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An Historical Study of the Discipline of the
Society of Friends 1738-1861

Abstract

This study is concerned with the rules for the conduct of Quaker life and the framework of organisation within which those rules operated, known generally as the discipline, in the period from 1738 to 1861. It begins with the first codification of the rules in 1738 and ends with the publication of the fourth edition of the book of discipline, embodying the results of major reforms, in 1861.

The discipline and the organisation of the Society in 1738 are first described in detail and the study then proceeds to describe the development of the discipline up to 1861, explaining where possible the influences responsible for that development. The obvious focal points between 1738 and 1861 are the years of publication of the printed books of discipline in 1783, 1802, 1834 and 1861 following the pattern of the manuscript Christian and Brotherly Advices issued in 1738.

The other chief events in the Society's history concerning the development of the discipline were the movement for the so-called revival of the discipline in the 1760s and an essentially theological controversy known as the Beacon in the 1830s, when the discipline was ineffectively applied and produced a schism on a small scale. The movement for the revival of the discipline was the major symptom of the discontent with the state of the Society felt by influential Friends throughout the period. This discontent reached crisis point at the end of the period when Friends realised the seriousness of their dwindling numbers. This study attempts to evaluate the responsibility of the discipline for this situation and deals finally with the major reforms in the discipline that were incorporated in the book of discipline in 1861.

An Historical Study of the Discipline of the
Society of Friends, 1738-1861

by D.J. HALL

Thesis submitted for the Durham degree of
Master of Arts, 1972

CORRECTIONS

- Page 71 : final line should read 'at a request'
- Page 75 : line 14 of long quotation should begin 'his Monthly Meeting to...'
- Page 125 : J.J.Gurney; it was intended to suggest that J.J.Gurney's associations with the Anglican evangelicals were a source of suspicion to Friends.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ADDENDUM

Chain of Friendship, a collection of letters of Dr. John Fothergill, which was consulted briefly and is cited in the bibliography, became available too late in this country to be used to the extent its value as a source would justify. The reader will find that it sets the scene for eighteenth century Quakerism very well and incidentally illustrates a number of points of discipline.

After this thesis was submitted the Friends Historical Society published (as a supplement to their Journal) an account of John Woolman's visit to England in 1772 by Henry J. Cadbury. This is similarly useful.

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Introduction

This study sets out, firstly to describe in some detail the discipline of the Society of Friends in England in 1738 with some brief explanation of the origins of the discipline, and then to trace and where possible explain the developments in the period up to 1861. The introduction explains the choice of limiting dates and attempts to offer some definition of the discipline.

1738 has been chosen as the starting point of the study as it was the year in which the first codified guide to the discipline, Christian and Brotherly Advices, was issued in manuscript form by London Yearly Meeting. This was a codification of advices that had been issued by the Yearly Meeting since the 1670s, but it is worth stressing that Friends had offered advice on conduct and procedure from the 1650s in the belief that the apostolic injunction 'Let all things be done decently and in order' (1 Corinthians, XIV, v 40) was not inconsistent with the freedom of a spiritual community. By 1738 the last of the first and many of the second generations of Friends had died and the need for a volume to take the place of personal recollection of advices had become increasingly apparent.

1861 is the most important of several possible terminal dates in the nineteenth century, the year in which the Yearly Meeting undertook perhaps the most radical revision of the discipline. The revision concluded a decade of considerable change with an overhaul of Yearly Meeting procedure, a broadening of the marriage regulations to include those not in membership

and a revision of the queries that included the abolition of the annual examination of the 'plainness of speech, behaviour and apparel' of the membership. Such administrative changes reflected changes in thinking that were of wider scope, for example on foreign missions where a conference in 1860 demonstrated the end of an excessively cautious treatment of the theme. It is not meaningful to write of eighteenth or nineteenth century Quakerism, the period between 1738 and 1861 is in a real sense a unity.

The study is based chiefly on the records and pronouncements of the supreme body of English Friends, the London Yearly Meeting, supplemented by contemporary journals and accounts of the Society and to a lesser extent by local records and histories including more modern works.

The ground of the Christian discipline of the Society of Friends was the love of one's neighbour; the discipline was designed to hold the Society together and to preserve it as an instrument of carrying out the 'two great commandments of perpetual obligation: the love of God, and the love of our neighbour.'¹ The scope of the discipline has been described as follows:

The Discipline of the Quakers is divisible into two parts. The first may comprehend the Regulation of the Internal Affairs of the Society, such as the management of the poor belonging to it; the granting of certificates of removal to its members; the hearing of their appeals upon various occasions; the taking cognizance of their proposals of marriage and the like. The second may comprehend the notice or observance of the moral conduct of individuals, with a view of preserving the rules which the Quakers have thought it their duty to make, and the

1. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends; London, 1858, volume II, p.149 (1810).

testimonies which they have thought it their duty to bear, as a Christian people.²

The justification of a system of discipline was laid down firmly by Samuel Alexander:

A clearer and more indisputable axiom can scarcely be laid down, than that every society of men, whether associating for civil or religious purposes, must have rules and regulation for the ordering and well-being thereof; with a power vested somewhere among its members, to treat with, to withdraw from, or to disown such as shall make infraction in the rules and regulations formed for its government, and its bond of union and shall persist in so doing.³

Finally, William Grover's words may be used to offer some explanation of how a meeting for discipline was more than merely a business meeting:

I believe, in a meeting for discipline, rightly gathered and rightly preserved, the united exercise of living members is, that Truth may prevail over all. To a meeting thus circumstanced, I believe at times, a very precious sensibility is vouchsafed, and Friends travel on in the simplicity of filial fear and reverence; and when a nomination is depending, Friends become, at times, constrained, at other times feel a tender, brotherly, sensible, freedom, to mention a name, without daring to stamp it high; but, in resignation, leaving it to make its way, or otherwise, as the Master pleases; and leaving it with the meeting, whether the right savour attends the expression, and whether there may be a right capacity in the nominee, to accept or decline. Thus Friends feel one for another, and the bond of tender gospel affection is preserved; and the travail for the cause maintained, and its prosperity sought, beyond all other considerations. Oh! one can seem to conceive what a precious thing it is, when Friends, in their meetings for discipline, can rightly bow under the solemnizing influence; not stamping any thing they do high, but fearing in the least degree, to wound the precious cause, or contribute to disperse the precious solemnity, either by speaking or withholding.⁴

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2. Clarkson, Thomas, A Portraiture of Quakerism; London, 1806, vol.I, pp.179-80.
 3. Alexander, Samuel, Brief remarks on the discipline amongst Friends; York, 1818, p.3.
 4. Selections from the Letters and Other Papers of William Grover; London, 1828, p.43.

I am grateful to my supervisor, Professor W.R. Ward, for his advice and stimulating comments from a non-Quaker point of view. I have drawn heavily on the knowledge of the sources for Quaker history of the Librarian of the Religious Society of Friends, Edward H. Milligan, and I am grateful too for the time he has spent with me discussing the discipline. Neither Professor Ward nor Edward Milligan is responsible for the opinions expressed in this study. It would certainly have been impossible to write this thesis without the help and hospitality of all the staff at the Friends House Library.

Chapter I

The Society of Friends in 1738

The organisation of the Society of Friends remained relatively stable throughout the period from 1738 to 1861. In that period changes in the structure of the organisation did occur, for example the introduction of preparative meetings, but such changes seldom appeared to possess the same importance as the more controversial moves at the end of the period, such as the amendment of the marriage regulations which came under heavy attack. This chapter describes the organisation of the Society in 1738; the early development of the organisation will not be described in detail, but some knowledge of the constituent parts of the Society's organisation will be assumed throughout the remainder of this study.¹ No attempt will be made to define the Society in detail in the terms used by sociologists of religion or to examine the transition from sect to denomination which has been done thoroughly elsewhere.²

There can be no doubt though that in sociological terms the Society had ceased to be a movement and had become an organisation by the early years of the eighteenth century. Kathleen Slack's definition of a religious organisation is relevant to the structure of Quakerism in 1738, 'a formalized

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1. For the earlier history of Quakerism see Braithwaite, W.C., The Second Period of Quakerism, second edition, London, 1961; Lloyd, Arnold, Quaker Social History 1669-1738, London, 1950, and Vann, Richard T., The Social Development of English Quakerism 1655-1755, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1969.
 2. See Isichei, E.A., From Sect to Denomination in English Quakerism, with special reference to the Nineteenth Century in British Journal of Sociology, 15 (1964), and Slack, Kathleen M., Constancy and Change in the Society of Friends, London, 1967.

group in which there is a definition of membership and differentiation of role, each being accorded a recognized status. Such an organization may be loosely or tightly knit.... Its force lies not only in the appeal of its purpose or end, although it does very largely lie there, but in its power to prescribe, permit, limit or terminate membership.³ She suggests that this description is clearly applicable to 1700 or even the later 1680s, but in Chapter II, section 38, it will be suggested that this power to prescribe and permit was first effectively established in 1737.

The system of meetings evolved before the basis of membership became clearly defined. This study is not concerned with meetings for worship as such, except in so far as rules and instructions were prepared for their conduct. The business of the Society, which may have included questions of membership, details of sufferings (principally distraints for ecclesiastical demands) and the support of the poor, was dealt with in a separate series of meetings, although the principles responsible for the practice were a vital part of ministry in meetings for worship. Meetings for worship were open to all comers, business meetings in the period after 1737 at their lowest level to all members and to selected members decreasing in number as the top of the pyramidal structure of meetings was reached. Before that business meetings were open to those invited to attend by Friends in a dominant position in the Society. John Stephenson Rowntree stated that originally only 'two or three true and faithful Friends from each particular meeting

3. Slack, Constancy and Change in the Society of Friends, p.9.

constituted the monthly meetings.⁴ Rowntree must have meant that only two or three Friends were empowered to speak for their particular meeting, other suitable Friends were able to attend business meetings. Apparently lists were not generally kept of those entitled to attend business meetings, although they were not open meetings. Most commentators on Quakerism in the early eighteenth century observed a decline in the personality of leadership and this may have been a cause of greater formality of organisation.⁵

At the bottom of the pyramid of business meetings was the preparative meeting. This was the counterpart for business purposes of the individual local meeting for worship and incorporated a select meeting for worship as all other business meetings did. Preparative meetings began to appear in the late seventeenth century in the north of England, increased in number particularly after 1760 and were first formally defined by a minute of Yearly Meeting in 1794. In the earlier part of the period the function of the preparative meeting was to prepare business for the monthly meeting and to deal with some business which did not require the participation of the monthly meeting.

The majority of monthly meetings represented two or more meetings for worship or preparative meetings in a particular area. The first monthly and quarterly meetings were established in the 1650s and by the end of the seventeenth century monthly meetings were an established part of the Society's structure. Monthly meetings generally met at monthly intervals (there were

4. Rowntree, John Stephenson, Quakerism, Past and Present, London, 1859, p.58.

5. Jones, Rufus M., The Later Periods of Quakerism, London, 1921, vol.I, p.106, for an example.

exceptions) to deal with business passed to them from their constituent meetings, with domestic matters, with the preparation of business to be carried by representatives to quarterly meetings and with business passed down from the quarterly meeting such as Yearly Meeting minutes on discipline or requests for information.

Quarterly meetings had essentially the same function as monthly meetings for a wider area, usually a county or group of small counties. The quarterly meeting acted in relation to the Yearly Meeting as the monthly meeting did to the quarterly meeting, accepting instructions from the Yearly Meeting. The rules for appeals illustrate the transmission of business upwards through the system.

London Yearly Meeting met annually from 1678 with the purpose of dealing with matters such as the formulation of rules relevant to the entire Society in England. Questions, suggestions and appeals were referred to it from quarterly meetings. Representations to the Crown on behalf of the Society were made by the meeting which was also responsible for communicating with other yearly meetings and was generally considered the parent body of Quakerism. Yearly Meeting clerks were appointed annually and between 1707 and 1807 no clerk served for two consecutive years. The Yearly Meeting for Ireland (in fact held half-yearly at Dublin until 1797) in practice considered itself subordinate to London Yearly Meeting.

Of the other meetings for business the most important was the Meeting for Sufferings which in effect (although not in status until 1833) was a standing committee of Yearly Meeting dealing with all the wider issues of the Society's business that occurred between Yearly Meetings and considering many

issues referred to it by Yearly Meeting. It was never an open meeting, and its membership was essentially made up of London Friends, acting as correspondents for the counties supplemented by such eligible Friends from the country as could attend.

The Morning Meeting was comprised of male ministers from London and the surrounding counties. Until 1797 when its meetings became monthly this meeting met every Monday morning. The ministers were probably joined by elders in 1727.⁶ From 1754 a Yearly Meeting of Ministers and Elders with both men and women present was held at the time of Yearly Meeting.⁷ The main functions of the Morning Meeting were to look after visiting foreign ministers, to endorse the liberation of ministers for travel abroad in the ministry and (until 1860) to examine all proposed publications on religious matters by members of the Society.

Three disciplinary meetings were peculiar to London and, unlike the three London based meetings so far described, dealt primarily with London affairs: the Six Weeks Meeting (from 1671), the Two Weeks Meeting (thought to have started in 1655) and the Meeting of Twelve, which was replaced in 1810 by a committee known as the Committee of Accounts of the Six Weeks Meeting.⁸ The Meeting of Twelve dealt entirely with financial

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6. The minute in Christian and Brotherly Advices manuscript, p.195, establishing the position of elders confirms that they should attend meetings of ministering Friends.
 7. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.X, p.551.
 8. Beck, William and Ball, T. Frederick, The London Friends' Meetings, London, 1869, provides the only comprehensive account of these meetings, although there is also White, Winifred M., Six Weeks Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends 1671-1971, London, 1971. William Beck (1823-1907) was a successful architect, an elder from 1869 and minister from 1881. Little is known of Frederick Ball who was secretary of the Bedford Institute Association before leaving Friends.

matters and trust property.

The Two Weeks Meeting existed before monthly meetings were established in London and originally performed all their functions; however, in 1671 it became concerned entirely with marriages in the area covered by the London monthly meetings. Its role as a meeting for discipline dealing with marriage was in addition to that of monthly meetings and in 1789 the Quarterly Meeting consented to its discharge on the grounds that monthly meetings could deal with all its business.

Six Weeks Meeting was of greater importance than Two Weeks Meeting, although some of its original significance had been lost by 1738 due to the increasing authority of the Meeting for Sufferings, the greater independence of monthly meetings and the establishment of a quarterly meeting for London. Six Weeks Meeting was left with responsibilities for finance and buildings. In 1745 it became a committee of London Quarterly Meeting largely because it had been weakened as a meeting for discipline by the reluctance of several monthly meetings to contribute properly to its funds and it had no superior meeting to invoke in disciplinary support. A case in 1735, when the Six Weeks Meeting had to come before London Quarterly Meeting because of Westminster Monthly Meeting's refusal to accept its decision, shows that it was no longer effectively a final 'court of appeal', the Quarterly Meeting nominally possessed no more than equal status.⁹ After 1745 the Six Weeks Meeting recovered financially and was still functioning in 1861. The country meetings in the Quarterly Meeting, Kingston, Longford and Tottenham, did not come within the scope of the Six Weeks

9. Beck and Ball, The London Friends' Meetings, p.121.

Meeting's activities until 1862.

It must be made clear that men and women only met together in some categories of meeting. In 1738 women's meetings for discipline were not so common as they were thirty years later and until 1784 there was no women's yearly meeting.¹⁰ This effectively meant that women Friends were deprived of a full role in the business of the Society although they possessed complete spiritual equality. Where men and women met separately the meetings were supposedly of equal status. Only in London was it customary for men and women to meet together in monthly meetings by the mid-eighteenth century, and this was taken by some as a sign of the low state of the Society.

Members of the Society, of either sex, could fall into one of three groups besides that of ordinary member: elders, overseers or ministers. These three groups were of great importance, although the overseers, concerned with the general behaviour and welfare of members, were not formally appointed until 1789 despite their existence in earlier years. In 1784 the Quarterly Meeting of Warwickshire asked Yearly Meeting whether the offices of elder and overseer were the same, and in general before 1789 the elders might be considered to have filled the function of overseers as well.¹¹ Elders could not also be ministers and were responsible for the spiritual well-being of their meeting and its ministers. Rufus Jones wrote a classic account of the elders from which some quotation became inevitable in any subsequent study:

10. Proposals to establish a Women's Yearly Meeting are discussed in Chapters IV and V.

11. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVII, p.450.

The Elders had no written formulas of belief or set declarations of faith by which to test the "soundness" of Ministers, but certain unwritten and more or less subconscious standards of "truth", as they called it, and of approved manner and appearance and tone came gradually into operation almost universally among them. . . . They constituted, together with the Ministers, separate "select" meetings within the Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Meetings, and these "select meetings" in large measure matured the spiritual ideals of the Society and created the atmosphere, or "temperature", in which the Elders swathed their lives and wrapped their spirits, and under which they formed their mental habits.¹²

In a study of the discipline the class of ministers is not very important, although contemporary quotations on the state of the discipline often came from ministers, more inclined as a group to public pronouncement than the elders. At the beginning of the period ministers were neither formally appointed nor registered by their meetings, to become a minister meant to have achieved recognition by ministers and elders in one's meeting. It would have been difficult to behave convincingly as a minister without such recognition and, if a minister wanted to travel outside the area of his own meeting in the service of the Society, the support of the local meeting of ministers and elders was necessary. In 1773 the Morning Meeting asked each monthly meeting to provide a list of its recognised ministers.

Some changes subsequent to 1738 and additional to those mentioned above will be noted in succeeding chapters, but the above summary describes the essential framework of the discipline in 1738 as it continued to 1861. Professor Arnold Lloyd saw 1738 as the end of a ten year period of marked decline in his study of Quaker social history, and through the eighteenth century until the so-called revival of discipline opinions

12. Jones, The Later Periods of Quakerism, vol.I, pp.125-6.

seem uniform in suggesting that the state of the discipline was weak.¹³ This pessimism does not appear to be entirely justified by the circumstances; the extremely high standards set by established Friends could not be achieved by all. A Friend writing in 1865 of the period around 1730 to 1740 captured the spirit of less precise comments along similar lines by his predecessors:

It is questionable whether there was not at this time an over estimate of the power, and a want of clear perception of the functions of ecclesiastical discipline At this time ... there was great extravagance in dress, and much expensive display in the wearing of mourning garments in memory of the dead. Attempts were made to keep these in check by the issuing of minute sumptuary regulations, but they failed to achieve their purpose. Combined with this laxity in conduct and moral principle, we find the manifestation of greater impatience under restraint. This feeling not unfrequently was carried to the extent of open insubordination and resistance. Several cases occur, where committees appointed by superior meetings were set at defiance by the inferior.¹⁴

Since there was such a degree of organisation in existence by 1738 it may seem surprising that there was no common record of the numerous minutes and epistles of London Yearly Meeting that constituted the discipline. Each meeting was in fact likely to have some form of record, clerks received epistles and minutes and preserved them conscientiously and systematically or not according to their disposition. At the beginning of the eighteenth century monthly meetings in Oxfordshire were keeping abstracts of advices from Yearly Meeting.¹⁵ In 1727 quarterly meetings were acquainted by Yearly Meeting 'that 'tis

13. Lloyd, Quaker Social History, p.69.

14. Thistlethwaite, William, Four Lectures on the Rise, Progress and Past Proceedings of the Society of Friends in Great Britain, London, 1865, pp.99-100.

15. Minutes of the Quarterly Meeting of Oxfordshire, quoted in Braithwaite, Second Period of Quakerism, p.377.

the mind of this Meeting that all minutes and epistles from this meeting be entered and kept by them in a fair book that all Friends of their counties and meetings may have recourse to them as occasional shall require.¹⁶

The next significant move came in 1735 when Yearly Meeting commissioned 'An Abstract of the Written Minutes and Advices of the Yearly Meeting; from the beginning: Under the Title: Of extracts of Christian Advices given forth from time to time by the Yearly Meeting in London.'¹⁷ The Abstract was presented to the Yearly Meeting in 1736, but had not been seen by Meeting for Sufferings and Yearly Meeting asked them 'maturely to Consider and Digest and Abridge and Connect as they may see Occasion, and make Report to the next Yearly Meeting.'¹⁷

In 1738 the compilation was completed and it was agreed that the book of extracts should be sent in manuscript to each quarterly meeting, Meeting for Sufferings being responsible for the copying and despatch.¹⁸ The book of extracts was arranged under subject headings with entries in chronological order and spaces for additions. The diligence of local clerks was essential if the book was to be kept up to date.

It is not clear how accessible the book of extracts was to members, but one writer implies, in a memoir of his grandfather, that it was not easy to see: 'The Rules were, then, all in manuscript, in a green vellum-bound book, which my grandfather's youngest brother used to call, 'The Green Dragon

16. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, quoted in Doncaster. L. Hugh, Quaker Organisation and Business Meetings, London, 1958, p.24.

17. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.VIII, p.187.

18. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.VIII, p.396.

of the Ancients', to be consulted like the Sibylline leaves, only by the chosen few.¹⁹ Copies of the book were sold to quarterly meetings for fifty shillings. Originally its successor was not available to members as individuals but leave was given to sell it to individual Friends in 1784.

19. Cookworthy, William, Memoir of ..., London, 1854, p.79.

Chapter II

The Christian and Brotherly Advices, 1738

In Christian and Brotherly Advices, commonly referred to as the Book of Extracts, minutes and advices appear under fifty-eight headings of which six were added between 1738 and the publication of the first printed book of discipline.¹ The subject headings in themselves give some idea of matters of particular concern to Friends and will be listed where no comment is necessary. The number of entries up to and including 1738 is noted in parentheses beside the subject title, although this bears no absolute relation to the importance or length of the entries.²

1. Appeals (4)

The appeal procedure was determined in a minute of 1727 (1, 1727) which defined the Yearly Meeting as the final 'court of appeal' within the Society and the only source of binding rules. It was open to members to appeal against a decision of a monthly meeting to the appropriate quarterly meeting and, if need be, from the quarterly meeting to Yearly Meeting. A time limit was imposed, three months after a judgment was made for notice of appeal to be given and six months more for the lodging of the appeal with the quarterly meeting. Notice of

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1. Christian and Brotherly Advices given forth from time to time by the Yearly Meetings in London, Alphabetically digested under Proper Heads. Manuscript 1738.
 2. Pagination in the various copies of Christian and Brotherly Advices varies and the most useful reference is probably to the year of a particular minute. References to Christian and Brotherly Advices in this chapter only are given thus (1, 1727) to the page in the version used and then to the year.

an appeal to Yearly Meeting had to be lodged within six months of a judgment. A meeting such as the Two Weeks Meeting of Colchester which was not a member of a quarterly meeting took its appeals direct to Yearly Meeting on the same basis as appeals to a quarterly meeting.

Appeals were heard within Yearly Meeting by a committee of twelve, nominated by twelve meetings in alphabetical order at the first session of Yearly Meeting, nominations in the next year following on from the next twelve meetings in order, except that no member of the committee was to be drawn from a meeting involved in the appeal(s) (2-3, 1728). Meetings omitted from the alphabetical sequence because they were involved in the appeal were to be taken first in the succeeding year (3-4, 1733). The number of appeals to Yearly Meeting from year to year throughout the period varies, one or two being the average. Not all the appeals that reached Yearly Meeting required a decision by the committee, of three appeals in 1737 one was withdrawn, in one case a settlement was reached between the meetings concerned and in the third the Yearly Meeting upheld a quarterly meeting which had supported a monthly meeting against an appeal by a member.³ In a majority of cases the decision of the superior meeting involved was upheld but this was not inevitable. The one appeal made in 1738 was dismissed as irregular.⁴

2. Arbitrations (11)

Friends saw arbitration as the one sure method to solve differences over material things; in differences over religious

3. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.VIII, pp.325-6.

4. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.VIII, p.403.

matters the basis of their conduct was to be found in Matthew chapter 18, verses 15-17 (9, 1684). Where no decision could be reached as to who should act as arbitrators monthly meetings were to make the choice and Friends were obliged to accept the arbitrators' decision (9, 1692). With this provision for arbitration in existence Friends were not allowed to sue one another at law, the scriptural basis of this rule was 1 Corinthians, chapter 6, verses 1-8 (10, 1696). There was no objection to legal action outside these limitations and it was accepted that a disowned Friend could be sued (11, 1697). In 1720 the problem of those merely associating with Friends was dealt with:

And whereas sometimes it so happens, that Persons under our Profession have proved so base and unworthy as when they have run themselves into Debt, to endeavour fraudulently and hastily to remove themselves or their Effects to prevent Justice, whereby those Creditors who are Friends have been deprived of an Opportunity of the Common Method of Friends specified in the Minute aforesaid; It is hereby declared, That the Last Paragraph of the said Minute, which prohibits Friends to Sue or arrest one another &c., Is not intended to prevent such evil Person in those practices from being Dealt with by a Legal Process (14, 1720).

Before the definition of formal membership there was little to stop such people claiming to be Friends and the spiritual sanctions of meetings could not be expected to have much effect upon them.

3. Books (16)

Two main topics are covered by the rules and minutes about books, the need to distribute Friends books widely and the need to vet the content of those books that might be associated with the 'official' opinions of the Society. Friends were also appointed to read and answer the books of adversaries (28, 1702).

4. Certificates (2)

It was decided in 1694 that Friends moving to Ireland should have certificates from their monthly meetings (35, 1694). Certificates were of importance in the matter of removals and settlements and also of travelling in the ministry, and reference was made in 1737 to minutes under these headings.

5. Children (27)

The numerous minutes concerning children deal with education, the need for parents to set a good example, warnings against extravagance and undesirable books, encouragement to put children as apprentices under Friends and to find Friends to teach, and in general exhortations to Friends to maintain as high standards for their children as they would expect of each other.

6. Conversation (12)

Conversation in this context meant behaviour in general. Friends were much occupied with the importance of their example to others. The minutes recommend Friends to avoid various traps and, in the words of 1691, 'to have no fellowship with the works of darkness' (60, 1691). A minute of 1736 under this heading observes a decline in standards, due it was thought to 'a Disregard to the Divine Light and Truth' (62, 1736).

7. Correspondents (16)

In the eighteenth century it was not possible for every quarterly meeting to send representatives to Meeting for Sufferings and London correspondents were appointed as early as 1682. A register of correspondents was maintained, no meeting was allowed to have more than four correspondents in

London (76, 1717), defaulters on debts were not allowed to be correspondents (77, 1730) and efforts were made to encourage attendance. Those not attending Meeting for Sufferings for a quarter were to be discharged as correspondents (78, 1734) and in 1737 with the problem continuing correspondents were requested to attend Meeting for Sufferings six times in the year (78, 1737).

8. Covetousness (6)

Covetousness was seen as a sin often leading to general neglect of the Quaker testimonies. If a Friend became dominated by covetousness and was financially successful he was likely to drift away from the Society; if unsuccessful he might require help or go bankrupt.

9. Days (4)

The testimony did not allow Friends to use heathen names for months and days. Some temptation to depart from it must frequently have occurred in business and Friends may well have succumbed to such temptation when business advantage resulted. The Lynn Monthly Meeting used heathen names on its accounts from 1732 to 1757.⁵

10. Defamation (1)

When one Friend felt defamed by another he was to resort to arbitration. In the same minute opposition was expressed to anonymous books directed against Friends (93-4, 1718).

5. Vann, The Social Development of English Quakerism 1655-1755, p.190.

11. Discipline (9)

It is obvious that many of the other 57 headings in the Book of Extracts relate directly or indirectly to the disciplines. The purpose of this heading is largely to deal with possible grounds of disownment in a general way. Referring to 'Gross Errors, False Doctrines or Mistakes' a minute of 1694 describes, after the due process of admonition, the final resort of disownment: 'But if any shall Wilfully persist in Error in Point of Faith, after duly informed, Then such to be further Dealt with according to gospel order; That the Truth, Church or Body of Christ may not Suffer by any particular pretended Member that is so Corrupt' (100, 1694). Advice on very similar lines was entered in 1698, 1701 and 1703.

Disownment could no more prevent the expelled member attending meeting than excommunication could, in the same period, prevent an Anglican attending a service. The disowned Friend could not be called on to contribute money or time to the Society, or, on the other hand, travel in the ministry or marry a member with the approval of the meeting. It seems that many disowned Friends remained as attenders and a good proportion accepting the justice of their original disownment (or the desirability of membership) sought reinstatement. This factor should be considered together with the rules of removal and settlement and Friends' care of their poor. A minute in 1708 shows that Friends were aware of the problems of disownment and reinstatement in that context:

For as much as some Persons who by their ill Conduct have Justly deserved and come under the censure of the Meetings to which they belong, have thought to get from under the weight of that judgement by Signing a paper of Condemnation, and thereby Suppose themselves discharged, 'tis therefore Recommended to Friends Consideration, that they be Careful not to

admit such Persons too early into Fellowship, or give them cause to think they are accepted, before the Meeting or Meetings are Satisfied on their Repentance and Amendment, notwithstanding such paper be given' (101, 1708).

The remaining minutes under this heading in 1738 are concerned with keeping up the discipline by charity and love, recognising that Friends will not always agree but suggesting that humility and patience will maintain unity rather than discord. These are persistent themes throughout the book of extracts in various ways and can be underestimated in looking at the discipline in the eighteenth century, as perhaps by Hugh Doncaster who sees it as predominantly concerned with prohibitions.⁶

12. Disputes (3)

Friends were advised to avoid all disputes and told in 1736 'None to be apt to take Offence but each to rectify his own failings rather than Censure others' (110, 1736).

13. Epistles (10)

Yearly Meeting received epistles from other yearly meetings, replied to them, and sent an epistle to each meeting in England. This was printed, although in some years a written epistle was also issued. Many of the paragraphs in this book of extracts and its later versions were taken from the Epistles.

14. Families (6)

15. Fast Days. First entry 1759.

6. In Doncaster, Quaker Organisation and Business Meetings, London, 1958.

16. Fighting (3)

Until the nineteenth century pacificism was not an indispensable tenet of Quakerism, although there was nevertheless a firm majority opinion against violence of any sort. Two minutes (123, 1693 and 1709) warned against ships' masters carrying guns in their ships and in 1730 a general advice against carrying arms was issued.

17. Kings and Governours (19)

The relatively large number of entries under this heading reflect the Quaker concern to be on the right footing with the civil power. Friends were discouraged from becoming involved in any form of political activity, and in 1692 the 'hope in God that we shall continue a People Always Quiet in the Land' (128, 1692) was first expressed; it was later to be quoted by traditionalist Friends disapproving of John Bright. Friends were repeatedly warned against defrauding the monarch of his customs and excise and in some areas there must have been a risk of doing this unwittingly in purchasing smuggled goods. The degree of toleration afforded by the Government was acknowledged with the injunction to 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's' (131, 1732).

18. Law (2)

19. Love (6) merely references to other headings.

20. Marriage (19)

The basis of the Quaker rules on marriage was laid down by George Fox before the first minute under this heading in the book of extracts, dated 1675. He described the spiritual nature

of marriage without a priest in 1666, 'never any priest did marry any, that we read of in the Scriptures from Genesis to the Revelations'⁷ and the procedure prescribed for Quaker marriages as he had published it in 1653.⁸ The nineteen entries up to 1738 in the book of extracts involved some elaboration of Fox's original suggestions but no significant changes.

Marriage was not in effect permitted without the consent of the parent meetings as well as the parents of both man and woman. In the case of first cousins or near relatives this consent could not be given (145, 1675). It was essential to notify the meetings concerned of one's intention to marry well in advance and enquiries were made by the meeting to ensure that there were no objections. This notice of intent had to be brought before both men's and women's meetings twice before the marriage could take place, usually in a normal mid-week meeting, sometimes in a specially summoned meeting (146, 1675). A minute in 1691 reminded Friends of former advices against 'Marrying by Priests, and with Persons of the World, unequally Yoking with Unbelievers; and against too early and unsavory Proceedings in Second Marriages after the Death of Husband or Wife' (148, 1691).

