

## Chapter 18

### Faithful lives

*Our church government would be an empty shell without the living expression of our faith provided by generations of individual Friends. Our custom of writing testimonies to the grace of God as shown in the lives of Friends provides us with a wealth of material showing ordinary Friends living out their faith from day to day. These testimonies show us that, whatever our circumstances, God can be present with us, and they encourage us each to be faithful to our own calling.*

*Our discipline and structures do not exist by themselves. The life of our Society is made up of the lives of its members. The faithfulness of our Society consists in the faithfulness of each and all of us. And none of us can expect 'the Society' to be more faithful, more committed, more loving, than we ourselves are prepared to be.*

- 18.01 *Joseph Bevan Braithwaite (1818-1905) was a leading Friend in the latter part of the nineteenth century, yet in his youth he came close to resigning his membership. Before doing so he thought it right to attend the Yearly Meeting of 1840 throughout and form his own judgment. His mind was changed by the reading of the testimonies to the lives of deceased Friends, as he records:*

I listened with an open mind to all that passed, whilst I was at the same time writing a pamphlet explaining my views in opposition to Friends... But I heard the testimonies [concerning] deceased ministers and was ashamed and self-condemned for my harsh judgment... I had been enabled through unutterable mercy to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour; now I saw somewhat of His unspeakable preciousness as 'the Good Shepherd' and 'Counsellor' of His people, 'always, even unto the end of the world'.

*The following testimonies and memoirs provide examples of Friends over three centuries being faithful to their leadings. (For current practice see 4.24-4.27)*

- 18.02 *Testimony concerning Elizabeth Hooton (1600?-1672) by George Fox:*

She was a serious, upright-hearted woman to the Lord and received his Truth several years before we were called Quakers... She was moved of the Lord to go to New England, taking her daughter with her, to desire the persecuting priests and magistrates to take away the laws for imprisoning, spoiling of goods, whipping, branding with hot irons and cutting off the ears of Friends and putting them to death; and instead of that they whipped her and her daughter very cruelly and put them out of their jurisdiction. And she was moved of the Lord to go again, and then the magistrates of Boston passed sentence of death upon her and about 27 or 28 more, and kept them close prisoners, and we got an order from King Charles the Second and hired a ship to carry it over that they might have a trial before the king, upon which they set them at liberty though they did not take away the persecuting laws...

Many prisons this poor Elizabeth Hooton was cast into only for serving and worshipping God and declaring the Truth, and about the year 1671 she travelled with me and others to Barbados and ... to Jamaica and being a weak ancient woman and zealous for the Lord and his Truth, she died in the Lord and is blessed and at rest from her labours and her works follow her.

She was convinced at Skegby in Nottinghamshire and held meetings at her house where the Lord by his power wrought many miracles, ... confirming people of the Truth which she there received about 1646, and fulfilled her ministry and finished her testimony about 1672...

She was a godly woman and had a great care laid upon her for people to walk in the Truth that did profess it, and from her receiving the Truth she never turned her back on it, but was fervent and faithful for it till death.

1690

18.03 *Testimony concerning Thomas Ellwood (1639-1713):*

He was greatly respected by his neighbours for his services amongst them; his heart and doors were open to the poor, both sick and lame, who wanted help, and had it freely, taking care to provide

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things useful for such occasions ... often saying, he mattered not what cost he was at, to do good.

He was an early comer to meetings, seldom hindered by weather (though he lived three miles distant) when bodily weakness did not hinder. The monthly meeting was held at his house about forty years, and he always looked very kind and courteous on Friends, when they came there, and took care and notice of the meanest, who came in sincerity.

Upperside Women's Monthly Meeting, 1714

### 18.04 *Testimony concerning Christopher Story (1648-1720):*

He suffered imprisonment and spoiling of goods with much patience, which proved to be his lot pretty early, by wicked men who became informers, seeking his ruin, with many others; yet the Lord preserved him in faithfulness, and brought him clean through all these exercises. He stood firm in his testimony against the anti-christian yoke of tithes, that none might be unfaithful therein, either in paying or in receiving them. And, having a gift beyond many in the government of church affairs, he exercised the same in much wisdom and prudence, and laboured diligently for the peace of the church, and to keep out everything that might appear to cause strife and debate. He had an excellent gift of healing and making up of breaches.

Carlisle Monthly Meeting, 1721

### 18.05 *Testimony concerning Joshua Barber (1660-1732):*

He was greatly beloved by the generality of the meeting he belonged to, for his good example, steady walking, and impartial judgment, even among his nearest Friends, as well as others. When he thought there was occasion for advice, he dealt in great plainness with all, where he was concerned, as he found his way open in the truth, so that he became a terror to evil-doers, though a comfort to them who did well.

