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Proctor Sampson

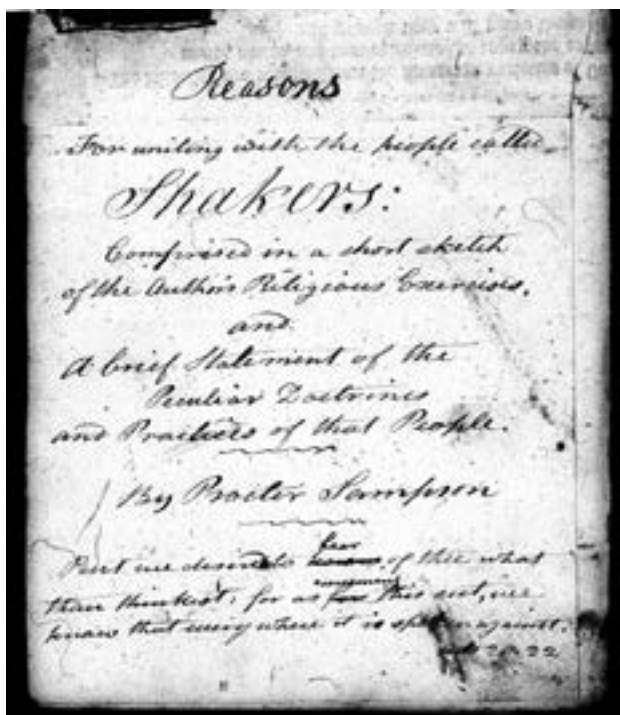
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Proctor Sampson (ca.1773-1855) was a New Lebanon, New York, Shaker and elder. After pursuing a life at sea, he associated with the Quakers, Methodists, and Freewill Baptists. He finally converted to Shakerism, corresponding with Shaker theologian Richard McNemar in the process. His children converted with him.

Sampson was instrumental in gathering the community at Sodus Bay, New York. He wrote *Remains of Joseph A. H. Sampson* (Rochester, N.Y.: E.F. Marshall, 1827), the first Shaker biography, as a loving elegy to his son, who died a Shaker at age twenty. This first section of his “Reasons for Uniting with the Shakers” has never been published. It is one of eighteen chapters, the rest devoted to theology, comprising a manuscript now in the collection of the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio, (VII:B-50). Sampson’s colorful narrative sheds much light on the religious ferment in southern Maine during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is a fascinating read, and we are pleased to present it in printed form for the first time.

Reasons For Uniting with the people called Shakers: Comprised in a short sketch of the Author's Religious Exercises, and a brief Statement of the Peculiar Doctrines and Practices of that People.

Proctor Sampson

[Editor's note: all spelling and lined-out text rendered as in original. Slashes indicate page divisions in the manuscript.]

But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerns this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against. Acts. 28:22

/ Short Account of the Author's Religious Exercises

I was born in Marshfield, Plymouth County, State of Massachusetts, December 23, 1772.

In my early childhood I had serious thoughts of God, and eternal things. My parents were members of the Congregationalist church. My Mother took pains to instruct me in what she thought the principles of the Christian Religion, such as saying my prayers, learning the assembly's chatechism, & Watts' hymns by rote, reading the scriptures, &c. But, following the dictates of a fallen nature, & the example of those around me, as I grew up, evil propensities increased / in me by the indulgence of them, & tho' I often felt conviction, and made resolutions to do better, these resolutions were soon broken. ~~I never however, from my child hood~~ ~~dend [deigned]~~ to indulge myself in some practises that many do, such as prophane swearing, taking the name of God in vain, or habitual lying.

When I was in my seventeenth years, I went to study with my brother, who was a physician, at Bath Kennebeck river. While here by hearing the baptists preach I was awakened to a greater sense of the necessites of living a religious life, and formed resolutions to do it, but I did not keep these resolutions.

Owing to declension of health, I relinquished the study of physick; and [?] returning to my Father's and living / with him some time, I ~~began~~ ~~going to sea~~ commenced & sea faring life, and continued in that business till I was mostly twenty five.

During the seven years that I ~~went to~~ followed the seas, I sailed to different parts of France, England, Holland, Germany, Denmark, Russia, Portugal, and the West Indies, and some of the southern states. I began going to sea with so determined a resolution not to fall into those vices too many sailors become slaves to, profane swearing, hard drinking, and associating with bad women, that I was always preserved therefrom; and I feel thankful to this day, for that mercy of God which protected me.

But tho' I fell not into these vices, I had to carry about with me a consciousness that I was a sinner in the sight of God; / and a belief that I was not prepared for death would often prick my mind into dejection.

About the time I was twenty-one, being then at Rotterdam, in Holland, I began to feel the misery of being in bondage to sin, in a far deeper manner than I had ever felt it before. I saw the necessity of living to God, and made resolutions thus to do: but I broke my resolutions as often as I formed them; and instead of reforming, it seemed to me that I grew worse and worse. I felt very unhappy; and I clearly saw that sin was the sole cause of my unhappiness; and I have never doubted from that day to this, that sin is the only cause of all the abundant unhappiness that emits in the human race.

