

SELECTIONS FROM

---

THE LETTERS OF  
ISAAC PENINGTON

## ISAAC PENINGTON (1616–1679)

*Before turning to the letters of Isaac Penington, it may be well to frame them with a glimpse, at least, into the life of this deeply committed Friend and his wife Mary. Isaac Penington was born in 1616. His grandfather had been a wealthy London merchant and his father one of the leading Puritan statesmen of Britain. The father had been a member of Parliament, Lord High Sheriff of London, and twice the Lord Mayor of London. His wealth and position made it natural for Isaac Penington to attend the University of Cambridge and the way to the highest society was open to him. He did not marry until he was thirty-eight years old. His bride was Lady Mary Springett, a beautiful and sensitive woman who had married when she was eighteen and had lost her husband—a gallant young colonel in Cromwell's army—a year after the marriage when she was carrying their child. It was this child, the lovely Gulielma Springett, called Guli, who was later to marry the young William Penn. Mary Penington had lost both parents when she was three and was brought up by relatives. When she came of age she inherited large estates and was a wealthy woman so that she and Isaac Penington had the most ample provision for any life position they might choose when they married in 1654. They settled in Chalfont St. Giles, an attractive part of Buckinghamshire, some twenty miles from London.*

*Both Isaac and Mary Penington were seekers, travelers in the spiritual life. They had tasted of different religious offerings but found none of their religious connections satisfying. Both were yearning always for more inward religion than they had discovered. There were centrifugal as well as centripetal forces*

## QUAKER SPIRITUALITY

that played on their first encounters with Quakers during the third year of their marriage. They were used to gentler manners than they found among these meetings and there were many things that put them off, yet they recognized a fierce sincerity and a centering down in the Friends that drew them.

Penington wrote of this period, "I set myself against taking up the cross to the language, fashion, and custom and honours of the world: for my station and connections in the world made it very hard; but I never had peace or quiet in my mind till the Lord, by the stroke of his judgments, brought me off from these things." It was not until 1658 that the Peningtons met George Fox and heard him preach. Isaac Penington's witness to the crumbings of his inner hesitations that took place after this year and a half of weighing the matter are moving to read: "I felt the dead quickened, the Seed raised insomuch that my heart (in the certainty of light and clearness of true sense) said, 'This is he, this is he, there is no other. This is he whom I have waited for and sought from my childhood, who was always near me and often begotten life in my heart. But I knew him not distinctly, nor how to receive him or dwell with him. And then in this sense (in the meltings and breakings of the spirit) was I given up to the Lord to become his, both in waiting for the further revealing of his Seed in me and to serve him in the life and power of the Seed.'" Again he cries out: "I have met with my God; I have met with my Saviour; and he hath not been present with me without his salvation. But I have felt the healings drop upon my soul from under his wings. I have met with the true knowledge, the knowledge of life . . . which my soul hath rejoiced in, in the presence of the Lord. I have met the Seed's Father, in the Seed I have felt him my Father."

At last they were inwardly reached and cost them what it might, and the prospect was that it would cost them perhaps all of their property and even their freedom (with prison the lot of so many Friends), they knew they must throw in their lot with these people. William Penn, their future son-in-law, in a tribute to Isaac Penington at his death said, "But to the glory of the living God and praise of this man's memory, let me say neither his worldly station (the most considerable of any that closed in with this way of religion) nor the contradictions it gave to former conceptions, nor the debasement it brought upon his learning or

## ISAAC PENINGTON

wisdom, nor yet the reproach and loss of all that attended his public espousal of it did deter him from embracing it." And the same could be said for Mary Penington. Her large wealth was nibbled away by relatives who used her refusal to take the oath as a means of keeping her from appearing in court against their claims. Even the property at Chalfont St. Giles was confiscated.