Brighthouse Monthly Meeting, 1733

18.06 *Testimony concerning Abiah Darby (1717-1794):*

She was a tender sympathiser with those afflicted, whether in body or mind, and an eminent example of Christian benevolence to those who are stewards of the good things of this life, being rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, and also at sundry times, under an especial apprehension of duty, the condemned and other prisoners in different jails.

Shropshire Monthly Meeting, 1795

18.07 *Testimony concerning William Coles (1743-1815):*

Our beloved friend was a man of few talents and did not possess the advantages of a liberal education; but having been favoured with the watchful care and instruction of religious parents and when very young yielding obedience to the visitations of Divine Love, he grew up in piety and virtue, and became an encouraging example of true Christian simplicity, humility, meekness, self-denial and universal charity.

When called to the work of the ministry, as he was animated with the Spirit of Christianity, and filled with a well-tempered zeal for the promotion of Truth and Righteousness, so in the exercise of his gift he was reverent in his deportment; and his communications evinced that he was well instructed in the school of Christ.

To advanced age he was industriously employed in procuring the means of subsistence; and with but a very moderate supply of the things of this life was contented and thankful, showing at the same time a disposition to generosity and hospitality.

Buckinghamshire Quarterly Meeting, 1816

18.08 *Memoir of Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845) by two of her daughters, Katherine Fry and Rachel Cresswell:*

It was her conviction that there is a sphere of usefulness open to all. She appreciated to the full the usual charities of gentlewomen, their

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visits to the sick and aged poor and their attention to the cottage children, but she grieved to think how few complete the work of mercy by following the widow or disabled when driven by necessity to the workhouse, or caring for the workhouse school, that resort of the orphaned and forsaken...

She heard of thousands and ten thousands of homeless and abandoned children wandering or perishing in our streets. She knew that attempts were made to rescue them and that unflinching men and women laboured and toiled to infuse some portion of moral health into that mass of living corruption... She encountered in the prisons every grade and variety of crime: the woman bold and daring and reckless, revelling in her iniquity and hardened in vice, her only remaining joy to seduce others; ... the thoughtless culprit, not lost to good and holy feeling nor dead to impression from without; and lastly the beginner, she who from her deep poverty had been driven to theft or drawn by others into temptation. Elizabeth Fry marked all these and despaired of none amongst them. Here again ... a crying need existed for influence, for instruction, reproof and encouragement. But it was not to all she would have allotted *this* task, though she could never be persuaded but that in every instance women well qualified for the office might be found to care for these outcasts of the people.

1847

### 18.09 *Testimony concerning Hannah Chapman Backhouse (1787-1850):*

It was early impressed upon her mind that it was her duty on all occasions to adopt the language and simple dress of a 'Friend'. She has been frequently heard to allude to this period of her experience; she did not make the change in a spirit of blind conformity, or as a mere matter of expediency; but after having reflected seriously on the basis of our practice in these respects: and her unswerving stability herein arose from her being deeply and thoroughly convinced that, as it regards plainness of speech, it had its origin in a righteous principle of truth-speaking and Christian integrity; and that our testimony against the vain and ever varying fashions of the times, in dress and other matters, is the result ... of that true liberty of soul in which the lowly disciple of Christ ... is led to manifest in

all his conduct and demeanour that he has no desire to be conformed to this world.

Darlington Monthly Meeting, 1851

18.10 *Memorial concerning Joseph Bewley (1795-1851):*

Humility was a conspicuous trait in the character of Joseph Bewley; for although he had acquired considerable influence among his brethren, he sought no pre-eminence. 'A meek and quiet spirit', united with kindness of heart and equanimity of temper, obtained for him the love and esteem of a large circle of relatives and friends. He was naturally diffident and retiring, and seemed to feel himself restrained from taking much part in public affairs, and to consider that a narrower path of duty was assigned to him. But his desires for the welfare of his fellow-men, and his sympathies for the sorrowing and afflicted, were not circumscribed by the bounds of religious association. His heart was open to feel for the sufferings of every class; and his pecuniary means were liberally but unostentatiously employed in the alleviation of distress, and in contributing to increase the comforts of those whose resources were limited. The wide-spread affliction, resulting from the general failure of the potato crop in 1846, called forth in his mind feelings of deep commiseration for his famine-stricken countrymen. He originated the movement for their assistance which led to the formation of the 'Friends' Relief Committee'; and, as one of its secretaries, he devoted himself with unwearied assiduity to the arduous endeavour to alleviate the distress which then so extensively prevailed.

