



A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Thirteen

Fourth Month 1982

Dear Friend,

This is a month of deadlines: There was the usual federal tax deadline on Fourth Month 15, which also coincided with the deadline for entries in our first Young Quakers Peace Poster Contest. I have received an exciting stack of entries, which will be judged soon and the winners announced in the issue for Sixth Month as promised.

There are some other deadlines this month which are also of importance for American Friends. The AFSC earlier this month passed a deadline for applications to fill its position of National Peace Secretary. Filling this slot will be one of the most important decisions of the year for AFSC. Will the new peace Secretary be an ecumenically-oriented Friend? Let us hope so. For Friends General Conference, the time is rapidly approaching for a decision on who will be their new Administrative Secretary. And on 3/17, FGC's Secretary of Nurture Dwight Spann-Wilson, announced his resignation effective in Ninth Month; so FGC has another crucial position to fill. Quaker ecumenical efforts could be much affected by the outcome of the process of finding Dwight's successor. He has, among other accomplishments, been active in dialogue with other branches of Friends.

Still another deadline will be upon us by the time you receive this, namely Fourth Month 30, which had been scheduled as the day by which negotiations for the UN Law of the Sea Treaty were to be finished and the Treaty signed. But as I write, it is uncertain whether the negotiations will finish on time; and, if they do, whether the US delegation will sign the Treaty. I will be staying on top of this story, as I have for the past year.

The last deadline to be mentioned here is for those readers whose subscriptions coincided with the first or second issues of *A Friendly Letter*. If you have not renewed, time will soon run out on your subscription. If your copy has a renewal flyer inserted in it, then it is time to consider whether you want to stay with me for another year. I hope you will.

I also want to make a special renewal offer for readers who are interested in helping *A Friendly Letter* reach a wider audience: If you will let me mail you 250 copies of back issues, and promise to distribute them among Friends, at your local Meeting or church, at Yearly Meetings or wherever, I will extend your subscription for six months, or send a six-month gift sub to the person of your choice. You don't have to take orders or handle money; just see that the copies get into the hands of people who might be interested in it. This offer is limited (because my supply of back issues is limited), so if it appeals to you, let me know promptly.

In the meantime, I hope you are now enjoying a well-deserved lovely spring after what has been a long and difficult winter for practically everyone.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

RECLAIMING A FORGOTTEN FRIENDS TESTIMONY

Quakers are rightly proud of our tradition of witnessing against social evils. There is one such evil, however, which for decades ranked high on Quaker lists of social concerns, but which today is practically unheard of. Yet it is an evil which has wreaked great havoc among us, as it has outside the Society. In fact, it has touched, and damaged, at least half a dozen Quaker families in my own circle of acquaintances, including my own--damaged them much more directly and immediately than have the wars, in protest of which we devoted so much energy over the years.

I'm speaking, of course, of alcoholism. Over the past few years, as the evidence of its visible impact on people I know has accumulated, so has my sense of frustration over the near-invisibility of this issue in most Friends groups. Of the three national conferences I attended last year, only at the Evangelical Friends General Conference was it even on the agenda, and there it was folded in with drug abuse and related problems in one of many brief workshops. Activity at Yearly Meeting levels does not seem much more frequent.

Two Realities That Need to be Confronted

This lack of attention is distressing, because I believe there are two overriding realities about alcoholism which cry out for Friends to face up to and begin to deal with them. The first reality is that while we may have all but forgotten about alcohol abuse, *it has not forgotten about us*. Most adult Friends, of whatever background, could probably count, as I can, several persons and families of their direct acquaintance who have been or are being ravaged by it. If comparable numbers of Friends were being hauled off to jail for refusing to swear oaths or submit to the draft, we would be organizing committees nonstop on their behalf. Our corporate neglect of this reality is, in my opinion, cause for repentance and renewal of a commitment to action.

Any such commitment, though, runs straight into the second reality about alcoholism among us, which is this: *Our traditional formulations of this testimony are obsolete*. They have not worked and will not work. If we are to get anywhere, we will have to admit our ignorance, start from scratch and think afresh.

Making such a new start will not be easy to do. In putting my thoughts together for this issue, I read over several old and new Books of Discipline from various Yearly Meetings. All of their statements in this field were steeped through and through in the spirit and rhetoric of Temperance and Prohibition. Moreover, I know there are numerous Friends who still approach this problem primarily in these terms.

Friendly Evasion: Echoing the Past, Accepting the Present

In light of these facts, it is easy enough to see how this testimony has been all but abandoned in recent decades. The ordeal of national Prohibition was one of the most divisive episodes in 20th century American history; its reverberations are still felt among us half a century after Repeal. When it was over, Prohibition's opponents were sure it had been proven an oppressive, unworkable failure, while its advocates felt robbed of a fair test and adequate enforcement. But rather than perpetuate this abrasive debate internally, Friends have evidently settled for echoing more or less clearly the old battle cries in their lists of Advices, while following the new, laissez faire ways in practice, except, of course, at Quaker functions.

