

David Gregg

The Quakers as makers of
America.

BX7632

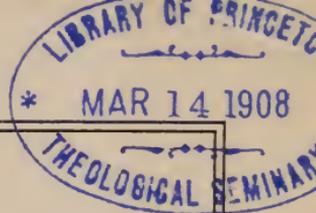
.G81



4157

1911

BX 1632
G81



The Quakers
AS
Makers of America

BY
DR. DAVID GREGG

THE QUAKERS
AS
MAKERS OF AMERICA

THIRD EDITION

1907

FOR SALE BY
FRIENDS' BOOK AND TRACT COMMITTEE
51 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

David Gregg is President of Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, a position which he has held since 1904. From 1889 to 1904 he was pastor of Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian church in Brooklyn, New York. During this pastorate he preached on successive "Forefathers' Days" a series of sermons on the "Makers of America."

One of these "Forefather Day" sermons was on "The Quakers as Makers of America, or Ideal Civilization." Two editions of this sermon have been published by The American Friend, and it is now reprinted by permission of the author and publishers.

The Quakers as Makers of America

WE are apt to think of the Quakers as a people of peculiarities; they are before our mind as men and women of broad-brimmed hats and poke bonnets, drab coats and gray dresses—a serious people of slow movement; a demure people, who are the victims of their own virtues. They are a peculiar people, but behind every Quaker peculiarity there is a consistent reason. The Quakers are more than an embodiment of oddities; they are an embodiment of great principles and an incarnation of a grand life. Both their principles and life have entered into the bone and sinew of our Republic, and both are still necessary for the realization of ultimate America. The reproduction of their spirit and purpose by American citizens will make real, by and by, our “manifest destiny.” We wish to look at this destiny as it exists in germ form in the souls of our Quaker ancestors. There is nothing more interesting or inspiring or profitable than the experience of those great souls who have helped to lead the nations up the heights of civilization and into the advances of civic life; who have led the human race nearer to God and into genuine and abiding liberty.

The Quakers had such souls. Such souls looked out of the clear and striking faces of George Fox and William Penn, Elizabeth Fry and Lucretia Mott. Around the lives of such heroes and heroines the history of the world has turned on an axis. They have helped to direct the main current of human thought in the right direction. You call them single souls, but they have multiplied themselves into myriad souls; they have become a people. There is no getting away from the true man and the true woman, from the single soul, if you would get at the origin and history of great movements. The tendency of scientific study in our time has perhaps led us to undervalue the influence of great souls. History has been believed to advance according to definite laws over which neither human genius nor human freedom has exerted any appreciable influence. Mr. Buckle explains national character as the result of circumstances, and he claims that history and biography are wholly different in their sphere; yet the fact remains that persons are the ruling centres in history. Take such personalities as Augustine and Luther and Fox and Penn out of history and the course of history ceases to be intelligible. Because this is so, we emphasize the names of the great men who stand chief among the races and peoples who form the constituents of our Republic, and we exalt their principles, which form the bone and sinew of American man-

hood. The Quakers, when seen at their best, stand in American history for ideal civilization; and this civilization is their contribution to the American Republic. As historic characters the Quakers are a marked and influential people in the midst of the most marked and influential types of mankind. They have put their stamp indelibly on national and international life. If we enter into the courts of justice we can see that they have been there: the substitution of affirmation in place of the oath is their work. The jails of humanity show the results of their reform; it was they who changed our prisons from sties to sanatoriums. The dream of that beautiful prison angel, Elizabeth Fry, is being worked out into reality in criminal law, and the remedial element in punishment is being pushed to the forefront in the administration of justice. They have put their mark even on the pages of our Holy Bible and have made it a book of greater power. They have taken some of its grandest prophecies and statements and commands and beatitudes; and by believing them, living them, translating them into reigning forces in the home and in the church and in the state, they have so made these their own that in reading the Book we instinctively associate their names with these Scriptures.

The Quakers arose in an age of dogmas and creeds and persecutions and reforms and religious revolutions and quarreling ecclesiastics. They took their

place among the ranks of reformers and were the most advanced of all. They were the liberals and radicals of that age; they were the reformers of the reformed; they undertook to reform Calvin and Luther and Knox. The Episcopalians and Puritans and Presbyterians protested against the Romanists, but the Quakers protested against the Episcopalians and Puritans and Presbyterians. In the language of Milton, to them "Presbyter was only old priest writ large." The Quakers were the Episcopalians and Puritans and Presbyterians of the seventeenth century, sweetened and modified and made over with a new and a large admixture of love. They denied all ecclesiastical rites; they went to God directly for their instructions, and worshiped before God in stillness and silence without prescribed forms. As the complement of a state without a king, they offered mankind a church without a bishop. Their aim was to humanize Christianity and substitute a Gospel of hope for a Gospel of despair. Sweeping aside creeds and councils and rituals and synods, they held that God and the individual man, living in loving fellowship, were sufficient. They simplified things in a wholesome way and struck for an all-round liberty. This was Americanism before its day; this was Americanism out-Americanized. They were a people of great moral purpose. Their ideals were their inspiration, and the realization of these ideals was their goal. They got

