EMERSON AND QUAKERISM[1]

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Since Dr. Frederick B. Tolles' "Emerson and Quakerism"[2] appeared, the students of Emerson have come to be aware of the importance of the relation between Emerson and Quakerism for a thorough comprehension of Emerson's philosophy. Miss Mary C. Turpie has added another light upon this problem in her "A Quaker Source for Emerson's Sermon on the Lord's Supper,"[3] in which she satisfactorily explains how much in his sermon "The Lord's Supper" he relied upon a Quaker book. This is the sermon in which Emerson gave the reasons for which he objected to the eucharist observed in his church. But it was in 1938 that Dr. Tolles wrote his pamphlet, and it was in 1944 that Miss Turpie's paper appeared, and, although various new materials have come to be available to the students of Emerson to which neither of them referred, no noteworthy effort has been added to clarify further the

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[1] This is part of the first chapter of my paper *Emerson and Quakerism* (1960). The study is based mainly on Emerson's manuscripts and other primary sources, access to which was generously afforded to me during my stay abroad as a Fulbright research scholar in 1954–1957, especially at the Houghton Library at Harvard University. The whole paper is an attempt to throw a new light upon the secret of the spirit underlying all Emerson's literary activities, and to correct some mistaken ideas about him held by many scholars today, through a closer examination than has hitherto been made, of the relation between his philosophy and Quakerism. My heartfelt thanks are due to Dr. Howard H. Brinton, Dr. Robert E. Spiller, Dr. Frederick B. Tolles, the late Dr. Stephen E. Whicher and Dr. Kenneth W. Cameron, among others, for their kind guidance, and to the Emerson Association, which has kindly allowed me to quote from unpublished Emerson manuscripts. (September 1962.)

[2] *American Literature*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 1938.

[3] *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. XVII, No. 1, 1944.

relation between Emerson and Quakerism. There are several omissions in these two papers. For instance, Dr. Tolles, so far as his " Emerson and Quakerism " is concerned, gives little account of the relation between Emerson and Whittier, the Quaker poet, who knew each other so well and had so much to do with each other. Dr. Tolles gives no reason, to give another instance, why Emerson, who was deeply moved by Quakerism and some of his contemporary Quakers, did not even think of joining the Society of Friends. As for Miss Turpie's paper, she seems to have been satisfied simply with indicating the Quaker source of Emerson's sermon, " The Lord's Supper," explaining how " The sermon follows not only the general plan but also the details and the very style of presentation,"[1] in Volume Two of Clarkson's *Portraiture of Quakerism*. Strangely enough she seems to be emphasizing that his indebtedness to Quakerism is simply a matter of words, and that what made him resign the ministry and what formed his religious thought and principle has little to do with Quakerism. She writes as though his belief in the faith and practice of Quakers had not caused him to use even the same arguments regarding the eucharist as Quakers used. Referring very little to Dr. Tolles's thesis, she says that " Before June, 1832, his contact with the Quakers was limited to a brief conversation with Stabler . . . and some reading of Sewel's *History of the Quakers* in 1830."[2] But this comment is neither accurate nor appropriate, for, as we shall see, he read many more Quaker books than just one book, Sewel's *History*, and influence does not necessarily depend upon the quantity of reading or the length of the conversation or of contact.

In this paper, therefore, making use of many new materials of research, I will first ascertain the relation of Emerson with Quakerism—how it began and developed, and what kind of influence he received from Quakers and Quakerism . . . It may be convenient to consider this question first through the Quaker literature

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 96.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 100.

he read, and then through his contact with his Quaker contemporaries.

(1) The Quaker Literature that Emerson Read.

As Prof. Tolles says,[1] Emerson read Sewel's *History of the Quakers* early in 1830, and he read it again two years later, at the critical moment in his whole career, that is, in 1832, when he went to the White Mountains to meditate alone before deciding to resign from the ministry. He took with him two Quaker books: Sewel's *History of the Quakers* and Tuke's *Memoirs of the Life of Fox*. It is noteworthy in itself that he carried two Quaker books about with him at such an important time.

