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# David Willson (1778-1866): Canadian Visionary Writer And Hymnodist

Thomas Martin Gerry

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DAVID WILLSON (1778-1866):  
CANADIAN VISIONARY WRITER  
AND HYMNODIST

by

Thomas Martin Farr Gerry

Department of English

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Graduate Studies  
The University of Western Ontario

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## ABSTRACT

David Willson was a visionary famous in his own lifetime for his controversial theological writings; for the many poems and hymns he composed; and for the utopian community -- the Children of Peace -- he helped build at Sharon, Ontario. This thesis initiates a thorough understanding of Willson's literary achievements by providing a critical overview of the entire canon, and by exploring Willson's thought and dominant metaphors -- the design of his visionary system.

The thesis presents the most comprehensive Willson bibliography yet assembled, including two books by Willson previously unknown to scholars, and the first itemizing of the Sharon Temple Museum's manuscript collection. To establish the intellectual and religious backgrounds to Willson's writings, the thesis traces the influences of Jacob Boehme's mysticism on George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, and from Fox to Willson, through Willson's membership in the Society of Friends from 1805 to 1812. The thesis examines Quakerism contemporary with Willson to account further for the genesis of some of Willson's social and theological precepts. To establish the historical

setting, the thesis presents details of Willson's involvements with political leaders and issues of the period. A sketch of contemporary Upper Canadian publishing activities suggests the literary context.

The thesis proceeds through Willson's books and manuscripts in chronological order to show the development of Willson's ideas and insights. Some of the topics are: Willson's treatment of evil -- similar to Boehme's -- as integral with divine creation; Willson's concept of the Bible as a way to know God, and the relations between the Old and New Testaments; his understanding of the Jews as a spiritual state; his image of Christ as the mediator between God and mankind, and whose way of universal love, available to the living, is the regaining of paradise. From these subjects and their presentations, the figure of the circle emerges consistently as the organizing shape in the design of Willson's visionary system. For example, the centripetal tendencies of the mind in the search for Christ appear in The Impressions of the Mind (1835), Willson's chief work. The hymns of the 1840's and 1850's are circular both in their mantric repetition and in their vision of the centrifugal state in which the faithful redeemed person is freed to wander innocently in God's care. In his last works, Willson's eschatological vision reveals itself to be based on the circular principles of physical death as a fearful baptism that inspires

repentance and a Christian life, and of spiritual death as a stage between suffering in life and spiritual rebirth. Willson saw in his own impending death the closing circumstances of many overlapping circles of activity. In conclusion, the thesis advances reasons for the decline of the Children of Peace after Willson's death.

The distinctive expressions of his visions that Willson left are important achievements in early Canadian literature. This thesis clears the way for more detailed studies, and proposes the fundamental patterns on which to construct a better understanding than has been possible until now, of the fascinating writings of David Willson.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother,

Erma Frances Gerry

and to my father,

Thomas M. F. Gerry



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Professor James Reaney's insightful teaching and guidance made this thesis possible. Professor Richard M. Stingle's helpful criticism and suggestions improved the expression and clarified many of the ideas in the thesis.

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## CHAPTER I

### WILLSON'S ARRIVAL IN UPPER CANADA AND HIS ACTIVITIES WITH THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

The details of David Willson's arrival in Upper Canada in 1801 are so symbolically suggestive of his later experiences that it is difficult to believe the single surviving account of it is not legendary. In her History of the Children of Peace of 1898, Willson's grand-niece, Emily McArthur, relates that the twenty-three-year-old Willson, his wife, Phebe, and their two sons, John David and Israel, were shipwrecked on their crossing from New York state to the Canadian side of Lake Ontario, and struggled to shore by clinging to a spinning wheel.<sup>1</sup> Out of water and a tempest David Willson appears with his family and a wheel: a vivid image of regeneration through mystical powers that contrasts prophetically with the straight roads surveyed and built by Lt. Governor Simcoe's

soldiers, roads that physically represent the rationalist British orthodoxy enforced in the wilderness province. The story also reverberates with the images of Noah and Moses and Jonah, Old Testament heroes who apprehend God's wrath through the agency of water, and who ultimately are saved by God's mercy. King David's "Psalm of Thanksgiving" in II Samuel 22, sung after "the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies," makes explicit the symbolic nature of this type of immersion:

When the waves of death compassed me,  
the floods of ungodly men made me afraid;  
The sorrows of hell compassed me about;  
the snares of death prevented me;  
In my distress I called upon the Lord...

He seht from above, he took me;  
he drew me out of many waters...

He brought me forth also into a large place;  
he delivered me because he delighted in me.<sup>2</sup>

With the King David of the Bible David Willson shares the sense of divine presence and the frequent realizing of direct communication with God.

Concerning Willson's life prior to his emigration, few facts remain. He was born on June 7, 1778 in Dutchess County of New York State, near Poughkeepsie, "of poor but pious Presbyterian parents," as Willson notes in A Collection of Items of the Life of David Willson..., in 1852.<sup>3</sup> From genealogical records we know that the Willson family originated in Carrickfergus, County Antrim, in Northern Ireland, where David Willson's grandfather, Hugh

Hugh Willson  
 (Linen merchant, Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim, Ireland -- ca. 1750.)

John (Came to Dutchess Co., N.Y., ca. 1770)  
 (1) m. wife in Ireland who died after the birth of Hugh L.  
 (2) m. Catherine ---(?) in America

Hugh L. (To U.S., 1775; U.C., 1801) John J. Ann Mary Hugh  
 (m. Lady Sarah Savage)

David (1778-1866) (m. Mr. Briggs) (m. Mm. Dunham) Phoebe (b. 1805)  
 (F. of The Children of Peace) (m. Hugh D. Willson)

m. Phebe Titus Benjamin (b. 1809)  
 (1777-1866) m. Anne S. Doan

Emily  
 (Mrs. McArthur, 1837-1924)

John David (1798-1887) Israel Hugh D. Mary  
 (m. Hannah Dennis) (b. 1799) (b. 1802) (1814-48)  
 m. Mary Hughes m. Phoebe Willson m. John Reid m. Charles Doan

1. John H. (1791-1863)
- m. Rebecca Burr (1802-74)
2. Richard Titus (1793-1878)
- m. Eleanor Eames
3. James Harvey
- m. ---- Seymour
4. Catherine (b. 1793)
- m. ---- Phelps
5. Alfred (1810-88)
- m. Martha ----
6. Hiram R. (1800-76)
- m. Caroline P. McLeod (1803-84)
7. Walt (b. 1811)
- m. Elias Doan (b. 1804)
8. Hugh H. (1803-71)
- m. Sara Ann Willson (d. 1867)
9. Louise
- m. Elias Jones

I. Genealogical Chart for Hugh Willson

Willson, was a linen merchant. In 1770 David Willson's father, John, came to Dutchess County with his son, Hugh L., during whose birth in 1768, the mother had died. John Willson remarried, and Catharine, his wife, bore four children: John J., David, Ann, and Mary (see Illustration 1). Young David's life, according to his own account, seems to have been rather bleak:

My occupation was hard labor in cultivating the soil, till I was left an orphan in a friendless world at the age of fourteen, without a father or a mother to assist me in life; after which I inclined to mechanical business in joining timber one part unto another...

My education was bounded by one year, and a considerable part of that time almost in my infancy.<sup>4</sup>

Besides carpentry, Willson engaged in the shipping business as a sailor on his brother's merchant vessel, "The Farmer", which operated between New York City and the West Indies. This activity is described by the Reverend H. H. O'Neill in 1836<sup>5</sup> and by Emily McArthur in her History of the Children of Peace. Henry Scadding, in Toronto of Old, states that Willson "had visited the Chinese ports."<sup>6</sup> David Willson himself does not mention it directly, but much of the imagery in his poems, hymns and other works is based on a close knowledge of the sea and sailing, so that Willson's having been a sailor is quite plausible.

Sometime during the 1790's Willson met and married

Phebe Titus. Minutes from the Nine Partners Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends in Dutchess County present details about Phebe Titus that possibly indicate a more precise time-period for the beginning of her liaison with Willson. Among the minutes for the seventeenth of Ninth month 1794, is the following testimony:

Whereas Phebe Titus Daughter of Israel a member of this meeting hath deviated from the rules of our profession in going out from plainness and keeping company with one not of our society and neglecting the due attendance of meetings, and she being laboured with from time to time in order to bring her to a sight and sense of her Error which not having the desired effect, we do testify against her said misconduct and disown her from being any longer among us, untill by amendment of life she doth manifest a repentance and make satisfaction to this meeting which she may be favored to do is our desire - signed in and by order of the above said meeting by Isaac Thorn  
Anna Thorn. clerks<sup>7</sup>

The "one not of our society" with whom the seventeen year-old Phebe was "keeping company" is possibly David Willson.

Another minute for the same date confirms that an indulged meeting, -- a meeting for worship with no disciplinary powers, -- that Quakers remote from the Nine Partners meeting house were permitted to attend instead of having to make a long journey every week, was to be held "as usual for three months" in the home of Israel Titus, Phebe's father. Surely Phebe's rebelliousness and resulting disownment must have been a source of dissension



in such an ardently Quaker household, and it is tantalizing to speculate that this factor may have been one motivation for Phebe and David Willson's later emigration to Upper Canada. Nevertheless, the fact that it was, in part, for "going out from plainnefs" that Phebe Titus was disowned by the Society of Friends, suggests that she might have shared some of her future husband's flamboyance and indomitability, and might not have been simply "a thin yellow sickly looking person" as Patrick Shirreff described her in 1835, the only extant description of Phebe Willson.<sup>8</sup>

David Willson's deliverance from the Lake Ontario storm on his family's arrival in Upper Canada in 1801 seemed to him to be a type of baptismal initiation also. The title of his most explicitly autobiographical work, for instance, reveals his sense of a new beginning at that time: The Practical Life of the Author, From the Year 1801 to 1860. Far from being "practical," the life that Willson portrays is highly spiritual. The period from 1801 to 1805, the latter being the year Willson joined the Quakers at Yonge Street Meeting, is characterized by him as "seven years in retired life" during which he sought "lonely places wherein to retire and worship the Spirit" and where he "was comforted with many visions of Light".<sup>9</sup> This is a prevalent pattern in Willson's writings: his being in exile in the wilderness, yet being attended by God and rewarded with visions. Willson later applies this view of

7

experience in the Upper Canadian bush to the group he founds, the Children of Peace, in overt comparison with the Biblical children of Israel who wandered in the desert and were sustained by heaven-sent manna. For Willson, then, both in his writing and in his everyday life, Upper Canada is a wilderness where holy influences are strong, and that is how he consistently treats his new home.

Naturally, John Graves Simcoe (1752-1806), Lt. Governor of Upper Canada from 1792 to 1796, took a much more thoroughly pragmatic stance in regard to Upper Canada than Willson did. Simcoe's intentions were to entrench permanent British rule in the colony and to populate the vast, sparsely inhabited land, always with the priorities of maintaining military defences and ensuring that Upper Canada "become capable of supporting its own expences or contributing to those of the Empire."<sup>10</sup> On September 7, 1792 Simcoe opened the Upper Canadian Legislature, created by the Constitutional Act of December 26, 1791, in the Freemason's Hall at Niagara-On-the-Lake (renamed Newark by Simcoe). During the eight-week inaugural session, the first statute effectively repealed the Québec Act of 1774 by institutionalizing English law as the rule of decision for the province. Subsequent bills reinforced the details of the English pattern of law and order with provisions for trial by judge and juries of twelve, the establishment of circuit courts by the Chief Justice, William Osgoode, and

other corollary measures.

Not only in matters of law did Simcoe attempt to recreate England in the newly-designated jurisdiction, the western region of what had until recently been the Province of Quebec, but he also used English place-names to influence the people's perceptions of Upper Canada's geography. For example, during an exploratory tour through the Western District, February 4, 1793 to March 10, 1793, Simcoe inspected a site at the forks of the La Tranche River on March 2-3, a site Simcoe had determined from maps to be a safer and ultimately more central place for the capital of Upper Canada than Newark was. He first named the projected town Georgina, then London;<sup>11</sup> the river he renamed the Thames. However, the Governor-in-Chief of the Canadas, Lord Dorchester, overruled Simcoe's plan, ordering instead that the capital be located at Toronto Bay. In 1793 Simcoe journeyed to this site at the Lake Ontario end of the Toronto Portage, named it York, and set his infantry corps, the Queen's Rangers, to clearing the land, erecting government buildings, and constructing roads: Dundas Street to link the capital to the Western regions; Yonge Street to the north, and the Danforth Road to the east.

To complement his applying of English administration to the colony, and to emphasize the purposes of bolstering defences and making the colony pay its way, on February 7, 1792 Simcoe issued a proclamation that invited settlers to

come and take up land in Upper Canada. Although approximately 7,500 Loyalists had settled permanently in Upper Canada during and after the American Revolution (1774-1784), the area was still extremely thinly populated. Simcoe's invitation was circulated extensively in the northern United States by individuals, such as the sycophantic George Hamilton, who wrote Simcoe, "I have trumpeted your Proclamations all over New England since my return and expect a numerous application from that quarter will be made to you for lands this spring and summer."<sup>12</sup> Hamilton had already obtained a township near the Rideau River and had "collected a sufficient number of associates...as will fill my Township to a single lot."<sup>13</sup> Although he disclaims any such motivation on his part, Hamilton warns Simcoe that many prospective land-seekers may "have no other view than to extort money from their associates and impose on you and other Officers of the Crown."<sup>14</sup> Perhaps it is this possibility of unscrupulous land-jobbers that lies behind a circumstance Simcoe had earlier noted. While in Quebec awaiting the arrival of the Queen's Rangers and his commission to govern Upper Canada, Simcoe wrote to Henry Dundas, Secretary of State for Home Affairs and Treasurer of the Navy at the time, that "from some intimation I have received relative to the wishes of a large body of Quakers to emigrate from Pennsylvania I propose sending a proper person to hold that intercourse

with them which they are too wary to commit to writing." 15

The reported activities of land-jobbers give rise to another interesting possibility concerning Simcoe's invitations. In the same letter that he reported to Dundas about the cautious Pennsylvanian Friends, Simcoe suggests a scheme to out-manoeuvre land-jobbers in the United States who are implicitly competing with Simcoe:

I beg leave to recommend that the whole of the Proclamation may appear in those of our West India Islands as the best means of their being transmitted to the United States, the land-jobbers of which are industrious in preventing them from being dispersed from this Country... 16

One sailor who quite conceivably could have pondered Simcoe's invitation on the voyage back to New York from the West Indies, of course, is David Willson.

Besides from Simcoe's unflagging loyalty to his sovereign, King George III, the governor's zeal for setting up British institutions also derived from his colonization plans. He believed many Americans would be attracted, like bees to honey by the efficient and just British system in Upper Canada. In a memorandum to Henry Dundas he states:

There are thousands of the Inhabitants of the United States whose affections are centered in the British Government & the British Name; who are positively enemies of Congress & to the late division of the Empire, many of their Connections have already taken refuge in Canada & it will be true wisdom to invite & facilitate the emigration of this description of people into that Country....

Other classes of Americans will emigrate to better their fortunes & whose Indifference to any form of Government may be converted into zealous attachment to that under which they shall live, whenever they shall feel the advantages of its beneficence & Wisdom, of the Equality of its Laws & its protection from the probability of foreign Invasion.<sup>17</sup>

These "other classes of Americans" in Simcoe's rhapsodic analysis include members of the Society of Friends (Quakers, as they were derisively nick-named by a seventeenth-century English judge), who were, in Simcoe's view, most desirable as settlers for Upper Canada: He shows great enthusiasm, in his reserved manner, on this subject in his opening remarks of a long letter to Phineas Bond, a leading Philadelphia citizen and also the British Consul there:

The information which Captain Stevenson has given me, that many of the people of the Society of Friends or Quakers have thoughts of settling in Upper Canada, appears to me of so much importance to the future prosperity of the Province, that I am sure you will pardon me, to whom His Majesty has been most graciously pleased to confide its Government, addressing myself to you without further introduction.<sup>18</sup>

After expatiating on the geographical and cultural privileges, including freedom of religion, enjoyed by Upper Canadians, Simcoe undertakes a commitment that would have been very attractive to Quakers, who are firm believers in peace and non-violence, and who therefore refuse to perform any military service. Simcoe writes:

If the Society of Friends should prefer the Government of Upper Canada, they will have a just right to such exemptions from bearing arms, as they have hitherto met with under the ancient Government of the British States.<sup>19</sup>

Simcoe later reports this undertaking in a note to his superior, Henry Dundas (Simcoe Papers, I, 198-199); and again, through Captain Charles Stevenson, Deputy Quarter Master for Upper Canada, the undertaking appears in a list of recommendations, numbered "18":

Emigration of the Quakers who would come in numbers into Upper Canada provided they have the free exercise of their Religion and an exemption from Military Duties and Taxation for the express purposes of War - could their Affirmation be considered as legal as an Oath and enable them to have a seat in the Assembly, Legislative Council, &c.<sup>20</sup>

Dundas only partly concurred with Simcoe's recommendations:

Every reasonable degree of Encouragement should be given to the Quakers as they are perhaps of all others the most useful to an Infant Colony, but to exempt them from any Taxes would be impolitic if not impracticable, and would sooner or later occasion discontents in His Majesty's other Subjects.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, it is clear that members of the Society of Friends appeared as excellent potential settlers to the Government of Upper Canada, who actively encouraged their immigration. In passing, one should note that the Quakers were not Loyalists, although many of them came to

Upper Canada simultaneously with the United Empire Loyalists. During the American Revolution Friends declined allegiance to either of the warring parties because of their Christian testimony against violence. For this non-partisanship they often suffered heavy material losses, as the Minutes of their Meetings for Suffering show,<sup>22</sup> but their reasons for emigrating to Upper Canada were never political.<sup>23</sup>

From the point of view of the American Friends, besides Simcoe's urgent invitation, there was another larger force that gave impetus to Friends to go to Upper Canada. This force is known as the "Great Migration". Rufus M. Jones, in Later Periods of Quakerism, compares the Great Migration to the seventeenth-century migration of Friends to America from Great Britain in terms of significance, saying, however, that the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Great Migration was much larger numerically.<sup>24</sup> Jones describes the two major causes for the Great Migration as the moving prophecy of Joseph Dew in 1799, "I see the seed of God, sown in abundance, extending far north-westward,"<sup>25</sup> which inspired many eastern meetings to move in a body to Ohio; and the desire of Friends to get away from the environment of slavery, to the evils of which John Woolman had in 1746 and 1757-1758 begun to awaken people,<sup>26</sup> combined with the Ordinance of 1787 which constituted the North-west Territory (later



Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan) for settlement and banned slavery forever. Dorland offers as additional explanations of the Great Migration the "economic instability and intense restlessness"<sup>27</sup> that followed the American Revolution, as well as the adventurous spirit that animated so many pioneers.

A small offshoot of this western growth of the Society of Friends occurred in New York State, at the extreme limits of which was the migration of Friends to north of the border. On the seventh of Ninth Month 1798, Adolphus (Adolphustown) Preparative Meeting opened under the care of New York Yearly Meeting and Nine Partners Monthly Meeting, although Friends had settled in Adolphustown as early as 1784.<sup>28</sup> At the western end of Lake Ontario in the Niagara district Quaker settlement was taking place in the same years. Friends who located at Pelham and Black Creek requested Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, with which they had been associated before moving to Upper Canada, to authorize a Monthly Meeting in 1797. Following visits by committees from Philadelphia in 1797 and 1799, on the first of Tenth Month 1799 Black Creek and Pelham officially opened as Preparative Meetings, and on the next day Pelham Monthly Meeting opened, with the combined memberships of the two new Preparative Meetings (79 people) and the superior disciplinary powers.<sup>29</sup>

In 1800, Timothy Rogers, a New Englander living near

Vergennes, Vermont, heard about the Friends in Upper Canada, and determined to go to them. In his Journal Rogers begins the description of his three-month trip with a conversation that took place on the twenty-fourth of Fourth Month 1800 between himself and his brother, Wing Rogers, who had tried to convince Timothy to stay home in Vermont until the harvest was gathered. Rogers' sense of urgency about his projected journey becomes evident in this excerpt from his Journal:

i cant se my way cleir to wait but should be glad of his compny i felt a grate tryal in my mind as i talked and walked the Rome and as he urgd very hard to have me wait i feld a hevvy impression of mind and told him if he would go amediatly i shold be glad but i understand their is. plases that their is frends metings at the Bay of Qumpy in New York yerly meting and pelum in the yerly meting at pheledelpha for pensalvany and [if] i go now it sems as if i shal find a plas between them and be helpfull to git frends in uper canada united and as i spoke i became zelus to sho my intent to do Right and it imprsd my mind so strong that said i it sems as if their will be a line runing and i can git land wher pepol may setol on both sids and a new contry will soon be like an old plas in a New Naborhod...<sup>30</sup>

Timothy Rogers' son-in-law, Rufus Rogers, started out with him, but "gave out before [he] got half way"<sup>31</sup> to Upper Canada. The elder Rogers went to the geographical "plas between" Pelham and Adolphustown on the Bay of Quinte. He describes his arrival in the Journal:

...and then it seemd as if i must go to york in this provens and by a grait deal of hard travil got to york and then went 30 or forty mils bac and following my consarn maid way to aply to govner giniril hontor and john Elmly chefe justis became my frend and all tho the land was vuid by a compny before me i got bac and got a grant for forty farms of 200 acors each by minding the feelings of the Good Spirit in my hart...<sup>32</sup>

Lt. Governor Peter Hunter's administration apparently continued the policy of actively encouraging Quaker immigration that Simcoe had initiated. While awaiting his patents for the forty choice farms north of York, Rogers journeyed to the Niagara district, and on his return to the provincial capital made a startling discovery:

...i went on to Lake Ery and found two prepritive metings one at pelum and one at blac crik...and whil i was gon in a day or two our frend Samuel Lundy came from pensalvany and took joining the land i had agreaid for and took from goverment a grant for 20 females mor joining after a long tejus jorny and laying many Nights alone in the wilderness i saw samuel in my return to york and isaac philips.that now is an eldor movd in to york from pensalvana monsy monthly meting...<sup>33</sup>

By 1803 the settlers promised by Rogers, Lundy and Phillips had taken up their lands in King, Whitchurch and East Gwillimbury Townships,<sup>34</sup> thereby justifying the government's confidence. From the seventh of Seventh Month 1802 Friends held meetings for worship at both Timothy and Rufus Roger's houses.<sup>35</sup> On the twenty-first of Sixth Month 1804 the Friends opened Yonge Street Preparative Meeting under the care of Pelham Monthly Meeting. They inclined to

Pelham rather than Adolphus Monthly Meeting because of the former's association with Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, and most of the Quaker settlers were from Pennsylvania,<sup>36</sup> probably because of the former Muncey members, Samuel Lundy and Isaac Phillips. Some of the Yonge Street settlers, however, originated in New York, including David Willson and his family. Timothy Rogers had an uncle at the Nine Partners Meeting,<sup>37</sup> the one to which Phebe Titus had belonged, so perhaps that is the connection that drew the Willsons to the Yonge Street settlement.

When he arrived in Upper Canada in 1801 David Willson was not a Quaker, but he quickly showed interest in joining the Society of which many of his neighbours were members. The first mention of Willson in historical records is his application:

At our Preparative Meeting at Pelham held the 31 day of 8 mo. 1803 one of the overseers of Yonge Street informed this Meeting that David Wilson requests to cum under friends cair.<sup>38</sup>

Because Friends' minutes are so discrete, we will probably never know why, but for some reason Willson's request was delayed longer than usual. At the Pelham Monthly Meeting on the seventh of Ninth Month 1803 Willson's application was reported and referred to a committee that had been appointed earlier to journey to Yonge Street to interview other applicants. To accomplish its assignment, the committee took six months. At the Pelham Monthly Meeting

of the seventh of Third Month 1804, while the other applications from Yonge Street received approval, the following minute appears:

The committee on the request of David Willson and his three minor children John Israel and Hugh report they attended to the service and are of the mind their case may rest under the care of the Monthly meeting; after deliberate consideration their case was refer'd to the same Committee.<sup>39</sup>

For a further nine months the committee deliberated. During this time the Willsons had a fourth child, Sarah, and as noted, Yonge Street became a Preparative Meeting (granted by Pelham Monthly Meeting on the sixth of Sixth Month 1804). Finally, on the second of First Month 1805, Pelham Monthly Meeting's minutes record the Willsons' acceptance:

The Committee on the acc't of David Willson's Request for himself & four minor Children (to wit) John, Israel, Hugh & Sarah to Become members forwarded a report they attended to the service & believe the meeting would be safe to grant their Request & friends Expressing their concurrence therewith they are accordingly Excepted Into membership & Nathanel Pearson is appointed to inform them thereof & report to a futer meeting.<sup>40</sup>

The last member of the Willson family to join the Society of Friends was Phebe Willson. The minutes of Pelham Monthly Meeting for the fourth of Second Month 1807 show this entry:

A Certificate was produced to this Meeting from the Monthly Meeting of Nine Partners for Phebe Wilson which was read,

Indorsed to the Monthly Meeting of Young Street.<sup>41</sup>

From the evidence these documents present, it seems plausible to conclude that Phebe (Titus) was originally disowned by the Nine Partners Meeting for keeping company with a non-Quaker who was probably David Willson. Over the nine intervening years David Willson became convinced that he ought to join the Society of Friends and when he did join, Phebe was reinstated. Conceivably the delay in David Willson's application was the time required for Pelham Friends to correspond with Nine Partners regarding the readmitting of Phebe Willson, should her husband become a Friend. If it were impossible to allow Phebe back into the Society, then David Willson's membership would be jeopardized because he would be guilty of keeping company with a non-Quaker, his wife. Insistence on endogamy by Quakers has been an important cause of their declining numbers over the years. In the Willsons' case, however, the Society of Friends saw its way clear to gaining, at least temporarily, a family of staunch Quakers.

The minute books of Yonge Street Preparative and Monthly Meetings, and Canada Half-Yearly Meeting, reveal that David Willson was an exceptionally active and prominent member of the Society of Friends right up until he was disowned in 1812. Less than a year after he had been accepted into membership, David Willson was appointed to the committees selecting a permanent clerk and an

overseer for the new Yonge Street Monthly Meeting, at its first session, the eighteenth of Ninth Month 1806.<sup>42</sup> Two months later, on the thirteenth of Eleventh Month 1806, Willson himself became the overseer, an important responsibility in the Monthly Meeting. Meanwhile, at Yonge Street Preparative Meeting, on the ninth of Tenth Month 1806, David Willson and Benjamin Pearson were selected to estimate the cost and collect money for repairing the meeting house,<sup>43</sup> probably a log house on Timothy Rogers' or one of the other Rogers' land.<sup>44</sup> Ten pounds was the required sum. From the seventh of Fifth Month 1807 to the eighth of Twelfth Month 1808 David Willson acted as clerk of Yonge Street preparative Meeting. Also at this time Friends in East Gwillimbury requested Yonge Street Monthly Meeting to indulge a meeting for worship at the home of Nathaneal Ray. The superior meeting granted this on the eighteenth of Sixth Month 1807. Willson was "one of the leading Friends"<sup>45</sup> at this meeting, which came to be called "Queen Street", after the road on which the Friends built their meeting house. Willson himself donated the land, lot 10, Concession 2, East Gwillimbury, on the seventh of First Month 1808.

Among the no fewer than fifty-six committees that the Quaker minute books show Willson served on between his joining Friends on the second of First Month 1805, and his disownment in 1812, some are particularly noteworthy for

understanding Willson's later activities. In spite of his being a recently convinced Friend, Willson worked on committees that were established to consider and make recommendations about doctrinal matters, an indication that Willson was a trusted expert on Quaker principles. On the seventeenth of Twelfth Month 1807 Yonge Street Monthly Meeting separated a committee that included Willson to investigate the distilling and retailing of spirituous liquors by local Friends. Initially the committee simply stated that moderation in these matters must be the rule. In a few years, after a considerable number of Friends had manifested by behaviour such as fighting, profane language, excessive drinking, and gambling that moderation was not being maintained, on the fourteenth of Sixth Month 1810 a committee, including Willson, set out to revise the official Discipline issued by the Yearly Meeting in regard to spirituous liquors. The committee prepared a strongly worded testimony against alcoholic beverages which it presented to the second session of Canada Half-Yearly Meeting on the twenty-ninth of Eighth Month 1810. This meeting decided to delay sending the testimony on to New York Yearly Meeting, under whose care Canada Half-Yearly Meeting operated, because the superior meeting had just issued a new Discipline that contained "consideration thereon", and Friends would require time to read and reflect on the Discipline's position.<sup>46</sup> Probably Yonge



Street Friends persisted in presenting their testimony against liquor to New York Yearly Meeting because at the Canada Half-Yearly Meeting on the first of Ninth Month 1813 the following extract from the yearly meeting's minutes was recorded:

in taking at this time a general view of the enslaved and deplorable condition of our poor intemperate fellow creatures, the minds of Friends were deeply impressed with the subject,...and affectionately desired that Friends be increasingly careful to abstain from the use of an article so destructive in its affects except for medical purposes....<sup>47</sup>

Another significant committee that Willson served was to address itself to two related issues that arose at Canada Half-Yearly Meeting's inaugural session at West Lake on the thirty-first of First Month 1810.<sup>48</sup> Pelham Monthly Meeting raised the first question, that of the

propriety of friends accepting lands from Government under and by virtue of the Proclamation in such cases granted to U.E. Loyalists which with the proof it requires being considered a breach of our discipline...<sup>49</sup>

The same committee had to deal with an issue that Yonge Street Monthly Meeting had raised: "a scruple of the propriety of Friends leasing the Clergy reserves which some have done...."<sup>50</sup> At the next Canada Half-Yearly Meeting, on the twenty-ninth of Eighth Month 1810, at Yonge Street, the committee reported its sense of these cases:

no member of our religious society can consistant with our principle receive or

accept of such lands or other rewards whatever from Government as is given for actual service in war or for aiding or assisting therein...

and, regarding the other question:

it is inconsistent with our religious principles for any members of our religious society to lease lands that is set apart or reserved by Government for the sole use and maintenance of a protestant Clergy....<sup>51</sup>

Nevertheless, Jeremiah Moore of Pelham Monthly Meeting, whose case was probably the reason Pelham Friends raised their concern in the first place, appealed the committee's judgment in the matter of receiving lands for military service. Moore appeared on the United Empire Loyalist List, but managed to satisfy the investigating committee, which included David Willson, that he did not serve the military, and he was not disowned.<sup>52</sup> These two prohibitions against profiting from war, and contributing to the support of a "hireling ministry", as Quaker minute books refer to the clergy of other religious denominations, are central to Quaker doctrines on pacifism and "that of God" in each person. By working for these committees, David Willson not only gained first-hand experience in applying Quaker religious principles to real-life situations, but, most important, during his years as an active Quaker, Willson must have learned a great deal about the doctrines he was called upon from time to time to enforce. This profound knowledge appears in various forms

in the copious writings that Willson produced subsequent to his leaving the Religious Society of Friends. Having sketched Willson's early biography and the historical setting, and before moving on to describe Willson's departure from the Quakers, and its aftermath, in the next chapter I shall delve into the theory of Quakerism and its origins.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Emily McArthur, History of the Children of Peace (Newmarket, 1898; rpt. Toronto: York Pioneer and Historical Society, 1967), unnumbered pages.

<sup>2</sup> II Samuel 22: 1; 5-7; 17; and 20. See also Psalm 18. All quotations from the Bible are from the King James Version and subsequently will be identified in parentheses in the text.

<sup>3</sup> David Willson, A Collection of Items of the Life of David Willson... (Newmarket: G.S. Porter, 1852), p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Items, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Rev. H. H. O'Neill, in Rev. Canon R. W. Allen, Notes on St. James' (Sharon typescript in Mis. 1949, Public Archives of Ontario, Toronto).

<sup>6</sup> Henry Scadding, Toronto of Old (Toronto: Adam, Stevenson and Co., 1873), p. 486.

<sup>7</sup> Minute Book for Nine Partners Monthly Meeting; ms. held at Friends' Center, New York City; call number 6N 15.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Shirreff, Tour Through North America (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1835), p. 106.

<sup>9</sup> David Willson, Practical Life (Newmarket: Erastus Jackson, 1860), p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> John Graves Simcoe, The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe,..., ed. E. A. Cruikshank (Toronto: The Ontario Historical Society, 1923), I, 27.

<sup>11</sup> Simcoe Papers, II, 293.

- 12 Simcoe Papers, I, 312 (April 10, 1793).
- 13 Simcoe Papers, I, 311.
- 14 Simcoe Papers, I, 312.
- 15 Simcoe Papers, I, 142 (April 28, 1792).
- 16 Simcoe Papers, I, 142.
- 17 Simcoe Papers, I, 27.
- 18 Simcoe Papers, I, 151-152.
- 19 Simcoe Papers, I, 154.
- 20 Simcoe Papers, I, 412.
- 21 Simcoe Papers, II, 82.
- 22 Details of Quakers' experiences at this time are given in Arthur J. Mekeel's The Relation of the Quakers to the American Revolution (Washington, D.C.: The University Press of America, 1979).
- 23 A. G. Dorland's The Quakers in Canada, A History (1927; rpt. Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1968), pp. 42-55, emphasizes and treats this point fully.
- 24 Rufus M. Jones, The Later Periods of Quakerism (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1921), I, 377-378.
- 25 Quoted by Jones in Later Periods of Quakerism, I, 377, from a letter of Borden Stanton, printed in Comly's Friends' Miscellany, XII, 218.
- 26 Full treatment is in Stephen Weeks' Southern Quakers and Slavery (New York: Bergman Publishers, 1968). Also treated in Rufus M. Jones' The Quakers in the American Colonies (1911; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962), pp. 321-327.
- 27 Quakers in Canada, pp. 58-59.
- 28 Quakers in Canada, p. 62.
- 29 Quakers in Canada, pp. 77-84.
- 30 Timothy Rogers, Journal (original ms., Archives of the Religious Society of Friends [Quakers] in Canada, D. B. Weldon Library's Regional Collection, U.W.O., London), pp. 160-161.

