



Lecture 1949

William Penn

*The
Flavor
of Man*

Jean Toomer

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by
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The name of William Penn has been chosen because he was a Great Adventurer, who in fellowship with his friends started in his youth on the holy experiment of endeavoring “to live out the laws of Christ in every thought, and word, and deed,” that these might become the laws and habits of the State.

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The Flavor of Man

Once again we approach the spring season. Soon a new cycle of life will start in the earth; and all men, if not participants, will be beneficiaries. We advance towards new birth in the natural order. Man's hands and man's machines will be in the fields. The store of things to eat will be replenished. More generously we shall have light and warmth from the sun, and life-giving waters. The earth and all of its teeming life, man excepted, will show abundance. God shall be manifest in His World. Dawn will be the herald; and when full day comes it will come with glory.

It was this season that Nicholas Herman, known to us as Brother Lawrence, was anticipating when he saw the bare tree that soon would be renewed to full foliage, and received a high view of the providence and power of God, and felt kindled in him a true and abiding love of God. He was then eighteen years of age, having been a soldier and a footman. Thus by God's grace the former soldier became a tender person, the footman received a measure of holiness. Then and there that young man was given the flavor of man, for the primary ingredient of man's substance is love, love of God, love of man, and through love, a sense of unity with all creation.

For the remaining sixty-two years of his life Brother Lawrence experienced an increasing fullness of life and an undiminished love of God. To live in love with God for sixty-two years! Would that you and I might so love just for one year, one week. Some day will it not come to pass? Does

the divine hand, moving in eternity, touch one of us, but not others? Surely it must happen, in God's time, that He will enable all of His children to obey His first commandment. Will we ever become thus able unless He does enable us? We cannot make ourselves love. The pale yearning I feel is not love. Much of the time I have more desire for dinner than for God. Most of the time I could more readily be the devil's advocate than Christ's disciple. I am still among the descendants of the rebel angels, though I wonder if they were angels.

Yet in me, as in you, there is a power greater than myself, stronger than the evil in me, that grips my being and moves me toward a harvest. What I shall ultimately reap I do not really know, though I make believe I know by using words as if they were the reality. Of this I am certain. Our lives have meaning only as they are preparations for what the Creator has in store for His creations.

And once again, these being the days just before things start growing, catalogues arrive from the large houses that supply seeds for the gardens of America. Not long ago my wife was going through one of the catalogues that annually fascinate her, when she suddenly exclaimed, "Listen to this! Here's something for you." Indeed it was. This is what she read:

Crystal Apple. 65 days. An amazingly attractive cucumber, perfectly round, crystal-white at all stages, with a sweetness and lack of cucumber flavor that is remarkable. Produces a tremendous number of fruit about the size of a lemon when mature.

Crystal Apple. It is not called a cucumber. It has neither the shape nor the size of a cucumber. And, to cap it all, it remarkably lacks the cucumber flavor! What ingenuity and labor went into the production of this cucumber that isn't a cucumber! Is this not typical of twentieth century man?

Consider the bread without the flavor of bread. In any restaurant you can get milk that hardly tastes like milk. Could it be that here in Philadelphia there is water that does not taste like water? Experts have some unpleasant but important facts for us. They tell us that it is doubtful whether there is a single stream in the United States which has not deteriorated during the past hundred years. The air of our cities is becoming smog. On most farms the topsoil is depleted. Much of our work is without the flavor of creativity; our literature without the flavor of literature; our religion without the flavor of religion.

Outstanding at this time is the fact that we have peace without the flavor of peace. But the wars we wage have the full horrible flavor of war. The bombs we make are not Crystal Apples.

In fine, there are too many men without the substance and the flavor of men. Wrong ways of living deplete our inheritance. The uncontested evil within and around us ravages the body of our life. Millions of people, having reached what should be the age of maturity, find themselves squeezed dry. Gutted lives make their miserable patterns upon the earth. They are still human beings, but something worse has happened to them than to the streams and to the atmosphere of cities.

People with an abundance of life, full of the content proper to human beings, would inevitably fashion a corresponding world. Those filled with creative energies, not to mention divine powers, would not and could not despoil the materials of the earth, exploit and fight their fellowmen.

We in America pride ourselves on being well off. Compared to the majority in Europe and Asia we are. But compared to the full norm of mature man ours is a poor life. Whether we be materially rich or poor, most of us live in spiritual scarcity. David, the writer of the 23rd psalm, could say and virtually sing, “My cup runneth over.” We cannot. Our cups are more nearly empty.

It is this inner scarcity that causes the frustration so evident in human life as ordinarily lived. It is this frustration, in turn, that sets people against people in domestic antagonisms, racial conflicts, class wars, international wars—one party wanting to punish the other for its own frustration, one hoping to wrest from the other what neither possesses. Frustration sets people against people in strife and war. Strife and war still further bleed us. Frustration thus increases, causing ever more acute conflict. This is the vicious circle that mankind is caught in, from which we must break free. This is the locked situation that holds us tight, from which we must be liberated, from which we must arise. But how are we to rise? Not even a balloon can rise if it is empty. We must be filled. Then, as George Fox and others have demonstrated, no outside force can hold us down or prevent us from doing our share to enable others to become fulfilled.