Isaac Penington was in prison for seventeen weeks in 1661-1662 in Aylesbury Gaol for worshiping God in his own house. On this occasion there were sixty other Friends in prison with him. When he was released they went straight ahead with meetings twice a week in his home. He was in prison again for a month for accompanying the body of a deceased Friend to the grave. In 1665 he was forcibly taken from sitting in a Quaker meeting and sent to Aylesbury for sixteen weeks. On the order of the Earl of Bridgewater he was sent to Aylesbury for nine months in 1665-1666. This was followed by another two years in the same prison by the order of the same earl. In 1670 he went to visit Friends in the Reading Gaol and was himself seized and kept in prison for one and three-quarters years between 1670 and 1672. Because he was always of frail health and highly sensitive, these periods of incarceration in Gaols as they were run at this time were a great cross to him, but he bore it all cheerfully and many of the letters in this selection carry the dateline of one of these prisons.

Thomas Ellwood, who lived in the Penington family as a tutor for the years 1662-1669, says of Penington, "I think not of him without delight." The word that described this gentle, tender, loving Friend, Isaac Penington, with great discernment was, "He was not stiff or stout in the defense of his own building." And he had little ill to speak about his persecutors. Mary Penington's complete sharing of her husband's witness made possible his courageous struggle for religious liberty. Isaac Penington died in 1679 and Mary Penington, who was five years his junior, died in 1682.

Letters have a way of drawing out of the one who writes them a genuine entry into the life of another. Often enough this pierces deeply into the life of the recipient and unsheathes the inward reaches of the being of the writer more tellingly than a conversation between them might do. For the shyness and reticence at sharing on the interior level of experience in each

## QUAKER SPIRITUALITY

*other's company seems to fall away under the spell of an intimate letter. These selections from the letters of Isaac Pennington are nearly all taken from his letters of spiritual guidance both to those within the Society of Friends and those outside that sought his counsel. Although they were written well over three hundred years ago they are marked by this penetrating intimacy that makes them not only authentic but capable of carrying to many readers in our own day a sense that the letters are speaking to their condition.*

*The selected letters have been taken from the second London edition, 1828. Where any identification of the date and the recipient of the letter exists, it is given.*

## THE LETTERS

*To Thomas Walmsley*

1670

It is not enough to hear of Christ, or read of Christ; but this is the thing, to feel him my root, my life, my foundation; and my soul engrafted into him, by him who hath power to engraft.

# #

O Friend, I beseech thee, mind this; come, O come to the true root! come to Christ indeed! Rest not in an outward knowledge; but come to the inward life, the hidden life, and receive life from him who is the life; and then abide in and live to God in the life of his Son.

*To Bridget Atley*

*No date*

He hath changed, and doth change thy spirit daily; though it be as the shooting up of the corn, whose growth cannot be discerned at present by the most observing eye, but it is very manifest afterwards that it hath grown. My heart is refreshed for thy sake, rejoicing in the Lord's goodness towards thee; and that the blackness of darkness begins to scatter from thee, though the enemy be still striving the same way to enter and distress thee again. But wait to feel the relieving measure of life, and heed not distressing thoughts, when they rise ever so strongly in thee; nay, though they have entered thee, fear them not, but *be still awhile, not believing in the power which thou feelest they have over thee*, and it will fall on a sudden.

# #

And oh, learn daily more and more, to trust and hope in him, and not to be afrighted with any amazement, nor to be taken up with the sight of the present thing; but wait for the shutting of thy own eye upon every occasion, and for the opening of the eye of God in thee, and for the sight of things therewith as they are from him.

## QUAKER SPIRITUALITY

*To Bridget Atley*

1665

Thou must join in with the beginnings of life and be exercised with the day of small things, before thou meet the great things, wherein is the clearness and satisfaction of the soul. The rest is at noonday; but, the travels begin at the breakings of day, wherein are but glimmerings, or little light, wherein the discovery of good and evil are not manifest and certain; yet *there* must the traveller begin and travel, and in his faithful travel (in much fear and trembling lest he should err) the light will break in on him more and more.

