IN WAR TIME: WHITTIER’S CIVIL WAR ADDRESS AND THE QUAKER PERIODICAL PRESS

Ean High
Northwestern University, USA

ABSTRACT

Fought, at least in part, for a cause in which many Quakers ostensibly believed and had previously risked a great deal for, the American Civil War was a time of great trial for American Quakers. Extending ongoing efforts to understand this complex period, the following essay considers John G. Whittier’s mid-war poem, ‘In War Time’, and the peculiarity of its simultaneous appearance in the major Hicksite, Gurneyite and Wilburite periodicals of the nineteenth century. Consequent of the singularity of its shared printing, Whittier’s poem renders more legible the dilemma Friends faced when attempting to position their peace principles in ethical relation to the mass suffering of the war. Reflecting, while also contributing to, a major transformation in American Quakerism, ‘In War Time’ questioned the ethics of dissociative pacifism, exhorting members of the Society to assist the Union war effort, if only in non-combatant roles, as nurses in hospitals and as teachers among the freedmen.

KEYWORDS


The time of trial is upon us; peace principles are being put to the test... Our newspapers teem with the spirit of war, and are calculated to instill and foster the same spirit; accounts of war achievements and the ideas of greatness and glory that attach to them; the preparations of men, money, provisions and instruments of death, and the destruction of property, the dead and wounded on the battle-field— with all these we are becoming familiarized, and in some measure leavened into the same spirit.

—Friends’ Intelligencer, ‘Peace’
On 6th Mo. 15, 1863 the Alumni Association of Friends’ Yearly Meeting School extended a vote of thanks to John G. Whittier, expressing the association’s gratitude for the poem he had prepared for its annual meeting at Newport. Written in the early months of the war’s third year, the poem ‘In War Time’ considers the immense obstacles the Religious Society of Friends faced when trying to put its guiding peace principles in ethical relation to the violence and mass suffering of the American Civil War. Anthologized and better known as ‘Anniversary Poem’, Whittier’s work prescribes a renewed Quaker Peace Testimony that is grounded in the conscience and in the body, modeled on the early Friends’ willingness to suffer for the sake of conscience.

The Civil War was a time of great trial for American Quakers. Since its founding in England in the late 1640s, the Religious Society of Friends has maintained a total disavowal of war and violence; more than a broad endorsement of pacifism, this Peace Testimony is an elaborate, albeit unfinished and unfolding, commitment among members of the Society to promote and preserve a sacred amity. That being said, the Civil War was fought, at least in part, for a cause in which many Quakers ostensibly believed and had previously risked a great deal for, that is, the abolition of slavery. So while it is difficult to quantify with any kind of precision, it is nonetheless clear that thousands of Hicksite, Gurneyite and Wilburite Quakers went against the tenets of their community and joined the ranks of the Union. For others, the dutiful, almost performative, continuation of this historic Peace Testimony during the first half of the war manifested in many corners as an uneasy restraint, resulting in a complex and contingent distancing of Quakers from the disquieting reality of the Civil War. While efforts to conserve the peace principles inherited from the early Friends endured for the war’s duration, the second half of the war, however, found Friends striving to position and reposition themselves and their Peace Testimony in ways that would allow them to aid better the causes of the Union.

Three days after Whittier’s poem was read at the meeting of the Alumni Association, the poem appeared in print in The Independent, a Boston magazine unaffiliated with the Religious Society of Friends. A week later it was published in William Lloyd Garrison’s Liberator. The poem appeared in Quaker-run periodicals within a fortnight of its delivery and by the end of July had appeared in the three major publications of nineteenth-century American Friends—the Friends’ Review (6th Mo. 27, 1863), The Friend (7th Mo. 11, 1863) and the Friends’ Intelligencer (7th Mo. 18, 1863). Limited in its capacity to cast light on the everyday lived-religion of Civil War Quakers, the archive of the Friends’ periodical press provides, nonetheless, a particularly multi-voiced record of how the Religious Society of Friends attempted to position itself in relation to the war as it was unfolding. The 1863 delivery and subsequent reprinting of the poem is suggestive of the Friends’ broad and dynamic striving, in the second half of the war, to realize a living Peace Testimony equal to the shifting landscape of the war and the nation.