We know, but tend to forget from time to time, the sources which can enrich the lives of the world's people. One source is the presence and works of men and women, past and present, who managed to attain some measure of spiritual fullness. Another is the hidden resources within all people. It is my belief that even those whose substance has been wasted have, deep within themselves, the powers capable of making full restoration, could these resources be reached. If salt has lost its savor, nothing can be done. Not so with human beings. Man is renewable. The great source is God, whose abundance is limitless. Christ came to open the way between men and the Eternal Being, that we might have life and have it abundantly.

A man's roots must go down into what is deeper than himself, his crown touch what is higher, his heart open to the beyond, and the whole move forward. Then will be be connected with the great heart and power of life.

Three hundred years ago in England there arose a people—and they did rise. They came upon a power. A power gathered them, and they knew they were related to the Divine Being. By awakening they opened, by opening there flowed into them an ample measure of human substance from their own resources, and, from the sacred Source, a goodly measure of the life that is above this life. A light, which previously had been hearsay, the light of Christ, invaded them. A love, which formerly was but a word to them, became the potent reality of their lives, the love of God. They found themselves changing, being born anew through a spiritual birth. Darkness and death fell away; and their condition ceased being that of spiritual scarcity in the

midst of spiritual abundance. It became that of abundance within an immeasurably greater store.

At first they were not called Quakers, nor did they seek to become Quakers. They sought contact with the mighty power whose touch makes men tremble. They sought to be Christians through and through, to possess what they professed, to be followers of Christ and more, to have Christ and his redemptive love real to them—to know this, to *be* this, experimentally. And to this end they disciplined their total lives.

Each in his and her measure made the discovery which the whole world awaits; namely, that there are direct and immediate links between man and God; and that, when man's seeking is crowned by God's grace, the apparent separateness of man from Deity is superseded by a wondrous partnership. No other discovery can mean to us what this one means. With it, all that plagues us begins to fall away. Without it, discover what else you will, the hard knot of our darkness remains. Evil is evil only because it separates our consciousness from God. Overcome that separation and we have overcome evil. Pain is pain only because we lack realization that we are related to divinity. Problems are locked problems because of the same lack. The divisions between individuals and groups are so wide, and often so injurious, because of the same. Whoever realizes his connection with God is unlocked. In some measure he is released from his tight self to God and to men. All life is transvalued. Days and nights have sacred meanings.

Those early Friends, as we know, were gathered from all ranks and levels of society, and from all occupations. Unified into one body were farmers, fishermen, tradesmen, innkeepers, shipmasters, jailers, soldiers, blacksmiths, preachers, ladies, knights, squires. There is indication that certain thieves, harlots, and murderers were affected. Many were changed from their old ways to the new way, and what they had been was as nothing compared to what they now became.

God's radiance spread from man to man. People felt as though a holy contagion were upon them. As the word of life was spoken in each one, each became of good substance and good flavor, and all were joined together by the Spirit wherein men have brotherhood. An irresistible power was in them, behind them, before them. Knowing what was being wrought within themselves, and how swiftly, and how rapidly it was spreading, they could not doubt that God's hour was at hand; that He was coming to touch and teach His people, every one, and lift them into a new dispensation with the full flavor of the Kingdom; and that they, the people now called Friends, were God's agents to transform the world.

It is difficult for us in this secular age of mechanization and global power-politics, living under the cloud of world wars and the rumble of catastrophe, to imagine the vision that glowed in those early Friends, to feel with like conviction that God's Kingdom is coming, coming swiftly, gathering the world's people into the long-awaited resurrection. We can more readily believe that anti-Christ is upon us, empowering evil, widening the path that leads to destruction.

We must acknowledge that the world of darkness is potent and, at the present time, ominous; but it is not the only possible world. There is another Being behind and above our ordinary persons. There is another world behind and above our ordinary world. We must renew the vision of that other world. The only way to renew it is to have experiences similar to those that gave it birth. To have such experiences we must seek God who gives them. The only way to seek God is to seek God first. Deny the nayward, affirm the yeaward, be true to those stirrings and motions which He starts in us, refuse priority to all else, and be faithful to the sacred.

Many British people of those days did not like the flavor of the Quakers. To some, the Friends savored not of Christ but of satan. Others feared that these religious radicals did have the true power of the spirit, and, having it, threatened to overturn the entrenched social and churchly orders. So they broke up their meetings, stoned and beat them, and threw them into jail. In prison the Quakers were more truly free than those who committed them. And right in the jails, amid the filth and the stench, those Children of the Light continued to radiate the Light.

The dynamic center of the Quaker movement was of course a man known as George Fox, but who once said of himself that he had a name unknown to men, a new name for the new man born within him. William Penn referred to Fox as “the first blessed and glorious instrument of this work,” Penn, after Fox’s death, paid him one of the finest tributes ever given man to man. Excerpts from Penn’s portrait will refresh

those who know them and give others a sense of the substance and flavor of George Fox.