After repeatedly forming resolutions / against sin, and still continuing to be overcome by it, I sank, by degrees, into a pretty fixed belief that I had sinned away my of grace, and had so habituated myself in acting against light in my own conscience, that ~~my day~~ I was now given up/over to a reprobate mind.

From Holland we sailed to Martinique, where the Yellow Fever was making dreadful ravages among our countrymen and others. Our Captain, and three of our sailors died of it. I was taken down by it, and had but little expectation but that I should die, as but very few who had the disease recovered. During this sickness, the strongest desire I seemed to feel was that I might so far recover as to get home to my friends, and die / with them. I thought I was not prepared for death, but that the sooner I died the less sin I should commit, and consequently should have less punishment to endure. Life seemed to have no charms for me. The objects I had been pursuing, and which mankind were generally pursuing, had, for some time, appeared to me but vanity and vexation of spirit.

After remaining ashore about two weeks, at a French house, where I was very attentively taken care of, I so far recovered as to go on board my vessel again. Before we were ready for sea one Sabbath afternoon I was

impressed on board a British man of war, Martinique having been taken by that nation from the French, a short / time before. I was taken on board what was called the Hospital Ship, where were many sick and wounded. During the short time I was on board this vessel, I saw human depravity, and human misery, far beyond what I had ever seen before. O, ye war-makers! consider, before ye rashly involve nations in war, what increase of wickedness and human misery/woe will result from ~~in-consequence of~~ your ungodly proceedings. And all ye who are “fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind,” consider, “from whence came wars and fighting among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts” [illegible lined out passage]

By the prompt exertions of our / merchant, I was soon released from this “Floating Hell,” and put on board my own vessel. Soon after this we sailed to Boston. From thence I went to Marshfield, my native place, where I spent some months at my Father’s, in a state of ill health. But the disease of mind I felt was far greater than my disease of body; and no doubt each contributed to the disorder of the other. For much of this time I really thought it would be but mocking God to attempt to pray to him, or to implore his mercy; so fixed it seemed to me I was in a nature opposed to him. But during the latter part of this time, I began to try to pray, & to feel more hope that I should finally find the mercy / and salvation of God. Having in a good degree measured my health, I went to Boston, and there shipped on board a brig bound to South Carolina, France and England. A few days after we left Boston, we experienced a violent storm, in which we apprehended much danger of being lost. I thought, during this storm, as regarded myself, I should be willing the vessel should sink. Life felt like a burden to me; and I really thought, if it was the will of God, that I should rather choose to die, than live to commit sin any longer.

We however weathered the gale, and two or three nights after when the watch to which I belonged was called to deck ~~to which I belonged;~~ / I felt in myself sensations which it seemed to me I never felt before. The load of sin, guilt, and misery under which I had so long been burdened seemed entirely to be gone from me; and I felt a freedom, a buoyancy of spirit, a peace, a happiness, indescribable. This was the night preceding the Sabbath; and I thought that Sabbath was the happiest day I had ever seen. My soul seemed filled with gratitude and love to God. I looked back on the troubles I had met with, and the anguish of spirit I had passed thro, and felt to bless God for them all. Created objects wore, to my sight, a new

dress. All bespoke to my feelings the power, and wisdom, and goodness of the Creator. ~~Even the countenances of / my shipmates appeared as if altered, and they looked lovely to me.~~

These feelings continued, in a greater or less degree, for some weeks. Sometimes as I lay in my cabin, the excellency of the Divine Character appeared to me so lovely, that I would be, as it were, constrained to utter aloud, "How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!" My feelings of thankfulness were such that often at taking our meals, and on other occasions, I would speak to my shipmates of the obligations of gratitude we were under the Giver of all good, for the benefits we were, continually receiving from him, and so far were they from ridiculing as sailors generally do anything that is called religion, the expression of my feelings evidently had a solemnizing and, for the time, a salutary effect upon them. / Often when standing at the helm, on the night watches, and at other times, the scriptures ran thro my mind with much sweetness; particularly the 21st chapter of the Revelations, where St. John prophetically described the beauty and glory of the New Jerusalem. I seemed to be free from any disposition to do wrong, my sense was so absorbed in good.

But these feelings gradually wore off, and evil propensities and dispositions revived, and gained strength in me. I had before this time, determined that I would soon quit a seafaring life, believing I should be more able to live a religious life on shore; but after this, worldly prospects so got hold of my mind, that I concluded I would soon make myself capable of commanding a vessell, and continue to go to sea till I had accumulated / property enough to live easily and respectably ashore.