‘In War Time’ reflects, while also contributing to, a major departure in American Quakerism. ‘The movement of many American Friends away from uncompromising pacifism’, suggests Tom Hamm, ‘has been long and complex,
and historians have yet to explore it fully... The fervent commitment of virtually all Friends to the Union cause between 1861 and 1865 brought the first compromises.8

Exemplary of these changes, the poem questions the ethics of dissociative pacifism, exhorting members of the Society to assist the Union war effort, if only in non-combatant roles, as nurses in hospitals and as teachers among the freedmen. In an effort to demonstrate how ‘In War Time’ focuses attention on the ethical basis underlying the many shifts the Society experienced during the years of the Civil War—and as a method for better understanding how the shadow of the Civil War forced the three major Quaker factions (the Hicksite, Gurneyite and Wilburite Friends) to reflect upon the animating spirit of their Peace Testimony—this essay reads Whittier’s poem alongside, and in response to, the early coverage of the Civil War found in the three Quaker periodicals in which it ultimately appeared.

While the nuances of the disputes that unsettled the Religious Society of Friends in the first half of the nineteenth century are well outside the scope of this paper, a brief overview highlights the significance of the poem’s nearly simultaneous appearance in the three Quaker periodicals, while also addressing the origins of the periodicals themselves. The first major division in the Society occurred from the Spring of 1827 to the Fall of 1828—beginning with the splitting of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and concluding with the Indiana Yearly Meeting—resulting in the formation of so-called Hicksite and Orthodox Friends. The Orthodox and Hicksite groups each established its own independent Yearly Meeting, an authoritative and administrative body comprised of representatives from smaller Monthly and Quarterly Meetings. The Orthodox Friends themselves divided into Gurneyite and Wilburite Friends starting in 1845, beginning in the New England Yearly Meeting and ending with the Ohio Yearly Meeting in 1854.9

Whittier, himself a New England Gurneyite Friend, was a founding member of the American Anti-Slavery Society (1833) and in 1847 became the corresponding editor at The National Era, an important abolitionist weekly newspaper. Whittier’s public prominence afforded him a uniquely influential position within the Religious Society of Friends, one that appears, if the repeated printing of ‘In War Time’ is any indication, to have transcended the divisions within the Society.10 One explanation for the poet’s broad appeal, at least amongst the Friends, is that his abolitionist efforts brought him into contact with members of each faction, as well as with non-Quaker intellectuals and organizations committed to the peaceable abolition of slavery. Noteworthy as the poem’s presence in the three periodicals is, it is not altogether surprising. When the poem appeared, Whittier was already the most well-known Quaker of the nineteenth century, respected and read by Hicksite, Orthodox and non-Quaker alike.11 That being said, ‘In War Time’ is remarkable among Whittier’s work for the near-simultaneity of its publication across the three periodicals. An anomaly of sorts, I know of no other printed piece that was similarly shared between the three magazines in the nineteenth century.
Like the two publications that would come to follow, the Orthodox The Friend was published in Philadelphia. Its first issue is dated 10th Mo. 13, 1827—nearly six months after the initial Hicksite-Orthodox schism cleaved the Society. Published weekly by John Richardson and edited by Robert Smith, The Friend would later assume a distinct Wilburite bias. The Hicksite Friends in Philadelphia began publishing the Friends’ Weekly Intelligencer in late March of 1844 (later shortened to Friends’ Intelligencer). Notably, unlike The Friend, the Intelligencer appeared without editorial attributions. Founded two years after the New England Orthodox Friends’ secondary fracture into Gurneyite and Wilburite Meetings, the Friends’ Review was begun by Enoch Lewis in 1847 who—according to the memoir written by his son Joseph Jackson Lewis—‘believed that a periodical in some respects different from The Friend was needed to express the opinions and principles of the major part [i.e. Gurneyite] of the Society’.13

Thinking of The Friend as the Wilburite outlet and the Friends’ Review as the voice of the Gurneyite is a useful and accurate shorthand; I should like, however, to qualify this shorthand slightly, noting that while The Friend definitely embraced the leanings of John Wilbur, tactical maneuvers and great effort at the administrative level kept the Orthodox Philadelphia Yearly Meeting nominally intact through the Civil War.14 So, while solidly identified with the Wilburites, perhaps The Friend might too be remembered as similarly striving to maintain the structural, or at least nominal, integrity of the Yearly Meeting in this period of Orthodox division.