He was a man that God endued with a clear and wonderful depth; a discerner of others' spirits, and very much a master of his own. As to man he was an original, being no man's copy. The most awful, living, reverent frame I ever felt or beheld, I must say, was his in prayer. He exercised no authority but over evil, and that everywhere, and in all; but with love, compassion and long-suffering. Though God had visibly clothed him with a divine preference and authority, and indeed his very presence expressed a religious majesty; yet he never abused it; but held his place in the church of God with great meekness. Having been with him for weeks and months together on divers occasions, and those of the nearest and most exercising nature, I can say I never saw him out of his place, or not a match for every service or occasion. In all things he acquitted himself like a man, yea, a strong man, a new and heavenly-minded man, and all of God Almighty's making.

Admit the excesses of George Fox, take into account those of his traits which have caught the eyes of the psychiatrists, and you still have a prodigious human being—and one, moreover, who turned men not to himself, nor to the power in him, but to God and to the power in themselves. He called men to be set free, not by themselves, not by other men, but by the Truth that illumines and liberates.

He knew the ravishing love of God. He was released to God and to men. He ascended and he extended. His abundance increased as he gave it away.

Outward change inevitably follows inward change; inward does not necessarily result from outward. Fox's chief aim was not economic or political reform, nor church reform, nor even peace. He aimed directly at the heart of the human situation—the change of changes, the radical change of man's consciousness, values, ends — the change of man's very being, and of his apprehension of reality. And he himself was the instrument, so that it actually happened in some numbers of people. Other men have had a similar aim; too few have had the effective power and purity.

When this man was in meetings he gave his flavor to the meetings; when in the market place to the market place; when in courts to the courts; when in jails to the jails. They tried to beat him down, to break his spirit. Man's spirit, when reinforced by God's, is unbreakable. They threw him into prison after prison. But he was inwardly released. No outer restriction could constrict him. In or out of jail he declared the Truth and changed people. Wherever his body was, he remained in the power, in the pure air of the spirit.

What enabled George Fox to be what he was and to do what he did? Shall we regard him as a religious genius living on a level unattainable by us? Was he favored by God more than we can ever hope to be? Not at all; but I find that some Friends of today tend to hold one or both of these views, and thereby miss the meaning that Fox's life can and should have for us. As his own ministry declared, his experiences were of

a type that we may come to have, some time in God's time, provided we do our part. There were practices he engaged in which, if known and practiced by us, will promote our rise. I have no thought that we should or could become like Fox. He was no man's copy. Neither should we be his copy, or any man's. Each of us, though bearing the common human stamp, is unique. It is a matter of levels of possible spiritual awakening and attainment.

Later on we shall see what Fox's crucial experiences were. Investigation of his inward practices, important as it is, lies beyond the intention of this paper. It is to be hoped, however, that each and all of us, particularly our young people, will pursue it. One of the best pieces of advice ever offered to aspirants in the religious life is contained in a book, published anonymously, *The Path of the Saint*. "The task before us is not to imitate what the saints do *after* they attain to divine knowledge. Instead we must acquaint ourselves with the means and exercises they used to achieve their goal."

William Penn was among those opened, raised up: and set in new motion. He too ascended and became of good substance. He too extended. And within, behind and before him was the larger substance and motion of the world that the Quakers were creating. Having entered into a new world of the spirit, he carried the flavor of it across the ocean to the land that was to become America, and began his Holy Experiment; wherein men, on a basis of wise economy, concerned government, and in all things fair dealings with one another, were to move Godwards, were to merit the grace of new

birth, so that in truth and wholly they would be changed men, new men in a total New World.

What has happened to that Holy Experiment? Has it increased and spread? Is it evident in the Market Street of the city still called the City of Brotherly Love? Does it radiate from the City Hall, on top of which stands the colossal statue of William Penn? Is there an uncommon light in the eyes of the city's people, and in their hearts a common goodwill? Has it been modified and enriched by the aspirations of other peoples and the vision of other faiths, so that it now covers the entire United States? Is this what modern America means to itself and to the world?

Or is it, rather, that the Holy Experiment has suffered during the intervening years a fate similar to that of the top-soil, the streams, the atmosphere? If this latter be the case, what mainly should we do about it? Strive by means of prayer, worship, service, and a creative contending with oneself, as Penn and most of the early Friends strove, to merit a spiritual birth. Surely we cannot give the flavor of God's world to this world unless we ourselves have it to give. We cannot organize our world as an expression of God's Kingdom unless we know by experience the nature of the model. Those who would lead others to the Kingdom, but have not seen it themselves, are likely to mislead. Most of those who doubt Christ do so because they doubt Christians. Most of those who doubt God do so because they doubt men.