The next voyage I shipped as first mate of a large Snow, and sailed from Philadelphia, to Germany and Portugal. I was a good deal out of health during this voyage; and I experienced, in various ways, much trouble and perplexity of mind. In St. Ubes, Portugal, I obtained my discharge from the vessell, and came to New York in another; feeling fully determined to quit going to sea. I then went to Philadelphia, to await the arrival of the vessell I left in Portugal, as I had property on board her. The vessell I awaited, meeting adverse winds and weather, was so long on her passage; the crew became sickly, & some of them died. Their provisions / and water being nearly exhausted, they put away for Bermuda, and were finally wrecked on the rocks, near that Island.

During the two months I waited for the arrival of this vessell, boarding about two miles from Philadelphia, I had much leisure for reading,

meditation and prayer, in which way I spent much of my time; feeling no disposition to go into company, and having no associates but the family I boarded with. A weighty sense of the vanity of the pursuits and ways of mankind was upon me much of my time, and I felt my need of a Salvation I was sensible I had not attained, but hoped I should. I believe I shall never forget some of my many thoughts and exercises during that time, as I was walking the fields, and to and from the city. / From Philadelphia I went to Marshfield. After tarrying a few weeks at my Father's, I went to the State of Maine, with an intention to set up a store in some suitable place in that country. Immediately/soon after landing at Hallowell, I went to see my beloved friend Nathaniel Thomas, at Reedfield, who was then an honest hearted, zealous Methodist, but is now a believer in the Second Appearing of Christ, and lives with the people at New Gloucester. The fervant labours and prayers of him and his wife for me ~~for my salvation~~ deeply affected my mind. I soon gave up the idea of setting up a store, and according to the advice of my friend Thomas bought 300 acres of wild land in Jay intending to try to clear up a farm. /

During that winter my mind was much taken up with diving things; and for ~~the~~ most of the time I thought I felt an evidence that I was accepted of God. I attended every opportunity, the meetings of the Methodists; and my associates were mostly those who belonged to that society. I entered but little into the disputes so prevalent in that day about, election, the decrees of God, the perseverance of the saints, &c. Whenever I met with those whom I believed to be Christians, they were dear to me, whether they belonged to this or that denomination. I believed the Salvation of Christ was Salvation from all sin; and the doctrine preached by the Methodists of the possibility and necessity of being cleansed from the last / and least remains of sin, was clear to me. I read with eagerness and delight the writings of Wesley and Fletcher upon Christian Perfection, or full sanctification and daily desired that St. Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians might be fulfilled in me: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God ~~that~~ your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." ~~And that I might be brought into that holy [disposition?] of soul wherein I might rejoice ever more, pray without ceasing, & in every thing give thanks."~~ For this, says he, is the will of God.²²

The latter part of this winter, my youngest sister, who was very dear to me, and who was the only unmarried sister I had, was much on my mind. My prayers were fervant that she might experience religion. As I was

engaged in private prayer, one morning, it was / impressed on my mind that if I would visit her, it would be the means of her conversion. I gave up to go nearly two hundred miles on foot, to my native place to see her, and it seemed to me I never travelled so easy before; such confidence did I feel that I was acting in the will of God. My labour was blessed; for before I left Marshfield she was rejoicing in the mercy of God.

In the Spring I went on my wild land, at Jay. I had often thought that if I could live a hermit's life, I could live to God. This summer I had an opportunity of trying it, in a degree. But what I experienced that summer put me out of conceit of a hermit's life: and however devoted and happy some have been in living a hermit's life, I was / convinced it was not the life I was called to live. It seemed to me I never felt temptation in a more powerful degree; and the afflictions I endured seemed almost insupportable.

My desires were frequently fervant to God that I might live a useful life, and that he would shew me in what way I could most benefit my fellow men, to whom I felt fervant good will. I began to ~~feel~~ be exercised about preaching; and I thought if I could be properly qualified for so important a work, and could be used as an instrument in helping souls to God, it would be of far greater value than contributing to the temporal benefit of many, tho never so great. But I desired that I might / not attempt it ~~such a thing~~ unless it was the will of God that I should. My beloved friends Nathl. Thomas & his wife, to whom I opened my mind freely upon religious subjects, believed the impressions I had on my mind were from God, and spoke of it to some of the preachers. They also encouraged me in it.

In the fall I rode round the Circuit with Joshua Taylor, a Methodist preacher, whom I much respected for his ~~pious~~ devout and amicable disposition. I prayed vocally in meetings, and exhorted some in much weakness and fear; believing that no one ever attempted to do anything of the kind that was more unqualified than I felt. It was much of a cross to me to appear in this way, as I was / extremely bashful & diffident. But I was sensible that when I did speak it was a releasement to my mind, and I felt more confidence in God. This seemed to be the only thing in my own mind to encourage me.

Nathaniel Thomas and I had been exercised in our minds about the people in our native place, and we apprehended it might be our duty to visit them. We agreed to spend a day in fasting and prayer, expressly for the purpose of knowing whether it was our duty, or not. We believed

we received an answer from God that it was our duty; and immediately prepared for our journey, and went to Marshfield.

