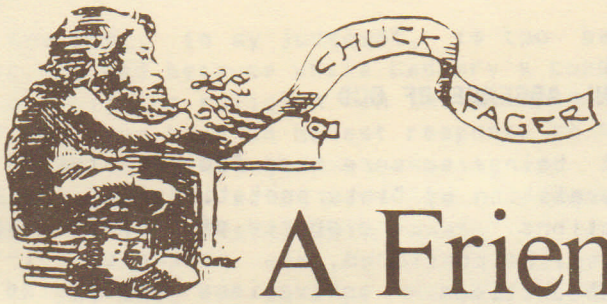

A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Eighty ISSN #0739-5418 Tenth Month, 1987

Dear Friend.

Let me begin with some housekeeping items: First, I have received a number of letters recently asking if there is an **Index** for this publication. The answer is no, there isn't an Index--yet. Clearly, though, one would be useful, to me as well as to back issue-minded readers and researchers. But the time needed for rereading all previous issues and making index entries is very hard for me to come by.

So Let me ask a question: Would one of you be interested in preparing an Index? I would be willing to offer some modest compensation, to be negotiated, and would set as a specification only that it be prepared in a computer medium compatible with mine(C/PM Wordstar or Datastar) to facilitate updating. If this idea is of interest to you, please drop me a note.

The second item is something I would prefer not to mention, but have been asked about too many times to pass by any longer: It has to do with the absence of my various publications from the recently-published catalog of Quakers United In Publishing, or **QUIP.** What happened is simply this: to defray the catalog publishing expenses, QUIP decided to charge a fee for each title listed. This policy seemed unwise to me, because the value of such a catalog depends very much on its being comprehensive, and since some Quaker publishers have more titles than they do funds, this would limit the catalog's usefulness. And in fact, my own bank balance was low at the time, so I regretfully declined QUIP's offer of listings. That is really all there is to that. Given the number of inquiries it has generated, though, it is probably worth reconsidering when the next edition comes around.

Last on this list, it is time to begin thinking ahead to our seventh annual nominations for **Quakers of the Year,** and once again I want to solicit your suggestions for consideration.

In the news, a tip of the broadbrim is in order to Friend Lon Fendall and the Peace Learning Center at George Fox College in Oregon, which recently received a $15,000 grant from, of all places, the United States Institute of Peace. Readers who remember our issue #43, which expressed considerable anxiety over the fate of the federally-funded Institute in the hands of a Reagan-appointed Board of Directors, will not be surprised to learn that this was the first grant it has made to any group with the name of Friends attached.

How did the Center manage it? Well, one cannot help but note the fact that, besides running a fine program, in other years Friend Fendall has served as campaign manager for Oregon Senator Mark Hatfield, who was among those principally responsible for getting the Institute proposal through Congress. This is not mentioned by way of criticism; it is how the game is played. More power to Fendall and the Center, and perhaps some of the rest of us can learn something from their example.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

 Subscriptions $13.95/yr.; Canada, $16; elsewhere $20

HENRY CADBURY AND THE AWFUL ABSENCE OF GOD

For many Friends of his time, the late Henry Cadbury(1883-1974) was something of a model: with his distinguished Quaker lineage, eminence as a New Testament scholar, and long tenure as chairman of the American Friends Service Committee Board of Directors, his seemed a life that was exemplary of traditional Quaker beliefs and values.

But it wasn't. As is shown very well in the new biography of Cadbury by Margaret Bacon, ***Let This Life Speak*** (University of Pennsylvania Press), Cadbury was an innovator, indeed even a radical within the Society, one of the more effective of our century. And thanks to Bacon's fine work, perhaps his religious outlook and its impact on Friends will receive more attention than they have. They deserve it.

Taking Action To Fill The Gap

Cadbury's Quakerism was a departure because it was built around an essential lack of faith and religious experience. "My lack of these is a nakedness that I hesitate to expose," he told a Harvard audience in 1936. He didn't know why he had never had inner experience that matched what he read about in the Bible and Quaker history; but he hadn't.