The need to publish the intention of marriage in advance was established in 1692: notice had to be given at two successive monthly meetings (or Two Weeks Meetings if relevant), thus preventing Friends rushing into premature marriage (148, 1692). Next it was decided that marriages should be discouraged between second cousins (150, 1709). In addition to these points it is

7. Fox, George, Journal, edited Penney, Norman, London, 1924, p.246.

8. Fox, Journal, pp.251-2.

evident that some parents were inclined to spend lavishly on weddings (150, 1718) and this was not favoured. Some might even have encouraged weddings for financial motives and Friends were warned, 'Let None make the Earth and the World the Ground of their Choice' (150, 1710). The printed epistle of 1738 suggests that previous advices were being neglected, marriages outside the Society were considered to be 'to the dishonour of our holy profession, and the hindrance of truth's prosperity.'⁹

This situation remained a problem until the reform of the marriage regulations at the end of the period. It is difficult to see how it could have been otherwise, given the small numbers in the Society relative to any particular community and normal human instincts. Friends, though distinctive in many ways, did not separate themselves completely from society and there must have been opportunities for young Friends to meet outsiders, other non-conformists as well as the considerable body of attenders not possessing formal membership who might be happy to marry into the Society. The debate as to whether the practice of disowning those who married out (that is married non-members) was or was not just or essential to the Society's well-being is closely connected with the general discussion of the decline of the Society in 1859 (see Chapter VII).

Irregular marriage was probably the cause of the majority of disownments in 1738. One writer has suggested that marriage by a priest (between two Friends and because of parental objections or objection to the scrutiny of the Society before permission was granted) was in fact more common at the time

9. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, London, 1858, vol.I, p.222.

than marrying a non-Friend.¹⁰ In a study of Leicestershire Quakerism Canon Quine suggests that there was a measurable drift away from the Society among young people because of the marriage regulations as early as the 1730s.¹¹ Something of the desire to enforce strict marriage regulations may have been derived from the fact that Quaker marriages were only tacitly accepted by the law until the passing of Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act, 26 Geo. II, c.33, 1753, which permitted Quaker marriage where both parties were members.

21. Meeting Houses (3)

Meeting Houses had to be recorded by law (159, 1691, referring to 1 William & Mary, cap.18, 1688). Friends were exhorted to keep the titles securely and maintain records.

22. Meetings for Discipline (31)

The framework of meetings for discipline, established 'According to the Mind and Counsel of God' (163, 1675) was described in Chapter I. The conduct of Friends' business was considered to be as much under the spirit as a meeting for worship and it was said that 'The Power of God is the Authority of the Men's and the Women's Meetings and of all the Other Meetings' (163, 1676). Meetings were not expected to depend upon the Yearly Meeting in all matters but were enjoined to wait on divine guidance (165, 1703).

Other minutes under this heading covered a variety of topics. The necessity of avoiding contentious meetings and excessive enthusiasm is treated here as well as under 'Discipline'.

10. Vann, The Social Development of English Quakerism 1655-1755, p.187.

11. Quine, The Quakers in Leicestershire 1648-1780. Unpublished Leicester Ph.D. thesis, p.18.

The young were to be encouraged to attend business meetings and women were to be encouraged to hold business meetings. Contemporary sources for the eighteenth century create the not unexpected impression that business meetings were dominated by older Friends. Some ministers were quite young and the young were to be brought up so that they might be 'Serviceable in the Church, helpful to Antient Friends and fitted to Supply their places as Such shall be removed' (166, 1704), a practical viewpoint. More common were the references to the good behaviour of the young and to their knowing their place (169, 1718). Little is said of the relations between the different types of meeting for discipline up to 1738 except to establish that no monthly meeting can divide itself for any reason (most probably on account of growth) without the consent of the quarterly meeting (168, 1715).

23. Meetings for Worship (20)

The maintenance and conduct of meetings for worship was the responsibility of the meetings for discipline. The minutes here give advice on keeping meetings on the right lines; watching against 'an Earthly Spirit' (186, 1689), maintaining meetings in families (186, 1696), punctuality (186, 1715), Friends not disagreeing in public meetings (187, 1716), not neglecting attendance because meetings were sometimes wholly silent (187-8, 1724) and bringing families and servants to meeting (188, 1732); some of these minutes were entered more than once.

24. Militia. This heading was introduced in 1762.

25. Morning Meeting of Ministers and Elders (8)

This Meeting was described in Chapter I; its function was

described thus in 1735: 'the Morning Meeting of London or any other Meeting of Ministers have a right as they See Meet in the Wisdom of Truth to Advise, Exhort and Rebuke any of their Members or any Ministers who may Travel in the Work of the Ministry, as Occasion may Require, without being Accountable for the Same to any Monthly or Quarterly Meeting' (196, 1735). The Morning Meeting was essentially a meeting for discipline, for a specific class of members of the Society and without the power to disown.

26. Mourning (3)

Mourning was discouraged as being one of the vain customs of the world.

27. Negroes (1)

A minute of 1727 (203, 1727) discouraged the importation of negroes (as domestic servants) although it is unlikely that any Friends were involved in what was an uncommon practice.

28. Oaths (2)

29. Orphans (1)

Monthly Meetings were expected to supervise the guardians of orphans and Friends were encouraged to appoint guardians in their wills (211, 1706).

30. Parliament (1)

31. Persecution (4)

32. Plainness (16)

Plainness was an important distinguishing feature of Friends who were repeatedly exhorted to keep to plainness in 'Language,

Habit, Deportment and Behaviour' (223, 1691). The result of such adherence as they gave was to make them stand out in society because of their maintenance of a simple mid-seventeenth century mode of dress and speech well into the nineteenth century. 'Extravagant Wiggs, and all other vain and Superfluous Fashions of the World' were to be avoided (223, 1691) and Friends were reminded that 'Surely Christ's Priesthood should not fall short of their care to endeavour to Stop and Remove the Manifest tokens of the Leprosie of the Great Sin of Pride, and all Superfluity of Naughtiness' (224, 1709). The young especially revolted from time to time against plainness, as Elizabeth Fry was later to record vividly. It was reported in 1715 'that some have cut off good heads of Hair, and put on long Extravagant and Gay Wiggs, which they that are not of Profession with us See as a mark of Declension from our Primitive Plainness' (225, 1715) and in 1718 that women were 'decking themselves with Gaudy and Costly Apparel, as Gold Chains, Locket, Necklaces &c. or Gold Watches exposed to open View' (227, 1718). 'Naked Necks and Breasts', 'hooped Petticoats' and bowing were also advised against. Throughout the period a stream of comments on the decline in observance of the testimony on plainness can be found.¹²

33. Poor (17)

To some extent the minutes up to 1737 under this heading form the basis of the rules of 1737 on removal and settlement

12. Scriptural justifications for plainness were largely taken from Paul, but Margaret Pike said 'Paul may be of that opinion but thou knows Paul was not a Friend.' Quoted in Hine, Reginald L., A Mirror for the Society of Friends, London, 1929, p.68.

(heading 38). The 1729 set of rules relating to removal and settlement was in fact included in the 1738 book of extracts under the heading 'Poor' as well as the more up-to-date 1737 rules. A quotation from Sir F.M. Eden's The State of the Poor may be considered with the rules: 'Very few poor are to be found among the Quakers; the reason of which seems as soon as a member becomes idle, drunken or otherwise depraved, he is expelled from the Society.'¹³ The statement is included here as a contrast to the apparent liberality of the actual rules; both it and the following quotations about the Quaker poor are valid for the eighteenth century as a whole despite their comparatively late dates. 'A Quaker beggar would be a phaenomenon in the world' was Clarkson's feeling and he said also of the Quaker poor that their wants 'are so well provided for, that they are not publicly seen, like the wants of others.'¹⁴

The first minute in the book of extracts remarks on the need to discourage poor Friends from coming to London because of the possibility of overcharging London Friends with the poor (235, 1695). This tendency towards migration to London was a major factor in the origins of the later rules of settlement which would hardly have been important if the burden resulting from the movement of Friends had been equitably distributed. In 1696 'the Rich' were charged 'to do good with their substance' (235, 1696). 1710 saw the first rules on the periods required to establish settlement in case of removal, three years without being a charge on the meeting for most individuals and one year in the case of servants (237-8, 1710). Impostors were not

13. London, 1797, Volume II, p.9.

14. Clarkson, Thomas, A Portraiture of Quakerism, London, 1806, vol.II, pp.89, 90.

unknown but Friends, who in general provided some relief for non-Friends, would not give help to them (239, 1711). The general doctrine of Friends' treatment of the poor was stated in 1718:

And with Respect to the Poor among us, it ought to be Considered, that the Poor both Parents and Children are of our Family, and ought not to be turned of to any others to be either Supported or Educated: And altho^h Some may think the Poor a Burden, Yet Remember where our Poor are well provided for and walk Orderly, they are an Ornament to Our Society: And the Rich should Consider "It is more blessed to give than to Receive, and He who gives to the Poor, Lends to the Lord who will repay again" (239, 1718).

No Friends were to receive relief from the parish and Friends were 'to See there be no Beggar in our Israel' (240, 1720).

In 1724 the rules of 1710 were repeated with the addition that 'Receiving Collection or Employment in any service of the Mo. Meeting to be deem'd a Settlement' (241, 1724). In 1729 they were given in greater detail and the necessity of certificates of removal again emphasised (243-5, 1729).

A meeting giving a certificate was to notify the meeting of destination and, if for any reason the certificate was not delivered or the meeting omitted to write, the person who moved remained officially settled within his original meeting. If on the other hand a Friend moved without a certificate and then became needy and applied for relief, the meeting was to request information about his standing from his original meeting. He could be requested to return to the original meeting and, after three months of refusal to comply with the request, neither meeting might give relief. Only where a Friend who had moved without a certificate remained for three years without receiving relief or coming under the disciplinary notice of the Society

was he allowed settlement. The existing arrangements between London monthly meetings were continued.

34. Preachers (16)

The minutes under this heading stress the recognition of ministers and the need to ensure that ministry was acceptable. In meeting Friends were expected not to express any disagreement they might have with ministers, while ministers were enjoined to listen to advice from their meetings and to be careful in their speech and behaviour. A minister who was disowned might be re-admitted as a member in the normal way but could not appear as a Minister 'till the Monthly Meeting Judge the Scandall Sufficiently Removed' (257, 1737).

35. Prisoners (5)

36. Queries (14)

The rôle of the queries can hardly be understressed in any study of the Discipline. Yearly Meeting in 1682 asked quarterly meetings to answer three factual queries annually. In 1696 eight queries were substituted, still entirely factual and now including 'What Signal Judgments have come upon Persecutors?' (269, 1696), which, perhaps fortunately for the Christian reputation of the Society, did not survive beyond 1707. Quarterly meetings began to submit queries to their monthly meetings to obtain the information required for their own replies to Yearly Meeting. The purpose of the queries was to remind meetings of ways in which their members might be neglecting the testimonies as well as to gather statistics of deaths, building of meeting houses, prisoners and growth in the number of meetings and members. Queries as to 'How Truth

Prosper's' (269, 1696) were difficult to answer without some reflection on the current state of affairs, although the answers to this type of query recorded in Yearly Meeting Minutes become increasingly stereotyped.

Some specimen answers to queries may be given to illustrate the variety of situations regularly occurring at the beginning of the period, firstly answers to the query 'How do Friends prosper in the Truth, and, doth any Convincement appear since last Year?' (271, 1725) from Buckinghamshire, 'We have to Communicate; That, because of too much Indifferency in Some, in things relating to Religion, & a Disposition in Some of our Youth to be drawn into Varsity, a general Prosperity in the Truth is much Obstructed';¹⁵ from Colchester, 'There are Some amongst us that we believe do prosper in the Truth, tho' to Our grief there are others who runn into Extreems, and take undue Libertys, Particularly in Habit & Speech'¹⁶ and from Oxfordshire, 'but alas! tis too Common to wonder at for Persons to assent to Truths they cannot be persuaded to Practice, so prevalent are the prejudices of Education, so strong the Depravity of Human Nature'.¹⁷ These passages exhibit a more individual language than the average answer which shows some slight degree of exception to total conformity to any particular testimony or qualified comments on 'growth in the truth'.

In 1737, in answer to the query on tithe, eighteen meetings (including tithe free Norwich and Bristol) thought no members were paying tithes, eighteen thought some, usually a few were,

15. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.VIII, p.198.

16. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.VIII, p.201.

17. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.VIII, p.224.

two recognised that many were, and three evaded the issue. Generally there was no great degree of satisfaction with progress in the truth. In the maritime counties the answers on defrauding the king of his revenue were often inclined to be non-committal; Kent Friends in 1738 knew 'of none in full Unity with Us that Concern in Running or Smuggling of Goods, or that do otherwise Defraud the King of any of his Customs, Duties or Excise'.¹⁸

37. Records (15)

38. Removals and Settlements (1)

On casual acquaintance the Quaker rules of removal and settlement and the Poor Law in the same period seem to possess some measure of similarity, at least in terminology. The Friends' rules were finally determined in 1737, the national system at the beginning of the period was most recently derived from two statutes, 13 & 14 Car. II, c.12, known as 'The Act of Settlement' but actually entitled 'An Act for the Better Relief of the Poor of this Kingdom', and 8 & 9 William III, c.30. The system as such had medieval origins and retained medieval elements, notably in the discouragement of movement from one parish to another. After the act of Charles II the ways in which settlement might be obtained were clearly defined and local officials in the parish appear to have attempted to prevent people gaining a settlement whenever possible (however, until 1814 parish overseers were obliged to escort paupers being 'deported' to the parish in which they allegedly had settlement).¹⁹ The aim of enforcing the rules of settlement

18. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.VIII, p.374.

19. Webb, Sidney and Beatrice, English Poor Law History Part 1: The Old Poor Law, p.335.

was of course to prevent people who were likely to become a charge on the poor rates obtaining settlement. With the Quaker rules of settlement it might appear that meetings were also anxious to prevent settlement in order to avoid financial responsibility for those who might fall on hard times.

There is indeed a parallel between the meeting in the Society of Friends and the parish in the country at large in the matters of settlements. But in addition to determining which meeting had the responsibility for a particular member the Friends' rules had to determine the eligibility of a person for relief as a member of the Society of Friends. The establishment of a formal concept of membership in the Society came with the 1737 rules of settlement. One more general point of comparison should be mentioned: it was the hope throughout the eighteenth century that in some way the poor could be made to pay their way, to recoup the poor rates. John Sykes suggests that this was virtually the case with Friends in the period too:

they had for more than a century investigated, case by case, their own poor, caring for the sick, the aged, the imprisoned, training the children, apprenticing the unskilled, gradually improving the social condition of the whole membership. In this they had been helped by a trade expansion that could use all willing hands (for which one must credit their entrepreneurs), and after 1737 by the rules of membership that enabled them to disown anyone not willing to be so used - thereby constantly sifting the ranks and maintaining a first rate labour corps. 20

This picture contrasts greatly with that which emerges from the rules alone, and Sykes preferred economic to spiritual motives in his explanations. Friends always paid the parish poor rates.

20. Sykes, John, The Quakers, London, 1958, pp.204-5. No evidence is given to support his theory.

Until the rules were made in 1737 the simplest test of membership was whether a person contributed regularly to the funds of a local meeting. Other references in this chapter show that under some circumstances contributions might be refused where membership had been established by regular attendance and contribution. Presence in the business meetings, as noted in Chapter I, implied recognition of membership before 1737. Dress and manner of speech would have indicated whether or not someone considered himself in sympathy with Friends. Systematic lists of members were not compiled until the 1760s and then chiefly as an aid to family visiting, although this does not of course preclude individual clerks from having kept lists for their own reference previously. The use of the word 'member' before 1737 demonstrates only that there was a customary recognition of membership and does not appear to support Professor Vann's conviction that there was a very clearly defined rule.²¹

The 1737 rules replaced all previous rules on the subject with nine basic instructions and references to two minutes on the subject of the poor, although that heading has already shown that a number of previous minutes were retained in the book. The rules were prepared by Meeting for Sufferings at the request of Yearly Meeting²² and 4000 copies were printed.²³ They stated that:

21. Vann, The Social Development of English Quakerism 1655-1755, p.145. Ch.IV gives examples of the use of 'member' before 1737.

22. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.VIII, p.247.

23. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.VIII, p.319.

(1) All Friends were members of the Quarterly Meeting or Two Weeks Meeting within whose boundaries they lived on 1 iv 1737 (i.e. June) except in the case of pensioners or of those receiving relief from any other meeting in which case they were members of that other meeting.

(2) Friends on moving were to apply to the meeting to which they belonged for a certificate addressed to the meeting they proposed to move to. When the certificate was accepted they became members of that meeting unless they had been insolvent or had relief from any meeting within the immediately preceding three years. If within three years Friends having moved needed relief the meeting they had left was to provide it or if necessary to repay the meeting to which they had moved.

(3) No Friend (other than apprentices or servants, see infra) was to gain settlement after 1 iv 1737 without a certificate unless the meeting in which he claimed settlement had received his collection or employed him (e.g. as a representative at monthly meeting).

(4) Monthly meetings were responsible for the relief of Friends in want. If a Friend was not properly a member of the meeting where he was resident, the previous meeting in which he had settlement should take responsibility and if necessary repay the meeting to which he had moved.

(5) Servants belonged after one year to the meeting of which their master was a member or if their master was not a member to the appropriate meeting for the area.

(6) Rules for apprentices were as for servants except that the required period of residence was 40 days.

(7) Certificates granted on moving could also be required as evidence in queries about marriage.

(8) Wives and children were members of the monthly meeting where their husbands or fathers were resident.

(9) Provision was to be made (as in 2 and 4 above) to repay to meetings sums laid out on relief where there were questions about settlement.

The above rules indicate that the financial burden falling on a meeting when poorer Friends moved must have been substantial. However, where disputes did arise, Friends were unlikely to suffer during the period of internal litigation because those not eligible as members for relief were nevertheless likely to receive the private charity of Friends. The number of disputes arising does give the impression that disputes that could not be readily solved were frequent, partly because the burden fell chiefly on the town meetings, especially those of London. No provision is made in these rules for applications for membership, although the first rule suggests that some kind of formality would be necessary. Before 1737 there are references to persons being added to the ranks of the Society by convincement but the first precise references to admission to membership occur in 1753 and 1764 (see Chapter IV).

39. Representatives (12)

At Yearly Meeting each quarterly meeting was to be represented, from 1728 by at least four members (302, 1728) or eight in the case of Yorkshire (302, 1730). The representatives were to stay for the whole proceedings of the Yearly Meeting and meetings were advised to take care in choosing suitable representatives, 'truly Approved in universal Love, Unity and Peace among Friends' (301, 1691).

40. Run Goods. This heading was introduced in 1756.

41. Salutations (2)

The entry under 1718 only served to emphasise further things said under the heading plainness : 'Advice given against a Declension crept in among us, by unbecoming Gestures in Cringing and bowing the Body by way of Salutation, which ought not to be taught or Countenanced' (307, 1718).

42. Schools (4)43. Scriptures (15)

Scriptures and religious books were considered almost the only fit reading for Friends and the minutes are as concerned to discourage Friends from reading 'Romances, Playbooks or other vain and Idle Pamphlets' (315, 1720) as to stress family reading of the scriptures.

44. Servants (3)

The keeping of servants was not considered incompatible with Quakerism and the habit increased throughout the eighteenth century as more Friends achieved commercial prosperity. Friends were expected to behave well towards their servants and the servants to show proper humility: 'Advised, That Servants Professing the Truth behave themselves in Due Subjection Humility and Plainness as becomes their Profession and Place ' (331, 1703).

45. Singing (1)46. Steeplehouse Rates (5)47. Stock, National (7)

A national fund was kept to deal with certain expenses and replenished by general collections at the direction of

Yearly Meeting. Meeting for Sufferings controlled expenditure from the fund (343, 1679).

48. Sufferings (14)

After 1738 sufferings comprised almost entirely distraints for tithe and church rate. A record of sufferings was kept and no compromise was allowed. Goods seized were sometimes returned to Friends through the kind offices of neighbours but these were still to be considered sufferings (349, 1684).

49. Talebearing and Backbiting (8)

Gossip was a great evil to Friends and numerous Scriptural injunctions were quoted against it.

50. Testimonies, Christian. This heading was introduced in 1759.

51. Tithes (24)

The first minute that not only reminded Friends of the testimony on tithes but also suggested that all Friends who 'Oppose, Slight or Neglect that Testimony be lookt upon and Dealt withall as unfaithful to the Antient and Universal Testimony of Truth' (365, 1675) was particularly early as far as the quoted rules go. Friends also had to be reminded not to resist with force seizure of their property and not to indulge in subtle compromise as by renting farms and paying a higher rent on the understanding that they would be exempt from tithe (368, 1696). In 1703 the method of evasion noted under 48 (Sufferings) above was again noted. Disownment was the remedy of last resort for those disregarding the testimony: Friends could be excluded from business meetings or their contributions to collections refused (372, 1706). The problem of their inclination to compromise

continued throughout the period; they were again exhorted in 1738 'that this Branch of our Christian Testimony be not laid waste by Connivance or Private Agreement with Priests or Impropriators' (378, 1738).

52. Tombstones (1)

Tombstones represented a divergence from the testimony on plainness and Friends were advised that where possible they should be removed (387, 1717).

53. Trading (20)

Friends were expected to avoid failure in business, to keep their word at all costs and to advise others who seemed likely to run into trouble. In part it was feared that business failures brought discredit on the Society (393, 1710). In 1732 a minute drew attention to the honesty and simplicity of early Friends in business. Reference was made again in 1735 to the fear of discredit: 'But if any thro' Ambition or Desire of Grandeur in the World, Shall reduce themselves to Insolvency, after having been thus plainly Cautioned and dealt with, according to the Nature of the Offence and Pursuant to the Advices of this Meeting in the year 1732, to which We Refer you, then the Society will Justly be Clear of Reproach arising from the Misconduct of Such' (397, 1735). It is not within the scope of this study to examine the process by which so many Quakers, rejecting the outward trappings of the world, became very prosperous in the eighteenth century or founded businesses that were to become household names in the nineteenth century. Those parts of the discipline concerning trade only explain Quaker success in two possible ways, that honesty prospered

and that there was little room for the unsuccessful. But there were struggling businessmen and much care was taken to avert bankruptcy as well as to remove the stain it was thought to bring on the Society's good name.

54. Visiting Families. This heading was introduced in 1756.

55. Visiting of Quarterly and Monthly Meetings. This heading was introduced in 1760.

56. Wills (10)

57. Yearly Meeting (25)

In addition to London Yearly Meeting there were other yearly meetings in England, for worship only, for example the Circular Yearly Meeting in the Western Counties (416, 1720). Other minutes dealt with procedure in the Yearly Meeting, the choice of clerk on a rotational basis (416, 1732), the need for propositions to be in writing (418, 1735) and the institution of a committee to read letters sent to the Yearly Meeting (419, 1736).

58. Yearly Meeting of Ministers and Elders. This heading was introduced in 1754.

Chapter III1738 - 1759

The issue of Christian and Brotherly Advices in 1738 introduced a period of intensified lamentation over the state of the Society which led eventually to the so-called Revival of the Discipline, the starting point of Chapter IV, in 1760. This chapter bridges the gap between 1738 and 1760, describing changes in the written body of the Society's discipline in that period and where possible illustrating some of the workings of its more important aspects. Many of the headings under which entries appeared in Christian and Brotherly Advices do not receive specific mention, either because they remained unchanged or because the additions made merely repeated the essential content of existing entries. The rules on marriage were printed in 1754 to reach a wider public and to ensure uniformity in practice, but this was not on account of any major change in their content.

Something should be said of the general state of the Society before particular aspects of the discipline are examined. There was a common belief in the growing worldliness of Friends, supported by the enthusiasm of weighty Friends for the text 'Woe to them that are at ease in Zion' (Amos VI, 1) and their pessimistic approach to life. There is a substantial element of truth in this picture, the standards set were difficult to attain and the enthusiasm of the early days had lost its impetus. In examining specific circumstances Friends sometimes acknowledged that things were going well and the answers to the queries were not always gloomy, but the outlook presented in journals and

Yearly Meeting Epistles was almost uniformly pessimistic.

William Law suggested that in rejecting the outwardness of the world Friends assumed an outwardness of their own.¹ The existence of the considerable body of rules, many of which in isolation might appear merely as suggestions, tends to support Law. David Hall wrote in a letter of 1747 of the necessity of having and of observing rules: 'Please to consider, that neither civil nor religious Society (morally speaking) can subsist, or be preserved from utterly relapsing and falling away into Confusion, without proper Rules and Government: And what signify Rules if not observed?'² Those who created the rules in the Society of Friends were essentially those most concerned with their observance and, while this may be a natural state of affairs, little in the way of the opinions of the less weighty Friends can be found.

The Epistles of Yearly Meeting provide a continuous series of examples of the accepted view of the state of the Society and this passage from the Epistle in 1742 is typical:

.... with grief, we must observe the negligence and remissness of too many, who, while under the profession of the truth, disregarding the instructions of the divine monitor in themselves, turn aside into the follies, vanities, and pastimes of the world; which, under a false show of innocent amusements, steal away the mind, and render it unfit for the exercise of virtue and the duties of the Christian religion.³

Yearly Meeting Minutes provide a meeting by meeting chronicle of

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1. Quoted by Stephen Hobhouse, William Law and Eighteenth Century Quakerism, London, 1927, p.40.
 2. David Hall, Some brief memoirs of the Life of David Hall..., London, 1758, p.55.
 3. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, London, 1858, vol.I, p.258. For a similar example see 1746, p.254.

the same sort of response, although some quarterly meeting answers to queries were rather more cheerful. This passage from Essex's reply to a query in 1740 is very typical: 'We cannot say much to the Prosperity of Truth, yet we hope things are rather reviving, though many to our grief are not so careful as we could wish, there seems to be a good Degree of Unity and Harmony amongst us.'⁴

In the years up to the revival such comments became more frequent, but there is no evidence to suggest any real change in the state of the Society over the period of this chapter. The standardisation of answers to the queries, through the requirement made as a formal instruction in 1761 that answers should 'be full and explicit, comprising the substance of every part of each query', only confirmed a tendency to stereotyped answers.⁵

John Griffith and his contemporaries in the seventeenth-fifties tended to write along the same lines.⁶ Griffith himself returned to England in 1750 after spending part of his life in America and a period of visiting meetings throughout this country convinced him of the low state of the Society. It is in this period that the first awareness comes of the existence of a number of people who were members of the Society without being involved in its activities, because their enthusiasm had faded, because they remained within the Society only as a result of family pressure or because, as some later commentators would suggest, their interest had been stifled by the rules. This

4. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.VIII, p.495. See also 1742 (Lincoln) and 1748 (Colchester).

5. Christian and Brotherly Advices, 1738, p.275.

6. e.g. Samuel Fothergill, William Reckitt, William Tuke.

situation, not exclusive to Quakerism then or now, has been traced by some writers to the definition of membership by the 1737 rules of settlement. These had established birthright membership making a wife and children members of the monthly meeting of which a husband or father was a member. Since the Society seems to have attracted a decreasing number of converts in the eighteenth century, this created a growing element of members who were present purely from habit. Hall was one contemporary figure who realised this and he used the term 'nominal Quaker' in discussing plainness: 'Such an one is an honest primitive Quaker his or her Dress, Address, and whole Conduct, agree to what he or she professeth. But such and such are modern fashionable Quakers, they profess the Spirit, yet, it is plain they live after the Flesh; so they are but Nominal Quakers.'⁷

The decline from the proper standards of plainness was generally considered the best visible sign of the low state of the Society. This apparent increase in conformity to the ways of the world seemed closely connected with a growing involvement in trade. The Epistles demonstrate the concern of Yearly Meeting for the maintenance of standards, but again Hall's words may be usefully quoted:

Whereby the Mouths of many of other Communion, who have their Eyes upon us, observing the Extent of our religious Principles and Pretensions, make their Remarks on our Conduct and Appearance, and are ready to say to this Effect: Ye were once a plain People, distinguishable in divers Respects, particularly in Plainness of Habit, and Speech, from all others; but we now can scarce know you to be of the Community of the Quakers who at the first were very remarkable in their religious Conduct, for their Humility, Plainness in Apparel

7. David Hall, Some brief memoirs..., p.166.

and Expression, Simplicity, Sobriety, Gravity, and Self-denial; but now, what Conformity to the Fashions, Customs, Grandeur, and Vanities of the World are you run and running into, whilst under the Profession of the Guidance of the Spirit? 8

Hall perhaps overstated his case for effect and up to the mid-nineteenth century the much criticised excesses of various Friends were hardly up to the more extravagant ways of the rest of society. Roland Stromberg's comments in Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth Century England (London, 1954, pp.145-6) make it clear that a similar situation, as far as the expulsion of bankrupt members, generally prevailed in Dissenting bodies, although the testimonies of plainness and against excessive wealth were quoted more often than they were honoured.

London in answering a query in 1740 regretted the introduction of the 'vain fashions, Customs & Salutations that are seen to abound.'⁹ In fact Quaker dress changed gradually through the eighteenth century, always remaining some years behind the simplest of contemporary fashions in style so that while the prevailing women's fashion for aprons between 1700 and 1750 favoured white Friends wore green.¹⁰ It was possible to go even further from the path of righteousness and worldliness meant more than speech, dress and mode of salutation. The Yearly Meeting Epistle in 1739 exhorted Friends to 'avoid all such conversation as may tend to draw out their minds into the foolish and wicked pastimes with which this age aboundeth; particularly balls, gaming-places, horse-races, and playhouses; those nurseries of debauchery and wickedness, the burthern and

8. David Hall, Some brief memoirs..., p.77, An Epistle of Love and Caution dated 1747.

9. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.VIII, p.503.

10. Stephen Hobhouse, William Law and Eighteenth Century Quakerism. Footnote on p.162.

grief of the sober part of other societies, as well as of our own.¹¹ Westminster Monthly Meeting enquired in 1751 into a report 'Relating to some young men under our profession rowing on the river Thames, and giving a publick ball.'¹² Fortunately they were not members of the meeting but their worldliness was rather similar to that criticised by Horton Davies as an indication of the low state of some contemporary Anglican clergy.¹³

This situation with its pattern of exhortations to higher standards in the Yearly Meeting Epistles and the regular admissions in the answers to the queries of only partial success in achieving such standards might be expected to have caused a number of additional entries in Christian and Brotherly Advices on the general aspects of discipline, plainness and behaviour. The increased number of entries does serve to illustrate the importance attributed to the subject, although there is a great deal of repetition in their content. The passage quoted above from the 1739 Yearly Meeting Epistle was entered under 'Conversation'¹⁴ and for the same year under 'Plainness'. Friends were urged to take heed of three scriptural texts that warned generally against pride and more particularly against self-adornment of women.¹⁵ In an extract from the written epistle of 1743 a further text was used to suggest that some Friends found it convenient to use plain speech amongst themselves and the world's speech in other

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11. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, Volume 1, p.227.
 12. Beck, William and Ball, T. Frederick, The London Friends' Meetings, London, 1869, p.254.
 13. Davies, Horton, Worship & Theology in England. From Watts and Wesley to Maurice 1690-1850, Princeton, 1961, p.75.
 14. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.66.
 15. Christian and Brotherly Advices, pp.229-30. Isaiah III, 1 Timothy II, v 9,10, 1 Peter III, v 3-5.

company, but this could only be controlled with the aid of informers.¹⁶ In 1745 it was found necessary to rule that mourning should be discouraged whether the deceased was a Friend or not.¹⁷

Friends also stood out from the world by their refusal to accept certain obligations imposed by the state or the established church. The Friend who became a churchwarden or paid tithe was as much an offender against the discipline as the Friend who bought smuggled brandy or evaded tax. Under the provisions of the Toleration Act Friends were able to appoint deputies as churchwardens but this was not generally accepted as a satisfactory answer. The objections were based not only on the reluctance of Friends to become involved in the affairs of the state or the established church but also upon the argument that Friends cared completely for their own poor and never allowed them to become chargeable to the parish. On the other hand it was argued by those who accepted the duty or hired a deputy that they were not evading a fine but fulfilling a duty in caring for all the poor.¹⁸ Yearly Meeting did not endorse this view and a legal opinion cited in the Book of Cases stating that though Friends were exempted they had to hire substitutes shows that they had attempted to argue that they were excluded from service by Canon Law as schismatics.¹⁹

The observance of government appointed Fast Days was the cause of some disagreement in 1759; Yearly Meeting thought that Friends should not observe them or state-appointed occasions of

16. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.230. 1 Timothy III, v 8.
17. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.121.
18. Edwards, George W., 'Quakers as Churchwardens and Vestrymen' in Journal of the Friends Historical Society, vol.LII, no.1.
19. Book of Cases, Volume 3, p.63 (Manuscript, Friends House Library).

rejoicing and they were further encouraged to support those Friends already maintaining a testimony at the risk of incurring popular wrath.²⁰

Friends might also become worldly by becoming involved in some way with privateers, run goods or the evasion of revenue payments such as stamp duties. The former was naturally the rarest, partly because of the scarcer opportunities for Friends to become involved, partly because it was so blatantly contrary to all Quaker testimonies about weapons even to be financially involved in privateering. Bristol Friends revealed their concern in their answers to the queries in 1744: '... some under our Profession are Concerned in fitting a Privateer or Privateers; and tho' we have Seen it Our Duty to Admonish Such against a Practice so inconsistent with the peaceable Doctrines of Christ, which have been our Constant and known Principles; Yet as we fear this Case may not be Singly confin'd to Us, and is of such Consequence to Society, We Submit it to your Consideration.'²¹ The Yearly Meeting felt able to give the advice requested by Bristol and issued a stern minute which was entered in Christian and Brotherly Advices, reaffirming the testimony against war and privateering, warning against carrying guns or letters of marque on Friends' ships and stating that those not observing these testimonies were to be dealt with.²² This was not a final solution for the Yearly Meeting Epistle in 1753 reminded Friends not only that payments of taxes should not be avoided when they appeared consistent with Friends' principles but urged them also to watch out for all those likely to succumb

20. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XI, 1759, p.476.

21. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.IX, 1744, pp.185-6.

22. Christian and Brotherly Advices, pp.124-5.

to 'that great inconsistency of being concerned in privateers, letters of marque, or ships armed in a warlike manner' and where necessary to administer 'timely admonition and suitable counsel.'²³

Tax evasion and the purchase of run goods must have been more obviously tempting and less easily detected. Occasional references occur in Yearly Meeting Minutes in answers to queries to show that a quarterly meeting on average recorded some exception every few years.²⁴ Run goods were more of a problem in coastal counties as the entries for Cornwall and Kent demonstrate. William Cookworthy, in a letter written in 1745, expressed his strong feelings against Friends having any dealings in run goods, but he observed at the same time that a substantial body of Friends seemed to see no objection to the practice.²⁵ 'Run Goods' appeared as a new heading in Christian and Brotherly Advices in 1756 with a brief minute advising Friends to avoid buying suspect goods.²⁶

Run goods and privateering may make more interesting reading but there is little doubt that the receiving or paying of tithe was a more important issue and a much more complex one. Under the headings 'Tithe' and 'Queries' in Chapter II the prevailing situation at the beginning of the period has been described and this situation did not change very greatly during the course of the century. No statistics are available to show what proportion of disownments can be attributed to Friends paying tithe and church rates (or more rarely receiving tithe), but next to marriage this may have been the most significant

23. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.I, p.303.

24. For an example, Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.IX, p.71, Cambridgeshire in 1742.

25. Memoir of William Cookworthy, London, 1854, pp.21-2.

26. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.306.

cause of disownment. Such disownments were comparatively straightforward and instances tended not to reach Yearly Meeting Minutes.²⁷ Reinstatement following repentance was also straightforward. The more complex tithe questions presented some problems. For example in 1749 an opinion was sought from the Attorney General as to whether the second crop of clover was tithable.²⁸ They were told that it was not if left in the ground to be eaten by cattle when tithe had been paid on the first crop. Thus Friends were prepared to use legal processes to avoid illegal distraint as well as passive resistance against legal distraint. Friends were not always clear in their minds about what might and might not be paid; Friends in Northumberland in 1740 were generally clear of paying or receiving tithes except for some who were not 'clear in their Judgement about a Modus Decimandi'.²⁹

Friends maintained a record of the amounts lost to church rates and tithes, on occasion suspicions were aroused by failures to present accounts of sufferings.³⁰ The distraints suffered by one fairly prosperous Friend between 1738 and 1747 are a good example of the sort of losses that might be expected:³¹

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27. The example of George Hutchins disowned by Leicester Monthly Meeting in 1750 for both paying and receiving tithe is quoted Quine, The Quakers in Leicestershire 1648-1780, p.165 (unpublished Leicester Ph.D. thesis, 1968).
28. Book of Cases, vol.II, p.59. This was a problem arising from a fairly new crop - by the end of the eighteenth century hothouse fruits were tithable.
29. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.VIII, p.507. Before the 1836 Tithe Commutation Act (6 & 7 William IV, ch.71) there were in some areas local customary arrangements for voluntary commutations into fixed annual payments, called a Modus Decimandi.
30. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.VIII, p.502, Lincolnshire.
31. The Autobiography of William Stout of Lancaster, ed. J.D. Marshall, Manchester, 1967, p.293. Appendix B by W.G. Howson.

- 1738 3 Iron Pans
 3 Mault Shovels (together) 5s.6d.
- 1739 6 Cheeses, weight 92 lbs., 15s.0d.
- 1740 2 Cheeses, weight 23½ lbs., 5s.0d.
- 1741 2 Cheeses
 4 Corn shovels (together) 8s.0d.
- 1742 1 Cheese 1 Box
 6 Pairs of Wool Cards (together) 7s.8d.
- 1743 6 Pewter Plates worth 4s.0d.
- 1744 6 Cheeses worth 11s.0d.
- 1745 Malt Shovels, Pewter worth 12s.0d.
- 1747 Cheese 42 lbs. worth 7s.6d.

The methods of evasion described in Chapter II were practised throughout the period, certainly up to the time of the Tithe Commutation Act. In Norwich (tithe-free) in 1748 many were 'prevented being distrained for Steeplehouse Rates, by the Interposition of Neighbours, they paying the Same without their knowledge.'³²

One monthly meeting in Hertfordshire gave some cause for worry as to faithfulness on tithe and it was decided in 1754 that a party of Friends should visit it to give assistance.³³ The Friends appointed to visit reported back to Yearly Meeting in 1755 suggesting that their care should be continued since they had seen no real evidence of change.³⁴ The same meeting was deficient in 1756 and was visited again until the concern eventually merged with the revival of discipline.³⁵

32. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.X, p.45.

33. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.X, pp.480, 506.

34. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XI, pp.72-4.

35. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XI, p.103 (1756), p.251 (1757), and p.368 (1758).

The additional minutes in Christian and Brotherly Advices echoed these features of the tithe problem. Among other minutes one warned Friends to guard against any practice which might lead to collusion³⁶ and another declared that mixed rates were illegal.³⁷ The habit of levying mixed rates, that is the church and poor rates together, produced varying degrees of opposition from Friends and their first conclusion had been that careful investigation should precede any payment.³⁸ The minute of 1757 covered another factor: Yearly Meeting advised that 'Friends should decline as much as may be to Receive such overplus when offered in a different Species from that wick was Distrain'd.'³⁷ Goods seized were often worth more than the amount owed for tithe and sometimes fetched more too when sold, but Friends were not allowed to accept any part of the proceeds as change from their involuntary contribution.

Other matters of discipline were less directly concerned with events in the outside world, those involving the position of the individual in the meeting, membership, disownment, reinstatement and the effect on these factors of removal, marriage and failure in business, and those concerned with the relationships between meetings in matters of standing, appeals and changes in structure.

The topic of marriage will receive more attention later in this study, when the evidence has become more plentiful and is accompanied by a greater recognition of the problems described in Chapter II. Irregularities such as that in 1748 when Six-Weeks Meeting 'Had to testify against a disorderly marriage

36. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.378, 1750.

37. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.379, 1757.

38. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XI, p.111, 1756.

where two Friends came into one of the meeting houses on a First-day, and, at the close of the meeting, without having passed through any preliminaries, stood up and declared that they took one another in marriage, some friend reading a certificate for them' were rare.³⁹ However, there was some feeling that diversity existed in the way of solemnizing marriage and in 1753 Yearly Meeting asked for information about the procedure in each county.⁴⁰ Meeting for Sufferings considered the replies submitted and prepared a summary of the marriage regulations which was printed and published in 1754. In the Yearly Meeting Minutes for 1755 it was noted that some objections had been raised to the printed rules but that these were not allowed.⁴¹ Tanner in his lectures on Quaker history thought that practice was still not uniform and quoted an example from 1755: 'John Clark ... was retained in membership on his expressing regret, in a letter to the Monthly Meeting, for the manner in which he had been married, his wife being also looked upon as a member from the time of marriage, and attending the meetings of Friends with him.'⁴² It seems most unlikely that they were married by a priest, and Clark must have been saved from disownment by his timely expression of repentance and the mitigating circumstance of his wife's regular attendance.

Before the printing of the marriage rules in 1754 there were seven supplementary entries in Christian and Brotherly Advices. In 1741 the proper treatment of those who married contrary to rule was outlined with the proviso that disownment

39. Beck and Ball, The London Friends' Meetings, p.121.

40. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.X, p.455.

41. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XI, p.70.

42. Tanner, William, Three Lectures on the Early History of the Society of Friends in Bristol and Somersetshire, London, 1858, p.103.

did not debar those in need from the private charity of Friends.⁴³ The reason for such disownment was given in 1744 as to avoid 'the Reproach and Dishonour, which might be brought upon our holy Profession thro' their Misconduct.'⁴⁴ The most important of the other entries, in 1749, noted the report of a committee appointed to consider the marriage of next of kin, which was in favour of adhering to the existing minutes of 1675 and 1747 opposing the marriage of first and second cousins.⁴⁵

The printed rules were issued 'that as little diversity as may be may appear amongst us, in regard to the form and manner of solemnization.'⁴⁶ They specified the precise forms of procedures already outlined in Chapter II, the wording of the declaration of intention to be made, of the actual declaration and of the certificate which was required by civil law.⁴⁷ Rule four specified that if there were no obvious objections to the marriage two men and two women Friends should be appointed by the monthly meeting to make enquiries, to see that there were no impediments to the marriage and to ensure that due notice was given.⁴⁸ Essentially the printed rules were a codification of the various entries in Christian and Brotherly Advices with the addition of this last item.

Friends' worries about trade and failure in business were outlined in Chapter II and no additional entries were made on the subject until 1771. Beck and Ball, in London Friends Meetings, suggest that many insolvencies (as many cases of

43. Christian and Brotherly Advices, pp.153-4.

44. Christian and Brotherly Advices, pp.154-5.

45. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.156.

46. RULES for proceeding in relation to MARRIAGE Agreed upon by the Yearly Meeting in LONDON, 1754.

47. 5 & 6 William & Mary, cap. 21.

48. Beck and Ball, The London Friends Meetings, p.2.

marriage by a priest) were the by-product of disorderly behaviour, often of drunkenness, but the point is not made by any other commentator on the period, contemporary or otherwise.⁴⁹

The case of Peter Nicholson provides a valuable example of proceedings concerned with insolvency. It commenced with his bankruptcy in 1753 and literature on the case was still being published up to 1770-71. Nicholson left Ireland in 1753 to come to England and was in 1755 charged by Dublin men's meeting with eight offences of which the most plausible was his too hasty pursuit of riches.⁵⁰ The meeting he had joined in England offered him some qualified support and thought that he had done all possible to clear himself of bankruptcy. The National Half-Yearly Meeting of Ireland upheld Dublin Quarterly Meeting and Nicholson's appeal reached London Yearly Meeting in 1759. Dublin had not in fact disowned him nor had they granted him a certificate of removal. Yearly Meeting recommended that he be given a certificate but Dublin Quarterly Meeting failed to provide one and then said in 1760 that he was disowned. Nicholson was rather prone to litigation, for another dispute, connected in some way with the first, arose in 1764. Nicholson here wanted to refer the difference to arbitration but without the co-operation of his meeting was forced to take the matter to the courts.⁵¹ This much simplified account of Peter Nicholson's troubles serves to illustrate the time scale that could be

49. Beck and Ball, The London Friends Meetings, p.124.

50. ANON, The Case of Peter Nicholson, with divers meetings and persons stated, Kendal, 1770, pp.3-6.

51. The Case of Peter Nicholson, p.17; see also Observations and Remarks on the Conduct of Peter Nicholson, 1770, p.6, which criticises his taking legal action.

involved in disciplinary cases. A series of inter-connected cases, those of John Roper of Norwich Monthly Meeting, concerned with behaviour as a minister, lasted from 1777 to 1796.

Another matter involving trade which may be seen as a prelude to the revival of the discipline took place within Yearly Meeting in 1759. Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting wrote to the Yearly Meeting expressing their disquiet at 'the shameful Bankruptcies and Insolvencies so frequent of late among those professing with us, which must principally proceed from a neglect of that sacred Guide which would certainly lead us out of these and all other enormities; the inordinate love of Wealth and Grandeur of this Vain World, precipitating them into various Schemes and branches of Commerce beyond their Abilities.'⁵² They thought the situation was bringing troubles upon many innocent people and that it called for immediate attention. Their concern was supported by Durham Quarterly Meeting and a committee appointed at Yearly Meeting to consider the concern and especially any instances of Friends committing frauds through insolvencies.⁵³ The issue became one of those considered by the committees appointed to visit meetings in 1760 and this committee does not appear to have reported to Yearly Meeting.

Up to 1760 there was no marked change in the structure of the Society or the organisation of its discipline. However, this is not to say that things were completely static and a number of points concerning organisation deserve mention. The Yearly Meeting Epistle in 1742 outlined the principle on

52. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XI, pp.467-8..

53. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XI, p.472.

which meetings for discipline should be held, recognising that there could be differences of opinion: 'And, in your meetings for discipline and the affairs of the church, where different sentiments may sometimes arise, let all be guided by the Christian spirit of peace and love, and, in everything disputable, conduct yourselves with that calmness of reasoning which tends to convince the understanding, one of another.'⁵⁴ Controversy within meetings is not much revealed by the sources used here for the eighteenth century and indeed Quaker methods in business meetings would have tended to ensure that only the accepted opinion was minuted. More is seen of disagreements between individuals and their meetings through appeals, and between meetings. In 1743 the Yearly Meeting discussed the methods to be used by a quarterly meeting in dealing with one of its constituent monthly meetings that refused to accept its judgment. A committee was appointed to consider the matter and reported that monthly meetings should accept quarterly meeting decisions or if dissatisfied appeal to Yearly Meeting. If a monthly meeting refused either to accept the quarterly meeting's judgment or to appeal, the quarterly meeting was at liberty to dissolve it or to bring the matter to Yearly Meeting. A monthly meeting thus dissolved might appeal to the Yearly Meeting, but if no appeal was made the quarterly meeting had to find membership for the individuals concerned in neighbouring monthly meetings and to care for them until this was done. The meetings gaining members in this way were allowed to appeal to Yearly Meeting if they had objections, as well they might at acquiring members from a meeting that had been dissolved for

54. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.I, p.240.

refusing to accept the proper authority of its quarterly meeting. Each quarterly meeting was to receive a copy of the report of this committee.⁵⁵

Amalgamations and discontinuations of meetings were not usually the results of such troubles. Before 1760 some thought was given to the problems of the weaker meetings, caused usually by lack of numbers or perhaps inappropriate geographical boundaries. In 1752 Yearly Meeting decided that very small monthly meetings should be encouraged to join with their neighbours⁵⁶ and in 1756 Yearly Meeting allowed the Quarterly Meetings of Cambridge and Huntingdon to unite, an example that was to be increasingly followed.⁵⁷ A further move to strengthen the formal structure of the Society was the decision in 1757 that a select meeting of ministers and elders should be held at quarterly intervals in each monthly meeting.⁵⁸

A particularly striking comment on meetings at variance was made by William Thistlethwaite and despite his failure to identify the source of the account it seems from its context to be appropriate to this chapter:

Combined with this laxity in conduct and moral principle, we find the manifestation of greater impatience under restraint. This feeling not unfrequently was carried to the extent of open insubordination and resistance. Several cases occur, where committees appointed by superior meetings, were set at defiance by the inferior. In one case, at least, of a somewhat later date, such a committee is reported to have been waylaid and attacked.⁵⁹

55. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.IX, pp.160-1.

56. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.X, p.375, Written Epistle.

57. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XI, p.103.

58. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XI, p.265.

59. William Thistlethwaite, Four Lectures on the Rise, Progress and Past Proceedings of the Society of Friends in Great Britain, London, 1865, p.100.

Further problems arose about membership, at all levels, from the duty of a quarterly meeting to send representatives to Yearly Meeting, to the individual disowned or refused membership. Northumberland, for example, was reminded in 1740 of the need to send representatives.⁶⁰ Yearly Meeting noted in 1755 that difficulties regularly arose in the appointment of representatives to various meetings, particularly at that time to meetings of ministers and elders.⁶¹ To modern eyes it is more remarkable that regular meetings were tolerably attended; bearing in mind the state of transport, costs and distances apparent apathy probably had very practical origins. Of course not all Friends were eligible as representatives of their meetings. Yearly Meeting in 1747 considered that members of Meeting for Sufferings should be 'grave and weighty Friends, such as are themselves Men of Clean hands and adorning the Doctrine they profess in their Lives and Conversations.'⁶² In addition to representatives there were correspondents at Meeting for Sufferings and it was suggested also in 1747 that the importance of this meeting called for a very careful choice of correspondents.⁶³

A rare account of the mood of Yearly Meeting was given in one of John Fothergill's letters in 1758:

... our last Yearly Meeting was large, and I think the business of it conducted with wisdom. Several things which were expected to have brought on pretty warm debates were either prudently composed or treated with such steadiness and conviction as to prevent much disputing. Nevertheless it must be owned that a manifest loss appeared in the

60. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.VIII, p.485.

61. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XI, p.80.

62. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.IX, p.553.

63. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.79.

removal of many worthy ancients, which seemed to dishearten many and gave those who had more forwardness than discretion too frequent opportunities to impose on assemblies who could have wished for less interruption of this sort.⁶⁴

On the more local scale it seems that meetings were inclined to impose restrictions on their membership in more subtle ways, 'The Somersetshire Monthly Meetings being held in private houses, were the more liable on that account to be restricted to particular cliques and classes.'⁶⁵ In 1751 three Friends in Nottinghamshire complained to the Yearly Meeting that they had not been allowed by the quarterly meeting to enter the meeting for discipline, but Yearly Meeting did not uphold their complaint.⁶⁶ The other aspect of complaints was the bringing of complaints against individuals in meetings for discipline, governed by the minutes urging private advice in the first instance, and in 1743 Friends were reminded that where they could find just cause for complaint it was wrong to bring this up only when a Friend was applying for relief or proposing to marry.⁶⁷ An example of a more extreme attitude comes from Tanner (unfortunately without a date) who says that 'one Friend was disowned because he refused to fasten a copy of his declaration of repentance to the market-cross of the town in which he lived.'⁶⁸ Ruddy effectively compares the tone of a contemporary Catholic excommunication with that of a Quaker disownment, the latter seems to have been rather milder.⁶⁹

64. Booth, C.C. and Corner, B.C., Chain of Friendship (Selected letters of Dr John Fothergill), Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, p.197. An account of Yearly Meeting in 1760 by John Griffith is quoted in Chapter IV.

65. Tanner, Three Lectures on the Early History..., p.140.

66. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.X, p.295.

67. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.IX, p.165.

68. Tanner, Three Lectures on the Early History..., p.140.

69. John Ruddy, A Treatise Concerning Christian Discipline, Dublin, 1752.

These themes were accompanied by a number of corresponding entries in Christian and Brotherly Advices. The entries ranged from procedural points such as that entered in 1745, that no appeal might be received a second time,⁷⁰ to the reminders about the duties of visiting families⁷¹ through the varied entries on the headings 'Discipline' and 'Meetings for Discipline'. Under the heading 'Discipline' a number of references were made to other headings, but there were also new entries dealing with removal and settlement, the need for Friends to approach possible disagreement with a calm and patient spirit⁷² and an expression of satisfaction at the plain language of the answers to queries in 1751.⁷³ A long passage from the Written Epistle of 1750 desired 'that All who have at heart the Honour of God, and the prosperity of Truth, would be stirred up to discharge a due Concern to Deal with such as Walk inconsistently with our holy Profession' and showed that neglect on the part of one individual could be the cause of another's downfall.⁷⁴ A similar entry appeared in 1759 under the heading 'Christian Testimonies', urging the duty of admonition.⁷⁵ The results of the discussion on meetings for discipline in 1743 described above were fully entered.⁷⁶ The other eleven entries under this heading either served as cross-references or were concerned with women's meetings, discussed below.

Within meetings the role of elders and overseers was important. The Yearly Meeting Epistle of 1744 included a

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70. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.5.
 71. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.405, 1756, 1757, 1758.
 72. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.104.
 73. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.106.
 74. Christian and Brotherly Advices, pp.103-6.
 75. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.362.
 76. Christian and Brotherly Advices, pp.177-9.

paragraph directed specifically at the elders which shows that their role then included much that would later be considered proper to the overseers; they were to 'advise and assist the weak, and to use their Christian endeavours for restoring such as may have wandered and gone astray from the wholesome advices from time to time given forth and recommended by this meeting.'⁷⁷

A minute of Yearly Meeting in 1755 added a query for monthly meetings which suggests growing awareness of the need for some more organised form of pastoral care, 'Have you Two or more Faithful Friends deputed in Each particular Meeting to have the Oversight thereof,..?'⁷⁸ A minute of Norwich Monthly Meeting in 1757 seemed to imply the existence of overseers as such in that meeting 'that the overseers of the poor do in future, allow 12s. for a coffin and 6s. for a shroud in which any poor friend shall be buried' to perform a particular function.⁷⁹ No change in the status or function of the minister took place in this period from the point of view of discipline, although some indication of possible problems when the structure of the Society allowed such freedom was given by a minute in 1745: 'disorderly persons who travel up and down preaching without Certificates &c. to be Stopt.'⁸⁰

The queries were seen as a major instrument of the discipline, a means of regular checking on the state of the Society in all its aspects and at all its levels. Recognising that local variations might provide helpful ideas, Yearly Meeting asked the quarterly meetings in 1754 to send in details of any local

77. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.I, p.246.

78. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XI, p.76.

79. Quoted by Muriel F.Lloyd Prichard, 'Norfolk Friends' Care of Their Poor 1700-1850' in Journal of the Friends Historical Society XXXIX, 1947, and XL, 1948.

80. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.IX, p.259.

queries that they used.⁸¹ In 1758 the Meeting of Ministers and Elders was asked to take the answers to queries more seriously and to give plainer, more explicit answers.⁸² The queries underwent a steady process of revision. A major revision took place in 1742 following the appointment of a committee to consider the queries; the effect was to make them more coherent without radically changing their content. The eighth query was further amended in 1744 by the addition of those phrases shown here in parentheses: 'Do you bear a faithful and Christian Testimony against the Receiving or Paying Tithes (Priests demands and those called Church Rates)? And against bearing of Arms (& paying Trophy Money)? And do you admonish such as are unfaithful therein?'⁸³ The insertion in the seventh query made in 1757 is as interesting: 'Is it your Care by Example and Precept to Train up Your Children (Servants & those under their care) in all Godly Conversation and in the frequent Reading the holy Scriptures, as also in Plainness of Speech, Behaviour and Apparel?'⁸⁴ In 1758 the bearing of arms was removed from the eighth query and a new query introduced which also asked about privateers, letters of marque and dealing in prize goods.⁸⁵

Women's meetings were as much subject to most of the problems and hazards described above as the men's meetings and complaints came from time to time that women's meetings were not being kept up. In 1744 and 1745 it was noted that women's meetings were to be encouraged and in 1745 it was additionally affirmed that proceedings in relation to marriage should always

81. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.X, p.548.

82. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XI, p.361.

83. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.273.

84. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.272.

85. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.274.

be laid before the women's meetings.⁸⁶ It was necessary in 1749 to ask the Quarterly meeting of Suffolk whether they had taken any action to establish women's meetings following the minute of 1745. As it happened they had.⁸⁷ A similar but more general query about the establishment of women's meetings for discipline was made by Yearly Meeting in 1755.⁸⁸ During the same period there was some consideration of the establishment of a Yearly Meeting for women which the women suggested would encourage enthusiasm and stimulate the upholding of the discipline.⁸⁹ The proposition, put forward by women Friends from York, mentioned the advices of 1744 and 1745 and was intended to establish on a formal basis the informal meetings of women which had taken place since the late seventeenth century at the same time as London Yearly Meeting without possessing authority or maintaining records. The Women's Yearly Meeting was not formally recognised until 1784.

Finally before passing on to the discussion of the revival it should be emphasised that there were always some local signs of revival of the discipline as well as the continuing flow of advices urging higher standards and returning to traditional ways, such as that in 1753 which recognised also the existence in 'divers places' of 'a commendable zeal and fervency to cleanse the church from pollutions, to restore the discipline thereof where decayed or disused.'⁹⁰ Beck and Ball describe a campaign in 1751 in Devonshire House Monthly Meeting which

86. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.IX, p.311.

87. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.X, p.136.

88. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XI, p.77

89. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.X, p.455, 1753.

90. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.I, p.283, 1753, and see also Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.X, p.65, for an example (Lincolnshire).

amounted to a local revival, when a committee was set up 'to purify the camp' and produce 'a list of disorderly walkers'. This followed the recognition that 'many such offenders for several years have passed uncensured, and without notice.' The Committee were still at work when the larger scale revival began and were not discharged until 1772, when they reported that 'all had been dealt with except two who can't be found.'⁹¹

91. Beck and Ball, London Friends Meetings, p.188.

Chapter IV

1760 - 1782

With the exception of the movement for the revival of the discipline the natural dividing lines in the study of the discipline in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries fall around the publication of the books of discipline, because other changes took place so gradually that there are no precise subdivisions. It is worth considering other views as to the turning points in the Society's history and particularly any that may place the start of a new phase around 1760. 'The period 1760-1859 was probably the time in which group endogamy and the "peculiarities" were most rigidly maintained', according to one writer,¹ and another felt that 'The hundred years from 1750 onwards were the creative period for the making of rules of discipline and perfecting methods of procedure.'² Although Rufus Jones wrote of Yearly Meeting action in 1760 marking an epoch, he and the other planners of the Quaker History Series, published by Macmillan between 1908 and 1921, saw 1725 as the principal watershed in the eighteenth century.³ Thistlethwaite thought that 1760 marked a distinct division of periods,⁴ but Edward Grubb saw the period from 1700 to 1820 as a whole.⁵ These opinions, expressed over a century, are not uniform and the reader may feel at the end of this chapter that the evidence presented, while confirming the existence of desire for change,

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1. E.A. Isichei, From Sect to Denomination in English Quakerism, in British Journal of Sociology, XV, 1964, p.213.
 2. Wilfrid Allott, Leeds Quaker Meeting, in The Thoresby Miscellany, XIV, 1968, p.30.
 3. Rufus M. Jones, The Later Periods of Quakerism, vol.I, p.138.
 4. William Thistlethwaite, Four Lectures.
 5. In the introduction to R.L. Hine, A Mirror for the Society of Friends, p.15.

does little to prove that it had positive results. However, this may be misleading as one would really expect the results to be most obvious at the local level which is not covered adequately in this study. The period is also considered to have been one of decline in the number of members, a decline that may have been connected with the improving economic position of Friends in general. Professor Vann does not think that these developments detracted in any way from the quality of eighteenth century Quakerism but, while what is best is seldom most popular, the majority of Friends felt that truth, as interpreted by them, should attract greater numbers of adherents.⁶

In their volumes dealing with this period, Bogue and Bennett describe the problems of dissent in general in words that will serve as an introduction to the revival of the discipline amongst Friends:

Indifference has been another enemy to the increase of the dissenting cause. In a second generation it is impossible to secure the ardour of zeal which influenced the parents to dissent. While some of their posterity imbibe their principles and possess their piety, others resist all their endeavours to convey impressions of religion, and grow up with cold indifference to the doctrines and spirit of the Gospel. In this state of mind they are prepared for a removal into the establishment. Marriage into episcopal families drains a part of the young people away. In the course of life something occurs which creates disgust with the meeting-house, and serves as a pretext for going over to the church.⁷

The same authors' specific comment on Quakerism is of similar interest:

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6. Richard T. Vann, The Social Development of English Quakerism, p.159.
 7. David Bogue and James Bennett, History of Dissenters from the Revolution in 1688 to the Year 1808, London, 1810, 1812, vol.IV, pp.320-1.

The manners of the age have during this period been exceedingly perilous to the virtue of the quakers. That seclusion which their system demands from what they account the vanities of the world, presents no ordinary trial of principles to their sons and daughters; are we not to wonder, if, in very many instances the spirit of the world has gained the victory. From this unreputable cause, there has been a decrease in numbers, which perhaps has not been balanced by the converts who have been brought out of the world to join their standard. ⁸

It might be suggested that in contemporary circumstances the Society did as well as it could, but this was not the consensus of opinion of weighty Friends in London Yearly Meeting who, through the revival, attempted to bring back the church to the standards of the seventeenth century. Friends may have had a distorted sense of proportion about their troubles relative to the state of English society leading them to magnify the importance of the revival.⁹ However, this view has not generally been accepted; the most recent historian to write about 'Friends in the eighteenth century says, 'Friends, under the influence of a new conception of discipline, purged themselves of many useless members,' but 1760-1 lies outside the main period of Professor Vann's thesis and the few illustrations he quoted for the existence of the 'new conception of discipline' are not completely convincing.¹⁰ On the other hand, Beck and Ball, who are usually convincing, also see the movement for revival almost as saviour of the Society: 'It was ... through the Yearly Meeting that the Society, when showing signs of becoming dispersed, was gathered together into social order and unity.' The committee formed by Yearly Meeting:

8. Bogue and Bennett, History of Dissenters, vol.IV, p.353.

9. London Yearly Meeting during 250 Years, p.42, supports this view.

10. Vann, Social Development of English Quakerism, pp.154-5.

spent years in visiting and encouraging the Churches, from this great purging of the camp resulted, as the numerous disownments show, and great order and regularity became infused into the discipline of the body... No doubt, the simple arrangements of the earlier half of the Society's existence, adapted to a state of the Church when much zeal was yet shown by travelling ministers, did not prove equal to the condition of affairs as the eighteenth century advanced In 1760 came a time of revival, when the whole body were aroused to take a much more general interest in the Society's welfare. Monthly Meetings ceased to be select gatherings of but a few invited ones... Accompanied with this a strict discipline became established, by which the Society was kept together, in a measure of life under social influences that threatened disruption. ¹¹

This comprehensive account of the cause, aims and effects of the revival for London is a good expression of the orthodox historical view.

The Minutes of Yearly Meeting for the years following the revival and those contemporary journals that have survived hardly support this enthusiastic account nor unfortunately is evidence at present available to demonstrate how (if at all) the pattern of disownments was influenced by the revival. However, a stricter discipline would almost certainly have made more difficult the position of birthright Friends entertaining doubts about their place in the Society or that of possible converts to Quakerism. The numerical decline of the Society in the early nineteenth century, including losses through a considerable number of disownments, which is reasonably documented, seems likely to represent a continuation of the eighteenth century situation.

A total of fifty-eight Friends volunteered for the service of the committee appointed in 1760 at a request from Yearly

11. Beck and Ball, London Friends Meetings, pp.57-8.

Meeting for 'Weighty Judicious Friends whether Ministers, Elders or others' to take part in 'administering help in many places.'¹² These terms of reference may have had some connexion with the reports produced, although it was unlikely that any but weighty and judicious Friends, basically committed to the existing discipline, would be at Yearly Meeting. The reports of the various groups of visiting Friends made to Yearly Meeting and the journals of John Griffith give a good, official account of the visits. Griffith began on the basis that 'Common reason will inform us, that when the main pillars give way, the building must inevitably fall.'¹³ In Yearly Meeting in 1760 Griffith noticed a marked decline in the usual answers to queries, indicating an increasing falling away from the faith, despite the efforts of previous Yearly Meetings. He agreed that stronger measures than the advices and epistles of past Yearly Meetings were needed and the idea of a committee evolved. The committee were 'to use their Christian endeavours, in the love of God, for the promotion and revival of wholesome discipline, and the comely order of the Gospel in the churches.' Griffith goes on to give a rare picture for the eighteenth century of the mood of the Yearly Meeting at their business: 'Great was the awful solemnity which covered the meeting, during its deliberation on this very important affair. The weight of the heavenly Power was so exceeding great and awful, that it was very hard for any contrary spirits to appear; yet objections against appointments for such services were advanced by some.'¹⁴

12. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XII, p.91.