But there are many other important Quaker books he read. Apart from J. L. von Mosheina's *An Ecclesiastical History*, in which the Quakers are dealt with sympathetically, and which he borrowed from the Harvard library in 1823 and then again in 1831, this time from Boston Athenaeum, there remains in Boston Athenaeum the record of the books which he borrowed from the library, in which we find the following Quaker literature:

1830 Nov. 12	Penn, *Select Works* (1)	Nov. 19
,, ,, 19	,, (2)	Jan. 1
1832 June 11	Clarkson, *Portraiture of Quakerism* (1)	June 11
,, ,, ,,	Penn, *Select Works* (5)	Sep. 20
,, ,, ,,	Clarkson, *Portraiture of Quakerism* (2)	[July] 2
1835 Feb. 20	Penn, *Select Works* (1)	Mar. 15
,, ,, ,,	Barclay, *Apology for True Christian Divinity*	Mar. 15

Except the two volumes: Penn's *Select Works* (1) and Barclay's *Apology for True Christian Divinity*, which he read in 1835, we notice that he read these books to refer to Quakerism in the vital points of his sermons. For example, Sermon 98,[2] in which he

[1] Tolles: "Emerson and Quakerism," 148–150.

[2] Unpublished. Houghton MS. No. 311.

refers to William Penn in preaching non-violence, was preached first on Dec. 5, 1830, seventeen days after he had returned Penn's *Select Works* (1); Sermon 104, in which he preaches the direct communion with God through the Inner Light in every man and refers to Fox and Penn, was preached first on January 12, 1831, eleven days after he had returned Penn's *Select Works* (2). Sermon 161,[1] in which he preaches work and labor in one's own vocation with a single mind, and refers to Penn, was preached first on Sep. 2, 1832, eighteen days after he had returned Penn's *Select Works* (5). The Quaker faith in God Within, independent of all outward authorities, is the underlying spirit of all his sermons, although the tone of some of his early sermons until April 1828 reminds us of a somewhat gloomy evangelical old church. It must *not* be considered that it is only where he mentions some Quaker name or names that he reminds us of Quakerism. Already in Sermon 23,[2] first preached on Sep. 28, 1828, he begins to preach "God is within us," and this faith leads him throughout his later sermons. The sermon on "The Lord's Supper," in which he was to declare his resignation from the ministry, was based upon Clarkson's *Portraiture of Quakerism*. In his last sermon preached at the Second Church in Boston, which was in reality the farewell sermon, that is Sermon 164, preached on Oct. 21, 1832, he says that "where the mind has no low ends, and is satisfied of the rectitude of its purpose, it assumes no veil—it needs none, but goes to its object openly, and by the shortest way. He is transparent. His intention shines through all his words and deeds." After having said this, which is the essential Quaker principle, he refers to George Fox, and says, "It was well said by George Fox, Quaker, 'That which I am in words, I am the same in life.'" These words of Fox quoted by Emerson will indicate the state of Emerson himself, who carried out what he believed and said, by resigning from the ministry.

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[1] Unpublished. Houghton MS. No. 374.

[2] Unpublished. Houghton MS. No. 237.

Thus through his reading of Quaker literature and use of it alone, it is evident that he was under some strong influence of Quakerism and was sincerely responsive to it, in non-violence, the singleness and transparency of heart and deed, the direct communion with God through the Inner Light and the denial of any outward religious authority, etc. in his most formative years.

(2) Emerson's Contact with His Quaker Contemporaries.

I

So far as the written evidence is concerned, Emerson's contact with his Quaker contemporaries began with a meeting with Edward Stabler in 1827. In his journal he writes the impression of the first Quaker whom he met and talked with:

> It was said of Jesus that "he taught as one having authority," a distinction most palpable. There are a few men in every age, I suppose, who teach thus. Stabler[1] the Quaker, whom I saw on board the boat in Delaware Bay, was one.[2]

The Biblical words referring to Jesus, "as one having authority," tell us eloquently what a deep impression he received from the Quaker. Apart from this general impression of the person, Emerson seems to have received a very deep influence from Edward Stabler in relation to his faith in the ethical truth of "compensation"—"one of the watchwords of [his] spiritual world." Though the details are not known, Emerson writes in his journal on June 29, 1831, when "he was giving a good deal of thought to the

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[1] Although "Stubler" appears in the published *Journals*, Stabler must be correct as Dr. Tolles indicates. The mistake, however, is not made by the editors of the *Journals* as Dr. Tolles supposes, but by Emerson himself, for the MS. shows that Emerson was not sure of the spelling of the name of the Quaker. Emerson first writes "Sadler," "a" being clearly written, and then crossing it out, he puts clearly "Stubler" over it, "u" being also very clear. [Cf. Tolles: "Emerson and Quakerism," p. 146, Note 15.]