- 31 Rogers' Journal, p. 162.
- 32 Rogers' Journal, p. 162.
- 33 Rogers' Journal, p. 162.
- 34 Certified by Lt. Gov. Peter Hunter, December 29, 1803, as quoted in Quakers in Canada, p. 93.
- 35 Minute book from this date on, call number H-7-2 in Archives of the Religious Society of Friends [Quakers] in Canada, D.-B. Weldon Library's Regional Collection, U.W.O.
- 36 Elizabeth J. Hovinen, The Quakers of Yonge Street (Toronto: York University, Dept. of Geography, Discussion Paper Number 17, May 1978), p. 29-31.
- 37 Quakers in Canada, p. 59.
- 38 Pelham Preparative Meeting Minutes, 1802-06 (ms. number H-6-1, Quaker Archives, U.W.O.), for 31/08/03.
- 39 Pelham Monthly Meeting Minutes (Joint), 10/2/99 to 10/1/06 (ms. number H-7-2, Quaker Archives, U.W.O.), pp. 108-109.
- 40 Pelham Monthly Meeting Minutes (Joint), p. 135.
- 41 Pelham Monthly Meeting Minutes, 11/5/06 to 1/1/1834 (ms. number H-7-3, Quaker Archives, U.W.O.), for 4/02/07.
- 42 Yonge Street Monthly Meeting Minutes, 1806-18 (ms. number 0-11-6, Quaker Archives, U.W.O.), for 18/9/06.
- 43 Yonge Street Preparative Meeting Minutes, 1804-62 (ms. number 0-11/1, Quaker Archives, U.W.O.), for 9/10/06.
- 44 Quakers in Canada, p. 95.
- 45 Quakers in Canada, p. 105.
- 46 Canada Half-Yearly Meeting Minutes, 1810-55, (ms. number 0-3-1, Quaker Archives, U.W.O.), p. 9.
- 47 Canada Half-Yearly Meeting Minutes, p. 35.
- 48 Sessions were held alternately at West Lake and Yonge St.
- 49 Canada Half-Yearly Meeting Minutes, p. 4.
- 50 Canada Half-Yearly Meeting Minutes, p. 4.

51 Canada Half-Yearly Meeting Minutes, p. 8.

52 Canada Half-Yearly Meeting Minutes, p. 18.

## CHAPTER II

### THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND TO WILLSON'S WRITINGS

To understand the symbols and theological background of David Willson's work, one must turn to the Christian mystical tradition. A vast literature on mysticism is available,<sup>1</sup> so this chapter will concentrate only on some of the characteristics of mysticism which bear most directly on Willson's writings. Willson learned his ways of thinking about religion, the chief topic of his poetry and prose, as well as his characteristic style as a mystic, from Friends.<sup>2</sup> In the 1790's and early 1800's, when Willson was learning about Quakerism -- learning, in fact, to be a Quaker -- the founder of the Society of Friends, George Fox, had been dead for little more than a century, and his reputation and writings were still a major inspiration and guide to the Quaker way of life. Fox's Journal was widely circulated among Friends at the turn of



the nineteenth century, as were the books of Friends contemporary with Fox, such as William Penn's No Cross No Crown, a formulation of a political system based on Quaker principles, and Robert Barclay's An Apology for the True Christian Divinity as the Same is Held Forth, and Preached by the People Called in Scorn, Quakers, a set of fifteen propositions that declare "what the true ground of knowledge is, even of that knowledge which leads to Life Eternal."<sup>3</sup> Both Penn and Barclay were close friends of Fox and closely followed his teachings in their works. David Willson was almost certainly familiar with these primary sources of Quakerism, as his work and Quaker records indicate.<sup>4</sup>

George Fox (1624-1691) lived in England, an environment physically remote from nineteenth-century Upper Canada, but by his actions and teachings recorded in books and pamphlets, Fox passed on important elements of the religious atmosphere of his time and place. Seventeenth-century England was a storm-center of religious controversy, as is well known, and in the midst of this tempestuous milieu the flame of George Fox's new faith blazed. By the middle of the seventeenth century, when Fox commenced his ministry in England, the Puritan spirit of the previous century, the "movement towards freedom from the corruption in the world around"<sup>5</sup> that grew out of the Lutheran Reformation, had in most circles become a lifeless

tradition, an adherence to the letter of the law rather than to its spirit. In The Puritan Spirit, G. F. Nuttall summarizes this decline as follows:

Puritanism had been a positive revivalist movement within the Church, Separatism had sought to hasten reformation,...and in both there had been the heightened sense of the value of the individual and the conviction of God's accessibility to the individual which mark them true children of the Reformation. But by the 1650's much of their enthusiasm had evaporated.... A Protestant scholasticism had grown up, Puritan theology had been systematized, and God was in danger of becoming the Deist God of argument again instead of the living God of Christian experience.<sup>6</sup>

The main source of this "conviction of God's accessibility to the individual" was the proliferation of translations of the Bible into vernacular languages that Luther had advanced in the fifteenth century. Important outgrowths from the democratization of God's Word were the diverse individual interpreters and an immense variety of sects that stood independent from the established Protestant, Roman Catholic and Anglican churches.

Like the Reformation movement itself, the most influential of these independent religious philosophies, including that of Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), arose near Gorlitz in eastern Germany. The theosophy that this great mystic created is the bridge that connects the Puritan spirit that still survived in Europe with the genesis of George Fox's teaching. Boehme was not a scholar or philosopher, but a craftsman shoemaker; he was a visionary

who thought not in rational concepts, but by mythical and symbolic intuition. In the most comprehensive and authoritative English biography of Boehme, J. J. Stouidt asserts:

with Jacob Boehme the philosophy of life (Lebensphilosophie) reasserted its ancient, compelling claims against Western culture's dominant rationalism. He stressed once again those feelings for life's primitive vigor which the Renaissance had cherished.<sup>7</sup>

Regarding Boehme's writings, Stouidt observes:

Boehme's doctrine, never fully systematized, emerges from matter which may, perhaps, defy rational order....

His expressed words emerged from what may be called mystical vision,...for he sought to expose the mystical analogue.<sup>8</sup>

Further, Boehme believed that his knowledge came from the Holy Spirit, not from his personal human resources. In this empirical orientation -- experiencing God, not just hypothesizing about God -- Boehme is comparable to all mystics. But it is primarily in the unique facets of Boehme's mystical theosophy that one may discern his formative influence on Quakerism, and it is this very influence that later would affect David Willson so strongly.

In his introductory essay in a translation of Boehme's Six Theosophic Points, the eminent Russian philosopher, Nicolas Berdyaev, states:

To Boehme, the physical, natural elements are at the same time of the psychic order. He sees in nature the same things that he sees in the

spirit. Man is a 'microtheos and a microcosmos'. The human soul contains both heaven and hell.... God can be found only in the depths of one's own heart. It is vain to seek wisdom in academies and books....

To know the spiritual world meant for him to immerse oneself in this world.... Knowledge is realized in existence itself; it is an event that takes place within being.<sup>9</sup>

Although Boehme's writings and contemporary descriptions of the man reveal that his was a pure, good and compassionate soul, his view of life shows an additional -- a modern -- consciousness:

He had a particularly strong feeling for the evil in the life of the world. He sees everywhere a pitched battle between contrary principles, between light and darkness.... He perceives God not only as love but also as wrath.... Within divinity itself he sees the dark nature which is an irrational abyss.<sup>10</sup>

Boehme conceives the world to be dynamic, not as a static hierarchy the way medieval writers like Dante and Aquinas tended to do. Berdyaev describes Boehme's conception:

The life of the world is a battle, a becoming, a vast process, all fire and dynamism.<sup>11</sup>

The great reversal occurring in Boehme's thought is that, unlike most writers before him, he "made the Bible his spiritual nourishment and meditated upon it free from the categories of Greek gods,"<sup>12</sup> gods that were external concepts and whose static lack of process was overlaid by

Platonic and Aristotelian Church Fathers onto the Bible's living God, the God who suffers crucifixion as a loving sacrifice.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in contemplating the living God, Boehme had to take into account his own knowledge of the evil in the world, in the form of wars and a corrupt Church. Boehme's conclusions, described by Berdyaev, synthesize his insights:

He saw a dark principle in all the primary sources of existence, more deeply than he saw existence itself. He was compelled to admit such a principle in Deity itself, and even a positive sense in the very existence of the evil that troubled him so much.<sup>14</sup>

This "dark principle" Boehme named the "Unground" (Ungrund). The Unground is the eternal "beginning" of theogonic process. It is the necessary chaos, a "debased and famished will. Light and love come to its encounter."<sup>15</sup> Berdyaev interprets Boehme's Unground as "an absolutely original freedom, something that is not even the meontic freedom determined by God."<sup>16</sup> The implication of the Unground is to overturn the traditional Christian doctrine of free will which views free will as a gift from God that humans, beginning with Adam and Eve, abuse, thereby making of freedom merely an opportunity for punishment or suffering and redemption. Berdyaev points out that this doctrine is shaped much like a comic plot. Rather than on salvation from pre-destined evil, Boehme's intuition of the Unground focusses on the theogonic process

of creation, the struggle of being with non-being that expresses essentially a tragic view of life. To contrast the validity of these doctrines, one needs only to consider the traditional Christian view as it appears in literature, where the norm is to belittle the forces of evil and to have the good triumph, as opposed to the world's present real situation, where the forces of evil are in no way little and all good is on the verge of being extinguished. Berdyaev elaborates on Boehme's realization of the tragic nature of evil:

The doctrine of the Unground and of freedom is a bold attempt to understand the creation of the world through the inner life of the divinity. The creation of the world is part of the interior life of the Divine Trinity and it can be for the Divine Trinity something absolutely exterior. In this way the principle of evil becomes tragic.<sup>17</sup>

The Unground is the original nothingness that calls forth something, the antithesis of all life, the darkness in which fire appears. Boehme's conceptions are always based on antitheses that generate a third principle or manifestation. Berdyaev explains how this operates in the case of the fire of life burning antithetically to the dark Unground:

To [Boehme] all life is fire but fire manifests itself doubly. There are two eternal lives, two different sources, and each resides within its fire. The one burns in love and the realm of delights. The other in wrath, anger, and pain, and its materials are pride, greed, envy, and wrath; its force is like a sulphurous spirit.... Christ on the cross has to absorb

into his secret and divine Being this angry wrath that has awakened in the essence of Adam, and through his great love to transform it into heavenly delights.' Boehme conceives redemption cosmogonically and anthropogonically as an extension of the creation of the world.<sup>18</sup>

It is important to notice in the excerpt Berdyaev takes from Boehme how thoroughly interpenetrated are the natural, visible world and the spiritual, as well as to notice the function of evil in his intuition of life's dynamism.

The Bible, for Boehme, operates in a similarly dynamic way, as may be seen in his elucidation of the process of redemption. Before humanity fell from Paradise, the person of Adam contained within himself "the feminine element, equally balanced between the 'Dark' and 'Light' Worlds, a Virgin image of God."<sup>19</sup> Boehme presents this apprehension of humanity's paradisiacal androgyny in his Mysterium Magnū:

Adam was a Man, and also a woman, and yet none of them (distinct), but a Virgin full of...modesty, and Purity, viz. the Image of God: He had both the Tinctures of fire, and light, in him; and in the Conjunction of which, the own Love, viz. the Virgineall Centre, stood, being the faire Paradisicall Rose-Garden of delight, wherein he loved himself; as we also in the Resurrection of the Dead....<sup>20</sup>

The tri-partite person of Adam as the image of God is meant to be congruent with the Trinity, and also to affirm that the process of redemption is personal. Stoudt notes:

Boehme, in distinction from Neoplatonic and oriental mystics and in full accord with Western cherishing of personality, sought freedom for the self to become a perfect self. He was one mystic who did not want to get rid of his self, only his sinful self.<sup>21</sup>

Through Sophia, Wisdom, humans are enabled to imagine their return to pre-lapsarian wholeness. This restoration was accomplished first by Christ when he became a real person.

Stoudt explains:

Boehme's Christology was dialectical; his Christ was androgynous. If the fall resulted in the loss of unity, then the Savior (whole-maker) restores the image to fullness and makes that image available for all men.... Male and female, having parted in Adam's sleep, reunite themselves in Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

This imaginative act is not accomplished through reasoning or knowledge of scripture. Boehme's words are:

Only the regenerate man, who has put on Christ's God-manhood as his own can know His person.<sup>23</sup>

Regeneration, according to Boehme, is accomplished through three stages: repentance, "the quieting of man's false imagination;" "prayer, "a discipline in which the will is transformed and can enter into the divine will and become saturated with the divine love;" and faith, not a rationalized dogma, but "one spirit with God, for the Holy Spirit moves in the spirit of faith."<sup>24</sup> In summary, Boehme says, "the means of Grace are subjectively adopted. External forms are unnecessary."<sup>25</sup>

As might be expected, the Churches' theologians, whose ideas derive from the rationalist schemes of Aristotle,



Plato, and the Church Fathers, and therefore, whose God is in many ways static, the perpetrator of a cosmic joke on humanity, have always been suspicious and fearful of the living God Boehme envisions. Nevertheless, a few people have appreciated Boehme's extraordinary gift of essential freedom and true life, among them, the earliest Quakers.

Although there is no direct evidence that George Fox read Boehme's works, the latter's books were becoming available in English in the formative years of Fox's life, 1647-1661, and, as Rufus M. Jones, the eminent Quaker historian, points out:

there are so many marks of influence apparent in [Fox's] Journal that no careful student of both writers can doubt that there was some sort of influence, direct or indirect, conscious or unconscious.<sup>26</sup>

Jones cites many examples of similarities between Boehme and Fox. He notes that, if the influence was indirect, it was likely through friends of Fox such as Francis Ellington, an ardent student of Boehme, and one of the first Friends.<sup>27</sup> The Behmenists, a sect that evolved into Jane Lead's group, the Philadelphians, later in the seventeenth century, were philosophically similar, but quite separate from Quakers.<sup>28</sup>

The writings of George Fox are so thoroughly permeated with terms, images and concepts which remind the reader of Boehme, that to demonstrate many of the strongest

affinities between the two it is necessary to quote only a short, characteristic passage from Fox's Journal:

Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocency, and righteousness, being renewed up into the image of God by Jesus Christ, so that I say I was come up into the state of Adam which he was in before he fell. The creation was opened to me, and it was showed me how all things had their name given to them according to their nature and virtue. And I was at a stand in my mind whether I should practise physic for the good of mankind, seeing the nature and virtues of the creatures were so opened to me by the Lord. But I was immediately taken up in spirit, to see into another or more steadfast state than Adam's in innocency, even into a state in Christ Jesus, that should never fall. And the Lord showed me that such as were faithful to him in the power and light of Christ, should come up into that state in which Adam was before he fell, in which the admirable works of the creation, and the virtues thereof, may be known, through the openings of that divine Word of wisdom and power by which they were made. Great things did the Lord lead me into, and wonderful depths were opened unto me, beyond what can by words be declared; but as people come into subjection to the spirit of God, and grow up in the image and power of the Almighty, they may receive the Word of wisdom, that opens all things, and come to know the hidden unity in the Eternal Being.<sup>29</sup>

On the experiential level, Fox's visionary elevation of 1648 is similar to many openings Boehme claims for himself in his Epistles. For example, the renewal of the sense of smell during a mystical experience is also reported by Boehme: "A very strong Odour was given to me in the life of

God."<sup>30</sup>

More important are the theological similarities between Boehme and Fox that Fox's description illustrates. As in Boehme, for Fox the experience of redemption is available to living human beings, not exclusively in an after-life. Humanity, for both Fox and Boehme, is perfectible. The state of perfection, moreover, for both writers is a stage like the original "state of Adam": it is a "state in Christ Jesus that should never fall." Boehme describes the Edenic world of Adam much as Fox knew it:

And Adam knew what every creature was, and he gave to every one its name, according to the quality of its spirit. As God can see into the heart of all things, so could Adam do also, in which his perfection may very well be seen.<sup>31</sup>

To regain the "state of Adam", both Boehme and Fox recognize that faith in the indwelling Christ is the way.

Boehme states:

We must force a way out of this world, out of the earthly man, and give up our will to His Will, and introduce our imagination and desire into Him; then we become pregnant in His virginity, . . . and we are new-born in Christ in ourselves.<sup>32</sup>

Besides the doctrine of perfectionism that Boehme and Fox share, it is clear that, as Berdyaev observes regarding Boehme, their spiritual lives are concentrated not on redemption solely, but on the dynamic participation in creation that is possible to the perfected human being because of Christ's guidance. Since Christ is indwelling,

for both Boehme and Fox the Church, the mystical body of Christ, is in humanity, not in "steeplehouses," as Fox terms church buildings. The truly Christian life, therefore, is involved with the world as the process of creation continues, in loving that of God in every individual human being. For both Boehme and Fox religion is a way of life.

Boehme, as shown above, conceives of life as a battleground where good and evil, light and darkness, love and wrath, all clash in the creative fire that arises from the Unground. Evil, for Boehme, has a positive role in life. In a like manner, Fox assigns a generative function to evil in cosmic life -- the natural microcosm and the spiritual macrocosm -- that he expresses in Boehmist alchemical imagery:

I was taken up in the love of God.... And while I was in that condition it was opened unto me by the eternal Light and power, and I therein saw clearly that all was done and to be done in and by Christ,...and that all these troubles were good for me, and temptations for the trial of my faith which Christ had given me.... As the Light appeared, all appeared that is out of the Light, darkness, death, temptations, the unrighteous, the ungodly; all was manifest and seen in the Light.<sup>33</sup>

The divine Light of Christ manifesteth all things; and the spiritual fire trieth all things, and severeth all things.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, as might be anticipated, Fox and the early Friends like Boehme, were continually in trouble with the

authorities of their day, for preaching outside steeplehouses because they maintained a belief in the individual's direct access to the Light of God, and for refusing to compromise in living what they understood to be a life in Christ. Fox and the early Friends were assailed both by Protestants and Catholics, in England and America. In addition to the friction with various established institutions that Fox's beliefs and actions created, there was also the perennial religious conflict, described by Howard H. Brinton in his history of Quakerism:

The history of all religion is a chronicle of the tension between the mystic or prophet, whose religion is inwardly grounded in experience, and the priest or theologian, whose religion is expressed through doctrine and symbol.<sup>35</sup>

Ironically, over time the prophet often comes to be the dogmatist. G. F. Nuttall summarizes Fox's late development:

Together with his vital convictions Fox combined great organizing and administrative powers, and as he aged the latter grew stronger, at the expense of the former.... By the end of his life Fox had moulded his Society into a regularly and efficiently organized body, the further reformation of which was as abhorrent to him as his own Quakerism had been to the Puritans.<sup>36</sup>

A century after Fox's death, when David Willson joined the Society of Friends, this dogmatism was very firmly established indeed, and eventually led to in serious consequences. Chapter I of this thesis documents David

Willson's activities as a member of the Society of Friends, and the present chapter presents some of the most important features of the Quaker theology that Willson would have learned during his association with Quakerism, and its origins in Jacob Boehme. Later chapters will show how in his writings Willson applies what he learned from Quakerism. Before that, Chapter III will describe Willson's departure from the Society of Friends and his reasons for this move.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Underhill's Mysticism: A Study of the Origin and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1911; rpt. 1957) and P. G. Moore's article, "Recent Studies of Mysticism: a critical survey," Religion, III, 2 (Autumn 1973), 146-56, contain good bibliographies on the subject of mysticism.

<sup>2</sup> In his article, "Visit of Stephen Grellet World Famous Quaker to Yonge St. Quarterly Meeting -- 1822 -- His Visit to Sharon and his Opinion of David Willson Founder of the New Sect The Children of Peace" (typescript, Aurora, 1942; in Quaker Archives, U.W.O.), J. M. Walton suggests Willson may have attended the Quaker School at Nine Partners, New York.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Barclay, An Apology... (1676; 14th ed. Glasgow: R. Barclay Murdoch, 1886), p. x.

<sup>4</sup> Copies of Fox's Journal, Penn's No Cross No Crown, Barclay's Apology, et. al., arrived from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting at Pelham on 29/09/06, according to the minute for that date in the Minutes for Pelham Preparative Meeting (ms. no. H-6-1, Quaker Archives, U.W.O.), and were sent on to Yonge Street, according to the minute for 17/07/06 in the Minutes for Yonge Street Preparative Meeting (ms. no. O-11-1, Quaker Archives, U.W.O.) At Pelham, they were given to David Willson. See illustration i.

<sup>5</sup> G. F. Nuttall, The Puritan Spirit (London: Epworth Press, 1967), p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Puritan Spirit, pp. 171-72.

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7 J. J. Stoudt, Jacob Boehme: His Life and Thought (1957; rpt. New York: The Seabury Press, 1968), p. 18.

8 Jacob Boehme, pp. 22-23.

9 Nicolas Berdyaev, "Unground and Freedom," in Jacob Boehme's Six Theosophic Points and Other Writings, trans. J. R. Earle (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1958), pp. vii-ix.

10 Six Theosophic Points, pp. ix-x.

11 Six Theosophic Points, p. x.

12 Berdyaev, "Unground and Freedom", p. xiii.

13 Andrew Louth in The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1981) details this development in Christian theology.

14 "Unground and Freedom", p. xiii.

15 "Unground and Freedom", p. xiv.

16 "Unground and Freedom", p. xiv.

17 "Unground and Freedom", p. xviii.

18 "Unground and Freedom," p. xxvii.

19 Jacob Boehme, Mysterium Magnum (London, 1654), ch. 18, no. 2, as quoted by Desiree Hirst in Hidden Riches (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1964), p. 93.

20 Hidden Riches, p. 93.

21 Jacob Boehme, pp. 231-32.

22 Jacob Boehme, p. 282.

23 Jacob Boehme, Mysterium Magnum, ch. 37, no. 30, as quoted by Stoudt in Jacob Boehme, p. 285.

24 Jacob Boehme, pp. 290-91.

25 Jacob Boehme, Mysterium Magnum, ch. 39, no. 9, as quoted in Jacob Boehme, p. 293.

26 Rufus M. Jones, Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1928), p. 220. Among others, Stephen Hobbhouse in William Law and

Eighteenth-Century Quakerism (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1928), p. 246, and Caroline Spurgeon in "William Law and the Mystics," in The Cambridge History of English Literature, ed. A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), IX, 307, and William C. Braithwaite in The Beginnings of Quakerism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), pp. 38-42, detect strong Bohemist influences in Fox. Thomas C. Jones in "George Fox's Teaching on Redemption and Salvation," (Diss. Yale University 1956,) p. 26, denies their similarities, as he generalizes about Boehme as a "classical mystic", failing to grasp the revolutionary side of Boehme's writings.

27 Spiritual Reformers, pp. 220-21.

28 Spiritual Reformers, pp. 227; 231-33.

29 George Fox, The Journal of George Fox (1694), ed. J. L. Nickalls (London: Religious Society of Friends, 1975), pp. 27-28.

30 Jacob Boehme, Epistles, XV, 18, as quoted in Spiritual Reformers, p. 223.

31 Jacob Boehme, Von den drei Principien Gottlichen Wesens, X, 17-19, as quoted by Stoudt in Jacob Boehme, p. 264.

32 Jacob Boehme, Von der Menschwerdung Jesu Christi, XII, 19, as quoted by Stoudt in Jacob Boehme, p. 289.

33 Fox, Journal, p. 14.

34 Fox, Journal, p. 15. Many similar examples occur throughout the Journal and Fox's other writings.

35 Howard H. Brinton, Friends for 300 Years (Wallingford, Pa.: Pendle Hill Press, 1952), p. xii.

36 The Puritan Spirit, p. 176.

### CHAPTER III

#### WILLSON'S SEPARATION FROM THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

The Minute Book for Yonge Street Monthly Meeting, which met near Newmarket, is the main contemporary source of information about the schism that took place in the Society of Friends in Upper Canada in 1812. One may discern perhaps the first tremors before this event in the response to the second of the series of queries sent biannually from Canada Half-Yearly Meeting in which members of Yonge Street Monthly Meeting stated:

We believe love and unity in a good degree subsist amongst most of our members though a contrary disposition in some of which some care is taken. [17/01/11]<sup>1</sup>

Six months later, on the fifteenth of Eighth month, 1811, the Yonge Street Monthly Meeting's response concerning their unity shows even more signs of strain:

2nd love and unity is in a good degree maintained by a considerable number as

becomes Bretheren, although a departure therefrom is obvious in some.<sup>2</sup>

Almost a year following this report, on the sixteenth of Seventh month, 1812, Queen Street Preparative Meeting informed the Yonge Street Monthly Meeting of Friends as follows:

William Read has been so unguarded in his conversation as to deny the divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by declaring his belief that he was no more than the Apostle Paul, or any other inspired man....<sup>3</sup>

The Monthly Meeting appointed a committee to visit Read, in accordance with their usual procedure in such cases. The committee reported on their visit at the monthly meeting on the fifteenth of Tenth month, 1812:

The Committee in William Reads case Report they have all Visited him and most of them have had several opportunities with him, and that he Acknowledges he used the expressions that he is charged with Concerning Jesus Christ, but dont allow that he thereby denied the Divinity of our Lord and savour, and that it appears to them that he lightly esteems the Scriptures, and expresses a Disbelief of some passages in them. And as to his interrupting the friend appearing in Testimony in a meeting for worship, he Signified he should do the like again, and appears no way disposed to acknowledge himself in an Error in any part of his conduct and Conversation, concerning the above particulars, and is not desirous of being continued a member with us. -- which being considered it is the Judgement of this Meeting that he be testified against.<sup>4</sup>

At the intervening monthly meetings -- between the appointment of a committee and its report on William Read -- the break in Friends' unity grew very serious indeed.

On the thirteenth of Eighth month, 1812, Queen Street  
Preparative Meeting reported:

David Willson, has so far, disregarded the good order, that should be observed amongst us, as not to Rise from his seat when a friend appeared in Supplication in a meeting for worship, and a few weeks ago stood up in a first day meeting and expressed his intention of Seperating from us, intending to open his own House in order to hold Meetings on the first and fifth Days of the Week, and since that time he with some others, of our members, have not attended our meetings but have been in the practice of attending Meetings at said David Willsons....<sup>5</sup>

Willson received the attention of a committee, as did his brother, John J. Willson, on the same day, for failing to "Rise from his seat when a friend appeared in Prayer in a meeting for worship," and also for declining to attend Friends' meetings, instead "attending at the meetings at David Willsons."<sup>6</sup> Israel Lundy was a third Friend to whom Yonge Street Monthly Meeting extended care at this decisive meeting on the thirteenth of Eighth month, 1812. Lundy's errors consisted in non-attendance at Quaker meetings, and attending David Willson's meetings. According to the Yonge Street Minute Book, "upon being treated with on these occasions," Lundy had offered a suggestive explanation for his deviant behaviour:

our yearly meeting is falling, or going astray, and this Monthly meeting will come to nothing, and part of the Scriptures, and part of our Discipline is fallen, and will never Rise again.<sup>7</sup>

At the next monthly meeting, on the seventeenth of Ninth month, 1812, the committees that had visited David and John J. Willson and Israel Lundy all reported that the separated Friends were persisting in asserting the correctness of what they were doing. Accordingly, the Monthly Meeting appointed further committees to draw up testimonies of disownment. The essay produced for David Willson, read at the following monthly meeting, on the fifteenth of Tenth month, 1812, states:

David Willson, (haveing had a Right of membership amongst friends) has openly Manifested his disunity with our society, by seperating from us declineing the attendance of our Religious Meetings, and opening a Meeting at his own house, and friends haveing treated with him, in order for his restoration, but our Labours with him, not haveing the desired effect -- We therefore have no further unity with him as a member of our Religious Society, untill he comes to a sence of his Errors and Condemns them to the satisfaction of this Meeting.<sup>8</sup>

The essays of testimony presented in the cases of John J. Willson and Israel Lundy cite the same reasons for their disownment as those for David Willson. At this same monthly meeting, the Women's Meeting, which met separately, reported that they had decided to disown Phebe Willson, "who has seperated from us, and declined the attendance of our Religious Meetings."<sup>9</sup> Earlier, on the thirteenth of Eighth month, 1812, the Yonge Street Meeting of Women Friends had heard testimony that Phebe Willson and Rachel Lundy had both failed to stand during a Friend's prayer,

and that they had joined the Meeting at David Willson's house.<sup>10</sup> Phebe Willson was formally disowned by the Women's Meeting on the twelfth of Eleventh month, 1812, and Rachel Lundy on the seventeenth of Twelfth month, 1812.

All of this trouble was not limited to members from Queen Street Preparative Meeting either, because Yonge Street Preparative Meeting also reported at the meeting on the fifteenth of Tenth month, 1812, that John Doan and Amos Armitage had separated themselves from Friends in a way similar to the Queen Street people. In his characteristic style, Timothy Rogers, who had been living at Pickering, which he had founded in 1809, notes the situation at Yonge Street Monthly Meeting, of which he was still a member, in his Journal:

this seson i atended monthly metings mostly at yong st neir forty mils Grate trobels arose both in state and sesiety for the states som time in the sixth month declared war and a number of yong stret frends Became so good and zelus in their one opinians that aftor telling their thoughts lef our meting and met to one daved wilsons Ny quen st meting and son aftor at amos hermatages shop within a quarter of a mild of our meting hous at yong stret for frends has a good hous 70 fet one way and 30 the other now bilt we disond these that separated which provd to be above twenty.<sup>11</sup>

On the basis of these excerpts from first-hand observations of the disturbing events of 1812, it is possible to propose a number of hypotheses about the causes of the split in Yonge Street Friends. The answers to the

queries from Canada Half-Yearly Meeting on the seventeenth of First month and the fifteenth of Eighth month, 1811, quoted above, show that the problems were doctrinal in origin, rather than behavioural deviations simply, because normally the latter were dealt with immediately by a committee, as the minute books amply illustrate, disciplinary matters being the topics most frequently recorded. Nevertheless, the minute that deals with William Read's opinion that Christ was not divine, treats the problem as a lapse in discipline -- Read was "unguarded in his conversation." All of the other disownments were in response to breaches of the Quaker Discipline also, such as failure to rise while someone was praying, and failure to attend Friends' meetings. Yet, clearly, the problems were doctrinal in origin. Israel Lundy's reply to the Friends who questioned why he was not attending Quaker meetings addresses this very issue. He stated that "part of the Scriptures, and part of our Discipline is fallen, and will never Rise again."<sup>12</sup> The fundamental doctrinal problem, then, it seems, was with the Quaker Discipline itself, the official rule-book to guide Friends' conduct. This diagnosis is borne out by a short book entitled A Testimony to the People Called Quakers, published in 1816, in which Willson describes the beliefs of the Children of Peace, the group whose nucleus was the meeting of Friends who separated from Yonge Street Monthly Meeting, and who



gathered at Willson's and Amos Armitage's houses, beginning in 1812. To the Society of Friends Willson states that the Children of Peace

have forsaken all your traditions and former customs, to support a meeting of the following description, (for rounds of ceremonies of discipline amongst us have ceased:) viz.

It is not good to have offices in the Church, for this reason, that it sets the house in two parts, which in justice may be called inferiors and superiors.

It is not good to cast any away from us, for this cause, that in so doing, we account them more unworthy than ourselves.<sup>13</sup>

Willson goes on to castigate the Society of Friends more directly:

You that ought to have been the salt of the earth have lost your savour; therefore, amongst the assemblies we hope no more. You have many rules amongst you, and they are too much contended for; yea, even to that degree, that your most precious talents are wrapped up in them as a napkin, and buried in the earth.... And a set of careless, uncircumcised people in heart are rabbling over your traditions, up and down in the earth, both in the ministry and discipline of the Church....<sup>14</sup>

Four years after the break, Willson's disappointment in Quakerism is still very much alive. He pinpoints the central problem as the Quakers' over-emphasis upon discipline at the expense of their "most precious talents," namely the individual's experience of the light of Christ, on which George Fox, whose followers were at first called Children of the Light, had premised the whole religion.

This tendency to rigidity and legalism was not uniquely a fact of Upper Canadian Quakerism, but marked almost the entire Society of Friends at the time, as R. M. Jones explains:

the eighteenth century was marked in Quaker circles by an abnormal degree of introspection.... The great issues of life were sought within the soul. Consonantly with this attitude the Discipline of the Society became unduly emphasized. The leaders devoted their lives to the business of forming and perfecting 'a peculiar people' and this concern far overtopped in importance the missionary aims of the redemptive work of the body. Gradually, too, there came, along with the habit of introspection, a tendency to glorify theological doctrine and to exalt 'soundness' in belief. This tendency produced a harvest of tragedy in the nineteenth century, as we shall see.<sup>15</sup>

These conditions were at the heart of David Willson's separation from the Quakers, as has been shown. In his Testimony to the Quakers of 1816, Willson makes a prophecy, based on his own perception of the division between the law-enforcers and the subjects within Quakerism:

Your Society is in two parts already, the concerned and unconcerned; them that mourn and them that mourn not -- and it will one day rend apart in a visible manner -- and your Judges that are sitting in their high seats, in the state of Eldership, will be left behind, with three quarters or more of your worn-out discipline, which is doing no more good in the walks of reformation, than a priest's cloak.<sup>16</sup>

Twelve years following Willson's prophecy of a visible

rending of the Society of Friends, it came true in the form of the disastrous Hicksite/Orthodox Separation of 1828. To some extent, therefore, the separation of the Children of Peace in 1812 must be perceived as a part of the Society-wide cleavage that had begun in the late eighteenth century in reaction to the tendency Jones describes. At one extreme of the early controversy were the evangelical Quakers, later the "Orthodox" faction, such as Mary Dudley, Thomas Shillitoe, and Stephen Grellet, who all strove to conquer sin and save souls by stressing rigid doctrines of man's depravity, scriptural infallibility, and Christ as a wholly divine being, miraculous and non-human. At the other extreme were the Quakers who continued to rely on the inward, experiential basis of religion, setting this above dogma in importance. Job Scott of Rhode Island, a mystic in the tradition of Jacob Boehme and William Law, and Elias Hicks of Long Island, after whom this faction was named, were the most prominent exponents of the supremacy of inward revelation.<sup>17</sup>

Willson's dissatisfaction with Quaker discipline, then, was based partly on his democratic belief that every human being has equal access to the Light within, as George Fox had taught, and that the institutions of doctrine, elders and overseers deny this fundamental Quaker tenet, and partly on his conception of judgment.<sup>18</sup> Willson expounds his view of judgment in The Rights of Christ, the

first section of a book he published in 1815, which shows marks of the recent schism in Yonge Street Friends.

The immediate motive for Willson to publish The Rights of Christ, he says, is to defend himself and the Children of Peace, who "are scandalously reported of throughout this Province, viz. Upper Canada, (chiefly by the quakers, and others whom they have employed) by false accusations."<sup>19</sup> The bitterness intensifies as Willson outlines the field on which he intends to combat the judgment of the Yonge Street Friends:

According to the expressions of the wise man 'there is a time for every purpose under the sun' -- So also, there is a time for me to meet with my enemies, not only in the sight of men, but in the presence of God, who is my judge amongst men this day....<sup>20</sup>

About the end of August, 1651, George Fox had refused money offered him to join Cromwell's army, and he was committed to the dungeon at Derby. To the magistrates of Derby he wrote:

when the Lord doth send his messengers unto you to warn you of the woes that will come on you, except you repent, then you persecute them, and put them in prison, and say, 'We have a law, and by our law we may do it.' For you indeed justify yourselves before men. But God knoweth your hearts; for he will not be worshipped with your forms and professions, and shows of religion.<sup>21</sup>

It is ironic that in 1812 it was the Quakers, supposedly followers of George Fox's teaching, who invoked their Discipline, the outward form of their religion, to

ostracize David Willson, who was conspicuously living in the same spirit as Fox had lived.