*To the Friend of Francis Fines*

No date

The sum and substance of true religion doth not stand in getting a notion of Christ's righteousness, but in feeling the power of the endless life, receiving the power, and being changed by the power. And where Christ is, there is his righteousness.

# #

Christ was anointed and sent of God, a Saviour, to destroy the works of the Devil, to break down all rule and authority contrary to God in man; for his work is in the heart. There he quickens, there he raiseth, there he brings into death that which is to die, raising the seed immortal, and bringing the creature into subjection to it. Now, to feel the power that doth this, and to feel this wrought by the power, this is far beyond all talk about justification and righteousness. Hither would I have thee come, out of the talk, out of the outwardness of knowledge, into the thing itself, and into the trueness of the new and living knowledge which is witnessed here.

# #

That charge of thine on us, that we deny the person of Christ, and make him nothing but a light or notion, a principle in the heart of man, is very unjust and untrue; for we own that appearance of him in his body of flesh, his sufferings and death, and his sitting at the Father's right hand in glory: but then we affirm, that there is no true knowledge of him, or union with him, but in the seed or principle of his life in the heart, and that *therein* he appears, subdues sin, and reigns over it, in those that understand and submit to the teaching and government of his Spirit.

## ISAAC PENINGTON

*To Friends of Truth in the  
Two Chalfonts*

*Aylesbury Prison, 1666*

The Seed which God hath sown in you is pure and precious. Oh, that it may be found living in you, and ye abiding in it. Oh, that no other seed may at any time usurp authority over it; but that ye may know the authority and pure Truth which is of God, and therein stand, in the pure dominion, over all that is against him.

# #

O my dear Friends, that there may be kept down in you which is forward to judge, to approve or disapprove; and may the weighty judgment of the Seed be waited for. And Oh, do not judge, do not judge, before the light of the day shine in you and give forth the judgment; but stand and walk in fear and humility, and tenderness of spirit, and silence of flesh.

# #

From your brother and companion in the faith, patience, and afflictions of the Seed,

*To a Friend*

*1673*

O my Friend, mind this precious Truth inwardly, this precious grace inwardly, the precious life inwardly, the precious light inwardly, the precious power inwardly, the inward word of life, the inward voice of the Shepherd in the heart, the inward seed, the inward salt, the inward leaven, the inward pearl, &c. whereby Christ effects this. Distinguish between words *without* concerning the thing, and the thing itself *within*; and wait and labour then to know, understand, and be guided by, the motives, leadings, drawings, teachings, quickenings, &c. of the thing itself within.

*To Nathaniel Stonar*

*1671*

If thou wilt have life, thou must come to that which gives life. If thou wilt come into the ministration of the New Testament, thou must come into the spirit and power; and now the letter of the Scriptures in the Spirit and power which wrote them, if ever thou know them aright.

## QUAKER SPIRITUALITY

# #

And oh, that thou also might feel quickenings of life and true leadings.

*To Catharine Pordage*

1671

I make little of the illumination of the understanding without subjection to him that illuminateth.

# #

The troubled soul is not only to go to the Lord but it must be taught by him how to go to him. The Lord is the teacher. . . . It is not the great and main work to be found *doing*, but to be found *doing aright*, from the true teachings and from the right spirit. . . . A little praying from God's spirit and in that which is true and pure is better than thousands of vehement desires in one's own will and after the flesh. For as long as a man prays thus, that which should die in him lives in his very prayer; and how shall it ever be destroyed, if it get food and gain strength there? . . . It is not thy proper work to look out at the way or think it hard (for it is not so to the true Seed), but to be travelling it in faithfulness as thou art drawn and led; and this will save thee much sorrow.

*To Catharine Pordage and Another*

1671

It is your proper state to wait daily, not for comforts, not for refreshments (that day is to come afterwards), but for convictions and reproofs of that in you which is contrary to God. . . . You must die to your own wisdom if ever ye will be born of a walk in the wisdom of God. . . . If ye will ever know the spirit of the Lord, ye must meet with him as a searcher and reprover in your hearts.

