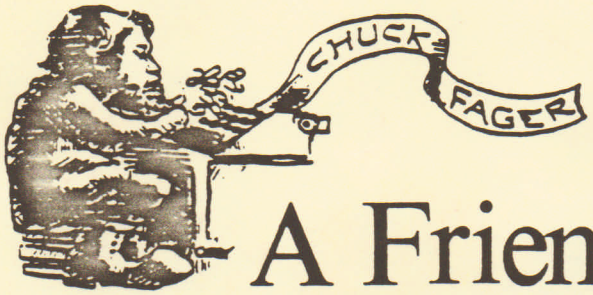


# A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Eight Eleventh Month 1981

Dear Friend,

As much as I want *A Friendly Letter* to be without flaw, the truth is I have made mistakes in my reporting. This month I want to begin by setting the record straight about some of them:

First, last month's *Quaker Chuckle* quoted verses from the First Epistle of John. Except, as a reader in Zanesville, Ohio pointed out, these verses were actually from that Apostle's Second Epistle. Ooops.

Next there is the matter of the Friends World Conference at Guilford College in North Carolina. Of course, I know it occurred in 1967, but in Issue #4 my fingers said it happened in 1965. Mary Rhodes of Easton, Maryland was only the first to catch me out on that.

The most embarrassing error,though,grew out of the *Quaker History* item all the way back in Issue #1 about the true origin of the game of Monopoly. Reader Darwin Mittelstaedt of Milwaukee was intrigued by my account, and wrote off to the U.S. Patent Office for a copy of Patent #740,626, which is what I said it was. But what came back to him was not the Quaker-originated plans for a world famous game, but rather an obscure design for improved oarlocks on metal boats, the brainchild of one Josiah Burton of Martinsville, Indiana. Friend Mittelstaedt wrote to me, wondering what had happened. The fact was that I had depended on secondary sources for the patent number; so I determined to get to the bottom of the matter forthwith. Fortunately the Patent Office is just across town from here, and after a few hours wandering in that great labyrinth of invention, I did. My secondary source and I had perpetrated another typographical error: the actual patent number is 748,626, though the rest of my information was correct. Moreover, the fascinating diagram of the original game board that came with the patent makes its character as the true progenitor of Monopoly abundantly clear.

So far, all these goofs have been minor. Still, I am grateful to the readers who ferreted them out and brought them to my attention. I am not dismayed by interpretations and opinions which differ from those presented here; but I do expect the facts on which my notions are based to be accurate, and so should you. Please keep letting me know when they aren't.

One other matter deserves brief mention here: Since *A Friendly Letter* began, postal rates have increased twice, a total of 33%. To keep postage costs under control, I will soon be shifting permanently from First Class to Bulk Mail, which is slower but cheaper. As you may have read elsewhere, this postal inflation threatens to strangle many periodicals. I am coping with it so far; but if you have enjoyed what you read here, you can help by sharing *A Friendly Letter* with others, and sending gift subscriptions to Friends this holiday season.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

# QUAKERISM AND THE AMERICAN CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

Has Quakerism been an unhappy influence on American society? Are its tenets and ways more part of our problems than part of their solution? Will getting our nation onto a healthier and more stable course require limiting and rolling back the impact of Quaker values on the body politic? Does Quakerism produce a poor quality of leadership? To all these questions E. Digby Baltzell, Professor of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, answers a qualified but unmistakable *YES* in his long and challenging book, *Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia*, published in 1979 by the Free Press. His argument is one that any Friend concerned for the futures of our Society and our society should read.

Baltzell makes his case in the framework and vocabulary of historical sociology, by a comparison of the contributions to American public life of Philadelphia and Boston, as examples of two contrasting cultural outlooks, that of William Penn's Holy Experiement, versus that of the Puritans who built New England. He writes well and without jargon, with a wealth of fascinating detail and anecdote. He aso writes from a sense of deep moral conviction, the kind that underlies so much of the best scholarship. Baltzell says his purpose in *PB&QP*, as I will call the book for short, is to "shed some light on why and how we have come to our present time of troubles," and this he does.