Willson's method of presenting his understanding of judgment is not by rational argumentation, but rather, by the poetic creation of a myth, the technique of expression Willson most often uses in his writings. To begin his elucidation of judgment in The Rights of Christ, Willson restates the original Quaker principle of universal access to the Light of Christ within:

Let him that hath received little, not condemn him that hath received much, because he hath not received it; neither let him that hath received much condemn him that hath received little, because he hath not received as much as ourselves: or such as condemn others, for not being like unto us. But rather let every man and every woman improve that which they have received of God without the condemnation of any. The same liberty I ask of all men without the condemnation of any, that every man may be free in the grace which he hath received, seeing it is the gift of God to all.  
Amen. 22

Stating the liberty he craves in the form of a prayer is Willson's effective enactment of the claim he has made earlier in the spirit of George Fox, that he is meeting with his enemies in the "presence of God". After this reminder, Willson proceeds to illuminate the process of judgment, using the Adam story from Genesis as the vehicle for his myth-making:

the worldly nature entered into the heart of Adam, by eating the fruit of this world, which sets mankind up to be judges of good

and evil in each other, rather than to be proper judges of what we are in ourselves. Therefore Adam was not left to be his own judge; but God came in him or into him in the garden of Paradise to be his judge of those things which he had done. And what he did, proved his own condemnation in the sight of God; in which state, it is lawful for God in man to judge each other; as our eyes being opened by the spirit of God, to the casting of the deeds of our brethren before their eyes, as God did the iniquity of Adam's before his, to his own condemnation. But when God condemned Adam, it was according to the measure or portion of grace which he had received of God, and his disobedience thereunto, proved his own condemnation. Therefore, without we stand by, in the hearts of each other, and hear what the spirit of God saith unto us, we must be incapable of judging according to the will of God, seeing we know not what each other receives of God. Therefore, we cannot judge whether it is fulfilled or not....<sup>23</sup>

Willson then relates this analogy he derives from the Old Testament to Christ's role in the world:

God knoweth, and Christ knoweth, because his spirit was with God, and is with God when the spirit speaketh to us, of what we should do. A state very different from this sinful world, when they rise up in judgment against each other. Nevertheless let all men have received whatsoever they may at the hand of God, it is no reason we should judge each other contrary to his will, seeing Christ came not to condemn the guilty, but call sinners to repentance.<sup>24</sup>

Having set forth how God's spirit operates in human judgment through the images of Adam and Christ, Willson brings his revelation back to the contemporary situation of his being judged by the Quakers:

Therefore show unto me and others, a cause why ye have condemned me, least your condemnation should be visited on your own heads, as received from your own works and not from mine, who hath condemned you not, save in this, that your own works prove your own condemnation.<sup>25</sup>

With this challenge Willson again demonstrates the presence of God's spirit as he tries to enact the way of Christ. Willson then goes on to testify exactly what Christ means to him by a myth-like exposition of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection as these occur in Willson personally:

One thing comforteth my soul, that after death cometh the resurrection, or after condemnation is done, then shall my soul be free. To this purpose came Jesus Christ into the world to set sinners free in the liberty of the Gospel, that his day might be glorified on earth with peace: And that God might receive praise in heaven for the coming of Jesus Christ in man to set our mortal bodies free from sin and death, which are the bonds of corruption in the sight of God.<sup>26</sup>

This perfecting action of the living Christ on human beings is what George Fox called "walking in the Light,"<sup>27</sup> and the premise upon which the Children of Peace were founded, peace being the Christ-like condition beyond condemnation, in Willson's belief.

The manuscript of Willson's The Rights of Christ<sup>28</sup> contains material that was never published, and that reveals more particulars of Willson's critique of the Quakers. The poems, letters and addresses are from 1814

and 1815, prior to the publication of The Rights of Christ, and comprise a documentary autobiography of Willson for this time. Some items are connected by explanatory passages such as, "After which I wrote as follows to my brethren and sisters,..."<sup>29</sup> indicating that perhaps Willson was considering publishing the work as a journal, in the manner of Fox and many other early Quakers, but in the end he only extracted portions that make up The Rights of Christ. Certainly the unpublished material is focussed on the specific features of Willson's perceptions of the Quakers' hypocrisy to a greater intensity than the more abstract expositions of the roles of doctrine and judgment that Willson published as The Rights of Christ.

The first entry in this manuscript booklet -- likely the earliest preserved work of David Willson -- is a poem called "A Song of deliverence from mine Enemies." In it Willson employs apocalyptic imagery to express his sense of liberation:

The night hath rag'd with stormy Beasts  
 Their spirit in my soul  
 But as the Sun did light the East  
 I overcome them all...

'Twas dearly bought with pains of hell  
 For fredom in my soul  
 That every soul his way might tell  
 That Jesus conquer'd all

First our God that victorious king  
 In Christ did overcome  
 And peace in him did humbly bring  
 Before his life was done



Just so with every humble soul  
 That mourneth unto death  
 In Christ, my God doth conquer all  
 Before we spend our breath....<sup>30</sup>

In Willson's view, what is preventing Christ's coming to the "stormy beasts" is their pride, shown by their absorption in human institutions and disregard for the spiritual:

No law will save us on the Cross  
 Nor works that's done by men  
 Will teach us of our saviours loss  
 Nor how he was condemn'd...

The reason is we choose some pride  
 Or state of ease on earth  
 And on proud beasts we ramble wide  
 From Jesus Christ in birth

Which was to suffer under shame  
 Untill he broke the law  
 And then triumphant rise again  
 And keep the world in awe

And him in whome that Jesus reigns  
 Will not be overcome  
 Tho judging beasts should rage again  
 Untill their life be done....<sup>31</sup>

Like George Fox, and Jacob Boehme before him, Willson senses with unshakeable faith that he has personally taken on Christ through suffering -- confronting the beasts of the night, in Willson's experience, the Society of Friends, whose pride has blinded them to the Light of Christ.

After this "Song of deliverance" Willson directly addresses the Quakers to point out specific examples of what he regards as pridefulness in their practices. He begins with their doctrine and behaviour of plain dressing,

begun by Fox as a protest against worldly vanity.

As I have had some months serious reflection on the nature of fine dress, with its consequences in the world, with other things of like nature and affect, in which mankind are proud of earthly things and circumstances, or states of life.... Those that profess plainness and moderation, are verry particular in coular, price, and quality; which is the same nature at the root, or in the soul, as others in their way least they should be found erring from their law, way or profession; Query, if the same nature is not at the root of every proud and evil work on earth; one man setts his price, and another choses his coular, and another his quality and size, let the price be what it will....<sup>32</sup>

Not only does Willson discern pride and vanity in contemporary Quaker formalities of costume, but also a callous disregard for the original Quaker message that all people, no matter what their class or station on earth, have access to the inner Light of Christ. Willson continues:

how is the poor to live up to these ways, ye that are high and lofty in the Earth.

Both in name and nation

Both in Church and station

the rich, the wise, and the great, can do as they will, while they have plenty of poor people to serve them; and the way to keep up their name and nature in the earth is to keep them so; for on the shoulders of the poor and afflicted, rests all the pride and grandeur in the earth; in this, that they are your servants in all things under the Sun, saye the Grace of God; for which it is meet, that the poor and unlearned should be your minister.<sup>33</sup>

In essence, Willson's observations draw on Boehme's vision of the totally interrelated qualities of nature and spirit. In Quaker educational practices Willson also detects profound hypocrisy. He writes:

some profess much study, to be fitted for the ministry in our society, and much attention given to reading the Scriptures and other religious writings; But how shall I read saith the poor, if I have no learning, or how can I study without time, or how shall I write if I know not how, To all these services the support of the body is necessary, and if I must labor at such a rate, as expends all the days of my life, where is my services in these things; why the rich saith, my son is at the Colledge, and another at the study, and reading, preparing to preach and teach the poor, in schools in meetings and at church so call'd, and it is so in deed;...

Thus the faculties of the poor is lost, in the servitude of others, and they have become of no use in the earth, save to fight the battles of the greats, and serve them in a time of peace, and bear up and support their Grandeur in the earth; For if you who are rich and fine, had to fare as others, and share with them, you would have to forsake your studies, and many their silent meetings, and be otherwise employed in the earth....<sup>34</sup>

Willson's vehemence increases as the address proceeds. To communicate his insights he uses the Biblical story of Satan's tempting Jesus with all the world if Jesus will worship him (Matthew 4, 8-9; Luke 4, 5-7):

But you -- worse than the Devil, in that day, but not in this, keep all things to yourselves, save that which you cannot, which is just to give the poor as much of your proffit and honor as will keep them

alive to serve you, both in Church and State, with black and white. But if Christ had received it ye could not have had it, moreover if Satan had kept it ye could not have received it, but ye are in the practice of neither, receiving all and giving none, and your treasures is more fruitless than hell on earth, for this sometimes terrifies the soul to love God; but yours keeps men and women in bondage forever, as long as they remain in your hands, who is more hardhearted than Satan, for he offered all, if Christ would serve him, but ye offer so little that the poor can scarcely live amongst you....<sup>35</sup>

From using this story as an instructive analogy, Willson moves on to parallel the Adam and Eve story from Genesis with the Gospel account of Christ's crucifixion in order to convey an imaginative and stirring message to his former friends:

the law is in your hands, so also is the lands, so also is the religion, and the order thereof in your societies; which the poor cannot form, for want of property; being bound to you servants, to the support of the body, is without time thereunto. In short ye are rulers in the earth, and the poor is your servants, and ye serve the Devil, or elce ye would suffer others to share and fare with you in these things, and one would not be above another, in their sect or station, no more than adam was above Eve, when they was both clothed with the skins of Beasts, of what coular I know not, neither do I care, I know it was a covering according to their nature in sin, before which they were naked, and so some or many of you must be again, if you ever know the resurrection of Jesus Christ, for altho he was clothed with fine linen, he was naked when he did rise from the dead, elce the clothes would not have been seen where he did lay: Therefore arise from the dead and let your garments be divided amongst the poor, as the clothing of Jesus Christ, for

these was poor in religion, and had much need for the covering of Jesus Christ, so also have ye in spirit, but as the garments of Jesus Christ never covered a rich body, so neither will his spirit cover a rich Society, or people on the Earth....<sup>36</sup>

In expounding his disapproval of Quaker vanity in their use of costume, as he sees it, Willson transforms clothing itself into a symbol with a coherent history from Genesis to Christ to contemporary Upper Canada. In later writings Willson utilizes the symbolic values he has developed in the foregoing passage on clothing and nakedness for a variety of purposes, yet with the same resonance he achieves here.

While thoroughly damning what he sees as the pernicious customs of Quakers, Willson also made sincere efforts to reconcile himself with them should they reform themselves according to his analyses. To this end Willson not only published written exhortations, but he also travelled to visit with groups of Quakers and address Friends in person. He relates, in Various Manuscripts..., that he wrote to the Society to tell them his desires for the religious work:

that it might be done right, and to the honor of God; that it might remain a sure foundation for future ages, that there should be no necessity of separations no more one from another, that the work might remain with honor to the spirit that gave it.<sup>37</sup>

Explicitly acknowledging his awareness of the original Quaker message, presumably from the books of Fox, Barclay, Penn and others he would have encountered, Willson undertakes to point out how contemporary Quaker ways were resulting in the "dishonor of God":

by the poor craving the friendship of the rich, and that hath a good character in this world, and casting away their little gifts, for the sake of the honor of the learned, that they might appear as much like them as possible, and receive the name of them that are religious in the earth, all which is eering from the right foundation therein, till at length, however well begun reformation may have been, these forementioned practices, has led them from the right foundation, to rest quite on another spirit, than at the begining.<sup>38</sup>

Almost as though he is reminding himself, as well as Friends, in the ballad-like poem that concludes this brief account of his aims in reconciling with the Quaker Society, Willson plays upon the principle of pacifism they share:

In state they quarrel for their laws  
In Church for their religion  
Its worth a moments solemn pause  
To see what their ingag'd in

Least we should chance to follow on  
Ingag'd in warlike battle  
And just like sticks on emty drums  
Our religion should rattle...

Some with swords and some with guns  
And others with the Bible  
They rattle them like emty Drums  
With weapons on the table

They'r all contending for the law  
 Save them that preach the Gospel  
 The world itself is kept in awe  
 And dont receive a morsel....<sup>39</sup>

In accord with what is emerging as a strong pattern in Willson's writing, the later stanzas of this poem invoke Christ:

He's dead and buried in the earth  
 Wrapt in the silent grave  
 And antient Scripture rattling forth  
 Of works when he did live

Before he died he was resign'd  
 And number'd with a thief  
 Because of priests he was confin'd  
 Till death gave him relief....<sup>40</sup>

The poem closes with stanzas that unite Willson's personal social and spiritual concerns and show his attempting to take on Christ's nature. As Christ suffered crucifixion, Willson writes:

Just so I think some priests will fare  
 That's judging other men  
 Therefore I cannot with them share  
 In offering to condemn

Therefore be humble in thy lot  
 And always help the poor  
 Be free in giving that thou'st got  
 And God will give thee more....<sup>41</sup>

Willson's meaning, as he conveys it in this poem, both by its form and its content, is identical to George Fox's original teaching: the individual must bear witness to the living Christ within; and the wrangling of priests over rigid doctrines and the emphasis on the letter of scripture, are impediments to living the spiritual

Christian life and result in visible abuses. For Willson, these evils are nowhere more telling and obvious than in the maltreatment of poor people.

In the essay that follows the poem just discussed, Willson uncompromisingly perseveres in his attack on the Quakers' atrocious behaviour with the poor. He develops an economic breakdown of the situation that sounds remarkably modern:

the spiritual name, or Quakers so called, are a remarkable ingenious sharp dealing people, and are as capable of extending their bounds beyond the seas, as any people on the Continent of America; What is the religious benefit of much trading; Why, a little proffit on many goods will amount to a great deal, true, and a great trader can sell to such a small advance, that a small one need not set up the business, but had better go and toil for the rich, and be sure of his wages; this makes abundance of emply for poor people; and the rich justify themselves thereby, that they are doing abundance of good in the world, in employing and feeding these poor creatures, for if no one will employ them they must starve....<sup>42</sup>

Even at this early period, Willson draws attention to the abominable mistreatment of black people, by imagining a conversation between two rich people:

How much do you give your laborens, and meckanicks, sais one to another; why some trifling wages, perhaps it may be some Black man, or woman, whom we keep to serve us; that lives in the kitchen, or some other out house about our borders, where they are convenient at our call; like the beasts of the field, we just give them their supply, and they are satisfied.<sup>43</sup>



...the poor is opprest from one degree to another, till the poor Blacks in North America, or land of liberty, so called, are toiling for nothing therein, while the product of their hands, with abundance of other laborers, has made more fools in North America, than useful servisable members in either Church, or state, and the greatest art they possess is in buying and selling that which other people earns....<sup>44</sup>

Willson connects the grim realities of economic and racial interactions with the observable condition of religion:

perhaps it was on the seventh day of the week, when the poor goes to market to git a supply for the Sabbath so called, to support their children on their weeks wages, while the rich goes to Church, and the poor would go also, if they could be fine as the rich and appear like them therein; But they are so hated by them, for their conduct at market, in buying and selling to the poor, in their necessities, that they think it not worth while to go and show their rags amongst a fine people, that cheated them yesterday, in beating them down in their wages, and beating them up at market....<sup>45</sup>

To Willson this exploitation is Satanic:

How think ye that religious people, even the spiritual name, spend their time when they are contending with their neighbour, or brother about the price of things: why I should almost say that they loved the world and the love of God was not in them, else we should be more in that disposition, that was willing to do good to others, as we have enough for ourselves: this in justice can be said of God that pleads the necessities of the poor, and needeth nothing himself, But men more in the likeness of satan that delights to make mankind miserable, please his own cause on Earth,....therefore the rich disposition in any state, or them that wants to be such, even in religion, is as great a weapon in the hands of Satan, to make mankind miserable, as the Bible is in

the hands of others to make them happy....<sup>46</sup>

Willson's alternative to the exploitation he deplors is based on the fairness that the Gospel teaches. Likely this is also the key to the economic system of the Children of Peace..

Therefore for the restoration of peace on earth, and that little time may be spent in selling and buying, I think it would be better for the religious people to give the seller his price, or not buy at all, and when we sell take up with what the buyer judgeth he can afford to give, or else not sell to him at all, which would always give peace and satisfaction in dealing, and would be a better standard than the market price....<sup>47</sup>

The compromises Willson proposes would replace selfish interest with Christian values:

the rich may possess the property, but the poor as much religion, or peace as the other, well then let that which is of the least value be cast away, the same may be ground for another dispute, but the religious cannot deny but that peace exceeds all....<sup>48</sup>

That Willson was not only writing his views to Quakers, but also actively reaching out to them in person, is shown by items in the manuscript booklet that follow his espousal of fair dealings in trade as a fundamental requirement for peace on earth. The first overture is a letter to Friends at Uxbridge in which Willson issues them a challenge to meet him, again in the presence of God:

neither can any of us believe or receive your Justification or that you are right in your own way, in the government and order of your little Meeting in that place; for which cause we nor either of us, cannot be subject or servants thereunto any more. But this I will say unto you, and see what your God will say unto it, and see if he is willing to serve, or come forth to an open conference, and be tryed, and if he is fetch him up with you next youths Meeting;... meet with me at yonge street at the meeting place on sixth day before the youths meeting, that I may have some conference with him in your hearing, that we may try to find out his likeness, and measure how great he is; and if he is greater than him whom we serve, we will all bow down and worship him, and become your servants; But if he cannot exceed us in council nor in Judgment, you may serve us, and we will become servants to each other, for the Kingdom of heavens sake; but if ye will not do this thing, ye may take your Gods and go your way in peace like unto us, and we will try to be together no more, then you will no what he will do for you in a time of trouble, when the circumstances of this world Governs your religion for the friendship thereof.<sup>49</sup>

The Uxbridge Quakers declined this opportunity, Willson indicates in a letter to Charles and Elizabeth Chapman of Uxbridge.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the phrasing of Willson's invitation reiterates in summary form the basic elements of his reasons for departing from the Quakers: their refusal to consider the different ideas of members of the Society, and their over-involvement with affairs of this world.

From West Lake on the twenty-third of Twelfth month, 1814, Willson writes home to the Youth Meeting of the Children of Peace a sermon exhorting the young people to a Christian life in the spirit of Jesus. Willson's visit to

the Quaker community at West Lake lasted for a few weeks. He wrote a poem to Phebe, his wife, letters to the Quakers at Yonge Street (20/12/14) and at Pelham, and to Peter D. Conger, a Methodist minister, who had evidently accused Willson of treasonous conduct (05/01/15). Generally the messages in these epistles from Willson at West Lake are that he desires the religious groups to desist from judgments and to unite together in peace. Willson's appeals went unheeded, although the Quakers did send magistrates to West Lake to question the ardent former member of their Society.<sup>51</sup> No witnesses appeared and Willson was acquitted. The Quakers did not let up in their charges and accusations; in response, the Children of Peace published Willson's The Rights of Christ.

The next chapter will examine the features of Willson's thought that he develops in "The Rights of Christ," the "Address to the Crown of England," and "The Pattern of Peace or Babylon Overthrown," the three titles in the one book known as The Rights of Christ. In this book one can read the transition in Willson's theological development from stating his principles in opposition to the Quakerism he knew at first hand, the subject of this chapter, to forming his own ideas and visions independently, and expressing them in literary forms throughout the remainder of his long life.

## Notes

- 1 Minute Book for Yonge Street Monthly Meeting, 1806-18 (ms. number O-11-6, Quaker Archives, U.W.O.), 17/01/11.
- 2 Minute Book for Yonge St. Monthly Meeting, 15/08/11.
- 3 Minute Book for Yonge St. Monthly Meeting, 16/07/12.
- 4 Minute Book for Yonge St. Monthly Meeting, 15/10/12.
- 5 Minute Book for Yonge St. Monthly Meeting, 13/08/12.
- 6 Minute Book for Yonge St. Monthly Meeting, 13/08/12.
- 7 Minute Book for Yonge St. Monthly Meeting, 13/08/12.
- 8 Minute Book for Yonge St. Monthly Meeting, 15/10/12.
- 9 Minute Book for Yonge St. Monthly Meeting, 15/10/12.
- 10 Yonge Street Meeting of Women Friends' Minute Book, 1806-17 (ms. no. H-16-6 in Quaker Archives, U.W.O.), 13/08/12.
- 11 Timothy Rogers, Journal (ms. in Quaker Archives, U.W.O.), p. 170.
- 12 Minute Book for Yonge St. Monthly Meeting, 13/08/12.
- 13 David Willson, A Testimony to the People Called Quakers (Printed for the "Children of Peace," dated the 20th of 11th Mo. 1816; The Library of Haverford College, Haverford, Pa.), p. 2.

- 14 Testimony to the Quakers, p. 4.
- 15 Rufus M. Jones, The Later Periods of Quakerism (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1921), I, 314.
- 16 Testimony to the Quakers, p. 5.
- 17 Jones in Later Periods, I, ch. IX, "Divergent Quaker Views," 274-313, portrays these and other figures in detail.
- 18 Clearly Willson comes out on the Hicksite side of the controversy, as this was expressed in 1812. Willson met Hicks himself at Canada Half-Yearly Meeting, 29/08/10, as indicated by the Minute Book for that Meeting (ms. no. 0-3-1, Quaker Archives, U.W.O.), when Hicks visited from New York Yearly Meeting. One can only speculate about their conversation.
- 19 David Willson, The Rights of Christ According to the Principles and Doctrines of the Children of Peace (Philadelphia: Printed for the Author, 1815), p. 4.
- 20 Rights of Christ, p. 4.
- 21 George Fox, Journal, p. 68.
- 22 Rights of Christ, pp. 5-6.
- 23 Rights of Christ, pp. 6-7.
- 24 Rights of Christ, p. 7.
- 25 Rights of Christ, p. 7.
- 26 Rights of Christ, pp. 7-8.
- 27 George Fox, Journal, p. 29, for one instance of the occurrence of this phrase.
- 28 The manuscript is kept at the Sharon Temple Museum, Sharon, Ontario, and numbered X975.441.1. It is in the form of a booklet entitled Various Manuscripts written by David Willson, founder of the Sect Known as "The Children of Peace." The pages are numbered from 155 to 253. Subsequent references are to this pagination. A photocopy of the manuscript is available in the Special Collection, D. B. Weldon Library, U.W.O., London.
- 29 Various Mss. by David Willson, p. 165.
- 30 Various Mss. by David Willson, p. 155; stanzas 1, 5, 6, 7.

- 14, 17, 18, 19.
- 31 Various Mss. by David Willson, pp. 156-57; stanzas
- 32 Various Mss. by David Willson, pp. 158-59.
- 33 Various Mss. by David Willson, p. 159.
- 34 Various Mss. by David Willson, pp. 161-62.
- 35 Various Mss. by David Willson, pp. 162-63.
- 36 Various Mss. by David Willson, pp. 163-64.
- 37 Various Mss. by David Willson, p. 165.
- 38 Various Mss. by David Willson, p. 165.
- 39 Various Mss. by David Willson, pp. 166-67.
- 40 Various Mss. by David Willson, p. 168.
- 41 Various Mss. by David Willson, p. 168.
- 42 Various Mss. by David Willson, p. 169.
- 43 Various Mss. by David Willson, p. 169.
- 44 Various Mss. by David Willson, p. 170.
- 45 Various Mss. by David Willson, p. 171.
- 46 Various Mss. by David Willson, pp. 171-71.
- 47 Various Mss. by David Willson, pp. 172-73.
- 48 Various Mss. by David Willson, p. 173.
- 49 Various Mss. by David Willson, p. 182.
- 50 Various Mss. by David Willson, p. 188.

51 No record of the charges exists as far as I know. Perhaps the state of war (1812-14) and Willson's presumed opposition to it would have served his enemies as a pretext for a charge of treason.

## CHAPTER IV

### SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHILDREN OF PEACE

A major change in Willson's world-view finds expression in manuscripts and two publications of the second decade of the nineteenth century. From basing his thought primarily on his differences with contemporary Quakerism, as he does in A Testimony to the People Called Quakers (1816), and the early portions of The Rights of Christ, and the manuscript material from the same period, 1814 and 1815, examined in the preceding chapter, Willson shifts to an emphasis on his own independently formulated theology. Saying this, however, is to oversimplify somewhat, because the influence of Willson's Quaker education never left him. For example, even at the age of eighty-five, in 1864, a year and a half prior to his death, Willson published two broadside epistles to his former friends. Although the mark of Quakerism on Willson was



indelible, and although its fundamental tenets were to remain at the heart of Willson's understanding, nevertheless Willson did develop a unique interpretation of life which he began to formulate publicly in The Rights of Christ of 1815 and even more independently in An Address to the Professors of Religion of 1817.

The Rights of Christ, as has been noted in Chapter III, begins with, and persists in being, partly a reaction to Willson's judgment at the hands of the Society of Friends. This is especially true of the book's second section, Address to the Crown of England, in which Willson proclaims his defence against Quakers' accusations concerning him. Yet, in the opening section of the book of the same title, The Rights of Christ, Willson moves from comparing Quakers' false judgments with true Christian judgment, to elaborating his own conception of Jesus Christ. It is significant, certainly, that differing views of the nature of the Son of God seem to have been instrumental in splitting the Children of Peace from the Quakers; as indicated by the case of William Read in 1812, a man who later helped build the temple of the Children of Peace. The minutes of the Yonge Street Monthly Meeting for the sixteenth of Seventh Month, 1812, also quoted above (Chapter III), record:

William Read has been so unguarded in his conversation as to deny the divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by declaring

his belief that he was no more than the  
Apostle Paul, or any other inspired man....<sup>1</sup>

As Willson explains it in The Rights of Christ, however, he does not completely share Read's ideas about Christ, a further indication of the growing independence of Willson's thinking.

Having shown that Christ came to save sinners, not to condemn them,<sup>2</sup> Willson goes on to explain Christ's relation to scripture:

although it took many souls to fulfil the scriptures by parts; yet all was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. For which cause, I have, from the abundance of the heart, called him a man of God; because he lacked nothing, and was the fulness of the will of God in one body, to the salvation of every state that is lost, and lieth under the condemnation of the sight of God by our own works, which renders or rendered others, incapable of their own salvation, without some one to testify of God unto us. Therefore the grace of God or angels of his spirit hath been sent into the world, for our instruction, prophesying unto us by Moses and others, that, by and by the day cometh, that we shall be made clean through Jesus Christ, and no part of the soul or mind left in the deeds of corruption any more.<sup>3</sup>

The Bible, then, for Willson, both records a historical messianic coming, and also prophesies this advent for each individual; it partakes of the past, present and future as an eternal, living truth. The incarnation of Christ, the fulfilment of God's will, has been described in the Gospels, but this incarnation also must occur within the soul of every human being for salvation, as Moses and the other prophets all teach.<sup>4</sup> This element of prophecy became

immensely important to Willson in his later writings and in the way he grew to regard his own ministry.

The image of Christ that Willson formulates in The Rights of Christ has much in common with Boehme's beliefs. For both men Christ is the material phase of God. Willson terms Christ "that power, by which God created all things under the sun."<sup>5</sup> Willson's italics may be his way of drawing attention to the pun. Like Boehme also, Willson views Christ's incarnation as a process of suffering for the sake of all mankind. Willson says:

when Christ saw the worlds or senses (which he had made, while he dwelt with the father,) had suffered a loss by sin, he so loved the world, and the honour of God, the power of all creation, that he immediately took the nature of condemnation upon him, to make way for Adam to dwell with the father, as at the first....<sup>6</sup>

Willson's Christology, explicitly stated in this excerpt, resembles Boehme's understanding of Christ in a most important detail: the loving redemptive work of Christ is integral to the creative aspect of human existence. Nicolas Berdyaev puts this crucial insight into the following words in The Meaning of the Creative Act:

Salvation from sin, from perdition, is not the final purpose of religious life: salvation is always from something and life should be for something....

The final mystery of man is revealed not only in the Christ who took the form of a servant, but in His Kingly aspect; not only in the image of Christ the Sacrifice but in

the image of Christ the Victor. The creative mystery of human nature is related to the Coming Christ, to the power and glory of the Absolute Man.... The Coming Christ will never appear to him who by his own free effort has not revealed within himself the other, the creative image of man.<sup>7</sup>

This need for freedom, of course, is at the root of Willson's departure from the Quaker movement.

Theologically, his combining of the creative and redemptive powers in his image of Christ demonstrates Willson's emphasis on human freedom. In the following passage, Willson's own creative vision of the relationship between Adam and Jesus reveals the genesis of freedom to, as opposed to the more common Christian value of freedom from:

[Christ] is or was that power, by which God created all things under the sun; therefore the earth was Christ's and the fulness thereof. So also the bodies of men belongeth unto Christ, and the righteousness thereof: Therefore he took the nature of condemnation upon him, that the world might be free from sin, and he suffer the loss, who was able to hide all the works of darkness, in works of righteousness.... seeing he so loved the worlds which he had made, that he rested not while they did lie bound under death and corruption which came by sin. Therefore he left God, and condescended to live with man, in favour with God till man was restored, and every man should dwell in the presence of God's spirit, as the soul of Adam did in the presence of God when the worlds was finished, till sin took place in man.<sup>8</sup>

The implications of this insight of Willson's are both poignant and radically liberating. Reminiscent of the original messages of Jacob Boehme and George Fox, and stated by David Willson as he himself comprehended human life from his own experience, this courageous affirmation of the present perfectibility of mankind through the appreciation of Christ's abundant love, is the elemental strength of Willson's early teaching, and is likely the spiritual magnet that moved people to join him in a new life.

The Biblical text to which Willson repeatedly returns in The Rights of Christ is Jesus's saying, reported in The Gospel of St. John, 6, 53:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

Jesus' listeners, the Jews in the synagogue at Capernaum, had difficulty understanding these words, so He elaborated:

As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.

This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.<sup>9</sup>

By partaking of this spiritual bread, according to Willson, "man is worthy to hear the voice of God once more in the presence of Jesus Christ."<sup>10</sup> Those who do not "eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood," Willson defines as "Israel":

which signifieth a people, that receiveth the internal law of God, and keep it not to their own salvation: which thing Adam done in the beginning....<sup>11</sup>

Both this definition of Israel and the distinction between the true bread of Christ and the manna God sent to sustain the Jews in the desert after Moses had led them out of the Egyptian captivity (Exodus 16, 15 ff.) take on renewed significance in Willson's later work. In The Rights of Christ Willson moves from here to augment his definition of Christ.

In order to characterize more fully the work of Christ in man, Willson posits a "spirit which led the soul astray":

it is that, that suffers in man, enabled by God thereunto... Thus, man suffers in body, soul and spirit for sin, seeing, he takes into him a spirit thereby which God never commanded him, and is contrary to the will of God; therefore it must come wholly out of him, before the spirit or will of God can enter the heart of man.... Which state, I call, Jesus Christ in man, in the glory and honour of God.<sup>12</sup>

Also recognizing the real power of evil, as Boehme did so vividly, is Willson's exegetic designation of Christ's action as mediation between the right and left hands of God. The right hand of God, Willson says, is:

that in which we are justified of God; and that which is the wrong side, or left hand of God, is that, in which we are lying under the condemnation of our own works, of which nature, Jesus Christ took upon him, toiling under which for our salvation, that we might pass from the left, to the right hand of

God. Thus, he became a mediator between the two states, often telling us of what God revealed to him, that we might believe therein, and do that which pleases God; till he could testify unto God his father for us, that we had become as he was, and was fit to dwell with God, by keeping and doing all things which he commandeth us, even as he doeth the will of his father which is in heaven. Which would be the baptism of the Son in us, by which we would be fitted to dwell with God as in the beginning, where Christ and God, or the spirit and the soul dwells together in man, actuating the five senses of the body.<sup>13</sup>

Again Willson delivers his sense of the immediate possibility and reality of living a spiritual life, a creative life of peace. Of Jesus, Willson says:

he made way for all men in himself, to come to the knowledge of God, and be at peace with his spirit, as he was at peace with all men on earth, when his groans and agonies had ceased on the cross, which is the end of corruption to all that hath sinned.<sup>14</sup>

The final dimension Willson gives to his very full image of Christ starts, as does the initial dimension, as a response to the Quakers' judgment. Possibly in reference to William Read's lightly esteeming the scriptures, and his expressing "a Disbelief of some passages in them,"<sup>15</sup> for which unguarded conversation the Yonge Street Quakers swiftly disowned Read in 1812, Willson creates an interesting argument against prideful behavior. To Quakers he says:

Therefore, take heed what ye say, lest ye condemn me without a cause; because I am not able to say, (like many others) that I own, and believe in all the scriptures, yet I have not condemned any part of them. But it

is not lawful for me in the sight of God, to say that which I am not, and if I should say, that the spirit of Christ dwells in me, then I might in justice say that I owned or professed all the scriptures that are written of God's spirit. But, suffer me to be small in my beginning; that I may grow in the grace of God, least I should be great in my profession and small in works, like many of my condemners; and instead of growing greater in the works of God, I should grow less than my profession, and great in the service of the Devil, like some of you, who cannot distinguish the works of one day from another, and for want thereof, have no knowledge how Jesus Christ grew in favour, both with God and man, nor how the grace of God was multiplied upon him, till he received the fulness of all things written in the scriptures into one body, even that which his spirit took upon him, in which he endured the nature of all sin, and the temptations thereof like unto us, and more in abundance; for he could not be overcome with the temptations of all the glories of the earth.<sup>16</sup>

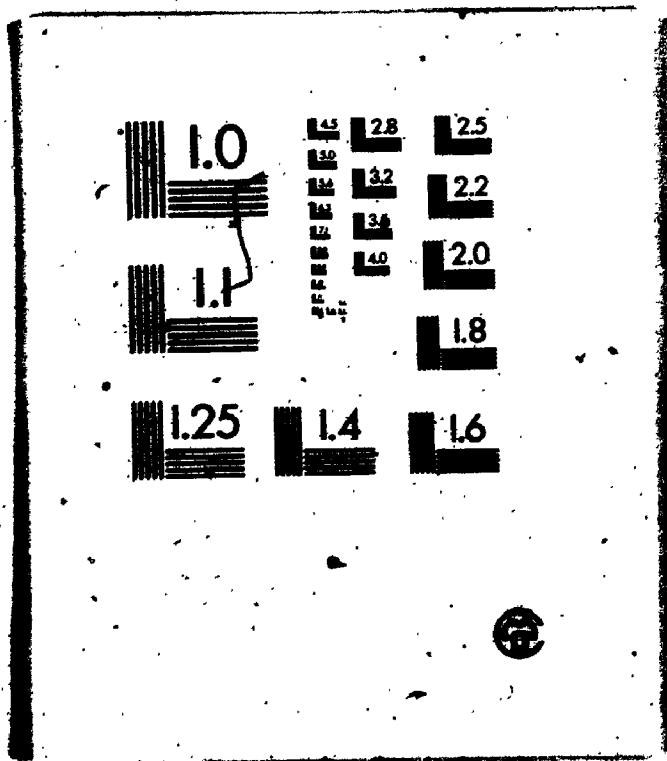
From this resounding sentence Willson moves on to a further warning that reiterates the personal, inner nature of salvation:

the desires of man are inferior to the will of God, which ought to have been denied by the soul of Adam in paradise, and said to the will of the flesh, or fruit of the body, not thy will, but that which God hath commanded me be done, which was fulfilled by Christ on the cross, after suffering through the whole of the Old Testament dispensation to the fulfilment thereof. Therefore, take heed how ye profess Christ and condemn others, seeing he may not be in all men alike. I may have received the least portion of his spirit... and another, another portion, all to the honour of the works done in his body when he dwelt therein in the fulness thereof.<sup>17</sup>

In this excerpt an ambivalence in Willson's thinking



2



appears that will become even more prominent in his later writings: the partial presence of Jesus' spirit in the Old Testament in contrast to the fulness of Jesus' spirit in the crucifixion and resurrection. Willson's doctrine that "one hath received one portion of his spirit, and another, another portion," will eventually become the basis for Willson's adopting a unique stance in his life and writing that combines Old and New Testament elements, with a diminishing stress on the latter. At the conclusion of The Rights of Christ, though, one's primary impression is of the vividness and richness of Willson's image of Christ.

