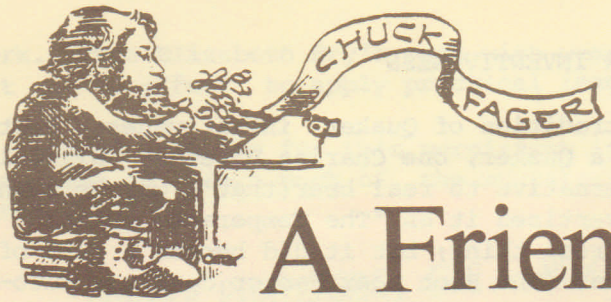

A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Thirty-Eight ISSN #0739-5418 Fifth Month, 1984

Dear Friend,

In spring a young Friend's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of...summer. At least, this no-longer-so-young Friend's thoughts do. And one of the most pleasant of such thoughts is that the forthcoming season will feature another session of one of my favorite Quaker gatherings, the Friends Music Institute, at one of my favorite Quaker locales, the Olney Friends School in Barnesville, Ohio. FMI can serve as another example of what I am calling the "Root Beer Factor" in Quakerism, of which more inside: FMI features fine musical training plus a concentrated exposure to Quaker principles and practice in a setting not only laden with 150 years of Quaker history but among an almost entirely Quaker constituency. Music in a Conservative Quaker school like Olney sounds incongruous; but how well it works can be judged from the fact that a very high percentage of attenders are repeaters. If I was 15 again, fer sure that's where I'd be come Seventh Month(after Friends General Conference, of course). For more details, write FMI, P.O. Box 427, Yellow Springs OH 45387.

Another place my thoughts are turning this spring is back to the financial needs of Quaker organizations. After sermonizing herein recently about the need for Friends to support our organizations more diligently, it seemed right to fit my practice to this preachment; so I have offered to insert in this issue, at no charge, a fundraising flyer from Friends United Meeting. The flyer, as you will see, speaks only ellip--tically of the group's needs; but one of its most pressing current needs is for financial support, which I hope many of you will turn to your checkbooks and provide. Moreover, better than one check would be a pledge of regular support, however modest. Regular contributions will be of great help in bringing stability to FUM's finances. (But, please, do not send contributions to me; send them directly to FUM.)

Inasmuch as the needs of Friends organizations are ongoing, you may find similar flyers from other groups inserted in future issues. I hope you will also consider them carefully.

Turning finally to our last issue, on anti-Christian prejudice among liberal Quakers, I have received several thoughtful letters in response. One reader, Sabron Newton, also passed on a brief statement by the late Marshall Hodgson of 57th Street Meeting in Chicago, which in my view has much to say to all concerned with this issue. It is too compact to excerpt from here. But it has been reprinted, under the title, *"The Peace Testimony: Christ Is The Root,"* by the Tract Association of Friends, 1515 Cherry St., Philadelphia PA 19102. At their price of ten cents a copy, it is a bargain in more ways than one.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

LET US NOW PRAISE QUAKER INVENTIVENESS

The "Root Beer Factor" is shorthand for the tradition of Quaker inventiveness. Root beer, after all, was invented in the early 1870s by a Quaker, one Charles Hires of Philadelphia, who thought at first it could serve as an alternative to real beer(that's why he changed the original name, which was "herb tea"),and advertised it as "The Temperance Drink." Of course, his "beer" never posed any threat to the real thing; but it did become a part of American culture, and made Friend Hires a wealthy man. (The Root Beer Factor does not automatically disconnect doing good from doing well.)

Another of my favorite examples is that of August Flitcraft, a Friend of Oak Park, Illinois, near Chicago. In the 1880s, accurate information about the premiums and values offered by various insurance companies was hard to come by, and Flitcraft thought this should be remedied. So he set out to gather this information and put it in a compact form which consumers could use to compare various companies and their wares. At first most companies were uncooperative, so Flitcraft had to buy a lot of insurance policies to get the data he needed. But get it he did, and the result was *Flitcraft's Compendium*, an exhaustive guide to insurance companies and their policies which, a century later, is still a standard in the field.