[2] *Journals*, II, 296.

notion of compensation ":

> Is not the law of compensation perfect? It holds as far as we can see. . . . I have nothing charactered in my brain that outlives this word Compensation. Old Stabler,[1] the Quaker in the Baltimore steamboat, said to me, that, if a man sacrificed his impurity, purity should be the price with which it would be paid; if a man gave up his hatred, he should be rewarded with love—'t is the same old melody and it sounds through the vast of being.[2]

It is true that with Emerson " The whole of what we know is a system of compensations,"[3] and that it is difficult to see when he was not aware of it; even in his very first sermon " Pray Without Ceasing " which was first preached in 1826, he emphasized compensation. It is true, therefore, that the idea of compensation could not have been implanted in him by Edward Stabler whom he met in 1827 for the first time, but it may not be too much to say that the words of Edward Stabler " as one having authority " about compensation were deeply encouraging. In discussing compensation in his revolutionary address at the Divinity School of Harvard, we find Edward Stabler's words remembered: " He who does a good deed is instantly ennobled. He who does a mean deed is by the action itself contracted. He who puts off impurity, thereby puts on purity."[4]

Apart from the problem of compensation, we notice an entry in his *Journals* about Edward Stabler's principle of preaching, which, as Emerson's sermons prove, Emerson was sharing:

> Stabler[5] said the difference between Brother Witherlee's preaching and his was this: Brother W. said, " If you do not become good you shall be whipt," and himself said, " If you will become good, you shall not be whipt."[6]

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[1] Cf. The above note, p. 67. 1.
[2] *Journals*, II, 389. Cf. Tolles: " Emerson and Quakerism," 148.
[3] *Ibid.*, 72. (January?, 1826.)
[4] *Works*, I, 122. Cf. Tolles: " Emerson and Quakerism," 148.
[5] Here also Emerson spells " Stubler."
[6] *Journals*, III, 228. (November 19, 1833.)

Thus in the entry of May 19, 1836, we find him remembering Edward Stabler as one of those "who have ministered to my highest wants."[1]

According to his biographies, letters and journals, there were not a few Quakers whom he came to be acquainted with in his lifetime, both American and British. He came to know many Quakers especially at New Bedford in 1834, where he went to preach for some time, in accordance with the request of "his kinsman Orville Dewey, quitting his pastorate there,"[2] though Emerson could not take his place permanently for the same reason for which he resigned the ministry at the Second Church in Boston.[3] Dr. Rusk says that "the episode of his irregular pastorate at New Bedford was important only because it brought Emerson into closer contact with the Quakers or ex-Quakers there."[4]

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But of all Emerson's Quaker friends, the one who exercised the greatest influence upon him seems to have been Mary Rotch at New Bedford, whom, according to J. E. Cabot, Emerson "always remembered with high honor."[5] W. Hale White says in his "What Mr. Emerson Owed to Bedfordshire"[6]:

> When Mr. Emerson was last in this country [England], I asked him who were his chief friends in America. He replied, "I find many among the Quakers. I know one simple old lady in particular [meaning Mary Rotch] whom I especially honour. She said to me, 'I cannot think what you find in me which is worth notice.' Ah," continued Emerson, "if she had said yea, and the whole world had thundered in her ear nay, she would still have said yea."

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[1] *Journals*, IV, 51. (May 19, 1836.)

[2] Rusk: *Emerson*, 199.

[3] Cf. Cabot: *Memoir*, 215.

[4] Rusk: *Emerson*, 199.

[5] Cabot: *Memoir*, 215.

[6] *Athenaeum* No. 2846, May 13, 1882, pp. 602–3. Cf. Tolles: "Emerson and Quakerism," 158.

I discovered that in the MS. journal on March 15, 1834, at New Bedford, Emerson records Mary Rotch's words in the following manner:

> Mary Rotch
> "I found though the sympathy of friends was most pleasant, yet the little faith I had, tho' but a grain of mustard seed, nothing could shake, and I found that nothing could confirm it."[1]

There is no doubt that these words were remembered in his reply to W. Hale White's question.