In the second section of the book, The Rights of Christ, called, An Address to the Crown of England, Willson's purpose appears to be to defend himself from accusations levelled at him by the Quakers. The poem that precedes the Address bears the heading, "Written on the prospect of death, by the Author, in the thirty-seventh year of his age; 26th of the 1st Month, 1815," and opens with the following stanzas which indicate the extremity of his situation as Willson perceived it:

The powers of hell are now combin'd;  
 With war against me rage,  
 But in my God my soul's resign'd --  
 The rock of every age.

His power in my soul I'll see,  
 When death and hell has done;  
 The hope thereof sustaineth me,  
 Until that day doth come.

In vain men rage against God's will

His power on earth is all;  
 For which I do resign my skill,  
 And on his power call.<sup>18</sup>

The war imagery is carried on by Willson in the Address to characterize the state of relations between the Quakers and the Children of Peace. This imagery would have gained in strength and impact on King George III and his subjects from their own consciousness of the War of 1812 in the North American colony, as well as from the revived threat from Napoleon in continental Europe, a threat that would end finally later in the same year as Willson's publication of The Rights of Christ, on June 18, 1815, at Waterloo. Willson was aware of his own significance in the midst of all these worldly affairs, and in order to gain an audience he issued a warning to the King and people of England:

--Consider what the Lord your God hath done unto you, not forgetting but that the enemy yet striveth for a place in your land, to overthrow the kingdom which ye possess. But while it is in your hands, I would that ye consider the poor subjects that are therein and are subject to thy power. Forget them not, I say unto thee, for this cause, that a nation is no more than one man, in the sight of God, and as he hath power in his wrath, to curse a nation for injustice done to one man, so also hath he power to bless the same for kindness and justice done to one of the least of his people, of which I am one that speaketh with thee this day.<sup>19</sup>

In this plain, in the Quaker sense, language, Willson also lets the king know about a choice George III has ahead of him:

Not forgetting the text, that God is peace, in which I am called to preach the gospel unto you, whether ye will receive it or not -- it is the same to me, seeing I have received, or trust in God for my own salvation. Ye are great indeed; I can't help that, neither do I want to, but am willing ye should remain great in the sight of God, although I am but small therein, in the things thereof. Now choose whether I should, or might be your servant in these things, yea or nay; as I think it would be a shame for a minister to be banished from your nation, for preaching the gospel of peace therein.<sup>20</sup>

In describing the situation that has caused him to address the Crown, Willson acquaints his readers with a telling characterization of himself:

I am a man under the visitation of God's power in your land, and many scandalous reports are in circulation against me. The intent of the spirit of the thing, is to put me to flight from your dominions, or that I should be imprisoned therein; for which cause, I as a dutiful subject make myself known hereby unto you of great estate in the world, least your minds should be affected and stirred up against me without a cause, by your inferiors, who seek to do evil to the works of God, whenever the Almighty is trying to do you good....<sup>21</sup>

Of the kinds of charges the Quakers were bringing against Willson no records exist, unfortunately, although, as noted before,<sup>22</sup> the state of war in the province from 1812 to 1814, and the Children of Peace's undoubtedly outspoken opposition to that form of evil, might have occasioned allegations of treason by the more earth-bound and perhaps revenge-seeking sort in Upper Canada of the period. In his condemnation of these accusers, Willson points out the

irony that history has created:

The last that suffered under the crown of Great Britain, I believe to have been the Quakers, through the scandalous reports and false surmisings of their enemies. And as I am one that have dissented from them, and have become a little body of people in this place, and on a little trial in our separate station from them, find that they are very envious against us, especially the most zealous amongst them, and by false reports and wrong judgments, have stirred up much evil against us in thy dominions; and in order that the power of government which is in your hands, should not be affected thereby, we write as follows for your information and peace sake between you and us, not desiring to be so far taken notice of, that you should plead our cause against our enemies, but that ye should not become a weapon in their hands to stir up strife against us without a cause, which might prove to your own condemnation in the sight of God....<sup>23</sup>

However, even if the monarch should fail to heed these desiderations, Willson serves notice that he has absolutely no intention of succumbing to the sorts of treatment that seventeenth-century Quakers like George Fox had endured:

It is not the nature of my spirit to lie bound in prisons, without a cause, as others hath done. Therefore I write unto you, that ye may show unto me a cause, and make manifest unto me that I am an offender thereof, before I suffer thereby.<sup>24</sup>

In concluding his Address, Willson modulates to a more conciliatory tone:

Seeing in peace God doth all his work in the beginning, and God changeth not, therefore let his works be at peace in our land, and the Lord's work be done in peace therein, because God is peace.

DAVID WILLSON

Whitchurch, county of York, and  
 province of Upper Canada, 15th  
 of the Second Month, 1815.25.

Besides providing insight into the social consequences of the Children of Peace's separation from the Quakers, the lasting interest of An Address to the Crown is in the picture it shows of Willson's approach to worldly matters, of which, to Willson, King George III is simply one other element, sharing equally in this world's subservience to God. What in the Address inclines, on the part of its author, to the immodest, even to the distinctly saucy, is in fact unmistakable evidence of the intensity and vigor of Willson's faith in God and in his own special relationship with God.

The title of the third section of The Rights of Christ is The Pattern of Peace, or Babylon Overthrown. Of the three parts of the book, this last is the one most independent of direct reaction to the Quakers, and the most original in conception. The Pattern of Peace is primarily Willson's meditation upon the place of evil in the world. It is his first full treatment of this perennial topic. The problem of evil may be stated as follows: if God is all good, why does He allow the existence, in His creation, of evil -- "si Deus bonum est, unde malum?"

As explained in Chapter II above, Jacob Boehme envisions the Unground, "the original nothingness that

calls forth something,"<sup>26</sup> namely, God, whose nature is dual: love and wrath. These inner aspects of God generate the world. In this way, Boehme assigns a positive value to the existence of evil. George Fox also regards evil as a salutary force. In his Journal, as quoted before, Fox says he "saw clearly that all was done and to be done in and by Christ,... and that all these troubles were good for me, and temptations for the trial of my faith which Christ had given me...."<sup>27</sup>

Of course, a wide variety of solutions to the problem of evil has been proposed throughout history, yet evil remains, fundamentally, a mystery. It is most pressing for those who believe in God, but no rationalization of evil is impervious to critical attack, so that in the end, whether as a Theist, Agnostic or Atheist, one's conclusions about evil are in the category of beliefs.<sup>28</sup> David Willson's attitude towards evil is very similar to Boehme's and Fox's.

Willson sees evil as an integral part of the cosmic process God initiates:

Behold the goodness of God to man in the beginning and doubt not but God is altogether good; for when he had finished the worlds and all things which is, or was therein, by his all-powerful, or labouring word; he gave the same unto man, whereby he might toil, and become an image, or heir of his glorious rest, which was with him when the worlds were made....<sup>29</sup>

The metaphorical six days of creation, according to

Willson, are the steps God ordains for men to follow; but Adam, "by forgetfulness, carelessness, or neglect, refused to keep the word of God."<sup>30</sup> Man's first disobedience "is, and was, the root of all evil under the sun."<sup>31</sup> Similarly to George Fox, Willson believes that this is in accord with God's plans:

Therefore it is meet for Adam, or his fallen state in us, to first know the evil which we have done, before we can know the will of God, which was in us before evil took place by transgression therein.<sup>32</sup>

One difficulty with this model of spiritual development is that in many particular situations evil leads not to a "glorious rest," but to further evil, such as the indiscriminate sufferings inflicted by wars. Willson's conception is like the Stoic idea that evil is actually a force leading to the good of the whole when seen in the proper perspective.<sup>33</sup> For Stoics, such as Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius, the proper perspective is the human individual's; for Willson, it is God's. Knowledge of evil is a necessary prelude to man's realization of God's will. Jesus Christ is a living witness of this process:

these that build up good, not knowing the foundations, and beginning of evil, is very likely to build thereon, and down comes Babylon, with all the glories of the earth; seeing Jesus Christ refused and despised them all, before he began to preach the gospel of peace to the people; and his first cry was not unto them, do good, but repent of that evil which is done, that hereafter we might do good.<sup>34</sup>



Not just in his teaching did Christ acknowledge the role of evil, but through the events of his life in the world

Christ takes evil into account:

Mark how he was baptized of John, when in man's estate, according to the size of the flesh, before he could endure all these temptations, by which all the Sons of Adam fell from uprightness of heart before God, not as though he had need to be baptized for his own sins, but as though we had need he should pass through this state, for our sakes, that his whole life might be the complete and full ministry of God, from the state of the fall, to uprightness of heart, or the full restoration of all that was lost in us, which appeared in Jesus Christ on earth, by fulfilling every state of the mercy, and power of God to all that hath sinned....<sup>35</sup>

Continuing to reckon with what he perceives as God's will

-- not with a man's, who might wonder, why evil at all --

Willson interprets the scriptural evidence:

In the life of Christ, are many mansions, much room, or many states, wherein all may rest, and never fall like Babylon; because every state in him is, and was right, and man the author of that which is wrong; and Jesus Christ, in whom was both the nature of God and man, in one body, the perfect knowledge of a mediator between the two states in us: therefore the life of Christ is the full and ample ministry of God in us, while we remain in a state of sin, or by experience in the least sense thereof, which sense was not in Adam, when he first heard the word of God, neither can it be in us, when the spirit speaketh in us again, which state I call God in man, and Christ with the father, as in the beginning....<sup>36</sup>

The Pattern of Peace, or Babylon Overthrown next

proceeds to a closer scrutiny of the transformation from an

evil to a Godly life that occurs in human beings. To begin with, Willson asks:

How came man into three parts, or the  
Godhead into three natures subsisting on or  
in one God?<sup>37</sup>

The identity of man's, experience and the three natures of God that Willson's query implies reminds the reader that Willson's theology is far from being literalistic or naive, and confirms the artistic skill involved in his development and manipulation of symbols. To elucidate man's and God's tripartite natures, a conception akin to Boehme's,<sup>38</sup> Willson presents a dynamic image that turns on the already-established concept of Christ as mediator. Willson says:

God became into, or came in two natures in man, after man had taken into him a nature by sin, contrary to the will of God, which he should not; after which God appeared no more naked before him, as in spirit, in the soul of Adam in the beginning, but began to take the nature of flesh upon him which first veiled Adam, or ourselves from his sight; therefore he began to speak to the sons of Adam or repeated transgressions in another manner, than that in which he first did speak to him in the beginning, in the heart, soul, or mind thereof.<sup>39</sup>

The symbolism of nakedness recurs in Willson's concept of the redeemed person:

God remained or remains veiled in the spirit, or flesh of Christ, and only reveals himself to man, by and through the flesh, or the spirit thereof, by parts, as the heart becomes clean by repentance, to the reception thereof, till he appears naked and bare in man as at the beginning, speaking to man by and through no object of mediation any more, in which state we receive Christ, in the glory and will of God;... that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, might dwell together therein as in the beginning when these three made one all powerful, all living and one all eternal God in man throughout the earth.<sup>40</sup>

Willson's emphasis on revelation available through the flesh also carries the connotation, upon which both Boehme and Fox particularly insisted, that for salvation humans must live the life of Christ, not just read about it or profess its virtues. The Babylon image becomes the vehicle for Willson's insight:

the builders of Babylon, who when they heard of heaven immediately provided a way to get there, like a man professing Christ in sin, which is the ministry to, or for that state, like a people professing to go to heaven on a tower, built of the things of God.... Thus Christ is professed in the dark, and the works of God hidden in the night, for want of repentance in the soul, every man building on his own foundation in a state of sin, before the heart is made clean, having corruption at the root thereof.<sup>41</sup>

On the contrary, Willson states, the Christian structure is within:

-- Let that which we have exalted, be laid low, and all crooked professions be made straight in us, by receiving the spirit of Moses and the prophets, with them that baptize on earth, that the ways of the Lord be made straight in us, and not one exalted one above another, in which state John was

sent into the world as a messenger before his face, preparing the world, or our hearts in the spirit of the nature thereof, for Jesus Christ, ~~of~~ the ministry of God to become active therein, building us up in his most holy faith.... therefore the order of God in a state of peace, is first to know our own sins; second, to repent thereof, by the ministry of the spirit of Jesus Christ, which first brings us to a knowledge thereof, after which we are made clean from the power of temptation, ... by which we become worthy to receive, or conceive the Holy Ghost once more....<sup>42</sup>

Willson develops another dimension to this proper preparation for the advent of Christ and the Holy Ghost into the human heart on the basis of his understanding of the meaning of the Babylon story:

Babylon is built up in many, and must fall, or be overthrown, and the exaltation thereof be laid low before the spirit of Christ will do the will of God in the hearts of these, in which it is exalted;... So also believe I, that many a profession will be laid low, before many will come to a knowledge of Jesus Christ in themselves, and the ministry of the Godhead in Christ, and how God came apart into his three distinct natures, or baptisms which again bringeth all things together, in the name of one all great and all powerful God, into which man cometh by doing one thing first, and then another, till every seal is opened in them, and every day of the week filled up before the seventh cometh: so must every purpose of the coming of Jesus Christ be filled up, before the knowledge and power of the Holy Ghost cometh: so must the doctrines and mysteries of the old and new testament be filled up, before we receive the knowledge of the Holy Ghost, which taught Adam before sin, and will teach us when sin is done....<sup>43</sup>

This doctrine of the simultaneous fruition of the Old and New Testaments becomes ever more important as Willson's

ideas mature. He closes the prose section of The Pattern of Peace with a repeat of his admonition to professors of religion, likely the Quakers in particular, to live Christ's teachings, not just talk about them. But before this stern warning, Willson conveys his sense of true salvation through building imagery that dramatizes both the contrast between, and the necessary combination of, the spirits of the Old and the New testaments. Willson prophesies:

the heart is the father's house, and his order will appear therein, when spiritual Babylon on earth is overthrown; and every one shall know the will of God therein, and portion of grace which he hath received: after which there shall be peace on earth with all, and all walk in the order of God in Christ for ever; and the building shall not come down any more, neither shall the spirit of Christ be crucified unto death by the builders of laws, and temples on the earth any more....

Therefore he is and was the house of God; in which there is much room; his spirit containing the inspiration of all things which are written in scripture of God: therefore blessed was, and is he in every state....<sup>44</sup>

The final section of The Pattern of Peace, or Babylon Overthrown is a poem called, "Some Reasons for Believing that the Spirit of Christ is not in All that Profess His Name." In quatrains it recapitulates much of the message of The Pattern of Peace, gaining strength, as a poem, from the preceding exploration of important concepts and symbols. The last three stanzas depend, for example, upon

the building imagery Willson has both created and interpreted in The Pattern of Peace, or Babylon

Overthrown. The lines very energetically conjure up the overthrow of Babylon and the rising of the true way to salvation, Jesus. The new structure is both inward and outward, and ultimately, like the teachings of Jesus, comes alive.

In vain the billows roar aloud,  
 God's spirit is supreme;  
 And soon will overthrow the proud,  
 By heaven's mighty scheme.

Arise Christ Jesus in the skies,  
 On earth thy power is all;  
 Thy spirit's over fading joys,  
 Triumphant in my soul.

Let me be great, let me be small,  
 My Saviour I adore;  
 Because his spirit in my soul,  
 Will rise to set no more.<sup>45</sup>

The Rights of Christ ends with "A Song, Giving God Praise, on the First Day of the Week, or the Morning of the Resurrection, Triumphant over Death, Hell, and the Grave." This "Song" forms a coda to the whole book, as it enacts Willson's statement in the preceding poem, "My Saviour I adore." In "A Song" Willson offers praise for Christ's death on the cross and for His resurrection. Willson adopts the stance of the man who actually has experienced salvation:

He died; to set my body free,  
 O'er this he rules as Lord;  
 To set my soul at liberty,  
 To God's inspiring word.

Christ, the salvation of the flesh,  
 Hath set my body free;  
 And hell can never have her wish,  
 In ruling over me.

Great God, for me these things thou'st done;  
 For peace and liberty;  
 And now for ever more to come,  
 Great honour be to thee.<sup>46</sup>

The concluding stanzas of "A Song" again convey Willson's experience of a new life, a new determination, this time through the traditional imagery of God's light guiding a ship. The "shore" reference reminds one of Willson's stormy arrival in Upper Canada in 1801, when he swam to the shore with his family, only to find religious storms that he weathered for fourteen years in and out of the Society of Friends. With these personal associations added to Willson's overt subject, Christ's resurrection, one may detect in the last lines of "A Song" a note of wistfulness amongst the chords of triumph:

Great God thy name as king ador'd,  
 To rule on earth's thy right;  
 And let thy spirit rule as Lord,  
 On earth to shine most bright.

The resurrection morning's come,  
 My soul doth leave the shore:  
 Thy will alone in me be done,  
 The sun doth set no more.<sup>47</sup>

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However scantily educated Willson claimed to be, his sixty-four page book of early 1817, entitled An Address to the Professors of Religion, is a brilliant accomplishment.

The book's dominant theme is stated by the title of its opening chapter:

A path from the latter end of the Revelations, to the first of Genesis -- and from thence to Paradise.<sup>48</sup>

This route is not so erratic or idiosyncratic as it might at first seem. For instance, in The Great Code: The Bible and Literature (1982), Northrop Frye, the distinguished literary critic, guides the reader along exactly the same path that Willson explored one hundred and sixty-five years earlier. In Frye's chapter on "Phases of Revelation" in the Bible, he calls the seventh phase "Apocalypse." Frye quickly brushes away perhaps the most commonly held reading of St. John's vision in the Book of Revelation:

We are greatly oversimplifying the vision, however, if we think of it simply as what the author thought was soon going to happen, as a firework show that would be put on for the benefit of the faithful, starting perhaps next Tuesday. For him all these incredible wonders are the inner meaning or, more accurately, the inner form of everything that is happening now. Man creates what he calls history to conceal the workings of the apocalypse from himself.<sup>49</sup>

Willson, of course, also knew how to see through the screen of history, as his opening chapter's title indicates:

A path from the latter end of the Revelations, to the first of Genesis -- and from thence to Paradise.



Frye states his own insight on the subject as follows:

We notice that while the Book of Revelation seems to be emphatically the end of the Bible, it is a remarkably open end. It contains such statements as 'Behold, I make all things new' (21:5); it describes God as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end of all possibilities of verbal expression; it follows the vision of the restoring of the waters of life with an earnest invitation to drink of it. The panoramic apocalypse gives way, at the end, to a second apocalypse that, ideally, begins in the reader's mind as soon as he has finished reading, a vision that passes through the legalized vision of ordeals and trials and judgments and comes out into a second life. In this second life the creator-creature, divine-human antithetical tension has ceased to exist, and the sense of the transcendent person and the split of subject and object no longer limit our vision. After the 'last judgment,' the law loses its last hold on us, which is the hold of the legal vision that ends there.<sup>50</sup>

To end his chapter on "Phases of Revelation," Frye puts this same understanding into different words:

Milton suggests that the ultimate authority in the Christian religion is what he calls the Word of God in the heart, which is superior even to the Bible itself, because for Milton this 'heart' belongs not to the subjective reader but to the Holy Spirit. That is, the reader completes the visionary operation of the Bible by throwing out the subjective fallacy along with the objective one. The apocalypse is the way the world looks after the ego has disappeared.

In our discussion of creation we were puzzled by the paradox in the word when applied to human activity. God, we are told, made a 'good' world; man fell into a bad world and the good one vanished; consequently human creativity has in it the quality of re-creation, of salvaging something with a human meaning out of the alienation of nature. At the end of the

Book of Revelation, with such phrases as 'I make all things new' (21:5) and the promise of a new heaven and a new earth, we reach the antitype of all antitypes, the real beginning of light and sound of which the first word of the Bible is the type.<sup>51</sup>

Willson's Address to the Professors of Religion begins with a discussion of scripture that makes the same point as Milton's to which Frye refers. Willson's words are:

I rather understand, by scripture writings, that it hath been given us whereby we might know God, and be brought together into one kingdom, or into that state of mind in which but one spirit doth rule, which would be the first state of Paradise again, or in that state in which God is in favour with the world.<sup>52</sup>

Willson enunciates this definition of scripture as a way to "know God" in contrast to the wrong use of scripture perpetrated by the "professors of religion," those who dwell on the letter of the Bible, not its spiritual dimension. Certainly this preamble on scripture is a further condemnation of the legalistic Quakers, written almost five years after the 1812 schism. Also, Willson's understanding of scripture places him, retrospectively, on the Hicksite side of the Quakers' Hicksite/Orthodox controversy. Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to regard Willson's Address as merely another reaction to the Orthodox Quakers. The Address is actually a mature and original theological work, alive with the visionary light of its author.

In what is emerging as a characteristic element of

Willson's compositional strategy, he ends the first chapter of the Address with a poem. These eight quatrains are both an invocation and a link between the preceding insistence on a spiritual, rather than a human or natural, foundation for religion, and the subsequent exploration of the Book of Revelation: Willson's poem is as follows:

Father, hear a lonesome object,  
 Hearken to my mournful prayer;  
 Guide my pen to every subject;  
 Lay the works of scripture bare.

Thy wisdom far exceedeth heaven  
 Thou founder of the earth and sea,  
 All scripture numbers are but seven,  
 Form each power distinct in me.

If I by nature do petition,  
 Thy great and mighty sovereign throne,  
Confuse my soul in dark damnation!!!  
 And make some other heart thy own!!!

I only ask for thy great nature,  
 Ruling in the air or sky,  
 Thou power that's in every creature;  
 That e'er did live, or yet must die.

Thou planted lights beneath the heavens,  
 A right thou has to blot them out;  
 'Twas Moses number'd thee in sevens,  
 Which brings all scripture works about.

The last account of number sevens,  
 Every day was sealed up,  
 And none but that that's in the heavens,  
 Could loose the seals, the heart or book.

The same pass'd thro' all mens transgressions,  
 By which he made the heart his own,  
 The same did rule o'er all professions,  
 His sacred heart -- the Jewish throne --

With room extensive for the Heathen,  
 Him that reads all nature's book;  
 Pray teach me one out of the seven,  
 And on thy myst'ries let me look. 53

Particularly in its imagery, Willson's poem partakes of the mysteries one also finds in St. John's vision of Revelation.

Willson begins to clarify the symbols and concepts he presents in the poem in the following chapter of the Address. The chapter is headed with the words:

John saw a book sealed with seven seals: by which I understand that he saw the lost state of man.<sup>54</sup>

As the poem of invocation states, the number seven is the luminous detail that Willson is using to create a bridge between the end of the Book of Revelation and the beginning of Genesis. Such a treatment of seven is entirely consistent with alchemical and esoteric symbolic customs from the cabbala to Jacob Boehme's early works, and many other mystical writings throughout the ages. Willson's design is to identify the macrocosm -- the whole creation depicted in the seven days of Genesis -- with the microcosm -- the individual human being's soul -- imagined as a book with seven seals in Revelation 5. In fact, this identification underlies the entire Book of Revelation. In Revelation 6, the systolic process is stated concisely in a group of similes that describes some of the consequences of the opening of the sixth seal. Each simile enacts the macrocosm-to-microcosm rhythm through specific comparisons:

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as

sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.<sup>55</sup>

Clearly, then, Willson's interpretation of the book with seven seals as the "lost state of man" is consistent with the meaning of Revelation. He says:

The seals signifies to me, that man had lost the right knowledge of himself, or yet never had gained it: therefore his heart was unto him as a sealed book, in which he could not read, until another more mighty than himself, prevailed to loose the seals of a secret heart unto him.<sup>56</sup>

This other, of course, is Christ, the mediator between God and man, spirit and flesh. In affirming this powerful agency of Christ, Willson alludes to the opening section of the Address, to his premise that the Holy Spirit, not the works of man, is the right foundation of life:

Now let it be remembered, from this time, henceforth, to the end, that no man in heaven, nor in the earth, nor under it, was found worthy to do the work; but the peaceable, meek and quiet disposition of the Lamb of God, and his body, flesh, or nature first slain, before his spirit reveals unto us the temple of the heart, or the order of the seven powers therein, in which temple God abideth not, until the last seal is opened, which brings us to a knowledge of the everlasting sabbath of rest, in which God abideth, with all nature about him, which are his servants at perfect rest.<sup>57</sup>

For Willson, as for Jacob Boehme and George Fox, this state of redemption, available in the present, through Christ, is

eternal:

the heart becomes an unsealed book of life,  
into which no dark thing can ever enter,  
because the high God, with the spirit of the  
Lamb, hath lighted it, and liveth, ruleth  
and abideth there; keeping the temple,  
throne or kingdom, forever.<sup>58</sup>

Again, Willson employs a poem to link this chapter with the  
next one. In the poem the New Testament revelation works  
as a type of the Old Testament revelation of the law to  
first Adam and then Moses:

Be thou a compass from the heavens,  
To guide me on the sea of glass;  
Lead my soul through all thy sevens,  
Make thou my soul bright gold or brass,

In which thy mysteries are engraved,  
Written by thy pen or hand;  
In every soul which thou hast saved,  
By thy great divine command.

First to us, by Moses written,  
In tables hewn of polished stone;  
These first commands -- by Moses broken,  
Shows that they were not thy own.

The heart, the tables, thou first formed,  
Was broken by thy first born son,  
And Moses was no better armed,  
Behold! the self-same work he done.<sup>59</sup>

Although the Old Testament revelation is imperfect, like  
the existence of evil, it is part of God's all-encompassing  
project:

But why, oh God should rise such rumours,  
From the mind or from the sea,  
And different beasts of various numbers,  
When souls that's bound are to be free.

I raise, saith God, inferior powers,  
Raging in the mind of man;  
And every nature that devours,

Shows their form, their size, their plan.

All rising and designing something,  
Do show themselves and pass away,  
To show all other power's nothing,  
In the Lamb's bright shining day.<sup>60</sup>

Willson's imagination thoroughly synthesizes the essential images from Genesis with those of Revelation in his interpretation of St. John's visions. Christ's work in man Willson identifies with God's seven days' work in creating the world; at the same time; for Willson, God's creation is the creative work of the redeemed person, the person who accepts Christ into daily life. When Adam acquired the knowledge of good and evil, God set him to toil in the realm of nature, in order that he could find a return to being the fulness of God's image. This is how Willson describes the process, blending the Genesis and Revelation stories most effectively:

God first lighted [Adam] in a natural state, against which the works of nature will always prevail. For this reason, that in that state of man, it is the greatest power: so was the seven spirits of Adam lighted and nature prevailed against it; so Moses saw, because he saw the fall of man, or the means by which he was at a distance from God, having six days work to do, to come to a knowledge of him, which is all the powers or numbers of which the soul consists. The same are the seals that Christ opens in the heart, and when they are opened, the spirit of every day giveth light (to the man to work by) in the soul, as the sun in the firmament lighteth every day unto us.<sup>61</sup>

The rest of the Address consists of a detailed exposition of a variety of the images of Revelation, mainly

the ones associated with the opening of the seven seals. Willson's technique is always to compare and parallel the events of Genesis with the visions of Revelation in the manner that the foregoing examples illustrate, so it is not necessary to review each instance here. Near the close of Willson's Address is a paragraph that unites the main insights of his book in a collage of images that very eloquently portrays the microcosm's destined identity with the macrocosm, and the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible:

And the whole mysteries that are contained in scripture, can amount to no more than either a man toiling by the power of nature or the flesh, and working his own destruction; or by divine command, and working his own salvation. And the first state of man, worketh the one way and the second state the other, which is Adam, and Christ in one person, natural and spiritual in subjection to one great ruling power, which by me, is called God. And the reconciliation of the three together, forms the peace and stillness in heaven, which took place at the opening of the seventh seal, which completeth the redemption of the man from things without, to be reconciled to things within and walk in favour with God. After which the seven spirits of God actuateth the man, which keeps all nature in its proper place, as the ark of Noah was built by divine command with partitions in it to keep the world in order, and each nature in its proper place; and the work of the six days of man distinctly apart by the partitions or night seasons, that are formed between them. 62

To understand these conceptions of Willson's is to understand the grounding of the Children of Peace's life in



Upper Canada, as well as the fundamental premises of Willson's teaching in subsequent years.

The Address ends with Willson's poem of 31/01/17, entitled, "The author's last prayer unto God for the redemption of this proud, wicked, uplifted, and unregenerated world of man."<sup>63</sup> It is one of only a few poems that Willson ever wrote in a form different from quatrains. He employs some of the images from Revelation he treats in the Address. Through the poem, Willson prays for a transforming vision like St. John's (and the reader's) in the Book of Revelation. The personal transfiguration that Willson evokes is striking indeed.

Let thy unbounded ocean roll,  
And billows rage from pole to pole,  
And thousand thunders roar;  
Let Satan buffet me in soul,  
I write for man no more.....

Let angels sing thy daily praise,  
Triumphant on the mind or seas,  
While shouts of horror roar;  
Do with the world just as thou please,  
The time of man shall be no more.

Let fiery light'nings swift descend,  
To loud proclaim the doleful end,  
When flesh no more shall reign;  
Thy vials full of wrath, pray send!  
In thy great ruling name....

Make of my heart a sea of blood,  
If unto thee it seemeth good;  
My blood like rivers freely flow,  
Wherein the world may fish for food,  
Before my revelation know.

Upon this mighty ocean stand,  
Thou great, supreme, divine command,  
And dip the num'rous nations in;

That by thy great baptizing hand,  
All may be washed from their sin.

All dress'd in robes of morning light  
As children born from Egypt's night,  
In which my Lord was slain,  
That's newly dress'd in mantles white  
They wear this great celestial name.

Let me an object disappear,  
Unworthy am to light the air,  
Or have a portion in the heart;  
Where thy command is shining clear,  
Thy presence to no more depart.

Thou earth, thou air, thou sea and sky,  
All nature is of which am I,  
Praise ye your Maker on the throne;  
The fish, the beast, the fowl that fly.  
My sovereign Lord has made his own.<sup>64</sup>

This remaking of Willson's world-view, his own path from Revelation to Genesis, was not mere rhetorical exuberance on his part. As the two manuscript documents that will conclude this chapter demonstrate, Willson personally lived through the shift from the natural, human limitations of Adam's state, and toiled through the writings that this chapter has examined to an understanding comparable, perhaps identical with, the vision of St. John, put into words in the Book of Revelation. For Willson, this movement culminated in his issuing of a brief "memorandum" that sets forth a new, spiritual dispensation for Willson and the Children of Peace. Because these works are available only in rare manuscripts, and also because they require little commentary, speaking eloquently for themselves, extensive excerpts will be presented here.

The first item is a fragment of an autobiography or

journal Willson kept. Two pages only, numbered seven and eight, survive. It dates from before the compositions explored earlier in this chapter.

I was onst a man without the knowledg of the power of God in the mind and knew nothing save that which I was instructed of by men -- therefore I believe it best to keep an account of that which is given me, not as giving honor unto man there for, but as giving information there of as follows -- for one year or more before I open'd my mouth to Rachel Lundy concerning the state of my mind in religion and towards her respecting her state and condition in the world -- I was drawn thereunto in my sober retired watch before God -- and as I waited on God during said time with prayer and supplication to know his will it seemed best for me to go and pay her a visit in the fear of God or his wrath which might come upon me for disobedience therein -- but according to the knowledge received I went, but oh the consequence and rewards of these things in the world this day -- as is already written -- my love towards her increast and my visits was for several times repeated in like manner as the former -- they always appear'd to me to give her trouble for she appear'd to be of a sad and sorrowful countenance altho she said but little or nothing to my services with her till this day -- I have traveled with much grief and affliction of her in my mind untill this time the 27 of 5 moth 1814 in which I give this account of my past life with her to all my brethren and sisters -- for what cause judge ye -- She hath sometimes been brought near and dear to me in my lonely retired watch before God, but when I come to look on my love towards her it was fitted with shame and reproach in this present world, for I saw it was required of us to be together in the sight of all men baring the name of that we was not guilty of for the sake of them that sin and are troden under the feet of men and despised of women for being guilty of fornication and adultery as tho they was unworthy of repentance before God, but these

have been brought near to me in spirit and am willing to suffer for them as for others as I believe all sin to be of one nature and cannot see either reason or judgment in one sinner being exalted and set over another... my tryals have been many on this account for when I saw that my friendship with this woman brought shame and not honor, I hated her in my very heart and prayed unto God that he would take her away and hide her from my sight and thrust her out of my mind that it might be clean and none dwell therein but God alone -- my prayers was curst and darkness and confusion became my companion -- untill I was often bowed in the secret of my soul that God would strengthen and enable her to endure all things required of her for his own Name sake untill this day....<sup>65</sup>

Here the journal breaks off, but what one may realize from this fragment is Willson's personal struggle that so nearly resembles the experiences of the old Adam. Nor did the trouble ever completely blow over. Outsiders often accused the Children of Peace, David Willson in particular, with deviant sexual behavior; and in fact, rumours and gossip about the very events Willson describes in this excerpt from his journal survive to this day in the Sharon area.