*To an Unknown Correspondent*

1671

Then, as God gives the knowledge, he requires obedience which is to be learned of God in the new spirit of life.

*To Thomas and Ann Mudd*

1672

While I was there with you, true living breathings did spring up in my heart to the Lord for you. Last First-day, my wife had a letter of George Fox sent her which I read that night. In the reading of it I

ISAAC PENINGTON.

had many thoughts respecting you, and a desire that ye peruse it; which I sent unto you the next day for that end. Now this morning you were upon my heart and several things rose up in me in reference to you. . . . One was that ye keep steadfast in that holy testimony to draw from outward and dead knowledge, and out of dead practices and worships after man's own conceivings into an inward principle, and into worship in spirit and in truth, both inwardly in the heart, and outwardly in the assemblies of God's gathering. . . . [Another], that ye be daily exercised, guided, and your heart opened and quickened by the principle and spirit of Truth; that so ye may know what it is to walk with the Lord and to feel the power of the Lord; and to be led by him out of and away from the mysterious workings of the power and spirit of darkness inwardly.

*To Widow Hemmings*

1673

O my friend, that thou mightst feel more and more the truth in the inward parts and be more and more established therein. . . . Oh! The Lord God prosper his own seed and holy plantation in thy heart and keep thee in the meek, lowly, humble, poor, and tender spirit, unto which is his mercy and blessing.

*To Widow Hemmings*

1675

There is a river, a sweet, still, flowing river, the streams whereof will make glad thy heart. And learn but in quietness and stillness to retire to the Lord, and wait upon him; in whom thou shalt feel peace and joy, in the midst of thy troubles from the cruel and vexatious spirit of this world. So wait to know thy work and service to the Lord, in thy place and station; and the Lord make thee faithful therein, and thou wilt want neither help, support nor comfort.

Thy Friend in the truest, sincerest, and most constant love.

*To Dulcibella Laiton*

1677

There is a pure seed of life which God hath sown in thee; Oh, that it might come through, and come over all that is above it, and contrary to it. And for that end, wait daily to feel it, and to feel thy mind subdued by it, and joined to it. Take heed of looking out in the reasonings of thy mind, but dwell in the feeling sense of life; and then, that will arise in thee more and more, which maketh truly wise,

## QUAKER SPIRITUALITY

and gives power, and brings into the holy authority and dominion of life.

# #

Come out of the knowledge and comprehension about things, into the feeling life; and let that be thy knowledge and wisdom, which thou receivest and retainest in the feeling life; and that will lead thee into the footsteps of the flock, without reasoning, consulting, or disputing.

*To S. W.*

1678

O my dear Friend, let not any part of thy life lie in notions above the Seed, but let it all lie in the Seed itself, in thy waiting upon the Lord for its arisings in thee, and in thy feeling its arisings. Oh, what becomes of flesh, and self, and self-righteousness, when this lives in the heart. My religion, which I now daily bless my God for, began in this Seed; which, when I first felt, and discerningly knew from the Lord, my cry to him was, Oh, this is it I have longed after and waited for! Oh, unite my soul to thee in this for ever! This is thy Son's gift from thee, thy Son's grace, thy Son's Truth, thy Son's life, thy Son's Spirit.

# #

Here Christ is formed in the soul, of a truth; here the black garments of unrighteousness, yea, of man's righteousness too, are put off, and the white raiment put on; here the holy image is brought forth in the heart, even the image of the dear Son, which partakes of the divine nature of the Father; here the soul is new created in Christ Jesus.