13. John Griffith, Journal of the Life, Travels and Labours, York, 1830, p.323.

14. John Griffith, Journal, pp.324-5.

This too reveals Griffith's own attitude and it is to be regretted that the thoughts of the contrary spirits were not recorded.

The Yearly Meeting received in 1761 reports on visits made to meetings in East Anglia. The Meeting noted that in most cases quarterly meetings intended to visit their monthly meetings in a similar way and also considered which other meetings should be visited. The report brought to Yearly Meeting in 1761 indicated that the concern was quite justified in the eyes of the Friends who had performed the visitation; they had found 'great neglect in that Necessary work of Admonishing and dealing with the unfaithful and disorderly walkers,' answers to queries had been superficial, 'Plainness of Speech, Apparel are departed from by many young People and divers Parents not clear in these respects' and four counties showed considerable deficiency in the payment of tithes.¹⁵ These comments were to be communicated in writing to the appropriate meetings.

1762 saw reports from a wide range of areas, completing the round of visits except for Wales and Scotland. The reports were very similar and examples of most forms of unfaithfulness described so far in this study were given with varying frequency. A number of recommendations for amalgamations were made. Superficial answering of the queries was noted and in the South-East one monthly meeting had been refusing to answer quarterly meeting queries.¹⁶ Militia, the hiring of substitutes, participation in fasts and rejoicing nights were cited as failings too often met with. It was noted that overseers were not appointed in all meetings but Lincolnshire excelled, 'no

15. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XII, pp.220-4.

16. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XII, p.381.

overseers or Elders of either sex appointed in Lincolnshire nor were Womens Meetings sufficiently encouraged there.'¹⁷

In the South-East 'a drowsy and lukewarm disposition too much prevailing' was found in meetings, many meetings were without meetings of ministers and elders and only one preparative meeting was regularly held.¹⁸ London and Middlesex presented particular temptations and, although in other ways the picture was more generally satisfactory, there it was reported that 'We fear divers are not clear of resorting to places of diversion whereby the mind hath been polluted, & rendered insensible of their great Duty and Interest of keeping their hearts with all dilligence and watching unto prayer, not knowing at what time the Lord cometh.'¹⁹ The report on the visit to Wales in 1763 conformed to the general pattern of reports made in 1761-2.²⁰ A comment made on Somersetshire represents a familiar explanation of the low state reported by the committees: 'Things appeared exceeding cloudy and heavy-occasioned we are jealous, by too close an attachment to the profits and spirit of the world.'²¹

Griffith supports the accounts given in Yearly Meeting Minutes, with more detailed descriptions of the deficiencies of the meetings he himself visited, chiefly in the eastern counties and Yorkshire, occupying more than thirty printed pages in the 1830 edition of his Journal. It would be tempting to quote him at great length for the flavour and variety of his language. The visit to the Monthly Meeting of Norwich included

17. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XII, p.377.

18. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XII, p.380.

19. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XII, pp.394-5.

20. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XII, p.421.

21. Tanner, Three Lectures on the Early History..., p.141.

a joint meeting with the women who stayed for its duration 'about six hours and a half ... though a motion was made sooner for our women Friends to withdraw, least some weak constitutions might be injured by long sitting.' Although Griffith found discipline in a good state in Norwich, there were serious risks, notably 'of the prevalence of earthly mindedness in some.'²² At Royston in Hertfordshire though 'Very deep and painful was our labour, under a mournful sense of that gross darkness which had prevailed' and the union of Royston was recommended and effected with Baldock and Hitchin on account of Royston being 'too weak to manage the weighty affairs proper to a Monthly Meeting.'²³ Travelling north Griffith complained in Pontefract that plainness was too often the result of education rather than 'the genuine product of a well regulated mind;' less obscurely he commented that the discipline was well maintained.²⁴

An appreciation of William Cookworthy gives an interesting picture of an actual visitation:

a deputation from the London Yearly Meeting was present, headed by Thomas Corbyn, a stern disciplinarian ... Their avowed object was to stir the slumbering embers of discipline ... A case of delinquency, reported from former sittings, having been again brought under notice, Thomas Corbyn gave vent to some expressions of impatience and surprise that so much trouble had been occasioned, and that, after such a length of time, the rules had not been enforced to the full extent of disownment; - adding, that he knew an individual so overwhelmed with contrition and a sense of his own unworthiness as to have entreated him Monthly to disunite him. "And is there a Meeting" said my grandfather, in a tone of impressive sweetness, "which could disown a man in such a frame of mind?"²⁵

Probably there were several such.

22. John Griffith, Journal, p.342.

23. John Griffith, Journal, p.346.

24. John Griffith, Journal, p.360.

25. Memoir of William Cookworthy, London, 1854, p.132.

Before looking at the detail of the working and development of the discipline between 1760 and 1784, two important matters must be mentioned, Fry's 'Book of Extracts' and a controversy over the nature of the discipline. Joseph Smith, in the standard bibliography of Quakerism, called John Fry's Alphabetical Extract. Of all the Printed Epistles the original Book of Extracts, somewhat uncharitably to the Christian and Brotherly Advices.²⁶ The contents of the work were all available in Christian and Brotherly Advices when kept up-to-date and in the printed Yearly Meeting Epistles, but Fry did make some of the advices more readily available than they would otherwise have been. The contents were very much based on Christian and Brotherly Advices, and the real importance of Fry's compilation lies in its existence and the evidence it provides of a live interest in the discipline. Although not prepared at the request of Yearly Meeting it can have given no offence.

In the disagreement over the nature of the discipline, Catholicus attacked in writing the concept of discipline held by John Griffith and described in one of his works.²⁷ Griffith of course was a supporter of the discipline as it emerges from our examination of Yearly Meeting proceedings and Christian and Brotherly Advices. Essentially he saw the discipline as very similar to that of the early Christian church and justified his

26. John Fry, An Alphabetical Extract. Of all the Annual Printed Epistles ... of the People call'd Quakers, London, 1762, second edition 1766.

27. Catholicus, An Essay on the Simplicity of Truth, London, 1779; John Griffith, Brief Remarks upon sundry important subjects, London, 1765. Smith, in A Catalogue of Friends Books, identifies Catholicus with Henry Portsmouth but the Friends House Library Catalogue attributes the essay to William Matthews of Bath.

view with abundant scriptural quotation. Griffith's attitude to disownment, which was very much that of the vocal parts of the Society as a whole, was the main ground of attack chosen by Catholicus. Griffith believed 'Salt that hath lost its savour which is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and trodden under the feet of men'.²⁸ Catholicus felt that such an attitude to disownment was very much too severe and alleged that Friends were 'giving into narrow and intolerant principles and practices.'²⁹ Griffith's book contained 'maxims of ecclesiastical slavery ... Maxims, better adapted to the Popish than any Protestant Church ... Maxims that must ever furnish occasion for dissension and discord.'³⁰ The comparison was taken further but the main contention was the injustice of imposing the same penalties on those who paid tithes, or married first cousins or married by a priest and upon drunkards and adulterers.³¹ This attitude to disownment was obviously coloured by the belief that tithes were paid by Christians in Apostolic times and supported by the text 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's.'³²

Catholicus proceeded to accuse some Friends of succumbing to spiritual pride,

for as they are apt to presume that they are the favourites of Heaven, enjoy the peculiar communications of God's spirit, and are fitted with sound judgement to rule in his church; Satan holds out to them the bait of discernment of spirits, and the power and duty of censure. This bait is readily swallowed, and such persons... think themselves anointed as judges in Israel, to

28. Griffith, Brief Remarks, p.54, quoting Matthews V v.13.

29. Catholicus, An Essay, p.21.

30. Catholicus, An Essay, pp.22-3.

31. Catholicus, An Essay, p.26.

32. Matthew XXII v.21.

seek out, to censure and set at nought, all who come not up to their standard of orthodoxy.³³

Catholicus made it clear that he was not opposed to discipline as such but he would have preferred a discipline that was more just, rather than one that was stricter. He made the interesting suggestion that the discipline was to all intents and purposes a breach of Christ's new commandment. This opinion may not have been unique and the sometimes apparently inexorable attitude of Friends to their weaker brethren does not impress their very tolerant successors. The care taken before the stage of disownment was reached is seldom evident from the type of record that this study is based on, although in Norwich for example there is evidence that cases of insolvency were very thoroughly and mercifully investigated.

The revival movement would seem to indicate that a period of continual development of disciplinary activity was to be expected after 1761 and that most of the entries in the book of extracts would be further reiterations. Apart from the distinct feature of the revival the background is similar to that previously described, although perhaps some of the energies of complaint prone Friends were diverted at the beginning of the period to their lengthy visitations. Yearly Meeting Epistles contain a range of expressions of sorrow at the state of the society. The Epistle of 1765 described the plight of the Society at some length and dwelt particularly on the inadequacy of attendance at meeting: 'It is a matter of much concern, that some in profession with us, are scarcely ever seen at those meetings, others but seldom, and too many, who cannot

33. Catholicus, An Essay, p.29.

in general plead cases of absolute necessity, or insurmountable obstacles, are far from giving timely and constant attendance: hence those meetings are often tedious in gathering, and appear disreputably small when assembled.'³⁴ In more general terms the decline in standards receives comment in Yearly Meeting Epistles in 1763, 1766 and 1767, for example, and comments on particular deficiencies were made at very regular intervals.

Friends believed that the position causing their disquiet was due in large measure to increased worldliness. Too many people were thought to be reading romances and novels according to an advice given in 1764,³⁵ which resulted from a concern of Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting about books 'which some booksellers, tho' Friends sell e.g. Plays, loose Romances, Novels, Books teaching Musick Gaming and others of evil tendency.'³⁶ This advice was repeated in the Epistle of 1769.³⁷ Other worldly practices continued, the erection of a gravestone at Nailsworth is recorded in 1764³⁸ and in 1765 and 1766 advices recommended the removal of every possible gravestone.³⁹ In 1782 Yearly Meeting considered the suggestion that Friends should refrain from the worldly habit of not allowing their women to attend funerals.⁴⁰ Tithe of course remained something of an issue although meriting only one general entry in Christian and Brotherly Advices in 1772. An important development resulted from the growing enclosure movement when in 1765 Yearly Meeting asked the Meeting for Sufferings to consider the effects of

34. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIII, p.337.

35. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.66.

36. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XII, p.600.

37. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.31.

38. Book of Cases, vol.III, p.117.

39. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.387.

40. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVII, pp.106-7.

enclosure in relation to priests' claims. It was thought that Friends needed to consider also whether they could contribute to the cost of obtaining enclosure acts when they included provision for the maintenance of priests.⁴¹

Militia, run goods and other aspects of their relationship with the State also remained problems, affording opportunities to the weaker-willed Friends to conform to worldly usages. Friends were reminded of the peace testimony and of their attitude to the state in 1775 and told 'Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.'⁴² London Yearly Meeting had noticed in 1760 that some Friends were hiring substitutes or paying to exempt themselves from personal service in the militia,⁴³ and a committee appointed to consider the provisions of the Militia Act decided in 1762 that Friends must not pay the assessment levied on counties failing to raise the required numbers of militia.⁴⁴ The whole of the Yearly Meeting Minute on this subject is exceptionally quoted in Christian and Brotherly Advices and an annotation in the copy used for this study says of the 1760 point on militia in the Written Epistle 'excellent advice and should have been entered in this Book.'⁴⁵ In Hitchin in 1778 the Clerk of the Monthly Meeting was found to have paid £2.12.6 for a substitute; he was called upon to resign the clerkship and disowned shortly afterwards.⁴⁶ Run goods, as an evasion of revenue duty, continued to cause problems in certain areas; special epistles were sent to Cornwall and

41. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIII, p.89. Two particular enclosure acts were referred to, for Fady in Leicestershire and Exhall Field in Warwickshire.

42. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XV, p.24, and Acts XXIII, 5.

43. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XII, p.106.

44. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XII, pp.403-5.

45. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.104.

46. R.L. Hine, A Mirror for the Society of Friends, p.49.

Kent in 1766 and followed by a reminder in 1768 because no appreciable change had been noticed.⁴⁷

Reasons connected with marriage continued to be prominent among the causes of disownment although little that was new developed. In Leeds Meeting between 1760 and 1790, 118 Friends married within the Society, according to rule, and 42 married out.⁴⁸ It is likely that some of those marrying out were eventually reinstated and that some of those marrying according to rule were eventually disowned or left for other reasons. The Yearly Meeting Epistle of 1777 sets out the reasons for the strict approach to marriage at some length, the essence being that 'Marriage implies union and concurrence, as well in spiritual as temporal concerns.'⁴⁹ The Epistle was a little unjust in describing the causes of mixed marriage in that there must have been many such marriages not the result of 'sordid interests, and ensnaring friendships of the world, the contaminating pleasures and idle pastimes of earthly minds; also the various solicitations and incentives to festivity and dissipation.'⁵⁰

A new development in opposition to a feature of the life of the world, in which only a very few Friends can ever have been marginally involved, was the campaign against slavery that grew out of the existing testimony against trade in negroes. A Yearly Meeting Minute in 1761, entered in Christian and Brotherly Advices, had stated that any Friends actually involved

47. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIII, pp.209-13; vol.XIV, p.417.

48. Wilfrid Allot, Leeds Quaker Meeting, p.41.

49. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, p.37.

50. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, p.38.

in dealing in negroes should be disowned and the Epistle had echoed this in 1763.⁵¹ After the formation of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787 this received recognition from non-Quaker historians, one of whom has written that 'except for some Quakers and a poet, no one protested against the slave trade until after 1770.'⁵² But Friends were hardly publicly active at this time and Overton's and Relton's statement that Granville Sharp was 'first in the field in the Anti-Slavery crusade' is not grossly unfair to them.⁵³

Friends' involvement in trade maintained its importance as a factor in the discipline and was sometimes not far removed from the general idea of worldliness. The Epistle in 1767 connected the two and suggested that the extension of trading activity had involved some loss of integrity. Extravagant living and the imitation of others meant that a few Friends lived beyond their income and to maintain the façade of fashion and prosperity borrowed and eventually ended in 'failures and bankruptcies; unknown among us in the days of our temperate and lowly minded predecessors.'⁵⁴ The Epistle in 1778 was very similar in intention and quoted 1 Timothy VI, 9, 10 as verified by the experience of Friends.⁵⁵ The only additional entry in Christian and Brotherly Advices under the heading 'Trading' states quite clearly that the discipline was to be applied quickly in cases of insolvency.⁵⁶ This was the result of the

51. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.203; Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XII, p.205; Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.I, p.328.

52. Roland N. Stromberg, Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth-Century England, p.155.

53. J.H. Overton and F. Relton, The English Church from the Accession of George I to the end of the Eighteenth Century, London, 1906, p.276.

54. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.I, p.347.

55. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, p.35.

56. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.398.

discussion of propositions from the Quarterly Meetings of London and Surrey in Yearly Meeting. London had merely wanted previous advices to be re-circulated but Surrey wanted a new look at methods of preserving Friends from the insolvency thought to result from high living. Yearly Meeting asked Friends to take 'every means consistent with the Rules of our known discipline to put a Stop to this growing evil.'⁵⁷ In 1779 Yearly Meeting agreed to the re-circulation of the 1732 minute on trade.⁵⁸ Friends did recognise that a bankruptcy was not invariably the fault of the individual and there is a case of a man made bankrupt as the result of the Lisbon earthquake being given a certificate of recommendation.⁵⁹ Monthly meetings were warned in the 1769 Epistle to take care in receiving contributions to collections from undischarged bankrupts whose money could not really be considered their own.⁶⁰

Turning to the structure of the Society there were few developments in the interrelationship of meetings, although the practical problems of membership, disownment and removal and settlement generated a number of minutes. Firstly, for the Yearly Meeting itself, there was only one point of note in the period when in 1781 two meetings suggested that the traditional holding of Yearly Meeting at Whitsun led people to believe that Friends made a particular observance of Pentecost. The Yearly Meeting felt it undesirable to encourage this mistaken belief and decided to meet at another time.⁶¹ Yearly Meeting

57. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIV, pp.223-8, 256.

58. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVI, p.267.

59. Minutes of Warwickshire North Monthly Meeting, 1764.

60. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.I, p.357.

61. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVI, p.573.

was not always popular, as a result of the revival of discipline which had promoted the idea of the amalgamation of the smaller and weaker meetings. The fusion of two monthly meetings, Croydon and Wandsworth, and Kingston by Surrey Quarterly Meeting in 1762 aroused protests from both.⁶²

The status of overseers and elders becomes a little clearer in the period, although there is a warning in 1761 that age and wealth should not be considered by Friends appointing elders.⁶³ According to Rufus Jones the great period of the authority of the elders includes that covered by this chapter and the revival could to some extent be seen as a re-assertion of the authority of that conservative element in the Society.⁶⁴ But they too had to be kept up to the accepted standards and it was noted at Yearly Meeting in 1760 from the report of the Yearly Meeting of Ministers and Elders that some of their number were neglecting attendance at meetings both for worship and discipline.⁶⁵ This situation continued in 1772 when it was recognised in an advice that bodily infirmity might be partly responsible for non-attendance.⁶⁶ An advice of 1772 stated that elders and overseers should meet annually to list suitable Friends to act as correspondents at Meeting for Sufferings, although this list was not intended to be binding.⁶⁷

Membership was now definitely becoming something to be acquired through a formal process of admission. In Leeds Meeting the first record of a formal application for membership occurs in 1767⁶⁸ and in Warwickshire North Monthly Meeting the

62. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XII, pp.400-1.

63. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.181.

64. Rufus Jones, The Later Periods of Quakerism, vol.I, p.127.

65. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XII, p.97.

66. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.429.

67. Christian and Brotherly Advices, pp.80-1.

68. Wilfrid Allott, Leeds Quaker Meeting, p.41.

first notice of admission into membership appears in 1774 with the first recorded application for membership other than for a child of Friends in 1787.⁶⁹ The advice in the Epistle of 1753 against the hurried admission of those convinced was repeated by Yearly Meeting in 1764 when perhaps it was more relevant. Friends were advised of convinced persons to 'Let the innocency of their Lives and Conversation first be manifested, and a deputation of judicious Friends be made to enquire into the sincerity of their Convincement of the Truth of our Religious Principles and let this appear to the satisfaction of the Monthly Meeting previous to their admission.'⁷⁰ Thistlethwaite suggests that after 1760 membership was defined 'in sharp but artificial lines.'⁷¹

The comparative scarcity of references to membership may indicate that the procedure by which membership was as much assumed as conferred was widely accepted and that, despite Friends' fears that many people dressing and speaking like Quakers were not really true at heart after some years of association with the Society, nominal membership on the part of converts was not then a serious matter. The greater emphasis on disownment in the records should therefore cause little surprise. Disownment was widely practised in non-conformist bodies, and the comment 'As excommunication among them involves no injury to civil rights, it is practised whenever the vices of a member are considered as a disgrace to the body' was made of dissent in general.⁷² Randall, in giving a specimen testimonial of denial (that may have been used in Dublin

69. Minutes of Warwickshire North Monthly Meeting, A Short Digest.

70. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.107.

71. William Thistlethwaite, Four Lectures, p.121.

72. Bogue and Bennett, History of the Dissenters, vol.IV, p.504.

Yearly Meeting) in a case of failure lays some stress on the need to maintain visible purity in the church and the terms of the testimonial he quotes are forthright:

... the Waste of his Substance was intirely owing to Carelessness and Extravagancy; which Conduct he perfectly knew was also quite contrary to the good Instructions, and wholesome Discipline, so piously and wisely recommend and settled by our worthy Elders now at Rest; we therefore, from a just Abhorrence of such Unrighteousness, hereby declare that henceforth we do not account him a member of our Christian Church, until he shew such Tokens of Repentance, as shall bear due Proportion to his Offence, which we sincerely desire. ⁷³

Disownment was the remedy chosen for many problems but, since it appeared a final process despite the possibility of reinstatement, there was sometimes hesitation about going so far. In 1770 Yearly Meeting was asked for advice on dealing with Friends who were persistent absentees and suggested that monthly meetings could act 'even to the Disowning of Such.'⁷⁴ At the same Yearly Meeting it was decided that while disowned persons might be buried in Friends Burial grounds no form of meeting could be held. One appeal by an individual against disownment was upheld in 1778, nominally because the monthly and quarterly meetings were held to have acted too hastily rather than on account of the grounds of appeal.⁷⁵ This was reconsidered on procedural grounds the next year and the recommendation made that the individual should, in the light of new information received, be dealt with according to the minutes in Christian and Brotherly Advices, which may have meant that he was again disowned.⁷⁶ Rowntree, commenting on Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting said: 'Disownment was regarded like expulsion

73. Joseph Randall, A Brief Account of the Rise, Principles, and Discipline of the People called Quakers, Dublin, 1776, p.20.

74. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIV, pp.99, 103.

75. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVI, pp.123-4.

76. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVI, p.267.

from a club appeals elicited much feeling, the result of one, in which the Yearly Meeting reversed the decision of the subordinate meetings was cried by the bellman in Thirsk Marketplace.⁷⁷

One of the more complicated disownment cases occurred when the person disowned, Mary Jerom, brought an action for libel against Francis Hart who had read the minute of disownment in Nottingham Monthly Meeting in 1762. After a rebuff from the court of Kings Bench, Mary Jerom renewed her attempt and was again defeated, although a retrial proved necessary to clear Hart completely.⁷⁸ The Minutes of Norwich Monthly Meeting show that disownments were sometimes based on behaviour that would have been considered immoral by any church. John Standen was disowned in 1781 on account of 'the report of his having a Bastard Child sworn upon him' being proven.⁷⁹ Similar cases occurred but not invariably with the same result and in 1798 a wife who was pregnant before her marriage was suitably contrite and therefore forgiven.⁸⁰

Appeals against disownment which reached the Yearly Meeting at regular intervals were most frequently connected with the rules of removal and settlement. Westmorland in 1763 sought advice on a complex case in which a disowned person moved to a neighbouring monthly meeting area in a different quarterly meeting and requested after some years to be reinstated. The new monthly meeting did not wish to make a decision that might create a precedent and wrote to the former monthly meeting for

77. J.S. Rowntree, Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting of Friends, Leominster, no date, pp.15-16.

78. Book of Cases, vol.III, pp.108-9.

79. Norwich Monthly Meeting Minutes 1776-1800, selected by Arthur J. Eddington, p.280.

80. Norwich Monthly Meeting Minutes 1776-1800, Eddington, p.285.

their opinion, which was that the monthly meeting in which the Friend was now resident had to decide whether she was truly convinced. Yearly Meeting, considering this and a similar case, decided that the meeting responsible for the original disownment had to deal with re-admission and the membership then be transferred if necessary.⁸¹

Removal and settlement accounted directly for eleven of the eighteen appeals to London Yearly Meeting between 1760 and 1782. The rules were involved and the possible circumstances more so. Meetings contended with meetings to avoid responsibility that they felt would fall unjustly on them. The solution in a case of disagreement between the Quarterly Meetings of London and Hertfordshire in 1763 was to share the cost of maintaining a particular poor Friend whose settlement was in doubt.⁸² In 1773 Northamptonshire Quarterly Meeting were genuinely unable to provide for all the poor Friends falling to their charge and a committee of Friends was sent to Yearly Meeting to seek a solution.⁸³ As problems were discovered attempts were made to fill the gaps in the rules. In 1761 it was ruled that widows or widowers gained settlement as single persons, their children remaining under the care of the Monthly Meeting of their origin.⁸⁴ In 1762 this was followed by the rule that a manservant only secured settlement when hired by the year, not monthly.⁸⁵ Then in 1769 it was established that a child became a member if either parent was a Friend.⁸⁶ The

81. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XII, pp.490-2, 495.

82. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XII, p.498.

83. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIV, p.506.

84. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.292.

85. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.293.

86. Christian and Brotherly Advices, p.293.

most substantial addition to the Advices was again on the subject of servants, who after a year belonged to the meeting to which their master belonged, or if he was not a Friend to the Monthly Meeting covering the locality.⁸⁷ It was decided in 1773 that the rules on removal and settlement should be printed for circulation.⁸⁸

Although there were some additions to Christian and Brotherly Advices in this period not described here, the majority of these tended to be consolidations of existing entries. Under the heading 'Preachers' a new set of advices from the Yearly Meeting of Ministers and Elders was given in 1775, summarising the rules of behaviour discussed here in detail. The saga of the Women's Yearly Meeting continued with meetings that were only informal through the lack of the sanction from Yearly Meeting which would have constituted them a meeting for discipline. London Yearly Meeting was not favourably inclined to a request from the women in 1765 that they might be allowed to issue an epistle to quarterly meetings and after a year's thought declined it.⁸⁹

Finally, we may note that some effort was made to keep the Christian and Brotherly Advices up-to-date and to stimulate a further revival, around the same period in the mid-seventies. Yearly Meeting considered in 1774 a minute from Durham Quarterly Meeting which suggested that minutes did not always reach every meeting and that some minutes were copied into the book of extracts under the wrong headings.⁹⁰ As a result of this discussion and the further consideration of the matter by the

87. Christian and Brotherly Advices, pp.293-4.

88. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIV, p.497.

89. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIII, pp.93-4, 201, 204.

90. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XV, p.113.

Committee to draw up the General Epistle Yearly Meeting in 1775 decided that a new book of extracts should be prepared.⁹¹ No more seems to have happened in Yearly Meeting until 1781 when deliberations on the method of preparing the new book took place.⁹² In the meantime there was some effort to keep up the good work done by the visitations of 1760-2 and Isaac Sharpless proposed a general visit to meetings.⁹³ Some visits took place and were reported in 1777; the final report presented to Yearly Meeting in 1778 contains some notes of optimism as well as the expected comments:

In divers places we had sorrowful occasion to lament the low, & languid state of many in professions with us, finding Meetings for Worship, more especially on Weekdays much neglected, a great remissness in the Religious Education of our Youth, many Instances of Unfaithfulness, and painful defection in various branches of that Christian Testimony which we as a people are most assuredly required to maintain...⁹⁴

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91. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XV, p.244.
 92. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XV, pp.433-9.
 93. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVI, p.377.
 94. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVI, pp.130-1.

Chapter V

1783 - 1801

The first printed, official, record of the discipline was produced in 1783, very much on the lines of the manuscript Christian and Brotherly Advices. This chapter concerns its publication and the following years up to the next version to be published in 1802, a relatively short period which shows some signs of a desire to present the discipline more concisely and more clearly and to establish the Society's organisation on a more definite basis. For part of the period covered in this chapter and in the first years of the next England was at war, on a greater scale than had occurred since the beginning of this study, and this too had some effect on the discipline.

Consideration of the need for a revised version of Christian and Brotherly Advices began in 1775. A report was made to Yearly Meeting in 1781 by the committee that had considered methods of preparing the new book of extracts. They thought first to use only those minutes containing the actual rules of discipline but decided that the advices were so important as the basis of the rules and so often closely related to them that it would be unwise and impracticable to attempt this. The second thought, dismissed because of the difficulty it would have entailed, was to produce a composite minute from the collection under each heading in the manuscript book of extracts. Finally they decided to take the simplest course, 'To Select, and extract Such Rules and Advices as the Committee thought most Suitable, and pertinent to the Several Titles, or Heads, under which they might be placed.'¹ This method could not be pursued effectively

1. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVI, pp.433-9.

by the Committee of Meeting for Sufferings appointed to revise the discipline and two Friends agreed to produce a draft from the existing manuscript book, the written and printed epistles and the Yearly Meeting Minutes. It became apparent to the compilers that much had been omitted from the manuscript book by meeting clerks in selecting extracts from the epistles.² The resulting draft was considered by a committee of Yearly Meeting and then in 1782 by a committee of members of Meeting for Sufferings and some appointed Friends. A number of alterations was made and two proposed entries referred to the Committee on Epistles before the draft was finally approved for publication.³ Yearly Meeting began to consider publishing a supplement in 1789, postponed the idea in 1791 and finally published the supplement in 1792.⁴

Unlike Christian and Brotherly Advices, Extracts from the Minutes and Advices had a preface justifying its existence, in fact through the lack of care taken to keep its predecessor up-to-date. It was hoped 'That these minutes and advices being more generally made known, may be more uniformly observed and put in practice, that order, unity, peace, and harmony may be preserved throughout the churches.'⁵ This was not the sole intention: it was hoped that youth would be especially stimulated and that the book would act as a reminder to weaker brethren. Friends were reminded too to read the Scriptures 'as superior to all other writings for instruction.'⁶ A member of the public

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2. This confirms the observation made previously about variations between copies of Christian and Brotherly Advices.
 3. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVII, pp.106-25.
 4. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVIII, p.536 and vol.XIX, p.61.
 5. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices of the Yearly Meeting of Friends, London, 1783, p.iv.
 6. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, 1783, p.vi.

reading the book would, it was hoped, be left with an impression of the 'constant and earnest endeavours of the Yearly Meeting for the promotion of virtue and religion.' Readers were informed that from the point of view of Yearly Meeting at least, despite a certain declension from earlier standards amongst some, the discipline remained as unchanged as the faith, doctrine, worship or ministry of the Society.

Apart from the obvious physical contrast between manuscript and printed pages in 1738 and 1783, the casual reader would not be immediately aware of any difference between the two versions. The 1783 volume included blank pages for the addition in manuscript of advices as issued: 'which are to be inserted in the manner, and in the page, in which they will be directed to be placed by the Yearly Meeting. No other additions are to be made.'⁷ In fact there was a considerable number of alterations in the entries, rather more than one hundred deletions and only slightly fewer additions, in addition to the introduction of new headings and re-arrangements within headings.⁸ The number of deletions probably gives a false impression of the importance of the revision; many minutes repeated the content of preceding minutes or sometimes recommended the consideration of them. In a number of cases the minutes added to the discipline replaced two or three former entries and under 'Marriage' for example ten entries were replaced by the new rules of 1754. The heading 'Books' lost thirteen entries but very little of its real content.

7. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, 1783, p.ix.

8. Because of the varying degrees of efficiency with which copies of the manuscript book of extracts had been kept up to date, no two copies were likely to have an identical number of entries under every heading.

Several titles from 1738 disappeared: 'Certificates' was absorbed as appropriate between 'Removals and Settlements' and 'Ministers and Elders' which also incorporated the former sections of 'Elders' and 'Preachers'. 'Children' and 'Orphans' also disappeared and three new headings, 'Parents and Guardians', 'Education' and 'Youth', took their place. 'Discipline' and 'Meetings for Discipline' were merged in one more convenient section as were 'Kings and Governors' and 'Parliament' which now appeared as 'Civil Government'. Several headings changed their names. 'Negroes' became 'Slaves' and 'Tomb Stones' became 'Grave Stones', while 'Talebearing' was added to 'Defamation' to compose 'Defamation and Detraction'. 'Fighting' was split into 'Militia' and 'War' and 'Love' became 'Love and Unity'. 'Prisoner', 'Questions', 'Representatives', 'Run Goods' and 'Salutations' were all absorbed by other sections. The new headings introduced were 'Affirmation', 'Convinced Persons', 'Liberality to the Poor' and 'Women's Meetings'. At the same time a number of minutes moved from one heading to another for the sake of clarity.

Many of the new entries were the direct result of Yearly Meeting proceedings discussed in previous chapters and in some cases extracts from Yearly Meeting Epistles were quoted. The new headings, with the exception of 'Convinced Persons', added very little to the body of the discipline, consisting entirely as they did of minutes written before the period of the revival of the discipline. The additional material under other headings varies considerably and only some entries merit consideration. Under 'Days and Times' a new entry explained the change to the Gregorian calendar in 1752, which of course meant that First Month was now that 'vulgarly called January' and the former

First Month became Third Month.⁹ The change of calendars must have been more confusing to Friends who continued to abstain from the use of heathen names than to the public in general.