There we appointed meeting, to which / many people assembled. In these meetings we prayed vocally, exhorted, and sung: and I felt in them a freedom, and divine power far beyond what I had ever before experienced. A powerful work of God took place among the people, and many professed to experience religion.

I will here mention something about some of the subjects of that work, as I have reason to believe that such exercises are more common among those who experience a work of God upon them than I then thought of. One of them told me that for as much as a year after his conversion, tho he constantly slept with his wife, he gave no place in his mind to fleshly inclinations; and did not then think that he should ever again live in the indulgence of / a carnal nature. Another told me that altho before he experienced religion, he had been much addicted to the indulgence of fleshly lusts, for a good while after his conversion he felt no fleshly inclinations, tho he was married; and lamented the revival and indulgence of his carnal propensities, finding it such a hinderance to his progress in religion; and added, if he was not married he would not enter into that state. I found afterwards that others were exercised in the same way.

I did not then, and some time before, believe that I should ever marry: being persuaded by the operation of the Spirit of Christ within me, that if I was faithful to the operations/requirements of that / Spirit I never should do it. I had no idea at that time but that christians generally might marry, and do right. But for myself, it appeared plain to me, that if I ever did marry, it would be to please myself, not to please God. But notwithstanding the views I then had and the belief for several years, that I never should marry, some years after this I did ~~marry~~. And tho I felt no immediate condemnation in living in that way, yet I was sensible that the indulgence of a carnal mind/nature shut me out from that enjoyment of divine good I had before enjoyed; and my relish for the things of God more and more declined, the longer I lived in that way. So true are the words of the apostle "Thy that are after the flesh do mind / (or savour) the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."

But to return from this digression: While in this work at Marshfield, my ideas respecting the state of a real Church of Christ, were far beyond anything I had seen in any of the Churches, so called. When I first became acquainted with the Methodists, the winter before, they appeared to me

more like the Christians we read of in the New Testament, than any professors I had before seen. But there were some things among them that never seemed right to me. They did not as a Society appear so plain in their dress and manners as I thought their profession called for. I thought when people came together / for religious worship, instead of going through a particular form of praying vocally, singing and preaching, a better way would be for everyone to feel after the operation of the Spirit of Christ in themselves; & to pray, sing, preach or exhort as that Spirit moved them: for I observed that I was often more reached and quickened by a few words from a plain illiterate man, woman or child, who spoke from an immediate impression, than from the long preaching and praying of an eloquent minister.

Altho Nathaniel Thomas had united with the Methodist Society in consequence of a reformation taking place, thro the preaching of the Methodists, in his neighbourhood, where no Freewill Baptists / lived, he was still held as a member of the Freewill Baptist Society, which he had joined many years before; and was much attached to that people. After I returned from Marshfield I saw two of the preachers of that order, at his house, and heard them preach. I was pleased with the plainness of their dress and manners. I was also pleased with this manner of their carrying on their meetings; where all were exhorted to wait on the Lord, and act freely in whatever manner his Spirit influenced them.

I accompanied John Buzzell, and the preacher who was with him, to Sandy river, where I heard them preach several times, I thought more in the power and / demonstration of the Spirit than any preachers I had before heard. Soon after I attended their Yearly meeting at Parsonsfield, where I saw Benjamin Randal, who was considered as the Founder/father of that Society in New Hampshire and Maine, and heard him preach, with much energy. With the advice of N. Thomas and his wife, I requested him to go to Marshfield, which he did, ~~and held meetings there~~. During the time I attended meetings with him there, I was much shut up, and began to doubt the genuineness of all I had thought I had experienced in religion. I went home with Elder Randall to New Durham (in New Hampshire), and taught a school there the ensuing summer. This was an afflicting summer to / me I believed that I was one of the greatest of hypocrites; and was vexed with myself that I had ever made profession of religion. I was strongly in the belief that my day of grace was over, and that I was given over to a reprobate mind. And tho Elder Randall, Samuel Runnals, and others very

kindly laboured to encourage me, and persuade me that this was not my state, I believed they were mistaken, and felt wretched beyond description.

In the Fall I went to Readfield and taught School on Kent's hill during the winter following. My Methodist friends prayed for me, and laboured to encourage me to hope in God, but it / seemed to me with but little effect. I appeared to myself as one of the vilest and most miserable mortals on earth.

It was the apprehension of some of my friends, that the cause of my sinking into such despondency was my not preaching, as they and I had believed I had been called to. At times I believed that I began to lose ground by not keeping up to my duty in that very respect. I could not deny that I had felt the presence and blessing of God in bearing testimony to the Truth, as far as it had been manifested to me. It was thought best for me to accompany Joshua Taylor to Penobscot River, which I unwillingly consented to. During this journey he treated me with all / the kindness and tenderness of a parent / but I remained greatly dispondant & shut up. It was hard for me to speak in meetings, feeling as I did, in the depth of almost total despair. But when I did speak I found a degree of releasement, and hope in God would spring up in me. After having been gone about two months on this journey I came back to my brother Luther's at Reedfield: feeling myself as being very far from a real christian; and concluding the Lord had never called such a vile creature as I was to preach. The summer after I spent with him br. Luther in much misery, working on his farm.

