

Rufus Jones 1863-1948

Rufus Jones was a highly influential American Quaker: a religious leader, writer, magazine editor, philosopher, professor, and activist. He was one of the founders of the American Friends Service Committee and an instigator of the Quäkerspeisung feeding program after the First World War. His influence enabled the two divisions of American Quakerism, which split in the mid 19th Century, to reunite after his death. Often described as a Quaker mystic, he was able to reconcile science and modern, liberal thinking with his Quakerism. He delivered the first Swarthmore Lecture in London in 1908, and is the only person ever to have given two, the second being in 1920.

Jones was born in Maine, USA, to an old Quaker family. His uncle and aunt, Eli and Sybil Jones, established Friends Schools in Lebanon (then part of Syria) and Palestine. He attended the Providence Friends School in Rhode Island and Haverford College in Pennsylvania and, having obtained an MA from Harvard, returned to Haverford as a professor of Psychology and Philosophy.

From 1893 to 1912 he was the editor of the *Friends' Review* (later called *The American Friend*); from this position he tried unsuccessfully to unite the divided body of Quakers. In 1901 Jones received another M. A., from Harvard. He also began teaching philosophy and psychology at Haverford in 1893 and continued to do so until retiring in 1934. From 1898 to 1936 he served on the board of trustees of Bryn Mawr College.

Having learnt in the study of natural science that “the world was not made in six days and that man did not begin with Adam,” far from being troubled by the scientific evidence, he found, “his religious faith all the more secure when it marched with facts.”

The essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson introduced Jones to the idea of George Fox as “one of a great historical succession of mystics.” This revelation changed Jones’s conception of his family’s religion. From the writings of the early Quakers, Jones crystalized the concept of the ‘inner light,’ an idea central in particular to modern liberal Quakerism. “The Inner Light is the doctrine that there is something Divine,

‘Something of God’ in the human soul," he wrote. This inner light was something integral to the human condition, irrespective of a person’s religious conviction.

At this time in history, the influence of evangelicalism was strong in the United States, with such events as tent meetings and the emphasis on the use of powerful pastors to “save” the sinners. This pull did influence Quakerism.

Jones’ mysticism was always strongly coupled with a sense of responsibility towards the world at large. In 1904, he published *Social Law in the Spiritual World*. In it, he made clear that the Quaker concept of “listening to the Spirit, being guided by the Inner Light of Christ” must be coupled with “call of duty ... an appeal to help build a better world for unborn generations... Keep your feet on the ground and get something done ... a true and noble life must move on both these legs and not a single one of them alone.”

He distinguished between negating or negative mysticism (making contact with an impersonal force) and affirming or affirmative mysticism (making contact with a personal being). He upheld that God is a personal being with whom human beings could interact. He wrote in *The Trail of Life in the Middle Years*, "The essential characteristic of [mysticism] is the attainment of a personal conviction by an individual that the human spirit and the divine Spirit have met, have found each other, and are in mutual and reciprocal correspondence as spirit with Spirit." He also exerted a major influence on the life and work of theologian Howard Thurman, who studied with him in 1929-30.

In 1917, when the United States entered the First World War, he and Henry Cadbury established the American Friends Service Committee, to provide ways for young conscientious objectors to serve without joining the military. They set up courses for COs, training them to work with groups like the Friends Ambulance Unit in Europe. At the end of the war, Jones steered the AFSC towards relief work and was instrumental in organizing the *Quäkerspeisung*, the large scale feeding effort that saved millions in Germany from starvation.

In 1927, Jones travelled to Asia. He met Gandhi and visited the birthplace of the Buddha, and went on an extended lecture tour in China. Shortly after, Jones addressed the World Missionary Conference in Jerusalem, calling on them be open to positive influences from other world religions, “gladly recognizing the good they contain.”

Following the attacks on Jews on Kristallnacht in 1938, he went to Germany with two other Quakers and met with Reinhard Heydrich, later one of the architects of Hitler's 'Final Solution,' to plead with him for better treatment for the Jews. Jones believed that it was in part Heydrich's awareness of their work with the Quäkerspeisung that led to their appeal being heard politely. "The promise made to us was kept," he wrote after the war, "and the door was opened for the extensive relief which followed our visit, including the emigration of many Jews."

In 1947, Jones represented the AFSC in Stockholm when the Quakers were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Throughout his life, Jones sought to heal the divide between the two branches of American Quakerism that resulted from the split in the mid 19th Century. The founding of the AFSC was one of the first ventures in which both branches worked together. His patient efforts are credited with bringing about the reconciliation, which was finally achieved in the mid 1950s, a few years after his death.