Reflected in both the poetry of John G. Whittier and the pages of the Friends’ periodicals, the ethical dimensions of the Civil War were a great dilemma to the Religious Society of Friends. Hicksite, Gurneyite and Wilburite communities were unsettled by the rumors and witnessed goodbyes of neighbors and sons leaving for the battlefield. Many it seems went willingly, others as conscripts, and still others as martyrs for the Peace Testimony. An article appearing in 11th mo., 1861 in the Hicksite Friends’ Intelligencer is admirably succinct in outlining the difficult position of many ‘young and ardent’ Friends:

That many of the young and ardent in our own religious Society should have been drawn into the whirlpool of popular enthusiasm, is not to be wondered at. The apparent connection of the contest with the anti-slavery movement, in which Friends have taken such a lively interest, has induced the desire, on the part of some, to have a war prosecuted with vigor, which seems to them to promise, as one of its results, the long-desired enfranchisement of the colored race.

While an unknowable number of Friends took up arms for the causes of the Union, others likely took the stance advocated in the Friends’ Intelligencer, which in October of 1861 advised its readers ‘to remain quietly at their homes, and attend peaceably to their own ordinary and proper business, meekly bearing whatever may be imposed for the support of our testimony’.15

During the Civil War, Friends who refused to bear arms for either the Union or the Confederacy faced social censure and ridicule, and because drafted Quakers often refused to pay either the commutation fine or to provide a suitable replacement to enlist in their stead, many were thrown into jail or, worse, physically
forced onto the field of battle. Recognizing early on that its peace principles set
the Religious Society of Friends against the dominant northern ethos, and were
therefore likely to attract anti-Quaker sentiments, the *Friends’ Intelligencer, Friends’
Review* and *The Friend* routinely published accounts of Friends past and present
gladly suffering for their commitments to peace. Signed by the Clerk, Joseph
Snowdon, a lengthy, two-page ‘Address to the Members of Philadelphia Yearly
Meeting, from the Meeting for Suffering’ appearing in the Gurneyite *Friends’
Review* is indicative of such encouraging efforts, expressing ‘feelings of affectionate
sympathy with Friends, under the various temptations and difficulties which may
assail them, in the present agitated condition of our beloved country’.

While long exegeses of scripture advocating meekness, faithful courage and
nonviolence are more common, articles passionately reaffirming the historic
continuity of the Peace Testimony likewise filled the pages of these periodicals. There
is so great an appeal to tradition across the presses, one begins to wonder
where the preservation of tradition ends and the mobilization of principle begins.
Turning to their unified and astonishingly rich archives, each of the three presses
set to work patterning a historic Peace Testimony sewn together from minutes of
Yearly and Local Meetings past, the seventeenth-century writings of the First
Founders and the inspired writings of concerned Friends living during the
American Revolution. An 1862 article in the Wilburite *The Friend* is suggestive of
the collective effort to spread, reaffirm and concretize, in the sphere of public
print, the particularities of the historic Peace Testimony. Foregrounding historical
accounts of Quakers jailed, fined and battered for their refusal to wage war, the
article—‘Suffering for the Testimony against War’—recapitulates, at great length,
the prescriptive decisions of eighteenth-century Friends during the American
Revolution:

> Many are the instances on record, in which the faithful members of our religious
Society suffered in person and property, from the ruling power, rather than violate
their testimony…one of these mentioned by Thomas Story in his journal, has
interested me, and I will offer an abstract of it for the columns of ‘The Friend’.

That the major presses of the Religious Society of Friends were turning back to
the Revolutionary War for clearness and encouragement underscores just how
important the historic commitments to, and nuances of, the Peace Testimony
became to nineteenth-century Friends, many of whom were confronting the
enormity of war for the first time. Simply signed ‘S’, a piece running in the
Gurneyite *Friends’ Review* is uncommonly candid on this point:

> Although taught from our earliest infancy to abhor wars and fightings—but hardly
knowing why we should do so—and educated in a Society, whose faithful members
have upheld peace principles throughout the course of over two hundred years, yet
the present emergency found many of us totally unprepared to meet its require-
ments. We thought, indeed, that *constituted as governments now are*, it was neces-
sary that this unprovoked rebellion should be crushed, and the traitors to their country
punished… Why then should not we aid our rulers in the execution of their
purposes, and strengthen their hands by our influence and our money, or by our
personal participation in the conflict?
The author takes two full pages to explain precisely why they should not aid their rulers in the ‘execution’ of their plans, whether that aid might be pecuniary, participatory or otherwise. Quoting scripture and refuting arguments of every kind, the article leaves its readers with queries intended to lead those in doubt to reflect upon the truth of the Peace Testimony on their own.