And so in place of this experience he focussed on character and conduct. "Religious life," he wrote in 1932, "flowers out of fundamental developed traits of character, not magical communications." Or as Bacon puts it, paraphrasing a 1940 Cadbury lecture, "If one could not oneself experience what others called revelation, one could study the lives of the men and women who had...and whose lives had been transformed. One could pattern one's character after such persons, beginning with Jesus, and try to make automatic those habits of ethical behavior which such persons taught with their very lives."

In itself, this perspective would not have been remarkable. After all, as Cadbury observed, among Friends mysticism or personal revelation "has never been general and... a large number of non-mystics have enjoyed religious life under its auspices and have contributed much that Friends have done for human good." So it is, and so they have.

But he did not stop there. In truth, he went considerably beyond agnosticism. He spoke of religious and mystical experiences as being no more than "moods" turned into revelation by "interpretations" or "dramatizations." The source of Friends' testimonies, he concluded, was psychological--mixed subconscious motivations sublimated into "assertions of divine revelation."

But this is not agnosticism. Rather, it is not unfair to sum up Cadbury's views of religious experience as essentially rationalist and reductionist--rather typical, one might add, of the Harvard Divinity School where he taught for twenty years. (I say this based on experience, having studied there in the late sixties.) Moreover, he offered this outlook, and what could be called the "Ethical Action" approach he drew from it, as a basis for Quaker life and work. In 1947 he reaffirmed that this view "is frankly non-mystical, and holds out no promise of a realized experience of God in this life."

Somehow Cadbury has not been a target of evangelical critics of liberal Quakerism as has his elder colleague Rufus Jones. This is remarkable and anomalous, because compared to him, Jones was a paragon of orthodoxy. Perhaps one reason Cadbury escaped Jones's fate was that he rarely engaged in direct theological controversy, preferring to speak indirectly and obliquely of such things. But another, as Bacon remarks, is that, somehow, perhaps because of his standing as a biblical scholar, his inoffensive demeanor, devotion to service, and sparkling wit, "people did not always hear Henry Cadbury" when he spoke directly about his religious views. They presumed a conventional Christian faith which was simply not there.

Drafting An Unwritten Orthodoxy

But even so, his "Ethical Action" Quakerism spread widely through the unprogrammed sector of the Society in the middle years of this century, until for awhile it was all but an unwritten creed of Friends General Conference. Yet the chosen and most effective instrument of its propagation was the American Friends Service Committee, of whose board Cadbury served as Chairman for more than thirty years. The history books paint AFSC as the "lengthened shadow" of Rufus Jones; yet while his role as founder was of course crucial, Jones was its chair for little more than a decade. Today's AFSC bears far more the stamp of Cadbury's "Ethical Action" Quakerism than it does of Rufus Jones and his prophetic mysticism.

And that, in my judgment, is too bad. It is too bad because while Cadbury's condition of building religion "in the absence of God," may have been an honest response to his own inner condition, as a basis for the Quaker movement it is woefully inadequate and many of its effects unfortunate.

I say that for several reasons. Most important is that the Society of Friends has from the beginning been built on the conviction of the reality of divine presence and leading, corporately if not individually. Our worship is based on this conviction of presence and leading; our testimonies are the outward witness to it; our business procedures make it their goal; our structures are intended to discern and nurture it.

An Idea Running Our of Gas

Indeed, Quakerism is designed to operate on immediate divine leading just as a car is designed to run on gasoline. If, say, you had a car but did not believe in gasoline, you could still perhaps learn much about automotive history, components, cultural significance and so forth, and all this could perhaps be put to some constructive use. But when you wanted to actually **go** someplace, you would have to use something else.

In the same way, I am convinced that a Society of Friends that lacked a substantial sense of divine presence and leading would have lost its reason for being and could not be long sustained. If it continued, it would be as some other kind of institution. Cadbury often argued to the contrary in his gentle way, that uncertainty of belief need not prevent us from taking action; in fact, action could lead to belief. Yet this formula does not really represent his own history, in which action was put **in the place of** a belief and experience which were not there. And this thesis sounds to me like saying you could somehow get the car started without putting gas in until later.