In the fall I went to Marshfield with my friend N. Thomas; where I met with those I had loved much, and had / been much beloved by them. While I had been from them they had been gathered into a Society of the Freewill baptist order. Soon after I got among them I experienced a degree of releasement and freedom I had not felt since I left them. We had no particular forms in our meetings: but when we met would sit in silence, till someone thought it duty to pray, sing, or exhort, as we believed ourselves called to by the Spirit. All had equal liberty to come forward in any exercise they believed they were called to; and we frequently had very powerful meetings. Our cries were to God for Salvation from all sin, and the advancement of his work on earth. Our exhortations to one another were to / be faithful and press after an increase of good. Those who attended our meetings were exhorted to flee from the wrath to come, by repentance and turning to the Lord.

But much of my time I had a distressing sense, that after all the

manifestations of the light and power of God to us, none of us really continued in Christ's words, so as [to] be his disciples in deed. I saw that what passed in the different denominations I was acquainted with would answer for Christianity, was not real Christianity; or that professors did not fully come into practical obedience to the precepts and example of Jesus Christ, which I was firmly persuaded was necessary in order to be prepared for the kingdom of Heaven. It was for sometime impressed on my mind that I must publickly / testify my views. But I feared if I should express myself fully as I felt, it would break up the Society: for it seemed to me that but very few were able to receive what I was at times strongly impressed the Truth called me to communicate. At length the burden became so weighty that I could keep back no longer without feeling a heavy woe; and I gave up to speak fully what the Lord should give me to speak. Immediately upon beginning to speak; I felt as if filled and surrounded with divine power. The substance of what I had to deliver was; That after/with all the light and power God had given us, none of us lived in the life of Christ; that we did not abide in Christ, and Christ did not abide in us; that the Lord / had a controversy with the professors of Christianity; that an almost if not a universal declension from true primitive Christianity was manifest in professors of every denomination: But that the Kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost would come; and that a very differant Christianity would be manifested on earth: That those would appear who would arise and shake themselves from the dust of the earth; follow the Lamb wheresoever he would lead them, walk as he walked, and be as he was in this world; love one another with a pure heart fervantly, and be of one heart and of one soul; loving God with all their hearts, and loving their neighbor as themselves. / In the Spirit of prophecy that was then upon me, I saw the beauty, the meekness, the love, the peace, the true happiness that would appear in the real followers of Christ: and that I should see the kingdom of Christ on earth as I never had yet seen it, I did not then doubt. The brethren and sisters generally felt and acknowledged the truth of the Testimony, and united with it, and for a season it seemed as if we were coming into the New Creation in very deed.

But our happy prospects were again clouded: and doubts, darkness and perplexity were again our portion. Some of us began to look towards the Friends or Quakers. I had been much pleased in reading the writings of this people; and believed they had been ~~the most~~ more favoured with the light / & power of God than any people that had arisen since the apostacy.

Their full testimony against war I was convinced ought to be supported by all who professed to be Christians; and I was once imprisoned in Plymouth goal, because I could not in conscience attend training, to learn the art of murdering my fellow creatures, or pay a fine for not doing it. I believed with them that it was wrong to buy and sell preaching; and that no religious exercises ought to be gone into except by the leading & teaching of the Spirit of God. Their rejecting the flattering titles and vain and deceitful compliments of the world, I knew was correct. Their exertions in favour of the oppressed African and injured Indians I highly approved of, / and their general benevolence, kindness and hospitality worthy the imitation of all who profess Christianity. But in our conversations about this people, so ~~great a proportion~~ many of them appeared so different from what we conceived the antient Friends to be, that the prospect of attempting to unite with them seemed discouraging to us. A considerable part of ~~the Society~~ our company were also still attached to water baptism, & the Lord's Supper, so called. People around us had given us the name of Quaker Methodists.

As there were no Freewill baptists nearer us than New Hampshire and Maine, and as our prospects seemed clouded where we were, some of the brethren concluded to sell their farms / in Marshfield, and move to Maine. Most of them finally sold, and settled at Knox, Montville, and Mount Vernon, in the State of Maine so that we gave up holding public meetings at Marshfield. Some time after they moved, I visited them, and spent about a month with them at Knox, working with one of the brethren on his farm. The Freewill baptist Society at Knox was then a large one. Prince Hatch and Solomon Butler were then the [?] deacons of the church. They have since united with the Shakers, and now live with the people at New Glouster.

