England in 1869 for extensive travels in ministry, captured the mood of the change in her address at Devonshire House, London, entitled "Christian Work and Christian Service." "Beyond our Christian character," she declared, "there is our Christian service in the church and the world."[28] Some twenty years later Emily Sturge summed up the many opportunities then available for women by asking, "Should we leave it to man to call attention to the present state of things? If we can help individuals, shouldn't we focus on larger issues as well?"[29] The memoirs of women active in the second half of the century are in this way remarkably different from those in the first. M. A. Marriage Allen's *Simple Sketches of Christian Work and Travel* (1911), for example, is full of service and short on piety. Recollections are less interested in the

ministries of women specifically and more in the actual work. Of two Cadbury sisters at the end of the century, one became a nurse and the other worked in adult education and became a Poor Law Guardian. Both were presented to the following generation as role models, but of a very different sort than before.[30]

The 1860s saw the beginnings of complaint regarding the activities of women in the Society, in relation to the opportunities in the wider world. These changes can be seen in the periodicals. If one could write in 1854, "let none underrate her influence, because her life is comprised in a narrower bound," a decade later one could ask about the Women's Meetings, "Why is it that their sphere of usefulness has been so much retrenched?"[31] If the 1850s and 1860s were the decades in which the proportion of women ministers began to decline, in this same period the opportunities for women increased as perception of need and impetus for greater service were felt. Attention to women's suffrage and to the higher education of women emerged at this time, and the tensions of change were experienced at many levels.[32] Ann Hunt (1810–97) commented in an 1868 letter that "It does indeed seem remarkable that while the place of women in the Church is being more acknowledged among Christians in general, our Society should seem to be retrograding in practice, and often in individual opinion."[33] Anna Lloyd (1837–1925) was at age thirty-two one of the first five students of Emily Davies at Hitchin College (later, Girton College, near Cambridge) in 1869. Her older sisters objected to her mixing with others of different religious ideas, and Anna herself wrote in 1870, "I am not in favour of women's rights, or professions for women except in a limited sense, but to forgo the chance of obtaining the intelligent women of England, with their leisure and philanthropy, on the School Boards, seems to me a great mistake." Under family pressure she left college after fifteen months, eventually became an artist and was in 1887 elected a Guardian of the Poor. She also wrote in a poignant letter in 1882: "It is the want of universality in Quakerism that displeases me. I believe the whole man with all his powers and gifts may be consecrated to God, and that we have no right to object to any of them, and try to trample them out."[34]

The conflicts Quaker women experienced for a decade or so from the mid-1860s had implications that were both personal and corporate. Mary Waddington complained in 1873 that "[t]he least activity is driven beyond the bounds of the Society as far as women are concerned; it loses the adherence of many of the more active and thoughtful, because they find the real influence they can exert outside is better for them than the languid sham co-operation they are invited to inside."[35] But in this same era Louisa Stewart exhorted Quaker women to get involved in the work that was so

needed, while acknowledging as well that many were held back "by the restraints of a false appreciation of woman" and the tendency of Friends to stay by themselves. In 1877 Hannah Maria Wigham urged women "to rid themselves of this false position, this burden of enforced idleness and 'gentility,'" and "give up once and for ever the idea of there being anything degrading in receiving money for our services."[36]

If Sarah Grubb or Elizabeth Dudley can serve as a representative of women's ministry in the first half of the century, Ellen Robinson (1840–1912) or Joan Mary Fry (1862–1955) may be similar representatives for the second half. The comparison illustrates the transition from the theme of pilgrimage to that of discipleship, with the latter seen in Fry's statement focusing on the connections to all of life: "Surely it should still be practicable, even in our complex civilisation," she claimed, "to weld individuals together with the simple tie of discipleship by which Jesus bound His immediate followers to Himself." In *The Communion of Life* (1910, the third Swarthmore Lecture and the first given by a woman), *The Way of Peace and Other Papers* (1904), and other writings, Fry sought to articulate old truths in fresh language, so that both Friends and non-Friends might grasp the depth of the religious tradition she represented at a time of increasing indifference and relativism. The whole of life, she argued, "is sacramental and incarnational" (here citing Baron von Hügel for the use of the word), which then made it possible for the Christ-conscious person to engage the world with new vigor: "Not as aliens now do we walk this earth, nor do we any more dread to hear the voice of the Lord God in our garden, for has not the Christ trodden its ways, has He not taken down dividing walls and made unity where there were divisions, and stirrings of life where was isolation of death?"[37] Without even referring to women's ministries, she cast that net very broadly.

