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People

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Quaker Individualism

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QUAKER INDIVIDUALISM

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Perhas there is no more democratic ecclesiastical organization in the world than the Society of Friends. Every member is entitled to attend every business session and meeting for worship, to follow what he considers to be the leading of the Spirit in meetings for worship and to express himself on any matter of business and have his views count for whatever weight his own character can give them. In matters of service for the kingdom of God, a very large measure of individual initiative has characterized our activities, and many a great work has been inaugurated and later taken up by Friends in an official capacity because of the concern of individual Friends and their faithfulness in following God's leading for them.

It is easy to recognize the dangers in such a system, and to see the necessity for wise direction on the part of the church and for willingness to cooperate on the part of the individual. But there is quite as real a danger that we shall fall below our privilege, even live on a lower plane than duty demands, by failing in the matter of individual initiative and faithfulness.

Let us consider just two things, each for himself, the matter of public worship and the matter of personal service in definite effort for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

First as to public worship. Will you not ask yourself some questions, and compel yourself to answer them? Such questions as these: "What is my attitude in the meetings for worship? Am I there regularly and promptly, or do I let unimportant things keep me away or make me tardy in arrival? In what attitude do I come into the meeting for worship? Do I come as a sponge, to be 'preached at, prayed for and sung to', or do I come with the definite intention to participate in the meeting as a genuine, personal worshipper? Do I definitely seek to make a personal approach to God--to have a 'meeting' instead of a 'church service'? And if God's Spirit bids me take some vocal part in the service can I be depended on to respond promptly and faithfully?"

Only as the individual members participate, in heart always and in voice when God so directs, can a real Quaker meeting be held. Are you living up to your privileges as a Friend in the matter of individual responsibility in meetings for worship?

And in the matter of definite Christian service, outside of the meeting for worship, every Friend should find or make a place and fill it. Why not ask yourself such questions as these: "Just what am I doing in the definite work of the Lord? What could I be doing? Is there a Sunday School class which needs a teacher and which I could teach? Could I do a real service in pushing the finances of my meeting? Is the Junior work lagging for lack of a service which I could render? Is there a real work I could do in encouraging other members in real Christian living, church attendance and such things? Just what can I do? Let me find or make a definite task and get to work at it."

If every member of every meeting would become an individual center of spiritual power in the meetings for worship and a center of spiritual activity in the work of the church, how much more rapidly would the Kingdom of heaven advance in the earth!

Levi T. Pennington