Selected Quotes

"The reason we can hope to find God is that He is here, engaged all the time in finding us."

"No one, I am sure, will suppose that I think that a religious experience is a substitute for a sound economic, or social, or financial, or political solution of the world's troubles. I only mean that we must deepen the quality of life and enlarge our faith in the scope of human destinies before any of the fine schemes on hand will work."

"To discover a truth involves the apostolic task of going out and doing it." "What needs to grow clear in the minds of all who are responsible for the training of youth, whether within or entirely outside the Church, is the fact that all genuine education must have a spiritual quality to it, - that is, it must have to do with the formation of personality, the building of character, the enlargement of life, the transmission of the supreme experiences of the race, and with setting free the higher potential powers of the individual."

"The first stage of 'entry into life' for Jesus is learning to love. To start executing a 'social program' without the creative and motive power of a great love behind it is

like building a factory and forgetting to attach the machinery to any driving energy that would turn the wheels.”

"The mystic is a person possessed of conviction, which for him amounts to an experience, that he has come upon the goal of life, that he has come back to the spiritual Source of his being....that he has in very truth found God."

Bibliography

- *Practical Christianity*, 1899. (Full text available at the Digital Quaker Collection.)
- *Eli and Sybil Jones: Their Life and Work*, 1899
- *Social law in the spiritual world; studies in human and divine inter-relationship*, 1904. (Full text available at the Digital Quaker Collection.)
- *The double search: studies in atonement and prayer*, 1906. (Full text available at the Digital Quaker Collection.)
- *The Abundant Life*, 1908.
- *Studies in Mystical Religion*, 1909.
- *The Quakers in the American Colonies*, 1911
- *The Luminous Trail*
- *New Eyes for Invisibles*
- *The Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, 1914.
- *The Inner Life*, 1916.
- *A Service of Love in War Time: American Friends Relief Work in Europe, 1917-1919*, 1920.
- *The Remnant*, 1920
- *The Later Periods of Quakerism*, 1921
- *Spiritual Energies in Daily Life*, 1922.
- *The Church's Debt to Heretics*, 1924?.
- *The Faith and Practice of the Quakers*, 1927.
- *The Trail of Life in College*, 1929.
- *Some Exponents of Mystical Religion*, 1930.
- *Pathways to the Reality of God*, 1931.
- *The Testimony of the Soul*, 1936.
- *The Eternal Gospel*, 1938.
- *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 1939.
- *Spirit in Man*, 1941
- *A Small-Town Boy*, 1941

- "Mystical Experience" in *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1942.
- *The Radiant Life*, 1944.
- *A Call to what is Vital*, 1948.
- [American philosophy](#)
- [List of American philosophers](#)

Rufus M. Jones also authored "SOME PROBLEMS OF LIFE" Copyright MCMXXXVII. Set up, Electrotyped, Printed, and Bound By The Parthenon Press at Nashville Tennessee, U. S. A. Later reprinted by Cokesbury. Don J. Hewett, Pastor ret.

Further reading

- Bernet, Claus: "Rufus Jones (1863-1948). Life and Bibliography of an American Scholar, Writer, and Social Activist. With a Foreword by Douglas Gwyn", New York 2009, ISBN 978-3-631-58930-4
- Endy, Melvin B.: "The Interpretation of Quakerism. Rufus Jones and His Critics", in: *Quaker History. The Bulletin of Friends' Historical Association*, 62, 1, 1981, 3-21
- Hedstrom, Matthews: "Rufus Jones and Mysticism for the Masses", in: *Cross Currents*, Summer 2004.
- Kent, Stephen: Psychological and Mystical Interpretations of Early Quakerism. William James and Rufus Jones. In: *Religion. A Journal of Religion and Religions*, 17, 1987, 251-274.
- Vining, Elizabeth Gray: *Friend of Life*. Philadelphia 1958. London 1959.

External links[edit]

- [Works by Rufus Matthew Jones](#) at Project Gutenberg
- [Works by or about Rufus Jones](#) at Internet Archive
- *Rufus Jones : A Luminous Life* (2001) Documentary on YouTube
- Profile at *Quakers in the World*
- Profile at *Christian Mystics*

Once each month in the middle of the week we had "monthly meeting" for business affairs. There came first a meeting for worship of the usual type, only larger than common. . . .