While I have deliberately tried to highlight the thematic, generic and formal continuity amongst the three presses, it is important to note that Hickite and Orthodox Friends generally maintained differing levels of engagement with the world outside of their communities. This relative proximity to the ‘world’ is reflected in the actual coverage of the war in their periodicals. ‘The Summary of Events’ column in the Wilburite The Friend often provided a state-by-state update on the movements of the two armies, the declarations of Lincoln and his war cabinet, as well as the mounting casualties. Uniformly in-depth and thorough, the column repeatedly included a section labeled ‘Progress of Hostilities’, or sometimes just ‘Congress’, and once, after a battle ‘near a small stream called Bull’s Run’, spoke almost spiritedly of ‘The First Great Battle’. ‘The Summary of News’ printed in the Gurneyite Friends’ Review is no less willing to provide its readers with accounts of the rising hostilities. In late April of 1861, two weeks after Confederate soldiers first took Fort Sumter and claimed Charleston Harbor for their own, the column ran a textured summation of the first collision between the Union and the Southern Confederacy.

In contrast, the Friends’ Intelligencer does not provide a running column on the war. Unlike the broad engagements with military movements and the political developments of the war found in both The Friend and Friends’ Review, the Hickite Friends generally depicted the Civil War as occurring well outside of the Society’s immediate affairs. It is clear, however, that the editors of the Friends’ Intelligencer assumed that its readers regularly followed war news in secular newspapers: ‘We have not attempted’, an anonymous contributor to the Intelligencer explains, ‘to give a regular abstract of the state of public affairs, such as can be gleaned from the daily papers, concluding that nearly all our readers have access to some of these sources of information’. However, even in articles that addressed warfare more specifically, the Intelligencer often avoids directly confronting the persistent reality of the Civil War, treating the war as a generic—almost abstract—phenomenon, rather than a particular event that necessitated equally particular and considered responses. Even a month after the attack on Fort Sumter, an article from the Intelligencer—simply entitled ‘For Friends’ Intelligencer’—fails to mention the Civil War by name, speaking more generally of: ‘The feeling of sorrow occasioned by the difficulties which have unexpectedly swept as a dark cloud over this once happy country’. The comparatively close coverage of the war’s early stages in both of the Orthodox presses makes the limited reporting by the Friends’ Intelligencer all the more remarkable, and suggests that some Quakers—despite the considerable number of Friends who were joining the Union cause—believed they had little connection to the war other than an earnest hope that some good (i.e., the total abolition of slavery) might ultimately come of it.
Composed of twenty-three rhymed quatrains—ABAAB, where three lines of iambic tetrameter (A) are braided with two lines of iambic dimeter (B)—‘In War Time’, like the three periodicals, attends reverently to the sacrifices of past generations of Friends. That being said, the poem also antagonizes the project of recapitulation by pointing out the limitations of simply claiming an inherited, radical tradition passed down from the early Friends. Whittier’s Civil War address aims to remind the Religious Society of Friends that the Peace Testimony—however steadfast and principled in past application and articulation—ought always to be a living commitment of the present. Following Whittier’s introduction, the poem’s third through sixth stanzas argue that donning the Peace Testimony as a kind of historic legacy is not itself sufficient to the magnitude of the Civil War. Exposing a drifting complacency within the Religious Society of Friends, the poet writes:

Full long our feet the flowery ways  
Of peace have trod,  
Content with creed and garb and phrase:  
A harder path in earlier days  
Led up to God.  

Too cheaply truths, once purchased dear,  
Are made our own;  
Too long the world has smiled to hear  
Our boast of full corn in the ear  
By others sown;  

To see us stir the martyr fires  
Of long ago;  
And wrap our satisfied desires  
In the singed mantles that our sires  
Have dropped below.  

But now the cross our worthies bore  
On us is laid,  
Profession’s quiet sleep is o’er,  
And in the scale of truth once more  
Our faith is weighed.  