From Knox I went to Reedfield and Mount Vernon, to see my brother Luther, and other friends. From thence I travelled around the Circuit on foot; holding meetings among the Methodists and Freewill Baptists; and felt sensibly owned and blessed of God in testifying of the necessity of abiding in Christ, and increasing in the divine / life, till we had attained a full Salvation from all sin.

From the first of my having experienced a work of God on my own soul, I thought I had felt a blessing in commending religion to others. I had been much exercised at times about giving myself wholly to it, as I thought I felt more owned and blessed of God when I had these feelings than I did at

other times. But much of my time a sense of my unfitness discouraged me. My Methodist friends, at this time, advised me to apply to the Quarterly ~~meeting~~ Conference for licence to preach in their connection. I hesitatingly received their advice; related to the ~~Quarterly meeting~~ Conference / the exercises of my mind about preaching, and they gave me a certificate of licence to preach in their connection.

Soon after, I began to doubt the propriety of this proceeding, and felt much agitated in my mind. I had apprehended before this that I ought not to belong to any particular sect; but to give myself up to the leadings and teachings of the Spirit of Truth; conform to whatever I conscientiously could in any denomination, and speak in whatever meeting I attended, if I felt divinity influenced to speak without respect to persons or sects. When I had felt the most divine power in speaking I had frequently testified that I was in that (meaning the power of God) that was before any sects and parties in religion and would remain when all sects should be done away; and my desires were fervant that people would give themselves up to the Light of Christ within them and place their sold dependance on that for "wisdom, righteousness, justification, and redemption." I appointed some meetings, but felt less freedom and strength in speaking than I did before I received a license. / Not long after I went to my native place; held some meetings there, and ~~believed~~ thought for a season that I was honestly endeavouring to do good, but felt but little divine strength. By degrees evil propensities gained strength in me, and I fell under the power of condemnation and gave up my confidence. I now concluded I should never attempt to preach any more; and sent back ~~the~~ my Certificate to the presiding Elder from whom I had received it; and wished I had never professed religion, such sad work I had made of it since I had thought I was converted.

By degrees I gave up going to any meetings, for a season. After that attended sometimes Friend's meetings, and sometimes the Methodists. At length, the Methodists / began to hold meetings at my house. Under their preaching an awakening took place in the neighbourhood, in which I participated; and thought I felt a blessing in praying vocally and exhorting, according to the impressions I felt on my mind.

I had read many of the Friends books, and was convinced of the truth of their doctrines, and the correctness of their Testimony against many of the allowed practices of other denominations. I had been much reached and affected by some of the discourses of their preaches; and had no doubt

they spoke under the immediate influence of the Spirit of God, with more clearness from that mixture of the wisdom of man, that I thought was manifest in the discourses of most, if not all the preachers / I had heard in other denominations.

Hoping I might find more strength to live to God by having a privilege of membership among them, I requested to be received into their Society. And after being visited by a Committee from the Pembroke Monthly Meeting, to examine into my motives and fitness for becoming a member, I was received as one of the Society.

While I was a member of this Society I often felt, in silent, and other meetings, and when I was not in meeting, the operation of the Power of Good. I had not a doubt in my mind but that their principles were more correct, than any other people I knew. When I felt the operation of divine good, I saw the freeness and Almightiness of it; and often / marvelled at myself why I did not, or would not, or could not keep myself in it, when I knew that my happiness entirely depended upon my doing it, and when it seemed to me I so fervently desired it. But I had still the afflicting knowledge that I did not abide in Christ. I continued a member of this Society about five years (~~and had many professed of their confidence in me, tho' I felt much of the time that I was unworthy of it.~~)

The first correct knowledge I had of the people called Shakers, was by reading a book called the Kentucky Revival, written by Richard M. Norma, who had been a Presbyterian preacher, but was now a Shaker. When I read of the introduction and progress of the Shaker's Testimony among / the subjects of that revival, and saw with what confidence they testified that they had received the abiding power of Salvation from sin, I thought if this people enjoy what they say they do enjoy (and I had no reason to doubt it) there is not another such people on earth; and they are the real followers of Christ, however much other denominations speak against them. I had long believed that the manner in which the first church at Jerusalem lived, when the multitude of them that believed were "of one heart and of one soul; neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common" ~~was a desirable state~~ the proper order of the Church of Christ: and was often afflicted in seeing members of the same professed church, some abounding in wealth, ease, / superfluity and luxury; while others with hard labor and toil, had sometimes to be deprived of the necessities of life. I knew these things aught not so to be; and believed it was owing to the influence of the

prince of ~~this world~~ darkness that they were so.

When I read this book, I thought I would see this people for myself; so various and contradictory were the reports about them. But after a while I concluded I had been so unfaithful to the light that had been given me, and had gone from one denomination to another in hopes of finding strength to overcome the power of evil, that if this people had more Salvation than any other people, such was my habit of departing from God, that I should fall away from any good I might find among them. It often seemed to / me that God had done everything for me that could be done in order to save me, and still I would not be saved. After I gave up the intention of visiting the people, I fell into such despondency and discouragement about my state, that for nearly two years almost total despair of ever gaining Salvation from sin got strong possession of my mind.