A Tradition of the Nontraditional

These two examples of Quaker inventiveness are less well known than many others; yet they illustrate the practical and constructive intentions which have shaped so much of this creative work. Even so, the "Root Beer Factor" often has an offbeat, idiosyncratic character. Most of us who have dipped into Quaker history have read of Abram Darby's work in developing steel, and Edward Pease's introduction of the first passenger train. Many of Pease's peers apparently thought his idea was, to say the least, peculiar. But such peculiarity kept Quakers, despite their small numbers, at the center of the technological developments which sparked the industrial revolution. But this strain of inventiveness has not been confined to heavy industry or to the early 19th century. Rather, if you look closely, you can see it popping up again and again, not just in the form of gadgets but in social inventions too, and down to the present day. Consider another pair of examples:

**Silviculture, or Tree-Farming*. A Quaker named J. Russell Smith, a professor at Columbia early in this century, wanted to find an alternative to agricultural practices which destroyed the soil. His worldwide researches led him to develop the concept of tree cropping, which made for a permanent, soil-preserving agriculture, one which could be adapted to make hillsides and other land unsuitable for traditional farming become productive. This approach is now being widely applied; and of Smith's book laying out his scheme, E.F. Schumacher said: "*Tree Crops* made so much sense to me that I have never been the same since. *It made sense* because it did not merely state(what was wrong)...no, it did much more...: it showed what could be done and what should be done."

**Partnership for Productivity*. David Scull, the late Virginia Friend who has been mentioned here before, traveled widely in pursuit of various Quaker concerns. He was deeply affected by the poverty of most Third World people; and as a businessman, he was disappointed by the nearly-complete lack of projects aimed at helping grass roots business people and entrepreneurs succeed, especially in making products or providing services needed for the development of their communities. In 1969, he decided to fill this gap with a new organization, which he set about creating. The result, 15 years later, is an ongoing, independent program with more than 100 employees working on several continents, and many local successes.

Quaker Inventiveness: An Equal Opportunity Employer

Nor, let me hasten to add, has this inventiveness been exclusively a male Quaker preserve. There was, for instance, Lydia Pinkham, whose own secret herbal mixture became a famous remedy for "female complaints." Besides making this elixir, Pinkham carried on a vast correspondence with women on health issues, a precursor of both Dear Abby and consciousness-raising. Or consider Elise Boulding, who has played a central role in making peace research (itself the brainchild of a British Friend, Lewis Richardson) a recognized field of academic

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work. Even Elizabeth Fry's work with women prisoners, which became a reform crusade, started out as an effort to apply practical imagination to a concrete situation of need.

What accounts for this persistent inventiveness? One major culprit was surely William Penn, who laid down much of the practical orientation of early Quaker education in his book *Some Fruits of Solitude:* "The world," he argued, "is certainly a great and stately volume of natural Things; and may be not improperly styled the hieroglyphics of a better: But alas! how very few leaves of it do we seriously turn over! This ought to be the subject of the education of our youth, who, at twenty, when they should be fit for business, know little or nothing of it....Children had rather be making of tools and instruments of play; shaping, drawing, framing, and building &c. than getting some rules of propriety of speech by heart...."

Where Saying Leads To Doing

This attitude also reflects the basic character of Quakerism as an egalitarian, inductive form of religion, looking first to experience rather than to dogma, tradition or authority. Answering George Fox's crucial question, "What canst thou say?" leads almost inevitably to the further query, "What, then, canst thou *do?*" This progression helps explain the frequent connection of Friendly inventions to Quaker concerns: when Elizabeth Magie invented The Landlord's Game in 1903, she was hoping to dramatize the evils of land speculation. That the history of her game, which evolved into the capitalism-celebrating Monopoly, is an ironic one is all right; the game is fun, just as Hires root beer tastes good even if it was a flop as a temperance drink.