*To S. W.*

1678

Oh, my Friend, there is an ingrafting into Christ, a being formed and new created in Christ, a living and abiding in him, and a growing and bringing forth fruit through him unto perfection. Oh, mayst thou experience all these things; and, that thou mayst so do, wait to know life, the springings of life, the separations of life inwardly from all that evil which hangs about it, and would be springing up and mixing with it, under an appearance of good; that life may come to live fully in thee, and nothing else. And so, sink very low, and become

## ISAAC PENINGTON

very little, and know little; yea, know no power to believe, act, or suffer any thing for God, but as it is given thee, by the springing grace, virtue, and life of the Lord Jesus. For, grace is a spiritual inward thing, an holy Seed, sown by God, springing up in the heart. People have got a notion of grace, but know not the thing. Do not thou matter the notion, but feel the thing; and know thy heart more and more ploughed up by the Lord, that his Seed's grace may grow up in thee more and more, and thou mayst daily feel thy heart as a garden, more and more enclosed, watered, dressed, and delighted in by him.

This is a salutation of love from thy Friend in the Truth, which lives and changes not.

*To Lady Conway*

*No date*

Oh, wait to feel the Seed, and the cry of thy soul in the breathing life of the Seed, to its Father, with its sweet, kindly, and natural subjection to him. And wait for the risings of the power in thy heart, in the Father's seasons, and for faith in the power, that thou mayst feel inward healing, of all the inward wounds which the Lord makes in thy soul, through his love to thee for thy good.

*To Abraham Grimsden*

*No date*

It is easy to profess and make a show of Truth, but hard to come into it. It is very hard to the earthly mind, to part with that which must be parted with for it, before the soul can come to possess and enjoy it. Profession of Truth, without the life and power, is but a slippery place, which men may easily slide from; nay, indeed, if men be not in the life and power, they can hardly be kept from that which will stain their profession. The Lord, who searcheth the heart, knows how it is with thee: oh, consider thy ways, and fear before him, and take heed of taking his name in vain, for he will not hold such guiltless.

*To One under Divine Visitation*

*No date*

Oh! look not after great things: small breathings, small desires after the Lord, if true and pure, are sweet beginnings of life. Take heed of despising "the day of small things," by looking after some great visitation, proportionable to thy distress, according to thy eye. Nay, thou must become a child, thou must lose thy own will quite by

## QUAKER SPIRITUALITY

degrees. Thou must wait for life to be measured out by the Father, and be content with what proportion, and at what time, he shall please to measure.

Oh! be little, be little, and then thou wilt be content with little; and if thou feel now and then a check or a secret smiting, in *that* is the Father's love; be not over wise, nor over eager in thy own willing, running, and desiring, and thou mayst feel it so; and by degrees come to the knowledge of thy Guide, who will lead thee step by step in the path of life, and teach thee to follow, and in his own season powerfully judge that which cannot nor will not follow. Be still, and wait for light and strength, and desire not to know or comprehend, but to be known and comprehended in the love and life, which seeks out, gathers, and preserves the lost sheep.

I remain thy dear Friend, and a well-wisher to thy soul in the love of my Father.

*To Joseph Wright*

*No date*

I was weary and sick at heart of opinions, and had not the Lord brought that to my hand which my soul wanted, I had never meddled with religion more. But, as I felt that in my heart which was evil and not of God, so the Lord God of my life pointed me to that of him in my heart which was of another nature, teaching me to wait for and know his appearance there; in subjection whereto, I experience him stronger than the strong man that was there before; and by his power he hath separated me from that within, which separated me from him before; and thus being separated, truly I feel union with him, and his blessed presence every day, which, what it is unto me, my tongue cannot utter.

*To The Women's Meeting at John Mannoek's*

*1678*

And mind, Friends, what is now upon me to you; it is one thing to sit waiting to feel the power, and to keep within the limits of the power thus far; and another, yea, and harder, to feel and keep within the sense and limits of the power, when ye come to act. Then, your reasonings, your wisdom, your apprehensions, have more advantage to get up in you, and to put themselves forth. Oh, therefore, watch narrowly and diligently against the forward part, and keep back to the life, which though it rise more slowly, yet acts more surely and safely for God.

Oh, wait and watch to feel your keeper keeping you within the

## ISAAC PENINGTON

holy bounds and limits, within the pure fear, within the living sense, while ye are acting for your God; that ye may only be his instruments, and feel him acting in you.