She was one of the two Quakers who were "removed from the place of Elders for uniting in the prayers of Mary Newhall,"[2] a progressive Quaker minister, at the Friends Meeting at New Bedford when there was a split in the meeting in 1824, as a result of which, "the liberal party . . . seceded in a body, joining the Unitarian Church."[3] Emerson read the record of the debates of the Meeting. He was so interested in it, especially that part which shows the nature of the religious ideas of the progressive Quakers in those days, that he quoted it in his journal.

> New Bedford, *March* 21.
> I have been much interested lately in the MS. Record of the debates in the Quaker Monthly Meetings here in 1823, when Elizabeth Roman and Mary Rotch were proposed to be removed from the place of Elders for uniting in the prayers of Mary Newhall. I must quote a sentence or two from two of these speakers. "February, 1823: M. N. rose in the meeting and began with, 'As the stream does not rise higher than the fountain,' etc.; spoke of the Mosaic dispensation in which the performance of certain rituals constituted the required religion; the more spiritual dispensation of our Saviour; of the advent of Christ; and the yet more inward and spiritual dispensation of the present day. These dispensations she compared to the pro-

[1] An unpublished entry written in pencil. This is immediately followed by the published entry "Nature tells everything . . ." (*Journals*, III, 265.)

[2] *Journals*, III, 265. (March 21, 1834.)

[3] Tolles: "Emerson and Quakerism," 157.

gressive stages of the human heart in the work of religion, from loving our neighbor as ourselves to loving our enemies, and lastly arriving at that state of humility when self would be totally abandoned and we could only say, Lord be merciful to me a sinner."[1]

Referring to this quotation, Prof. Tolles gives two other quotations, one from *Nature* (1836) and the other from a lecture on "War" (1838), which both describe Emerson's idea of the development of the human spirit, and says, "There can be little doubt that this conception of successive stages [of spiritual development], leading up to complete humility and submission, was suggested by the speech of Mary Newhall which he read in the Quaker records."[2] But this is a mistake, because this idea had been held by Emerson long before he read the record. We see the evidence in many of his unpublished sermons, such as Sermon 96, "Doing the Will of God"[3] (first preached on November 28, 1830); Sermon 114, "Trust in the Lord"[4] (first preached on April 24, 1831); Sermon 152, "The God of the Living"[5] (first preached on April 22, 1832); Sermon 160, "The Increasing Knowledge of God"[6] (first preached September 2, 1832), etc. For instance, in Sermon 96, "Doing the Will of God," he says:

> "*Thy Will be done* is the Constitution of the Spiritual World. It is the desire of angels. It is the love and the happiness of heaven. . . . The time shall come sooner or later in the history of every soul when the veil shall be torn from this truth that the happiness of all is involved in the voluntary performance of God's Will and who resists it resists himself and man and God. And blessed is he who knows this in season."

Prof. Tolles indicates two features of Mary Rotch's faith as having

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[1] *Journals*, III, 265–266. (1834)
[2] Tolles: "Emerson and Quakerism," 160.
[3] Unpublished. Houghton MS. No. 309.
[4] Unpublished. Houghton MS. No. 327.
[5] Unpublished. Houghton MS. No. 365.
[6] Unpublished. Houghton MS. No. 373.

had much to do with the development of Emerson's thought. The first is "her extreme doctrine of obedience [to the Inward Guidance],"[1] which we have referred to above, and the second is her idea of immortality. There is no denying, as Prof. Tolles says, that these had a great deal to do with his spiritual development. But we should be aware that in both features of her faith, her influence upon Emerson was not so much in opening his eyes to a new truth as in confirming and adding fervor to the faith which he had already held before he met her. We must discuss this point further, because it leads to the consideration of self-respect, which is the core of his thought.