If Fry illustrates the different perspective, her life span, going long into the twentieth century, is perhaps not as representative as that of Ellen Robinson, who first became a teacher, ran a boarding school in Liverpool with her sister until 1889, was recorded as a minister in 1885, and became active in a variety of causes, including the higher education of women, women's suffrage, home mission work, and, in her most distinctive work, international peace.[38] In contrast to notions of the Kingdom of Christ as being within an individual or something one looked forward to entering upon death, themes present in Quaker women's discourse in the first half of the century, Robinson spoke of "the extension of the kingdom of Christ" in the context of her home mission work. It was the object set before the church, the spirit of service that she hoped would increase and ripen and bring forth much fruit.[39]

In view of this transformation in understandings of roles of womanhood even within the Society, to say nothing of the culture at large, it is instructive to see how earlier generations of active women ministers were viewed by women later in the century. Such a perspective can be seen in Matilda Sturge's 1895 pamphlet, *Types of Quaker Womanhood*, which took as examples the lives of Mary Dudley (1750–1824), her daughter Elizabeth Dudley, Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845), and Hannah Chapman Backhouse (1787–1849). What particularly impressed Sturge (1829–1903) were the sacrifices they made—the extensive traveling, usually leaving children and often husband at home; the adoption of the dress and language of a Friend as testimony and outward profession; and their patience in sorrow—as well as their lives of devoted service. By emphasizing their response to a sense of a call and their engagement in "paths of usefulness," Sturge could use them as models for contemporary women despite the changes that had taken place over two generations.[40]

The views of Fry, Robinson, and Sturge were shared broadly among Quakers at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, as a liberalizing spirit gained ascendance. Although each of these women was recorded as a minister, they all demonstrated through their activities that the work they undertook did not have to be confirmed by a ministerial vocation. Thus, the decline in numbers and relative proportion of women ministers in the Society of Friends over the course of the century represents a significant and too frequently overlooked aspect of the changes experienced in the Society itself. The point here, however, is to note all that it meant for the understanding of women's ministries, now shaped certainly by developments in the larger culture and representative in its own way of the changing models of womanhood.

Notes

[1] "The Fitness of Women for the Ministry," *Theological Review* 13:2 (1876): 239-73; reprinted in *The Peak in Darien* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882), 199-262.

[2] "The Ministry of Women," *The Friend* N.S. XVI:191 (Ninth Month, 1876), 225.

[3] Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 94-95. While stating that "women ministers greatly outnumbered men" (94) in the early years of her period, she does not note their decline in numbers and relative proportion by the end of the century, nor does she reflect on what this might have meant. In relation to this subject, one should note that the British experience with women's ministries was not normative for the whole Society of Friends.

[4] Thomas C. Kennedy's chapter on women in *British Quakerism 1860–1920: The Transformation of a Religious Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) focuses on these issues, especially how acceptance of or resistance to internal subordination in relation to governance affected attitudes toward larger societal questions, notably women's suffrage.

[5] These groups of nineteenth-century Quakers and their respective positions are well described in Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, chapter I.

[6] Joseph John Gurney, *Observations on the Religious Peculiarities of the Society of Friends* (London: J. & A. Arch, 1824), 215, 225-26. Gurney's point became especially conservative in the second half of the nineteenth century, when it seemed to many that the role of women in the denomination had not even kept pace with the larger culture, including other religious traditions.

[7] Gurney, *Observations*, 227.

[8] John Stephenson Rowntree, *Quakerism, Past and Present: An Inquiry into the Causes of its Decline in Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1859), 106-107.

[9] W., "The Society of Friends as it Was and as It is," *The Friend* (1844): 243; H., "Letter," *ibid.*, 276.

[10] The first three lists were not published. They are in the Friends Library, London: List of the Names of Friends in the Ministry in Great Britain and Ireland, c. 1815 (Box H1/7); Acknowledged Ministers in the Society of Friends in England and Ireland in 1837 (Robson Mss. 67); and Ministers: List of Recorded and Unrecorded, etc. (obtained 1866, by John Thorp) (Box K2/10). The 1884 figures are included in *Book of Meetings: Containing an Account of the Times and Places of Holding the Meetings of the Society of Friends in America* (Columbus, OH: Joseph H. Miller, 1884), pp. 168-78; the comparative United States numbers of recorded ministers in this volume give 38 percent women (371 of 971) (p. 207).