'Love and Unity' lost the six entries appearing in 1738 and replaced them with three of similar content from the period before the revival. A new entry under 'Marriage' set out a stronger line on mixed marriages and was prepared in 1783:

And as we have great cause to believe, that remissness in dealing, and weakness in some monthly meetings in accepting superficial and insincere acknowledgements, have had a great tendency to promote such marriages, we earnestly advise, that monthly meetings be very careful not to accept acknowledgements without full satisfaction of the sincere repentance of such transgressors, manifested by a conduct circumspect and consistent with our religious profession.¹⁰

This minute must have contributed to the problems of the Society in maintaining numbers, although on the assumption that Friends were not, on repentance, expected to abandon their new partners, the demonstration of sincerity might have produced domestic difficulty where the non-member husband or wife did not attend meeting regularly.

Under 'Militia' two minutes resulting from previous proceedings were entered together with a quotation from the Militia Act of 1778 demonstrating that a Quaker might not be imprisoned for refusing to serve if he had no effects to be distrained.¹¹ Because of the risk of impostors attempting to secure this privilege Friends were required to produce evidence of identity from their meetings.

9. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, 1783, pp.45-6.
 10. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, 1783, p.107.
 11. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, 1783, pp.134-5;
 18 Geo. III, c.59, 15.

There appeared under the 'Monthly Meetings' heading (meetings for discipline were treated in 1783 in particular under their titles as well as under the general headings of 'Discipline' and 'Meetings for Discipline') a description of procedure in disciplinary cases that crossed meeting boundaries, dated 1782.¹² If a Friend, Smith, committed an offence in one monthly meeting while he was a member of another distant monthly meeting it was for the suffering monthly meeting to notify his own of the offence and for his own meeting to deal with him, through the other meeting as their agent because of the distance, informing the other formally of the action taken. If Smith had moved outside the area of any monthly meeting then that geographically nearest to him was to take responsibility. If Smith had committed his offence in a nearby meeting his own meeting would have dealt with him without needing to involve another meeting as their agents.

One omission was of some importance because the original minute contained an implicit approval of a practice very much opposed by Friends later in the eighteenth century. Under 'Sufferings' the minute of 1684, quoted in Chapter II, had said that goods distrained were to be counted as sufferings even when returned through purchase by a neighbour. This could of course have been taken as encouraging reciprocal agreements between neighbours which would have restored lost goods to Friends and effectively have meant that they paid tithe by a roundabout method, contrary to the terms of other minutes.

These differences between 1738 and 1783 may give the impression that the re-organisation of the content of the

12. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, 1783, p.161.

handbook to the discipline was really the work of Friends attempting to rationalise the collection of minutes forming the discipline. The development in the period between these dates, with the slowly increasing emphases on topics such as run goods, peace, militia and especially trade, and the parallel agitation for revival from weighty Friends caused by their appreciation of the obvious lack of enthusiasm for plainness and socially damaging resistance to tithes amongst some elements in the well-established and prospering Quaker commercial families, does not always relate very clearly to the book of discipline.

In this and the succeeding period Friends may not always have found themselves quite so isolated in society, particularly with regard to plainness, since there was certainly some general feeling about excesses in other parts of society as a whole, encouraged by other nonconformists and by the Anglican evangelicals. Overton and Relton see a sobering influence in the later eighteenth century affecting duelling, Sunday observance and dress. Although some plainness of dress was attributed to the doctrine of equality propounded in the French Revolution, the main factors were both economic and evangelical: 'Wigs and swords disappeared, and a style of dress characterised by extreme simplicity set in. The gay colours of the former age were superseded by the greys and browns and black of the later years of the century. Their note, a special note of the Evangelical school was seriousness, and to be serious became no longer a cause for ridicule.'¹³ Against this may be set a complaint made by Samuel Palmer in a sermon in 1794 that late dining was

13. Overton, J.H. and Relton, F., The English Church from the Accession of George I to the end of the Eighteenth Century, pp.225-6. Bogue and Bennett in History of Dissenters, III, pp.46, 108, stress the resemblance of Methodists and Moravians to Quakers in dress at this time.

causing rich Dissenters to be absent from afternoon services.¹⁴ Thus prosperity threatened the testimony of other denominations too.

Friends, while a small part of the world was moving to meet them with some degree of plainness, tended in some families to become lukewarm towards plainness, which was assumed by the Yearly Meeting to be an indication of their attitude to the entire discipline. 'C.P.' in a letter written in 1793 bewailed the state of the Society in an analogy of which about one twelfth is quoted here:

Alas what great occasion is there for this pruning work in our highly favoured society. How many wild shoots have been suffered to remain and grow, even to the destruction of some promising trees, ... How heavy laden with fruits of worldly mindedness are some, whose outward appearance is specious. Pretended self-denial is in many instances self-gratification, ... These masked characters among us (it appears to me) do more hurt than open libertines, they create a distrust of the whole body of our members, brand us with the stigma of hypocrisy, and sorely wound the living remnant, who mourn for offences they cannot remedy, and lament the discouragement administered by them to tender infant plants in our garden.¹⁵

This passage reminds one of Griffith's feelings at the time of the revival and similar opinions were expressed by William Savery, a visiting American minister, who spoke at some length in the Yearly Meeting in 1797 on the worldliness of Friends, contrasting unfavourably their present behaviour with that 'of the Primitive believers who sold their possessions and brought the prize there of and laid it at the Apostals feet.'¹⁶

Yearly Meeting Minutes and Epistles were never so

14. Lincoln, A., Some Political and Social Ideas of English Dissent 1763-1800, Cambridge, 1938, quoted on p.54.

15. Kendall, John, Letters on Religious Subjects written by Divers Friends Deceased, London, 1820, p.348.

16. Cockin, Richard, Pen Pictures of London Yearly Meeting, London, 1929, p.52.

elaborately pessimistic as that and indeed frequently expressed some hope of improvement. The Epistles, which provide a regular expression of Yearly Meeting opinion throughout the period, had little that was new to say about the state of the Society. A comment in the Epistle of 1784, 'examples of folly, dissipation, and libertinism, are so generally prevalent in places of opulence and luxury,' recognised the greater difficulty of maintaining standards in the larger cities which is also reflected in advices on apprentices in London.¹⁷ In 1786, in mentioning the deviation from proper standards, there was at least the hopeful comment that 'we are comforted in the prospect of a return from this Babylonish captivity.'¹⁸ Despite that hope the Epistle in 1787 dwelt on the plight of the Society at great length and was concerned at those 'who contenting themselves with a nominal profession of membership, or a form of godliness, are not solicitous for an acquaintance with its living virtue and saving power.'¹⁹ Some of the trouble was thought to be a consequence of the mingling with the world which was inevitable in business. It was not proposed that Friends should isolate themselves completely, although to say 'Of the Lord's people formerly it was said, they should dwell alone, and not mix with the surrounding nations' implies some hope that this might have been possible.²⁰ The Epistles in 1789, 1792, 1793, 1794 and 1797 displayed similar feelings about the state of the Society, although 1793 revealed a little improvement: 'we have not found things in so neglected a condition as in some former

17. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, p.58.

18. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, p.66.

19. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, pp.68-9.

20. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, p.70.

years; and some increasing concern appears to have invested the minds of many brethren.²¹

In this situation of permanent uneasiness, perhaps so readily accepted that it was not far from complacency producing an expression of similar opinions every year and similar sincere, ineffectual reminders from Yearly Meeting, the procedures for visiting meetings and uniting the weaker meetings continued. The words of a typical report might appear just as well as a general comment on the Society in a Yearly Meeting Epistle.²² Friends visited Dorset, Devon and Cornwall in 1787 and reported back to Yearly Meeting, '... yet with sorrow we observed many so taken with the love of this present world, and so earnest in the pursuit of its fading enjoyments, as to discover much indifference about the things that are Christ's hence great remissness and Inconsistencies prevail.'²³ In the following year there were reports on another four visits, embracing the meetings of thirteen counties where the situation did not seem quite as serious.

The reader is by now used to this picture of dissatisfaction at the state of the Society and as particular themes are examined no totally new factors will emerge. The continuity of these points of weakness is important and in its time it was seen as detrimental to the state of the Society. In some respects by 1861 it was the Society's reaction to human weakness or the interaction with the world that was seen as damaging.

Situations described in previous chapters arising from Friends' departures from plainness and general standards of

21. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, p.86.

22. And may of course have been written by the same Friends.

23. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVIII, pp.249-51.

conduct are valid too for this period. The Epistle in 1798 reminded Friends of William Penn's comment on fine clothes, that 'The trimming of the vain world would clothe the naked one.'²⁴ In 1801 it was necessary to exhort Friends to raise their standards of punctuality²⁵ and it was made evident by a minutes in 1799 that human weakness could not always be overcome by exhortation: 'And we apprehend it may be of benefit in the minute which may be sent down on the occasion to advert to the subject of drowsiness, and that friends be put on considering whether their meetings be held at those times or hours in which the body is most free from this painful propensity.'²⁶ More extreme behaviour did occur and in 1800 a family of six in Hitchin, who had allegedly been supported by the meeting for twenty-seven years, were disowned because of continued 'intemperate drinking, lewd conduct and swearing.'²⁷ Plainness had its practical disadvantages, gravestones were not used at this time and John Lecky who watched a funeral in 1794 described the method of finding a suitable space in a Friend's burial ground where graves were not identified. 'There appears to be a difficulty in knowing where to open the Ground and they are obliged to bore with an Instrument, when, if they meet any Obstruction they try elsewhere.'²⁸

The dangers of trade continued to concern Friends and the continuing and increasing reminders to Friends both about the use of wealth and the risks involved in business, observed by Raistrick in his detailed study of Friends in industry as well

24. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, p.101.

25. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, p.113.

26. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, pp.444-5.

27. Hine, Reginald L., A Mirror for the Society of Friends, p.43.

28. Journal of the Friends Historical Society, An Irishman at London Yearly Meeting in 1794, vol.XV, p.7.

as in the general history of the discipline, indicate that some difficulty was experienced in maintaining a consistent attitude.²⁹ At one end of the scale there were the disownments for insolvency, at the other the first signs of the departure of prosperous Friends from the Society. The reason seen for business troubles in the Epistle of 1783 was a lack of 'due subjection to the cross' which led Friends into business with insufficient capital or understanding and which let them flounder on enlarging debts until ruined when they experienced difficulties.³⁰ This warning evidently did not succeed as the epistle in 1793 had to return to the theme, acknowledging that 'Many have been of late the overturnings and failures in the commercial world; and some amongst us have not escaped the disgrace.'³¹ Friends were therefore urged 'to contract rather than enlarge our plans for the acquisition of wealth ... recollecting, that as Christ ... declared his kingdom not to be of this world, so neither can his faithful followers make it the storehouse of their treasure.'

Friends continued as well to meet secular demands and in 1796 Yearly Meeting attempted to correct the misapprehension that continual disregard of the rules on tithe did not necessarily result in disownment.³² Opinion was not completely united: one of the Yearly Meeting diaries extant records that in 1797 a Friend, George Harrison, expressed disapproval of Friends being disowned for payment of tithe.³³ It called for some effort to maintain the testimonies in some areas and this was

29. Raistrick, Arthur, Quakers in Science and Industry, London, 1950, pp.339-42.

30. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, p.55.

31. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, p.88.

32. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, p.316.

33. Cockin, Pen Pictures of London Yearly Meeting, p.55.

shown in 1789: 'Two Friends were last year imprisoned for refusing to find substitutes in the militia; and one Friend hath been this year committed to prison, by process in the ecclesiastical court, on account of tithes and still remains a prisoner.'³⁴ It remained essential for Friends to meet legitimate demands from the state and they were warned against the evasion of stamp duties in 1785.³⁵ There was also a possible patriotic inclination to be helpful in time of war. Lettson, of whom Sydney Smith was to ask, 'Is not Dr. Lettson at the head of the Quaker Church?', appears to have accepted a commission in the volunteer forces.³⁶ Even worse was the revelation made in the Written Epistle in 1790 that public allegations had been made of Quaker involvement in the manufacture of arms; unfortunately the result of the enquiry made was not minuted.³⁷ A deficiency in answering the query about arms and privateers was reported from the Quarterly Meeting of Warwickshire, Leicestershire and Rutland.³⁸ In wartime there would appear to have been three chief motives for departing from the testimonies, patriotism, commerce and convenience in meeting the demands of the state for the war. 1796 was a bad year, in addition to the exceptions noted above some Friends were thought to be paying the rate for raising men for the Navy.³⁹ In 1797 it was noted that a fine in lieu of military services under the Cavalry Act could not be acceptable to Friends.⁴⁰

Problems arose too when Friends were expected to illuminate their premises at times of public rejoicing. John Lecky of

34. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, p.75.

35. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVII, p.577.

36. Raistrick, Quakers in Science and Industry, p.347.

37. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVIII, p.603.

38. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, p.287.

39. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, p.316.

40. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, p.359.

Cork, in an account of his return journey from London Yearly Meeting in 1794, noted a Friend in Hull who was a carpenter 'though plainly dress'd ... anxiously seeking his Workmen to send to some of his Customers ... to fix up Boards &c. for Candles.'⁴¹ This was on the occasion of a British naval victory.

Enquiry was made by Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting in 1784 into the apparent case of a slave-owning Friend resident in Scarborough. The enquiry was pursued for four years and discontinued when it was discovered that the possible offender was actually a member of Devonshire House Monthly Meeting in London.⁴²

On the subject of marriage there were some doubts about the rules and three points were raised at Yearly Meeting in 1783.⁴³ Bristol expressed concern at the number of Friends marrying outside the Society and asked if any solution could be found, but these rules remained unchanged until 1861. Dorset and York did not consider the proposed entries in the revised book of extracts clear and sought some amendments, Dorset particularly asking that the proposed entries on mixed marriages should be reduced to one general rule. York additionally suggested that it was unreasonable for the children of mixed marriages to be entitled to membership. The general points were answered in 1783 and it was agreed that a new advice on mixed marriages should be issued to meetings and printed in the next book of extracts. This did not satisfy all meetings and in 1789 a request for further clarification from the Quarterly Meeting of London and

41. Journal of the Friends Historical Society, An Irishman at London Yearly Meeting in 1794, vol.XV, pp.8-9.

42. Rowntree, J.S., Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting of Friends, p.18.

43. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVII, pp.275-9.

Middlesex led to the revision of the 1786 minute and the conclusion that the children of mixed marriages could not be birthright members of the church of either parent.⁴⁴ In 1791 Buckinghamshire asked whether the education of a child of a mixed marriage at the Friends' school at Ackworth was equivalent to an acknowledgement of membership. Yearly Meeting decided that it was not nor did it in itself constitute an entitlement to membership.⁴⁵ Another marriage problem, raised by London, occupied Yearly Meeting in 1796; if a woman member of one meeting married a member of another meeting contrary to the rules which meeting had the responsibility of dealing with the woman? The Yearly Meeting decided that her own meeting should take any necessary action.⁴⁶ The continuing revision of the rules on marriage indicates some concern for justice.

Membership and the connected processes of disownment and admission show little change between 1783 and 1801. Two particularly complex disownment cases occurred in 1801, one concerned essentially with removal and settlement, the other chiefly with doctrine and to a lesser extent procedure; this was the case of Hannah Barnard.⁴⁷ Hannah Barnard was a visiting American minister whose refusal to accept the advice of the Morning Meeting of Ministers and Elders to forbear from exercising the function of a minister set off a chain of appeals.⁴⁸ It was felt that her position was Unitarian, and objections were made to her interpretation of scripture.⁴⁹ Her appeals to

44. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVIII, pp.528-9.

45. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, pp.19, 27.

46. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, pp.299, 304.

47. See particularly Pollard, F.E., B.E. & R.S.W., Democracy and the Quaker Method, London, 1949.

48. Hodgson, William, The Society of Friends in the Nineteenth Century, vol.I, p.45.

49. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XX, p.59.

Devonshire House Monthly Meeting from the Morning Meeting and then to the quarterly meeting and eventually to Yearly Meeting were all rejected, as was her request to be heard by the Yearly Meeting at large instead of the Committee for hearing appeals.⁵⁰ Another problem was considered by Yearly Meeting in 1799 when the Quarterly Meeting of Berkshire and Oxfordshire sought advice on the situation of trustees to Friends' funds being disowned.⁵¹ In the Six Weeks Meeting between 1785 and 1790 there were 160 disownments and only four reinstatements, a surprising figure which gives some indication of the finality of disownment. In 1825 the Meeting decided not to receive further information on disownments.⁵²

On admission to membership a letter written in 1788 concerning a Friend's opinion of an application shows how little the process was just a formality. The writer says of the applicant:

I do not doubt his having been sensible of the secret influence of the divine principle in his own conscience, or that his judgement has been measurably convinced by the testimonies he has heard borne to the truth, as professed by us as a people. I as little doubt the sincerity of his desire to be considered as one believing in the same principle, and desirous to walk by the same rule. But whether there is yet that thorough conviction, that perfect harmony of faith and practice, as would justify a conclusion that the whole is leavened, I hope he will not be offended if I recommend to his serious consideration rather than he should desire a premature admission; for as he that believeth will not make haste, so a waiting for the right time, when perfect unity will be experienced, will not retard his growth in the truth...⁵³

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50. Hodgson, Society of Friends in the Nineteenth Century, pp.44-6.
 51. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, p.430.
 52. White, Winifred M., Six Weeks Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends 1671-1971, London, 1971, p.51.
 53. Kendall, John, Letters, pp.287-8.

Removal and settlement retained their importance in the period, with rules and cases being discussed regularly by Yearly Meeting. In 1786 the rules for the settlement of servants were amended so that a servant no longer gained settlement by being in one place for a year but required also a certificate of removal or some similar recommendation.⁵⁴ A case from Cambridgeshire in 1788 showed the impossibility of having fully comprehensive rules. A mother had asked for relief for the younger of her two children, born after the disownment of her husband, and the meeting also considered the position of the older child born around the time of the father's acquiring membership. Both children would receive relief but was either eligible for membership? Yearly Meeting decided that the younger child was a member of the Society.⁵⁵ In 1790 and 1795 Yearly Meeting considered the contents of certificates and decided that they should include comments on conduct and details of any debts.⁵⁶

The most complex removal and settlement case referred to Yearly Meeting in the period came from the Quarterly Meeting of London and Middlesex. A married woman whose husband had been disowned came from Ireland with her daughter, a removal certificate and the husband. Within three years two more children were born and the mother died. The father applied for support to the monthly meeting in Ireland but the monthly meeting accepted only the eldest daughter as a member, because the father was disowned before the birth of the two younger children. According to normal English practice the two younger

54. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVIII, pp.97-8.

55. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVIII, pp.370-1, 377.

56. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVIII, p.571, Vol.XIX, p.241.

children would have obtained membership and the Yearly Meeting decided this, saying that they should belong to the Irish Meeting. Since the rules in Ireland were different in not allowing membership to children when either parent had been disowned, the National Meeting of Ireland was to be asked whether some means might not be devised to prevent similar problems. In the meantime the two children were to be supported by the Yearly Meeting from the National Stock.⁵⁷

The functions of elders and overseers continued to become more clearly defined. Rufus Jones in fact suggests that the office of overseer was first clearly defined in 1789, although he accepts the Yearly Meeting Minute of 1755 discussed in Chapter III as an indication of the customary practice of having overseers and says that that minute itself represented a clarification of existing practice.⁵⁸ Professor Jones' case for 1789 as the decisive year in the definition of the function of overseers rests on evidence which is certainly interesting, a proposition from the Quarterly Meeting of Warwickshire which seems rather to indicate that some irregularities had prevailed in the Midlands. Yearly Meeting in 1789 considered this proposition, which sought clarification of the position, 'It not appearing clear to some Friends whether the office of Elder and Overseer be one and the same under different Appellations, or two distinct Offices, for different Services.'⁵⁹ The reply to this proposition was definitive, stating that the offices of elder and overseer were distinct, although it was possible for one person to be appointed to both and the doubts entertained

57. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XX, pp.21-2, 55-6.

58. Jones, Rufus M., The Later Periods of Quakerism, vol.I, p.124.

59. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVIII, pp.520-2.

in Warwickshire would seem to have been the result of a local variation from the existing practice in the rest of the country. Yearly Meeting additionally directed that overseers should be chosen in the manner directed for elders in 1784.⁶⁰ Those who were overseers only did not sit in Meetings of ministers and elders. In 1785 the difference between the positions of ministers and elders had been brought out; again both positions could be occupied concurrently, a Friend was not deprived of 'his eligibility to his former station as an Elder, or Minister, when in the Wisdom of Truth he may be appointed to the one, or by the great Master of our Assemblies qualified for, and called to the other...'⁶¹ Provision was made also for the dismissal of incompetent elders when Yearly Meeting in 1795 decided that provision should be made for visiting those elders who were inadequate or unfaithful and in essence a continuous review of the state of the elders was recommended.⁶²

Yearly Meeting considered a number of questions about the organisation and holding of meetings between 1783 and 1801. The theme of uniting smaller meetings was discussed in 1783 and in 1784 four recommendations for the union of quarterly meetings were made to Yearly Meeting by a committee set up in 1783.⁶³ Agreement was reached on the unions of the Quarterly Meetings of Bristol and Somerset, of Cheshire and Staffordshire and the Quarterly Meeting of Norfolk with the Monthly Meeting of Norwich. Norwich Monthly Meeting had been established in 1667, it was one of several meetings (including London, Bristol and Colchester)

60. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVIII, p.528, and see Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVII, pp.450-1 and Appendix to the Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, 1792, p.3.

61. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVII, p.572.

62. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, pp.252-4.

63. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVII, pp.416, 427-9, 433-6.

originally in direct correspondence with London Yearly Meeting and in 1689 submitted its own report to Yearly Meeting.⁶⁴ Agreement was not reached on uniting Northumberland and Cumberland or on splitting the Quarterly Meeting of Wiltshire to unite Salisbury with the Quarterly Meeting of Hampshire and the rest of Wiltshire with Gloucestershire. In both these cases the recommendation of Yearly Meeting was eventually carried out.⁶⁵ A further series of unions between quarterly meetings was recommended in 1787 and the recommendations actually carried out by 1790.⁶⁶

These major meetings were discontinued in the period. The Bristol Yearly Meeting, which had ceased to act as a meeting for discipline in 1772, was discontinued in 1798, most counties not having sent representatives for several years, as a result of a proposition from the Quarterly Meeting of Bristol and Somerset.⁶⁷ The Circular Yearly Meeting in the West of England which was essentially a preaching meeting was discontinued in 1787, as a result of a proposition from the new Quarterly Meeting of Gloucestershire and Wiltshire which claimed that 'the number of Gospel-labourers rightly gifted for such public Meetings, is greatly reduced.'⁶⁸ The Circulating Yearly Meeting in the Northern Counties was discontinued in 1798 too. It was similar in function to its western counterpart but its queries included basic disciplinary questions. It seems to have been laid down chiefly because of difficulties in organising a large scale

64. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.I, p.2 (1672).

65. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVIII, pp.83, 96.

66. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVIII, pp.231-43, 577-81.

67. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, pp.389-91.

68. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVII, pp.83-5, 229.

meeting.⁶⁹ In 1795 Devonshire proposed that it should be made possible to convene a special session of the Meeting for Sufferings, but this was rejected by Yearly Meeting.⁷⁰ The practical difficulties of holding such meetings would have been considerable and regular attendance at Meeting for Sufferings was already a substantial commitment.

Yearly Meeting was concerned with the problems raised by quarterly meetings. An epistle to quarterly meetings was issued in 1792 and this suggested that the complaints of the quarterly meetings would be reduced in number if they themselves were more resolute in applying the discipline. Yearly Meeting evidently felt that it was spending time on matters that should have been entirely local: 'How can it suffice you to hear their repeated confessions on weakness, without so laying it to heart as to assist them! ... By neglecting to do this, ye not only neglect your own duty, but countenance inferior Meetings in that inactivity of which ye complain to us.' The epistle continued: 'Press then forward in your clear duty, Be not contented with echoing to us the mournful language of complaint, Visit your Monthly Meetings by proper Appointments, search the lamented evils to their source, and do not despair that divine Wisdom will direct the remedy, and divine Strength assist your hands in the Application.'⁷¹ In 1788 at least Norfolk Quarterly Meeting had organised a visitation to its constituent meetings as a result of the answers received to queries.⁷²

69. Journal of the Friends Historical Society LII, No.3, 1970. Butler, David M., 'The Circulating Meeting for the Northern Counties'.

70. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, p.242.

71. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, pp.126-7.

72. Norfolk and Norwich Quarterly Meeting. Transcripts of Minutes 1784-1850, edited by Arthur J. Eddington, p.14.

Yearly Meeting in 1794 considered the role of preparative meetings and ended by defining their function. The Yearly Meeting Minutes give little idea of the importance of the discussion, saying that the holding of preparative meetings might be of real advantage and that a preparative meeting might consist of two or more particular meetings. The business of a preparative meeting was to appoint representatives to the monthly meeting, to provide information for monthly meeting records of births, burials and removals and to consider the queries.⁷³ Preparative meetings had existed at least since the mid-eighteenth century and this discussion was intended to clarify a situation that is shown by Cockin's diary to have been confused. Cockin describes the appointment of a sub-committee: 'it was concluded to appoint a sub-Committee to digest the subject, and prepare a report to a future Meeting - this Committee was nominated so as to have Friends who were of different sentiments upon it - they could not however at their first sitting unite in judgement.'⁷⁴ The concern was brought forward in a proposition from the Quarterly Meeting of Lancashire at seven a.m. one morning and the discussion resumed at seven p.m. on the same day 'when the subject of the business of Preparative Meetings was largely and painfully debated upon and at length concluded to propose to the Yearly Meeting what appeared the general sense of the Committee, which however was not cordially united with by some Friends.' The minute of Yearly Meeting does not appear to have restricted preparative meetings to the performance of their specified functions, but nevertheless Allott considered that it virtually deprived Leeds Preparative

73. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, p.212.

74. Cockin, Pen Pictures of London Yearly Meeting, p.43.

Meeting of life.⁷⁵ In 1799 Yearly Meeting decided that men and women should not generally sit together in preparative meetings.⁷⁶

One further point may be made about Yearly Meeting in the period, the relatively important position occupied by Americans visiting the meeting where they tended to adopt a somewhat dogmatic attitude on disciplinary matters. The diary of Joseph Woods comments on Yearly Meeting in 1792: 'Luckily we had no Americans to tell us what the practice is in their country' and adds, 'The women sent no proposals of innovation. They told us, however, as usual, that the Lord had owned them, an expression which, being so oft repeated, seems to imply a fear that they should find no owner.'⁷⁷

The women's aspirations to a yearly meeting of their own were fulfilled when in 1784 Yearly Meeting agreed to recognise the unofficial womens meeting.⁷⁸ It was to be called the 'Yearly Meeting of Women Friends held in London' and was not to make rules or alter queries without the concurrence of Yearly Meeting. It was not then a meeting for discipline in the manner of the others, but as Rufus Jones suggests this may have been enough to satisfy the women whose positions as ministers were already established; could they have expected more in the eighteenth century?⁷⁹ In 1792 Yearly Meeting considered the nature and extent of the women's role in discipline at monthly meeting level and decided that they should:

75. Allott, Leeds Quaker Meeting, pp.45-6.

76. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, p.450.

77. Cockin, Pen Pictures of London Yearly Meeting, p.27.

78. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XVII, pp.452-4.

79. Jones, Rufus M., The Later Periods of Quakerism, vol.I, p.118.

- (1) Inspect and relieve the wants of the female poor, applying to the Men's Meeting for the means.
- (2) Take cognisance of the rules for marriage.
- (3) Join in signing the certificates of removal for women Friends.
- (4) Visit women moving into the area of the monthly meeting.
- (5) Join in the nomination of women overseers.
- (6) Visit with the men any woman applying for membership or re-instatement.

To this definition was added the rider that 'No proceedings of the Women only are to be a sufficient ground for a testimony of disownment.'⁸⁰

The queries retained their position as an important instrument of the discipline and an entry dated 1787 in the 1792 supplement to the book of extracts reminded quarterly and monthly meetings that queries were not merely requests for information but were intended also to cause useful self-examination and to prompt the elders to make early reports where their own efforts had been unsuccessful.⁸¹ A report on the queries prepared by a Yearly Meeting committee in 1791 showed that there were some variations in approaches to answering them. Some changes in wording were made and the requirements for answering reorganised so that some were not answered every quarter.⁸² The separate series for the women and for ministers and elders were subjected to similar changes. In 1798 London

80. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, pp.116-19.

81. Appendix to the Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, London, 1792, p.2.

82. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, pp.50-7.

and Middlesex suggested that the queries should be answered less frequently and in 1799 Yearly Meeting advised that they should not be answered in the summer.⁸³ The changes show that views on the application of the discipline were not static. Quarterly meetings of course had some of their own queries, sometimes intended to fill gaps in the series laid down by Yearly Meeting, as in Norfolk in 1785: 'It appearing by the printed Book of Extracts, that in the Quarterly Meeting Queries therein, there is no Query respecting the Care of the Poor, the Quarterly Meeting directs, that in future the following Query, viz. How are the Poor amongst You provided for? be made an additional Query, and be the Tenth Query in the Answers to this Meeting.'⁸⁴

The period as a whole shows beside the inevitable growth of the organisation of the Society a certain parallel tendency to simplification where possible so that administrative requirements should not be an impediment to spiritual life. Less frequent answering of queries and the recommendations urging quarterly meetings to keep their own houses in order rather than trouble Yearly Meeting with comparatively trivial problems are an indication of this. In 1791 a proposition from Yorkshire suggested that the increase in monthly meeting business with the more frequent need for signing certificates justified a modification of procedure and it was agreed that only the Clerk and three Friends needed to sign certificates.⁸⁵ Yearly Meeting in 1792 considered a further Yorkshire proposition to the effect that the registration processes

83. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, pp.390, 447.

84. Norfolk and Norwich Quarterly Meeting. Transcripts of Minutes, p.7.

85. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, pp.21, 27.

caused unnecessary work for quarterly meetings and a minute from the Yearly Meeting of Ministers and Elders saying that too many signatures were necessary on certificates for Friends travelling abroad.⁸⁶ London and Middlesex in 1793 requested the standardisation of the form of return of sufferings.⁸⁷ These minor changes taking place at the same time as the formal recognition of the Women's Yearly Meeting and the definition of preparative meeting responsibilities show that the structure of the Society, if becoming more bureaucratic, was at least influenced by a desire for economy of effort.

86. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, pp.90-1, 100.

87. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XIX, pp.145-6.

Chapter VI

1802 - 1833

A new book of discipline was published in 1802, under the same title as its immediate predecessor. It was prepared by a committee at the request of the Yearly Meeting, although the Yearly Meeting Minutes contain no detailed record of any discussion that may have taken place about its preparation on the lines of the questions about the various possible approaches raised in 1781. The preparation of the 1783 book and its 1792 supplement were fairly recent events and the uncertainties will not have been as great in 1801 as they were after forty-five years in 1782. The greater accessibility of the discipline once the book of extracts was printed made Friends realise how rapidly it appeared to change over the years, although, as we have seen, the changes were as much the result of weeding out repetitive entries as of introducing completely new themes.