Seeing an account in a newspaper, of a great mob assembling against the Shakers, in Ohio; abusing them, and threatening them, that unless they ~~renounced their faith,~~ and broke up and dispersed by such a time, they would come again, and execute vengeance] upon them, I wrote to Richard McNemar desiring him to give me information about the mob, when they came again / and opened to him some of my religious exercises and feelings. I received a long letter from him in answer, wherein he gave some account of the Society and the wicked conduct of this persecutors. As some ~~part of~~ things in his letter may be of use to some who may now be in a state similar to mine at that time, I will make a quotation from it.

“The Prebysterians, Seceders and New Lights are generally united against this way, for two special reasons: 1st. because it doctrinally exposes that absurdity of their false cloak of imputed righteousness, and demonstrates the necessity of being Christ-like, and doing right, in order to be esteemed righteous in the discerning eye of God; —and 2nd because / it practically reproves their vicious lives by openly shewing how the true followers of the Lamb do, in reality, live. When the Angel (or Messenger) of God stands in the sun of righteousness, and reveals the wrath of God against all righteousness, men are scorched with a great heat. They could bear to hear a great deal said against sin, and for holiness; but when we come to pluck out the right eye, and cast off every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and enter upon a life of positive obedience to God, and stand in it , this touches their plagues and sores to the quick, and sets them to blaspheming to some purpose. But the more they blaspheme, and vent their persecuting venom against this strait and narrow way of self

denial, the more / it turns to us for a testimony that it is the only way of God. I am truly pleased with thy honesty, and in stating thy experience and opening thy case; and tho I wish thee in a better condition, yet I know how to sympathize with one in thy situation; as many years of painful experience have taught me the hopes and fears, the longing desires, the vigorous exertions, and various exercises of a miserable sinner, struggling with the body of this death. I should be glad to communicate many things to thee on this subject, which I cannot in the compass of a short letter. This however I would observe: that it is hard to be obliged to sail on dry land, to keep in a way where there is no track, or to follow where none go before. When the denominations around us testify that it / is their faith to commit sin daily, in thought, word, and deed, we do not dispute it; and we think we are equally entitled to credit, when we say, that it [is] our faith to “be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke”: and it must reasonably be granted that they, and we respectively, live up to our profession, unless the contrary is proved out by our actions. I mention this, that thou mayest be guarded against the false insinuations, and slanderous aspersions that might be cast into thy way, to prevent thee from inquiring into the real character of this people.” This letter was dated, Turtle Creek, 1st Month 5, 1811. [Union Village, Ohio, January 5, 1811]

I valued this letter very much for the interesting intelligence & good advice it contained. The caution given me in the last part of the above quotation was useful to me, for as soon as any perceived I had a favorable opinion of the Shakers, for as soon as any perceived I had a favorable opinion of the Shakers, abundance of evil reports about them were brought to my ears.

Soon after my wife died, I gave up trade, which I had been engaged in for some years, and laboured to bring my personal affairs in as narrow a compass / [words lost in gutter of manuscript] in the fall of 1813, I accompanied John Bailey, a much esteemed preacher among Friends, on a religious visit to the state of Maine. We visited most of the Societies of Friends meetings in that state. After this, having placed my two children at Friends’ boarding School in Washington, Nine Partners, having and but little business on my hands, I passed my time in much dejection of mind.

Business calling me West, I concluded I would continue my journey to New Lebanon, and perhaps as far as New Hartford, near Utica, where my brother Caleb lived. As I drew near New Lebanon, a multiplicity of thoughts crouded my mind. I thought I had set out, about twenty years

before, to seek Salvation from sin: had prayed much /for it; had again and again been favored with divine good; had made use of all the means I believed best adapted to gain the end of my faith, salvation from sin; had read the bible much, and abundance of other books I thought written by the most spiritually minded; had associated with those I thought most devoted to God; and still, after all my various exercises and struggles I was unsaved: sin still had dominion over me. I enquired in myself whether if I should, for twenty years to come, if I should live so long, be more likely to gain Salvation from sin, by the use of all the means I knew of in the world, than I had for twenty years before, and I could not see that I should.

When I ~~came~~ began to converse with this people, I used some arguments against / their most peculiar doctrine, that Christians could not marry; but soon felt the weakness of my arguments. I was soon satisfied from what I saw and heard that the power of Salvation, and strength of divine love, prevailed among this people beyond what I had witnessed among any other people. I was conscious that those who most knew Salvation from sin, were best able to direct and assist others to obtain it. Still I hesitated about attempting to unite with them. It seemed to me as contrary to my natural feelings as it would be to lay down my life. I feared, if I should set out, I should not persevere. The effect it would have upon my natural relations, acquaintances, and above all, the Society of Friends of which I was a member. I was sensible / they could not view it in the light I did; and to wound the feelings of those whom I respected and loved ~~much~~, felt very afflicting to me.