[11] Edward H. Marsh, *Facts About Friends: A Study of the Statistics of London and Dublin Yearly Meetings, 1861-1911* (London: Headley Bros., n.d. [1912]), 21-25. In 1990, Edward H. Milligan's list of "Ministers Recorded by Each Monthly Meeting, 1861–1899" (Friends House Library, Recorded Ministers, 1861–1924; Index and Incidence) noted 38 percent women (213 of 557). The Society of Friends decided in 1924 not to record ministers in the reports to Yearly Meeting. A number

of Monthly Meetings had stopped their own recording of ministers, so the figures for 1900–1924 are not nearly so reliable an indication of directions and patterns as the earlier period is.

[12] Alfred W. Bennett, "The Yearly Meeting of Friends," *The Friends' Quarterly Examiner* 1 (1867): 374; "On the Ministry of Women," *ibid.* 2 (1868): 309. In this editorial, the writer also commented on preaching styles, suggesting that because there had been fewer male ministers a half-century earlier, the women ministers "may have been impelled into a less feminine style of preaching than we may desire" (307).

[13] *Sermons Preached by Members of the Society of Friends* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1832), 16.

[14] As an example, see *Reasons why Christian Women Should Exercise the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, Particularly in Reference to the Ministry of the Gospel* (Lindfield: W. Eade, 1840). This tract, written by Susanna Corder originally in 1839, became part of the Tract Association of the Society of Friends series and was re-published regularly throughout the century.

[15] "Public Services of Sarah Grubb," *The Friend* 3 (1845): 156-59, 180-83, 203-206, 226-29 (the account is drawn from letters of Ann Baker, who accompanied her, chiefly written to her sister); J. and H. Grubb, eds., *A Selection from the Letters of the Late Sarah Grubb (formerly Sarah Lynes)* (Sudbury: J. Wright, 1848), 114; *Some Account of the Religious Experience of Ann Crowley* (Lindfield: W. Eade, 1842), Preface and 28; J. Bevan Braithwaite, *Memoirs of Anna Braithwaite* (London: Headley Brothers, 1905), 105-106; Elizabeth Robson, "Particulars of a Visit to the Families of the Friends of Manchester Meeting, paid by Elizabeth Robson and Abigail Dockray in the Year 1833" (Friends Library, MS Vol. S 140).

[16] Katharine Backhouse, *A Memoir of Mary Capper, Late of Birmingham, A Minister of the Society of Friends* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1847), 355; Samuel Fox, ed., *Memoirs of Maria Fox, Late of Tottenham* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1846), 293, 433, 234-36; *A Selection from the Letters of Lydia Ann Barclay, A Minister of the Gospel in the Society of Friends* (Manchester: George Harrison, 1862), 33, 167.

[17] Backhouse, *A Memoir of Mary Capper*, 220; Fox, *Memoirs of Maria Fox*, 373.

[18] *Sermons Preached*, 1832, 19; Charles Tylor, ed., *Memoirs of Elizabeth Dudley* (London: A. W. Bennett, 1861), 232.

[19] *Sermons & Prayers, by Joseph John Gurney, Esq. and Mrs. Elizabeth Fry* (London: Hamilton, Adams, 1836), 80, 57, 77.

[20] Sarah (Lynes) Grubb, Sermon at Yearly Meeting, 1820 (Friends' Library, Mss. Portfolio 39.31); *Sermons Preached by Members of the Society of Friends* (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1832), 42, 53. A 1795 letter from Dr. J. C. Lettsom, without indication of the person to whom it was addressed, but declared by the editor of *The Friend* to "almost certainly" be Sarah Lynes, later Grubb, offers comments on her preaching. The one most relevant in terms of her later activity declares: "I had the satisfaction to observe in thy testimony no denunciation of divine vengeance—language too often made use of, whilst it is derogatory to the attributes of goodness and mercy, of the author of all human happiness. A minister should endeavour to promote virtue by the beauty, advantage and love of it; not by the dread of

punishment: one becomes a rational creature; the other is not virtue but a slavish fear" ("Eighteenth Century 'Eldering,'" *The Friend* N.S. 63 [1923]: 383).

[21] Rowntree, *Quakerism, Past and Present*, 140. The debates of these years are discussed in Isichei, *Victorian Quakers*, chapter V.

[22] Katharine Backhouse, *An Address to the Society of Friends* (Darlington: Harrison Penney, 1856), 4, 7.

[23] Sarah Alexander, *A Voice from the Wilderness; being a Brief Review of the Calling, Progress, and Present Decline of the Society of Friends* (Gloucester: John Bellows, 1860), 38.

[24] Elizabeth B. Emmott, *Loving Service: A Record of the Life of Martha Braithwaite* (London: Headley Brothers, 1896), 37; J. M. Richardson, "An Address to Christian Women," *The Friend* N.S. 10 (November 1870), 261; Alice Alexander, "An Appeal to Christian Men on the Subject of Female Attire" (Dublin: John Gough, 1872).