# #

And take heed of the quickness and strength of reason, or of the natural part, which avails little: but wait for the evidence and demonstration of God's Spirit, which reaches to the witness and doth the work. Are they in a snare? are they overtaken in a fault? yea, are they in measure blinded and hardened, so that they can neither see nor feel, as to this particular? Retire, sit still awhile, and travail for them. Feel how life will arise in any of you, and how mercy will reach towards them, and how living words, from the tender sense, may be reached forth to their hearts deeply by the hand of the Lord for their good. And, if ye find them at length bowing to the Lord, oh, let tender compassion help them forwards; that what hath been so troublesome and groundedly dissatisfactory in the progress, may at length have a sweet tissue for their good, and our joy and rejoicing in the Lord.

# #

Your Friend and Brother in the tender Truth, and in pure love and precious life.

### *On Prayer in Families*

*No date*

Ye must come out of your knowledge, into the feeling of an inward principle of life, if ever ye be restored to the true unity with God, and to the true enjoyment of him again. Ye must come out of the knowledge and wisdom ye have gathered from the Scriptures, into a feeling of the things there written of, as it pleaseth the Lord to open and reveal them in the hidden man of the heart.

### *To a Parent*

*1665*

I have not much freedom to write at present, yet the spirit of thy letter doth so strongly draw, that I cannot be wholly silent.

This, therefore, in the uprightness, fear, and tenderness of my heart, I say to thee.

There is a pure principle of life in the heart, from whence all good springs. This thou art to mind in thyself; and this thou art to wait on the Lord to be taught, and enabled by him to reach to in thy

## QUAKER SPIRITUALITY

children; that thou mayst be an instrument in his hand to bring them into the fear of him, which is acceptable to him, and will be profitable to them. Mind therefore its leadings in thy heart, and wait to be acquainted with its voice there.

# #

And as to thy children, daily feel the need of instruction from the Almighty, to govern and direct them, and wait daily to receive it from him; and what thou receivest, give forth in fear, and wait for his carrying it home and working it upon their hearts. For he is a Father, and hath tenderness, and gives true wisdom to every condition of his people that wait upon him; so as he may be known to all daily, and they able to be nothing without him.

Breathe unto the Lord, that thy heart may be single, thy judgment set straight by his principle of life in thee, and thy children guided to, and brought up in the sense of the same principle. As for praying, they will not need to be taught that outwardly; but if a true sense be kindled in them, though never so young, from that sense will arise breathing to him that begat it, suitable to their state; which will cause growth and increase of that sense and life in them.

Thus in the plainness of my heart have I answered thee, according to the drawings and freedom which I found there, which I dare not exceed, who am thy unfeigned Friend, though outwardly unknown.

*To E. Terry on Disputes*

*No date*

As touching disputes, indeed I have no love to them; Truth did not enter my heart that way, nor do I expect to propagate it in others that way; yet, sometimes a necessity is laid upon me for the sake of others. And truly, when I do feel a necessity, I do it in great fear; not trusting in my spear or bow, I mean in strong arguments or wise considerations, which I (of myself) can gather or comprehend; but I look up to the Lord for the guidance, help, and demonstration of his Spirit, that way may be made thereby in men's hearts for the pure seed to be reached to, wherein the true conviction and thorough conversion of the soul to God is witnessed. I had far rather be feeling Christ's life, Spirit, and power in my own heart, than disputing with others about them.

## ISAAC PENINGTON

### *The Friends of Both the Chalfonts*

1667

Now, my dear Friends, ye know somewhat of this, and ye know the way to it. Oh, be faithful, be faithful, —travel on, travel on; let nothing stop you; but wait for and daily follow the sensible leadings of that measure of life, which God hath placed in you, which is one with the fulness, and into which the fulness runs daily and fills it, that it may run into you and fill you.