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How Emerson felt and responded to his discovery of the first feature of her faith may be best seen in the following entry in his journal on February 12, 1834, at New Bedford, through which we may be able to realize the likeness of the two souls:

> Pleasantly mingled with my sad thoughts the sublime religion of Miss Rotch yesterday. She was much disciplined, she said, in the years of Quaker dissension, and driven inward, driven home, to find an anchor, until she learned to have *no choice*, to acquiesce without understanding the reason when she found an obstruction to any particular course of acting. She objected to having this spiritual direction called an impression, or an intimation, or an oracle. It was none of them. It was so simple it could hardly be spoken of. It was long, long, before she could attain to anything satisfactory. She was in a state of great dreariness, but she had a friend, a woman, now deceased, who used to advise her to dwell patiently with this dreariness and absence, in the confidence that it was necessary to the sweeping away of all her dependence upon traditions, and that she would finally attain to something better. And when she attained a better state of mind, its beginnings were very, very small. And now it is not anything to speak of. She designed to go to England with Mr. and

[1] Tolles: "Emerson and Quakerism," 161.

Mrs. Farrar, and the plan was very pleasant, and she was making her preparations, and the time was fixed, when she conceived a reluctance to go for which she could not see any reason, but which continued; and she therefore suspended her purpose, and suffered them to depart without her. She said she had seen reason to think it was best for her to have staid [*sic*] at home. But in obeying it, she never felt it of any importance that she should know now or at any time what the reasons were. But she should feel that it was presumption to press through this reluctance and choose for herself. I said it was not so much any particular power as a *healthful state* of the mind; to which she assented cordially. I said, it must produce a sublime tranquillity in view of the future—this assurance of higher direction; and she assented.[1]

As the footnote to this entry indicates,[2] "Emerson gives this doctrine of the Quakers" in the essay "Greatness." This essay was written about 1868, and in this essay Emerson makes it clear that his central principle of life, "self-respect" or "self-reliance," depends upon his complete obedience to the divine guidance of the Inner Light, which he explains explicitly as the element of the faith of the Quakers." He says:

If we should ask ourselves what is this self-respect it would carry us to the highest problems. It is our practical perception of the Deity in man. It has its deep foundations in religion. If you have ever known a good mind among the Quakers, you will have found *that* is the element of their faith. As they express it, it might be thus: "I do not pretend to any commandment or large revelation, but if at any time I form some plan, propose a journey or a course of conduct, I perhaps find a silent obstacle in my mind that I cannot account for. Very well,—I let it lie, thinking it may pass away, but if it do not pass away I yield to it, obey it. You ask me to describe it. I cannot describe it. It is not an oracle, nor an angel, nor a dream, nor a law; it is too simple to be described, it is but a grain of mustard-seed, but such as it is, it is something which the contradiction of all

[1] *Journals*, III, 258–259.

[2] *Ibid.*, 259.

> mankind could not shake, and which the consent of all mankind could not confirm."[1]

One notices that this depends almost literally upon Mary Rotch's own words, which he had heard thirty-four years before. The note to this quotation in " Greatness " confirms it, saying: " These were the words of Miss Mary Rotch of New Bedford, and they made deep impression on Mr. Emerson, when in 1834 he was invited to preach for a time in that city."

As Prof. Tolles says, " this doctrine [of Mary Rotch] made a lasting impression upon Emerson." To illustrate this Prof. Tolles refers to an entry in Emerson's *Journals*, recalling Mary Rotch's words, eight years later (1842)[2]; " Worship " in *The Conduct of Life* (1860); and to " The Sovereignty of Ethics " (1878) in *Lectures and Biographical Sketches*, and suggests that 'The first explicit appearance of this doctrine in his published writings (it is present, of course, by implication in " Self-Reliance ") is to be found in " Spiritual Laws " in his first volume of essays,'[3] quoting:

> We need only obey. There is guidance for each of us, and by lowly listening we shall hear the right word. . . .
>
> I say, *do not choose;* but that is a figure of speech by which I would distinguish what is commonly called *choice* among men, and which is a partial act, the choice of the hands, of the eyes, of the appetites, and not a whole act of the man.[4]

But as to the idea which Prof. Tolles suggests, that 'Later on, as this teaching [of Mary Rotch] sank deeper into his consciousness, he saw it as the necessary bridge between self-reliance and the Over-Soul, and in the essay on " Worship " in *The Conduct of Life* [1860] it has become inextricably woven into the fabric of his thought,'[5] or that 'As he gew older, the doctrine of complete

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[1] *Works*, VIII, 309–310.

[2] *Journals*, VI, 280. (October ?, 1842)

[3] Tolles: " Emerson and Quakerism," 162.

[4] *Works*, I, 139–140.