[25] C.W.S., "The Residence of Ministers," *The Friend*, July, 1858, 129.

[26] As with Gail Malmgreen's statement, "Quaker and other nonconformist women were among the first to speak out for women's equality, their feminism a direct outgrowth of their liberal faith" (Introduction, in Gail Malmgreen, ed., *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760–1930* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986], 6).

[27] Sandra Stanley Holton and Margaret Allen, "Offices and Services," 3.

[28] Sarah Smiley, "Christian Work and Christian Service" (London: F. B. Kitto, 1871), 21.

[29] Emily Sturge, "Am I my Sister's Keeper?" *Friends' Quarterly Examiner* 22 (1888): 490-91. A mark of the expansion of opportunities for women is that Sturge's paper was first read before the Bristol Women's Liberal Association. Not only was such an organization not in existence in the first half of the century, but Quaker women would not even have thought of participating in such. The confrontation in 1840 at the World Antislavery Convention in London, where the American women delegates, including Lucretia Mott, were denied seating and permitted to view the proceedings only from a screened-off gallery, is a good indicator of prevailing British attitudes to the role of women in the public sphere, something that the English Quaker understanding of women's ministries at the time did not challenge. In a paper similar to Sturge's, Anna Strangman Southhall (1841–1912), the first woman to be president of the Birmingham Friends' Reading Society, gave her presidential address in 1899 on "Social Change in the Nineteenth Century," in which she focused on the changes in the position of women in the previous half century, giving particular attention to education and opportunities for work. In the Society of Friends Southhall was an overseer and an elder, but was not recorded as a minister; her paper was published in *The Friends' Quarterly Examiner* for 1899 and printed as an Appendix in Geraldine S. Cadbury, *Anna Strangman Southhall* (n.p., 1912), 54-73.

[30] M. Christabel Cadbury, *The Story of a Nightingale Nurse and Kindred Papers* (London: Headley Brothers, 1939). The sisters were Mary Cadbury (1839–96) and Hannah Cadbury (1830–1904).

[31] A.V.D., "Woman's Influence," *The Friend* (July, 1854): 124; H.S.N., "Women's Meetings," ibid. N.S. 5 (December, 1865): 261.

[32] An early essay in a Friends' journal, with authorship veiled, argued that women should be given parliamentary suffrage, but the author went to great pains not to claim equality with men: "Masculine and feminine minds have a different way of looking at subjects equally within the province of both . . . the views of both combined would lead to juster and more perfect thought and action" (Vega, "Should Women be Admitted to the Exercise of the Parliamentary Suffrage?" *Friends' Quarterly Examiner* 2 [1868]: 447).

[33] Matilda Sturge, *Memorials and Letters of Ann Hunt* (London: Headley Brothers, 1898), 33. She first spoke in a meeting for worship in 1873 and was recorded as a minister in 1876.

[34] *Anna Lloyd (1837-1925), A Memoir* (London: Cayme Press, 1928), 70, 96.

[35] Mary Waddington, "The Position of Women in the Society of Friends," *The Friend* (September, 1873): 227.

[36] Louisa Stewart, "A Word to our Sisterhood," *Friends' Quarterly Examiner* 1(1867): 577, 579, 582; Hannah Maria Wigham, "Woman's Work," ibid., 11 (1877): 195.

[37] Joan Mary Fry, *The Communion of Life* (London: Headley Brothers, 1910), 36, 11, 47. She was recorded as a minister in 1904.

[38] See the biographical study of her published just after her death: Mary J. Cooke, "Ellen Robinson," *Friends' Quarterly Examiner* 46 (1912): 147-56.

[39] Ellen Robinson, "Home Mission Work," in *Three Papers read at Lancashire and Cheshire Quarterly Meeting on Our Duty to Propagate the Gospel among the Populations around Us* (Salford: J. Roberts and Sons, 1888), 5, 9.

[40] Matilda Sturge, "Types of Quaker Womanhood" (London: Friends Tract Association, 1895), citation on p. 22. To reinforce her recognition of the differences between the generations, Sturge added, "But in the mean time other forms of Christian activity have multiplied around us, and fields of usefulness have opened which were formerly inaccessible, especially to women, who are at the same time better equipped by mental training for their tasks" (22). For discussion of Sturge's own life of service, which corresponds to that of Joan Mary Fry and Ellen Robinson, see Margaret Allen, "Matilda Sturge: 'Renaissance Woman,'" *Women's History Review* 7:2 (1998): 209-26.