The introduction to the 1783 book of extracts was reprinted together with a new introduction in 1802. The new introduction stated that it had been 'found expedient to omit several advices which stand in the first edition; chiefly, because there were others under the same head of equal or superior pertinency, or because, in a few instances it seemed eligible to exchange them for others, issued since the printing of the Book of Extracts: and there has been a considerable abridgement of some of those which remain.'¹ In this edition it is possible to see the hands of the editors clearly; the introduction comments on the

1. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices of the Yearly Meeting of Friends, London, Second Edition, 1802, p.x.

set of 'pretty copious marginal and other references.'² Minutes and advices from earlier years that had been substantially altered were also identified, some previous minutes were split up for clarity and the order of extracts under each heading rearranged. The new edition was lauded in the final paragraph of the introduction: 'The variety and excellency of the matter contained in the Book of Extracts, entitle the collection to attentive and repeated perusal; there is instruction for the inexperienced, and confirmation for the more advanced Christian; and while it teaches the letter of our discipline, it bears abundant testimony to the spirit in which it should be conducted ...'³

The majority of the numerous additional entries do not deserve separate attention. There were forty-seven headings to replace the fifty-one of 1783, but two had been subsumed so that 'Education' joined 'Parents and Guardians' as 'Parents, Guardians and Education' and 'Meetings of Ministers and Elders' joined 'Ministers and Elders' to become 'Ministers and Elders and their Meetings'. These changes removed some of the need for cross-referencing. Apart from those five other headings disappeared and three new ones (two of which had actually started life in the 1792 supplement) were introduced. 'Correspondents' were re-distributed as appropriate under 'Meeting for Sufferings' or 'Yearly Meeting', 'Differences' were amply covered by 'Appeals', 'Arbitration' and 'Love and Unity', 'Epistles' and 'Law' were likewise split and redistributed. The 'Yearly Meeting for Worship' heading was now redundant. The new headings were

2. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, 1802, p.xi.
 3. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, 1802, p.xiii.

'Gaming', 'Preparative Meetings' and 'Queries', 'Queries' being reinstated for convenience after dismissal from the 1783 book.

As before the committee making additions to the book did not confine themselves to minutes and advices issued since the compilation of the previous volume but went back before 1783 to find the most effective passages for their purpose. A proportion of these changes as well as the post-1783 (or 1792) minutes deserve comment. Under 'Appeals' it was ruled that the Yearly Meeting would not receive appeals that were printed.⁴ Under 'Discipline' a new advice was taken from the 1795 written epistle, 'that the management of our Christian discipline be not committed to hands unclean.'⁵ On 'Marriage' a quotation from the written epistle of 1718 advised against spending money on wedding entertainments that would be better used for the relief of the poor.⁶

A number of the new entries, appearing under a variety of headings, deal with the temptations to Friends to seek worldly gain and a passage inserted against slavery implies that even slave-owning developed from a too zealous pursuit of riches. A passage from the epistle of 1795 entered under 'Trade' recognised the general problem: 'Circumscribed even as we are more than many, it is not unusual, in our pursuit of the things of this life, for our gain and our convenience to clash with our testimony.'⁷ Other headings with additional entries on similar themes were 'Conduct and Conversation', 'Gaming', 'Liberality to the Poor', 'Marriage', 'Masters, Mistresses and Servants' and 'War' but surprisingly not 'Covetousness'.

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4. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, 1802, p.4.
 5. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, 1802, p.50.
 6. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, 1802, p.74.
 7. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, 1802, p.198.

Two new rules show how Friends were guided in many aspects of life. In 1793 it was decided that applications for membership from foreigners should be considered in the first instance by the Meeting for Sufferings which could be expected to cope more readily than a monthly meeting with problems of language, of understanding the customs and religious backgrounds of applicants and their desire to become members.⁸ Once Meeting for Sufferings had considered a case and reported it to Yearly Meeting a monthly meeting would be assigned to the individual for purposes of discipline. Another rule in 1799, preventing in general the loan of meeting houses for non-Quaker purposes, indicates that other bodies were anxious to borrow rooms for meetings and realistically it was recognised that Friends could not expect to borrow rooms from others for religious purposes.⁹

On the whole the 1802 book of extracts was not revolutionary, although its new or revised content cannot be dismissed lightly. The period up to the publication of the next volume in 1834 was a difficult one for the Society, with war and social unrest which must have come close to many prosperous Friends. In addition the anti-slavery agitation and eventually the Reform Bill produced an increased awareness of political means more varied than petition, deputation and epistle for furthering Quaker testimonies in the country at large.

The state of the Society at the beginning of this period was described in detail by Thomas Clarkson in his three decker Portraiture of Quakerism published in 1806. Clarkson, who was not a Friend himself, although much involved with Friends in the anti-slavery crusade, gave a balanced and just account of the

8. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, 1802, p.78.

9. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, 1802, pp.85-6.

Society. He began by explaining his intention of first mentioning the prohibitory advices and his reliance on the book of extracts as a primary source of facts. His advice to the reader is sound:

... if the Quakers should differ from him on any particular subject ... they set themselves apart as a Christian community, aiming at Christian perfection; that it is their wish to educate their children, not as moralists or as philosophers, but as Christians; and that therefore, in determining the propriety of a practice, they will frequently judge of it by an estimate very different from that of the world. ¹⁰

Clarkson also discussed the prevailing opinion that Friends were a declining body, observing that there were no real numerical facts to support this opinion, although circumstances seemed to make it inevitable. He believed that the tenets of Quakerism led to prosperity and that 'if men grow rich in the Society their grandchildren generally leave it.' He saw disownment on account of trade, marriage and tithe as the vital factor in a decline, arguing that American Quakers who greatly outnumbered the English did not have to contend with tithe and were inclined to live in predominantly Quaker rural communities where there was little opportunity to marry out of the Society. Clarkson realised that the ideal solutions to these problems would be unacceptable to the Society but thought that greater liberality with the profits of trade, encouraging young Friends to teach, a more compassionate attitude to mixed marriages where disownment resulted to encourage repentance and the conversion of the partner and finally the acceptance of liability for lay tithes would all ease the situation. ¹¹

10. Clarkson, Thomas, Portraiture of Quakerism, 1806, vol.I, pp.45-6.

11. Clarkson, Portraiture of Quakerism, vol.III, pp.320-38.

William Hodgson in The Society of Friends in the Nineteenth Century, published in 1875-6, gives another detailed account of the decline at the beginning of the century, in terms that expressed great regret at the slackness of the discipline. His opinion was not entirely pessimistic. The Society at the beginning of the nineteenth century was 'as a whole, a living and influential body, though in many of its parts, and in some of its general features, in a languid condition.'¹² Hindsight perhaps enabled him to see the cause of this in the discipline: 'a state of ease was eating out the good seed in the minds of others; and a state of mere formality, promoting a strict but lifeless maintenance of the outward forms and discipline, was beginning to characterize the walk of some more or less active members in various places...'¹³ Comments on the state of ease are frequently found in economic terms in the contemporary literature, but the idea of the lifelessness of the discipline did not have such wide currency. Hodgson sees a dichotomy in the Society between the legalistic and the lax. On the one hand there were the 'encroachments of an easy, worldly, superficial spirit' and the fact 'that for a considerable period of time, the exercise of the discipline had become, in some places, increasingly relaxed and inefficient,' on the other 'the formal, legal and lifeless manner, equally unavailing to the preservation of the body, "without spot or wrinkle".' One led to an increase in the number of nominal members, the other promoted hypocrisy and 'in either case, a class of members will be likely to accumulate, ready for the influence of any

12. Hodgson, William, The Society of Friends in the Nineteenth Century, Philadelphia, 1875, vol.I, p.13.

13. Hodgson, The Society of Friends in the Nineteenth Century, vol.I, p.17.

plausible ism, wherewith restless spirits may undertake to agitate the body.'¹⁴ The principal agitations of the body in the period 1800-1861 would be dismissed too lightly if described merely as plausible isms, but there can be little doubt that nominal Quakerism was increasing.

In this period the problems connected with plainness and the general involvement of individual Friends with the world continued, although the original sources have little that is new to add to the picture already presented. J.J. Gurney, a merchant and member of a family which maintained a relatively elaborate household at Earlham Hall, was aware of the dangers of worldliness, taking similar attitudes to the right use of financial resources and the methods of building those resources to those of some of his contemporaries and friends among the Anglican evangelicals, a source of suspicion to some Friends. Gurney commented on the inevitability of Friends' involvement in trade as an encouragement to the accumulation of wealth, 'Excluded as we are, by our principles, from some of "the professions", and belonging so generally to the middle class of the people, it is very usually our lot to be engaged in trade; and such being the case, peculiar watchfulness is undoubtedly required of us ... that we may not be numbered among those whose delight and trust are in riches; for truly it remains to be impossible to "serve God and Mammon".'¹⁵ Clarkson's views were similar in part; he thought that the strong position of Friends in trade owed something to their honourable methods and perhaps to their inclination to keep to conservative methods on the

14. Hodgson, The Society of Friends in the Nineteenth Century, vol.I, pp.18-19.

15. Gurney, Joseph John, Observations on the Distinguishing Views and Practices of the Society of Friends, Norwich, 1842, p.412, note 9.

grounds that 'hazardous enterprises in the way of trade' were 'apt to disturb the tranquillity of the mind, and to unfit it for religious exercise. They may involve also the parties concerned and their families in ruin.'¹⁶

Trade did indeed involve some of the parties concerned in ruin and the incidence of insolvency cases in the period, that is as revealed by the number of cases reaching the Yearly Meeting and by general comments on the theme, shows an increase. In 1816 the Durham Quarterly Meeting asked Yearly Meeting to consider issuing a clear statement of the Society's testimony on insolvency, adding that the secretive behaviour of individuals had prevented the right counsel being given and that monthly meetings were not given enough freedom to disown members under these circumstances. Yearly Meeting however did not agree either that further statements were needed at the time or that the existing rules imposed restrictions on the freedom of meetings to act.¹⁷ Durham returned another proposition in 1822 involving also the rules of removal and settlement, suggesting that the time necessary to effect a settlement for someone with a record of insolvency be reduced from four years to two. The example quoted implies that there had been some unfortunate local experience, for in the initial period before a Friend gained settlement if he had moved after becoming insolvent the cost of any relief necessary for him fell on his original meeting. It was anticipated that some meetings might suffer an unreasonable burden when numbers of insolvent Friends had moved away only to encounter problems elsewhere.¹⁸

16. Clarkson, Portraiture of Quakerism, vol.I, p.57.

17. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, pp.357, 362.

18. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXII, pp.349-50.

In 1826 the written Yearly Meeting Epistle proffered advice on Friends' financial affairs, urging regular inspection, sharing information, not trading beyond one's capital and retiring early from business when means allowed it to devote time and money to the Society and good works.¹⁹ This again bears some resemblance to the practice of a small number of contemporary and influential Anglican laymen as well as testifying to the growing general prosperity of Friends.

On the subjects concerning the relationships of Friends with the state, military themes seemed to be predominant in the period. Tithe was considered in 1806, when it was noted that returns in money were still sometimes made after the sale of goods distrained.²⁰ This was still frowned upon. Between 1806 and 1809 the Meeting for Sufferings considered the problem of Friends who were called upon to serve as churchwardens and vestrymen and gave an opinion which shows that some Friends were uncertain about the behaviour to adopt in these circumstances:

In one (or) two districts a Friend is thought to have served the office (of churchwarden) many years ago and in London the practice of choosing Friends is well known not to be uncommon. A Friend cannot consistently comply with such a practice, and this Meeting thinks it will be useful for the Monthly Meetings to put their members on their guard in this respect, and inform them that if anyone should be called upon to serve the office or provide a substitute he may have a copy of some reasons shewing the inconsistency of compliance by applying to the Clerk of this Meeting.²¹

Friends' testimony against war was well established, but all the implications that military affairs might bring to bear on ordinary civilian life had to be worked out as each new

19. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol. XXIII, pp. 119-23.

20. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol. XX, p. 358.

21. Edwards, George W., 'Quakers as Churchwardens and Vestrymen' in Journal of the Friends Historical Society, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 48-9.

occasion arose. In 1810 Yearly Meeting stated that 'It is the Judgment of this Meeting that it is inconsistent with our known Testimony against War, for Friends to be in any manner aiding and assisting in the conveyance of Soldiers, their Baggage, Arms, Ammunition or other Military Stores.'²² In 1812 the military theme reflected troubles at home. Yearly Meeting cautioned Friends against having their property protected by armed men; Friends were to have confidence in divine protection and a warning was also given against keeping arms 'or in any manner uniting in armed associations,' presumably even as physicians.²³ A proposition from Scotland in 1814 went still further in suggesting that it was clearly objectionable for Friends to be shareholders in banks which kept military guards or in insurance companies which paid tithe. The proposition was however not thought suitable for consideration by the Yearly Meeting and was returned to the representatives without any reason being given.²⁴ A proposition of a similar sort from the Quarterly Meeting of Gloucestershire and Wiltshire in 1824 was also rejected; it had suggested the possibility of issuing a caution about making loans to foreign countries lest the money might be applied to military purposes.²⁵

Marriage, or more especially marrying out, was an increasing source of worry to Friends in this period. Clarkson wrote that 'the Quakers, as a married, may be said to be a happy people,' which is reasonable when the prohibitions and the detailed preliminaries to a Quaker wedding are considered.²⁶ His

22. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, pp.48-9.

23. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, p.169.

24. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, pp.261-3.

25. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXII, pp.513, 539.

26. Clarkson, Portraiture of Quakerism, vol.II, p.4.

attitude to disownment for marrying outside the Society was tolerant and based on a thorough discussion of the religious principles and practical family problems involved, but he saw the views of other Christians:

People of other religious denominations have charged the Quakers with a more than usually censurable pride, on account of their adoption of this law. They consider them as looking down upon the rest of their fellow-creatures, as so inferior or unholy as not to deign or to dare to mix in an alliance with them; or as looking upon them in the same light as the Jews considered the Heathen, or the Greeks the Barbarian world. And they have charged them also with as much cruelty as pride on the same account. 27

Whether or not this impression was false, and fear for the preservation of their own standards rather than pride in those standards would appear a more accurate estimate of the source of the policy, the number of disownments on account of marriage can only have encouraged it.

In 1805 Yearly Meeting considered a detailed proposition from the Quarterly Meeting of Warwickshire about the practice of dealing with Friends who appeared inclined to marry contrary to rule.²⁸ Local practice had been for elders and overseers to take action when they anticipated any such move, entering the cases on the monthly meeting books if their advice was not heeded. The Quarterly Meeting requested advice on the procedure of entering the record of such cases before the marriage had taken place; the Quarterly Meeting had concluded that this was not essential but some Friends had not been satisfied. The important point was that once the case was placed in the records of a meeting for discipline that meeting had to take the matter

27. Clarkson, Portraiture of Quakerism, vol.II, p.11.

28. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XX, pp.271-5.

up and deal with the individuals concerned, which might precipitate the action that all really wanted to avoid. The Yearly Meeting ruled that once overseers or other concerned Friends reported a refusal to take counsel to the monthly meeting it had to take the matter on its books.

Other concerns presented to Yearly Meeting in this period concerning marriage dealt with technical questions. A proposition from Suffolk in 1805 requested clarification on the permitted degrees of relationship for marriage; a member had formed an acquaintance with his deceased wife's sister with a view to marriage, complicated by the secrecy of his behaviour.²⁹ Yearly Meeting expressed disapproval of clandestine marriages and recommended compliance with the laws of the land on the permitted degrees of relationship. In 1819 London and Middlesex put a proposition to Yearly Meeting in the hope of expediting disownment in cases of marriage contrary to rule by dispensing with a second visit when marriage had taken place after a warning.³⁰ This may be taken as an early sign of the coming movement towards a change in the marriage regulations by attempting to remove the superfluous process of visiting when it was already too late. Another attempt at simplification came in 1832 from Devonshire Quarterly Meeting and was referred to the committee concerned with revising the book of extracts. The proposition sought the introduction of an optional written declaration of intent to marry in place of the personal appearance then required at monthly meeting, on the grounds that great difficulties were experienced when parties intending marriage lived at some distance apart.³¹

29. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XX, pp.83-4, 102-4.

30. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXII, pp.108-10.

31. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXIV, pp.154-5.

Yearly Meeting in the early part of this period received an uncomfortable shock from an example of the downfall that could befall even the most respected Friends. The Recording Clerk appointed in 1783, John Ady, had caused some concern when it was discovered in 1807 that he wished to remain in trade while continuing as Recording Clerk, a problem that was eventually resolved by his receiving a supplement to his salary on condition that he gave up business.³² In 1811, however, the blow fell when the Committee for Auditing the Accounts reported: 'the actual balance in favour of the Yearly Meeting is only £733.19.2. This Balance would have been larger by nearly £200 had not John Ady applied this sum to his own use.'³³ Ady was soon disowned by Devonshire House Monthly Meeting which must have found the incident extremely discouraging, urging the weaker brethren to conform in small things when a prominent member of the Society defaulted on this scale would be more difficult.

Yearly Meeting did not otherwise experience great excitement in the period. Cockin gives an interesting report of an extended simile of the conduct of the Yearly Meeting:

Richard Jourdan ... observed that the conducting the business of the Yearly Meeting was somewhat like the steering of a Vessel by a compass, the finger of which, by the power of a Magnett, always pointed one way, but by the tossing of the waves and from adverse winds, the finger became a little shook, and sometimes occasioned a trifling variation which required a time of calm before it regained its right center, - so, in conducting the business of the Yearly Meeting, when the sure guide was not watchfully attended to, it produced a little disorder and obstructed the progress in the right way, untill a quiet settlement was again obtained, under the direction of the sure Pilot. ³⁴

32. Journal of the Friends Historical Society, vol.28, 1931.

Our Recording Clerks: John Ady, p.36.

33. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol. XXI, p.101.

34. Cockin, Richard, Pen Pictures of London Yearly Meeting, p.80.

Such a little disorder seems to have been caused in 1822 by Isaac Crewdson, who in the course of 'a very animated debate on the subject of giving illegal receipts ... remarked he considered the subject of minor importance compared with some other things.'³⁵

Yearly Meeting continued to encourage visits to meetings at all levels, the types of visit that proffered encouragement and those that resulted in proposals for local reorganisation. Thus the Committee on Epistles in 1805 judged that visits should be made to six quarterly meetings.³⁶ A committee reporting on visits to meetings at all levels in Cumberland and Northumberland in 1813 gave a typical report filled with mingled regrets and hopes.³⁷ The Yearly Meeting Minutes for 1814 and 1815 show evidence of considerable discussion of the policy of uniting monthly meetings and quarterly meetings, recommendations were still not always acceptable to the meetings concerned and a number of the propositions were deferred.³⁸ Again in 1819 a committee appointed to visit quarterly meetings 'with reference to their religious state and Geographical Boundaries' reported on a number of proposed revisions and the concern effectively remained constant.³⁹ There were always some difficult cases. It was evident in 1817 from a discussion of the union of Norwich Monthly Meeting with other monthly meetings in the quarterly meeting in support of the poor that Norwich had retained a substantial measure of independence after official participation in the Norfolk Quarterly Meeting began in 1784.⁴⁰ Yearly

35. Cockin, Pen Pictures of London Yearly Meeting, p.169, quoting William Hargreaves.

36. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XX, p.292.

37. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, pp.224-8.

38. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, pp.265-6, 317.

39. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXII, p.138.

40. Norfolk and Norwich Quarterly Meeting. Transcripts of Minutes, p.125.

Meeting had also to concern itself with simpler things; in 1812 monthly meetings were advised to keep alphabetical lists of their members.⁴¹ A legal opinion was sought in 1810 as to the possibility of silencing a non-Friend who spoke excessively in meeting and counsel advised that this was feasible.⁴² And as a sign of a modern spirit in the Society there was a proposal in 1831 that the Meeting for Sufferings should change its name to one more appropriate to its function, a proposal that was deferred for one year and has yet to succeed.⁴³

The offices of the Society do not require so much attention in this period, the questions of definition having been completed for the time being. Clarkson describes the offices of elder, overseer and minister and dismisses what he considers a common criticism of the overseers, that they 'possess a portion of the spirit of ecclesiastical dominion; that they are austere, authoritative, and overbearing in the course of the exercise of their office.'⁴⁴ While there was always some possibility of the abuse of power the selection procedure, the emphasis on the fact that Friends should not necessarily expect to be continued as overseers or elders after a period and the ability of meetings for discipline to remove embarrassing individuals must all have militated against such a situation being prolonged. Yearly Meeting was actively concerned about standards and in 1810 received a proposition from the Quarterly Meeting of London and Middlesex to the effect that a monthly meeting might not be the most effective judge of whether or not a Friend was fit to be a minister. The Yearly Meeting recommended that

41. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, p.168.

42. Book of Cases, vol.IV, p.32.

43. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXIV, p.50.

44. Clarkson, Portraiture of Quakerism, vol.I, p.197.

sufficient time be allowed for the women's meeting to consider the appointment as well.⁴⁵ This was followed in 1812 by another proposition from London and Middlesex, asking Yearly Meeting to consider the expediency of women Friends joining committees appointed by quarterly meetings to assist monthly meetings in the choice of elders. Yearly Meeting decided that this practice should be encouraged.⁴⁶

The acceptance of ministers from overseas and especially from America became something of a problem after the separation in America.⁴⁷ Yearly Meeting in 1829 decided that Meeting for Sufferings should consider the minutes accompanying American Friends before they were allowed to preach in England and there was also concern about Friends returning from America with certificates.⁴⁸ Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Quarterly Meeting proposed in 1830 that Friends wishing to visit Scotland and Ireland (as ministers) should have the approval of the quarterly meeting as well as the monthly meeting and Wales recommended that such concerns should be considered jointly by the quarterly meetings of men and women.⁴⁹

This was the last period in which the Friends' rules of removal and settlement operated in parallel with the Old Poor Law. The first matter of importance was the revision of the second rule in 1812, which was evidently not achieved in an atmosphere of complete agreement. Apart from modified wording

45. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, pp.30, 33.

46. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, pp.143

47. The Hicksite separation in the United States began in 1827-8, the party led by Elias Hicks laying an excessive emphasis on the doctrine of the Inner Light at the expense of the authority of scripture, while their opponents moved towards a more orthodox Christian position.

48. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXIII, p.365.

49. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXIII, pp.416-7.

in this rule, which dealt with the status of Friends becoming insolvent within a period of three years of moving from one monthly meeting to another, the financial responsibility of the meeting from which the Friend was recommended was established. The revised rule allowed for a greater variety of circumstances concerning cases of insolvency after removal and imposed time limits for the necessary transactions between meetings so that, for example, a meeting which did not give notice of a liability to provide relief to the other meeting concerned within six months had to accept responsibility for providing the relief.⁵⁰ The complexity of this regulation illustrates the Quaker hope of providing regulations for every eventuality and presumably the demand for the change arose from situations which monthly meetings had been unable to cope with. Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting proposed to Yearly Meeting in 1814 that the rules of settlement should be simplified, the proposal was deferred until the following year.⁵¹ In 1816 the same proposal was referred to the Committee on Epistles who proposed that 'the right of maintenance in our Society shall, in all cases, depend on the length of residence in any one Monthly Meeting after its acceptance of a Certificate on behalf of a Friend, without any reference whatsoever to Insolvency.' This period of residence was intended to be one year and the proposal was referred to Meeting for Sufferings for comment, re-emerging in the new rules of 1822.⁵² Questions of removal and settlement were regularly complicated by disownment and insolvency. Lancashire in 1803 had sought clarification in a situation

50. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, pp.178-80.

51. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, p.263.

52. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, pp.361, 383-4.

where a Friend who had been disowned for insolvency and whose family had then been granted relief was reinstated, moved and fell on hard times again. The saga occupied thirteen years, the eventual Yearly Meeting ruling was that the eleventh rule of removal and settlement was decisive and the Friend concerned gained his settlement.⁵³

A new set of rules on removals and settlement, was issued in the supplement to the 1802 book of extracts produced in 1822.⁵⁴ The revised and comprehensive rules did away with the complex regulation evolved in 1812 while retaining its substance in a clearer form of words, so that the various restrictions on gaining settlement left the division of responsibility clearly defined. No particular provision was now made for servants and apprentices. Because of the periods necessary to gain settlement, up to four years in the case of a Friend becoming insolvent after his certificate had been accepted, settlements had to be accepted under certificates issued under the superseded rules for a transitional period from the beginning of ninth month, 1820.⁵⁵

Suffolk had suggested in 1815 that the number of appeals made on the grounds of dubious settlement would be reduced if it was possible for quarterly meetings to maintain some form of common stock for the relief of poor Friends. The proposition was approved with a qualifying phrase about financial practicability.⁵⁶ In 1818 the Quarterly Meeting of Bristol and Somerset observed that some problems were being caused by

53. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XX, pp.157-9.

54. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, Supplement to the Second Edition, London, 1822, pp.278-86.

55. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices, Supplement 1822, p.284, Rule X, 3.

56. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, pp.314-5, 317.

the discrepancies in the descriptions of character in certificates originating from different meetings and Yearly Meeting a year later accepted this and encouraged consistency.⁵⁷ A case that arose in 1824 proved that the new rules were not completely comprehensive, but it can hardly have been envisaged that many Friends would emigrate three years after a removal, return to England on the charity of American Friends after a further four years, receive relief in the meeting they had left on emigrating and then move to another county and require relief. The family concerned ended up in Banbury Monthly Meeting which claimed reimbursement from the original meeting of these Friends because it had received a certificate from New York Friends and was denied on the grounds that they removed with a certificate seven years previously. The question remained whether these Friends had settlement in England at all and their support was provided from the National Stock until they gained a new settlement.⁵⁸ A rule was proposed, and adopted in 1825, that the time between granting a certificate to leave the country and the return of the Friends concerned be disregarded.⁵⁹

Admonition, disownment and the rules on appeals, often but not invariably connected, received much attention in the period. Clarkson describes the process leading from admonition to disownment in some detail, clearly demonstrating that disownment was not resorted to lightly and showing the thoroughness of admonition in confidence by the overseers.⁶⁰ He was able to dismiss the charge of precipitate action and quoted the maxim

57. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXII, pp.36-7, 150.

58. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXII, pp.519-22.

59. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXIII, p.47.

60. Clarkson, Portraiture of Quakerism, vol.I, pp.172-4, 191-3.

'Nemo fuit repente turpissimus' translated as 'no man was ever all at once a rogue'. Admonition was given a significant place in five of the Yearly Meeting Epistles in the period and Friends were reminded that 'Neglect in this point gives countenance to defects and increases them, whilst the faithful admonisher may hope to partake of the reward of those who "turn many to righteousness", who, saith the prophet, shine "as the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel xii 3).'⁶¹

Admonition did not always succeed, particularly in cases where marriage contrary to rule was in prospect. Disownment should not be seen as a final process because of the opportunities for appeal and because of the interest maintained by the Society in those disowned. Gurney expressed the fear that care of those disowned might cease after the act of disownment but they remained eligible for Friends' charity and could continue to attend meetings.⁶² The case described above in connexion with the Lancashire question illustrates this continuing care. In 1809 the burial of disowned Friends was considered and the Yearly Meeting concluded that meetings should not be held on these occasions.⁶³

One disowned Friend at least, Henry Finch, who continued to attend meeting, made a considerable nuisance of himself by insisting in 1803 in remaining at the meeting for business of the Quarterly Meeting of London and Middlesex. When he had ignored several requests to leave the meeting was adjourned. Finch then brought an action against Friends for assault and for

61. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, p.161. See also 1803, 1808, 1816, 1827.

62. Gurney, Observations on the Distinguishing Views and Practices, p.518. He quotes II Corinthians ii, 67, in support.

63. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XX, pp.508, 511.

preventing his entrance to a building open for religious worship. In court it was argued that a meeting for discipline was no more an open church service because it began with an act of worship than was a session of either House of Parliament opening with prayers.⁶⁴

A number of important cases led to uncertainties about the usefulness of the rules on appeals as they stood and to substantial revisions as a result of lengthy Yearly Meeting proceeding. Sometimes an appeal raised new questions of principle; an appeal case occurred in 1805 in which the appellant was found insane and was reinstated on the condition that he should not attend meetings for discipline.⁶⁵

One of the most complicated cases in the period concerned an acolyte of Hannah Barnard, Thomas Foster, who demanded that his appeal against disownment be heard by the Yearly Meeting at large because it concerned a matter of faith and doctrine. Although Hannah Barnard had been denied this right, Foster was allowed it but was still disowned. Hodgson found some difficulty in establishing the origin of the regulation that allowed appeals on questions of faith and doctrine to be made to the Yearly Meeting at large instead of the Committee for Appeals.⁶⁶ The rule appears to have been adopted in 1813.⁶⁷ Foster's doctrine was shown to be essentially that of the Unitarian Book Society of which he was an active member and contrary to the selection of writings from approved Quaker authors used for comparison.⁶⁸

64. Book of Cases, vol.IV, pp.9-11.

65. Cockin, Pen Pictures of London Yearly Meeting, pp.94-5.

66. Hodgson, The Society of Friends in the Nineteenth Century, vol.I, p.52.

67. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, p.236.

68. Cockin, Pen Pictures of London Yearly Meeting, p.141.

Another appeal case of interest concerned Thomas Sturge who was unwillingly displaced from the office of elder 'on account of some hazardous speculations in flour and other Articles which proved unfortunately beyond his ability to bear.'⁶⁹ The speculations were concealed from the monthly meeting for five years and the writer of the letter thought that Sturge's efforts to retain his eldership had only succeeded in providing public evidence of his foolishness, which was not entirely unexpected since Sturge 'was always more remarkable for the exuberance of his disciplinarian Zeal than the extent of his understanding.'

Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting asked in 1804 for the rules on Appeals to be rewritten since they were not sufficiently explicit but Yearly Meeting rejected the proposition.⁷⁰ In 1806 Yorkshire made a similar suggestion, the Committee on Epistles recommended that no change be made but issued a statement on procedure.⁷¹ Then in 1813 a new set of rules for the Committee for hearing Appeals was produced, including the point mentioned above about faith and doctrine.⁷² Further consideration was given to the rules for appeals in 1814 as a result of Foster's case and a new set of rules drawn up, incorporating the greater part of the rules introduced in 1813, going into greater detail and defining procedure for inferior meetings.⁷³ Yearly Meeting reserved to itself the power to decide whether an appeal on a matter of faith and doctrine should be heard by the Yearly Meeting at large or by the Committee.

69. Cockin, Pen Pictures of London Yearly Meeting, p.109.

Joseph Woods to William Matthews of Bath.

70. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XX, pp.215, 233.

71. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XX, pp.349-53.

72. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, pp.233-7.

73. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, pp.284-91.

These rules were not thought entirely satisfactory and in 1815 Yearly Meeting decided to operate on the rules of 1813 until a new set could be prepared.⁷⁴ Draft rules were accepted after some amendment in that year, to be revised again in 1821 and 1822.⁷⁵ The procedure went to elaborate lengths to be just and made allowances for the possibility of division in the Committee for hearing Appeals. Much of the content of this final set of rules in the period was not new, but its presentation was more logical and detailed than that of the previous rules, defining for example the proportion of the membership of a committee needed to confirm its ruling. To a certain extent this contravened the normal Quaker principle of taking the sense of the meeting and Yearly Meeting went further in 1821 in referring to quarterly meeting practice '... and that in all other cases the judgment of the majority of the Committee shall be final.'⁷⁶ In a similar manner, but more concisely, the rules for arbitration were recast in 1827 and 1828, although Meeting for Sufferings said that the changes made were only in the interests of clarification.⁷⁷

The period covered by this chapter is transitional, falling between the relative quiet of the eighteenth century following the enthusiasm of the seventeenth century and the period of more violent internal movement which begins with the 1830s. The overhaul of some aspects of the discipline was partly a response to the problems presented by interaction with the world and

74. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXI, p.306.

75. Extracts from the Minutes and Advices. Supplement 1822, pp.237-48.

76. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXII, p.297.

77. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXIII, pp.108-9, 235-8, 269.

the claims made for a greater freedom of belief and action within the Society, but the chief movement in the Society's fortunes was not yet through the discipline.

Chapter VII

1834 - 1861

The period between the publication of the third edition of the book of discipline in 1834 and that of the fourth edition in 1861 is the most conspicuous period of development in the discipline between 1738 and 1861.¹ In addition to the essays written for the essay competition in 1858, which were concerned both with interpreting the state of the Society and, to a varying extent, with the historical background to that state, there is a relative abundance of material for the period. Two Quaker periodicals began life in 1843, The Friend and The British Friend. The British Friend was published in Glasgow and took the more traditional line of the two. Its motto was 'Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein.'² More manuscript diaries of Yearly Meeting, an increased number of memoirs and biographies of prominent Friends and the considerable literature produced by the Beacon controversy add to the volume of information available for earlier chapters. It is not surprising that the period should recently have received more attention from historians than the preceding century. This chapter does not attempt to treat the background to the disciplinary changes in detail; a brief and perceptive account is given in Part I of Professor Chadwick's The Victorian Church and a fuller study in Mrs. Isichei's Victorian Quakers.³

1. Rules of Discipline of the Religious Society of Friends with Advices, London, 1834. Extracts etc. relating to Christian Doctrine, Practice and Discipline, London, 1861.