For Whittier, the enervating divide between rote profession and the haptic reality of truths ‘purchased dear’ was evidence of a misplaced self-regard that was effectively collusion. Honoring the early Quaker’s willingness to embody and animate their principles, ‘In War Time’ suggests that the Society’s responsibilities are not just to an unseen Heaven, but also to a corporal and transient Earth.

Throughout the poem, Whittier points emphatically to the historic account-ability and ongoing responsibility of the Religious Society of Friends to the unfolding war. Rejecting the detached quietism that would have Friends ‘remain quietly at their homes, and attend peaceably to their own ordinary and proper business’, the seventh through tenth stanzas of Whittier’s poem do away with what the poet understands to be a specious refuge; that is, the false comfort that
the intentional withdrawal from war signified the Friends’ own blamelessness. Whittier writes:

The cry of innocent blood at last
   Is calling down
An answer in the whirlwind blast,
The thunder and the shadow cast
   From Heaven’s dark frown.

The land is red with judgments. Who
   Stands guiltless forth?
Have we been faithful as we knew,
   To God and to our brother true,
   To Heaven and Earth?

How faint, through din of merchandise
   And count of gain,
Have seemed to us the captive’s cries!
   How far away the tears and sighs
   Of souls in pain!

This day the fearful reckoning comes
   To each and all;
We hear amidst our peaceful homes
   The summons of the conscript drums,
   The bugle’s call. 30

Like numerous articles across the three periodicals, the poem acknowledges the hardships of Friends who, faithful to their testimony, ‘keep fealty to the laws / Through patient pain’. 31 ‘In War Time’, however, reaches beyond the communal pain of the Religious Society of Friends in an effort to draw nearer the ‘faint’ and ‘far way’ sufferings of the soldier and of the slave. Indicative of Whittier’s broad revisionary project—and following the eleventh stanza, which takes up the Friends ‘patient pain’—the twelfth through fourteenth stanzas urge Friends to suffer alongside and with the country as a whole:

The leveled gun, the battle brand,
   We may not take;
But calmly loyal, we can stand
   And suffer with our suffering land,
   For conscience’ sake.

Why ask for ease when all is pain?
   Shall we alone
Be left to add our gain to gain,
   When over Armageddon’s plain
   The trump is blown?

To suffer well is well to serve;
   Safe in our Lord,
The rigid lines of law shall curve
To spare us: from our heads shall swerve
   Its smiting sword. 32
Throughout the poem Whittier exhorts Friends to recognize how they themselves are complicit in the ongoing war and to reflect on how their self-preserving priorities and tactics of withdrawal have deafened them to the pain and misery of others. ‘Let me urge our young Friends humbly to seek for strength in retire-
m\ent’, an article in the Friends’ Intelligencer advises, ‘There is no more reason now, than at any other time, why we should imbrue our hands in the blood of others; all war proceeds from the same source’.33 Believing that the ethical crisis produced by the Civil War was not an external forced imposed on Friends, but one eman-
ating from a shared history, ‘In War Time’ fully accepts the Religious Society of Friends’ deep entanglement with the dark, clouded sky and the blood already on the ground.

Marshaling Friends into action, the sixteenth through the nineteenth stanzas express Whittier’s commitments to a Peace Testimony that, while inherited, must be renewed through lived experience. In these stanzas, ‘In War Time’ legitimates a model of Quaker charity capacious enough to allow Friends conscientiously to position themselves within the Union war effort. Outlining an embodied Peace Testimony, Whittier revitalises ground broken by the early Friends by poetically replenishing ‘the fields of duty’ open to those in the present. Rooted in growth and sweeping in its expansionist implications, ‘In War Time’ advances a historical Quaker praxis attentive to, and tending toward, the ongoing cultivation of practiced truth.

Thanks for our privilege to bless
   By word and deed,
The widow in her keen distress,
The childless and the fatherless,
   The hearts that bleed!
For fields of duty opening wide,
   Where all our powers
Are tasked the eager steps to guide
Of millions on a path untried:
   THE SLAVE IS OURS. 34

Ours by tradition dear and old
   Which make the race
Our wards to cherish and uphold,
And cast their freedom in the mold
   Of Christian grace.

And we may tread the sick-bed floors
   Where strong men pine,
And, down the groaning corridors,
Pour freely from our liberal stores
   The oil and the wine.35

Whittier’s departure from the definitions of Christian duty dominant in the Hicksite, Wilburite and Gurney periodicals is emblematic of the Friends’ shifting response to the second half of the war. The poem’s catalog of embodied public
charity—offered in opposition to private, cloistered virtue—is an attempt to expand the modes of ethical relationality available to any Friend led to defy the driving force of civil war.