Dublin Monthly Meeting, 1852

18.11 *A memoir of William Dent (1778-1861):*

The writer recalls in his school days the tall spare figure of a venerable Friend who regularly attended Yorkshire Quarterly Meetings. It was evident that he lived in the wholesome deliberate air of the country. His Quaker garb was spotlessly neat. His face spoke of indwelling light and peace with all mankind. When words came they were few and weighty. It is told how he would drive fourteen miles to a Friends' meeting to worship. On one such

occasion he rose, and said, 'God is love', and then sat down again. It is believed no listener forgot that sermon. He and his family were known to be of the salt of the earth; but what could a plain tenant farmer accomplish in a small village aloof from the life of the world? At the time when he settled in it several of the houses were in an insanitary condition; the labourers had no gardens to speak of, the children had no school, but there was a public house for the parents. When at four score years his call came to go up higher he left a village where every cottage was a healthy home, where all able-bodied labourers wishing for an allotment could have one. The public house had gone and a good village school had been established. For many years the schoolmistress had lived in his house. A Bible Society anniversary in his big barn was the annual festival and Eirenicon of the district. It may fairly be said that the whole neighbourhood was slowly uplifted by the coming of one quiet life into its midst.

1913

### 18.12 *Testimony concerning John Henry Barlow (1855-1924):*

Resolute but cautious, judicial and yet sympathetic, a man of quiet strength and almost stern gravity, and yet with a very tender spirit beneath apparent severity, a man slow to take the initiative, yet vigilant and constant in the discharge of responsibilities which were laid upon him – such was John Henry Barlow... His character and his faith qualified him to render invaluable service to the Society as clerk of [London] Yearly Meeting from 1913 to 1919. During these troubled and perplexing years when feelings were often strained and patience nigh to breaking point, when new elements of enthusiastic life were beginning to emerge in the Society, John Barlow showed himself to be a true leader, by promoting real harmony without compromise. 'He had a great gift in knowing, during those difficult war years, just when the Meeting had got to a place where it might step quite swiftly into a region higher and clearer than itself realised it was yet ready for, and he helped it to take the step by offering minutes which, while they did not compromise, did not on the other hand rouse factious opposition nor lead to subsequent reaction by any over-stressing or labouring of words'.

Warwickshire North Monthly Meeting, 1924

- 18.13 *Mary Hughes (1860-1941) was a daughter of Judge Thomas Hughes, author of Tom Brown's schooldays. In her late thirties she started to live in the East End of London. She identified herself completely with those around her, sharing their poverty, their privations and their lack of opportunities for cleanliness. She joined the Society of Friends in 1918 and Friends long remembered the stirring of conscience that was felt in Yearly Meeting when her white-haired, red-cloaked figure was present:*

The longest journey Mary Hughes made was in spiritual conception. In her youth she ... took part in work on behalf of the poor and unfortunate. You drove to that work in a carriage and when the work was done you drove back to a beautiful house... Mary Hughes was never a one for condemning the way in which other people lived their lives; she was too busy with the way in which she chose to lead her own. If she had ever consciously wondered why this way, which she saw in her youth, was not satisfactory to her, she could have found the answer ... in those words *when the work was done*. It became clear to her that what she had to do could never be *done*, not even for an hour. Her life itself must be her work, but it could be her work only if it were lived in the appropriate circumstances. She didn't want to *visit* the poor. She wanted to be *with* the poor and to be poor herself...

She had no set schemes. She founded no institution. Neither did Jesus... 'He went about doing good.' So did Mary Hughes... It was a question of being rather than of doing. You trusted to the contagion of goodness rather than to homily or sermon. Necessarily, such a personality, linked as it was to endless sources of spiritual strength, became a magnet, and there again one hears the echo of an old phrase: 'I will *draw* all men unto Me.' As this magnet drew the poor and dispossessed, there was plenty to do; and Mary Hughes went about the doing of it in her own idiosyncratic way... She never turned down man or woman who had duped or bamboozled her. It was in the nature of things that the world contained sinners, and she wished above all to live close to the nature of things. This she could confidently do because of her belief that the overriding reality is spiritual. She would have thought herself most faithless if a few sinners had shaken her... Burning with shame, radiant with love, she set her course and followed it... The whole point of her life will be missed unless we can share her faith that 'the things that are seen are temporal, the things that are unseen are eternal'. Looked at from

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that point of view, this shabby and sometimes verminous woman becomes one of the few, 'of whom the world is not worthy'.

