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## ALLEN JAY: MINISTER, LEADER NURTURING LEADERS

HOWARD R. MACY

Jay, Allen. *Autobiography of Allen Jay*, ed. Joshua Brown. Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2010.

Near the end of his life, Allen Jay's friends urged him to write an account of his service and experiences. He agreed to write and left a compelling autobiography that not only reveals a remarkable life but also gives a first-hand witness to many of the key events, issues, and common practices among Friends and in the United States during the 1800s. Comparing it to the journals of George Fox and John Woolman, editor Joshua Brown regards this book as a must-read to understand Friends in that era.

Of course, such a recommendation makes it an ought-to book, but I found soon that I was reading out of keen interest rather than out of Quaker-teacher duty. Allen Jay writes well, is a good storyteller, and describes significant experiences. I find getting to know remarkable people through reading often helps me, and Jay has given me much to ponder for my own life and service.

Allen Jay demonstrated the importance of day-to-day discipleship. He listened steadily for God's leading, and he obeyed, often courageously. He lived with integrity, was principled and forthright, yet he was gracious and generous toward others, even in times of conflict. It is little wonder that almost everyone he knew respected and loved him. He was a key leader in many ventures, but also demonstrated his conviction that the best leadership is the kind that develops leaders.

Jay was born in 1831 and grew up in western Ohio, in Miami County and later about six miles north of Dayton, where his family was part of the Randolph Meeting. His farming family had deep Quaker roots and Allen Jay clearly credits them with laying an important foundation for his own life by teaching hard work, integrity of life, the value of education, and the importance of and patterns of following Christ. He recalls an experience when he was thirteen years

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old in which he embraced his own discipleship, what he speaks of as a conversion. (11)

While he was still at home, his family worked for the abolition of slavery, and the farm on which he grew up was a station on one of the most important routes of the Underground Railroad. In recounting one of his first-hand experiences in helping a runaway slave continue his route to freedom, Jay gives a vivid picture of the risks and ingenuity that involved. (14-16) Though they actively resisted slavery, his father modeled for him how to “keep in harmony” with folks, including Friends, who disagreed with them about the Underground Railroad or other matters.

One of Jay’s stories that continues to amuse and teach me describes how he came under the influence of one of his father’s hired hands, a man who had become a follower of William Miller. Miller had predicted that “second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ” would happen at noon on a particular day in 1843. Young Allen thought he should be ready. On the morning of the appointed day, before Allen’s father went out to the fields he told Allen to chop wood they would need for the winter. When his father understood Allen’s hesitation, he reassured him that he himself had missed the end of the world several times already and that they would probably need the wood. Allen writes that he could not work, but that after the family clock had struck noon and nothing happened, “my mind was relieved, and that afternoon I chopped wood with a lighter heart than I ever had before, and by night had it all piled up nicely.” More than sixty years later he reminds the Church that it “had better go on chopping wood,” mindful that Christ taught that we would not know the time. (17-18)

After he was married, Jay and his bride settled on a farm about eight miles from Lafayette, Indiana. There they established their young family, and they were involved in farming, education, and the life of Greenfield Monthly Meeting. As the Civil War dragged on, the state of Indiana instituted a draft and Allen Jay’s name was drawn. He refused to enlist and also refused to pay the \$300 he could use to “hire a substitute,” a tidy sum when men earned about a dollar a day. He told the military recruiter, “If I believed that war was right I would prefer to go myself rather than hire someone else to be shot in my place.” (75-76) Because of his refusal, the legal confiscation of his property began but was unexpectedly postponed. He learned later that President Lincoln himself had stopped the sale of his cattle and goods. (77)

Jay began public ministry in his mid-20s, in the early years traveling to visit among Friends, and especially to minister in the homes of Friends families. He recounts that in the first three years he was in the homes of three to four thousand families. Over his life he came to travel in ministry widely among Friends all across the United States and eventually to Britain and Norway.

After the Civil War concluded, Friends in Baltimore felt a concern to help Friends in the South, especially in North Carolina, to rebuild and recover from the war's destruction. They founded the Baltimore Association to raise large sums of money and to oversee this work. After the program was established, they asked Allen Jay to move from his farm in Indiana to North Carolina to be the superintendent of that work. He served nine years there helping to build and rebuild schools, finding and placing good teachers, contributing to the success of a model farm, and continuing in a life of public ministry. He describes vividly and poignantly the plight of the people he served; the poverty and devastation in the post-war era was stunning. Looking back thirty years later, he delights that the steady work of teachers and ministers had reversed the decline among North Carolina Friends and had, instead, led to substantial growth. The power of Jay's eyewitness report surely will capture many modern readers, as it did me.