As I ride into Philadelphia the train stops at a station near which is a building bearing in large letters this sign: Wrecks Our Specialty. It refers to motor-cars. I am thinking of

human beings. I am thinking that that sign is appallingly appropriate to an aspect of our own civilization and every other of which we have record. Not *whole men* our specialty. Not *holy men*. Neither our own nor any other culture has been so enlightened. Wrecks—and my heart aches. Human wrecks by the millions. They are to be seen in the slums of any city, in hospitals, in poorhouses, on the roads, on farms, and in mansions and penthouses too. These are the wrecks of so-called peace-time society. The wrecks of war-time society are here and there the world over, and the mutilated bodies of countless thousands are buried out of sight.

Not far from this meeting house, at Byberry, there is a Pennsylvania state institution for the insane. It specializes in the acute condition of wreckage that is being increasingly caused by the severe dislocations of our time. It is said to be typical of such institutions throughout the nation that congratulates itself on its prosperity and well-being. Some of us are concerned about that place and its people. Some have given service there. Albert Deutsch has made a nation-wide investigation of insane asylums and recorded his findings in a book entitled, *The Shame of the States*. Writing of Byberry he says:

I was reminded of the pictures of the Nazi concentration camps at Belsen and Buchenwald. I entered buildings swarming with naked humans herded like cattle and treated with less concern, pervaded by a fetid odor so heavy, so nauseating, that the stench seemed to have almost a physical existence of its own.

I hear this and I say—there in that institution the flavor of man has departed, and a stench taken its place. There, but for the grace of God and the help of some of my fellowmen, I might be, my body among the naked bodies, my mind among the unhinged minds, my soul in the torment of being bound to an instrument it cannot use. I am humble before so much choked suffering. So many of our kinsmen are in asylums so-called, in ghettos, in concentration camp and colonies, and in some high places, critically reduced below the par of man. Does it matter that some have white bodies, some black, that some are Jews, some Gentiles, some Republicans, some Democrats? It matters that they are human. It matters that they are men and women, whatever else they are or were, but have lost the powers and the faculties proper to men and women. May God reach those beyond human reach.

Your and my comparative good fortune carries with it the duty that we shall share such substance as we have, and increase it so as to share it more. Every human derelict puts the cross upon those relatively whole and sound, and reminds us to be disciplined and dedicated.

Man has made his impress upon the earth—and upon man. Each generation leaves its mark, each individual. Some marks are magnificent, some have beauty; many are ugly, many are blights. Claiming to develop Earth's resources, men have carried on a systematic exploitation of them, and of each other. Forests have been hacked down, land ruined, nature's stores squandered, people enslaved. In the name of farming, deserts have been made. In cities there are slums and filth, and on the outskirts smouldering refuse. By their marks the vaunted lords of the earth are revealed as rebels

against the harmony of Nature, against the laws of their own beings, exiles from God. The lords are outlaws. Now the rulers of the two most powerful nations of the world are contemplating and preparing for — or, as they would say, preparing against — a war that may indeed end war by ending man.

In God's Kingdom there are no policemen who might descend to earth and prevent our committing race-suicide, impound us until we come to our senses. Yet I pray that His power may reach us directly in this hour. I pray, not because I think men should cling to this life, or have indefinite tenure on this planet. But if we are to continue living, may the ignoble and the mediocre be burnt out in the fires of this age. May we be regenerated and live nobly.

From all sides, especially from the scientists, we hear that there is a desperate race between education and catastrophe. Education moves slowly. Catastrophe moves swiftly. Time runs out. The alternatives, I am convinced, are starkly these: Transcendence or extinction. We must rise, rise above ourselves into that ocean of light and love, or the ocean of darkness and death will engulf us. We must rise not only so as to surmount impending catastrophe, but that we may take a decisive step upward towards our true destiny. The peril of the present situation, if we make good use of it, can release force for human transformation.

Words no more than point to the tragic yet potentially wonderful condition of man in our time. Our deeper rhythms may seem a death march; rightly heard, they may herald the approach of mankind's ascent to a higher level of existence.

O, that we might go down into our roots and meet one another, below words, below thoughts. Now is the time to meet the reality of that of God in every man, and to realize that all the peoples of the earth are brethren.

As we go down to rise, we shall encounter under the surface, and shall have to penetrate, an obstruction more unyielding than words. It is a knot of darkness in each of us, composed of indifference inertia, prejudice — all of our nayward forces. It is tied tight by fear, and by the self-willed, self-sufficient ego. This is what keeps us away from our Father, and from each other, and from all that lives. Take hold of it. Loosen it. Suffer it to be burnt out. Go down under the knot of death; for below it, still below it is the golden core. There we shall find the forces of life that rise, and that will lift us with them. This is the inward journey.

Young people in whom life is fresh, who have not yet acquired so thick an insulation between themselves and Deity, may they make way to the sanctuary of the heart, and bring to earth the flavor of heaven, and bring to men the flavor of God.

It may be, as some think, that the condition of man's world is currently showing signs of improvement. It may be, as others think, that nothing has yet been done to lessen the undertow to destruction, much less to free us from it. But we here are certain of this. Times of crisis must not be used as an excuse for demoralization and inner collapse, or for relaxing the struggle that each and all are called upon to make. Whatever the world situation, we must make certain that at least a remnant continues to live within the moral law, upholding

human values and duties, acting on the conviction that in each human being there is an undying essence or soul that survives the death of the perishable body, and persists ultimately to fulfill God's purpose.