their strength from ideals and convictions and visions of which the senses take no cognizance. James Freeman Clarke calls them the "English Mystics." If they were mystics, they were exceedingly practical mystics. They were one of the most independent people among all the races. They differed from all the sects around them in that they renounced the use of all force in the propagation of their principles. They inculcated and practised religious toleration. They have the honor of being one of the few divisions of Christendom against which the charges of cruelty and selfishness and love of power cannot be brought. Their gun was a protest, their bullet a principle, and their power the inner light. They served the church and state by what they were. Their method of pushing their faith was to be what they believed and then assert themselves. They exalted the passive virtues. This was the method of Jesus Christ. All which Jesus ever did in this world was to assert Himself and suffer. When violence was used against them their principle of action was, never retaliate. Their method of growth was by patience and perseverance and quiet suffering, and their method was effective. For example, they carried their religion in the Massachusetts colony and planted it right in the midst of the hard-headed Puritans. The Puritans persecuted them, whipped them, robbed them, hung them, but they kept right on asserting themselves and suffering

until, by their patience, they wore out the cruelty of the Puritans and brought the Puritan scourge and scaffold into public disgrace. The public, won over to them by their beautiful spirit, rose and demanded the cessation of persecution. Thus they purchased and established for us by their sufferings the religious toleration which now exists in our Republic. They served America by patiently suffering. Their martyrdom was like the martyrdom of the church of the catacombs, of which history tells us in thrilling words. The church of the catacombs was the kingdom of God in sackcloth, working underground, along channels and galleries of rock, to overthrow and replace the armed empires above. The Quakers were content to be in the minority on every great question until by self assertion and honest argument and right living they could win men enough to their side to make them the majority. In the first days their ways and principles spelled anarchy, but by the slow education of centuries, and by the beneficial changes which they wrought, they now spell righteousness, peace, love. You see, I am giving the bright and beautiful side of the Quaker story: I am telling what they contributed by way of strength and glory; I am speaking of them as the children of light, shining with the celestial beauty of a Christ-like spirit. In telling the story of the Quakers there is only one starting point—we must start with George Fox. He is to Quakerism what

Christ is to Christianity, its incarnation. In him we find the traits and principles and hopes and methods and life of Quakers at their best. He represents the heroic age of the Quakers. He gave Quakerism as a life and started it out on its thrilling career to march through England and Holland and America. This has been the order and growth of Quakerism: George Fox gave the world a Quaker life. Robert Barclay took the doctrines and principles and purposes out of which that Quaker life was constructed and built these into a terse, clear, logical Quaker system. It was necessary to build such a theological system for the purpose of defense under attack and misrepresentation, and as a fair treatment of the public. This formulated the Quaker system Edward Burroughs took and carried out to the world and expounded and preached, and by the conversions which he made built up into a Quaker society. Then came William Penn who took the life of Fox, and the system of Barclay, and the converts of Burroughs, and built all into a Quaker commonwealth, which gave Quakers the civil embodiment of their cherished ideals and which gave America the powerful colony of Pennsylvania, a bulwark in the defense of freedom. After this came John Greenleaf Whittier, who took the commonwealth and the converts and the system and the life and beautified all. With chiseled words and sculptured cadences he built Quakerism into a cathedral-

like poem of liberty, full of reverence for God and of appreciation of man and of praise for the truth. George Fox, who was the spiritual father of the Quakers, was born in 1624. This makes him a child of the seventeenth century. Did he rise to power in that century? Was he so endowed and did he assert himself as to make for himself an immortal name among immortal men? If so, he was a man among men. That was a powerful century and brought forth wonderful products. It was a century when every weakling was relegated to obscurity; for George Fox to make his mark in that century is all the evidence required to prove him a great man. This was the century of great religious wars; this was the century of great books and measures and men. If you except the Bible, the most democratic books ever published were published in this century. Cervantes published "Don Quixote," which set all the world laughing at sham aristocracies and mock heroisms; that book helped to turn away the human mind from the worship of the false and artificial. Shakespeare's dramas were published then; his works tended toward human equality; they made kings and queens only men and women like their subjects. Bacon's works were published then; these taught men to feel it not only their right, but their duty, to look with eyes undimmed by a church creed at all things which the Lord had created. Bacon's works made it possible