But after much struggle of mind, believing it the only way in which I should be likely to gain Salvation, I gave up to attempt to unite with the Testimony of this people, by confessing my sins as to God, in the presence of his witnesses; with a full determination to forsake them, and to labour to separte myself from that nature which/that had produced them, and labour to be partaker of that divine nature, whereby I might bring forth fruit unto God.

And, blessed be the Father of mercies and God of all grace and consolation, I do know that from that time to the present / I have experienced [word in gutter?] victory over the power of evil; and I have no doubt if I abide in faithful obedience to this Testimony, I shall attain to the intire destruction of every thing in me that is contrary to the nature of God; and shall thus be prepared for perfect and everlasting happiness with him, “for he is faithful who hath promised.”

I was forty one years of age when I came here, and have lived here nearly 20 years, and can truly say I have enjoyed far more true happiness since I ~~came here~~ have lived with this people, than I did in all my life before. I have had temptations and tribulations, in common with my brethren: and we have no idea of entering into the kingdom of God, or washing our robes, and making them white in the blood, or life of the Lamb, but thro great tribulation. But the deepest tribulation will not bring the soul into real misery, / like condemnation.

I have often thought, since I was twenty-one years of age, that if being a slave in Algiers all my life would be the means of my obtaining deliverance from the cruel testimony of sin, I would readily submit to be one. Must I not then feel thankful that with deliverance from the cruel tyranny of sin, I would readily submit to be one. Must I not then feel thankful, that with deliverance from the tyranny of sin, I am free from outward tyranny; and with my beloved brethren and sisters who have been made free by the same previous faith, enjoy together abundance of spiritual blessings and are as comfortably supplied with temporal things as any reasonable person can desire.

And I have felt as thankful on account of my children that I united with this people, as I have on my own account. Before I came here, seeing much a flood / of corruption in the world, by which it seemed all were more or less carried away from the Truth, I had many distressing feelings on account of my children. I could comfort myself with but little hope that they would grow up in that ~~Truth~~, as innocency I wished they might. I have here had the satisfaction of seeing both my children, one eleven, ~~and~~ the other eight years of age when I came here, embracing the Truth, and growing up in the fear of God: kept, I am fully convinced, from the evil that is in the world, in a manner they could not have been kept among any other people. I have seen my son, at the age of twenty, leave the body: but so fully satisfied have I been that his soul was united to God, and / that he is now seen in the enjoyment of Everlasting God, that I have not had one feeling on account of his death that has caused me any unhappiness. My daughter, I am confident, has chosen the only way of God, the way of holiness, for her everlasting treasure/portion. So that I am satisfied with the goodness of God to me in respect to my children.

Before I saw this people I heard abundance of evil reports about them; but that did not discourage me from attempting to know for myself, their real character. I think these evil reports rather drew my mind to them, than

from them: for I knew, if they were the real followers of Christ, all manner of evil would be spoken against them falsely. I have not found one of these evil reports to be true; and I am fully satisfied that / the one great labour of the body of the people is, to “be blameless and homeless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.”

When I was with the Methodists, Baptists and Friends, I saw the necessity of being seperated from the world, in order to be true follower of Christ. The Methodist and Baptist brethren would often use expressions to this import: “We are not seperated from the world as we ought to be,”—“We must come out and be seperate:” And I have used expressions to that import; feeling as I spoke. But to effect that seperation I felt unable. I found that putting off all superfluity of dress, and abstaining from many of the wrong practices of the world, did not / effect the necessary seperation. I read that by the cross of Christ, the new testament Christians were crucified to the world, and the world crucified to them; and used sometimes to say, ~~that~~ when I saw this was not effected in us, that it seemed to me; that with all our talk about denying ourselves and take-up the cross daily, we had not come to true understanding of what the real cross of Christ was.

In receiving the Testimony of borne by the people called Shakers, I have learned what the cross of Christ is, and the only way by which seperation from the world is in reality effected. St. John understood the matter. Let us hear him. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the / Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, & the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” Until these three foundation principles of the world are renounced and hated, separation from the world cannot be known. Renouncing, hating, crucifying these three principles, will effect that separation. Thus, and thus only, will the powerful effects of the Cross of Christ be known and manifested.

Having thus written a little, of the much I might have written, of my former religious exercises, I will now proceed to give a brief statement of the belief and practices of that strange people who are so misconceived of, and so misrepresented in the world.

It may be proper to premise here, that / we have no particular creed, or articles of faith, to which all are required to subscribe who unite with us, as is common in many religious Societies. We believe true Christianity to be rather practical than theoretical; and that divine Light and Truth, whenever it is received and properly improved by obedience to it, will be

always increasing in the Soul, not only thro time, but for ever in eternity,
~~forever and ever~~