For the sake of Christ's work on earth, for the sake of others and of ourselves, we are obligated here and now to do all we can to dispel the stuff of darkness; to retain the good substance we now have, regain what has been lost, and continue growing. Douglas Steere has said, "The power of renewal is part of the nature of man." Creative living activates this power.

Suppose that by creative living, each in his own field, each in accord with his uniqueness and in harmony with the common structure of man, we have regained, at the adult level, the wholeness and the flavor natural to a child, and have acquired marks of maturity. Is this all? Do we stop here? Is this the end of development? Has God nothing more in store for us?

Even a perfectionist would have to grant that this would be a great deal. Were some number of human beings to become as adequate in the human order as a tree is in its order, the whole atmosphere of our world would begin to clear, the spiritual and physical slums to disappear, abundance to replace scarcity, and war cease. Considering how many of our kind usually become derelicts, it would indeed be wonderful could there be a substantial increase of those becoming whole and sound. Considering the age-long condition of the mass of people, it would seem nothing short

of miraculous were an effective number to flower in just a natural way.

Yet there is more. There is still the Beyond. There is a rise as high above the ordinary human as the ordinary human is above the animal—and we should know of it, so as to lift up our eyes and aim for it. There are higher terraces in the life of man. To attain them should be our long-range objective. The human adventure does not end with ordinary maturation. Were we as adults to fulfill the promise of childhood and become integrated, we would still be within the frame of the first birth. A second birth awaits us. Were we to flower in a natural way, we would still remain in the natural-human order. God’s design for us is that we rise higher, in virtue of His yeast and seed in us, through a spiritual birth into the divine-human order. Robert Barclay referred to the higher state of being as the “new creation.”

Religion is rooted in the entire life of man. With what objective? To nurture, guide and implement our growth in the spirit up to the threshold of transformation, and beyond. Religion’s first total yield occurs when a man becomes a risen being. For only then can he truly pray, worship, and live a wholly consecrated life. Then he can effectively practice the love of God, and the love of men and all creation.

How do we know that it is possible for man to rise above himself and become established in a higher condition? There is evidence. If not yet within ourselves, it is to be found in the lives and works of some men and women; specifically, in the records of Quakers from the early days up to the present.

Said William Penn of the early Friends, “They were changed men themselves before they went about to change others.” So it must be. The reformers must themselves be reformed. They must have undergone a new birth before they can speak and act with the power of the resurrected. Prophetic ministry can only come from prophets. Apostolic work can be done only by apostles.

They were changed men, said Penn. But how changed? They were changed by God towards God, and toward one another. They were born again of the water and of the Spirit. Thus they knew what Nicodemus could not comprehend, though Jesus was there to instruct him. Each, by a spiritual birth saw the Kingdom of God, which is to be seen in no other way. Each in his measure entered the Kingdom, which is to be entered in no other way. Humble in himself, yet exultant in the glory and goodness of God, William Dewsbury declared: “I witness I am regenerated and born again of the immortal Seed.” Others of the early Friends gave essentially the same testimony in the same spirit.

Thus changed, how did they aim to help change others? Having themselves been through a major transformation, they would hardly want less for other men. They could not have been satisfied to effect small improvements in individual character and conduct, in social institutions and conditions, unless these were necessary means to the root-change. They saw a great, quiet, sweeping inward revolution awaiting all men, they the agents of it. The early Friends aimed to help others change as radically as they had been — to reach others, open them, bring them to Christ and to God,

that by a spiritual birth all might enter the Kingdom, and none be left outside.

Of course, not all early Friends were thus empowered, and pointed. Had they been, then indeed their way of life would have been irresistible, expanding throughout England and beyond, unlocking the nations, gathering into its motion the peoples of the earth. That did not happen then. It is not happening now. But may it not happen, in God's time? Even in those days of the covering, some were Quakers more in name than in experience. Some drowsed in meetings, even as we. Some strayed, and had to be gathered again. Some even turned against the testimony and steamed off to other ends. Yet the truth is, and the wonder too, that the number of those opened extends considerably beyond the names we know best.

Through conscious and unconscious preparation, through effort and seeking crowned by God's grace, many Friends came up over. They arose in spirit, above that which had bound them, to a new consciousness of reality, to a new character, and consequently, to new behavior. As they arose, they deepened and extended. Their rise had elevation, depth and breadth. It was a deep rise. A deep rise characterizes all true spiritual transformations. It is to a deep rise that we of this day are called — not as an end but as a means, not because we may personally want it but because by and through it we will become really able to love and to serve God and man. Only as we so rise will our contemporary Quaker faith and practice have the vision and the power of the original. Only so will the Quaker message of today be,

not simply an interpretation, but a glowing witness in our time of the progressive revelation of God in the lives of men.

The early Friends ascended to God before they extended to men. It was the rise that enabled them to extend. They continued ascending to God while they extended to men. They extended so that others might in their turn ascend. The purpose of extending through ministry and every kind of work was to enable others to experience the deep rise, the holy rise.