In the year intervening between the preceding autobiographical fragment and the following document, The Rights of Christ, An Address to the Professors of Religion, A Testimony to the People Called Quakers, and A Lesson of Instruction Written and Published for the Children of Peace, were all published by Willson. In retrospect, one may see these writings as Willson's spiritual odyssey from the all-too-human nature of the events prior to 1814.

including the split from the Quakers and the involvement with Rachel Lundy, wife of Israel, to the following highly spiritual document, dated, "County of York, and Province of Upper Canada 19th of 2d month 1817":

As I am about to leave you in the world my brethern and sisters, -- I commit to your care, this short memorandum of my sense of Church discipline, as a mantle of peace, or as a sure defence against disturbances in the Church -- to be worn by you for ever, or untill kings and princes rule no more. --

It is not good to have offices in the Church; for this reason, that it sets the house into two parts, which in justice may be called inferiors and superiors. --

It is not good to cast any away from you; for this cause, that in so doing ye account them more unworthy than yourselves. --

It is not good to compell any son or daughter, to any past actions of life, because we know not what the Lord our God may require of them. --

It is not good to appoint a brother or sister to do any service in the Church; for this reason, the appointment of men may be the only qualification that they are endued with to serve, and thereby may run when the Lord our God hath not sent them: and by so doing become like the hireling that is endued with no other qualification than the laying on of mens hands, and the dead senseless letter of the College. --

It is good to grant relief to all amongst you, that there may be no murmuring in the Church, for the want of the things of this world. --

It is good to abhor riches, and trust in God; because the treasures of the rich exalts a man above his neighbour, and causes the poor to feel inferior to such in the world, without a cause. --

It is good to aim ~~all~~ the labour of the Gospel to the cultivation of the soul; seeing it is the part of our everlasting salvation, or our unchangeable distress. --

It is good not to bind anything on our children, save that which proceedeth thro

the medium of their own minds, lest we clothe them with the robes of hypocrites. -- for our sakes, Peace be with you all Amen.

If any of the church professors should ask you, what you will do with the wicked, and difficulties that may arise amongst you, -- say unto them, sufficient is the day to the evil thereof. -- And the spirit of our Lord be with you to the coming of the end of the world.

David Willson. --66

In the next chapter, the implementing of Willson's spiritual precepts will be examined, in part through the eyes of some contemporary observers.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Minute Book for Yonge Street Monthly Meeting, 1806-18 (ms. number O-11-6, Quaker Archives, U.W.O.), 16/07/12.

<sup>2</sup> Noted in Chapter III above.

<sup>3</sup> Rights of Christ, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> The traditional view of the relation of Old Testament prophecies and their fulfilment in the New Testament is outlined by V. H. Stanton in "History of the Progress of Revelation and of the Messianic Hope," in The Cambridge Companion to the Bible (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1893), pp. 160-174.

<sup>5</sup> Rights of Christ, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Rights of Christ, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, The Meaning of the Creative Act (1914), trans. D. A. Lowrie (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), pp. 105, 106-107.

<sup>8</sup> Rights of Christ, pp. 9-10.

<sup>9</sup> St. John 6, 57, 58.

<sup>10</sup> Rights of Christ, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Rights of Christ, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Rights of Christ, p. 12.

- 13 Rights of Christ, p. 13.
- 14 Rights of Christ, p. 14.
- 15 Minute Book for Yonge St. Monthly Meeting,  
16/07/12.
- 16 Rights of Christ, pp. 13-14.
- 17 Rights of Christ, p. 17.
- 18 Rights of Christ, p. 18.
- 19 Rights of Christ, pp. 25-26.
- 20 Rights of Christ, pp. 26-27.
- 21 Rights of Christ, p. 27.
- 22 Chapter III above.
- 23 Rights of Christ, pp. 27-28.
- 24 Rights of Christ, p. 28.
- 25 Rights of Christ, p. 29.
- 26 Chapter II above.
- 27 George Fox, Journal, p. 14; quoted above, Ch. II.
- 28 A survey of explanations of evil is in the article  
by W. D. Niven on "Good and Evil", Encyclopedia of Religion  
and Ethics, ed. James Hastings (New York: Chas. Scribner's  
and Sons, 1922), VI, 318-326.
- 29 Rights of Christ, pp. 33-34.
- 30 Rights of Christ, p. 35.
- 31 Rights of Christ, p. 35. Not money, as St. Paul  
tells Timothy in I Timothy 6, 10, the origin of the phrase.
- 32 Rights of Christ, p. 35.
- 33 See The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers, ed. W.  
J. Oates (New York: The Modern Library, Random House,  
1940), pp. 223-487, and 491-610.
- 34 Rights of Christ, p. 36.
- 35 Rights of Christ, p. 36.



- 36 Rights of Christ, pp. 36-37.
- 37 Rights of Christ, p. 37.
- 38 See above, Ch. II.
- 39 Rights of Christ, pp. 38-39.
- 40 Rights of Christ, pp. 39-40.
- 41 Rights of Christ, pp. 44-45.
- 42 Rights of Christ, p. 47.
- 43 Rights of Christ, pp. 48-49.
- 44 Rights of Christ, pp. 49-50.
- 45 Rights of Christ, p. 54.
- 46 Rights of Christ, p. 57.
- 47 Rights of Christ, p. 59.
- 48 David Willson, An Address to the Professors of Religion (New York: George Largin, 1817), p. 3.
- 49 Northrop Frye, The Great Code: The Bible and Literature (Toronto: Academic Press Canada, 1982), I, 136.
- 50 The Great Code, I, 137.
- 51 The Great Code, I, 138.
- 52 Address, p. 4.
- 53 Address, p. 8.
- 54 Address, p. 9.
- 55 Revelation 6, 12-14.
- 56 Address, p. 9.
- 57 Address, p. 9.
- 58 Address, p. 10.
- 59 Address, p. 11.
- 60 Address, p. 12.

61 Address, p. 14.

62 Address, pp. 59-60.

63 Address, p. 62.

64 Address, pp. 63-64.

65 David Willson, ms. from the collection at the Sharon Temple Archives, no. 976. 213. 31. A photocopy is available in the Treasure Room, D. B. Weldon Library, U.W.O., London, Ontario.

66 David Willson, ms. from the collection at the Sharon Temple Archives, no. 973. 32. 1. A photocopy is available in the Treasure Room, D. B. Weldon Library, U.W.O., London, Ontario.

## CHAPTER V

### REALIZING THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS. CONSEQUENCES.

For the eleven years from the end of 1817 until early 1829, David Willson's literary output diminished to a meagre level in comparison with the busy years of 1814 to 1817, and 1829 to 1860. The paucity of published material especially, but also of manuscripts, for the 1818 to 1828 period, leads to the speculation that somewhere, in a descendant's attic perhaps, there may be a stack of material by the usually prolific Willson. On the other hand, the years 1818 to 1828 were occupied, perhaps almost fully, by the physical consolidation of the Children of Peace community at Hope; a consolidation based on the religious principles set forth in the piece quoted at the end of the preceding chapter. Willson's great energies must have been considerably taxed by his carpentry work in the construction of the Children of Peace schools in 1818,

their first meeting house in 1819, and the Temple of Peace, begun in 1825 and opened in 1831. Nevertheless, the industrious Willson did manage to find some time for writing, and the items from this period establish themes that recur throughout Willson's later, more plentiful, writings.

In A Present to the Teachers and Rulers of Society, printed in Philadelphia on July 1, 1821, Willson takes as his text Jesus' words to his disciples at the Last Supper:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.<sup>1</sup>

Willson's opening statement in A Present is an enlargement upon his view of sin expressed in his early works, in this instance with a new focus:

Universal Love is the acting principle of a Christian; from thence sorrow for sin ensues. There is a mark given us, whereby we may know if we have passed from death unto life; that is, if we love the welfare and being of our brethren.<sup>2</sup>

Willson's experiences on various disciplinary committees of the Society of Friends, and his observations of their practices, such as disowning members who transgress the Quaker discipline, are in the background of a couple of rhetorical questions Willson formulates, answers to which are severely condemnatory:

Whom did Jesus convict, our professed Master? the strictest pharisees of the sects. Whom do you convict? those that transgress the law. In this there is a manifest proof that such a spirit is not of the Saviour, but of the law. From whence arises sharp convictions, hard speeches, and scourging, the one of another? It is the want of love and affection, and only remains in those who have not received that tender command that Jesus gave to his children -- if we have not love to our brethren, we still remain in the bonds and death of our forefather, the first son of God.<sup>3</sup>

With the manuscript of A Present, Willson likely journeyed to Philadelphia in 1821, there published it, and probably presented it to leading members of the Society of Friends in the chief Quaker city, founded by William Penn. Willson could have published his book much more easily in Newmarket or York. Besides the fact that the only known copy of A Present is in the collection of The Library Company of Philadelphia, there is no substantial evidence for a visit by Willson to the city. For example, the Society of Friends' minute books do not record the presentations of disowned members. Nevertheless, that Willson was still, in 1821, concerned enough to write and publish A Present, indicates he, at least, was practising what he preached:

Now let us search the cause of offences, and cease to be angry with the race of men. If a man acts erroneously, it is manifest he is not healed of his disease; he is not purged of that imperfection in which he was created to do the will of God. I do not argue that man was created imperfect, but that he is created to be taught better, than that which he knows by creation....

To all men that hath power in communities, I with full purpose of heart recommend love the one to the other; as long standing societies evinces us, that there is likely to be no victory gained over the rest by this opposition.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, Willson did not intend his publication to be antagonistic. After he makes these points about Jesus' new commandment, Willson goes on to elaborate what is really the spiritual foundation for a Christian society, specifically, one imagines, the Children of Peace:

There never was any thing created in the heart of man that is not useful to him; blame no man for his faculties and passions, for he did not create them; but as good rulers and judges of the universe, teach them how to use them according to the purpose of the Creator. This is the benefit that one man is of to another. This is the necessity of man from the beginning until now: it is why lost sheep wander astray, and cry for a shepherd; it is the real and true cause why we should love one another... This principle, practised, would make the world happy, and offences would cease; it would be promoting the reign of Messiah, and placing the government upon his shoulders; it would be calling home the very ends of the earth into one family; it would teach us to say when we saw those that are created more dishonorable in faculties than ourselves, and therefore in practice, the Creator hath done it, thou art a member of mine own body, and of the same blood, my hand and my foot is the works of one Creator; I will esteem the most infirm as my own limb, or member of my own person...<sup>5</sup>

Willson concludes the prose section of A Present with a prophecy filled with hope:

If I might venture to publish my opinion on society, and the rulers thereof, I think the

government will be rent from the present acting principle, and given to another more worthy; one that acts with less zeal for form, and more for virtue; one that acts more from the pure principles of genuine charity, and is more silent in the seat of judgment: for the world is educated in a zealous flame to that degree, that if it was so suffered of God, every one would abolish every principle and form but his own. Such spirits are unworthy, and according to Gospel testimony, and Jewish practice, are likely to be given up to the barren banks of tradition, which hath long been practised for nothing.<sup>6</sup>

The poem with which Willson concludes A Present is composed of three sections. Each one employs a different stanza form, and each deals with a different aspect of the subject Willson introduces in the preceding prose passage. The first part, in quatrains that rhyme in the ABAB pattern, takes perhaps the most extreme example possible, the enslavement of black people, to illustrate Willson's insistence on the absolute necessity for loving one's neighbour in the spirit of equality before God. The poem addresses the slaves themselves, then their owners:

Oh! distant and afflicted race,  
 Bound slaves in a distant land;  
 How many tears o'erflow the face,  
 Dragg'd from the mother's tender hand.

Masters, like iron, rule the board --  
 Oh! there they set a scant supply,  
 And with a harsh offensive word,  
 These mourning sons their wants deny.

I plead for mercy and for grace;  
 Let brothers each our bounty share;  
 Let blessings bless th' unhappy place,  
 Where mourning sons of Afric are.

Ye masters grant a full supply,  
 Divide your blessings from the Lord;  
 Do not their mournful wants deny,  
 Attend to hear their crying word....

Impart this love, oh God, so kind,  
 Let Afric's race this bounty share;  
 Relievé from sorrows of the mind,  
 And make them children of thy care.

Their pains proportion with the rest,  
 Let masters drink their sorrows in;  
 And cry for mercy to be blest,  
 And pardon for their painful sin.

Let Afric smile from grief opprest,  
 That long hath been their heavy load;  
 And in a peaceful mansion blest,  
 Enjoy the mercies of their God.<sup>7</sup>

The resoluteness with which Willson does not hesitate to speak out about this evil abuse demonstrates his sense of intimate involvement with all facets of the world he knows.

The second section of the poem is written in six-line stanzas that rhyme AABCCB. Here the specific concern is the plight of the poor in Europe -- their ill-treatment by rulers of both Church and State:

Let Europe's long oppressed race,  
 That priests with lashing scourges chase,  
 Find mercy in the Son;  
 And thou, Jehovah, hear their cries,  
 With oil anoint their weeping eyes,  
 To see in years to come....

Give them a priest that's just and true,  
 To help them with their troubles thro',  
 And set the captives free;  
 And teach them how the race to run,  
 That peace and blessings may be won,  
 To shun their poverty.

For tythes give them a proper pay,  
 A priest to bear their pain away,



A hand their wounds to heal;  
 Let rigid clergies all repent,  
 In vain their noisy breath they've spent,  
 Their hearts no pain can feel....

If I must starve while others fat,  
 I'll pay to no such friend as that,  
 But in my grief opprest --  
 I'll hate my teacher and my friend;  
 Nor will I keep his taught command,  
 That doth destroy my rest.

Troubles my brother doth ensue,  
 This is the fountain led unto,  
 Oh speedily return;  
 England in a new mantle dress'd,  
 May be like Eden's pleasure blest;  
 My brothers learn to mourn.

Why do not subjects well agree,  
 Like children of one family,  
 They're by one Clergy taught:  
 Oppression, brothers, causes grief,  
 And cries arises for relief  
 And praise and prayers forgot.

I pray you'll for old England pray,  
 And rise to take her grief away,  
 My love to her's sincere;  
 Oh! long to hear a better hope,  
 And give your vain traditions up,  
 And dry the mourner's tear.<sup>8</sup>

From these affairs of the old and new worlds, Willson turns  
 in the final section of his poem to a vision of his own  
 conceiving: a vision of the Church as a healing mother:

Oh Church delightful that I see  
 Appearing naked unto me;  
 I'll try to half thy glories tell,  
 Whom much I love, adore so well.  
 Thou scarlet red in prophet's blood,  
 Came from the bosom of thy God --  
 Thy breasts like snow, how fair, how white,  
 To give all distant nations light;  
 Like to the sun appears thy face,  
 With features of unfading grace;  
 Thy feet beneath the deepest sea,

On standing pillars hid from me --  
 Nor can all nature look thee through,  
 Thou mother, whom I run unto:  
 Thy bosom with sweet cordials flows,  
 Within thine arms are sweet repose.  
 Thine eyes like steel there's none can turn,  
 They reach unto all hearts that mourn;  
 Thy shoulders an unshaken wall,  
 Who stands thereon, can never fall;  
 And these that's drawing at thy breast,  
 Shall never hunger, nor shall thirst. --  
 Thou giv'st to all a rich supply,  
 That doth not thy sweet call deny;  
 Thine hand thou reaches through the storm,  
 And bears thy children on thine arm.  
 Thou mother of our lasting peace,  
 Thy deeds of joy can never cease;  
 Thy breast is filled with purest laws,  
 That children from thy bosom draws:  
 No son so fair, no maid so bright,  
 My joy, my comfort, my delight;  
 My Saviour's harmless bleeding spouse,  
 To thee I will perform my vows --  
 To thee I will my tribute pay,  
 That bears my heart-felt grief away.<sup>9</sup>

The child-like rapture that Willson expresses, his ardour and trustfulness, operate here to underscore the message of the earlier parts of A Present. The contrast between the preceding admonitions about various abhorrent situations in the world, and this final rhapsody that personifies the possibilities of the love that Jesus commanded people to share, convinces the reader of the truth of Willson's message. That Willson's beliefs are so thoroughly benign makes the reactions he and the Children of Peace received at the hands of the "teachers and rulers of society" very sad indeed.

In his next publication, "The Lord's Celebration," a broadside poem of one page, Willson's vision of the Church

as a benevolent institution providing succour to all people equally, expressed in A Present, takes the physical shape of a building. In the way that loving one's neighbour is a way to honour God, by following Jesus's new commandment, so Willson's poem treats the raising of a church structure as a form of praising God too. The form of the poem is Willson's most experimental:

# THE LORD'S CELEBRATION.

In peace I write this structure  
And raise to him an altar  
That when he comes descending

The Lord to gratify,  
Built for his name alone,  
He'll make with me his home.

In Eighteen Hundred Twenty  
We'll fasten the four corners  
United with my Father:

With five this date I'll pen,  
And lay the bottom stone;  
We'll build this house alone.

Here's stone is the foundation  
And then we'll raise the pillars  
Plan'd by the Architecture

Well beaten into square,  
Aloft the work shall go,  
That formed this globe below.

We'll ring it round with columns  
To mind us of apostles  
We'll try to follow after

Their number Twelve shall be,  
That once the earth hath trod;  
And build a throne to God.

In the midst of these columns  
We'll never bow to Masons  
The skillful Architecture

We'll raise the royal square;  
Nor ask them of their art;  
Is Grace within the heart.

We'll raise our work as high  
As he the executor  
He'll show the art to Women

And spring our arches high  
That give to me the plan,  
That's home of home to man.

We'll chain the globe by quarters  
Like gold it shall be gild'd  
High hanging by four spires

If on the top shall hang,  
And union testify  
To please the seeing eye.

Its length shall be four times  
To North and South be facing  
The union of best timber

Its breadth be equal square,  
To East and West the same;  
Shall build this royal frame.

We'll clothe it with white colours  
Its height to plates be twenty  
In twenty-five begin it

With green spread on the brow,  
With adding number one  
In thirty-two get done.

An altar to all nations  
With forty-eight bright windows  
With bars and gates surrounded

A standing pillar here  
No darkness there shall hide,  
To keep it clean inside.

On Ararat we'll place it  
A house of lasting blessings  
A rest for every nation

And Place its name shall be,  
Where grace is multiplied,  
And God is in the inside.

Its ornaments and gilding  
Its weights are without number  
And endless is its measure

No architect can tell,  
Its corners were never known,  
Like mercer of the Thread.

Written A. D. 1822, by

D. WILLSON

"NORTH YORK GAZETTE," FRIDAY, SEPT. 1822.

The dimensions Willson specifies here are the ones that guided the builders when they began their work in 1825. Although the emphasizing of particular numbers, shapes, and proportions is reminiscent of accounts of temple constructions in the Bible,<sup>10</sup> there is no very precise correspondence to a particular scriptural model. The important observation is rather that, like so many Old Testament patriarchs, Willson actually erected a temple or "altar" to God. To build a place to sacrifice to God is a priority for nearly all of the leaders of the children of Israel: Noah (Genesis 8, 20), Abraham (Genesis 12, 7 and Genesis 22, 9), Jacob (Genesis 35), Moses (Exodus 17, 15; Exodus 20, 24 and Exodus 27), and David (II Samuel 24, 25), for example. Willson's structure, first described in "The Lord's Celebration," and eventually, from 1825 to 1831, built of Upper Canadian wood, is the image around which revolves a belief that sustained Willson, and underlies his writings, for the remainder of his long life. Willson believed that he was in the direct line of descent from his Old Testament namesake, King David. David Willson believed that his own experiences in the Upper Canadian wilderness were a type of the wilderness experiences of the children of Israel. The ultimate foundation of the belief is Willson's direct communication with God, and God's with Willson. For Willson, this communication established beyond question his spiritual inheritance as the same as

that of the Old Testament figures to whom God also appealed directly.

Not too suprisingly, perhaps, Willson's designation of his personal place in the process of ongoing Biblical revelation seemed, to many observers of the time, extraordinary, if not utterly insane. Willson's claim aroused considerable curiosity and, unfortunately, much negativity too. Accounts of Willson and the Children of Peace, mostly written by British visitors to the North American backwoods colony, treat the Temple of Peace as a marvel to behold; of Willson's teachings, however, imperfectly understood, the writers' assessments are less favourable.

Mary Sapper O'Brien, whose husband, Colonel Edward O'Brien, built St. Thomas Church at Shanty Bay in 1842, left a series of journals that provide informal glimpses of early Upper Canadian life. Her entry for February 26, 1829, describes an "excursion to Newmarket":

We passed a line of hills they call the oak ridges... cloathed as is the whole district, with oak and pine, the latter of which is now, of course, the most conspicuous.... Beyond this is the district known by the appellation of the Quaker's settlement tho' the population has ceased to be entirely quaker, -- here the farms are cleared of stubs and stumps & as neat as an English farm, backed by noble woods and the strongly undulating surface rendered more various by frequent portions of wood which have been left. the houses are mostly very neat and there is a large Quaker meeting house....

Newmarket is a post town, consisting of about 14 houses, three of which, are stores.... We went about two miles farther to look at an establishment of a certain religious impostor, David Willson, who has collected about him persons enough to form a tolerably large village & persuaded them to consider him as a prophet & resign their substance into his hands and their conduct to his direction -- he has built for them a whimsical place of worship for which he has an organ, teaches them to sing &c. -- but I don't know what to believe farther of his reported plans. The folly was not one at which I could be amused & the visit gave anything but pleasure.<sup>11</sup>

O'Brien's priorities of neatness and Englishness for farms, pleasure and amusement for her excursions, suggest that she was a veritable person similar to Lady Backwash, "an English gentlewoman of the memoir-writing ilk," from Rick Salutin's 1837: The Farmers' Revolt.<sup>12</sup> Her observations for March 1, 1829, continue with her activities on the Newmarket outing, and indicate that by no means everyone shared her condescension towards David Willson:

We went to church very comfortably in the sleigh, tho' it was snowy and rather cold -- our congregation was hardly so numerous as before, but this we account for from the circumstance of David Willson's preaching at a little distance & his preaching, singing, &c., is in general, I believe, a considerable attraction to curiosity as well as admiration.<sup>13</sup>

Dr. Thomas Rolph's visit in 1832 yielded a more sensational theory to explain the popular support Willson evidently enjoyed. One wonders what it was that precipitated Rolph's gentlemanly blustering, especially his certainty about the ease of access to Willson's alleged

harem: •

[Hope] is celebrated from some motley sect having fixed themselves in it, headed by a David Willson, a sort of Mohammed -- who, although possessing an extensive harem is not quite so jealous of its houris, as his illustrious predecessor in concupiscence, 'holding all things in common.' It is not a little singular that that demi-semi-anything-arian, W. L. Mackenzie, should discover in this ranting, ravaging sect every thing in accordance with his views of religion and morality. What with the influence of music, and the still softer attractions -- the founder of this new sect has managed to induce many farmers to dispose of their farms, to take an acre lot in this little village of Priapus. Alas! how melancholy to contemplate a man forming a religion on the wreck of morality, and increasing the number of his votaries by holding out to them the unrestrained indulgence of their libidinous appetites.<sup>14</sup>

Less inclined to such unrestrainedly prurient social commentary is D. Wilkie's sketch of his encounter, during the summer of 1834, with David Willson. Wilkie's objections to Willson's teachings are based, apparently, on the former gentleman's detecting an insidious democratic tenor to Willson's remarks. The traveller's distaste for the class standing of Willson's congregation is suggested in the opening words of his depiction:

One Sunday during my stay in Toronto, David chanced to preach in a small meeting-house appropriated to his use when he visits the city. Curiosity (I can hardly claim a higher motive) prompted me to attend. The place was nearly filled when I entered, apparently with servant-girls, working-lads, and apprentice-boys about town. Benches were placed crosswise, allowing the sitters to face the end of the



apartment, where stood a small erection answering for a pulpit. On the right hand, next the wall, sat several young women, and round a table in front of them were four or five men with musical instruments.<sup>15</sup>

All of this makeshift,<sup>16</sup> the reader gathers, is frightfully unsatisfactory to this acute observer, accustomed to comfortable, name-plated, fixed, Anglican pews; and the human centre of the service appeared no less wanting to Wilkie:

After the congregation had remained for some time in silent expectation, David entered and halted on the floor before the pulpit. He appeared to be about seventy -- middle-sized -- dim-eyed -- with grey locks, which were combed back, displaying a forehead of far from commanding or intellectual proportions. The general expression of his countenance was dry solemnity, and his mind appeared to be clouded with the infirmities of age.<sup>17</sup>

The over-estimation of Willson's age by fifteen years may not discredit Wilkie's report, -- it was a common mistake -- but what is one to make of the visitor's claim to have viewed Willson's mind? With some reservations about Wilkie's astuteness, at least in linguistic matters, the reader can only hope that his account of the ensuing service contains as much fact as the plenitude of details implies. Wilkie advances his description of Willson with renewed attention to the commonly visible:

His dress was composed of blue cloth, his coat was surtout shape, with a standing-up or quaker collar. His posture was erect, and he remained for several minutes with his right hand clasping his left arm behind; his eyes fixed on vacancy, and some solemn

thoughts seemed to be revolving in his mind. He soon, however, awoke from his abstraction, and took from a side-pocket a sheet of manuscript, which, without preamble, he read aloud. It was a hymn, and we understood, of his own composing. After a little pause, the attendant girls rose and chanted over the verses, while David, in an audible voice, continued to give out the lines. The tune, however, did not tally with my ideas of appropriate church music; it had more the character of a careless rant. After another pause, meant apparently to give the audience an opportunity of meditating on what they had listened to, he again gave out the words of the hymn, while the girls and musicians joined in full band, and created what was little better than a varled noise, and well calculated to dissipate any religious musings we might have been engaged in.<sup>18</sup>

The conduct of the service, as Wilkie so fastidiously evokes it, establishes the use that was made of the vast quantity of what appear to be poems, but are in fact hymns, by Willson, that survives. That they were sung or chanted with instrumental accompaniment would have added much to their effect, and must be remembered when one reads them. Wilkie's aristocratic sensitivities are aroused to furious heights by the discourse that Willson proceeded to deliver:

Without recourse to the Bible or other text-book, he abruptly entered on his discourse with the words, 'The apostle Paul says.' I do not recollect the passage; but I well remember this much, that the rambling rhapsody which followed could not have drawn its perverted spirit from any part of the apostle's inspired writings. Our preacher soon lost sight of affairs of a spiritual nature, and expatiated upon those of a wordly sort. He employed neither genuine argument nor deduction, nor did he in any material degree appear to be capable of appealing to the passions of his hearers.

The burden of his discourse seemed to be the injustice practised toward the world by all those who possess an abundant share of the good things of life. That they are all usurpers and tyrants; that there ought neither to be masters nor servants; that all mankind are equal; and that it is the duty of the poor to pull down the rich. Such, in short, we found were the doctrines advocated by the leader of the 'Children of Peace.'<sup>19</sup>

Although he has previously reported that the meeting house was attended by a near-capacity congregation, Wilkie feels able to reassure his readers:

I believe, however, that there is little cause to fear that the crude ideas and shortsighted dogmas of the 'Children' are of a sort likely to spread widely. The abilities and rhetorical powers of their advocate can have little influence in attracting new votaries, of even the most ignorant and unreflecting description.<sup>20</sup>

The last of these hostile portrayals of David Willson and the Children of Peace that will be quoted here, is by another member of the British upper class, Sir R. H. Bonnycastle. This gentleman's note on Willson is useful, like the other accounts, for shedding some external light on the little society of Hope, and also for indicating the degree to which people aligned with the colonial establishment of Upper Canada, if not officially, at least in sympathies, based their assessments upon fear-induced speculation and hearsay:

numbers of deluded people have placed themselves under the temporal and spiritual charge of a high-priest who calls himself David, his real name is David Willson. The temple (as the building appropriated to the celebration of their rites is called), is

served by this man, who affects a primitive dress, and has a train of virgin ministrants clothed in white. He travels about occasionally to preach at towns and villages in a wagon, followed by others, covered with white tilt-cloths: but what his peculiar tenets are, beyond that of singing and dancing, and imitating David the King, I really cannot tell, for it is altogether too farcical to last long; but Mr. David seems to understand clearly, as far as the temporal concerns of his infatuated followers go, and the old-fashioned significance of meum and tuum are religiously centred in his own sanctum. It was natural that such a field should produce tares in abundance.<sup>21</sup>

Patrick Shirreff, whose book, A Tour Through North America, Wilkie had read, visited Willson at Hope, the Children of Peace's village. Shirreff's report conveys his interest in the newly-built Temple of Peace through a detailed description of the striking edifice. The visitor also narrates a conversation he had with Willson, during which the latter's impatience with haughty British curiosity-seekers who publish nasty distortions about the Children of Peace, is manifest:

In the morning we were conveyed in a waggon round the neighbourhood of Newmarket, our first stage being the village of Hope, known also by the name of Davidstown, the residence of a religious sect called the 'Children of Peace,' founded by David Willson. It is upwards of four miles from Newmarket, and consists of sixty or seventy houses scattered up and down. Not finding Mr. Willson at his house, where we saw his wife, a thin yellow sickly looking person, we proceeded to the counting-room, a fanciful building, which was open, and no one within. Mr. Willson being pointed out on the street, I introduced myself as a stranger anxious to see his place of

worship, to which he dryly assented. He asked if I belonged to government, and on learning the object of my tour, and place of residence, two men who accompanied him enquired anxiously about Scotland, and the state of the working classes there. On entering the building we took off our hats, placing them on a table, and were told we might walk round the house....

There was a cold suspicious reserve in Mr. Willson's manner, which prevented me at first engaging him in conversation. After fruitless attempts I remarked the temple was a handsome building, and he muttered in satirical sounds, 'we did not wish to raise a temple, it is only a meeting-house.' I said the interior of the building was tastefully finished, and asked if the design was his own, -- when he repulsively replied, 'Did you ever see one like it?' On answering in the negative, he said, with a great deal of self-complacency, 'That is the work of the mind.' I had now a key to his good graces, which was used, and he conversed freely on a variety of subjects. I had a publication in my pocket, entitled 'Canada as it is,' wherein he was mentioned; and on reading the particulars, he emphatically said, 'Part is true -- but three-fourths are lies.' From seeing Mr. Owen's name in the book, he said he had his writings, and asked how he got on in Scotland. I stated shortly his late career, and he seemed pleased at hearing of the breaking up of New Harmony.<sup>22</sup>

"Canada as it is" may refer to an early version of the Bonnycastle book quoted above. That Willson had the writings of Robert Owen is a tantalizing detail. What influence did this utopian thinker's ideas have on Willson and the Children of Peace? To them, perhaps, it was only as a negative example, as Shirreff's comment that Willson "seemed pleased at hearing of the breaking up of New Harmony" suggests. What other utopian literature did

Willson read? Was he aware of the Rappites, then in Pennsylvania? At present, there is no record of Willson's library. Perhaps the only solid conclusion that may be drawn is that Willson did read, and was not the unlettered tabula rasa he often claims to be. Shirreff next offers a portrait of Willson as he appeared in 1834 at the age of fifty-five or -six:

David Willson seems about sixty-five years of age, and is a middle-sized, square built man, wearing his hair over his forehead, and squints considerably. He reminded me of my early friend and preceptor, Edward Irving, but the association, in all probability, arose more from semblance of character than of feature. He was dressed in a short brown cloth jacket, white linen trowsers, with a straw hat, all perhaps home-made. Originally from the State of New York, he had resided thirty years in this country. The number of his followers is unknown, but all offering themselves in sincerity are accepted, as he dislikes sectarianism, and has no written creed. He seems to act on Quaker principles, assisting the flock with money and advice. The produce is sent to York market weekly in common, yet individuals are left to guide themselves. There is a school for teaching young women to be industrious, whether they join the sect or not. Most people in the neighbourhood say the 'Children of Peace' are good people, but scandal has been busy with their leader.<sup>23</sup>

Whatever this scandalous gossip was, it is probably the basis for Rolph's "libidinous rampancy" theory about Willson's popularity. The genesis of such gossip may have been nothing more than the association by people unfamiliar with the group, of the Children of Peace with other sects,

such as the Mormons, whose unorthodox marriage customs could inspire fantastic lascivious talk. Less innocuous is the possibility that the colonial authorities had a hand in promoting these ad hominem attempts to discredit the Children of Peace whose communality and independence, as has been shown, the authorities found threatening. Of such oligarchies, smear tactics tend to be the wont: the Polish military rulers' claim of possessing sexually compromising photographs of Lech Walesa is perhaps the most recent example. In this connection, it is likely relevant that Willson's first question to Shirreff was whether the Scotsman belonged to government.<sup>24</sup>

Sensibly, Shirreff ignores the gossip concerning Willson, and goes on to demonstrate the respect for Willson that one senses Shirreff gained from his interview with him, by printing in full a tract that Willson gave him, explaining "the tenets of the family:"<sup>25</sup> This document elaborates on the following Gospel text, Matthew 25, 34-36:

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

Naked, and ye clothed me....