[5] Tolles: " Emerson and Quakerism," 162.

acquiescence, which Mary Rotch had arrived at only after a long period of self-communion and inward struggle, became more and more acceptable to him as rule of life,'[1] there seems to be room for discussion. It is not clear what years Prof. Tolles actually means by 'Later on' or 'As he grew older,' but it seems to me that we cannot say that Emerson came to be convinced of Mary Rotch's principle of life and "saw it as the necessary bridge between self-reliance and the Over-Soul," only in his later years, in his fifties or sixties.[2] Apart from "Self-Reliance" and "Spiritual Laws" in *Essays, First Series* (1841), we have ample evidence that he had had the same belief in a voluntary obedience to the Divine Guidance as the basis of real self-reliance. In "The Over-Soul" (*Essays, First Series*, 1841) Emerson says,

> In the presence of law to his mind he is overflowed with a reliance so universal that it sweeps away all cherished hopes and the most stable projects of mortal condition in its flood. He believes that he cannot escape from his good. The things that are really for thee gravitate to thee. . . . And this because the heart in thee is the heart of all.[3]

Emerson's self-reliance always means God-reliance, and it is inconceivable that he ever meant it otherwise in his use of the word in explaining his philosophy of life. In Sermon 90: "Trust Yourself" (first preached December 3, 1830), for example, he says:

> It is the effect of religion to produce a higher self-respect, a greater confidence in what God has done for each of our minds than is commonly felt among men. It seems to me, brethren, that a great calamity with which men are contending after all the preaching of Christianity is their distrust of themselves. . . .[4]

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[1] *Ibid.*, 163.

[2] In "The Sovereignty of Ethics" Emerson writes, "I have never seen, until now, that . . .," (*Works*, X, 197.) but we should notice that this "I" does not mean Emerson in his seventies when this essay was published, for that "I" is the person to whom Emerson says: "Have you said to yourself ever: 'I abdicate all choice . . .'?"

[3] *Works*, II, 293–294.

[4] *Young Emerson Speaks*, 105.

> In listening more intently to our own soul we are not becoming in the ordinary sense more selfish, but departing farther from what is low and falling back upon truth and upon God. For the whole value of the soul depends on the fact that it contains a divine principle, that it is a house of God, and the voice of the eternal inhabitant may always be heard within it.[1]

Again, in Sermon 123: "The Limits of Self-Reliance"[2] (first preached July 31, 1831), he says;

> To take on trust certain facts is a dead faith. A trust in yourself is the height not of pride but of piety, an unwillingness to learn of any but God himself. Let a man therefore prove all things, and hold fast that which is good. Let him not use any duplicity with himself. Let him never fear to reject that view of God which his heart tells him is wrong believing that it is God in his heart who bears witness to Himself.

Thus the point is that we should be aware that before he met Mary Rotch, he had already had the same belief. Consider this a moment. When Mary Rotch described her principle of life, the complete obedience to the Inward Guidance, could anyone, without having shared the same belief not only in theory but also in practice, intuitively say on hearing it, that "it was not so much any particular power as a *healthful state of the mind*" and that "it must produce a sublime tranquillity in view of the future—this assurance of higher direction." And did Mary Rotch assent "cordially" without intuitively feeling that Emerson *knew* it?

But there is no doubt that this faith of his was deeply confirmed by Quakerism. In a letter to Benjamin Peter Hunt in 1835, he says:

> You used to talk of Self-Reverence. That word indeed contains the whole of Philosophy and the whole of Religion. I would gladly know how profoundly you have pierced it. Did you ever meet a *wise Quaker?*

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[1] *Ibid.*, 110.

[2] Unpublished. Houghton MS. No. 336.

> They are few, but a sublime class of speculators. They have been perhaps the most explicit teachers of the highest article to which human faith soars the strict union of the willing soul to God and so the souls access at all times to a verdict upon every question which the opinion of all mankind cannot shake and which the opinion of all mankind cannot confirm. (*sic*)[1]

So far as I know, Emerson uses more or less the same most emphatic expression " the opinion of all mankind (or the whole world) cannot shake and . . . the opinion of all mankind cannot confirm . . . " in at least four different writings[2] about Quakers, the source of which being the unpublished entry explicitly described as Mary Rotch's words, which I have quoted on page 55 of this book. In the quotation Mary Rotch simply says " nothing could shake, and . . . nothing could confirm it." The emphatic expression of " the opinion of all mankind . . . " or " the whole world . . . " which he preferred to " nothing . . . " might convey Emerson's own deep impression at her words.