There are three progressive stages — seeking, ascending, extending. Asking, receiving, giving. The one is necessary to the other. Without receiving, what have we to give? As Gilbert Kilpack has said: “We must be served before we can serve.” These stages are vividly illustrated in the life of George Fox.

Fox’s phase of intensive seeking covered a period of about four years, beginning with his departure from home at the age of nineteen and culminating in his first decisive experience. It is so well known that we need not dwell on it, except to recall that throughout this stage, Fox, feeling himself a stranger in the earth, underwent all manner of trials, temptations, struggles, suffering — and some openings to the truth. Time and again his needs and problems impelled him to seek help from men. Each time he was thrown back upon himself. No one could reach him and speak to his condition. Presently he found himself in a locked situation. Then came the experience indicated in the often quoted passage, “And when all my hopes in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what

to do; then, oh! then I heard a voice which said, ‘There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition’: and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy.”

Most interpreters of the life of George Fox give an outstanding place to this experience, as indeed they should. Some give the impression that it was Fox’s main and highest experience. To my mind, there is nothing to indicate that it was a deep rise. Not yet was he radically changed. Not yet did he extend to others, publishing the Truth. It was a rise of joy, to be sure. It marked the point where belief became a certainty and was reinforced by a higher authority. It was a turning point, without doubt. And, though not itself a transforming experience, it signaled, as we can see in retrospect, that Fox’s arduous climb was soon to be graced by an effortless ascent.

Shortly thereafter, his desire for the Lord grew stronger, as did his zeal for direct knowledge of God and Christ, without help of man or book. God let him feel His love, which is endless and eternal, and in this love Fox saw himself as he was without God, and other men as they were without God. Now he was full within the current that was leading to his first deep rise. Something of the great heart of life was entering his life.

Again he felt the love of God, and, in its light he saw death and the working of death in men, and Christ and the working of Christ in men, as the way out of death into everlasting life. He saw all that is out of the light. As a pure fire arose in him, he was lifted by it into the light and given spiritual

discernment; and there came to him a vision of the world being prepared for God's occupancy.

And it was after all that, and only after it, that the Lord's power began to spring in George Fox and he went forth, extending to men, declaring the Truth, convincing them of the Reality of which he was convinced, turning them to the experience he was experiencing, telling them of the possibility of a sinless and holy life, in this life, above this life, before their bodies should die.

Towards the end of his twenty-third year Fox began his ministry, the many forms of his apostolic work. Not yet, however, had he completely come up over. He continued under temptations and sufferings for yet a while. We can see from the context that he felt himself somewhat held down when he had the opening recorded in the memorable words, "I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love which flowed over the ocean of darkness."

Presently came his second deep rise. It was without doubt a major transformation. He called it a great work of the Lord. The experience lasted for about two weeks, after which he was a risen man, a Child of the Light, so changed that even his body appeared new-moulded. He wrote: "For I had been brought through the very ocean of darkness and death, and through and over the power of Satan, by the eternal, glorious power of Christ; even through that darkness was I brought, which covered-over all the world, and which chained down all, and shut up all in death." Thereafter his extension to men

increased in height, depth, breadth; and many were the convincements.

Another ascent came about two years later. It is the one which most concerns us here. His account of it begins with the arresting declaration:

Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword, into the paradise of God. All things were new; and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Christ Jesus, to the state of Adam, which he was in before he fell.

On the basis of this testimony we can see that Fox had again quite risen out of the ordinary condition of man, this time into a higher condition which he recognized as a definite state, calling it the state of the unfallen Adam. Unless we have had a similar experience, we will not understand the nature of that state; but can we not sense the wonder and the fullness that would be ours were we in it? Surely it would seem enough to satisfy our aspirations. But not yet had the summit been reached. Fox goes on to say: "I was immediately taken up in spirit, to see into another or more steadfast state than Adam's in innocency, even into a state in Christ Jesus that should never fall." Though he did not say he rose into it, he realized that it is there, and attainable.

Three conditions of man! Two above the ordinary condition! As I understand it, men in the ordinary condition fulfill, at

best, but one-third of their spiritual potentialities, usually less. Thus we see in a new light why spiritual scarcity prevails, and how there may be abundance. Risen to the state of the unfallen Adam, we would fulfill two-thirds of our potentialities. Only when transfigured into the state in Christ, would all our potentialities be realized.

Fox leaves no room for doubt that in his view, human beings, by growth and transformation, can so rise, higher and higher until, as he expressed it, they “grow up to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” His mission among men was to enable them by God’s grace to attain that fullness, that abundance, that wholeness, that holiness.

Knowing that men can rise, he also knew that, when partially risen, they are subject to fall — to rise again, sooner or later to become firmly established in a risen state, so that it becomes one’s abiding condition of life and being. George Fox was assured that he himself was thus established. Among the passages of the *Journal* that could be cited to show his attitude on this matter, I select but one, and this because it not only speaks to the point but throws light on one of the chief contemporary testimonies of the Society of Friends — the Peace Testimony.