for Newton to open the heavens, Watt the air, Lyell the earth, and Darwin animal life. "The Pilgrim's Progress" was published in that century; so was "Paradise Lost," so was Baxter's "Saint's Rest," and so was the authorized version of the Bible, which gave the Book to the common people. The Book is the ever-enduring Magna Charta of civil and religious liberty. This was the century of the Westminster divines, with their catechism and confession of faith. This was the century of Cromwell's guns. Can George Fox rise in this century? Can he in this century found a sect which shall live and prevail and modify society, and add freedom to freedom, and inaugurate reforms which, when carried out, will realize the ideal civilization? Can he lead in the strike for independence in an age when the whole trend of things is toward independence? He does.

George Fox had a profound sense of the length and breadth of the love which God had for mankind, and this made him the philanthropist he was. "All men are members of the family of the All Father and are brother." In his journal he says: "I saw the infinite love of God." God's love to man inspired his doing good to all men; hence he inaugurated help for the helpless and led in prison reforms and charities, and in the organization of societies for the emancipation of all human brothers in slavery; hence he inaugurated movements looking to the abolition of the

horrid and ungodly practice of brother man shooting down brother man; hence he protested against imprisonment for debt and against the infliction of capital punishment for minor crimes. From the brotherhood of man he evolved, under the teaching of the Spirit, the doctrine of human equality. He made woman the equal of man, and to establish her equality gave to her her full half of the meeting-house. He argued, if men are equal, why should some be greeted with idolatrous titles, and receive obeisance from others, and be addressed in flattering pronouns? With him every brother man stood for just one, and that one was no better than his neighbor; hence he refused to doff his hat to any man, or address any man as 'your reverence,' 'your holiness,' 'your grace,' 'your honor'; hence he called men by their Christian name, treating all alike. William Penn, following his example, addressed even King Charles II. as 'Friend Charles.' There was democracy in that. Hence he introduced the use of the pronouns "thee" and "thou" into conversation as a protest against caste. William Penn has built up a grammatical argument for the use of these pronouns; "thee" and "thou" are singular pronouns; "you" is the plural pronoun. Why should any single man be addressed as though he were plural—as though he were a regiment or one? A plural pronoun used in the place of a singular pronoun is a species of flattery for the purpose of magnifying

a man or a woman. Recognizing that man is the brother of man, George Fox labored to promote honesty and truthfulness between man and man. This led him to secure a fixity of price for goods in all the trades, a custom which is now established. This led to simplicity of speech in conversation. He argued for the abolition of the oath, for the reason that he would have every word uttered by man as true as an oath. That honesty and truthfulness might be made easy, he argued for an all around simplicity of life, and protested against extravagance and waste and vanity and idle luxury and the senseless change of fashion. Such was George Fox, and such were the doctrines and practices which he contributed to civilization. George Fox was a magnificent freeman, and he introduced into the world of thought and life that genius of liberty which was calculated to make every other man a freeman like himself. How did these legacies which George Fox contributed to America reach America? He brought them himself. The man himself trod the very ground we to-day tread. He traveled through the American colonies for the express purpose of asserting himself and his gospel of liberty. After he had worked out his mission here he went back to England to find a grave, and there he died, saying: "I am clear, I am clear." And was he not clear? What man ever left the world having done his duty more fearlessly, or having declared more

completely all the counsel of God as he understood it, or having given to the world grander ideals for the coming civilization? But the principles of George Fox came to America not only in the person of George Fox himself; they came also in the persons of his many followers, who settled in all the colonies, but notably in Massachusetts and Rhode Island and Pennsylvania. In most of the colonies they had patiently to work their way into recognition. This was especially so in Massachusetts. The first thing which met the Quakers there was persecution, and that from the holy Puritans. This is one of the stains which rest on the memory of the Puritans. It is vain to try to excuse it, for it cannot be excused; it can only be admitted and apologized for. In former years I offered my service to the Puritans and made a special plea in their defense, but I now beg leave to withdraw from the case.