In " Self-Reliance," Emerson says, " They fancy that I choose to see this or that thing. But perception is not whimsical, but fatal . . . my perception . . . is as much a fact as the sun."[3]

To this expression about " no-choice " E. W. Emerson gives the following note:

> He went alone to the woods to *listen*. Perhaps his early friends among the Quakers at New Bedford had confirmed this tendency in him to wait until the Spirit spoke. He felt himself the mere ambassador charged to faithfully deliver the message committed to him. This must be its own evidence and it was not for him to argue about it.[4]

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[1] *Letters*, I, 433.

[2] (1) W. Hale White: " What Mr. Emerson Owed to Bedfordshire " (*Athenaeum*, No. 2846, May 13, 1882, pp. 602–3.)

(2) " Greatness," *Letters and Social Aims*, 309–310.

(3) *Letters*, I, 432–433.

(4) *Early Lectures*, 172.

[3] *Works*, II, 65.

[4] *Ibid.*, 393.

The second point on which Emerson owed to Mary Rotch is his idea of immortality. Referring to Emerson's writing on immortality in his journal (on Dec. 20, 1834), Prof. Tolles says that "his ideas on the subject of immortality bear the impress of her ripe wisdom."[1] Emerson says in the journal:

> My Reason is well enough convinced of its immortality. It knows itself immortal. But it cannot persuade its down-looking brother, the Understanding, of the same. That fears for the cord that ties them, lest it break. Hence Miss Rotch affirms undoubtedly, "I shall live forever," and, on the other hand, does not much believe in her retaining Personality.[2]

To this Prof. Tolles says, "This, essentially, was the final position which he reached in his essay on "Immortality," and gives the following quotation from the essay to prove it:

> I confess that everything connected with our personality fails. Nature never spares the individual; we are always balked of a complete success; no prosperity is promised to our self-esteem. We have our indemnity only in the moral and intellectual reality to which we aspire. That is immortal, and we only through that.[3]

But, again, this "position" of Emerson in relation to immortality was as old as his conception of God Within. With Emerson the idea of immortality or salvation is inseparable from the idea of the Divine Guidance within us our mortal selves. We might say that all the sermons of Emerson are concerned with this. For instance, in Sermon 163: "Indifference to Death"[4] (first preached on September 16, 1832), he says:

> It seems to have been the design of Christ to teach us that duration was not life, that our immortality did not consist in continuing to

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[1] Tolles: "Emerson and Quakerism," 163.

[2] *Journals*, III, 398–399.

[3] *Works*, VIII, 342–343.

[4] Unpublished. Houghton MS. No. 376.

> breathe, but in disclosing that part of man which has nothing to do with decay. . . . Heaven is not in the sky, nor in the opening of its gates to be announced by trumpets of archangels and thunders of melody. It is where you live and in what you say and do—in homely duties, trivial particulars. . . . Why should we dread to die if in our lives we are faithful to our duties? and if not, we should dread to live. Let us apply ourselves to God; let us lay ourselves in the lap of his love who is the Source of life and feel assured that we can never perish.

Thus it may go without saying that Emerson had already been enjoying the same religion in reality as that of Mary Rotch before he met her.

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But this does not mean to prove that Emerson appreciated Mary Rotch's faith any the less. On the contrary, we might say that it was because he had been well prepared that what she said or did appealed to his heart so strongly, and that, without the inspiring contact with Mary Rotch, he might not have attained that purity and fervour of his faith which he did. Everything she said or did seems to have given him a moving and lasting impression. For an instance of her conduct that impressed him, we may give an anecdote which Emerson witnessed, which showed Mary Rotch's principle of guiding children based upon her faith in the Divine Guidance within us all.