Before stating how the Children of Peace's objectives are in accord with these words of Jesus on God's criteria for separating the sheep from the goats, Willson specifies how

the Children of Peace arrived at their outlook:

The world is in a singular system to us, as we can be to them; that is, that they are in a state of servitude to a set of Christian priests, since Christ came to liberate the captives. The objector may say, they are in no servitude on the classical plan, but what is voluntary. I answer, a child should be directed in his choice, and a disciple taught to pray. We confess the people are directed in their choice, and invited to be baptized, join society, and partake of the holy ordinances. If we may give the ancient names to the present apostles, Peter saith come, for this is the way, and I can prove it by scripture; Paul saith come, for I can condemn the very creed that Peter approves, and justify mine own to an extreme. Now we are of the mind to leave the creeds of the Christian Apostles of this age (of which they have no scant number) and take into a simple way, in which there can be no dispute, and which, we think, will outwit the priests of the Christian church to condemn. We take the words of Christ our Saviour for truth, but to believe in all the contradictions of the age, is to us impossible. 26



The simplification of religion that the Children of Peace achieved was founded on Jesus' direct style of approaching life, as he expresses it in Matthew 25, 34-36, the text for this tract. Willson says:

The Son of God hath plainly shown us how we shall gain admittance to the blessed purposes of the creation, for this is the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world.<sup>27</sup>

This awareness of the symbolical nature of the word "kingdom" on Willson's part, it should be pointed out, attests to his sophisticated understanding of the Bible, and his conscious use of symbolism, even though at times his work might seem naive. He goes on to state the plan for the Temple of Peace:

We have built a house for the purpose of offering to God Israelite fashion; we purpose to commence the last Saturday in October, at twelve o'clock, and continue to offer to God for the purposes contained in the text, once in the month throughout the year, and so on successively until the year we die, leaving this example and precept to our children always; this we perform without the direction of a priest, or any officer in the church, for we are brethren.<sup>28</sup>

The phrase, "Israelite fashion," harkens back to the observations made above, that Willson, at least as early as 1822, when he envisioned the temple in "The Lord's

Celebration," was beginning to see himself and the Children of Peace as spiritual descendants of the children of Israel. According to Willson in the tract Patrick Shirreff published in his book, only the quarrelling of greedy priests is obscuring the true state of mankind:

Christ united Jew and Samaritan, and remnants of every kind to himself, and gave them the name of brethren; he is the pillar of a glorious Millenium. And when priestcraft is fulfilled, and God hath said it shall come no farther, it will come to pass. The priest is heir of the big sum -- other church officers of less;... he holds the chief office of putting in and putting out of office -- of calling one a sheep, and another a goat -- taking in and casting out of the church.<sup>29</sup>

In the situation as Willson interprets it, then, the avaricious priests pervert God's judgment which Christ teaches, and set up their own false criteria:

...they have got the world divided indeed; and one priest will call his neighbour's sheep goats, and keep them on his left hand, because his creed is not written in their foreheads. But there is another dark class called sinners, and they are not fit for any body's building materials, and have no mark upon them but the black mark, unworthy or uninformed. I belong to these, and I am resolved never to wear a priest's creed on my forehead; for if I do, I am sure I will despise my neighbour or brother, and will not count him equal with myself. I am on the goat side of the question -- the priests have put me there; but I mean to prove that such judges as ours may be in error, for these that some call goats, others call sheep.<sup>30</sup>

Willson's aim is simply, as a society of equals, to follow Jesus' lesson that the redeemed are those who treat all

people lovingly:

If men are generous, hospitable, and kind to all people in necessity, the Son of God hath justified them; he hath taken away their selfish and proud heart, and given them a generous one, equally wishing salvation to all the world, dividing their crumbs equally to those that stand in need. This is the glory of God, and the power of religion. Where is the priest's office here? The Son of God saw it would come to an end, when the hearers were preached or converted into the practice of the text.<sup>31</sup>

Willson concludes his part of the tract with a summary:

We have built a house to sacrifice to God, feed the hungry, and clothe the naked.... We are not perfect; but the system adopted by us is justified of God in Scripture, and draws the soul near unto God and Christ. It is beyond all creeds and sectarian plans, and is with us the end of craft. We lament the divisions of the world, and the pride of the people, the superiority professed by priests, and the tribute paid to them. Therefore, in adopting this plan, we expect to employ them no more.<sup>32</sup>

The second part of the tract Shirreff reprinted is a statement by three of the Children of Peace which provides an altogether different image of David Willson than the disapproving remarks published by condescending British tourists noted earlier. The three Children of Peace begin by affirming the way to lead a truly Christian life that Willson expounds in his section of the tract:

We hold that doctrine is good for the soul, as the physician is for the sick; but the above-written purpose is the end, when the soul is restored from selfish delights and purposes, and prefers the will of God before his own, he is as the patient healed. But

this doth not constitute him to be an idle creature the rest of his days. What shall he do? Do as the sick man healed of God; devote his strength to praise; vocal and instrumental, that the harp of David, and the hymn sung by the apostles, may be united together.<sup>33</sup>

Willson's conviction that both the Old and the New Testaments applied synchronously to the Children of Peace, that they were God's chosen people, heirs of the children of Israel who had accepted Christ's teachings, had taken root and was producing fruit. These writers' observations on David Willson himself also show their great esteem for the apparently prematurely aged man:

.And as for our public friend, he is growing old, and seems hastily preparing to die, and he has enabled us in the hand of God to see as we saw not, and to liberate our hands from priests' wages, lawyers' fees, and the judge's sentence at court. He will give way for nothing but civil power; to such we esteem him as a true subject, and not of the alien kind. Church matters with him are voluntary; he is bound to none, and refuses the control of creed or priest in the service of God. We rejoice in his labours; they make glad the heart for the exhibiting of such liberal and generous doctrines as hath so far liberated our hands and feet from a kind of veiled Christian slavery. We build a house where we intend they may be handed down after his death to our children, and the succeeding ages of the world.<sup>34</sup>

After many more supportive comments about Willson, the three Children of Peace close their testimony by indicating that the isolating effects, of which the previously quoted traveller's censures are examples, were not limited to Willson. Moreover, it is difficult not to find the

judgments of outsiders unwarranted and the consequent ostracism of the Children of Peace deplorable, when one considers the goodness of their intentions and accomplishments in following Christ's way of loving one's neighbour. Murdoch M'Leod, John Doan, and Ebenezer Doan conclude:

We think ourselves done with the sectarian plan of worship -- rather the principle than the plan. We think that no priest can preach us to a better end than the purposes of our present house, and that no doctrine can lead us to better purposes than these. Therefore, we embrace our own, and set the dividing plan, of converting into a hundred divisions, free, and give this testimony to the world, that if our testimony in public doctrines is unworthy, not to suffer them into your houses, for we do not covet that yours should be offered unto us.<sup>35</sup>

Another writer who did not participate in the general vilification of the Children of Peace is William Lyon Mackenzie (1795-1861). Politically, of course, the radical reformer, Mackenzie, was at the opposite end of the spectrum from the haughtily Tory British visitors, a factor which undoubtedly accounts for Mackenzie's openness to Willson's ideas of equality and an alternative to the Family Compact's mix of religious and state hegemony. In his newspaper, the Colonial Advocate (founded in Queenston in May, 1824, and moved to York in November of that year), Mackenzie printed advertisements, notices, and reviews of events that involved the Children of Peace. These items treat them as a group of respectable citizens.

The edition of the Colonial Advocate for July 16, 1829, reports the death of John Willson, aged ninety.<sup>36</sup> John Strachan, Anglican Bishop of York, and leading member of the Family Compact, delivered the funeral oration in what the article terms the "chapel" of the Children of Peace, likely their first meeting house. In the July 29, 1830, issue, an article signed "V.V." states that the Temple of Peace is nearing completion, and that the Children of Peace already had raised nearly enough money for a new meeting house -- which was not built for another decade. "V.V." also applauds the charitable activities of the Children of Peace, citing as an example the generosity of Samuel Hughes, who had taken in and was caring for an elderly black man, a former beggar crippled by the palsy, and for whom Hughes had fabricated a wheeled chair.

On January 27, 1831, Mackenzie reports on the debate in the Upper Canadian Assembly concerning a marriage bill. He quotes an excerpt from a speech by Christopher Hagerman, the Solicitor General of Upper Canada, which dispels any notion that relations between the Children of Peace and the political authorities were at all harmonious, as the visit by Strachan in 1829 might have suggested. The Colonial Advocate's story is as follows:

In debate on the marriage bill, Mr. Hagerman, the King's Solicitor General said 'he heard of a sect called the Children of Peace in this country -- but they were the Children of Wrath -- not the inheritors of

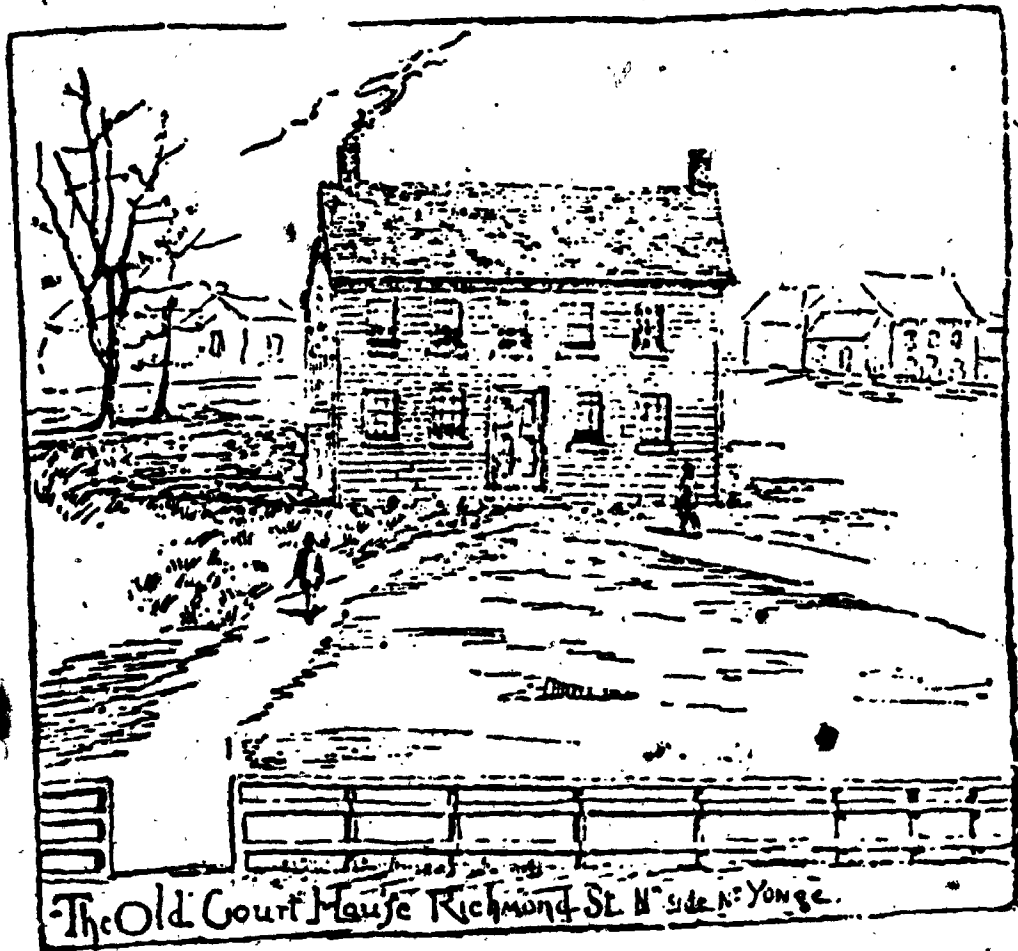
God's word, and not entitled to the privileges of Christians. What! are we going to give the right (of marrying) to every ignorant person, who, having addressed a number of people at Ancaster, Port Hope, or some other place, may please to call himself a preacher? He hoped not.'

The learned solicitor notwithstanding, our excellent precepts and valuable example, continues to indulge by far too much in personalities.<sup>37</sup>

With the issue of December 5, 1833, the Colonial Advocate became The Advocate, in line with Mackenzie's increasing opposition to the exploitation of Upper Canada he apprehended on the part of the colonial administration and its supporters. On the front page of The Advocate for February 20, 1834, appears an advertisement that shows how active in local affairs the Children of Peace had become, a facet of their life that does not come through from David Willson's works:

#### GRAND PROCESSION

We understand that David Willson of Hope, with his friends will walk in procession from their Hotel (Lawrence's) to the Old King's Bench Court House, at the Hour of Two O'Clock on Wednesday the 26th inst., being the day preceding the meeting of the General Convention of Delegates for the several townships of this County. They will be accompanied by music and banners, as on the occasion of the late County Election, and they request the friends of freedom, truth, justice and constitutional right to take part in the procession. Arrived at the Court House Mr. Willson intends delivering a discourse suitable to the interesting occasion, and he has requested us to invite as many of the members of the Convention as can make it convenient to be present. The Band of the Township of East Gwillimbury is one of the most splendid and complete we have ever listened to, and if the weather be



IV. The Old Court House, York, U.C. From J. R. Robertson's Landmarks of Toronto



at all pleasant the whole of the performers will attend.<sup>38</sup>

In this same number of The Advocate, an article by David Willson appears. He addresses the members of the York Convention, communicating to them a quantity of largely platitudinous general advice. A couple of noteworthy facts emerge from the piece, however, as Willson writes:

I consider the care of our young Province to be of great importance, and a weighty subject to the mind. Wm. L. Mackenzie with a few of his friends assisted me in getting my prospects on this subject into action, and now, when first assembled where I cannot attend with expediency, suffer me to acknowledge that my mind is too weak, and that I am too shortsighted to act extensively in the corners of the province; but having greater desires than means I communicate my feeble prospects on the subject of convention and trouble you no more....<sup>39</sup>

Willson's squinting behaviour, observed by Patrick Shirreff, and the admission here of shortsightedness, indicate that Willson may have been seriously handicapped. This explains the increasing illegibility of his handwriting, and also the use of scribes to record his poems and sermons. His blindness and premature aging, suggested again in Willson's statement, as it was by visitors quoted before, combined with the fact that he lived for another thirty-two years, until 1866, account, to some degree, for the growing prominence of the part suffering plays in Willson's works. The other significant

bit of information in the above article, of interest also to the legal authorities, one might guess, in view of the rebellious events to occur in December, 1837, is Willson's mention of collaborating with William Lyon Mackenzie and his friends.

At the Old King's Bench Court House in downtown York, the Children of Peace band played, and David Willson addressed the assembled citizens, as promised. In The Advocate of February 27, 1834 (like the Colonial Advocate, this newspaper was published every Thursday), Mackenzie writes about the scene of the preceding day:

the splendid band of Hope, [played] on the way the Jubilee Waltz, the Huntsman's Chorus, No. 1 Quadrille, Le Petit Tambour, and the Busn aboon Traquair. -- The standard bearers carried two flags (by Scholefield) a black one with white border, and 'the constitution' inscribed in silver, and a sky blue one, with an amber border, motto 'Peace and Justice,' in gold, shaded. The day was excellent, the court house filled to overflowing, and after the standards had been suspended over the tribune the following song was well sung (Air, Rodney's Glory, with thunders of applause.)

Our King and country we address,  
 With honest freedom we express,  
 What we dislike and what we bless,  
 With hope our sorrows may be less  
     For King and Constitution,

When Parliament becomes our foe,  
 We find our glass has run so low  
 We let our King and country know  
 We cannot be contented so  
     With King and Constitution....

We'll send no more beyond the seas,  
 We spend the time and lose the fees,  
 Nor yet a balm to the disease;  
 But now we'll try ourselves to please  
 In every institution.

And for a Parliament we'll try  
 That's just and true, not prone to lie  
 Then with their prayers we will comply  
 And stand for 'William' till we die  
 And for our Constitution...

O come CONVENTION haste to try  
 Nor let your years be passing by  
 While others are set up so high  
 For public silver to supply  
 And stain our Constitution.

Tell Priests it is a lasting shame  
 Their sacred office to profane  
 To preach and legislate FOR GAIN  
 That's giving half the country pain  
 By such a resolution.

But to conclude, we will be still,  
 Save now and then a sheet we'll fill,  
 When we partake the bitter pill  
 That's give to us for want of skill  
 By these in Constitution.

O that this mournful winter past,  
 Forevermore may be the last  
 Of Parliaments of such a cast,  
 Whose deeds attend our hopes to blast  
 And curse the Constitution.

Some day will 'William' hear us cry,  
 And send o'er sea a good supply,  
 For these old men will grieve and die,  
 For this our eyes will all be dry,  
 This is our resolution.

Mr. Willson of Hope then addressed the meeting with great force and effect, another song was sung which we will give next

For this our eyes will all be dry,  
This is our resolution.

Mr. Willson of Hope then addressed the meeting with great force and effect, another song was sung which we will give next Thursday, and the procession returned to the York hotel, the band playing Jock o'Hazeldean, The Prussian March, the New Rigged Ship, the Recorder, &c. The greatest order and good humour prevailed.<sup>40</sup>

The "Verse's sung at the close of Mr. D. Willson's Address to the people of York, Feb. 26th, 1834"<sup>41</sup> are also politically oriented, but retain Willson's characteristic style. Again the song makes use of an easily shared refrain, probably bellowed heartily by the enthusiastic, if disenchanting, citizenry:

O that our Sun may set in peace  
And that offences all may cease  
That truth and Justice may increase  
Our Liberty!

O may our hands the cord unbind  
For we too long have been confined:  
To act the part that we're designed  
For Liberty!

O may our great design be blest,  
May William set our hearts at rest,  
And move the load that hath oppressed  
Our Liberty!...

We trust we'll state our cause so clear  
That all his Parliaments may hear,

For we're resolved to plead sincere  
For Liberty!<sup>42</sup>

As is well known, this appeal and all others except the violence of 1837, went unheeded.

William Lyon Mackenzie's support for the Children of Peace was not bounded by personal and editorial friendliness. In a book he wrote to outline the grievances of the Upper Canadian populace, called Sketches of Canada and the United States, and which he published in London, England, when he visited there from April to August of 1832, Mackenzie devotes an entire chapter to the Children of Peace. His purpose is to present a portrait of this "new order of Christians" as an example of a flourishing alternative to the church of England, which Mackenzie viewed as an agent of repression in the colony. On a tour of York County in 1828, Mackenzie visited Hope. In his chapter on the goings-on there he provides ample observations to contradict the fulminations of the British travellers cited above.

Mackenzie's first comment on the Children of Peace, of whom he counted thirty or forty families, distinguishes between them and the Society of Friends:

Among the many sects which have taken root in the soil of Upper Canada, a new order of Christians has, within a few years, arisen and become conspicuous (even to our legislature) less by the peculiarity of their doctrines (for they have no written creed) than for the outward form of their worship, which is very splendid; whereas the Quakers or Friends, from among whom they

chiefly took their rise; have made plainness and simplicity their distinguishing characteristic, even so far as the very cut and colour of their garments.<sup>43</sup>

Mackenzie lists the occupations of some of the Children of Peace, indicating the sources of their self-reliance and relative prosperity: "tanners, weavers, hatters, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, coopers, joiners, shoemakers, cabinetmakers, carpenters, tailors, harnessmakers, storekeepers, and wheelwrights."<sup>44</sup> This array of solid artisans and the many farmers of the area supported not only the construction of imaginative religious buildings, but also a programme of education:

There are two schools in Hope: one for the ordinary branches of education, and the other, on a far larger scale, for the instruction of young females in knitting, sewing, spinning, making chip and straw hats and bonnets, spinning wool, and other useful accomplishments of a like description. There is a male and a female superintendent resident in this latter school: the pupils cook, make their own clothes, keep the garden in order, receive lessons in reading, &c., and work at their various avocations. I counted nearly a dozen of large wool-wheels in one of the rooms. Among the pupils I saw either one or two young girls from York, and they all seemed happy and contented.<sup>45</sup>

After a lengthy cataloguing of the statistics of the partly finished Temple of Peace, by which he was extraordinarily impressed, Mackenzie sketches the formal religious life of the Children of Peace:

The religious services of the society are performed as yet in the old chapel, a plain building outside, but finished within in

very handsome style. The number of members and hearers is about 200, and the utmost regularity is said to prevail at their meetings. As I remarked before, the Children of Peace, like the Quakers, have no written creed; the church discipline being altered and amended, if need be, on motion, by a majority of the congregation. As yet, however, every alteration of church government has been carried without opposition. On Saturday, at noon, there is a relaxation from labour -- the children give over their work or tasks, amuse themselves, and take their recreation in the fields. In the evening there is a meeting in the chapel for religious exercises: besides, I was informed that the sabbath is strictly kept. In the old chapel, I observed several paintings by Coates, -- Peace, represented by an elegant female figure with an infant on each arm, and Eve trampling the serpent under foot: there is also a third painting of Peace by the same artist. On one side of the organ is a picture of King David's harp; on the other, his spear, bow, and shield. Four black flags, used at funerals, with a star in the centre, and gilt at the top of the staff, wave from the organ-loft.<sup>46</sup>

The descriptions of the Coates paintings remind one of the vision of the Church Willson recorded in the poem at the end of his book, A Present to the Teachers and Rulers of Society. The picture of King David's equipment is another indication of exactly how pervasive Willson's ideas were among the Children of Peace.

Mackenzie did not hear Willson speak publicly during his visit to Hope, so, when the Children of Peace held a service "eight miles from York," on September 2, 1829, he took the opportunity. With an account of this event Mackenzie finishes his chapter on the Children of Peace.

His report sounds very similar to D. Wilkie's in the basic procedural details, but Mackenzie's attitude is antithetic. Whereas Wilkie heard "little better than a varied noise,"<sup>47</sup> Mackenzie heard music whose "effect was very pleasant and delightful."<sup>48</sup> The congregation Mackenzie joined was of "perhaps 200 or 300 persons in all, attentive, decorous, and well dressed."<sup>49</sup> Wilkie saw only "servant-girls, working-lads, and apprentice-boys about town."<sup>50</sup>

There are descriptions other than those by Mackenzie which present the Children of Peace in a favourable light, mostly appearing later than the late 1820's and early 1830's,<sup>51</sup> but for the purposes of the present chapter, Mackenzie's coverage adequately redresses the balance. The fact is, that the Children of Peace were unjustly censured by early British observers, who, by their religious, class, and political biases were blinded to the many constructive and unselfish contributions that Willson and his group were making to Upper Canadian life. As a phenomenon of the beginning of a new religious group, this ostracism is the rule, according to William James in his Varieties of Religious Experience.<sup>52</sup> But nevertheless, distressingly, a century and a half later the blindness persists.<sup>53</sup>

Certainly the injustice of his treatment was not lost on David Willson; nor did he take it lightly. In "The Davidites' Records," a 615-page selection of documents



dating from about 1824 to 1871,<sup>54</sup> the first part of the collection is divided into books of psalms. In the fourth book occurs the following passage, dated January 19, 1829, which shows Willson's response to faultfinders:

Set out this morning as a lonesome traveller on an unknown journey, in the presence of God and his holy angels: Building mine own altars, and performing mine own worship, writing mine own Psalms, and speaking mine own language -- that God alone may be glorified of all. I am as in the centre of the Earth and various dispositions around me; but with me doth both the Priest and the Prophet enter into rest -- These shall see the desire of their soul and be satisfied -- their memorial is written in my heart forever -- these will never depart from me. I shall be with them and them with me as long as the sun rises and sets, and the increase of their wisdom there shall be no end. The Lord liveth forever. Their sorrow will be my sorrow, and their joy will be my joy, their strength will be my strength, their prayer will be my prayer, their song will be my song, I will be theirs and they will be mine, and we shall conquer in the Earth and none shall reign over us but God alone. The evening shall be as the morning, and the morning as the evening....<sup>55</sup>

Through physical and personal isolation Willson finds spiritual solidarity, both with his fellow Children of Peace and the patriarchs of Israel, God's chosen people. To reiterate this most essential feature of Willson's self-conception, a few excerpts from the psalms he wrote from 1824 until the opening of the Temple of Peace on October 24, 1831, may be cited. The second psalm of the first series succinctly states the stages Willson

experienced on his spiritual journey to arrive at mythically identifying himself with the Old Testament patriarchy:

When earthly thrones exalted high  
 Above my head doth reign  
 I'll at the feet of Jesus lie  
 That numbers every pain....

He sorely wounds that he may heal  
 May blessings clothe his name  
 I'll bless the man that sorrows feel  
 And dies that I may reign.

How plain thy voice I hear  
 Thou just and living God  
 Thou calls the distant sinner near  
 That's wandring far abroad.<sup>56</sup>

It is important to notice that Jesus, defined in earlier books by Willson as the mediator between God and humanity, is still, with all the emphasis on Old Testament revelation, the agent who accomplishes Willson's redemption. In the fourteenth psalm of the first series the personified Church, in whose voice most of the psalms are sung, proclaims the wholeness the Children of Peace achieve through their activities of praise -- their building, their singing, their living in harmony with Jesus' new commandment of love:

My broken thoughts together join  
 And limb to limb again unite  
 A perfect body Lord is mine  
 For thou my members did create

When limb to limb's together join'd  
 The race of men will all be one  
 Perfect in heart and sound in mind  
 Praising the Lord for wonders done.

Oh my deformity is great  
 It plain to me appears  
 And love hath come to reinstate  
 With music in my ears.

The harp of David sweetly plays  
 The slumbering dead to wake  
 And Israels singers tun'd to praise  
 The bars of death to break.

Cloth'd with majesty and grace  
 The Church triumphing sings  
 And to her breast that happy place  
 The distant stranger brings.

Her circling arms with love divine  
 The nations circles round  
 And with her new born song sublime  
 Declares her Eden's found.<sup>57</sup>

The reference to "circling arms" echoes with the phrase in "The Lord's Celebration," "We'll raise our semicircles," when Willson is envisioning the Temple of Peace. The "circling arms" and "semicircles" became the arches in the temple. During the period of construction of the temple many of the psalms, probably sung at the Sunday meetings, are concerned with the meaning of this building. What becomes very clear is that the temple is pervaded with symbolic significance, charged with spirituality in the way that Willson's writing is.

Near the end of the first series of psalms, all composed in 1824, Willson switches for a couple of psalms from the thirty-two-line (two sets of four quatrains that rhyme ABAB) form to a prose form that sounds like the Psalms of the Old Testament. The following example reveals one level of the significance of the Temple of Peace:

The heart of Moses is a beautiful dwelling,  
 it is the record of thine hand, the treasure  
 of thy works. It is the house of  
 Patriarchs. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is  
 there, with all the righteous sons of  
 Israel. My soul is there and speaks from  
 thence of thee; thou incomprehensible wonder  
 of the world.

I asked of Moses he took me in. 58

The sixth psalm of the third series elaborates the  
 sense of identity with King David that Willson  
 experiences. It is entitled "The spirit of the Lord making  
 way for the soul of David and his ancient kingdom on  
 earth:"

My heart speak loudly of thy king  
 David in thee doth reign  
 Ye saints above and angels sing  
 David doth live again  
 His courage doth his foes subdue  
 His spirits bright and strong  
 His ancient steps he doth pursue  
 With gladness sings his song.  
 His humble knee before the throne  
 In deep prostration bends  
 Again to Judah he is known  
 And Jacobs name defends  
 His soul for Israel ne'er returns  
 His soul cannot be slain  
 His spirits bright his bosom mourns  
 O'er all the prophets slain. 59

The twenty-fourth psalm in the third series rejoices in a  
 similar belief, a similar celebration of the call Willson  
 heeds:

Come death give honour to the place  
 Where God's ordain'd to stand  
 A temple of his living grace  
 Rebuilding by his hand...

O death put fourth thine hand and feel  
 How square the bottom stone  
 Lift up thine eyes the blood set seal  
 Is plac'd to thee unknown...

I will not vanish till I see  
 My soul a quiet rest for thee  
 My prayer secure in death will lie  
 When crowns remove and monarchs die

No sons in death shall e'er remain  
 Till ancient blood shall rise again  
 But thro' Gods quickning grace I'll see  
 The priest and prophet rise in me

And Davids kingdom and his throne  
 Shall dwell in safety and alone  
 And David in his tent shall dwell  
 Between the gates of heaven and hell.<sup>60</sup>

This last designation of David's dwelling is a short-form for the dichotomy, noted before, between the amicable unity of the Children of Peace and their division from the "world" of the Upper Canadian establishment. As the opening of the temple approached, this duality becomes more and more prominent as a theme in the psalms. On June 13, 1831, four months before the first service in the temple, Willson composed a psalm "For the house of peace on the Jewish Sabbath in the afternoon":

With spreading circles o'er our head  
 Our walls adorned with green  
 The little flock Jehovah fed  
 Within our walls are seen  
 These walls did for thy glory rise  
 That gave to us the plan  
 And here we'll come and sacrifice  
 With love to God and man  
 It is our lot to feed the poor  
 And for their offspring mourn  
 To add a balsam to the sore  
 That priest and prelate scorn  
 No priest these walls shall e'er profane  
 With words of empty sound  
 For in the midst we'll place thy name  
 And circling children round.<sup>61</sup>

In the centre of the Temple of Peace is an ark that

contains the Bible.

The "Song for the Altar" -- "Altar" refers to the temple, a place of sacrifice -- that the Children of Peace sang at the opening service, on October 24, 1834, is as follows:

This day our sacrifice begins  
 We trust in Israel's name  
 God bids us offer for our sin  
 And put away our shame  
 The mournful poor before our eyes  
 Affords our heart a cause  
 The widow weeps her children cries  
 For bless'd messiah's laws  
 These are deeds he did ordain  
 His precepts we obey  
 We offer in Jehovah's name  
 To put our guilt away  
 For grief and woe doth these attend  
 That doth despise his son  
 For these the living God offend  
 They are not two but one  
 For so we worship and adore  
 We'll round this altar stand  
 And give to God forever more  
 That gives to us the land.  
 Oh here the wandering feet shall come  
 The weary find a rest  
 For both the father and the son  
 We worship and are blest. 62

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From the foregoing psalms and poems, one receives the impression that, in spite of copious external opposition, the Children of Peace themselves were truly experiencing peace. Sadly, there is evidence that the peacefulness did not last long. Very strangely, in confirmation of a few hints dropped earlier (one is the line, "No priest these

walls shall e'er profane," quoted above), David Willson apparently did not participate in the opening, or any other, service held in the Temple of Peace. In the course of outlining the rituals the Children of Peace should perform on Saturdays, Willson says:

this is Israel's sabbath of the Lord keep half the day holy on every month according to our appointment to meet before him, and sacrifice to his holy name. Abstain from our twelve o'clock meal, for half of Israel's sabbath is restored unto us on that day; and unto me he will restore the whole in a foreign land, and I shall see his name; but the glory of his house I shall not see with mine eyes; and I may not partake of it because it is forbidden of the Lord for causes not lawful for me to reveal; it is the Lord's pleasure which I may not communicate to my friends....  
 ...it is the Lord's dwelling, he hath shut me out of it, my feet shall never enter there; it is your great salvation to keep in this way, it is a bright polished sword against priestcraft in the earth.<sup>63</sup>

These instructions are signed, "Farewell, David Willson." Willson (or God) relented early in the 1840's.

"The Davidites' Records" indicate that a grave and bitter quarrel took place shortly after the temple's opening. Never directly defined, the dispute seems to have concerned the material affairs of the Children of Peace, especially the group's decision-making process as applied to property transfers. The fragmentary suggestions of an explanation in "The Davidites' Records" begin on April 12, 1831, in a statement of "Regulations adopted by the children of peace, for settling the village of Hope."<sup>64</sup>

According to these regulations no land in Hope could be bought or sold without consent of the majority of the assembly. A "trial for inheritance" was also established in order to evaluate people wishing to join the Children of Peace. Breaking these simple rules -- no promoting sectarian principles, no profaning the sabbath or disrespecting worship -- would be grounds for requesting someone "to withdraw from our settlement, when due settlement is made according to Justice, or the Judgment of the nine persons."<sup>65</sup> All of these legalistic procedures, likely prompted by the obviously valuable new temple, would have been extremely repugnant to Willson, as one might guess from what has been demonstrated about his views on people's judging each other.

Next, on November 15, 1831, three weeks after the inaugural service in the temple, a memorandum preserved in "The 'Davidites' Records" states that any demands for recompensation by contributors to the construction of the temple are, as of that date, revoked. Two weeks later, Willson introduces a "Song for the Altar" with these words:

The following song was written Dec. 2nd 1831/as a particular mark of God's divine favor we record the same to preserve the memory of God's goodness -- It was written previous to an objection of much trouble which took place in the church, from the policy and ambition of the people, in the case of reelecting a council to decide matters of dispute....<sup>66</sup>

The song itself contains the following stanza that



indicates the dispute may have shifted towards Willson as the central issue:

Tis for thy name I long have stood  
And not for glory of mine own  
Divide the evil from the good  
And let thy holy will be known.<sup>67</sup>

By Christmas of 1831, Willson was not preaching: the sermon recorded in "The Davidites' Records" is not his.

Previously, on December 10, 1831, Willson refused to judge or decide how the problem of property transfer would be handled. One infers that the younger Children of Peace, concerned by Willson's apparent elderliness, wanted reassurance that their substantial interests would be protected. On December 19, 1831, Willson was asked to make a statement on the subject; he responds that he cannot do so, and instead says this:

I am accused, and my soul is weak through accusations, and debilitated of God to act. I could once give the pattern of a house that God gave me. I could set that house in order... I could stand in the midst of my brethren and sisters on a sabbath and fill the maidens with songs, and the heart of my brethren with understanding in the sacred characters... But oh! home, alas! for home! I am a vile transgressor in the eyes of my fellows, the old and the young hath rose up against me as a storm...

these perpetual bruises which hath continued for many years and continue to increase, is upon the point of overthrowing my part amongst you. I am not a clean dealer, I am partial to the interest of my children, I speak from hearsay, I am an unjust judge, I work opposition among my friends, I consent to my brethren cheating, these things abound in society, and increase with many more I could mention. I now give

it to you as my opinion without an alteration of practice in the neighbourhood, our connection is near at an end. Contention is forbidden me, and craft is against the will of God, I submit my case to providence and wait the event....<sup>68</sup>

It seems from this that Willson was being ostracized even by the Children of Peace.

What is called "A Memorial of Hope," dated December 22, 1831, appears next in "The Davidites' Records." It is a biographical sketch of Willson that becomes an apology to him, and gives further clues about the cause of the dispute:

he is skilful in order, and exact in discipline in his own way, we often oppose his sense, for it seems strange to us and we several times have obscured the congregation with a veil by these untried practices of ours, who are members and elders of the same according to years, and have put him to silence, for he will not contend for points on earth... he laid the foundation, or was the first stone in our present congregation (which has grown to be considerable) and told us to build thereon, and there seems to be a snare for us in the very expression, for when we try to build and forward the fellowship of society, we seem to be like putting the new wine in the old bottle, or new cloth on an old garment, do as we will the rent seems to be made the worse, he is silent when we are in action, but observing of our infirmity to act.

he hath call'd both old and young to action male and female, for no other cause known to us, than to teach us how frail we are....

we have not found him a cripple in the service of God, his skill has appeared great in building for one of his age, as the executions of his patterns at the village of Hope abundantly testify, we only find ourselves able to abuse the priviledges confer'd upon us in the transactions of

society, and too often rather abuse our friend that gave them, God excepted, we therefore believe it best for us in body and soul to lay down our armour, and confer upon him what he hath confer'd upon us, and esteem and respect him as the father of us all, who hath begotten us into this capacity where we can do nothing, we are but as children in the day of battle, the troubles of the age are too mighty for us, and we resign -- and by these presence, revoke all former covenants and appointments that we have made with each other, and confer on him our elder brother. in the service of God, the order of the house of the Lord, and neighbourhood of which we belong, so far as may concern the worship of God, and peace of the people....<sup>69</sup>

This partly resentful and mainly abject "Memorial" elicited the following, "A private address to my friends in particular," from Willson, on January 3, 1832:

We all know that we have had much trouble of late arising, from contrary spirits of a different disposition. it may be the tempest hath arose so high as to drive some quite away from our worship. I believe that many of my brethren and sisters have done the best they could. I have no desire to take merit to myself, but to show myself a friend to the sincere hearted, as to any division amongst us, be not active on the subject, let us trust more in God and less in what we can do...