The Sense of the Meeting

[FROM *A Boy's Religion from Memory*]

RUFUS M. JONES

"If Friends' minds are easy, I apprehend it may now be a suitable time to lower the shutters and proceed to the business of the meeting." As the venerable elder at the head of the meeting spoke these words, slowly and solemnly, he raised his broad-brim and put it on his head with considerable dignity, and we children knew that the "first meeting" was over. In these modern days a dinner is served "between the meetings," but in my boyhood days no such thing ever happened. Not even the hungry boy got a bite until the affairs of the Church were properly settled. Creak, creak, creak—we heard the middle "shutters" coming down from above to divide the men from the women. I could never imagine how it was done! No human instrument was ever anywhere visible. The ancient elders spoke, and lo, the wonder worked! Later, when the investigating age was upon me, I crawled up a ladder into the loft and solved the mystery; but in the early period it seemed as though the same spirit which "moved" the solemn man to put on his hat was also in the descending shutters which no visible hand touched!

I used always to sit on the "men's side," but I sat close up by the partition, and ever and anon I caught the notes of a woman's voice breaking in upon our "business" with a strong

outpouring of prayer or the earnest word of counsel, for the women had less "business" than the men, and hence "religious exercises" filtered all through their "second meeting." It was somewhat so on the men's side, though to a less extent. But even here it was impossible to draw any line between "business" and "religious exercise." A solemn religious tinge colored everything, even the driest items of business, and I believe the spiritual tide often rose higher in the "second meeting" than in the first—particularly if there was a visiting minister present.

By the "world's" methods, all our business could have been transacted in twenty minutes. We often spent two hours at it, because every affair had to be soaked in a spiritual atmosphere until the dew of religion settled on it! Above, in the "high seats," sat two men at a table fastened by hinges to the minister's rail. This table was swung up and held by a perpendicular stick beneath. On it lay the old record-book, a copy of the "discipline," and papers of all sorts. The "clerk," the main man of the two at the desk, was another one of those marvelous beings who seemed to me to know everything by means of something unseen working inside him! How could he tell what "Friends" wanted done?—and yet he always knew. No votes were cast. Everybody said something in his own peculiar way. A moment of silence would come, and the clerk would rise and say: "It appears that it is the sense of the meeting," to do thus and so. Spontaneously from all parts of the house would come from variously pitched voices: "I unite with that," "So do I," "That is my mind," "I should be easy to have it so." And so we passed to the next subject.

Occasionally there would be a Friend who had "a stop in his mind," or who "didn't feel easy" to have things go as the rest believed they should go. If he was a "weighty Friend," whose judgment had been proved through a long past, his "stop" would effectually settle the matter; but if he was a persistent and somewhat cantankerous objector, the clerk would quietly announce that the "weight of the meeting" seemed decidedly favorable to action.

The longest stretch of business was always over the "queries." These were original inventions of the Quaker, and

they have no parallel in any other religious body. Like many other things, the "queries," with their carefully rendered answers, have undergone a change. They take a less important place now, and the boy of today may not tell of them when he gives his impressions to the next generation. But in my day they were still alive, and the meeting took them seriously enough.

"Are all meetings regularly held?" "Are Friends careful to observe the hour?" "Do Friends keep from all unbecoming behavior therein?" "Are tale-bearing and detraction guarded against?" "Do Friends pay their bills, settle their accounts, and live within the bounds of their circumstances?" "Do they read the Holy Scriptures in their families, and bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?" "If differences arise, are measures taken to end them speedily?" "Is the discipline administered timely and impartially?"

Each separate meeting sent its special set of answers for this public confessional. "Love and unity are not so well maintained as we could wish." "Some Friends do not observe the hour." "Mostly kept from unbecoming behavior, though a few cases of sleeping in meeting have been observed." "Friends generally bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." I had no idea what that meant, though I supposed it meant "to be good."

After the answers were read, we listened to grave preachments on these various lines which "were queried after," as the phrase used to run. What got said on these occasions was not very juicy food for a boy, though the standard of life which was set up in these times of examination did, after all, have a silent influence which left a good deposit behind.

There were two transactions which were always exciting, and I used each time to live in hope that they would come off. One was "the declaration of intentions of marriage." When such an event occurred the man and woman came in and sat down together, facing the meeting in the completest possible hush. It was an ordeal which made the couple hesitate to rush into marriage until they felt pretty sure that the match was made in heaven. Solemnly they rose, with the parents standing on each side, and informed us that they purposed taking each other

in marriage, and the parents announced their consent. The meeting "united," and permission was given "to proceed." The marriage itself came off at an even more solemn meeting, when the man and woman took each other "until death should separate." I remember one of these occasions, when the frightened groom took the bride "to be his husband," which made the meeting less solemn than usual.