The Puritans who desecrated temples and destroyed the finest works of art are not the people to condemn others for rudeness, are not the people to bore the tongues of Quakers with red hot irons, and cut off their ears, and brand their flesh, and strip them naked and publicly scourge them for the crime of rudeness. In some cases the cruelties inflicted had unbalanced them mentally. The Quakers used no force; theirs was the strength of the martyr nature. On behalf of the Quakers I instance the letters which they wrote in

their prisons, and the words which they spoke on the gallows, and the prayers which they offered for forgiveness of their murderers. I put these in the deadly parallel column with the Puritans' cruel laws and branding irons and knotted whips and public gallows, and then leave the decision of the case to posterity. There is this to be said for the Puritans: A popular reaction set in against persecution, and by this means Puritanism rectified itself. The reaction came from such outspoken men as the Puritan sea captains whose story John G. Whittier forcibly relates in a poem pertaining to the dark colonial days. The Quaker power in America reached its height in the coming of William Penn and in the establishment and life of the colony of Pennsylvania. William Penn was second only to George Fox as a Quaker influence. The territory of Pennsylvania was given to William Penn by Charles II. in lieu of money owed his father by the crown. The land was his to do with as he wished and he devoted it to working into life a Quaker commonwealth. There was no man better fitted to establish such a commonwealth than William Penn. He had paid a large price for the privilege of being a Quaker, and this made him a man to be trusted. He sacrificed the friendship of his home; his father said of him, "William has become a Quaker or some such melancholy thing." He had ability; he was educated at Oxford. He was democratic in spirit; and his defi-

dition of a free government shows this. "Any government," he said, "is free where the people are a party to the laws enacted." He was a kindred spirit to John Bright, the Quaker statesman of Great Britain, who for a whole generation was a leading spirit in the great movements of his country, and who was always on the right side. John Bright got his principles from William Penn. An analysis of his public life will show the Quaker principle of civil life to be this: Political power is rightly exercised only when it is possessed by the consent of the governed and is used for the welfare of the community according to the permissions of the moral law. This principle guided William Penn when he organized his colony. He gave it a constitution and laws full of the genius of humanity, and full of equal justice. He allowed all reforms to be pushed within his territory. There was not one good Quaker thing which did not flourish in it. Here the Indians were treated as brothers and here they acted brotherly in return. The colony was a temperance colony; it was an anti-war colony; it was a colony noted for its religious toleration. For over one hundred years the Quakers controlled it. Its homes were full of sweetness and strength. The colony was one of the greatest powers in the American revolution and furnished such leaders as Logan and Mifflin and Dickinson, all of them Quakers. Benjamin West, the great painter, was

born here in a Quaker home; he was one of the founders of the Royal Academy of Great Britain. The liberty of thought granted by this colony bore its products and brought the colony honor. It enabled it to grow into what it is to-day, the second State in the Union. The colony gave the country the city of Philadelphia, the one city of the Republic which rivals Boston in old colonial landmarks, just as in the olden time it rivaled Boston in that leadership which inaugurated the American revolution. It gave the country Independence Hall; it was the home of the Continental congress. Here was framed and debated and publicly signed the Declaration of Independence itself, which made the American revolution a historic fact. All this took place not on Puritan soil, but on Quaker soil, and all this took place where it did because there was more freedom of thought in Philadelphia than there was in Boston.

The part which the Quakers have taken in building the American Republic makes clear this two-fold way in which patriots can effectively serve their country:

1. By uttering an emphatic protest against all destructive evils.

History can ask no grander illustration of the power of protest than Quaker life on American soil. Why is it that there is no African slavery to-day within our borders? It is because the Quakers as early as 1688 issued their protest against African slavery, and kept

it issued until the nation was educated up to the emancipation proclamation. But mark this: They invested their all in their protest. They meant it, and they made the American people feel that they meant it. Their protest was strong with the moral strength of a splendid personality and a consistent life; its power was moral.

2. By keeping before one's country uplifting and inspiring ideas.

We call guns, swords, powder, forts, iron-clads and armies national powers; the Quakers have taught us that there are powers beyond these. The powers beyond these are right thoughts, high ideals, holy visions, righteous principles, burning aspirations. These make a strong manhood and womanhood, make a strong, pure state. The men and women who have these thoughts, ideals, visions, aspirations, go straight to God for them; they are exponents of God. The ideal civilization exists only in the plan of God.

This is the message of the Quaker fathers to the patriotic sons of America: If you would render your country the highest service and lead it forward to the millennial age, be an intellect to your country, think for it; be a conscience to your country, make moral decisions for it; and think and decide within the lines of God's holy law. If you would render your country the highest service, be the Lord's prophet to your country; dream dreams for it and see visions for it.

It was Socrates and Plato and Aristotle, men of thought and of vision, who were the promoters and conservators of the national strength of Greece; and it was Samuel and Elijah and Isaiah, the prophets of the Lord, who were the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof. Be to the American republic what these men were to the kingdoms of which they were citizens. Hold up ideals before the people as they did, and then, like them, you will attain a civilization embodying your ideals.

BX7632 .G81

The Quakers as makers of America.

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 · 1012 00039 4553