Fox was taken from the House of Correction to the marketplace, before the commissioners and the soldiers, and asked to fight for the Commonwealth, as captain of the new recruits. “I told them I knew from whence all wars arose, even from lust, according to James’s doctrine; and that I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars. But they courted me to accept their

offer, and thought I did but compliment with them. But I told them I was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strifes were.”

This shows, of course, that Fox was opposed to war on principle and because of religious conviction; and that, when put to the test, he refused to take part in it. It shows more, namely, that he was in the life that *is* peace-full. He was firmly established in the life and power wherein war is *impossible*. He was not making a choice. He was stating a fact, which to them was incomprehensible. Do we understand it? Do we realize that his testimony calls us to a complete emergence from the frustrated life that causes armed wars sometimes, antagonisms and strife all the time? The Quaker Peace Testimony, in its very essence, is a summons to arise.

Is there anyone in his right mind who would not want to fulfill this testimony in his own life? Can there be disagreement? In this we are united. And if we agree to this, we shall have to agree that we cannot rise to peace if we go to war.

Some, way down in themselves, in that knot of darkness, may doubt that men can rise through new birth into new men, in a world made new. The evidence of others, impressive as it is, does not thoroughly convince. One can but offer it, trusting that each will in time come to have the first-hand experience.

There are those today whose lives are demonstrations that upward transformation is possible. This is the very heart of

the Quaker witness through the years, and of all major religions. It is inevitably given by every man and woman, the world over, whom God hallows and lifts up into a truer being. What is religion if not this? Christ's mission is to enable men through him to grow up to God.

As best we could, we have lifted our eyes to the hills. It may have seemed a bit hazy up there, the view none too clear. Our sight may be unaccustomed to such gazing. But we have seen, at least in idea, that there are two conditions of life above the one that most of us are in. We have had a glimpse of the stretch to the human summit — at which point man becomes more than man, he partakes of the divine. How do we feel? Are we encouraged or discouraged, challenged or overborne?

We may be sure that George Fox, writing of his transcending experiences, did so with the aim of pointing man to his true destiny and giving substance to man's hopes. We may be as sure that Rufus Jones and Thomas Kelly, in our day, wrote and spoke as they did with a similar aim. Yet many of us, on being shown the high vistas, feel not uplifted but downcast, even futile. How explain the discouragement so often felt when we are confronted with the rising terraces of human life? Perhaps we have believed ourselves to be more advanced than we actually are. Sight of the heights gives us a realistic view of our present position, and deflates our unwarranted assumptions. Our actual state of being is not reduced, but our ego is. Perhaps we lack faith. Perhaps we forget certain of our experiences.

A deep rise, it should be repeated, is an enabling experience. By it we become able to do what previously we could only try to do. Though we may not yet have had a deep rise, every human being on earth has known enabling experiences of some kind, from childhood on.

I remember my trials as a child trying to learn to tell time. It was patiently explained to me; but I could not imagine how anyone ever came to know what those hands and figures meant. One day it happened. Something clicked in me and to my great joy I began to understand. I could do the impossible! That “something” which happened within me was an enabling experience with respect to telling time.

All have had similar experiences learning to read, to tie shoelaces, to skate, to swim, to drive a car, to create a poem. Remember how, when first taking up the study of a foreign language, or any subject that seemed foreign to us, we were totally on the outside of it; and then, lo and behold, we were on the inside. All along the line we have had growth-compelling experiences. Every skill we now possess was acquired partly by our efforts and partly by events occurring deep below the level of consciousness in the mysterious inner workings of man.

There are as many types of enabling experiences as there are fields of human endeavor, and within every type there are varieties. They continue to come to us, sometimes in the midst of action, sometimes in prayer, sometimes even while we sleep. In the life of prayer there are times when our efforts are given a sudden rise and movement forward by

inner events which we cannot name. Thus we progress in the life of prayer. Thus we advance in life.

Shall we then limit ourselves? Shall we hold tight reins on our expectancy? Shall we say — Yes, our relatively minor efforts have been aided, but our major ones will never be? It is true that the crucial experiences which came to George Fox are of a higher order than those that occur in the general run of life. Need we therefore assume that only the lower orders are for us, the higher not at all? Is this faith? Is it God's will to give us only the little gifts that enable us to keep body and soul together and do the work of the world? Or has He in store for us also the greater gifts which will enable us to grow up to Him and serve His Kingdom? It seems to me that the very purpose of the little gifts is to develop us to the stage where we will be ready to receive the greater ones.

We have seen how Brother Lawrence was enabled, and George Fox. Rufus Jones recorded at least one of his higher enabling experiences, as did Thomas Kelly. One came to Antoine de Saint-Exupery while piloting an airplane over enemy territory; one to Starr Daly while in prison. The list is longer than we may think. Dante, William Blake, Thoreau, Emerson, Walt Whitman. . . . It includes not only those known through their written records, but a large number unrecorded. Are we left out? For the time being, perhaps; but not forever. If we do our part, then, in God's own time, there shall happen even to the least of His children all that has happened to the greatest. On this faith I stand. Let us stand together.