Howard Spring, 1949

### 18.14 *Testimony concerning Mary Ann Stokeley (1869?-1941):*

Mary Ann Stokeley was associated with Ratcliff Meeting from her earliest years. Born and bred in Stepney, within a stone's throw of the old Ratcliff Meeting House in Brook Street (now Cable Street), she first attended the Sunday School at the age of four, and thereafter made her spiritual home with Friends. Very short in stature and of comparatively frail physique, she knew poverty at first hand, and was never able to earn an adequate wage. Yet despite her physical and educational disadvantages, for many years she was responsible for a Sunday School class of rowdy Stepney girls, to whom she gave of her best.

Mary Stokeley did not apply for membership of our Society until she reached middle life, after many years as an attender. Her attendance at meeting for worship was regular and punctual and she took an interest in all the concerns of her preparative and monthly meetings. Very conscious of her own limitations, her part was a silent one, but she was amazingly faithful to the tiny meeting to which she belonged. Our Friend was not a 'oncer' – for many years she was in the meeting house morning, afternoon and evening every first-day. It was indeed the centre of her life.

During the air raids in the last war she was repeatedly pressed to leave the district, but she preferred to share the danger with her own kith and kin, and there can be no doubt that the anxiety of the time shortened her life. Ratcliff Meeting was reduced to one or two, yet up to her last illness she was in her place every first-day morning with unfailing regularity. Faithfulness was indeed the keynote of her life, and an example to us all.

That our Friend should, out of her poverty, have left us a substantial legacy is truly humbling. She lived in one room, enjoyed none of the refinements which most of us consider essential for a reasonable life, and might well have spent the money on comforts in her last years.

But she preferred to leave her money to the religious fellowship of which she was so humble and unobtrusive a member.

Ratcliff & Barking Monthly Meeting, 1955

18.15 *Testimony concerning Joseph E Southall (1861-1944):*

Towards any form of pretence, hypocrisy, shallow or muddled thinking, he was merciless. He had a shattering way of evoking the memory of George Fox at the most inconvenient moment... Gatherings of Friends were often put upon their mettle by a summing up from Joseph Southall, and many were the sharp encounters which reminded us of simple but vital principles in danger of being smothered by more material concern. And then, the battle over, who has not seen him shaking hands with his late adversary over a cup of tea, beaming through his half-moon spectacles with the world's most celestial twinkle in his eyes, the clear parchment pallor of his face broken into what would have been the smile of a benevolent old gentleman had it not somehow been pointed with the wit of a Joseph Southall.

Warwickshire Monthly Meeting, 1945

18.16 *Testimony concerning Jessie Ritch (1896-1951):*

We do not forget that our Friend was not without her human foibles; these indeed endeared her to us all the more, as we realised that she was no plaster-saint but compounded of the same elements as ourselves. Her enthusiasms were sometimes short-lived, but even when, as sometimes happened, she asked to be relieved of some piece of service taken up under concern, the result was often that others were drawn to share what had been of her originating.

Sutton Preparative Meeting, 1952

18.17 *Testimony concerning Lucy E Harris (1873-1962):*

Lucy E Harris ... trained as a doctor... She sailed for China almost at once, one of the first doctors to be sent by Friends... No situation

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daunted Lucy Harris. Fighting between war-lords was rampant after the Chinese Revolution of 1911 and it was inevitable that she should meet and have trouble with some of these unpleasant characters. Her utter fearlessness in dealing with such difficulties sprang from her deep faith in God, not a cosy belief that nothing dangerous would happen to her, but a firm belief that in whatever did happen she would have the presence of God with her... Two war-lords with their followers were lined up on each side of the river. Lucy Harris, a tiny slightly-built woman possessing a firm, strong, clear voice, stood in a boat in the middle of the river, shouting to them, insisting that they stop their fighting and go their separate ways. They turned themselves about and went. On another occasion wounded had been crowded into her hospital from one of the battles of the opposing bandits. The successful one demanded that they should be handed over to him. Quite apart from the fact that the wounded men were her patients, she knew that this would mean instant death to them. She refused to hand them over.

Hertford & Hitchin Monthly Meeting, 1963

### 18.18 *Testimony concerning Annie Morris (1900-1980):*

Annie and Edward Morris shared the common lot of many Lancashire people – hardship and poverty. [After Edward died in about 1950 Annie] went back to the mill to work once again at the job she knew so well – weaving...