# #

Thus, my dear Friends, let us retire, and dwell in the peace which God breathes, and lie down in the Lamb's patience and stillness, night and day, which nothing can wear out or disturb: and so the preservation of the poor and needy shall be felt to be in his name, and glory shall be sung to his name over all. . . .

### *To the Independents of Canterbury*

No date

It pleased the Lord, after many years, when my hope nearly failed, to visit me in a wonderful manner, breaking my heart in pieces, giving me to feel his pure living power, and the raising of his holy Seed in my heart thereby; insomuch, that I cried out inwardly before him, "This is He, this is He whom I have sought after and so much wanted! This is the pearl, this is the holy leaven! Do what thou wilt with me, afflict me how thou wilt, and as long as thou pleasest, so that at length I may be joined with this, and become one with this!" So, the eye of my understanding was from that day anointed, and I saw and felt the pure life of the Son made manifest in me; and the Father drew me to him as to a living stone, and hath built my soul upon him, and brought me to Mount Zion, and the holy city of our God; where the river of life sends forth its streams, which refresh and make glad the holy city, and all the tabernacles that are built on God's holy hill.

# #

Oh, that ye might inwardly know these things! Turn in, turn in. Mind what stirs in your hearts; what moves against sin, what moves towards sin. The one is the Son's life, the Son's grace, the Son's Spirit; the other is the spirit and nature which is contrary thereto. If ye could come but to the sense of this, and come to a true inward silence, and waiting, and turning at the reproofs of heavenly wisdom,

## QUAKER SPIRITUALITY

and know the heavenly drawings into that which is holy and living, ye would soon find the Lord working in your hearts.

### *To Catbarine Pordage on Prayer*

1671

Prayer is a gift; and he that receiveth it, must first come to the sense of his own inability; and so wait to receive; and perhaps begin, but with a groan or sigh from the true Spirit, and thus grow in ability from the same Spirit, denying the ability which is after the flesh: this latter abounds in many, who mistake and err in judgment, not waiting on the Lord to be enabled by him rightly to judge and distinguish between flesh and spirit, but are many times willingly ignorant in this particular, —it will cost so dear to come to a true understanding therein.

# #

The troubled soul is not only to go to the Lord, but it must be taught by him *how* to go to him. The Lord is the teacher, and *this* is a great lesson, which the soul cannot learn of itself, but as it is taught by him. Men abound in their several ways in religion, in that which God is arising to scatter and confound; so that, it is not the great and main work to be found *doing*, but to be found doing *aright*, from the true teachings, and from the right Spirit.

In the time of great trouble there may be life stirring underneath, and a true and tender sense, and pure desires, in which there may be a drawing nigh and breathing of heart to the Lord; but, in the time of trouble and great darkness, may not a man easily desire amiss, and pray amiss, if he have not his guide. A little praying from God's Spirit, and in that which is true and pure, is better than thousands of vehement desires in one's own will, and after the flesh.

### *To the Women Friends at Armscot*

1678

In your meetings together to do service for the Lord, be every one of you very careful and diligent in watching to his power, that ye may have the sensible living feeling of it, each of you, in your own hearts, and in the hearts one of another; and that ye may keep within the limits of it, and not think, or speak, or act beyond it. And know, Oh, wait more and more to know, how to keep that silence which is of the power, that, in every one of you, what the power would have silent may be silent. Oh, take heed of the forwardness of the flesh, the wisdom of the flesh, the will of the flesh, the talkativeness of the flesh;

## ISAAC PENINGTON

keep them back, oh, let them for ever be kept back in every one of you, by the presence and virtue of the power.

The power is the authority and blessing of your meetings, and therein lies your ability to perform what God requires; be sure ye have it with you. Keep back to the life, keep low in the holy fear, and ye shall not miss of it. You will find it easy to transgress, easy to set up self, easy to run into sudden apprehensions about things, and one to be of this mind and another of that; but feel the power to keep down all this, and to keep you out of all this; every one watching to the life, when and where it will arise to help you, and that ye may be sensible of it when it doth arise, and not in a wrong wisdom oppose it, but be one with it. And thus, if any thing should arise from the wrong wisdom in any, ye may be sensible of it, not defiled or entangled with it, but abiding in that which sees through it and judges it; that so life may reign, in your hearts and in your meetings, above that which will be forward, and perking over the life, if ye be not very watchful.