Without this conviction of presence, the Quaker peculiarities of our institutions make no real functional sense, and sustaining them would become increasingly difficult; and it seems to me that the AFSC has been going through just such a process, as has been asserted here before(AFL #7, #66). Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of this change, that it has put AFSC on the very outer layer of the Society's periphery seems all but inarguable. And similarly, in recent years the Cadbury ethos has been in broad retreat within FGC circles, swept back by a resurgence of mystical/religious seeking **and** finding which owes far more to Rufus Jones and even programmed Friends such as Elton Trueblood and Wilmer Cooper.

One important reason for this is highlighted in Bacon's book. She reveals in sad detail that this "Ethical Action" religion proved to be of little comfort to Henry Cadbury in his times of personal travail. Despite his rationalism, she notes that he frequently expressed in private a sense of loss at not having more sense of the reality of God and divine presence. Bacon also discloses that in the early 1940s, and again in the last decade of his life, he was overcome by deep, dark depression. The first bout was so serious that he took leave from Harvard, spent time in an institution and even underwent electric shock treatments. The latter period, a generation later, was managed and concealed by the use of tranquilizers; but it lasted until the end. "Only those very close to him knew about the dark feelings," Bacon writes; "the rest of the world found him as loving, gentle, witty and hardworking as ever." And so, indeed, I found him when we met briefly in 1969.

A Life Still Speaking, With A Smile

Many another contemporary Friend has made a similar pilgrimage through darkness, as George Fox did to an ocean thereof; but many have also glimpsed, as Fox did, the ocean of light that overcomes it. Our language about this experience varies, and different wings of the Society will doubtless continue to quarrel about what is the proper framework for expressing and understanding it. But it continues nonetheless. And out of it emerges a conviction that belief, or experience, is the soil from which authentic action grows; but once sprouted, they go together; one does not have to precede the other; they proceed in a reciprocal relationship--as the Epistle of James said long ago.

To be sure, as Cadbury said there are and will continue to be many "non-mystics" among Friends; but they can be supported and carried by the sense of presence in the Society at large, as our metaphorical car, with its gas tank at least part way full, could carry a load of passengers.

Thus, the religious legacy of Henry Cadbury, an important Quaker force once, seems to be fading rapidly. Perhaps this is just as well. After all, we still have his many fine historical writings, his example of scholarship and dedication to service, and not least his apparently inexhaustible wit, with which thankfully ***Let This Life Speak*** is generously seasoned. All this and the Revised Standard Version, too--that's plenty.

Address Correction Requested

INSIDE: HENRY CADBURY AND QUAKERISM WITHOUT GOD?

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

THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

In 11/1935, his second year at Harvard, Henry Cadbury faced a major moral dilemma: whether to sign a Massachusetts loyalty oath adopted the previous summer. All teachers in the state were required to sign the oath; and the state was not kidding--a Friend teaching at nearby Tufts University who flatly refused to sign lost his job.

As a Quaker, Cadbury would be permitted to file an affirmation rather than a formal oath. But he was strongly opposed to the whole idea of loyalty oaths. Yet he also needed his job, and liked it as well. What was he to do?

One thing he did was to consult with several Friends. Back came letters of encouragement--and job offers. But a group of his fellow professors urged him to join them in signing the oath with a letter of reservation.

Cadbury ultimately joined the others, but first tried to rewrite the statement to make it more acceptable. However, his first revision was rejected. So was the second. Harvard's president offered to make his a test case which the university would fight to the Supreme Court; though he admitted he thought they would lose in the end.

Cadbury finally signed the affirmation and filed a letter of objections; and on this third try, it was accepted.

QUAKER CHUCKLES

Henry Cadbury's wit was legendary, and Margaret Bacon's book is studded with examples of it. Here are several:

Cadbury was one of the scholars who produced the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament. The new translation was very controversial in some quarters, however, and there were even threats to burn it. Asked to comment on this reaction, Cadbury replied, "Well, they used to burn the translators. If now they only want to burn the translation, I guess we have made some progress."

During the translation work, his wife Lydia reported overhearing an argument between their son Warder and a boy from next door. The neighbor was boasting of his father's literary exploits. "That's nothing," Warder Cadbury retorted, "my father wrote the Bible."

Finally, after traveling home from England by ocean liner, he reported that he had been free of seasickness, but others had not been so lucky. One of them was a young man he had met who said he was a writer. Asked where he had been published, the young man, who had made many ocean voyages, said he was a frequent contributor to the "Atlantic."