## *His Basic Theme is Religious*

Reading *PB&QP*, it soon became clear to me that Batltzell's thesis was much more than just sociological; it was as much or more so a religious argument, and not a new one at that: Baltzell believes that the history of these two cities shows that American society has been too much shaped, especially recently, by the spirit of freedom, egalitarian individualism and spontaneity that characterized Quaker Philadelphia, and not enough by the contrasting spirit of discipline, hierarchical authority and continuity associated with Boston Puritanism. When I interviewed him some months ago, he freely admitted that behind these two cities, and the contrast of Puritan and Quaker they offered, he saw the much deeper and older tension within Christianity and Western religion, namely the tension between Law and Gospel, between Old Testament and New testament, between Sinai and Calvary. Boston, his book shows, has produced many more notable public figures than has Philadelphia; yet he asserts that the forces typified by Quaker Philadelphia now have the upper hand in our society, making it ever more difficult to govern or even organize. We need, he believes, an infusion of some modern equivalent of the authoritative Puritan brahmins in our national life to give it more order, and to serve as a bulwark against tyranny. And such leadership, he is convinced, is unlikely to come from those nurtured in the fragmenting Quaker-Philadelphia ethos.

## *Learning From a Classical Conservative Outlook*

Baltzell, in short, is an unreconstructed conservative, unabashedly aristocratic in his outlook, a credit to the high church Episcopalianism which he calls home. Knowing this, it would be easy, but wrong, to dismiss his book out of hand. It is, after all, easy to score minor points against his thesis: one can say there were many other factors besides religion affecting these two cities' evolution, which there were; one can haggle about his sources and methods, which like all historical studies are inexact; or one can expose his bias toward the Puritan style of class leadership, a bias he cheerfully and disarmingly admits. I have read several reviews of *PB&QP*, one or the other of which challenged him on all these points; yet all of them also largely accepted his overall argument about the two cities and their place in history, as, for that matter, do I.

The more significant challenge to his thesis, it seems to me, comes at its roots, which are theological: If we have too much Quaker-ish Gospel and not enough Puritan Law in American life, does redressing the situation really require eliminating Quaker influence? Does not the history of Christianity indicate instead that some combination of these factors are necessary to a productive cultural balance? When I asked him this, he agreed that it does. But furthermore, if this Quaker-ish Gospel spirit he writes about has its predictable perversions in anarchic and self-destructive period like those we went through in the 1960s, does not the Puritan-Law spirit have its characteristic vices as well? Indeed,

Baltzell admits that it does, above all a tendency toward righteous warfare, going right back to its guiding spirit, John Calvin, not to mention the Old Testament holy wars. And of the remarkable line of public leaders of Puritan origins, it is also remarkable how many have led Americans into wars, holy and otherwise, from Plymouth's Josiah Winslow marching forth to eliminate the Indians in King Philip's War in 1675, to John Kennedy's role in our fateful involvement in Vietnam almost 300 years later. Then there is the Puritans' penchant for domestic crusades against "heresies," which among other victims included four Quakers hung on Boston Common, and many others horribly mistreated. There is virtue, it seems, in some of what did *not* happen in Philadelphia under Quaker influence, problematical as it may have been in many ways. And I am not sure Baltzell fully appreciates this.

*Quakerism Is Not Really the Target*

Baltzell largely agreed with these points during our interview. This suggests that his goal is not really to get rid of or discredit Quakerism. Indeed, the larger setting of his book may not involve us that much at all. In the Preface to *PB&QP* Baltzell notes that "most meaningful knowledge is highly personal, and theories about the meaning of facts are rooted in one's autobiography." As I sketched in his own biography during our conversation, the significance of this comment seemed to grow. For Baltzell is a product of this very Puritan establishment whose failure to maintain its hold on American public life he laments; but he is also the product of its collapse. His family's wealth sent him to elite prep schools as a youth; but then the money was lost, and when he left the service at the end of World War Two, he was only able to attend graduate school with the help of the GI Bill, like so many other American veterans of humbler origins.