2. Jeremiah vi, 16.

3. Respectively London, 1966, pp.421-36 and London, 1970.

The publication of a new book of discipline began the period in the traditional way with no forewarning that it was to be the last of the old style of books of discipline. Yearly Meeting decided in 1832 that a new book was necessary and asked the Meeting for Sufferings to prepare a new edition, the publication of which was approved in 1833, Yearly Meeting Minutes devoting approximately 100 pages to the amendments and additions required.⁴ The new edition reprinted the prefaces of the two earlier printed editions and added after the preface some extracts referring to fundamentals of Friends' beliefs. The alphabetical arrangement of entries, from 'Advices' to 'Youth', was retained, although the headings used were not identical to those of the previous editions. Some topics that had had separate status in 1802 were united for convenience, thus 'Gravestones' was joined by 'Mourning Habits' and 'Oaths' by 'Affirmations'. 'Moderation and Temperance' and 'Plainness' had stood as two headings in 1802 and appeared in 1834 as 'Plainness and Moderation' and 'Temperance' and 'Tithes' and 'Sufferings' were appropriately united. Other changes in the arrangement of sections were of similar significance.

As had happened with the previous new editions a number of changes was made to the content of many headings by adding new paragraphs, some of which continued to be drawn from minutes and epistles written before 1738, and by deleting others. Some headings were much amended as a result of Yearly Meeting discussions in the few years immediately preceding publication, 'Appeals', 'Arbitration', 'Marriage' and 'Queries' being particularly affected. 'Conduct and Conversation' was much

4. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol. XXIV, 1832, p.166; 1833, p.288 et seq.

amended, one previous entry was dropped, nine entries made after 1822 from the supplement to the previous edition retained and eleven new entries added from a period between 1783 and 1808. The theme changed slightly in emphasis with a greater weight on the general ideas of conduct in the new entries to redress the balance of the comments on specific failings or virtues that had prevailed before. However, the additions included not only general points such as 'The best recreation of a Christian is the relief of distress' from the 1799 Epistle but also an advice from 1718 against 'cringing and bowing the body by way of salutation which ought not to be taught or countenanced.'⁵

It is sufficient to say that the changes made in the content of most other headings were of similar or lesser significance. Under 'Liberality and Benevolence' an addition from the Epistle of 1833 was essentially evangelical, encouraging missionary work.⁶ 'Temperance' gained all but one of its entries from the composite section 'Moderation and Temperance' of 1783 and 1802; the appearance of a separate section demonstrates the increasing emphasis on temperance through which Friends were encouraged 'to advocate and promote the suppression of ... the improper and immoderate use of ardent spirits.'⁷ Among other additions two definitions were of importance, perhaps showing the increasing circulation of the book of discipline and its use as an introduction to the Society's practices. Meeting for Sufferings was defined as a standing committee of the Yearly Meeting 'entrusted with whatever may arise during the intervals of this meeting, affecting our religious society, and requiring immediate attention.'⁸ The Morning Meeting was defined as

5. Rules of Discipline, 1834, pp.38, 44.

6. Rules of Discipline, 1834, p.81.

7. Rules of Discipline, 1834, p.253.

8. Rules of Discipline, 1834, p.107.

'constituted of the acknowledged ministers and appointed elders of the quarterly meeting of London and Middlesex, together with all other friends in those stations who incline to attend.'⁹

A great many small additions were made to the entries concerning the various levels of meetings for discipline which served to explain their functions and powers more clearly.

Another new heading was 'Oversight' which explained the responsibilities of the overseers and indeed of all Friends who attempted to take some personal responsibility for the well-being of those in their meetings without being formally charged to do so. Entries were drawn from minutes and epistles between 1701 and 1833 covering a wide range and emphasising the responsibility of Friends for mutual care: 'We greatly desire the increase of true overseers amongst us, under whatever name they may stand in the church.'¹⁰

This book of discipline had a life of 27 years; the supplement published in 1849 contained only new material, in a few cases superseding earlier entries but in general adding to the existing entries.¹¹ The decision to produce an appendix to the book of extracts was reached at Yearly Meeting in 1846.¹² Further consideration was given to the matter in 1847 and the Yearly Meeting Minutes record that 'no alteration of moment is suggested except the omission in the minute under the head "Civil Government" of the following words in the declaration taken by a Magistrate "and engaging well and truly to fulfil it", which it appears are not a part of the enactment.'¹³ Some

9. Rules of Discipline, 1834, p.170.

10. Rules of Discipline, 1834, p.186.

11. Supplement to the Rules of Discipline of the Religious Society of Friends, with Advices, London, 1849.

12. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXV, p.619.

13. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVI, pp.30-1.

alteration under the heading 'Marriage' was also necessary as a result of recent legislation. The final version of the supplement was approved by Yearly Meeting in 1848.¹⁴

The period is distinguished by two movements, the later important changes in the discipline and particularly the marriage regulations and the theological crisis known as the Beacon which began in 1835. The Beacon controversy was the most significant theological event in the Society between 1738 and 1861; it developed from the tensions between the different extremes of quietism and evangelicalism that had arisen in the Society and was to a limited extent stimulated by the Hicksite separation in the United States.¹⁵ The chief considerations may be summarised very briefly; although a considerable body of literature was produced by the controversy, the real themes were very much elaborated by a legal and technical approach.¹⁶

Isaac Crewdson, a Manchester manufacturer of some influence in the Society, published his book A Beacon to the Society of Friends in 1835 as a refutation of Hicksite errors stating an orthodox Christian position firmly based on scripture and thus rejecting much in the Quaker tradition.¹⁷ This precipitated a storm of opposition from quietist Friends, already uneasy at the evangelical position adopted by the influential J.J. Gurney, which effectively split Manchester meeting. Both the Yearly Meeting and the Quarterly Meeting attempted to restore unity in Manchester and succeeded only in observing the resignation of

14. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVI, p.79.

15. See note 47, Chapter VI.

16. An idea of the volume of the literature is given by The "Beacon" controversy in the 1830s: a catalogue of certain pamphlets in the collection of the Society of Friends, 1968, compiled by J.D.S. Hall, pp.viii,93. Bibliography submitted for diploma in the University of London School of Librarianship. 178 items are listed.

17. A Beacon to the Society of Friends, London, 1835.

some three hundred Friends, chiefly in the North-West, in a short period.¹⁸

The attempt to solve a doctrinal disagreement through the agency of a committee failed, but the method itself is significant. In the minutes of the Committee of Yearly Meeting appointed to render assistance to the Quarterly Meeting reference was made to the problems being experienced by the Monthly Meeting and 'to the publication called "the Beacon" as one of the principal causes of want of unity.'¹⁹ The Committee issued a statement, which was later printed, giving reasons for their rejection of Crewdson's position and he produced a reply which in manuscript comprised fifty-nine closely written quarto pages.²⁰ The Committee dealt principally with Crewdson as the source of disunity, although William Boulton and a few other individuals who supported Crewdson also became involved in correspondence with the Yearly Meeting's Committee. The eventual conclusion of the Yearly Meeting Committee's deliberations was to recommend that Crewdson and Boulton be requested to refrain from speaking in meetings for worship.²¹

This simple answer, to silence the extreme evangelicals and to prevent Crewdson from attending meetings of Ministers and Elders, while letting them remain in membership and advising

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18. This estimate seems to have been first given in J. Bevan Braithwaite, A Friend of the nineteenth century, by his children, London, 1909, p.50.
19. Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee of Yearly Meeting appointed to visit Lancashire Quarterly Meeting. Manuscript, Friends House Library, p.3.
20. Crewdson, Isaac, Statement in reply to the Statement of the Committee appointed by Yearly Meeting to visit the Quarterly Meeting of Lancashire. Dated 9th of 7th Month 1836. Manuscript, Friends House Library.
21. Minutes of the Committee ... appointed to visit Lancashire Quarterly Meeting, pp.102, 106, 151-2.

the Meeting not to proceed against Crewdson, had merely the result of encouraging them and their families and followers to resign. The incidents made their mark on contemporaries and in addition to the detailed but uncontroversial accounts of the proposed visitation to Lancashire Quarterly Meeting and its result in the Yearly Meeting minutes²² we have an account from Edward Grubb's father of Yearly Meeting in 1836 and letters from James Clark, a member of Manchester Meeting at the time. There was some feeling, not only amongst the most evangelical Friends, that the Yearly Meeting's Committee had taken too strong a line and Clark wrote immediately after the Yearly Meeting's Committee's recommendations were known: 'I can hardly tell thee of the feelings that occupied my mind after taking my seat in Meeting yesterday morning and seeing one Friend after another that had taken an active part in these persecutions, filling the highest seats in our Synagogue...'²³ Manchester overseers also seem to have thought that the Yearly Meeting's Committee were particularly harsh in their attitude.²⁴ On the other hand, Yearly Meeting contained members of two opinions, as Edward Grubb recounts: 'The proceedings of the Committee pleased neither party: to the "orthodox" they appeared wanting in vigour and rigour; to the "evangelicals" they savoured of persecution.'²⁵

It could be argued that the problem raised by Crewdson should have been dealt with through the normal channels, being

22. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXIV, pp.512, 515; reported cited in note 19, and Supplementary Minutes of the Committee reconvened to consider Crewdson's statement. Manuscript, Friends House Library, p.103.

23. Journal of the Friends Historical Society, vol.16, 1919, 'The Beacon' Letters of James Clark', p.132.

24. Supplementary Minutes, p.7.

25. Friends Quarterly Examiner, vol.29, 1895, Edward Grubb, 'Past and Present, the Yearly Meeting of 1836', p.102.

raised first in the Preparative Meeting and then in Monthly Meeting. If the Preparative Meeting predominantly favoured Crewdson though his book would not have been judged to conflict with accepted Quaker doctrine. The proportions of orthodox and evangelical Friends in Manchester at the time are not known, but the Quarterly Meeting thought it worthwhile to appoint a Committee to assist the Monthly Meeting, evidently in anticipation of some problem. J.J. Gurney, although a member of the Yearly Meeting's Committee, seems to have been unhappy with the arrangement.²⁶

The Committee recommended no disownments and the great majority of evangelically inclined Friends outside the North West remained in the Society with clear consciences and perhaps a certain amount of the adjustment which the editor of the Christian Advocate thought typical of J.J. Gurney: 'What shall we say of the shameful inconsistency of Mr. Joseph John Gurney, looking one way and rowing the other? His voice is the voice of Jacob, but his hand is the hand of Esau. The sentiments he expresses are always evangelical; but the acts he performs are always "orthodox".'²⁷ Some measure of inconsistency was quite common and the evangelical position, in a form less extreme than Crewdson's, gained ground in the statement in the 1836 Epistle on the authority of scripture and generally in the remainder of the nineteenth century.²⁸ This account of the Beacon has hardly mentioned the discipline as such, although it has shown an unusual procedure involving disciplinary recommendations, and

26. Hodgson, The Society of Friends in the Nineteenth Century, vol.I, p.261.

27. Friends Quarterly Examiner, vol.29, 1895, p.105.

28. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, pp.270-4.

something of the effect on the Yearly Meeting of an exceptionally controversial matter. The agitation created by the Beacon was unparalleled but the real crisis was local and on the evidence available it is difficult to believe completely Grubb's account of the excitement in Yearly Meeting: 'The occasion would seem to have been one of almost unexampled excitement. Signs were not wanting of imminent disruption in the Society. Party spirit ran high, and it was anticipated that matters would come forward on the decision of which the very existence of the Society might depend.'²⁹

Grubb's comment on the role of the Clerk at Yearly Meeting in 1836 is revealing too, not only about the Beacon but about Yearly Meeting procedure in general: 'The Clerk, it is clear, can have held no enviable position; but he seems to have been lacking in firmness. He was apparently quite at the mercy of Luke Howard, who had, it seems, a kind of craze against the female sex in general, and was allowed to drag it in at intervals whether relevant to the business in hand or not.'³⁰

The Beacon affair cannot but have influenced the state of the Society in general at the beginning of this period. For the first time it can clearly be seen that the many comments on the low state of the Society and the threats to its existence had some basis in fact. Observers may have mistaken the causes of the problems, but certainly by the time that a movement

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29. Friends Quarterly Examiner, vol.29, 1895, p.101; and for a similar contemporary opinion see also Bryant, S.E. and Baker, G.P., editors, A Quaker Journal being the Diary and Reminiscences of William Lucas of Hitchin, 1804-1861, London, 1934, volume I, p.102. Lucas was a moderate Friend who did not feel sufficiently orthodox by 1842 to become clerk of his quarterly meeting.
30. Friends Quarterly Examiner, vol.29, 1895, p.107.

towards the reform of the discipline existed they could not escape their manifestations, falling numbers and the dissatisfaction of prominent individuals associated with the Society. Professor Chadwick sums up opinions on the decline of the Society succinctly: 'Conservative Friends thought that their Society declined because its younger members were disloyal to tradition. They warned the Society that if members continued for another generation to abandon the peculiarities, no Society would exist. Liberal Friends thought that the Society declined because its conservative government adhered to tradition.'³¹

The production of the third edition of the book of discipline gave the Yearly Meeting an opportunity to consider the discipline and the state of the Society and the conclusions reached were embodied in a substantial section of the Yearly Meeting Epistle in 1833. Members were 'much impressed with the value and importance of our christian discipline,' and believed that 'it is in accordance with the simple principles of church government developed in the New Testament.' No problems were seen in the content of the discipline then, Friends at Yearly Meeting thought it 'a privilege to be subject to it, and, as occasions may arise, to contribute to uphold it.' At the same time it was recognised that an effort was necessary to uphold it; Friends were reminded 'that the discipline of the church affords a wide sphere of usefulness to all who are concerned for the prosperity of the cause of truth, and little as, in some cases, our dear brethren and sisters may see of the fruit of their labours, we would at this time press it upon them

31. Chadwick, Owen, The Victorian Church, Part I, p.429 (first edition).

not to relax in a pious watchful care over the flock.³²

These opinions did not survive the period unchallenged. One of the first Friends to express disquiet about the discipline and its effect on the state of the Society from a moderate position was John Rowntree in a letter to his son Joseph Rowntree in 1838, where he made the point that the discipline managed to overlook some kinds of un-Christian behaviour while descending against innocuous traits in members of an exemplary Christian character.³³ John Bright, who incurred the wrath of the quietist Friends, not for entering Parliament in itself but because he became prominently involved in public life, had substantial reservations about the discipline although he was very much a Friend, maintaining the testimony of plainness in dress in the earlier part of his public career.³⁴ He naturally became disillusioned about the discipline at the time of his sister's disownment for marrying out, criticising the Monthly Meeting for imposing the same penalties for the extremes of immorality and a simple marriage to a non-member. Bright, who was in a better position than many Friends to see how the Society appeared to outsiders, then went on (in his diary entry on the day of his sister's disownment) to consider the future of the Society without much confidence. He thought that 'tests and observances which can never be of real importance' excluded many and that many more were forced to leave because of the narrow rules.³⁵ Shortly after his sister's disownment he was to write in a letter that

32. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, p.253.

33. Rowntree, J.S., A Family Memoir of Joseph Rowntree, Birmingham, 1868, pp.254-5.

34. Trevelyan, G.M., The Life of John Bright, London, 1913, p.107.

35. Trevelyan, The Life of John Bright, p.173. Diary entry for 5 April 1849.

he felt that a strict observance of the peculiarities was 'teaching for doctrines the commandments of men' and making 'to ourselves burdens which Christianity is intended to free us from.'³⁶ His well known opinion on the record of disownments for Marsden Monthly Meeting was shared by the active liberals in the Society: 'This is a wonderful picture of what good men may do acting on mistaken notions of duty to destroy the very structure they are most anxious to uphold.'³⁷ The history of William and Mary Howitt contains similar features, and Mary Howitt thought that William looked better and was no less religious for abandoning the peculiarities.³⁸

Some commentators saw a greater theological element in the problems of the Society than did others. F.D. Maurice, whose book The Kingdom of Christ owed its origin to the Beacon controversy, thought the Society would probably perish by a slow decay, having survived the threat of schism, losing its own distinctive basis to either Evangelical or Unitarian incursion.³⁹ He was aware of the problems posed by involvement in trade and by the creation of outward observances of speech and dress. Maurice's essential view was that Quakerism had no great claim to survive once Friends thought of themselves as members of a superior sect rather than the Church. J.S. Rowntree in his prize essay on the Society attributes some element in the decline of the Society to 'the peculiar form of public worship

36. Mills, J. Travis, John Bright and the Quakers, London, 1935, vol.2, pp.6-7, quoting Mark vii, 7.

37. Mills, John Bright and the Quakers, vol.1, pp.424-5.

38. Howitt, Mary, edited Howitt, Margaret, An Autobiography, London, 1889, vol.II, p.219. The 'peculiarities' was the traditional term used to describe the testimonies on plainness.

39. Maurice, F.D., The Kingdom of Christ or Hints to a Quaker, second edition, London, 1842, vol.I, pp.xlix, 71-4.

adopted by the Friends.⁴⁰ This point apart the chief specifically religious matter mentioned by Rowntree as a contributory factor in the decline was the Beacon affair. He associated with the form of public worship a passive attitude to the religious life and wondered, if such things had been capable of enumeration, what loss of numbers could have been attributed to the lack of variety in the mode of worship, the lack of encouragement of preaching and the general lack of enthusiasm in the approach to religious life.⁴¹

Another of the essays published in 1859 suggested that the decline in the Society's fortunes was due largely to the Quaker failure to go out into the world and preach the Gospel. The same writer thought that the absence of devotional singing weakened the life of the Society but in addition to this highly individual view he felt that the marriage regulations and the maintenance of the minor peculiarities were great disadvantages.⁴² Janney, an American minister, thought that an approximation to the doctrines of the established Church was one of the chief reasons for the decline. He favoured the more orthodox point of view and thought that Gurney's influence was partly responsible for existing problems. Janney's arguments were more convincing when he wrote about the marriage regulations as a cause of the decline.⁴³

The theological arguments put forward as causes of the decline in the Society's fortunes have been described only as

40. Rowntree, Quakerism, Past and Present, London, 1859, p.27.

41. Rowntree, Quakerism, Past and Present, p.183.

42. Fothergill, Samuel, Essay on the Society of Friends, London, 1859, pp.7, 35, 59, 151, 172.

43. (Anon.) Janney, Samuel, An American View of the causes which have led to the Decline of the Society of Friends in Great Britain and Ireland, Philadelphia, 1860, p.11.

a part of the wider arguments that included several points of direct reference to the discipline. The role of evangelical Friends in the agitation for the reform of the discipline was more important. The attitude adopted by The British Friend was both anti-evangelical and anti-reform; it saw the evangelicals giving way to the temptations of life in the world through their association with members of other denominations, then wanting to amend the rules to make their newly acquired positions legitimate within the Society.

The Essay Competition of 1858 was of considerable importance in encouraging the consideration of the problems of the Society from a variety of viewpoints. An anonymous gentleman offered a first prize of one hundred guineas for the best essay explaining the decline in numbers of the Society of Friends which had been so clearly revealed in the census of 1851. We have seen that this was not the first indication of an awareness of troubles and indeed The British Friend ran a series of articles entitled 'Are Friends, as a Society, increasing or decreasing?' before the Census, beginning in 1848.⁴⁴ This series of course explained the traces of decline that were visible as the result of a lowering of standards in the Society and it did not go beyond a very general discussion. At the same time The Friend published occasional correspondence on the theme.

The essay that won the first prize in the competition was John Stephenson Rowntree's Quakerism, Past and Present. Not only was this the least partisan of the major essays submitted

44. The British Friend, Glasgow, 1848, pp.281 et seq.,
309 et seq.

(despite Rowntree's firm support for reform) but it was the first work concerning the state of the Society in the nineteenth century to have anything approaching a firm statistical basis.⁴⁵ Rowntree's comments were based on a sample that covered approximately twenty per cent of the Friends in the country, from areas in Yorkshire, Lancashire, London, Essex and the West of England. Rowntree's essay recognised the inevitability of loss from any church on the same basis as losses from the Society and noted the absence of any compensating entry of members to the Society.⁴⁶ He made the important point that Yearly Meeting, although annually informed of the total number of persons joining the Society by conviction, received no statistics concerning the numbers leaving.⁴⁷ Having demonstrated the seriousness of the situation he proceeded to analyse it, discussing theology, the testimony on plainness and the marriage regulations as causes. His conclusion, that of the factors that could be identified in the decline of the Society and supported by figures, the marriage rules was the most important, is not surprising. Of the others he thought the forbidding aspect of the Society to outsiders as a result of the testimonies the most worrying. This theory was not strikingly new, the case assembled to support it was, although Rowntree was a little over-enthusiastic in his attempt to trace the beginning of the decline to the late seventeenth century.

Friends had been aware for some time that the marriage

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45. Quakerism, Past and Present gives the conclusions from and summaries of the figures gathered by Rowntree. His notes survive in Friends House Library and more detailed figures from them have been printed in Journal of the Friends Historical Society, vol.52, no.2, 1969.
46. Quakerism, Past and Present, p.75.
47. Quakerism, Past and Present, p.135.

regulations were probably detrimental to the Society and, as we shall see, the peculiarities had also received serious consideration before the Essay Competition took place. Some of the changes considered had already taken place, although Hodgson's picture of the Society in 1855 seems somewhat exaggerated:

In some of the large meetings in England, very few indeed could be recognised by their appearance as professing to be Friends, large numbers, not only of the private members, but also of the ministers, elders, and overseers, had ceased to appear in the plain, simple garb of Friends, and could not be distinguished from the people of the world, either in their dress, their language, or their manners. 48

Hodgson betrayed himself within his next few pages as an upholder of traditional Quakerism by writing: 'The Yearly Meeting appeared to be entirely under the control of the innovators, who, in the same spirit of restless self-activity and desire for an easy popular religion, which had led to the changes in doctrine and practice, soon began to tamper with the Discipline.'⁴⁹

Hodgson's opinions were shared by some of the essayists, who tended to be more traditional than Rowntree (or the anti-Quakers, who adopted the view that Quaker practices were totally un-Christian), but they could not always avoid reaching some of Rowntree's conclusions. Thomas Hancock, an Anglican clergyman, who suggested that 'the whole tenor of my Essay goes to prove that its (Quakerism's) salvation is impossible' also argued that many practices contrary to the discipline were not sinful.⁵⁰

48. Hodgson, Society of Friends in the Nineteenth Century, vol.2, p.363.

49. Hodgson, Society of Friends in the Nineteenth Century, vol.2, p.375.

50. Hancock, Thomas, The Peculium, London, 1859, p.xiii. William Lucas of Hitchin thought Hancock 'a high Puseyite'; A Quaker Journal, vol.II, p.536.

W.C. Westlake argued to the contrary in The Sure Foundation that Quakerism did still rest on a sure foundation. He was prepared to see some of the peculiarities disappear rather than remain as a barrier giving the world the view that the Society was narrowly formalist.⁵¹ However, he supported plainness and wrote of the peculiarities that 'In looking at these testimonies, it must, I think, be acknowledged, that the spirit of every one of them is in accordance with the New Testament.'⁵² Another of the essays, violently hostile to the Society, was Edgar Sheppard's A Fallen Faith, being a historical, religious and socio-political sketch of the Society of Friends. This essay identified eight causes of decline including the rejection of a paid ministry and the unsubstantial character of Quaker worship as well as the practice of disownment and the failure to proselytise.⁵³

The Friend, which had more editorial enthusiasm for Rowntree's essay than for Hancock's, which won the second prize, thought that Rowntree's evidence was perhaps more valuable than his theories.⁵⁴ The point that Rowntree clearly proved had been made in a letter The Friend had published in 1854: 'It is an anomalous fact, that death, resignation and disownments should reduce our numbers more rapidly than they are increased by convincement and truth.'⁵⁵ But The Friend was not willing, despite its reputation for a liberal attitude compared with its contemporary, to endorse Rowntree's recommendations about the discipline, and suggested:

51. Westlake, W.C., The Sure Foundation, or Past and Future of the Society of Friends; London, 1800, p.73.

52. Westlake, The Sure Foundation, p.36.

53. Sheppard, Edgar, A Fallen Faith..., London, 1859, p.22.

54. The Friend, 1860, pp.1-3.

55. The Friend, 1854, pp.4-5.

We think that a further pursuit of the subject would, among other advantages, have suggested an important branch of the inquiry on which his essay is altogether silent - the limitation which may have been imposed on the numerical success of Quakerism by the very purity of its doctrines. We think that numerical success is too much referred to in the essay before us, as if it were a test of purity of doctrine and soundness of practice in religious society. 56

The Friend's position here prevailed in the Society before the essay competition and an earlier opinion given by Joseph Rowntree in his diary of Yearly Meeting in 1857 shows that the discussion of the state of the Society was generally inconclusive and scarcely grappled with real facts:

Those who were present at the meeting on the State of the Society must have been struck with the detached fragmentary manner in which it was handled. No clear statement of what the condition was, of what the evils were, of what was wanting in that discipline or constitution, and on the other hand, no general plan, no broad view of the remedy but a number of excellent fragments. 57

This was the great value of the essay competition, it stimulated more reasoned consideration of the state of the Society and produced more useful answers to the major questions than was possible in a session of Yearly Meeting. Indeed the anonymous donor of the prizes awarded in 1859 may have been influenced by the discussion in 1857, as J.S. Rowntree certainly was. Joseph Rowntree, in his account of Yearly Meeting in 1857, identified the lack of information about the numbers and causes of disownments as important and a relative also apparently spoke on this

56. The Friend, 1860, pp.1-3. This point has been made before. In John D. Gay's The Geography of Religion in England, London, 1971, p.35, the author suggests that a number of smaller churches today argue that intensity of commitment matters more than numerical strength.

57. Rowntree, Diary of Yearly Meeting 1857. Manuscript in Friends House Library, pp.15-16.

theme.⁵⁸

The analysis of the decline of the Society has, for the purposes of this study and this particular chapter, been made chiefly in terms of the discipline, although some reference was made earlier to the more directly religious factors seen by J.S. Rowntree and Samuel Fothergill as contributing to the decline in the Society's fortunes. It would be wrong to under-emphasise the role of other factors which one may infer possessed a greater importance than the surviving evidence can confirm. The discipline was the chief reason for departures from the Society but the failure to acquire new members must equally have been a major factor in bringing about the weakened position of the Society. The discipline may have contributed to this failure, but the lack of proselytising and the impression gained by outsiders of the religious or social state of the Society were also important. There can be no doubt that the majority opinion in the Society thought that a state of decline existed, dismissing the view that numbers did not matter if the body was pure.

The idea of a crisis in the general life of the Society was of course accompanied by the development and examination of the regulations on specific themes following particular cases that had characterised discussion of the discipline in the preceding century. More attention was given to the state of the Society as a whole later in the period as a result of the essay competition and in the few years before this consideration of gravestones, dress and especially marriage began to make Friends

58. Rowntree, Diary of Yearly Meeting 1857, p.50.

think of the probable role of the discipline in putting off potential applicants for membership. Only one attempt was made, in 1850-1, to ensure a visit to all quarterly meetings by the usual arrangement of a committee appointed for the purpose but a number of visits were made to individual quarterly meetings.⁵⁹

The Society's position on plainness and relations with the outside world changed in this period, demands by the state church and occasional military obligations did not vanish, but a greater threat to the Society was seen in the tendency of some members to conform to the general way of life of the outside world. Some consciousness of the strong economic position of Friends in society and a certain sense of guilt at this seem to have been growing too. Some Friends tended to link the supposed desire for wealth with the acquisition of the vain trimmings that wealth could provide. The theme of the love of money was discussed at Yearly Meeting in 1836 and Samuel Tuke referred to 'the present state of unexampled prosperity, and this at a time when the position of the toiling masses of the country was probably worse than at any former period of our history.'⁶⁰ This problem could not be resolved (and remains in the Society today), but some of the modes of behaviour considered to be the depths of depravity by Friends at the beginning of the nineteenth century (often part of the way of life of practising middle-class Anglicans) came to be accepted by a good proportion of the Society.

Friends continued to resist those demands that appeared to

59. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVI, p.189, p.289 (1851), and vol.XXV, pp.387-8 to show visits to Dorset and Hampshire, Westmoreland.

60. Friends Quarterly Examiner, vol.29, 1895, p.114.

support the state church and in this respect Yearly Meeting made no concessions. Yearly Meeting decided in 1841 that a statement of the more excessive cases of distraint should be printed for circulation.⁶¹ Reminders were issued from time to time as in the Yearly Meeting Epistle for 1850 which counselled in gentle terms the refusal of all demands made for the support of an unacceptable system.⁶² This situation did not mean that most Friends were cut off from society entirely or unaware of current events. The chronicle of the Seebohm family records a meeting held on the day of Queen Victoria's coronation in 1837 at which 'solemn supplications, in which both Queen and people were remembered were offered.'⁶³ This did not contravene the previous testimony against government-ordered fasts or celebrations and was surely undertaken from a sense of duty. Edward Pease, a very plain Friend, wrote in his diary on the day after the coronation, 'Some mournful feelings are mine on learning that, some of our young men were among the festive parties of yesterday.'⁶⁴ Pease did not say that the coronation caused this grief, although his disapproving attitude to a flower show in 1848 implies that any display or ceremony was unwelcome; it was more that 'scenes of music and clamorous noise ought to be held in great repugnance by all Sober Christians.'⁶⁵

Friends' involvement with the world increased on a more serious level too, also to the disquiet of the orthodox. Entry into politics was not only onto the national stage on which

61. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXV, p.322.

62. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, p.356.

63. Private Memoirs of B. and E. Seebohm, edited by their sons. London, 1873, p.123.

64. Pease, Edward, edited Pease, Sir Alfred, The Diaries of Edward Pease, London, 1907, p.130.

65. Pease, The Diaries of Edward Pease, pp.130, 260.

John Bright and Joseph Sturge served prominently to represent the Society but also at a local level. Yearly Meeting in 1836 considered this situation and decided, despite the reservations of some Friends about any involvement in the world beyond simple trading, not to discourage Friends from entering civil government but to ask them to take careful account of the responsibilities and temptations involved.⁶⁶ In 1838 the matter was taken up again and Friends were cautioned against making the declaration required, on taking office in a Municipal Corporation, not to disturb the Church of England.⁶⁷ The Yearly Meeting Epistle in 1843 summed up one side of opinion in a famous passage directed against Bright:

We have ever maintained that it is our duty to obey all the enactments of civil government, except those by which our allegiance to God is interfered with. We owe much to its blessings; ... and whilst bound by our sense of religious conviction not to comply with those requisitions which violate our Christian principles, we desire ever to be found of those who are quiet in the land.⁶⁸

In general members of the Society were becoming less likely to be found of those who were quiet in the land, anti-slavery agitation and social reform were pressing concerns. The epistle went on to consider and encourage philanthropy, warning Friends to be careful when becoming involved in charitable associations, 'lest such associations should gradually draw them into that assimilation with the world which is unlawful to a follower of Christ.'

In the Quaker periodicals, diaries and biographies of the period the maintenance of the testimonies on plainness receives

66. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXV, p.63.

67. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXV, pp.188-90.

68. Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, vol.II, p.314.

greater attention than other aspects of involvement with the world. On the one hand there are orthodox expressions of distaste and distress at the life of families like the Gurneys, on the other Howitts and Frys poured a gentle scorn over the extremes of plainness. Sometimes most Friends were agreed on the undesirability of a particular practice; in 1859 the Yearly Meeting took up the case of an Elder whose recreation was supposed to be shooting.⁶⁹ Mary Howitt's autobiography suggests that Friends in Surrey were particularly strict adherents to the testimony on plainness, some Kingston Friends in 1837 would not read books or have newspapers in the house.⁷⁰ Seven years later she was able to write that 'Friends are becoming more liberal in regard to colours; for instance many plain Friends have crimson curtains to their dining rooms, and very handsome carpets' which seemed to accord more with her own 'perfect pleasure in colour.'⁷¹ This must have shocked older Friends as much as the wearing of wedding rings had disturbed Edward Pease in 1841.⁷²

The most obvious evidence of the plainness of a Friend would have been his mode of dress and stray references give the impression that it was also the first aspect of the testimony to be widely neglected. Arguments for plainness in some measure continued throughout the century but the type of case reported in Forster's memoranda of Yearly Meeting when a Friend said of plain clothes: 'We cannot cast them away and retain our peace - they are laid upon us of the Lord, not merely to distinguish us, but that we may bear a testimony against the pride of man' certainly

69. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVII, p.146.

70. Howitt, Mary, Autobiography, vol.I, p.200.

71. Howitt, Autobiography, vol.II, p.12.

72. Pease, The Diaries of Edward Pease, p.172.

declined.⁷³ This view contrasted with the moderate and historically correct opinion of Rowntree that early Friends merely practised non-compliance with current variations in fashion and that plainness should not involve extremes.⁷⁴ Conformity was encouraged however by the dominance of plain Friends and the occasional desire to obtain benefits which these weighty Friends might have controlled. A letter to The Friend in 1853 questioned the testimony on dress and added: 'I could mention some of the largest (meetings) in England where the possession of all the mental and spiritual endowments required for certain appointments, without the addition of the strait coat, is practically deemed a less qualification than the plain dress without these gifts.'⁷⁵ George Cadbury wrote of plainness of dress:

At first I followed the tradition of my fathers, and had a coat made of the very straightest and most old-fashioned type, but I was very soon brought to see the danger of any outward forms of this kind. They were so very easily assumed, and I knew of many who adopted them so that they might be admitted into the Society, especially those with large families who wished to have their children cheaply educated at the Friends' boarding schools.⁷⁶

Although this point cannot be substantiated from other sources, one would have expected Friends to have been aware of it when considering applications for membership. In the earlier history of the Society the advantages to be obtained from membership probably did not outweigh the sacrifices it might entail; by the mid-nineteenth century with a more assured social

73. Forster, Josiah, Memoranda respecting London Yearly Meetings from 1828-44. Transcript of manuscript in Friends House Library, pp.47-8.

74. Rowntree, Quakerism, Past and Present, pp.138-42.

75. The Friend, 1853, p.91.

76. Gardiner, A.G., Life of George Cadbury, London, no date (popular edition), pp.181-2.

position and a system of excellent schools there may have been nominal Friends on Cadbury's terms.

The arguments against the testimony were elaborated in a pamphlet by Edward Sewell, Reasons for objecting to the Peculiar Practices and Opinions of the Society of Friends, with regard to Dress, and Mode of Address.⁷⁷ The pamphlet states strongly that 'these peculiar practices are fraught with inconvenience and do seem productive of some decidedly evil consequences.'⁷⁸ Sewell correctly saw the peculiarities as a barrier to outsiders, without an adequate basis in Scripture, which had the effect of making the smaller meetings completely isolated in society. Nor was he so ardent a reformer as to completely reject the testimonies since he had some enthusiasm for much of the testimony on plainness of speech. During the discussion about plainness in dress the rules of discipline supported the traditional viewpoint while the less traditional Friends in effect defied them.

Another significant feature of the drift away from plainness was to the increasing frequency amongst Friends of some degree of involvement with the arts. The most traditional Friends were as suspicious as any Muslim of graven images and music was associated with forms of worship they repudiated or, in its secular aspects, with frivolity. The few Friends who achieved any prominence in the arts, the Howitts or Bernard Barton for example, were offered no encouragement. The theatre and dancing remained completely outside the experience of traditionalist Friends. The British Friend is a source of examples of

77. (Anon.) Sewell, Edward, Malton, 1855.

78. Sewell, Edward, Reasons for objecting to the Peculiar Practices and Opinions..., p.6.

objection to various practices such as the adverse comment made in 1847, on a Friend who had allowed his portrait to be hung in an institution he had endowed.⁷⁹ Sarah Alexander, one representative of the orthodox, disliked 'the growing relish for intellectual culture' which with 'the increased pursuit of large mercantile concerns' drew Friends to the towns and she thought too that friendship with 'the great, the talented, or the rich of this world ... had all a more or less direct tendency from the cross of Christ.'⁸⁰

Apart from marriage the amendment of the discipline which represented the greatest concession to the world in the eyes of the traditionalists was the change in the regulations concerning gravestones. The difficulty caused by the practice of having no stone to mark a grave was graphically described in John Lecky's words in Chapter V, but the regulation against gravestones remained in force from 1766. In 1850 the Quarterly Meeting of Norfolk and Norwich sent a proposition to the Yearly Meeting suggesting that it might be possible to identify the place of a burial without offending against the testimony and a committee was appointed to consider the matter. The committee recommended that some modification should be permitted: 'a plain flat stone, laid horizontally, the inscription on which is confined to a simple record of the name and age of the individual interred underneath, together with the date of the decease, is no violation of such testimony.'⁸¹ A further proposition in 1851 recommending the use of plain, perpendicular head and foot

79. The British Friend, 1847, p.284.

80. Alexander, Sarah, A Voice from the Wilderness, being a brief review of the Calling, Progress, and Present Decline of the Society of Friends, Gloucester, n.d., pp.44-5.

81. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVI, pp.178-9, 199-200.

stones was rejected.⁸² The aim of the Yearly Meeting was to ensure uniformity: gravestones had to be put down according to the directions of the meeting so that 'such an entire uniformity may be preserved in respect to the materials, size and form of the stones, as well as in the mode of placing them, as may effectually guard against any distinction being made in that place where "the rich and poor meet together".'
The British Friend published the Yearly Meeting Minute of 1850 without any particular comment, but correspondents in The Friend expressed some disquiet.⁸³

Finally, connected with plainness, was the subject of temperance which assumed a new importance within the Society in this period. Friends had counselled moderation in all things for some time but this had not prevented some being brewers or owning buildings leased as public houses.⁸⁴ A Committee was appointed by the Yearly Meeting in 1835 to prepare a minute on intemperance and this recommended abstaining from all distilled spirits except for medicinal purposes.⁸⁵ Again in 1857 the Yearly Meeting advised Friends to abstain from the consumption and manufacture of alcoholic liquor.⁸⁶ This was not universally acceptable. Joseph Rowntree's Yearly Meeting diary shows that, while James Backhouse felt that the growing solemnity of meetings for worship and discipline might be related to the progress of the temperance movement, a Quaker brewer present was rather

82. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVI, p.245.

83. The British Friend, 1850, p.175.

84. For one example in 1803 in St. Helens see Barker, T.C. and Harris, J.R., A Merseyside Town in the Industrial Revolution St. Helens 1750-1900, London, 1959 (reprint), pp.106, 423, where it was suggested by a local Methodist that Friends benefited from this use of their property and gave no spiritual return to the town.

85. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXIV, pp.517, 541.

86. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVII, pp.39-40.

upset and said that 'There was much that was objectionable in the drapery trade.'⁸⁷

Marriage held a particularly important place in the development of the discipline in this period. Although it may be argued convincingly that traditional attitudes towards the various forms of plainness deterred outsiders from considering the Society seriously and encouraged members to depart, it is impossible to demonstrate this by more than isolated examples. On the other hand the effects of the marriage rules can be demonstrated from surviving sets of statistics. We know for example that Bristol lost 357 members by resignation and disownment between 1801 and 1851 and that this figure included 97 disownments on account of marriage. Gloucester Monthly Meeting lost 64 members including 18 by disownment for marrying out in the same period; the Monthly Meeting had 84 members in 1801 and 112 in 1851. York Monthly Meeting with an average membership of 302 between 1837 and 1854 lost 79 members including 26 by disownment for marrying out. Brighouse Monthly Meeting (which included Leeds, Bradford and Huddersfield) had 275 disownments between 1800 and 1854, of which 163 were on account of marriage and membership stood in 1851 at 820.⁸⁸ On average it may be said that the numbers disowned for marrying out were equal to those disowned for all other reasons.

The problems derived from the Friends' marriage regulations had been recognised by Clarkson at the beginning of the century and were presumably the subject of much informal discussion before the 1850s when the amendment of the regulations became

87. Rowntree, Diary of Yearly Meeting, 1857, p.27.

88. Hall, D.J., Journal of the Friends Historical Society, vol.52, no.2, 1969, 'Membership Statistics of the Society of Friends 1800-1850'.

a live issue in Yearly Meeting. Marriage within the rules could be complicated enough and in 1842 Yearly Meeting considered and rejected a proposition from the Quarterly Meeting of Bristol and Somerset which would have allowed the substitution of a declaration of intent for the actual appearance of both parties about to marry at a meeting for discipline.⁸⁹ In 1848 it seemed necessary for Yearly Meeting to remind Friends that marriage was a religious as well as a civil contract.⁹⁰ The question raised in 1842 was brought up in a similar proposition from the Quarterly Meetings of Durham and Yorkshire in 1855, accepted this time by Yearly Meeting in 1856, to allow a certificate to be substituted for the attendance of a woman Friend to declare her intention of marriage at the man's meeting for discipline.⁹¹

Serious reconsideration of the marriage regulations began in Yearly Meeting in 1856 with a proposition from Yorkshire that persons professing with Friends be allowed to marry Friends when they were regular attenders at meeting and perhaps in the case of regular attenders even where neither contracting party was a member.⁹² The proposition was not rejected outright but referred to the next Yearly Meeting. In the meantime a long letter appeared in The Friend, discussing the whole position of marriage in the Society of Friends in a detailed and reasoned fashion. 'R', the correspondent, drew attention to the acceptance into membership of those whose husbands or wives might not become Friends and saw the process of existing members marrying non-Friends as very little different in fact.

89. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXV, p.371.

90. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVI, p.86.

91. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVI, pp.519, 562, 617-8.

92. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVI, pp.594-5, 614.

'R' concluded his case by writing: 'I trust our discipline will soon be modified so as to be more in harmony with the enduring, hoping and forgiving spirit of the Gospel.'

Correspondence in reply both opposed and supported 'R'.⁹³

Yearly Meeting in 1857 seemed to approve the Yorkshire proposition from 1856 but thought that a final decision should be deferred for another year.⁹⁴ The Yearly Meeting in 1858 referred the proposition to Meeting for Sufferings and representatives from each quarterly Meeting which delayed the final decision for a further year.⁹⁵

In the meantime Joseph Rowntree published Statements connected with the Marriage Regulations of the Society of Friends which gave some account of the Yearly Meeting's deliberations and made recommendations for the reformed procedures.⁹⁶ It was suggested that a good deal should be left to the discretion of the overseers in each meeting but that marriage should not be allowed between a Friend and a non-Friend not in sympathy with the Society. In summarising the harm caused by the current rules the pamphlet ended, 'We appear to be experiencing the consequences which not unfrequently result from attempting to administer the discipline of the church by rule, rather than (sic) by the exercise of conscientious judgement on the merits of each case.'⁹⁷

Yearly Meeting in 1859 finally recorded the Society's approval of the Yorkshire proposition of 1856 with the

93. The Friend, 1856, pp.210, 223-4. One suspects that 'R' was a Rowntree, probably J.S. or his father Joseph, but The Friend's files for the period are incomplete.

94. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVII, p.66.

95. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVII, p.111.

96. York, 1858. Privately printed.

97. Rowntree, Statements concerned with the Marriage Regulations, pp.18-19.

reservation that it was still the opinion of the Society that marriages between persons of different religious views were inexpedient.⁹⁸ It was then necessary to seek the necessary amendments to the legislation governing marriages after the manner of the Society and it was not until the publication of the next book of discipline that the changes were finally valid. The comments in the essays on the effects of the old marriage regulations appeared in the meantime.

In a period preoccupied by special concerns the developments in the general field of membership and the procedures for disownment, admission or resignation were not so significant. There was, perhaps, a keener recognition that the expectation that new members would conform to the testimonies on plainness was a deterrent. The difficulties of the working man not only in becoming a member but in remaining one were substantial. J.S. Rowntree's Yearly Meeting diary for 1859 reported an address on these lines made to Yearly Meeting and a letter quoted in a biography of Bright shows that one Friend at least found it impossible to find a wife at his own social level within the Society.⁹⁹ At the same time as removing one reason for disownment the Yearly Meeting introduced another, although hardly of the same importance, when it approved a proposition from the Quarterly Meeting of Cumberland and Northumberland to require that a person persistently refusing to go to arbitration should be disowned.¹⁰⁰

Removal and settlement received no significant mention in the Yearly Meeting records until 1859 and it may be that the

98. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVII, pp.172-4.

99. Rowntree, Diary of Yearly Meeting 1859, p.57; Mills, J. Travis, John Bright and The Quakers, vol.1, p.439.

100. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVII, pp.159-60.

prolonged consideration of the rules described in previous chapters seemed to have borne fruit. The records that were an essential part of the procedure for removal and settlement were kept on a somewhat different basis from 1837 when only members were included in the registers. Yearly Meeting considered the state of the registers (which it did not find generally very satisfactory) in 1840 in the light of the Society's new statutory role and noted that transcripts had been made of 1449 volumes.¹⁰¹ In 1859 two quarterly meetings put propositions to the Yearly Meeting about the rules of removal and settlement, one proposing the rescission of all rules, the other seeking simplification of them.¹⁰² Yearly Meeting decided to hold a conference to consider the regulations. The proceedings of this conference, at which it was agreed that the existing rules should be rescinded, were recorded by Yearly Meeting in 1860.¹⁰³ A separate regulation was to be drafted to cover Friends emigrating to the Southern Hemisphere, relief from local funds and certificates of removal were to continue and various advices were to be altered to show that the first obligation of Christian charity was giving to the poor. Before a certificate of removal was granted enquiry was to be made by the monthly meetings into the conduct and circumstances of the person moving. Easing the process of giving assistance to needy Friends whose circumstances were coupled with some question of settlement was probably accompanied by a decline in the numbers of Friends needing relief.

Another task undertaken by the Yearly Meeting towards the

101. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXV, pp.266-7.

102. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVII, p.155.

103. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVII, pp.212-7.

end of the period was a revision of the queries to which minor alterations had been made by Yearly Meeting in 1845. The subtlety of the slight variations in the answers to queries needed skilled interpreters and the consideration of one answer in 1849 shows this:

Ministers and Elders are preserved in love and in unity one with another, except that in three instances the terms "a good degree of unity" and in a fourth, the words "with but very little exception", are made use of, and with but one case of exception in which a "good degree of harmony" is reported, that they endeavour in harmony to promote the advancement and spreading of the truth. 104

The consideration of the queries in detail began with the recommendation in 1858 that Meeting for Sufferings should consider the fourth query which was then: 'Do Friends endeavour by example and precept to train up their children, servants, and those under their care, in a religious life and conversation, consistent with our Christian profession; and in plainness of speech, behaviour and apparel?'¹⁰⁵ Yearly Meeting decided, but not finally, in 1859 that the latter part of the query should be omitted and a compensating addition be made to the advices. In that year the queries were referred to the Committee on the Arrangements for conducting the business of the Yearly Meeting for revision.¹⁰⁶ In 1860 the proposed revisions were considered and a new set of queries adopted incorporating those new ideas about the discipline which were accepted.

Only one important constitutional matter arose during the period concerning the organisation of meetings, the consideration

104. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVII, p.110.

105. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVII, p.112. Supplement to the Rules of Discipline, 1849, p.380.

106. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVII, p.175.

of the constitution of Meeting for Sufferings which Yearly Meeting decided to pursue in 1856.¹⁰⁷ The proposals made and adopted did not affect the function or powers of the Meeting for Sufferings but enlarged the range of its possible membership and in the light of improved transport encouraged country correspondents to attend.¹⁰⁸ Changes were made in Yearly Meeting procedure in 1861 following a report to the Yearly Meeting in 1860 but on the surface these were slight. A summary of the answers to the queries from all the quarterly meetings was to be read, a meeting was to be held particularly to consider the reports of the Friends schools and an examination of the details of distraints was to be carried out by Meeting for Sufferings as the basis of a general report to the Yearly Meeting.¹⁰⁹ To some Friends these decisions, especially that not to hear every answer made by a quarterly meeting to the queries, represented an abdication of responsibility by the Yearly Meeting. They certainly did not seem slight at the time and in fact represented a substantial overhaul of the traditional procedure of Yearly Meeting.

In 1861 the Society published the fourth book of extracts, known generally as Christian Doctrine, Practice and Discipline. This was arranged by a Conference on the Rules of Discipline which reported to Yearly Meeting in 1861.¹¹⁰ The Conference found in the third book of extracts and its supplements 'the same counsel being not unfrequently repeated, though under somewhat different forms of expression.' This, as has been shown, was noticed on the previous occasions of a revision of

107. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVI, p.624.

108. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVII, pp.68-76.

109. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVII, pp.249-50, 361.

110. Minutes of Yearly Meeting, vol.XXVII, pp.368-70.

the book of extracts, but on this occasion it was acted upon more thoroughly. The changes in rules for removals and settlements, for marriage and gravestones and the amendment of the queries rendered many former entries superfluous but in addition the contents were subjected to a major reorganisation.

Thomas Pumphrey explained in a letter to a Friend in 1860 that he did not expect to be able to attend the conference and went on to write about his concept of the place of the discipline in the life of the Society and his hopes for the nature of the new book of discipline. His letter is worth quoting from at some length and partly illustrates the Quaker reconciliation between the idea of freedom and the need for rules:

... In my study of the New Testament, I see how little there is of absolute rule laid down to be acted upon, but how constantly great principles are brought out, as those by which the Church and individual members are to be regulated; and in pondering over the history of our own Society, and that of other sections of the Christian Church, I notice the proneness there is to multiply rules and specified directions; and this proneness is the greatest when, vital godliness is lowest: there may be a necessity for this. I am not one who would ignore definite rules altogether, but I would cherish a godly jealousy over them, and be especially careful that instead of illustrating and being subordinate to the principle, they did not stifle and supersede it. Therefore I rejoice in the abrogation of our rules of settlement, and the presenting instead of them, in bold relief, the great duty of Christian benevolence; love to man as the reflection of love to God, and this love manifesting itself in relieving the outward necessities, and sympathizing in all the varied trials of our fellow members.

I rejoice in the modification of the Marriage Regulations, which in practice had so concealed the principle, that, as the discussions frequently showed, many Friends mistook the rule for the principle; and honestly believed that in altering the one we were sacrificing the other. Now what I would desire is, that in putting forth a new edition of the Rules and Advices, it should be

the concern of Friends to see what Rules can be safely spared; and that the Principle upon which Meetings and individual members ought to act should be clearly set forth. ¹¹¹

The new edition no longer relied on an alphabetical arrangement; there were now three chapters, 'Christian Doctrine', 'Christian Practice' and 'Christian Discipline', the second and third being subdivided into sections. The introduction contained a warning, derived from recent experience. 'May it ever be borne in mind that rules, however wisely devised or carefully digested, if acted on with a mere rigid adherence to the letter, will tend only to formalism.' ¹¹²

The division between doctrine and practice was relatively straightforward but that between practice and discipline was not so clear-cut. Practice gave more or less elaborate accounts of the traditional Quaker approaches to a variety of subjects, these were covered concisely in the advices which appeared in the chapter on discipline, but this dealt chiefly with actual regulations for marriage, the conduct of appeals and arbitration, the organisation and procedures of the structure of meeting leaving alone a number of themes which in this study have been treated as a part of the discipline. The discipline for the purposes of the third chapter was systematic and the chapter begins with an historical sketch of the origins of the discipline in the seventeenth century.

The new book of discipline introduced the Society of Friends to a new period in its history, a period in which the decline in the Society's fortunes was at least arrested and in which Friends became less conspicuous for their peculiar

111. Ford, John, editor, Memoir of Thomas Pumphrey, London and York, 1864.

112. Christian Doctrine, Practice and Discipline, 1861, p.v.

practices. The final words on the new discipline may be left to Daniel Pickard whose Expestulation on behalf of the Truth was an attack on the new book.¹¹³ His introduction as well as his title betrays the approach adopted: 'It may be regarded by many as an act of presumption, on the part of individual Friends, in this manner to review the deliberate conclusions of the Yearly Meeting; and truly it would be so, had the Yearly Meeting remained faithful in the line of Divine appointment, and not turned aside from sound doctrine.'¹¹⁴ Pickard informed his readers that the rot set in before 1861, with the developments following the change in the regulations on gravestones, and he proceeded to analyse the new queries in detail, attributing an exaggerated significance to the slightest changes in wording. He considered the dropping of the advices on the change of calendar and the use of heathen names 'one of the most significant facts of the late revision; and cannot be accounted for otherwise, than as a result of defection and revolt from our acknowledged profession.'¹¹⁵ It would be tedious to examine his detailed and uniformly hostile criticisms of the new queries. His comments on the new advices were similar; in 1802 he thought the advices had been of a definitely disciplinary character, by 1833 they were already more 'exhortative and doctrinal', and their 'language was softened and amplified.'¹¹⁶ He complained too that 'Much

113. Pickard, Daniel, An Expostulation on behalf of the Truth, against Departures in Doctrine, Practice, and Discipline, in which the Revised Queries, Rules and Advices of London Yearly Meeting of Friends, are examined and compared with former editions, London, 1864.

114. Pickard, An Expostulation, p.vii.

115. Pickard, An Expostulation, p.28.

116. Pickard, An Expostulation, pp.70-77.

of the new minutes, ... is more like tender private pleading than like discipline.'¹¹⁷ Pickard's views represent the reaction of the most traditional Friends, but they also tell us something of the period that had passed in the Society's history and of the attitudes of the makers of the discipline.

117. Pickard, An Expostulation, p.107.

Chapter VIII

Conclusions

It cannot be claimed that this study represents the last word in the consideration of the discipline of the Society of Friends between 1738 and 1861, or even that it replaces rather than supplements the standard works on Quakerism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although the ecclesiastical history of the eighteenth century has been relatively neglected by historians, in a study of this length, covering a span of more than a century, it has only been possible within the limits of time to begin to make a contribution to Quaker history.¹ Some questions are likely to remain unanswered until a great deal more work has been done on regional Quakerism. However, some attention has been drawn in this study to facets of the discipline and the factors influencing its development which may have been undervalued in previous work. It has not always been possible to explain the changes in the discipline satisfactorily and some matters remain undeniably obscure. The themes of membership, the role of elders and overseers, the introduction of preparative meetings and the part played by women in the discipline have all been re-examined yet still deserve serious attention. This chapter will sketch out the more important themes of the study briefly in general terms and conclude with some remarks on the major unanswered questions.

From the original sources quoted in earlier chapters it is evident that Friends at Yearly Meeting and the Meeting for

1. See the chapter by John Kent on the eighteenth century in The Penguin Guide to Modern Theology, vol.II, Historical Theology, London, 1969.

Sufferings gave a great deal of their attention to matters that now appear essentially administrative. This was true also of all meetings outside the meetings for worship; they were business meetings influenced by an element of worship, determining the manner in which rules dictated by the spirit should be followed in everyday life. There was in Quakerism a genuine interest in the fine detail of administration as well as a conscientious approach to every aspect of life and a concern to see that all brethren walked in the paths that were best for them. The application of this interest may hardly seem compatible with the freedom of belief that is one of the most striking features of modern Quakerism or with some of the claims of Friends in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The only, and inadequate, explanation that can be offered is that the apparent preoccupation with organisation and regulations arose from a natural and strong concern to preserve something that was of great importance to Friends. If that was so this study has shown that that concern did not always achieve its ends.

Certain changes in emphases were visible in the discipline in the period. Some of these were due primarily to external factors, the changing role of the rules about tithe or the increasing importance of the rules concerning involvement in military matters towards the end of the eighteenth century are examples. Similarly after Catholic Emancipation and the Reform Act of 1832 Friends gradually became aware of a duty to accept some responsibility in public life outside the Society.² This

2. The responsibility had already been accepted in the case of the anti-slavery crusade with Quaker support for the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade founded in 1787.

idea gathered momentum slowly before 1861, its impact was chiefly on a small number of thoughtful Friends, and barely began to influence the discipline. Some things in the rules hardly changed in the whole period, although they might be illustrated by alternative quotations from the Epistles and the Minutes of Yearly Meeting in successive editions of the book of extracts. The treatment of those who failed in trade remained essentially the same, although one suspects that the care taken to avoid this situation for any particular Friend by his overseer and contemporaries must have improved with experience.

The Quaker attitude to failure in business brings down on the Society the charge of possessing something of a double standard. Love and tolerance were, in a sense, it is sometimes alleged, offered only to those who were both loving and tolerable themselves. Charges of hypocrisy were often levelled at the Society, not always from outside, implying that there were separate laws for rich and poor.³ This situation is common, especially in the nineteenth century, as Professor G.F.A. Best wrote in an essay on 'Evangelicalism and the Victorians':

... the alleged hypocrisy of the Victorians, often pinned peculiarly upon the Evangelicals: the preaching of double standards of morality or virtue, one for the prosperous, one for the poor; or one for public and one for private use; or the enforcement of a "morality" which was not perhaps "moral" at all. Of this charge it may at once be said that any society which keeps high ideals before its eyes is likely to fall below them; and for my part, as citizen and parent, I don't know whether I would

3. The alternative allegation is that there were no poor Friends. The analyses of occupations in Vann, The Social Development of English Quakerism, 1969 (see p.118 for the beginning of the period) and Beck and Ball, The London Friends Meetings, 1869, p.90 for 1780 in London, show that this is not entirely true.

prefer to live in a society professing high ideals and not coming up to them or in a society becoming so suspicious and cynical about ideals that it is difficult for anyone with a persistent taste for them to indulge it. "Respectability" certainly did become an exigent standard - exigent enough to make social nonconformists at least uncomfortable - and its prescriptions clear enough for anyone wanting to be thought respectable to know how to do so. 4

Such comments continued to be levelled at nonconformists when our period had closed. The point in that quotation that seems most deserving of emphasis is the recognition of the difficulty of living up to high ideals in any society; much of the discipline is concerned with human frailty that has passed the point of the unrecorded efforts to save individuals from formal proceedings. It could not be said at any time that there was one standard for public and another for private use among Friends. Friends were constantly concerned for the good name of the Society. This concern is criticised when its results are seen chiefly as the expulsion of bankrupts, but the refusal to participate in public rejoicings or to join the militia will only have been respected by a minority outside the Society.

No comprehensive study has yet been made of the economic history of Friends in relation to the moral and economic tenets of the Society, and it has not been possible within the bounds of this study to examine that subject thoroughly.⁵ However, a growth in prosperity produced much the same results as in other denominations:

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4. Symondson, A., editor, The Victorian Crisis of Faith, London, 1970, pp.48-9.
 5. See Grubb, Isabel, Quakerism and Industry before 1800, London, 1930, and Raistrick, Arthur, Quakers in Science and Industry, 1950.

There was a tendency, especially after 1725 (and in the New World as well as the old), for Dissenters to conform possibly in accordance with Emerson's observation that no Dissenter rides in his coach for three generations. Certainly there were many signs of the decay of Dissent, mainly from an excess of prosperity and respectability; the alarm became great around 1730. Nothing better indicates the temper of the age than the almost complete disappearance of the multitudinous sects of the seventeenth century, and the absence of any new ones. Presbyterian, Independent, and Baptist, along with Quaker, persisted but in all cases showed signs of diminishing vitality. Clearly the decline of persecution and the growth of their wealth softened the Dissenters' zeal.⁶

Equally a proportion of the Friends who became prosperous remained within the Society, not always easily. The influence of the more prosperous Friends seems to have coloured the public image of the Society and inevitably was a factor among those discouraging the entry of new members.

Several features of the situation were not then exclusive to Quakerism and it has been possible only to introduce occasional comparisons with other denominations and the Established Church. The accusation of possessing double standards made by opponents, the plainness of dress and active opposition to the slave trade are three features in this category. Additionally an example of an Anglican (evangelical) attitude of responsibility to the state, in a region where Friends experienced some problems, is given by G.R. Balleine who wrote of George Canon, the Headmaster of Truro Grammar School:

One day, however, a curious problem presented itself for solution. His doctor had ordered him some wine, and in that smuggling neighbourhood it was impossible to obtain any on which the duty had been paid. As a Christian he could not consent to participate in a fraud, and yet he could not pay the money himself without getting others into trouble. At last he

6. Stromberg, Roland N., Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth-Century England, p.94.

determined to send what was due to the curate of the parish with a note asking him to hand it on to the proper authorities. 7

Some features of the Society had equivalents in other churches rather than exact parallels, for example the organisation of the pyramidal structure of meetings.

Various changes in the discipline, most of them taking place slowly over a period of years, with the exception of those resulting from changes in legislation or a sense of urgency like the reform of the marriage regulations, seem now to have been natural responses to the external situation. Some, like the creation of the Women's Yearly Meeting, were ahead of developments outside the Society, most, if adequate comparisons could be found, were probably behind. The time taken for change to be effected indicates resistance as well as caution. The essays in 1859 were not all pro-reform nor did changes in the book of extracts necessarily meet with approval. One writer saw that the existence of a body of legislation and the machinery to enforce that legislation was, if not incompatible with the spirit in which the discipline was created and operated, a strange bed-fellow at times:

The alterations which have taken place in the written records, by abridgement and digesting into a printed volume of extracts, which a few years ago was supposed to be a final adjustment; the late revisals and new modellings of that book of the law, and the mode of procedure in marriage (which had before been repeatedly changed), the uses of select meetings, augmentation of the powers of women's meetings; printed sanctions of writings afterwards rejected or verbally disapproved &c. go to a proof of more instability among the members of a spiritual body, than fully comports with their professions of divine guidance. 8

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7. Balleine, G.R., A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England, London, new edition, 1933, p.94.
 8. Freeman, Theophilus (William Matthews), A General Epistle of Brotherly Admonition and Counsel, 1806, p.20.

Other Friends did not assume that divine guidance was a final arbiter of the rules in the seventeenth century or at the time of any particular revision and that no change was thus justified after the seventeenth century. However, William Matthews was more perceptive than most of his contemporaries whose views appeared in print and he was also aware of the seriousness of the decline in the Society's numbers.

This mention of any existence of awareness of the Society's problems raises the first of the unanswered questions about the discipline, why did only isolated individuals really realise the true state of the Society? The consideration given to the discipline in the middle of the eighteenth century was based on the belief in the low state of the discipline among the existing body of Friends, not on a sensation of an actual decline in numbers. The decline in numbers did not receive proper and serious attention until the results of the Religious Census of 1851 were known and then within a decade fairly drastic action was taken. A partial explanation has been advanced elsewhere in this study, that it was quite possible to despise such a concern with numbers. This apart it is difficult to believe that Friends were so unimaginative as to overlook their problems; the business fortunes created by some families must have required imagination as well as honesty and application. But the journals and minutes consulted do not display any real evidence of concern about the state of the Society in terms of its numbers until late in the period. As has been shown, statistics of departures from the Society were not required by Yearly Meeting and the Six Weeks Meeting decided in 1825 not to receive further information about disownments.

This question and similarly that of the interaction between the religious and the economic life of Friends may remain unanswered, partly because of the lack of thorough studies of Quakerism in particular localities. General local histories have seldom devoted sufficient effort to Friends to do more than quote selected examples of apparent eccentricity and histories of particular meetings do not always make the best use of the material available. So, apart from generalisations about the liberalism of the Yorkshire Quarterly Meeting or the conservatism of Friends in the South-East of England, it is not at present possible to write anything meaningful about variations in local practice. More work on local records would almost certainly fill out the patchy statistical background to the study too. As the bibliography shows it has not been possible to consult local records in more than a couple of digests. No study of the discipline can claim to be complete without a full assessment of how it was put into practice locally. In the period covered by this study there were at different times between 100 and 150 monthly meetings, most of whose records are still extant. This study has set out to provide an account of the discipline chiefly at national level without which no adequate study could even be begun of local administration. But local studies, indicating how far national legislation represented a response to local needs and what practices were followed as a matter of form rather than conviction, might modify some of the conclusions of this study.

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