Our present trouble hath arose from the children of some being far exalted above others, which bespeaks prosperity in the earth, but every increase of interest is not an increase of wisdom nor understanding. when it promotes divisions in the house of the Lord, that prosperity is cursed from heaven. are we not all one blood are we not all one people....<sup>70</sup>

A possible item of contention relating to the exalting of some over others, more particularly, of David Willson over the rest of the Children of Peace, is the small building

known as "The Study," built for Willson in 1829. He goes on, in the passage from which the above excerpt is taken, to mention his clothing, which may in fact refer to the study:

I have not promoted grandeur in my habitation, my garments are beyond my choice, and I often would put them away but I dare not; I know from whence they come, and I am afraid to offend the Lord;... I am not proud of the clothes I wear... be moderate in your buildings and your apparel, this is the will of the Lord for you.

Whatever the precise issues involved in this rift were, it seems, from "The Davidites' Records," that it healed, and that life for the Children of Peace grew peaceful once more. For Willson, the years immediately following the opening of the Temple of Peace were to be his most productive of literary works.

The final observation to be made, in conclusion of this chapter, is that another form of Willson's writing begins in the 1820's: the "memorial," published as a broadside to be posted in the community. These poems, about a recently dead member of the Children of Peace, and others, increase in frequency as the years go on and David Willson outlives so many of his brethren and sisters. Besides their significance as expressions of sorrow and sympathy, these memorials may be seen as an integral part of the view of life that is David Willson's abiding theme, and that this chapter outlines. The outsider status of the

Children of Peace is not usually lamented by Willson, but rather, it is understood to be the inevitable result of their choosing a spiritual life instead of involvement with worldly matters. The works of Willson and the Children of Peace, including the songs, the band's music, their charity, the buildings, are spiritual works in praise and sacrifice to God. Death, in the memorials, is apprehended as another stage in spiritual development, analogous to the Children of Peace's "death" to the world. In Willson's memorials death appears one way to the survivors and another way to the dead person, much as most of the "world" sees the Children of Peace antithetically to their self-conceptions. Usually, to express this in the memorials, Willson imagines the dead person as speaking to the living, courageously seeing, as he does, both sides of solitude. The first extant memorial is for Willson's grandchild, entitled, "To the Memory of Absalom Willson, aged six weeks and ten days; Hope, February 9th, 1828":

From mirth come to the tomb  
 And in it cast a look  
 And see the Infants heart how soon  
 In pieces cold and broke  
 From tender arms I've fled  
 To seek a lasting home  
 And found a mansion with the dead  
 For little Absalom  
 My friends look on my face  
 How pleasant and how fair  
 How cold and lonesome is the place  
 Where you must leave me there  
 I've fled from rising harms  
 No fear disturbs my home  
 Without a mother's nursing arms

To lie in earth alone  
Mine eyes in lasting sleep  
Ever in earth to lie  
No mother near to hear me weep  
No friend to hear me cry  
But a few painful days  
To my relations tell  
Without a time of thanks or praise  
I bid them all Farewell. 72

## Notes

- 1 St. John 13, 34-35.
- 2 David Willson, A Present to the Teachers and Rulers of Society (Philadelphia, July 1, 1821), p. 3.
- 3 A Present, p. 3.
- 4 A Present, p. 8 and p. 11.
- 5 A Present, pp. 12-13. Willson is referring to St. Paul's discussion in Corinthians 12.
- 6 A Present, p. 16.
- 7 A Present, pp. 18-19.
- 8 A Present, pp. 19-21.
- 9 A Present, p. 22.
- 10 Examples of such descriptions are: Solomon's, I Kings 5, ff; Ezekiel's vision of a new temple, Ezra 40; and the replacement for Solomon's, Ezra 3-4.
- 11 Mary Sapper O'Brien, Journals (in Provincial Archives of Ontario, under this author/title listing), no. 12.
- 12 Rick Salutin, 1837: The Farmers' Revolt (Toronto: James Lorimer and Co., 1976), stage direction, p. 219.
- 13 O'Brien, no. 12.

14 Thomas Rolph, A Descriptive and Statistical Account of Canada (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1841), pp. 185-186.

15 D. Wilkie, Sketches of a Summer Trip to New York and The Canadas (Edinburgh: J. Anderson, Jun., and A. Hill, 1837), pp. 203-204.

16 Scadding in Toronto of Old, p. 106, notes that Willson preached at a courthouse or school on Berkeley St. and Lawrence's Hotel.

17 Wilkie, p. 204.

18 Wilkie, pp. 204-05.

19 Wilkie, p. 205.

20 Wilkie, pp. 205-06.

21 R. H. Bonhycastle, Canada As It Was, Is, and May Be, 2 vols. (London: Colburn and Co. Publishers, 1852), I, 285.

22 Patrick Shirreff, A Tour Through North America, Together with a Comprehensive View of the Canadas and the United States (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1835), pp. 106-06. Don Blair, in The New Harmony Story (New Harmony, Indiana: New Harmony Publications Committee, 1959), p. 38, indicates that Willson's sentiment was general:

While discontent was developing within the community the world at large was enjoying the failure of Owen's dream, largely because of his religious beliefs or disbeliefs, as you prefer.

The breakup of New Harmony was officially announced in March, 1827.

23 Shirreff, p. 108.

24 Shirreff, p. 106.

25 Shirreff, p. 108. The first part of the "tract" is the text of Willson's sermon of June 24, 1831, found in ms. form in P.A.O. ms. no. 188, "The Davidites' Records," pp. 239-247.

26 David Willson, tract/sermon quoted in Shirreff, p. 109.



- 27 Willson in Shirreff, p. 110.
- 28 Willson in Shirreff, p. 110.
- 29 Willson in Shirreff, p. 113.
- 30 Willson in Shirreff, p. 113.
- 31 Willson in Shirreff, pp. 113-14.
- 32 Willson in Shirreff, p. 114.
- 33 Murdoch M'Leod, John Doan, Ebenezer Doan in Shirreff, p. 114.
- 34 M'Leod et. al. in Shirreff, p. 115.
- 35 M'Leod et. al. in Shirreff, p. 116.
- 36 In "David Willson and Government, Politics and Society in Upper Canada" (York Pioneer, 1974), p. 6, W. John McIntyre states that John Willson was David Willson's step-father.
- 37 Colonial Advocate, Jan. 27, 1831.
- 38 The Advocate, Feb. 20, 1834.
- 39 The Advocate, Feb. 20, 1834.
- 40 The Advocate, Feb. 27, 1834. "William" in the song refers to the King.
- 41 The Advocate, Mar. 6, 1834.
- 42 The Advocate, Mar. 6, 1834.
- 43 William Lyon Mackenzie, Sketches of Canada and the United States (London, 1833), pp. 118-19.
- 44 Mackenzie, Sketches, p. 119.
- 45 Mackenzie, Sketches, p. 120.
- 46 Mackenzie, Sketches, p. 122.
- 47 Wilkie, p. 204.
- 48 Mackenzie, Sketches, p. 124.
- 49 Mackenzie, Sketches, p. 124.

50 Wilkie, p. 204.

51 Examples are C. P. Mulvany, G. M. Adam, et. al., History of Toronto and the County of York Ontario, 2 vols. (Toronto: C. Blackett Robinson, 1885); and W. H. Smith, Smith's Canadian Gazeteer (Toronto, 1846).

52 William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature (1901-02) (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1952), pp. 328-29.

53 David Willson's work appears in no anthology of Canadian poetry. He is ignored in Charles Steele's thesis, "Canadian Poetry in English: The Beginnings" (U.W.O., 1974).

54 P.A.O. ms. no. 188, "The Davidites' Records," microfilmed May 9, 1969. (Abbreviation: "D.R.") The source of these records is the ms. collection of Mr. D. Pinder of Newmarket.

55 D.R., p. 204.

56 D.R., p. 2.

57 D.R., p. 14.

58 D.R., p. 29.

59 D.R., p. 81.

60 D.R., p. 102.

61 D.R., p. 298.

62 D.R., pp. 259-60.

63 D.R., p. 225 and 228.

64 D.R., p. 257.

65 D.R., p. 258.

66 D.R., p. 263.

67 D.R., p. 264.

68 D.R., pp. 282-83.

69 D.R., pp. 284-85.

70 D.R., p. 288.

71 D.R., p. 288.

72 This memorial is found in ms. in a booklet of sermons, hymns, etc., by Willson, in the Sharon Temple Archives. Ms. no. 959 .84 .31. Also available as photocopy in Special Collections, U.W.O.

## CHAPTER V

### CHILDREN OF PEACE AND CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

More than one historian<sup>1</sup> labels David Willson a "Hicksite Quaker" at the time of his separation from the Society of Friends in 1812; probably because of the Hicksites' and the Davidites' emphasis on spiritual guidance rather than rational or scriptural authorities. In the most comprehensive history of Quakerism in Canada, A. G. Dorland maintains that the primary effect of Willson's separation on the Quaker schism of 1828 was to impress some Canadian Friends with the necessity for tighter disciplinary controls -- it was an object lesson to illustrate the contentions of the Orthodox faction.<sup>2</sup> Dorland's point may be true, but from it one ought not to conclude that in his theology Willson was a Hicksite entirely. Certainly the Hicksites and Willson shared a belief in the immediacy of God's revelations, but their

premises for this belief were unreconcilable.

From about 1725 to 1825, a powerful influence on the Quakers who would become Hicksites in 1828 was Quietism, which R. M. Jones describes in Later Periods of Quakerism:

Quietism at its height was the most acute and intense stage of European mysticism. It was not a wholly new type of inward religion. It was rather a result of the normal ripening, the irresistible maturing of experiences, ideas, and principles that had been profoundly working for a very long period in the religious consciousness of Europe -- a fact which partly explains its seemingly spontaneous appearances in a number of widely separated localities. It was an intense and glowing faith in the direct invasion of God into the sphere of human personality -- a faith rising in many cases to the level of indubitable experience -- but a faith, at the same time, indissolubly bound up with a fundamental conception of man's total depravity and spiritual bankruptcy.

The discussion of Willson's The Rights of Christ (Chapter III above), shows that Willson, like Jacob Boehme and George Fox, believed that through Christ's love human beings are enabled to win salvation, a perfection Fox calls "walking in the light," and that Willson characterizes as the life of Peace. In a summary of the Hicksite/Orthodox controversy, Dorland confirms the fact that neither the Hicksites nor the Orthodox group followed the original sense of George Fox's teachings, as David Willson attempted to do:

While the Orthodox party were determined to make doctrinal soundness the one central issue, the Hicksite party insisted that

Quaker tradition had never emphasized doctrinal uniformity or external authority in religion, but that the real issue was the attempt on the part of a small but influential group of English and American Friends to subvert the democratic discipline of the Society, and to limit religious freedom of thought. But these failed on their side to appreciate how deeply the Orthodox party felt the importance of emphasizing the divine nature of Christ, and the supreme authority of the Scripture as the sheet-anchors of religion against the waves of religious infidelity and free thought which were running high at this time. On the other side, the Orthodox party failed to realize how provocative was their assumption of infallibility in the face of the new liberal tendencies of the age; and how unwise was their determination "to hew the line" of Orthodox faith, regardless of where the chips might fall. On both sides there was a conspicuous lack of love, and a complete misunderstanding of the real genius of Primitive Quakerism of which they both claimed to be the true exponents.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, Dorland's interpretation of Willson seems to be fallacious. He states, for example, that Willson stressed "freedom from any religious standards or disciplinary restraints,"<sup>5</sup> a Hicksite gone berserk, as it were. Even a cursory reading of almost any one of Willson's works would negate such an assertion as Dorland's. The essential difference between Willson and both factions of Quakers is in Willson's sincere and largely effective adherence to the peaceful, loving, and joyous spirit of George Fox and the first Friends, while the contemporary Society of Friends was rent by quarrels over doctrine. Because of the strong formative influence Quakerism had exerted on Willson, the 1828 schism would

have been of great concern to him. It is probable that he journeyed to Philadelphia in 1828, though few details of the trip survive.<sup>6</sup>

Other events in the world outside Hope, the thriving village of the Children of Peace, -- events that form the background to Willson's most productive years of literary activity, the 1830's, -- were political in nature, and for a time drew the Davidites out of their isolation. In Chapter V above, the descriptions of Willson's preaching, and the Hope band and choir's performances in York indicate one aspect of the Children of Peace's participation in politics. The 1837 rebellion in Upper Canada was a disastrous occasion for the Davidites: the one rebel shot and killed in the skirmishing on Yonge Street was James Henderson, a cooper from Hope; among other Children of Peace, John and Hugh Willson, David's sons, were imprisoned for seven months in York, Hugh for an additional five months in Fort Henry at Kingston; and Alexander McLeod, a Davidite, died shortly after arriving in Van Dieman's Land as an exile for his part in the rebellion. Furthermore, the Temple came close to being destroyed by a militia unit that marched on Hope shortly after the events of December 6 and 7, 1837.<sup>7</sup> David Willson himself consistently counselled against any participation in violence, going so far as to fetch his son, John, from Montgomery's Tavern at the time of the action there. The aftermath of the

rebellion proved the wisdom of Willson's non-violent stance, not only because of the suffering visited upon Hope, but because it was peaceful means that eventually redressed many of the Upper Canadian people's grievances -- means such as Lord Durham's Report, and the Act of Union of 1841. In the 1840's, as further evidence of the vindication of Willson's principles, and of Willson's enhanced respectability among the people of Upper Canada, he became an adviser and friend to Robert Baldwin. Baldwin also opposed the rebellion. He became leader of the Reform Party, and after 1844 was Member of Parliament for the fourth riding of York, the riding in which the Children of Peace lived.<sup>8</sup>

In the sphere of Willson's literary activities during this period, The Impressions of the Mind: To Which Are Added Some Remarks on Church and State Discipline, and The Acting Principles of Life, of 1835, is Willson's outstanding work because it brings together most of the themes, concepts and imagery that he had developed up to that time. (Perhaps recognising this, the Children of Peace sold the book to visitors to the Temple.<sup>9</sup>) Willson's other important publication of the 1830's is Letters to the Jews, also from 1835. He published a short piece, The Sinner's Friend, in 1836. Besides this substantial output, a host of manuscript material exists. The present chapter will focus on the themes, images and structure of



Impressions, using the other writings as background or elaboration on Willson's chief work.

Impressions was published in Toronto in 1835, and, as its complete title indicates, it was bound with two other works: A Friend to Britain (1835), and The Acting Principles of Life (1835). The entries in all three sections of Impressions are given dates: The Impressions of the Mind begins October 9, 1832, and ends on January 29, 1835; A Friend to Britain begins December 1, 1834, and ends January 28, 1835; and The Acting Principles of Life begins February 20, 1835, and ends March 16, 1835. Willson's habit of dating his writings is likely an indication that they may have been used as sermons and hymns; also, the dates demonstrate the principle Willson always maintained:

I never repeat one communication twice over,  
nor sing one old hymn in worship: bread from  
heaven is our lot -- descending mercies.<sup>10</sup>

His gratitude for God's blessings on the Children of Peace in their wilderness home is the source of Willson's association of the ancient Israelites fed on manna by God, during their wanderings in the desert after the Egyptian captivity (Exodus, 16, 35), with the group in Upper Canada. For order and form in his book, Willson relies on the day to day revelations themselves, rather than imposing an external systemization. What occurs, nevertheless, is that a pattern does emerge as one reads Impressions. In his prophetic way, Willson indicates the form of the book in a

description of the mind:

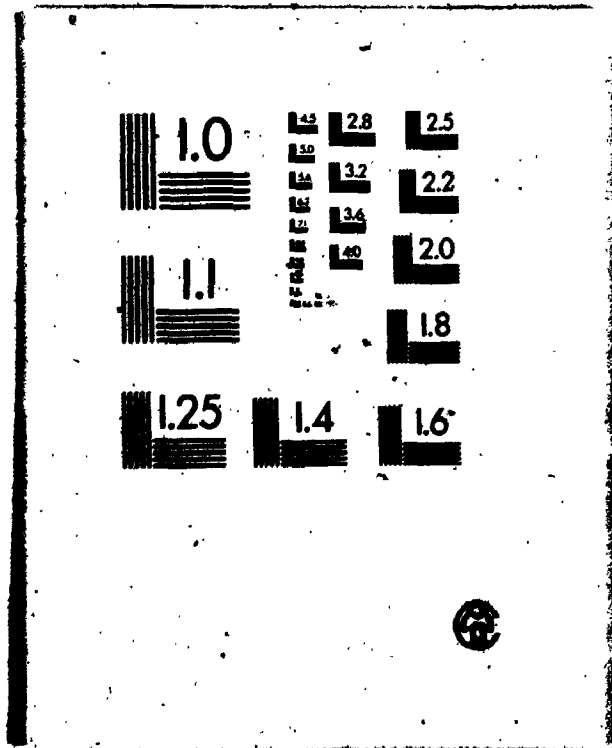
The mind hath as many parts in it as there are in the creation, and the centre of it we wish to find. My small history will end there; there will my pen and thoughts be stayed;... There I shall find the Lord if he is ever known of me, there I shall see the saints at rest; there I shall hear the last song that ever shall be sung, and the solemn harp of everlasting praise.

The predominant shape Willson indicates is the circle, of which he intends to find the centre. His method operates to include the multiplicity of Creation. Willson's symbolism is entirely in keeping with traditional world-wide usage, as the entry on the "Centre" in J. E. Cirlot's A Dictionary of Symbols makes clear:

To leave the circumference for the centre is equivalent to moving from the exterior to the interior, from form to contemplation, from multiplicity to unity, from space to spacelessness, from time to timelessness. In all symbols expressive of the mystic Centre, the intention is to reveal to Man the meaning of the primordial 'paradisaal state' and to teach him to identify himself with the supreme principle of the universe.... A great many ritual acts have the sole purpose of finding out the spiritual 'Centre' of a locality, which then becomes the site, either in itself or by virtue of the temple built upon it, of an 'image of the world.' There are also many legends which tell of pilgrimages to places with characteristics that relate them to Paradise.<sup>12</sup>

Not only in Impressions did Willson enact the symbolism of the circle and its centre, but also in the architecture of the Children of Peace's remarkable Temple: it is surmounted by a golden sphere on which is engraved the word "Peace."<sup>13</sup>

# 3



Willson's reference to the staying of his pen and thoughts when he reaches the centre means that communication will be direct, unmediated even by words, a state identical to the one reached at the end of the Book of Revelation.

"Song" is also used in its universal sense by Willson. Cirlot notes:

singing, as the harmonization of successive, melodic elements, is an image of the natural connection between all things, and, at the same time, the communication, the spreading and the exaltation of the inner relationship linking all things together.<sup>14</sup>

This observation epitomizes the purposes of the musical activities which took place in the Temple. Further, Cirlot's words express the fundamental significance of Willson's stylistic practice -- one might say, "ritual" -- of interspersing hymn verses in his works.

On the same page of Impressions from which the foregoing excerpt on the centre is taken, Willson goes on to say:

I would reach the centre of my soul and see every propensity of the mind at rest with God, and this is with me a world to come.<sup>15</sup>

The implication of this sentence is the key to understanding Impressions. Willson invites the reader to identify imaginatively with the central point of view towards which the "impressions of the mind" Willson records centripetally tend.

The images Willson employs to express his sense of the

quest he pursues usually suggest a centripetal structure.

On December 4, 1834, for example, he writes:

The sanctuary of the Lord is in the midst of all things. The nearer my heart is to God my Saviour, the more I can see of his wondrous works; the more passive is my mind, the more sensible of impression. The nearer I am to the centre of all things, the more subject to command. The more I am simple and ignorant by nature, the more ready I am to obey. The centre of a compass is the stand to see every point of the globe.<sup>16</sup>

From this passage, one may determine just how clearly Willson understands the mystical quest for the centre; how carefully and precisely he chooses his images; and, incidentally, that it is deliberate that he adopts the stance of an unlettered original, when, as Chapter II above shows, his writings bear so many marks of Fox and other early Quaker writers. "Wisdom's Ways," the entry for May 28, 1833, presents a cluster of images based on the circle:

Wisdom's ways are as many paths leading to a fountain of living water, where the weary drink and are at rest. They are as gates to a hidden treasure which when the soul findeth she seeks no more. They are as pillars that never move in a storm. The fountain never dries, neither is the treasure exhausted; she has no end. Few find the gates of wisdom; haste leads us by the port, and except we return we miss the appointed way forever. The things of God or the workmanship of his hands delights the mind at the first appearance, and like as many children gathering flowers, we run after them....

There is a way to a substantial blessing through the laws of the Lord. These are the ways of wisdom. The heart of man is a table for God to write upon; the laws of Moses and the life of Aaron were written there.<sup>17</sup>

The Temple of the Children of Peace uses twelve pillars to support the central area containing the ark, and above this the golden ball of Peace is suspended. The metaphor of the heart as a "table for God to write upon" also connects with the Temple because in the ark at its centre is the Bible. Thus the table or Bible imaginatively translates into the seeker's heart. The Children of Peace performed their offerings near the centre of their Temple, thus dramatizing a living image of human hearts inscribed with the will of God: sacrificial charity. The image of offering tables among twelve pillars, which are named after Jesus' apostles, is an image very close symbolically to the image of the legendary Round Table at whose centre stands the Holy Grail. All of these details make it evident that Willson was drawing upon ancient, traditional sources of symbolism, and further relate him to other Christian mystics, particularly Jacob Boehme. Paradoxically, ~~but~~ again in concert with most mystics, Willson opens Impressions with the following "Observations to the Reader":

The want of literary qualifications will be seen by every observing reader in the following pages. I have not set out to please the learned, nor supplicate the great. My object in the publication of these few broken hints to the world, hath been to improve the small measure given, that, in the end, I may lay down my head in peace with God. I have drawn the following lines from the mind;... It will be observed that I am in favour of ancient simplicity

and plainness of speech. The want of education and literary skill has made my sentences but few on various subjects, and left the cause naked that I have taken in hand. Perhaps the learned may clothe the same sentiments with a more pleasing language, and the Truth may live.<sup>18</sup>

By now it should be apparent that Willson's disclaimer is applicable at times to his grammar, but in other aspects of his writings the "want of education" is actually the traditional ethos of the mystical writer.

Although until recently the Natural Sciences Library at U.W.O. held a copy of Impressions, cerebral anatomy is a topic remote from Willson's concerns in the book. The title, The Impressions of the Mind, is a formulation of an expression often used by Quakers and others contemporary with Willson. Timothy Rogers (quoted above, Chapter I) for instance, uses the phrase, "a hevvy impression of mind"; and the New York Yearly Meeting's minutes (quoted above, Chapter I), note that "the minds of Friends were deeply impressed." In Willson's writings and the writings of other Children of Peace the expression is also common. In Impressions Willson devotes a good deal of attention to the meaning of "mind." He meditates on the contents of a cliché -- "impressions of the mind" -- a technique many writers and thinkers exploit. Generally, Willson formulates his insights into impressions of the mind in metaphor.

Willson explores the relation between God and the

human being in the entry for February 2, 1833, "The Life of a Redeemer in the Mind":

God possesses the hearts of those that love him; if he hath redeemed us from vain and transitory enjoyments he possesses the whole mind, and this is altogether the pillars of the man, and the principles of action. The mind is a combination of our numerous thoughts. It is these that compose the mind; and there is one Judge over us to comfort or confound all the imaginations of the heart.<sup>19</sup>

The image of pillars relates to a simile later in the same section of Impressions:

Thou assumest the mind to thyself O God, as thine house or tabernacle here below;... thou hast made it for thine own dwelling, this is where thou showest thyself to man, it is all thine.<sup>20</sup>

Continuing with Willson's images concerned with spatial aspects of mind, one finds an unusual conception of the mind's location in "What Is Life?" (February 19, 1833).

Willson writes:

The person is but a waymark to the mind, and the mind as a distant city or far country to those who do not seek to find the prize, or travel industriously to come to a sense of the man.... A man's mind is as a wilderness; he knoweth not what it will produce until it is cultivated and improved....

It is the mind that holds a communication with spirits, and commits to the man intelligence from God... The mind or spirit of the man never was created, but is spirit, and was and is with God always, either in the far distant and measured regions of his judgments, or compassed about by the bounds of his favours in which there is no wrong.<sup>21</sup>

Willson's writing is remarkably similar to Jacob Boehme's



both in the thorough interpenetration of physical and spiritual dimensions they realize, and in the powerful sense of the ineffable they convey.

Another spatial image Willson often uses emphasizes the centripetal tendency, noted earlier as the characteristic mode of Willson's work:

The mind is a part of God's spirit,  
 given to this human frame, and as the  
 streamlets and rivers never rest short of  
 the bosom of the sea -- where the whole  
 family of springs and rivers unite; so the  
 travelling mind cannot rest short of the  
 bosom of God. A man's mind is ever from  
 home till he returns to the father or  
 fountain of spirits, and this is the place  
 of his appointed rest.

The way is clear, let us proceed,  
 For all our footsteps are decreed;  
 But if our thoughts these lines despise,  
 There's death and hell before our eyes.

The tomb looks frightful as the night,  
 We tremble when the grave's in sight;  
 Affrighted man, O tell me why  
 Thy soul is not prepared to die?

Hast thou been idle or astray?  
 Or did thy thoughts pervert the way?  
 Get ready now -- the time is short,  
 Thy dwelling's in the outer court.

Come in, the keeper's at the door,  
 The fountain's clear, and bread's in store;  
 Behold the living system move,  
 See God is jealous of thy love.

His word be thy chief corner stone;  
 There build thy house for God alone,  
 And God will come and dwell with thee,  
 Whoe'er thou art or mayest be.<sup>22</sup>

Once the person has chosen to live in the mind, a transformation occurs. Willson explains this in "Chapter

I" of Impressions (May 28, 1833), by using an analogy that is reminiscent of his own immigration to Upper Canada:

If a country affords an encouraging history, we will some times haste to remove there to better our condition of life, why not speak of the fertility of the mind, and induce some wandering souls that are seeking for a residence of rest, to leave this world and its common course, and inherit the mind, improve it as a new country, and enter into rest, enjoy the fruit of our labour and be at peace; for this is where God hath ordained praise, and where he will satisfy the soul in itself, for a man is a kingdom of his own and he needeth not be as an alien in a far country, and a servant of men.<sup>23</sup>

A description of this "human kingdom" is the subject of "Chapter II" (June 7, 1833):

Eyes and ears are but the organs of the mind, of themselves they can do nothing. It is the mind that employs them to hear and speak, they are as servants sent abroad to bring home intelligence to the mind. The mind is not small, otherwise as a vessel it would become full. But not a little hearing and seeing fills the mind, and now we have an evidence of its almost unbounded extent, it will contain a history of all nations kingdoms and countries, language and science. It will not contain a deity only by parts, but there is nothing created so extensive as the mind and as it is unknown, uncomprehended, and to us unbounded, we are almost or quite forced to believe it is a limb of the deity, and came out from God, and is our intelligencer from heaven above and hell below.<sup>24</sup>

The phrase, "limb of the deity," reinforces an association that continually intrudes when one is reading Willson: the writings of William Blake (1757-1827), a mystic contemporary with Willson. One of many instances where

Blake expresses an insight identical to Willson's appears in the notes to his engravings of The Laocoon:

The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination, that is,	}	Jesus: we are his Members.
God himself		
The Divine Body		

It manifests itself in his Works of Art (In Eternity All is Vision).<sup>25</sup>

Willson's mention of the eyes and ears is also very close to Blake's understanding of the senses expressed in A Vision of the Last Judgment:

The Last Judgment is an Overwhelming of Bad Art & Science. Mental Things are alone Real; what is call'd Corporeal, Nobody Knows of its Dwelling Place: it is in Fallacy, & its Existence an Imposture. Where is the Existence Out of Mind or Thought? Where is it but in the Mind of a Fool?... Error is Created: Truth is Eternal. Error, or Creation, will be Burned up, & then, & not till Then, Truth or Eternity will appear. It is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it. I assert for My Self that I do not behold the outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & not Action; it is as the Dirt upon my feet, No part of Me. 'What, it will be Question'd, 'When the Sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?' O no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host, crying 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.' I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight. I look thro' it & not with it.<sup>26</sup>

The similarities between Blake and Willson are manifold and profound, as these examples illustrate. Perhaps it is the effects of their contacts with Jacob Boehme, in Willson's

case, through the writings of George Fox, that account for the deep affinities between Blake and Willson. Certainly their closeness adds to the comprehension of Willson as an important participant in the phenomenon of Western mysticism. Like Blake, whose writings were almost completely ignored during his lifetime in England, Willson experienced mystical certainties in isolation. Willson observes:

It taketh time to evince truths. I must only strew these lines as seeds in the earth, (from my small habitation in the wilderness of Upper Canada,) and as the husbandman or cultivator trust to the growth of them, or whether they have place in the mind of this world or not, I know that I have found what I cannot deny, and seen that which I dare not conceal.<sup>27</sup>

What a melancholy fact it is that Willson's seeds of wisdom have been left to the wilderness for so long.

Turning away from the life of the senses to the eternal life of the mind has consequences that ultimately vindicate this orientation and enrich the spirit:

As I serve not the princes and nobles of my age, they frown upon my appearance, -- as I pay no tribute to the priest, he stands a distance from my necessities, -- as I find fault with governments and counsellors, I share none of the public gold, -- and as I cannot walk in consort with my brethren, I am chastised by them for error; and hasten my steps to meet the grave. Every time I fall, I am the stronger. Every turn adds experience to the mind. Every frown increases my faith; for by these heart-known lessons I am taught more and more to distrust the world.

The drop of water tasteth sweet,  
 We in the thirsty desert find,  
 And every fall directs our feet,  
 And every crumb assists the mind.<sup>28</sup>

To Willson, the sensory world's purpose, in fact, is to cause suffering in order to effect a radical change of mind. On November 1, 1834, he writes:

All things that are are right, and not any thing hath been removed from its place since the worlds began. Providence is every where and overseeth all things.... We generate evil, because our minds are so to do; and if we did not, we would not know ourselves to be the weaker or lesser part of experience; but sin bringeth in or introduces the superiority of a judge to abase a sinning mind. The Lord loveth sinners as the husband the field, from which he receiveth wealth, honour and glory from the workmanship of his hand; so doth the Deity from the heart of a sinner. The forgiving of sins by the Deity, extolls and promotes the noblest praise of God.<sup>29</sup>

In "The Dispensations of God to the World" (December 17, 1834), Willson elaborates on this statement of the significance of evil, relating evil to baptism:

through past experience I am confident -- and that without doubting, that if I suffer tribulation without sin, the hand of God doeth it, and it is only to reveal to my soul, the greater measures of his will -- enlarge the mind by baptism, and bring that to light tomorrow, which is today unrevealed -- as wisdom under deep waters, he only changes our diet to delight our taste, increase our love, and multiply our praise. How can the miser increase his joy? No way but by doing one thing over; but the children of God, ever hath new bread from heaven....<sup>30</sup>

In the Manuscript, Book of Saered Record, Willson states this distinction between quantitative and qualitative

criteria in other terms, but still uses the baptism metaphor:

Death destroys the person, but despair refines the soul -- changes the spirit -- and is the mother of a new life. In despair the son of God resign'd his person to death -- and his spirit to God. There can be no pure religion short of this baptism. ... Water baptism may be a tradition -- but despair is of deep and lasting consequence.<sup>31</sup>

As one would expect, Willson's conception of the mind as a "limb of the deity" determines his views on important matters besides the correct sphere of concentration in life, and the role of evil. Creation itself, signifying both the world and the activity, -- meanings which Willson conflates -- is another fascinating example. Through interpreting the Biblical account of God's work, Willson reveals his own ideas about creation. Following tradition, Willson assumes that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch. In "The World's Evidence for a Deity" (November 2, 1834), Willson says:

The creation proves his spiritual existence. It was by the creation and sublime evidences that Moses came to the knowledge of God; he was no man's servant in his hand-writing, but his history in many passages are evidently the productions of the mind. That Moses ever saw the worlds created by the light of the sun. I believe not, but that he saw the world and the things thereof come to light in himself, and he wrote of them as they arose.... Where did Moses contain his skill of revelation before his hand-writing? In the mind without doubting. Then all he knew was contained in the mind; and the moon and stars, rivers nor

seas, days nor nights, seas nor dry land were never there, neither did this sun that lights the globe ever rise in the heart of Moses. He was not born when the worlds were made, nor Adam neither. Then no man revealed these things to Moses, nor ever was there a man in life that ever saw the worlds begun. Now, I will give my sentiment of the times, and pass forward. The Lord continues to reveal. He cannot be known by ascending in balloons or digging into the earth; and the whole hand-writing of Moses is to convince the world there is a God. He, Moses, was no better child when he was born than Abraham his father; but Abraham saw one thing, and he and seeking ages ever find, and reveal the wisdom of God unto the world, so the whole of the books are composed called the sacred writings. They are all the productions of the mind and the revelation of God....