> A little girl had asked Miss Rotch if she might do something. Miss Rotch asked her, "What does the voice in thee say?" The child disappeared, and presently returned to announce that "the little voice says no." "That," said Emerson, "starts the tears to one's eyes."[1]

This was not a transient, sentimental impression. That principle

[1] Conway: *Emerson at Home and Abroad*, 69. Cf. Tolles: "Emerson and Quakerism," 160–161.

of hers influenced Emerson's principle of the education of his own children. In writing to his brother William Emerson in 1845, when he had three children, he says:

> . . . We must arm them with as much good sense as we can, and throw them habitually on themselves for a moral verdict. I remember Mary Rotch of New Bedford told me, that, in her childhood, her father and mother never told her to do this or to avoid that, but only, that there was one with her who would tell her, whilst she might very easily deceive them.[1]

On March 22, 1847, after Emerson "had lectured in New Bedford, and no doubt met there some of his Quaker friends,"[2] Mary Rotch wrote to Emerson a letter, "in which she discusses Griswold's comment on Emerson's idea of sinking God in man and wants to know whether Griswold is correct."[3] To this Emerson wrote the following letter, in which we shall be able to feel the reality of the relation of the two mutually inspiring great souls more accurately. It was by no means a teacher-to-student relation, but a Friend-to-Friend relation. Just like two Quakers they were enjoying the unity of faith in diversity, each independent of the other, and yet each admiring and moving the other in the depth of their hearts.

> Concord, March 28, 1847.
>
> MY DEAR FRIEND,—It was a great pleasure to hear from you, if only by a question in philosophy. And the terrors of treading that difficult and quaking ground shall not hinder me from writing to you. I am quite sure, however, that I never said any of those fine things which you seem to have learned about me from Mr. Griswold, and I think it would be but fair, as he deduces them, that he should explain them, and, if he can, show that they hold. No, . . . I never willingly say anything concerning "God" in cold blood, though I think we all have very just insights when we are "in the mount," as our fa-

[1] *Letters*, III, 277.

[2] J. E. Cabot: *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 498.

[3] See Rusk's note, *Letters*, III, 388–389.

thers used to say. In conversation sometimes, or to humility and temperance, the cloud will break away to show at least the direction of the rays of Absolute Being, and we see the truth that lies in every affirmation men have made concerning it, and, at the same time, the cramping partiality of their speech. For the science of God our language is unexpressive and merely prattle: . . .

Personality, too, and impersonality, might each be affirmed of Absolute Being; and what may not be affirmed of it, in our own mind? And when we have heaped a mountain of speeches, we have still to begin again, having nowise expressed the simple unalterable fact.

So I will not turn schoolman today, but prefer to wait a thousand years before I undertake that definition which literature has waited for so long already. Do not imagine that the old venerable thought has lost any of its awful attraction for me.

I should very heartily—shall I say, *tremulously*,—think and speak with you on our experiences or gleams of what is so grand and absorbing; and I never forget the statements, so interesting to me, you gave me many years ago of your faith and that of your friends. Are we not wonderful creatures to whom such entertainments and passions and hopes are afforded?

Yours with respect and affection,
R. W. Emerson.[1]

There were a number of other Quakers by whom he was deeply impressed, and they are all very interesting to a student of Emerson, but in the present paper suffice it to say that Mary Rotch was the best example of those Quakers who had a great deal to do with Emerson's religious thought and career. Essentially he was so much of a Quaker that, as a matter of fact he confessed, when Emerson was asked by his cousin, the Rev. David Greene Haskins how he would define his religious position, " with greater deliberateness and longer pauses between his words than usual, ' I am more of a Quaker than anything else. I believe in the " still small voice " and that voice is Christ within us.' This was probably

[1] Cabot: *Memoir*, 498–500.

in the year 1839."[1]

And Emerson's view of Quakers in general may be best summarized in the following quotation from his lecture on "Natural Religion" delivered on April 4, 1869:

> I have sometimes thought and indeed I always do think, that the sect of the Quakers in their best representatives appear to me to have come nearer to the sublime history and genius of Christ than any other of the sects.[2]

We should notice that as late as in 1869 he says "indeed I always do think . . ."! Probably no better praise might be offered to Quakers by anybody than this, except through his real life of Quakerism, which, too, Emerson lived in reality, except for one subtle point. But unfortunately space does not permit any further discussion here.

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[1] David Greene Haskins: *Ralph Waldo Emerson: His Maternal Ancestors, with Some Reminiscences of Him*, Boston, 1887, p. 118. Cf. *Works*, VIII, 431; E. W. Emerson: *Emerson in Concord*, 48.

[2] *Uncollected Lectures by Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Edited by Clarence Gohdes, New York, William Edwin Rudge, 1932), p. 57.