In one sense, the poem’s primary contribution to the nineteenth-century Peace Testimony is, in fact, Whittier’s willingness to treat the testimony as an inherited, though fluid, and ongoing practice. This desire to actuate Friends into substantive enterprise, Roland Woodwell’s exhaustive biography suggests, was in keeping with an abiding position of Whittier’s:

He told the story of the end of slavery within the Society of Friends in the [National] Era April 8, 15, and 22 [1847]… It concluded with the remark that Friends of the present day should ask themselves if they were maintaining the lofty standard of the old Quaker worthies. It seemed to Whittier that their increased zeal for verbal orthodoxy and distinctions of creed had led to a decline in practical, active testimony against evil customs, unrighteous laws, and popular sins.

‘In War Time’ is a clarion call, encouraging Friends to step outside the borders of the Society’s past and to ‘suffer with our suffering land / For conscience sake’ in the present.

The democratic and religious responsibilities framed in Whittier’s poem—to the Union, to freed families and to others suffering from the consequences of war—renders more legible an emergent shift in American Quakerism, one that would ultimately bring Friends nearer to the Union and the suffocating violence of the Civil War. The coincident publishing of ‘In War Time’ (6th Mo. 27—7th Mo. 18, 1863) with the arrival of Cornelia Hancock at Gettysburg on 7th Mo. 6, 1863 is a curious example of how the poem indexes a particular moment in Quaker history. Hancock, whose letters offer an intimate record of her visits to wounded soldiers, would become one of the most well-known Quakers to serve as a nurse in the war. The establishment of the Philadelphia-based Friends Association for the Aid and Elevation of the Freedmen by Hicksite Quakers in 1864 and the Friends’ Freedmen’s Association by the Orthodox in the same year, are just a few examples of the nearer relations Antebellum Friends cultivated in the second half of the Civil War.

Exemplifying and participating in the observable transformation the Religious Society of Friends experienced during the years of the Civil War, the shared publication of this major poem intimates that Gurneyite, Hicksite and Wilburite alike weighed the value of Whittier’s pronouncement of Quaker complicity in the war, as well as his assertion that even if Quakers still should not actually take up arms, they should more actively support the Union war effort, in whatever peaceable ways their conscience would allow. What is more, besides being a neat moment of symmetry between divided communities, attention to the repeated publication of ‘In War Time’ helps to calibrate ongoing work concerned with Whittier’s poetry and the reception of his writing.

Michael Cohen, a literary historian whose work is concerned with ballad form and the publication of Whittier’s antislavery poems in newspapers, draws on Whittier’s poetry in an effort to better ‘incorporate and understand the cultural
life of poems in the context of their production and consumption at different points in their history. Having argued in this paper that the legibility of Whittier’s poem as an index and weighty articulation of a moment of flux in the Religious Society of Friends relies on the singularity of its nearly simultaneous publication in the three periodicals, it is obvious that I sympathise with Cohen’s assessment that Whittier’s body of work lends itself particularly well to this variety of literary, historical method. However, ‘In War Time’ also augments Cohen’s efforts by suggesting that the reception of Whittier’s poetry is at times contingent upon the context of its printing as well as the religious dimensions of its inception. For example, subsequent editions of ‘In War Time’, or ‘Anniversary Poem’, retain the heading under which it originally appeared in the Friends’ periodicals: ‘Read Before the Alumni of the Friends’ Yearly Meeting School, at the Annual Meeting at Newport, R. I., of the 6th mo., 1863’. When Whittier called for the renewal of the early Friends’ embodied peace principles in the nineteenth century, he spoke as a Quaker to other Quakers.

There is much more work to be done on the history of Friends’ relief efforts during the Civil War, particularly around the ways in which Quaker ‘Women’s response to war helped transform Friends’ adherence to and interpretation of the peace testimony and their disciplinary standards’. Linda Selleck’s study of Quaker women educators and Glenn Crothers’ research into Friends’ support of the Union in northern Virginia are vital additions to our growing understanding of this period of contestation and change. Keenly sensitive to the ethical impasse facing American Quakers, writ large, ‘In War Time’ is an unlikely patch of common ground for those wishing to understand the unsettled state of American Quakerism during the years of the Civil War.