The great revivals of the mid-1800s affected Friends deeply, bringing growth, change, and resistance. Allen Jay was in the thick of it. In Indiana he witnessed "the breaking out of the revival spirit" among Friends. Though he was wary of extremes of emotionalism, he embraced the new life and grew with it. When invited, he himself preached effectively in revival meetings.

The revivals also brought new practices in meetings for worship, in teaching, and in other ways. Sadly, this led to conflict and even separations. Jay wrote often about how damaging such separations can be and worked hard to bring reconciliation. In addressing divisiveness he cautions, "How sad it is to see those who make such high claim of being led by the Spirit judging and condemning others in a most un-Christian and bigoted spirit." (337)

Allen Jay himself worked hard to bring Friends, now scattered across the continent, to greater communication and cooperation. He helped Friends find ways to collaborate in the emergence of modern missions projects. He supported the conference that resulted in the Richmond Declaration of Faith in 1887, a strong show of unity

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among many American Quakers. In fact, Joseph Bevan Braithwaite, the principal author of the declaration, stayed in Jay's home in Richmond and wrote most of it at Jay's desk. Jay gave practical support to development of the Five Years Meeting (now Friends United Meeting). In his own wide travel, he steadily nurtured the shared ministry of Friends across the nation.

Joshua Brown rightly notes that Allen Jay says much less about the particulars of the divisions among Friends than we might expect, especially in view of the fact that he lived in the midst of much of the controversy. He was born just after the Hicksite Separation, was in early adolescence during the Wilburite Separation, saw first hand and participated in the movements of revivalism in Indiana, witnessed and accepted emerging new practices among Friends in the last third of the century, and saw, especially in his connections at Earlham, the development of conflicts among Friends about how to interpret the Bible and to respond to the development modern scientific theories. Perhaps the lack of details is one of the ways Jay tried to avoid furthering division. He was saddened and burdened over this. In one place he writes, "The history of separations proves that they are destructive to the growth of the Church," and illustrates that using Quaker examples. (91-92) A little later he challenges again: "Has separation ever caused more people to hear the Gospel? Ever enlarged the Church? Ever shown to the world more of the gentleness and meekness of Christ? Has separation ever caused the world to exclaim, 'Behold how these Christians love one another?' Has it ever caused those who held wrong views to turn and hold right ones?" (94) At this point, in my judgment, Allen Jay offers us both love and enduring wisdom.

One of Jay's greatest contributions was to Quaker education. He repeatedly spoke of the power and importance of good schools, and he served Friends schools in a variety of ways, including through fund-raising. After his death Friends remembered, "He put his rare ability for raising money and enlisting tangible support for educational work at the service, at critical times, of Earlham, Guilford, Whittier, Penn, and Pacific [now George Fox] colleges." He took "upon himself the drudgery necessary to raise funds to realize his ideals." (364) As nearly as I can see, he didn't like fund-raising, and this shows again Allen Jay's faithfulness to answer God's call.

Two days before his death, while attending a missions conference, Allen Jay went to dinner with three promising young Friends ministers.

They spent a delightful evening together reminiscing, looking toward the future, and urging Jay to tell them especially of his work in North Carolina after the Civil War. He encouraged them in the service they had begun and said, "It is not much that I have done; I hope you all may be able to do much more than I have done." And as he left them he said, "All right. Good-bye. I will see you again." (355) Forty-eight hours later he had passed on.

It has particularly impressed me that one of those young men was Levi Pennington from Indiana, who just a year later began long service as president of Pacific College, for which Allen Jay had high hopes. I have often thought that Allan Jay's devotion to Christ, tenacity for education, and generosity in spirit helped guide Pennington's service to Friends in the Northwest and may have, sometimes, gotten him in trouble when he did not join in divisiveness as readily as some Friends would have hoped.

Thanks to Joshua Brown and Friends United Press for bringing us this fine new edition of Allen Jay's autobiography. As a book for readers and researchers, it is very well done. It includes excellent support materials. The foreword by Joshua Brown is well done, pointing toward important themes. In the introduction Thomas Hamm sets the historical context very helpfully. The support materials also include a timeline of Jay's life and a useful index. I hope many Friends will enjoy reading it and will even share with others by giving a copy to their meeting's library.