The other interesting event was the liberation of ministers for religious service "in other parts." If the minister was a woman Friend, as often happened in our meeting, she came in from the otherside with "a companion." They walked up the aisle and sat down with bowed heads. Slowly the bonnet strings were untied, the bonnet handed to the companion, and the ministering woman rose to say that for a long time the Lord had been calling her to a service in a distant yearly meeting; that she had put it off, not feeling that she could undertake so important a work, but that her mind could not get any peace; and now she had come to ask Friends to release her for this service. One after another the Friends would "concur in this concern," and the blessing of the Lord would be invoked upon the messenger who was going forth.

Some of these occasions were of a heavenly sort, and the voices of strong men choked in tears as a beloved brother or sister was equipped and set free. From this little meeting heralds went out to almost every part of the world, and the act of liberation was something never to be forgotten—only to be surpassed by the deep rejoicing which stirred the same company when the journey was over and "the minutes were returned."

It is all very well now to sit down at a comfortable desk and write of what happened in those long business meetings. But the kind reader will please remember that the uncushioned seats were hard in those days, and that a boy's stomach will not be fed with "concluding minutes" was read a rebellion well before the "concluding minute" was read a rebellion well underway within. The vivid picture of that steaming dinner which was (to the boy) the real event of those days, blotted out the importance of preserving love and unity, or any of the other desirable things which concerned the elders. At length the

happy moment came—"We now separate, proposing to meet again at the usual time and place, if the Lord permit."

With this began the invasion of the homes in the neighborhood. Every dining-room had its long table, and an elastic supply to fit the rather reckless invitations which all members of the family gave with little or no consultation. Here was one place where a boy counted as much as a man! In the meeting he had no part to play, he was not considered, but the havoc he wrought on the dinner made him a person of some importance! If he got crowded out to the second table the delay only made him a more dangerous element to reckon with!

No boy who has had the fortune of being taken to monthly or quarterly meeting in the good old days of positive religion and genuine hospitality will forget what it meant, so long as he remembers anything.

I Go to Philadelphia

[FROM *Finding the Trail of Life*]

RUFUS M. JONES

One of the most important features of the association with my new-found "uncle" and "aunt" was the fact that their home was, in Yearly Meeting Week, one of those old-fashioned centers of hospitality which was so elastically expansive that it could house and feed an unbelievable number of relatives and Friends. Here on these occasions I met almost literally "Friends from everywhere." I found myself all unexpectedly plunged into a living nucleus of pure and unalloyed old-time Quakerism, such as I had before only read of in books or heard of from descriptions given by "the oldest living inhabitant." It was an extraordinary experience, one that could hardly have been duplicated then, and one that could no more be found on earth today than could the dodo in his native habitat.

Yearly Meeting, which came then in April and coincided with the annual visit to the city of the circus and with the usual week of rain, was the yearly gathering of the "orthodox" Friends of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. It convened in the Arch Street Meeting House and brought together, at that period, about a thousand men and twelve hundred women, who met for their business sessions in different meeting rooms. The men for the most part wore coats with straight collars—the "shad-belly" type—and they were crowned with broad-brimmed beaver or silk top-hats which they kept on their heads until after they had taken their seats in the meeting house. The women, and even the girls in many instances, wore the old-time "sugar-scoop" bonnets, while those who were slightly more "gay" wore a neat "shun-the-cross" bonnet. One would hear, after meeting or at dinner, a comment like this about some woman Friend who had been appointed on some important committee: "What dost thou think of appointing—— on a committee like that? Why, she has a cape on her bonnet!" I remember how on one occasion a venerable visiting Friend from England who had been twice around the world "in the love of the gospel" expressed a "concern" to visit the women's meeting in order to give them a message of truth and life, and the meeting decided that "way did not open" for the Friend to go. I expressed great surprise at this decision when we were sitting at dinner. "Didst thou suppose," a friend replied, "that a man with a beard like that would be approved!" . . .

The centerpiece of the exercises of Yearly Meeting in those days was the reading of a list of "Queries" which were designed to reveal the moral and spiritual condition of the members and the meetings of the Quaker flock. They were searching questions about the life and conduct, "the walk and conversation" of the membership. These Queries were admirably fitted to form a silent "confessional" for the individual soul, and if they had been read effectively and then left upon the soul and conscience of the listener to be silently faced and meditated upon, they would have produced a powerful impression. But the custom had grown up to have them formally answered in writing and to have the answers *weightily* considered. This