NOTES

1. 1st Mo. 25 (1862) vol. 18issue 46, pp. 724-25. This paper uses the dating notation of the periodicals it cites. In the nineteenth century the Religious Society of Friends used an alternative system of dating wherein numbers replace the standard Gregorian months: January = 1st Month, February = 2nd Mo. etc.


3. Sarah Palmer, a Philadelphia Friend, wrote in a personal letter, ‘Quakers are drilling, contrary to all peace principles of the Sect; indeed, from all appearances we may suppose their hopes are based on war. I’m opposed to war—to cutting down men like grass—but if ever war was holy, this one, in favor of the most oppressed, the most forbearing, most afflicted, down-trodden, insulted part of humanity, is a holy war.’ See Bacon, M.H., Abby Hopper Gibbons: Penal Reformer and Activist, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000, p. 86. An excerpt is quoted by Hamm, T.D., in Angell, S.W., and Dandelion, P. (eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 71.


6. While I am interested in the archives of the Friends’ periodical press for its dynamism, it is not my contention that the robust recapitulation found in the Friends’ periodicals of the nineteenth century constitutes a divergent or more holistic textual-manifestation of the historic Peace Testimony than something like Jonathan Dymond’s influential monograph An Inquiry into the Ascendency of War with the Principles of Christianity (which was first published in America in Philadelphia, 1834) or through the many Quaker pamphlets circulating before and during the Civil War, e.g., John Jackson’s 1846 ‘Reflections on Peace and War’.

7. This extends, in my view, to the book of poetry in which the retitled ‘Anniversary Poem’ appears, i.e. Whittier’s 1864 book of poems In War Time and Other Poems, Boston, MA, Ticknor & Fields, 1864.


9. For a summary of the several separations, see Hamm, The Quakers in America, especially Chapter 3, ‘Their Separate Ways’.

10. The Hickite Intelligencer, by way of quick example, reprinted an extensive review of Whittier’s 1849 book, Poems—published by Benjamin B. Mussey & Co. of Boston—that first ran in the National Era. The review was split into two multipage-parts and ran in back-to-back issues (2nd Mo. 17, 1849; 5/47-48, pp. 374 and 379). The earliest reprinting of a Whittier poem I have been able to identify in the Intelligencer is the poem ‘Chalkley Hall’, which ran in volume 2, issue 9 of the press (5th Mo. 31, 1845, p. 68).


12. Eventually the paper included a tagline indicating that the publication was ‘Edited by An Association of Friends’. It is worth mentioning too that the first incarnation of the Intelligencer was actually published in New York City, 4th Mo. 2, 1838, and was edited by Isaac T. Hooper. However, the press folded for financial reasons. The Philadelphia-based periodical took the name in 1844, but had no personal or legal ties to the earlier attempt. The New York Intelligencer stated its purpose in relation to that of The Friend, ‘Our orthodox brethren have been for some time prosecuting a scheme, similar in some respects, but failing in one essential particular, to answer the desired end; and we make this statement, to show that we are not taking up a position on pre-occupied ground’. Friends’ Intelligencer (of NY). 4th Mo. 2, 1838, 1/1, p. 4.


14. At the time of Enoch Lewis’ venture, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, the majority of whose members were Wilburite in their leanings, was the largest and most influential Yearly


17. An article in the Friends’ Review from 9th Mo. 1862 provides a typical example: ‘When called to any infringement of their scruples on this point, their plea was, that as Christians they could not fight. This was the ground of the earliest apostles of Quakerism, established by reference to the New Testament, and has been maintained unimpaired by their accredited successors down to the present day.’ Friends’ Review, ‘Friends and the War’, W.N., 9th Mo. 6, 1862, 16/1, p. 6.


20. Hamm, Transformation, especially Chapters 2–3. By way of quick example, one possible reason for this was financial, as Wilburite and Gurneyite communities were more economically and socially engaged with non-Quaker businesses (i.e. wealthier) than were the H Hicketite. Whittier is likely referring to this in his critique in the ninth stanza, ‘How faint, through din of merchandise / And count of gain, / Have seemed to us the captive’s cries! / How far away the tears and sighs / Of souls in pain!’