Looking over Baltzell's earlier work, particularly his 1963 book, *The Protestant Establishment*, and a long article, "The Protestant Establishment Revisited," published in 1976 in *The American Scholar*, one can see that a major theme, perhaps his central motif, has been "the decline and eventual disintegration of the American Protestant establishment," as he put it in the 1976 article. He believes that his establishment peers have definitively lost both the capacity to run America, and perhaps more important, the *will* to do so. This establishment still exists, but more as an object of ridicule in *Doonesbury* and the popular *Official Preppy Handbook*, than as a group with any authority. Moreover, as Baltzell has shown, it was not dislodged by any revolutionary army; rather, the key to its decay has been internal, a drying up of the springs of life, intellect and ambition, a failure of nerve.

*The End? Or a Transition to a New Beginning?*

Thus, perhaps *PB&QP* should be seen as a long chapter in an essentially tragic story of the decline of one ruling group in America, told by a member of the group who is as dismayed by the melancholy plot of his saga as was the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah by the divine command to pronounce the doom of the only community he had ever known and loved. The relationship of this decline to Quakerism is no doubt more ambiguous than Baltzell's ideal types admit. After all, Philadelphia Quakerism has been part of this establishment subculture(as testified by listings in *The Preppy Handbook)*, and shows many of the same signs of internal decline that Baltzell sees elsewhere. But most of Quakerism lies outside that orbit, and shows considerably more vitality.

For that matter, if Baltzell's book misses the mark as an epitaph for American society, perhaps it is because its scope is too limited. While the old rulers may be passing away, new groups are rising to take their place; the old establishment was centered in the Northeast, and both power and authority, as well as wealth, are clearly moving away from that region. But does that really portend the end of our world(and the end of Quakerism)? Or could it signify the passage from one long episode in our history to another, with new sources of stability and authority, and renewed potential for a constructive role in the world for America, and for Friends within the country?

Perhaps my intuitive conclusion reflects my own non-establishment origins, but the changes Baltzell has sketched so well in *PB&QP* do not leave me feeling hopeless, but rather optimistic. His book is a fine one, packed with high-quality food for thought, and much truth. But it does not persuade me that America or Quakerism, imperfect as both are, are washed up. Not yet, I say; not by a long shot.

First Class Mail

INSIDE: QUAKERS IN AMERICAN SOCIETY--
PART OF THE SOLUTION,
OR PART OF THE PROBLEM?

From: Chuck Fager, *A Friendly Letter*
P.O. Box 1361
Falls Church VA 22041

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*THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY*

At the end of Tenth Month, 1944, nothing unusual was happening in Pasadena, California. That lack of news is important in Quaker history because earlier that autumn, a young Japanese-American girl had been released from an internment camp and allowed to enroll at Pasadena Junior College. And her release had come about mainly in response to the efforts of California Friends. The girl and her family, like practically all Japanese-Americans, had been taken from their homes after America entered World War Two and held in desolate internment camps for nearly two years. West Coast Friends, galvanized by a Quaker pastor named Herbert Nicholson, had petitioned and written thousands of letters protesting this unjust action. Allowing the girl to leave the camp and enter college was the first crack in the government's internment policy, and it was accompanied by many dire warnings about public hostility and even possible violence against her because of feelings about the Japanese "enemy." But nothing untoward happened; the experiement was a success, and after several more months of intensive effort, again led by Friends, the government began releasing the Japanese-Americans from the camps.

The story of this campaign is told in a little book, *Valiant Odyssey*, by Friend Nicholson. He had been a missionary in Japan, spoke Japanese, and was the most frequent outside visitor to the camps. I recently got a letter from Friend Nicholson; he is now in his 90s, but still visits Japanese-American families and churches he has known since World War Two, and he recently appeared at a hearing conducted in support of their continuing efforts to obtain redress for their unjust sufferings. I was honored to receive his letter; Herbert Nicholson represents Evangelical Quakerism at its finest.

*QUAKER CHUCKLE*

*Fit For a Queen?*

In the late 1820s, Friend Richard Vaux was appointed by President Jackson as secretary to the U.S. embassy in London. A dashing young man, he was popular at court, and wrote home to the effect that he had been to several grand balls at the palace and had even danced with the Princess Victoria. When this report was read to his mother in Philadelphia, she immediately looked up and said anxiously, "I do hope Richard won't marry out of Meeting."

*Remember: Subscriptions to* A Friendly Letter *make great gifts this Holiday season!*

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