About this time Westhoughton Meeting sharply declined in numbers. As her contemporaries died one by one, eventually Annie Morris remained as the only active member of Westhoughton Meeting, and for thirty years she served as an overseer. Although suffering from rheumatoid arthritis, Annie Morris took upon her frail shoulders the responsibility of maintaining the life of the meeting. It was a great sadness to her, not only to see the decline of the meeting but the decay of the meeting house. As months and years passed, the meeting house became unsafe, but Annie, although in poor health, continued to hold meeting for worship alone. This was a time of great sadness but she remained invincibly faithful to her belief in the goodness of God.

Eventually, first one and then another joined Annie in meeting for worship in the cold damp meeting house. Soon there were about ten people attending...

She died on the 14th September 1980. She had been attending Westhoughton Meeting for more than seventy years – a faithful Friend.

We thank God for the lovely, faithful, tender spirit that was Annie Morris.

Hardshaw East Monthly Meeting, 1980

- 18.19 What Katie [Riley] was is written in the hearts of all who loved her. Her hospitality was phenomenal, the neat little house and garden providing rest and beauty. She delighted in helping her guests to relax, showing them lovely books or pictures, serving meals daintily. It seemed a joy to her to live for others, and she regularly visited the lonely, the elderly and the sick. She sent little notes of love, always decorated with an appropriate drawing, and hundreds of such messages are treasured by many people. If someone ill or housebound needed her, Katie would go for weeks or even months to stay with them, though it was a real sacrifice, as she loved her own home and meeting best.

Pleasance Holtom, 1981

- 18.20 *The 1959 edition of Christian faith and practice contained an introduction to its opening chapter which has become much loved amongst Friends, as much for the charm of its language as for its content. We would not now write such a passage, with its heavy emphasis on men, and with women being remembered for 'the beauty of their person as well as character'; moreover, some Friends omitted in 1959 now find a place. Yet we wish to keep this passage for its reminder of the many Friends, just as worthy to be mentioned as those in this book, who however have not found a place, and for its warning of our failures which is just as necessary now as when it was written.*

The Society of Friends might be thought of as a prism through which the Divine Light passes, to become visible in a spectrum of

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many colours; many more, in their richness, than words alone can express.

George Bradshaw made railway time-tables to the glory of God, John Bellows made dictionaries, Daniel Quare made clocks; but these we cannot quote. The labourer in the fields, the housewife sweeping her room, the faithful tradesman, have left few memorials. Scholars like Thomas Hodgkin, Frederic Seebohm and Rendel Harris have their memorials elsewhere. No voice speaks here for the long line of scientists that began before John Dalton, and stretches on after Arthur S Eddington. Let no one think, because we have omitted them, that we could forget the Quaker seamen: Robert Fowler, Thomas Chalkley, Paul Cuffee the negro captain, and all their gallant band. There is no word from the masters of industry – the Darbys of Coalbrookdale, Richard Reynolds, Joseph Rowntree or George Cadbury; or from those pioneers of social protest – John Lilburne the Leveller, John Bellers, Peter Bedford or Alfred Salter of Bermondsey. Here are no pictures of the women whom we remember for the beauty of their person as well as character – Gulielma Penn and Esther Tuke; or such glorious old men as William Tuke (who in his sixties founded York Retreat) or Theophilus Waldmeier (who in his sixties founded the Lebanon Hospital); or our children James Parnell, little Mary Samm, and those who kept the meeting while their elders lay in gaol.

Even of the ministers there are few enough: George Fox, but not Richard Farnsworth, that ‘man of parts and Champion for the Truth’; John Woolman, but not Anthony Benezet; Stephen Grellet, but not his friend and travelling companion, William Allen; Elizabeth Fry, but not Deborah Darby who foretold her career of mercy. We have shown persecution endured and overcome in seventeenth-century England and New England, but not in nineteenth-century Norway or twentieth-century Germany. Though the field of Quaker concern has stretched across the world, we have had for the most part to stay at home, naming but one or two of a great company beyond seas. If we could have shown Rachel Metcalfe mothering her orphans from her invalid chair; or George Swan, the boy from the fairground, playing his concertina through the villages of India – if only we could have shown them all!

But then in honesty we should have had to reveal also the extent of our failure; the light dimmed in narrow hearts and creeds, the baptism of grace lost in timidity and torpor, the corrosion of arrogance and self-satisfaction – for we have known these, too. May the light prevail over the darkness; may those who are here speak for all the children of the Light, to the needs of other times as well as to their own.