The last thing meant to come out of any such commentary as this is fuel to re-ignite those old fires of discontent. For better and for worse, it is clear that there is no going back to the Prohibition era, either in policy or outlook. At the same time, how can we continue to ignore the presence and effects of this plague among us? I believe meaningful action will begin with the humble admission that we do not, in truth, know what to do as a Religious Society that could effectively reduce the toll of alcoholism among us and in our nation in a manner that was acceptable to Friends and the public at large, with the exception of only a few programs like Alcoholics Anonymous. For that matter, we don't know very much about

how to educate our children so that they will in fact be less likely to succumb to the ubiquitous social pressures associated with drinking. (This melancholy judgment is not confined to Friends, nor is it only my personal opinion. A new study by the National Academy of Sciences documents in detail the minimal impact of most traditional alcohol education efforts, for adults as well as youth. This study, which is a very useful resource, is entitled *Alcohol and Public Policy: Beyond the Shadow of Prohibition*. Edited by Moore and Gerstein, it is published by the National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington DC 20418.)

Seeking New Answers: A way to Begin?

Let us suppose that Friends did begin to confront what I have called the two overriding realities about alcoholism--that it is an evil which cries out for a meaningful corporate response, but that it is also an evil to which we do not know how to respond effectively. What kind of testimony could be reconstructed on this foundation?

I don't pretend to know the answers to that question. But I do want to make some suggestions for finding answers. The first is that this issue is too big to be tackled head-on by local Meetings and churches without some expert help. Thus, some major Quaker body should bring together the best talent among us--and from outside as well--for some serious, sustained study, threshing, and drafting of recommendations for wider consideration by Friends. The American Friends Service Committee's practice of appointing a Working Party would fit this need well (and in my judgment, the appointment of such a Working Party would be an excellent investment of AFSC resources). Another vehicle might be a well-prepared national conference, like those held in 1980 on Quaker service and in 1981 on ministry at the Quaker Hill Conference Center in Richmond, Indiana, jointly sponsored by the Center and the Earlham School of Religion.

The next suggestion would be for such a study effort to consider our testimony at several levels, in keeping with the multifaceted character of the problem. We need guidance for action in at least four areas:

- * *Non-drinking youth*: How can we educate young Friends to keep them from alcohol use at best, or abuse in any case?

- * *Non-abusing adults*: Most alcohol-related accidents involve "moderate" drinkers, *not* alcoholics. How can we encourage occasional drinkers to minimize their drinking or to give it up entirely, while avoiding the old Temperance image of self-righteousness?

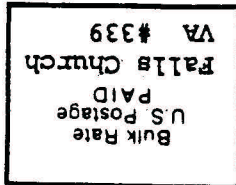
- * *Alcohol abusers*: Besides support for Alcoholics Anonymous, what role can Meetings, Yearly Meetings and associations play in helping Friends and families cope with and overcome the effects of alcoholism?

- * *Public Policy*: What legislative and regulatory actions can practically diminish alcohol intake and abuse as a public health problem, without causing major social friction or division among Friends?

A Challenge Too Great For Friends?

This is a tall order for any Working Party or conference. Maybe it is indeed too tall an order for American Friends. In the last half-century, most work done in this area has been supported by, and mostly left to, the federal government. But alcoholism research funds, like many others, have been sharply cut back in the past year. So who will do the work now? Can Temperance-minded Friends step forth from their traditional attachments enough to consider new ways of bearing their witness? Can non-abstaining Quakers admit that our current hands-off attitude is woefully inadequate? And can either group spare enough attention from "more pressing matters" to get something started?

I hope so. For while our other traditional testimonies, particularly our Peace witness, are very important and deserve full support, our forgotten Quaker testimony on alcoholism was also, and still is, very much a matter of life and death.



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THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

Last month we mentioned that George Fox left Jamaica headed for the American colonies in Third Month 1672, and had a harrowing journey marked by storms and the threat of being captured by pirates. On Fourth Month 23 of that year he finally touched land again, near the mouth of the Patuxent River in Maryland. He was just in time for the first gathering of Friends on the Western Shore of Maryland, a gathering that eventually became Baltimore Yearly Meeting, which is still a vital child of Fox's labors at the spry age of 310 years.

Forty years later on the same date, Fox's widow, Margaret Fell Fox, died in England. What an astonishing woman she was: she died at 88, after bearing nine children, helping bring Quakerism into the world as well, and after spending more than seven years in prison for her faith. She died at Swarthmoor Hall, the family estate that served for many years as the headquarters of the Quaker movement.

QUAKER CHUCKLE

A Wedding Sermon

Once a woman Friend, who was about to go into a wedding, was waylaid and eldtered by two of her Meeting's overseers. With as much delicacy as they could muster, the Overseers advised the woman Friend of their sense that she was apt to speak too often during worship, and urged her to restrain herself during the nuptial meeting which was about to begin.

All through the following ceremony, the woman Friend brooded over having been thus disciplined. She felt wronged by their judgment, and finally the burden of it became too much for her to bear. And just as the happy couple was about to rise and speak their vows to each other, this woman Friend, still thinking of the overseers, leaped to her feet and exclaimed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

A Pauline Failing

Many years ago another woman Friend was speaking to a mixed gathering, and expressed approval of women speaking in worship, and even in public when moved to do so. A man listening to her shook his head and said, "But The Apostle Paul was not of that opinion."

The woman Friend replied quickly, "But thee knows that Paul was not a Friend!"