21. ‘The events now transpiring in the United States’, the column’s preface explained shortly after the firing on Fort Sumter, ‘are of so much greater moment than in any other quarter, that we shall devote the whole of the space appropriated to the summary to domestic occurrences. These alas, have been of a most melancholy character, presaging the immediate commencement of civil war.’ The Friend, ‘Summary of Events’, 4th Mo. 20, 1861, 34/33, p. 264.


23. Friends’ Review, ‘Summary of News’, 4th Mo. 20, 1861, 14/33, p. 527. See too the following issue, 34, for the paper’s coverage of Lincoln and Jefferson Davis’ proclamations for volunteer militias. A didactic article by a Richard Dykes Alexander, an English Quaker, entitled ‘War Inconsistent with Christianity’, appeared in the Friends’ Review a week before the Confederate firing on Fort Sumter, further suggesting the solicitous interest of Orthodox Friends in the imminent clash of North and South. 4th Mo. 6, 1861, 14/31, p. 486.

24. Friends’ Intelligencer, 4th Mo. 27, 1861, 18/7, p. 104.

25. Rather than providing their own coverage and insight on the war, the Friends’ Intelligencer published sweeping editorials refusing any ‘Plea of Self-Defence’ or ‘Plea of Necessity’ as justification for war in general. Friends’ Intelligencer, 5th Mo. 18, 1861, 18/10, p. 148. 5th Mo. 25, 1861, 18/11, p. 164.


27. The Friend and the Friends’ Review to the unfolding of the war suggest the early understanding on the part of many Friends that the Society would not be able to wait out the war, that it would need to come to understand itself in relation to the mounting conflict. That being said, the positions expressed in the Orthodox presses, like the Hickite, are still limited in so far as they do not necessitate taking any direct responsibility for the war or its underlying causes.


33. Friends’ Intelligencer, ‘For the Friends’ Intelligencer’, 5th Mo. 18, 1861, 18/10, p. 147.

34. Whittier’s rather emphatic possessive-declaration here may be misleading to readers unfamiliar with his consuming efforts for the causes of abolition and black citizenship. Whittier, to me, is calling on Friends to engage in work to relieve the sufferings of the freedpeople—‘the slave is ours’. Such work was well underway by 1863. However, the line cuts both ways: where Whittier perhaps testifies to the Society’s long-standing opposition to slavery, which by about 1784 had eliminated slave-ownership from their community, the backlash of the line insists that Friends accept responsibility for the long-term sin of slavery in which they were still complicit. In this way, the poem asks its readers to share responsibility for the generation of the war.


36. Woodwell, John Greenleaf Whittier: a biography, p. 197. Of the poem itself, Woodwell writes that it, ‘said substantially what had been said two years earlier in the circular letter to Members of the Society of Friends but added that the free slaves were, by tradition, the wards of the Quakers’ (p. 319).


38. The Intelligencer had been reporting on the Women’s Association of Philadelphia for the Relief of the Freedmen, a largely but not exclusively Quaker organization, all through 1863. I am indebted to an exhibit digitized by Bryn Mawr College for information about these organizations (http://trilogy.brynmawr.edu/specoll/quakersandslavery), as well as the Women’s Aid Association Minutes, Book I, 1862-3, MSS—(quoted in Heckman, O.S., ‘Pennsylvania Quakers in Southern Reconstruction’, Pennsylvania History 13/4, p. 251).


40. Crothers, G., Quakers Living in the Lion’s Mouth: The Society of Friends in Northern Virginia 1730–1865, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012, p. 256. Crothers writes that, ‘in the fall 1862 aftermath of Antietam, Quaker women in Loudoun and Frederick Counties fed—sometimes under protest—Confederate and then Union troops’ (p. 239). I would add to this evidence the collected letters of Elizabeth L. Comstock, which too show that Quaker women were bringing comfort to wounded soldiers by at least 1862. Also, more than a year before the poem’s initial delivery the Women’s Aid Association of Friends was formed by the women of the Orthodox Yearly Meeting in Philadelphia with the aim of getting clothing and blankets to Southern freedmen.

AUTHOR DETAILS

Ean High is a graduate of Earlham College currently undertaking doctoral work at Northwestern University, USA. He reads and writes about the religious dimensions of American Literature, especially in the colonial and late antebellum periods.

Mailing address: Northwestern University, Department of English, University Hall 215, 1897 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60208-2240, USA.

Email: EanHigh@U.Northwestern.edu.