There is no good reason for us, the spiritual descendants of George Fox, to be as he found so many Christians of his day. He said of them: “For, of all the sects in Christendom (so-called) that I discoursed withal, I found none that could bear to be told that any should come to Adam’s perfection, into that image of God, and righteousness and holiness that Adam was in before he fell; to be clear and pure without sin, as he was. Therefore how should they be able to bear being told that any should grow up to measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ?” Surely we can bear to be told, and to believe. Otherwise why be Quakers?

Rufus M. Jones wrote, “The unique epochs are those in which man has risen above himself and discovered the Unseen World where he belongs. Then one does what he couldn’t.” He too called us to a deep rise, a holy rise, that thereby we might become able — ever more able.

God, to whom all things are possible, can help us make in this century a great epoch. The power and the glory are His. Our part is to aim our lives that way, doing creatively whatever we are called to do, upholding each other, opening ourselves more and more so that we may pray with the power of prayer, and worship with the height and depth of worship. At the right moment, the Light of the World will break through our clouds, and radiance come full upon us.

In the human life of this era it is still possible to ascend and extend. In the America of today there are hills that for us can be Pendle Hills, if we are risen within ourselves. On earth there are more people than ever before, beset by more problems and a greater danger. We need, more than ever,

that some seekers shall find, shall receive the light and love that liberates us from our ego-prisons, and works a resurrection. And it will happen, if God so wills. In our day some people somewhere shall be born of God, and become agents of the Power, and form with one another a loving body to cherish the life and share it with mankind.

Man, if he so wills, can do much for man, but only in the natural and human orders. We can be men only if we help each other. God alone can lift man into His order, and impart the substance of the divine. To want less than this is to miss the high purpose of religion; is, for Friends, to disavow the origin and aim of their own testimonies; is, for any and every man to consign himself to the welter of evils and conflicts which can never be resolved save as we emerge from scarcity by receiving life from the sacred source within ourselves. We must advance towards new birth in the divine-human order.

May it come to pass through our struggles, our sufferings and joys, the little acts of service, the greater acts of heroism, our daily work, our devotions, our tragedies and triumphs . . . God grow us to Thee.

About the Author

Jean Toomer (1894 – 1967) was an American poet and novelist commonly associated with the Harlem Renaissance, though he actively resisted the association, and modernism. His reputation stems from his only book, the novel *Cane* (1923), which Toomer wrote during and after a stint as a school principal at a black school in rural Sparta, Georgia. The novel intertwines the stories of six women and includes an apparently autobiographical thread; sociologist Charles S. Johnson called it "the most astonishingly brilliant beginning of any Negro writer of his generation". He resisted being classified as a Negro writer, as he identified as "American".

Toomer continued to write poetry, short stories and essays. His first wife died soon after the birth of their daughter. After he married again in 1934, Toomer moved with his family from New York to Doylestown, Pennsylvania. There he became a member of the Religious Society of Friends (also known as Quakers) and retired from public life.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Toomer

About the Lectures

The William Penn Lectures started as a ministry of the Young Friends' Movement of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. In the beginning of the last century, "Young Friends" was the community of young adults from both the Hicksite and the Orthodox Philadelphia Yearly Meetings, which reunited in 1955. The Young Friends Movement began the lecture series "for the purpose of closer fellowship; for the strengthening by such association and the interchange of experience, of loyalty to the ideals of the Society of Friends; and for the preparation by such common ideals for more effective work through the Society of Friends for the growth of the Kingdom of God on Earth." The name of William Penn was chosen because the Young Friends Movement found Penn to be "a Great Adventurer, who in fellowship with his friends started in his youth on the holy experiment of endeavoring 'To live out the laws of Christ in every thought, and word, and deed; and that these might become the laws and habits of the State.'"

The first run of William Penn Lectures were given between 1916 and 1966, and are warmly remembered by Friends who attended them as occasions to look forward to for fellowship with our community, inspiration, and a challenge to live into our faith. The lectures were published by the Book Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting has granted Pendle Hill and Quaker Heron Press permission to reproduce the lectures as free ebooks.

Although it was [announced](#) in 1960 that the series would be discontinued several lectures were published in the early '60s. It appears that the lectures given between 1923 and 1931 were never published. If we come upon manuscripts of these lectures, we hope to publish them in future.

In 2010, the Young Adult Friends of PYM revived the series, officially launching the second run of the William Penn Lectures in 2011. [The series was renamed](#) the *Seeking Faithfulness* series in 2016, as part of the Young Adult Friends of PYM's concern for dismantling racism within the yearly meeting and the wider society. It no longer felt rightly ordered to have a major event named after a slaveholder. The [Seeking Faithfulness](#) series is hosted by the Young Adult Friends for the benefit of the whole yearly meeting community, and invites a Friend to challenge us all to explore new ways to practice our Quaker faith. The Seeking Faithfulness series seeks to nourish our spiritual lives and call us to faithful witness in our communities and throughout the world.