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A LETTER TO THE EDITOR, 2/12/2011

To the Editor:

I'm writing to express my gratitude for Barbara S. Worden's "*His Power and Spirit in Their Hearts*": *Quaker Spiritual Direction* (QRT #115), which answers some long-standing questions I've had about the possible place of spiritual direction among Friends. It's also made me poignantly aware of the lack, within my own large, urban unprogrammed meeting, of any structure or tradition by which the spiritually more mature can help the less mature grow. True, we sometimes run a Quakerism 101 class or a retreat, or the Lord will raise up a minister to give some word of teaching or exhortation. But I often pine for a modern-day equivalent of the old Second-Day Meeting for Ministers and Elders, or something by which focused intentionality might take the place of the *laissez-faire* spirit in which we sometimes treat the development of our brothers and sisters. So thank you, Friend Barbara!

But it distressed me to see certain lapses in the editing of the article, such as the reference to "Sir Isaac Pennington" on p. 9; Sir Isaac, sometime Lord Mayor of London, was the father of Friend Isaac, who as a Quaker would not have used a title. Also, Friend Isaac's wife Mary is cited in the article as "Mary Pennington," and though the referenced anthology *Hidden in Plain Sight* reproduces the spelling "Pennington" from an 1821 publication, it gives the generally accepted spelling "Penington" in the contents and the index. Had the article used the accepted spelling, it might have spared readers some head-scratching as they wondered whether the reference was to Isaac's wife or some unrelated Friend.

More serious, in my view, is the article's perpetuation of the myth that George Fox wrote "walk cheerfully over the earth" (p. 6). I've seen a big bronze plaque in front of a New England meetinghouse that had the Quakers walking cheerfully over the "earth;" and a Friend I know and admire distributes Quaker business cards bearing this same wording. But Fox's "Exhortation to Friends in the ministry" (1656, *not* on the occasion of the raising up of the "Valiant Sixty" in 1654, as stated on p. 6) urges them to walk cheerfully over the *world*. In Twenty-first-Century English, the semantic difference between

“earth” and “world” has all but vanished, but for Fox and his readers it was major. The world (Greek *kosmos*, “order”) was what hated Jesus, because He testified that its works were evil (John 7:7 AV). To *walk over* the world was, for Fox, not merely to travel extensively, but more fundamentally to *conduct oneself* (a meaning we see in the Quakerese phrase, “walk disorderly”) in a manner that avoided defilement by the world’s ways. “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be?” queried Peter (2 Peter 3:11). *Ones that walk cheerfully over the world*, should be our answer; ones that “stand steadfast in the unchangeable life and seed of God, which was before changings and alterings were; and which will remain when they all are gone” (Fox, *Epistle No. 76*).

The widespread ignorance among North American Friends of what Fox actually wrote is partly the effect of Rufus Jones’s editing of the *Journal*. Page 265 of Jones’s edition reproduces p. 287 of the 1831 edition of Fox’s *Works*, vol. 1 (reprinted in 1990 by the New Foundation), up to the beginning of Jones’s last paragraph on that page. At that point Jones skips to p. 290 of the 1831 edition, completely cutting out Fox’s *Exhortation to Friends in the Ministry*, which carries the phrase “walk cheerfully over the world” near the top of p.289. Fortunately the Nickalls edition of the *Journal* retains the *Exhortation*.

It is a major concern of mine to discourage worldliness among Friends, by which I mean, primarily, our laying value on the worthless, frivolous and transient, which will not save us when we come to the point of knowing our need for salvation—from addiction to it, and worse. Letting Friends know what “walking over the world” would have meant to Fox is part of that work. A George Fox who merely advocated cheerfully racking up Frequent-Flyer Miles by traveling over the earth is not the Fox I’d waste my time telling First-Day School children about.

— *John Edminster*

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