For that matter, not every Quaker inventor's idea worked out. Though the mid-nineteenth century, Francis Rotch of New Bedford, Massachusetts spent most of his life and inherited fortune trying to build a better harpoon for sail-driven whaling ships. But his first model, put together with years of effort, didn't work; and by the time he was ready with another prototype, the whale industry as he knew it was collapsing, never to rise again.

But despite such failures, which as any inventor or entrepreneur knows are abundant, Quakers have continued to display this practical, constructive attitude toward the world and its problems, saying again and again, in effect: *"What does thee mean, such-and-such a problem is insoluble? Let's set aside that conventional wisdom, roll up our sleeves and see what we can do."* And surprisingly often, we have managed to accomplish something useful.

A Missing Link in Modern Quakerism?

At least, I *think* we have continued to do that. It's hard to know what's going on in your own generation with much clarity. And while I don't want to be unnecessarily viewing with alarm, still I worry about this sometimes. A survey of the present Quaker constituency would show more and more of us settled into the professions, academia, various levels of the civil service, or the corporate equivalents thereof. These are not necessarily bad places to be....But there doesn't seem to be anywhere near as many Quaker small businesses and entrepreneurs; and can we sustain our quirky, peculiar kind of inventiveness, this "Root Beer Factor" without the measure of independence such ventures make possible?

Maybe we can; again, I'm not insisting that we have lost this special genius. After all, as this issue was in preparation, a Friend was visiting our family, while looking for a way to apply his successful experience in an alfalfa sprout-growing business to the needs of poor people and refugees in the Third World. I don't know if he'll find a way; but he shows that Quakers are still out there looking for new ways to do things. Yet what also seems undeniable is that we don't talk much about this tradition anymore; we don't celebrate it or openly nurture it as part of our religious heritage.

And to that extent at least I believe we should definitely change our ways. Shouldn't all of us who have enjoyed playing Monopoly or drinking root beer(not to mention riding trains or using steel) consider how to best maintain our society as a kind of greenhouse of new ideas, some of which will one day blossom unpredictably to enrich the world our children will inherit?

INSIDE: QUAKERS AND THE
"ROOT BEER FACTOR"

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

THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

In Fifth Month 1787, the first British Society for the abolition of the slave trade was formed. It was not a Quaker group, but nine of the twelve founding members were Friends. How the British Quakers and their allies managed finally to abolish slavery in all England's dominions before America did and without a civil war is a long story, but one well worth pondering on this side of the Atlantic.

Also worth pondering is that in this month 1672, George Fox left Maryland, where he had attended a session of Baltimore Yearly Meeting, headed for Long Island. He made his journey on horseback, by canoe and on foot, covering in about two weeks what it now takes us about two hours to drive on a good day. A year later in the same month, Fox finished his labors in America and headed home on a ship called The Society of Bristol. The return voyage took thirty-nine days.

And at the end of this month in 1660, the Puritan authorities of Boston hung Mary Dyer on their common.

QUAKER CHUCKLES

So Be It

A certain weighty elder in an oldtime meeting was given to preaching at length every First Day. He was also, in proper Quaker fashion, prepared to stop in mid-speech to await further divine guidance. One morning, when he had preached a good while, he abruptly paused, and was heard to murmur, "And what shall I say next, Lord?"

An unmistakably human voice piped up from a back bench and answered clearly, "How about 'Amen'?"

Soon To Be A Quaker Button

At a recent Yearly Meeting session, a weighty member was overheard patiently explaining to a visitor, "No, I don't belong to organized religion--I'm a Quaker."

A Hot Comment

A plain Friend was once accosted in the street by a stranger who thought he knew the Quaker's face but could not quite place it. "Now, where in hell have I seen you before?" he asked perplexedly.

"From where in hell does thee come?" said the Quaker.