# #

There is that near you which will guide you; O! wait for it, and be sure ye keep to it; that being innocent and faithful, in following the Lord in the leadings of his power, his power may plead your cause in the hearts of all his tender people hereabouts; and they may see and acknowledge, that your meetings are of God, —that ye are guided by him into that way of service in his holy fear, in which he himself is with you, and by the movings of his Holy Spirit in your hearts, hath engaged you. Be not hasty either in conceiving any thing in your minds, or in speaking it forth, or in any thing ye are to do; but feel him by his Spirit and life going along with you, and leading you into what he would have any of you, or every one of you do. If ye be in the true feeling sense of what the Lord your God would have done, and join with what is of God, as it riseth in any, or against any thing that is not of God, as it is made manifest among you; ye are all in your places and proper services, obeying the blessed will and doing the blessed work of the Lord your God.

*To M. Hiorns*

1679

Now this advice ariseth in my heart. Oh, keep cool and low before the Lord, that the Seed, the pure living Seed, may spring more and more in thee, and thy heart be united more and more to the Lord

## QUAKER SPIRITUALITY

therein. Coolness of spirit is a precious frame, and the glory of the Lord most shines therein, in its own lustre and brightness; and when the soul is low before the Lord it is still near the Seed, and preciously in its life one with the Seed. And when the Seed riseth, thou shalt have liberty in the Lord to rise with it; only take heed of that part which will be outrunning it, and getting above it, and so not ready to descend again, and keep low in the deeps with it.

# #

*Postscript:* Now, feel the child's nature, which chooseth nothing, but desires the fulfilling of the Father's will in it. I cannot desire to enjoy any thing (saith the nature of the true birth) but as the Father, of himself, pleaseth to give me to enjoy. There is a time to want as well as to abound, while we are in this world. And the times of wanting, as well as abounding, are greatly advantageous to us.

# #

So, be still and quiet, and silent before the Lord, not putting up any request to the Father, nor cherishing any desire in thee, but in the Seed's lowly nature and purely springing life; and the Lord give thee the clear discerning, in the lowly Seed, of all that springs and arises in thy heart.

Thou didst read precious things of the Seed, when thou *wast* here, *written outwardly*; oh, that thou *mightst* read the same things *written inwardly* in thy own heart; which that thou mayst do, become as a weaned child, not exercising thyself in things too high or too wonderful for thee. Every secret thing, every spiritual mystery, but what God opens to thee, is too high and wonderful for thee. And if the Lord at any time open to thee deep mysteries, fear before the Lord, and go no further into them than the Lord leads thee. The error is still in the *comprehending knowing mind*, but never in the lowly weighty seed of life; —whither the Lord God of my life more and more lead thee, and counsel thee to take up thy dwelling-place there, daily instructing thee so to do. For the greatest as well as the least must be daily taught of the Lord, both in ascending and descending, or they will miss their way; yea, they must be daily *taught* of him to be silent before him, and know [what it is] to be *still* in *him*, or they will be apt to miss in either.

*This from thy Friend,*

## ISAAC PENINGTON

*To an Unknown Correspondent*

*No date*

This is our religion; to feel that which God begets in our hearts preserved alive by God, to be taught by him to know him, to worship, and live to him, in the leadings and by the power of his Spirit;

# #

There is life, there is peace, there is joy, there is righteousness, there is health, there is salvation, there is power of redemption in the Seed; yea, there is so. But thy soul wants and doth not enjoy these things. Well, but how mayst thou come to enjoy them? There is no way, but union with the Seed; knowing the Seed, hearing the voice of the Seed, learning of and becoming subject to the Seed.