All things below are but a shadow of worlds to come. That which is to us to come, is that which ever was. There is spirit and mind in the kingdom of God. The mind is the atmosphere of all God's holy and angelic spirits, saint and Saviour; if we ever know them, we know them there. It pleased the Lord to reveal to the mind of Moses, the deeds of creation; he made use of the waters to prefigure the mind to Moses; the sun, as the rising of a Saviour in the soul; the body as dry land.... All the springs and streams worship the sea, because they are the greater fountain of living waters. So all our mind and abilities worship the mind of a Deity, the element of our creation. Who can keep the living stream from the sea? neither king nor councils. Who can keep my soul from God? None.<sup>32</sup>

Again, Willson's mingling of physical and spiritual planes is pervasive. In prose resounding with the cadences of the Psalms, Willson explores the relation of the human mind to creation:

The mind is the sense of all things observable. The Deity has taken up his rest in the human mind. All nature doth adore

and worship there, or Moses could not have told us of a Sabbath's rest. The superior parts of a Deity rest in this temple or spirit called the mind; and this is the house of the Lord.... When we see the vegetating plant, the growing tree, the increasing and decreasing brute, the turns of the seasons of the creation, the activity of nature in all living, save man, we have seen the end of what these can reveal of the deeds and formation of a Creator's hand, the activity of spirit in them, which is given according to their needs; but when we come to the mind of the human family and the revelation of God to the world, who hath read through the book of life and can say we have come to the end of wisdom? Not the Pope, nor his superiors. When the wise men can tell me the drops of water there are in the sea, and the depths of the atlantic, then will I believe these things, or that the end has come or revelation ceased.<sup>33</sup>

Willson goes on to summarize his understanding of the Bible in a way that further explicates his sense of physical and spiritual realities:

There is a school prepared for us. Moses not only saw what had been from the beginning, but saw what would be in the end. God would come in the flesh, and him we should hear, in all things. Here ends the law of Moses: It brings us to this school; and the evangelist John tells us by this word that teaches the mind, whose house is the inner temple and courts of the Lord, the world was made, and all that are therein. Now I presume the visible God is within the voice like the coming and going wind. The mind that is like the table for the law of the Lord, can receive the purposes of the creation. The outside of a Deity -- that is, all we see, is but as the mantle of the Lord -- excites me to know what is within the veil, and the creation attracts my mind, not to sin, but to fear a Deity of such power.... And the more I receive and know of the Deity, the more full, perfect, and extensive shall my worship be. And the purpose of the whole visible creation is to



direct our attention to the inner man, who is acquainted with the revelation, the judgments, and mercies of our God. Spirit only seeth unto spirit. The human eye can only discern the outside of things. It is the inner man that knoweth the Lord and is acquainted with his works.<sup>34</sup>

Focussing on Moses' writing about the Fall, Willson says:

Moses has said that the Lord made man naked and then clothed him. In vain we read if we do not understand. Man was not ashamed until he sinned, and was then disposed to hide himself from the presence of the Lord. The deed he did was only an evidence of the spirit. He was not ready to come to judgment, -- he had not fulfilled command, -- he hid himself from the Lord, revealing to us the space of repentance was wanting before he was ready to appear before the Judge of a spiritual world; and by his deeds hath revealed himself unto us. The Lord clothed him, but slew him not; Moses hath wisely said with the skins of beasts, a true evidence of his action, the spirit and principle he acted from in the mind. If this spirit had been obedient in the mind, (the world of spirits,) from whence should we have known sin? There is nothing now that was not then, there was nothing then that is not now. The whole writing of Moses respecting the creation is the evidences of the form of the man in the inner part, and the deeds of Adam our personal action. Adam by his own deeds knew himself to be a sinner; but not without the assistance of a Judge could he have known this.<sup>35</sup>

This passage reiterates Willson's sense of the relation between time and eternity, further consequences of which will be examined later in connection with Willson's beliefs about the Jews. Also, in the passage just quoted, the question of Willson's views on scripture is pursued: the writings of Moses dealing with creation, Adam and the Fall, present, in Willson's interpretation, an allegory

applicable to each human being.

In "The Love of God to the World" (November 29, 1832), Willson reveals his own method of writing and its relation to the Bible:

... Much hath been written -- but I must write; different experience affords a different hand writing, and that which is nearest the truth will rise uppermost at last....

I know I shall agree with the evangelist -- for truth is ever the same -- though widely differing in form. It is still the same in virtue or effect.. It was a change of mind that the Son of God sought for, what prophets and apostles sought for or desired. The scriptures hath become books and texts disputable in this world, they came from different minds, but from one God; they are the impressions of his mind, upon the heart of man, brought into existence and remain with us.<sup>36</sup>

In their way, then, Willson's writings parallel scripture, because "truth is ever the same -- though widely differing in form." The Book of Sacred Record contains another statement that illuminates Willson's concept of scripture:

I am a servant of that God or spirit that was before Israel was born of his mother into the world, I have ever written without any impressions of scripture on the mind, yet I have made use of them, both in writing and speaking to confirm the world that I was not ignorant of the sacred truths contained in them. I have had none acting as a parent to my spirit. God hath been all to me.<sup>37</sup>

The sermons copied into the Book of Sacred Record and the entries in Impressions subsequent to the date of the preceding excerpt, October 30, 1832, take for their texts not Biblical passages, but themes devised by Willson

himself. To him, scripture is a lesson to prepare the mind for true service, the "rest" of the seventh day of creation. He proceeds in the Book of Sacred Record to state:

The great intentions of scripture is to break a man off from following his own mind, that all his propensities may become servants to the house of the Lord. The soul is given to serve the Lord, as well as the person, by which God is glorified in both soul and person.<sup>38</sup>

The role Willson assigns to the Bible is closely akin to the way both Jacob Boehme and George Fox perceived the scriptures.<sup>39</sup> In "The Power and Virtue of the Word of God" (October 28, 1832), Willson shuttles between describing his experiences and praying, thereby enacting in words the changes the Bible has wrought on him:

Oh God! I have heard thy word, and bear witness thereunto. Thy word is my salvation, the bread of my soul, water to quench my thirst, and the pathway of eternal life, because there is no end....

I now write for thee by the measures thou hast given, and cease not to give thee praise. Thou madest a covenant with my soul when she was young, and as a faithful friend thou now makest good thy word. It is written in the past records of my life that I should write for thee, which promise this solemn moment of my life thou by thy justifying spirit enablest me to do.... None knoweth the Lord save these that walk after him; these behold his miracles in the soul and are acquainted with his wondrous works. Now I must testify of the Lord until this day and then cease. He hath formed my spirit with his right hand, he hath said unto my soul live, he hath opened a way before me and bid me walk therein....

Mockers will mock me, and the present

divines will despise my name. Clothe my soul as with a mantle O God! -- my spirit in a cloud, that I am not seen, that thy glory only may light the world forevermore. Deeper than the seas are thy wisdom. Wisdom dwells in unsearchable depths, bring her up O God from deep waters, as thou calledst the sun to rise as revealed to thy servant Moses. Enable her to bear twins O Lord unto Moses and unto Christ, the pillars of thine house below. Let my name be blotted out O Lord under the sun, that thou may have all glory; for honour belongeth unto thee. Build up the tents and tabernacles of ancient days; dwell therein, and make thy name glorious below the sun.<sup>40</sup>

As with Boehme and the early Quakers, Willson's emphasis on human perfectibility led him to believe less in the dogma derived from scripture than in truths of ongoing revelation. Willson says:

The Lord continues to reveal.... We are all in the hands of God, and must receive what he giveth; bitter or sweet, sorrow or joy, all are revelations of his command. He that seeth the creation rising in his mind according to its religious and temporal usefulness, saw as Moses saw, he owns the operations of God's Spirit on his mind, and one thing after another is brought to light in him.<sup>41</sup>

Willson's frequent references to the Old Testament give rise to the question of his view of Christ, who, with Moses, is the other pillar of God's Church on earth. Willson states in "The Son of God is Sent to the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel, and Unto Them He Sendeth His Own" (December 6, 1834):

It is requisite to know Moses before Christ. Christ hath said, if ye had known Moses ye would have known me: but the wise and prudent of his day did not know either

of them....

The person of Jesus is an evidence of the truth -- his deeds are signs or true representations of the Holy Ghost: he was a Prophet in which there was no guile.-- blameless before the Lord; his body was a tabernacle of the highest, but who hath seen his mind? It never was revealed to the world, but under a veil or shadow, it was secreted in his holy body, for the Lord hath not appeared unto us without flesh, as unto our father in Eden, or as he hath done unto Moses face to face; and except the days come that never has been; we shall not be saved from our sins.... The shadow pursued to its origin, leadeth us to the substance; so the person of the Son invites us to come to God, the original of all good, and the father of that which by Moses came into the world. Those that know not Moses, know not God, for Moses was of God, a true servant sent into the world, to redeem Israel from bonds.... A living mind cannot be reconciled to a dead and speculative system;... The Lord loveth the man that cannot help himself; his heart is an open door for the reception of the Lord; he will take the stranger in -- he will give him drink when he is thirsty, food when he is hungry -- he will clothe the naked and feed the fatherless -- he will visit the sick, and those in prison, for the soul of Christ is there suffering for our sins, that is not to say he is not reconciled with God in heaven; for the father was well pleased with him when he was groaning for our sins. Till we relieve the afflicted, the Son of God will not be at rest with us.<sup>42</sup>

In summary, Willson holds that because the world generally still fails to live by Christ's commandments, the Christian age has not dawned fully yet.

This fact, much lamented by Willson in his writing, forces him to adopt the corollary that the Children of Peace in Upper Canada were experiencing what the Bible says the Children of Israel experienced. This is the source of

Willson's interest in and sympathy for the Jews. His vision of renewal in Ontario includes contemporary events that he describes in terms appropriate to ancient Israel. In the following passage from Impressions, written on November 1, 1832, Willson is referring to the cholera epidemic that had recently ravaged the province:

Let us meditate on the things of God, and be sober. It is a dreadful day indeed when we have to live every hour in the fear of death and terror of the grave. So the last summer hath been to all that beheld the unconfined chastising hand of God upon the earth. The grave-yards were cultivated as the fallow-ground for the seed; the grave-diggers were as so many gardeners preparing the ground for the dead, -- men that had not lived half their days.... My son and my daughter, come away from the broad way of the earth; there is danger therein, -- a lion is in this way: the Lord will appear strong before, strong and unconquerable, if thou pursuest the pathway of men, or vain glory in the house of the Lord. The bosom of the Lord is filled with wine for his people; he will make them joyful in his own inheritance, the house he hath chosen for their dwelling....

There is a new day dawning on the world: The Spirit of the Lord hath arisen in the east, and shineth on the western world; and by the rays of this sun, we behold the power and glory of ancient days. No man can govern the Lord; he will have his own way in the earth. And these are the latter days when the Lord shall appear as he now doth, -- clothed with judgment and with mercy.<sup>43</sup>

Willson's "lion" in this excerpt may refer to the British emblem, and the "house", to the Children of Peace's Temple, as well as to Biblical passages (such as I Peter 5, 8 and Psalm 42, 13 or Psalm 118, 26). Willson proceeds to exhort

the Children of Peace in terms that echo both the Psalms and the Book of Revelation:

Behold the vineyard of the Lord increases; the pastures are enlarged, and there is water in the stream to quench the thirst of the thirsting flocks of Israel. The grape is on the vine, the figs are on the trees, and in the midst of her are the words of life, and whosoever partaketh thereof shall never die. These are the commandments of the Lord, springs of living water, and rivers thereof leadeth all flesh to the city of God.<sup>44</sup>

Congruent with the centripetal structure of

Impressions and its spatial imagery, is Willson's sense of temporality. All of Willson's writings are thoroughly imbued with his belief in transcendence of time and space, expressed through circular imagery, repetition and metaphor. In "The Strength of the Mind" (April 27, 1834), Willson affirms his vision explicitly:

I am in a great measure an inhabitant of the wilderness, and my mind has increased in a natural way by the help of God. The handwriting of the scribe and prophet encouraged me forward; but when I had found a little, I could feed myself through God's assistance, and I had no need that these present divines should put bread to my lips....

Blessed is the mind that trusteth in the Lord; he is as a staff that doth not fall; he is a sure compass in the storm.... that spirit which hath arisen by Moses, the prophets, and the Son of God, will never set; it remaineth as the sun, to give light to the world; and these ancient characters are the productions of the spirit of truth.... A Christian's mind cannot remain in history but a few days. His soul begins to hunger for the bread he has heard of, and to drink of that spring where Christ and the

prophets draw water for the whole earth....

Every soul has to answer to God for his own guilt; and the books of the prophets stand alike to us all, and they direct us forward to the bosom of a Saviour, who is now with God, who said, If I go not away, the comforter will not come. His personal appearance is but for a time, but his spirit is forever.<sup>45</sup>

For Willson, even Biblical history must be transcended. He continues:

Every true prophet from Abram till now dug their own wells, and watered their flocks from the springs of experience. But now people live as if all things were done for them, and as though the experience of David were an everlasting song in their lips. Such a life is a repetition, and the productions of a weak mind. Any natural and uncultivated school boy can perform such deeds as these. But to prove that the Lord is unbounded in wisdom, and that he hath not given all his mercies to one age of the world, nor to one mind, -- Isaac succeedeth Abram, and Jacob Isaac, and the prophets Moses, and Christ all that had been before him. In these sacred characters we see the order of life and the continuation of revealed religion; and by these succeeding ages the world grew wiser and wiser, for all and every age added to the honour and glory of God. But by feeding on history, -- this idle, easy, and indolent way of life, -- the world has lost the knowledge of God, and the progress of the mind is stayed for want of faith in God through the revelation of Moses and the prophets -- the practice of Christ and those that believed in him. Oh that life was restored to the world, and light to the mind, that wisdom might increase, and the glory of God be multiplied by every succeeding generation that is born into the world! And for this purpose I write from my own mind, and somewhat against the most earthly dignified characters in existence; and my mind still continues to find that daily meat, that strengthens my abilities to step a little further forward, with hope that I shall find the lonesome mind of the



prophet, or the indwelling of a Saviour, that my experience may be like theirs and in accordance with the will of God, as he hath revealed to the world by Moses and by Christ.<sup>46</sup>

This lucid explanation makes it possible to appreciate the wisdom and the courage that must have taken for him to try to live his life according to these principles. To the best of his considerable abilities, Willson did live a life released from history, as attested not only by his writings, but by the establishment of the Children of Peace, their sharing community, music and buildings dedicated to the glory of a living God.

A Friend to Britain, the second work bound with Impressions, addresses the British people in the context of Willson's eternal vision. Knowing the basis of his understanding, the reader may sympathize; most British recipients of Willson's admonitions would likely have taken them differently. In the opening chapter of A Friend to Britain, "An Address to the Clergy of the Christian World" (December 1, 1834), Willson tells these men just how he views their situation from his angle:

I write to let you know, that the eye of heaven is upon you; and that the calls of God have reached the wilderness, and that the God of Jacob is whispering in the ear of those whom you call small things.... I am not the Priest's clerk, the Bishop's boy, the Clergy's 'prentice, nor the Deacon's command. I am a poor and lonesome man contented with small things. I have read a little of Israel, and of all the maidens or churches; I am in love with them, for although they are cast off at present, their

former blessings exceed all that crowneth the earth; and you are walking after them towards their fall, but have not tasted of their hope to arise. I believe without doubting in the resurrection of Israel; and whatsoever they have done good, to the resurrection of life, will remain forever.<sup>47</sup>

Willson is even more uncompromising in his analysis of the British Christians' history. He continues:

The children of Israel have almost fulfilled a dear atonement for the blood of the prophets, and the Messiah; but you are living in pomp and splendour, while the blood of martyrs is crying at your gates. I am a kind of an original character, and look back to the Ancient of days for light. Why should I prefer you before the Jews? The hands of the Christians are stained with blood; not only war but the murder of their brethren, who gave up their lives for conscience sake. If Israel had to answer dearly for this crime, (the Deity is not changeable in his mind,) you must answer for yours. Your spiritual courts issued these mandates: first killed your brethren and then went and preached the gospel to the poor, and took their bread and garments for revealing the will of God unto them.<sup>48</sup>

In spite of the apparent finality of this condemnation, in his next address, written on December 4, 1834; Willson modulates to a friendlier tone:

Britain is my hope, for there I shall see the salvation of God. I love the king as my father, for he will receive grace, and be at peace with his people. Britain is the star of nations; the sun will rise and shine upon her as morning rays on the western hills. Britain will become as a saviour to the world; as the mother of nations, she will receive of God, and crown her offspring with peace. She has conquered her deepest foes, the clergy.... There will be great tribulation before the coming of these days, such as has not been or ever will be again.<sup>49</sup>

The catalyst on earth for the fulfilment of Willson's millennial hopes for Britain is Israel. He says:

Hear a word from a friend, ye inhabitants of the isles. What God hath ordained and appointed will come to pass. He hath appointed Israel, the Jews, to be his people, and it will be so. God is their Saviour; to this end were they made, and their means is salvation to all the world. The globe hath but one centre, nor Israel but one Saviour. The personal Son of God hath appeared, but the solemn effect is yet to come; for though we say we have believed, (that are Christians,) we have not practised; such a faith is dead, and renders our situation but little better than the Jews... I believe in a coming Saviour, but in no salvation without deeds of righteousness. If we would keep his revealed will, and Israel receive the prophets, he would be our great reward; he would come into the mind and dwell with us. He hath made his personal appearance in this way: we need not look for him any more. But he has a spiritual coming appointed of God; and as he was in that holy and blameless person, so would he be with us and in the mind, leading us into all the truths of which the prophets hath foretold, and his holy person revealed.<sup>50</sup>

Likely it is because of the Reform Bill of 1832 that Willson is optimistic about Britain's role in the future establishing of Christian ways on earth. He goes on to say:

Reform has begun in Britain as in Abraham, and will spread through the whole earth.... Britain is restoring the poor to their right, and pleading for a free circulation of just principles, and the preaching of the Gospel on the principles it began in Israel and in Judah.<sup>51</sup>

Although Willson's prophecies may sound disconnected from

reality, clearly he intended them in a practical sense.

In the same year that Impressions was published (1835); Willson also published Letters to the Jews. The twelve epistles in this brief volume of seventy-one pages are dated from June 28, 1835 to July 11, 1835. In communicating directly with the Jews, Willson was attempting to hasten the restoration of this people, an event that, as indicated in Impressions and A Friend to Britain, in turn would bring about the redemption of Britain and the entire world. In the first letter Willson states his position -- not an uncommon one at the time -- very clearly:

Joshua was of the dispensation of Moses, and Christ of the Prophets, for he prophesied of that which should be hereafter. He, Jesus, was a true prophet, and the New Testament ought to be received by you, as a book of prophets or prophecies of things that will come to pass, for the words of this prophecy, the New Testament relates unto us, that another dispensation shall come upon the world, and this dispensation is, the salvation of the Jews, the chosen of the Lord.<sup>52</sup>

However, Willson also states that "The Lord is not a respecter of bloods, but of souls that are within us,"<sup>53</sup> showing that for him "Jews" is fundamentally the term for a spiritual state. He elaborates on the allegorical sense of Israel in the same letter:

As the Hebrew's were first called in Abraham to a reformation, they are the first chosen; and their personal distress prefigures the tribulation of the soul, and

sheweth how dear the field is bought; or the inheritance of the promise that we have lost through sin.<sup>54</sup>

As might be expected in light of some of Willson's assertions in Impressions, in Letters to the Jews he also places great emphasis on Moses' role, because Moses communicated with God "face to face."<sup>55</sup> Willson says:

The Lord was in the mind of Moses, and taught him in the tabernacle, all things he should reveal unto Israel. There were none before Moses like unto him; but there should be after. Moses knew all things by revelation from the foundations of the world... The world waiteth for the resurrection and return of Moses to his people, as he hath been, to fulfil his prophecy, and communicate all things to them, which they shall hear, and believe in all things past, as a prophesy of days and times that were to come. The christian world is far from peace, neither doth the christian faith in the man Christ Jesus effect the salvation of the world, neither are they a light to the Jews.<sup>56</sup>

In these words of Willson's, one senses that he is trying with his own writings to begin the work of resurrecting Moses. In Letter 3 Willson goes on to state:

Now, I believe, in spirit I must become the Jew; as to blood, that is impossible.... the sooner I am a Jew in spirit it is the better for my soul, because I then become heir with them in the things that God hath given, and speak with them as a brother about the things of God.... Israel of old will soon be had in remembrance, and the name of Abram come to light, and David be seen in Israel, Jacob's sure defence. Therefore as David could not be overcome, his sword shall never depart from the house of the Lord.<sup>57</sup>

This is one of many instances where the coincidence of the

Biblical King, David; and David Willson's names bears a large amount of significance for Willson's self-conception. The similarity of Children of Peace and Children of Israel is another aspect of this phenomenon, noted above in connection with their wilderness trials. In the eighth letter, Willson presents the following description of himself:

My spirit is from a far and distant hill.  
It is older than Israel, and was before  
 Moses was born into the world; because the  
 Lord God of Jacob and of Israel, giveth me  
 that which hath not been revealed. I  
 neither ask alms nor break bread with the  
 churches that are; I am not depending on the  
 hills nor cities, but a daily supplicant to  
 my God, that hath upheld my spirit in the  
 wilderness. Almost the desert of the world  
 is my abode, and I confer not with flesh and  
 blood about the things of God.<sup>58</sup>

Willson clearly intends these unflattering remarks about Upper Canada to augment the image of himself as a prophet on the order of Moses or King David. Much of Letters to the Jews is prophetic both in tone and in substance, and, as the following poem from the eleventh letter demonstrates, much relates to how Willson spiritually sees himself and the Children of Peace:

Thus I'll go to my tent and sing,  
 Below the shady bough,  
 My soul shall hope in Israel's King:  
 With him I'll keep my vow.

Still on the earth his feet shall stand,  
 Mine eyes his name shall see,  
 To rule the fold and bless the land,  
 And every vine and tree.

His springs shall rise, his waters flow,  
 From fountains pure and still;  
 'Tis all my prayer, I mourn to know  
 My Saviour, and his will.

No oak shall shade him from my soul,  
 Within he writes his name,  
 Thunders may roar and billows roll,  
 The tempest is in vain.

I still seek the immortal prize,  
 That none on earth can give,  
 A Saviour's name to make me wise,  
 And God with me to live.<sup>59</sup>

As Chapter V of this thesis mentions, some visitors to Hope concluded that Willson was deranged because of the beliefs he held about the Jews and himself. In fairness, though, it must be noted that Willson was in fact utterly humble about himself while at the same time claiming the role of announcing God's will as this was communicated directly to him. Without doubt, moreover, Willson's motives were altruistic; and the ridicule, based on superficial understanding, that was heaped upon Willson's beliefs and practices, was grossly unfair, and enduring.

Willson's double vision of the Jews as a favoured race and as a spiritual state -- a concept he most fully develops in Letters to the Jews -- is also an important feature of Impressions. Willson's role as "David," the shepherd; giant-killer, king and psalmist, is a part of the larger identification of the Children of Peace with the ancient Children of Israel, of course. To express the redemptive experiences of the Children of Peace in the Upper Canadian wilderness, Willson normally uses terms that

were originally applied to the Children of Israel in the Bible. The first consequence is to reinforce the sense of circularity and overlapping in time. "Despair in Distress" (January 8, 1833) concludes with the following prayer to God:

Let Zion appear with her guest -- let peace arise. Time is far spent and Israel is not redeemed -- thy chosen one and Jacob thy people - thou wilt call Israel in Jacob; and in Abraham shall thy seed rejoice. The hills wait for their coming, the Sun will not set till Israel is at rest; thou wilt turn the light of this world back on the dial, 'till Israel reach his fold, and thou art at rest with him. Israel shall come forth from thy bosom, and inhabit the earth, where they have been captives.... all the earth shall see the Lord and Israel's name forevermore.<sup>60</sup>

Even in a passage that recounts historical events, the interweaving of Old Testament myth is striking:

"I am myself one of the wandering kind from society, for the Judges found me unworthy of communion, and like my father out of Paradise -- I was put away -- the gates were closed against me, fast and strong. I could enter in no more, they were placed as the burning cherubs there. I went from door to door, many hundred miles for communion with my friends the Quakers, but could gain no admittance; as spoke one, so spoke they all: they were fearful I would divide the society by public communication.... I soon found a spring of living water, and fresh pastures to my soul. I now enjoy a little field in the wilderness with a few brethren of the lost number like myself: here we have been since the year 1811, building houses to the Lord -- introducing ancient praise into the assemblies of his people. Our little field enlarges (as David hath said of the abounding mercies of his God) -- our springs



fail not, neither do our pastures pass away,  
and from my lonesome tent I set out this  
morning to reveal the Son of God to the  
world.<sup>61</sup>

In describing most explicitly the apocalyptic mission of Christ, Willson's technique of overlapping present and past times to create an eternal perspective, gives rise to an unusual identification:

Christ was and is the means, God the Saviour of us all. The means could not do farther than the Father was with him; he overcame the world in spirit, but the world overcame him in person, and he fled from the house of Jacob and the tents of Israel. He did not only ascend in person, but in spirit also, and revealed himself to but few afterwards; but as this is the highest attainment in religion, the name of the Holy Ghost, which has now become a hiding place for hypocrites, (not the Ghost but the name,) satan himself hath chosen this garment or character to wear in the name of religion, and in this name I have suffered shameful tongue and pen abuse, which is hard to endure, because it hurts the mind, and is not the deeds of mercy nor good will. Now hath satan clothed himself with his last garment. Adam will soon be naked again. The first will be last, Alpha and Omega; the beginning will be the end. There is but one God and one order of life. When all the various means are summed up into one, they will number no more than one man and one woman, nature and God. Here Satan first began his reign and here it will end. God will tabernacle with man, and there will be God and man again, no serpent or mediator between, it is near at an end, when satan is where he began. The covering shall be taken from our father, and the man shall see himself, and the man Jesus will pass away when his mission is fulfilled, as his body ascended back into heaven. Between God and man is Satan's place, and Christ came from heaven to abolish his name from between man and his Maker, that every soul should have knowledge of his builder and maker, who is

God, and his word or Christ the means and maker of us all.<sup>62</sup>

Willson's conception of the struggle between opposing forces is very similar to Boehme's theory of the generation of nature, described in Chapter II above. In Willson's imagery, Satan, the serpent that brought about the centrifugal fall into time and space, gives way to Christ, the redeemer; who draws all to the centre, in an eternal, rhythmic process. To Willson, this is not an abstract notion, but a reality that is available to human beings here and now, as Boehme and George Fox also believed.

Willson says:

Till the day cometh that the universal love of nations and societies is preached from the pulpit -- the love of neighbors as ourselves, and practiced, there will be peace in no nation under the sun....<sup>63</sup>

Willson addresses the final section of Impressions, "The United Colonies of North America" (January 29, 1835), to the Americans. Completing the circle, at the end of his work he returns to contemplate his birthplace. To the Quakers, his spiritual origin, he also returns in the last section of Impressions: he notes the fulfilment of the prophecy he made in Testimony to the Quakers in 1816, that the Society of Friends would "one day rend apart in a visible manner."<sup>64</sup> He also restates his view that their error was in assuming the judgment seat over their brethren. Answering a final question about the various political and religious divisions in the world, Willson

provides a centripetal image that summarizes the form and meaning of Impressions as a whole:

Can one good Lord Jesus Christ be the author of this abounding contention there is on earth about heaven and hell, God and the devil? I think not. He communicates one understanding to all men because he is the Prince of Peace, but a diversity of gifts from one body or spirit; but these accord and at last centre into one, the bosom of Christ Jesus the Saviour and Redeemer of the world.<sup>65</sup>

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The third book bound with Impressions is The Acting Principles of Life (1835). Again the entries are dated, the dates following on from A Friend to Britain and Impressions before that. The Acting Principles, Willson trusts, will "encourage virtue and suppress vice."<sup>66</sup>

Uniquely among Willson's works, in The Acting Principles there are no poems among the prose passages, but the prose itself is poetic -- cadenced like the Psalms, and, also similarly to the Psalms, Willson's prose employs parallelism. The opening section, "Love" (February 20, 1835), shows Willson characteristically circling around his subject, defining through metaphor:

Love hath no beginning nor ever will have an end. Love is the revealed will of God, and the saviour of nations. Love is the conquering sword of God, the peace-maker of the world, the blessed of God. She bears his own image, and is forever. She ariseth

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Toronto: J. H. Lawrence, Printer, Guardian Office.

V. "Index" of Willson's A Friend to Britain

in the east as the light of day. She is the bride of man, and the bridegroom of the soul. She binds together, and none can part those whom she hath joined together. She hath connected limb to limb, and joint to joint, since ever her name was known to the human mind. She is ever in the presence of God. She conceals her mind from those that disbelieve her name, till sorrow shall enable them to embrace her hand with a smile. She is as the queen of the Deity; as male and female, she is one with God.<sup>67</sup>

As a glance at the table of contents of The Acting Principles reveals, Willson arranges his subjects in contrasting pairs. This organization is consistent with Willson's vision of life as a whole: he imagines the world micro- and macrocosmically, as a rhythmic dilating and centring process. In his apostrophe to "Life" (March 6, 1835), Willson lucidly depicts his impressions of the rhythm:

Life, thou art the ways of man, and the child of God. God hath clothed thee with his own dwelling. He hath placed a crown on thy head and thrown it down to earth. In thy name he hath built great cities, and consumed them with fire. He hath caused thee to flee to the mountain and hide in the by places of the rocks, to shun his name. He hath pursued thee with the sword, and caused thee to fall in the battle. He clothed thee with a garment by the morning light, and before the setting sun cast thy covering into the grave. He has made thee mourn with the mother, and rejoice with princes in one day.<sup>68</sup>

Perhaps the most beautiful of the apostrophes in The Acting Principles is the one addressed to "Light" (March 25, 1835). Writing about this subject, one of the central images of Quakerism, Willson attains great heights of

poetic inspiration. For him, light is the coalescence of the diverse themes he treats throughout Impressions. In "Light" Willson reaches the eternal perspective he seeks:

Light, thou art the covering of the world, the presence of the highest. By thee man was made, and a sun placed within his breast to give light to the inner man. Thou art without and within the soul; by thee the earth is discovered, and heaven, to the mind. By thee the plant arose from the bosom of the earth, and is clothed with many colours. Thou art the name of the Deity with us; the bitter and the sweet grow up before thee, and unnumbered virtues are extracted from the ground.... Thou art connected with life as the husband with the bride, and life and light are one in all things.

Wisdom is the light of life, and with her she walketh always. Who hath seen wisdom without thee, or life without direction? Hope is implanted in thy breast, and faith is the proceeds of light, and bringeth life into action, and the whole work of God appeareth visible to the eye in thee. Thou art in the eye, and in the sun and skies; and when life departeth from the body light is absent also, and the eye is closed in the dark.<sup>69</sup>

The closing pair of themes that Willson treats in The Acting Principles are "Mercy and Charity" and "Judgment" (March 16, 1835). This opposition synthesizes into the subject that is supremely important to Willson: his relationship with his God. The closing paragraph of "Judgment", indeed of the entire book, epitomizes this relationship:

Judgment and mercy are as twins of the Almighty: by the one he doth trouble for our sins, and by the other abate the consuming flame. These are united by his convincing

and converting power, by which he will redeem all the inhabitants of the earth into the presence of one God; and the children of this world shall be as the children of one father: and heaven and God, and saints and angels, dwell here on earth with them forever. All shall be convinced and converted in the flesh: the mind is the habitation of spirits, heaven and hell is in it, and here guilt consumes the sinful soul; it is where the dead shall live, and the sinner be converted and redeemed from all his woes, and his soul as the living stream seeking the bosom of the sea, flow to his creator God, and live with him forever and enjoy those promised worlds that are to come, which is a conversion of the soul.<sup>70</sup>

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To conclude this brief survey of the abundant writings by David Willson in the 1830's, The Sinner's Friend or Guide to Life, an eight-page booklet dated March 23, 1836, must be mentioned. The booklet is a recapitulation of Willson's doctrine of the function of evil, and another clear statement of his understanding of Christ. Perhaps it was originally intended to rectify any misunderstandings that had arisen concerning the Children of Peace and the Jews. As he does in Impressions, Willson stresses the centripetal tendency of the mind that is humbled through suffering. Willson's imagery in the following passage is strikingly Bohemist:

All the scripture doctrines flow into one channel -- all have an end in the life of Christ -- all direct and lead to him, because he is the visible God, and beyond.

his life there is nothing obscured that is needful, or essentially necessary for the salvation of the mind. In his life, obscurity is brought to light -- the kingdom of misery, and a life justified of God. In him, mysteries have an end; because in him the sinner is judged for his sins, and converted from his guilt. All through tribulation, and the death of our sinning propensities, God destroyeth the old or first mind in the flame, and giveth the converted sinner a new mind. In this change of life, he hath passed through the flaming sword, his spirit participating in the death of his Redeemer, hath a right to the tree of life -- and his mind hath followed his Lord through tribulation into Eden again. Every sound penitent is with the Lord, and is small in his own eyes, as the child or the dust of the earth. This is Eden restored, or paradise regained. The whole system pertaineth to the changes of the mind, without which no man can see the Lord.<sup>71</sup>

The Sinner's Friend concludes with Willson's vision of the apocalypse, a vision that is charged with human friendliness and sublimity:

For as Christ hath declared himself to be the resurrection of good and ill -- the sinner and the just -- the sinful spirit of all ages suffered in Him for their sins; and in him the just are rewarded for their deeds. There is nothing more plain than this, that his mind is the universal space of all flesh, or being, and that he is to be known in person, and that in person all the ages of the world were and are to be rewarded for their deeds. There is, therefore, a time of restitution for all things, and all shall hear the alarming trumpet, and the spirit of the dead shall hear; because the spirit of truth is a quickening power over the mind, that calleth every spirit from works to rewards, and the body beareth witness of the Son, and the blessings of God are conferred upon His own from age to age, through the transferring influence of his will; and the curse of nations is conferred upon the wicked through



all the ages of the world. The Lord troubles to convince, and converts to save, and this has been his disposition through time, and will continue through all the ages of eternity; because he is the one invariable God -- giving means according to necessity.<sup>72</sup>

Willson's message in The Sinner's Friend is to reiterate the personal relevance of Christ's revelation which Willson imagines in Impressions as finding the centre of the circle. The day of judgment is the achievement of true perspective. The redeemed person is able to perceive the "disposition" of God "through all the ages of eternity." By living the life of Christ in person, Willson affirms, each human being may find the centre of the overlapping circles of time and space, the resurrection of the dead, "paradise regained."

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Henry Scadding, Toronto of Old (Toronto: Adam, Stevenson, and Co., 1873), p. 486; and Isaac Fidler a missionary in Thornhill, calls the Davidites "Quakers," in Observations, pp. 324-26.

<sup>2</sup> Quakers in Canada, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> Later Periods of Quakerism, I, 113-114.

<sup>4</sup> Quakers in Canada, pp. 123-124. Also see the note on p. 125 of this work for a bibliography of the Hicksite/Orthodox controversy.

<sup>5</sup> Quakers in Canada, p. 134.

<sup>6</sup> This is mentioned by James Hughes in his "Introduction" to A Vision Concerning the Desolation of Zion: or, the Fall of Religion among the Quakers, Set forth in a Similitude or Vision of the Mind: Particularly Dedicated to the Captives, or Scattered Tribes of that Body; Now Commonly Called Orthodox and Hicksites (Toronto: J. H. Lawrence, 1835), p. 4. In The Early Writings of David Willson, W. John McIntyre assumes this book to have been written by Willson, but there is no evidence for such a view. Hughes, a close friend of David Willson, presents biographical details of the anonymous author in the "Introduction" that do not accord with the facts of Willson's life. Christopher Densmore, Archivist at the S.U.N.Y. at Buffalo, corroborates the fact that Willson is not the author of Desolation of Zion, on the basis of his research on Hughes.

7 Information on the involvement of the Children of Peace in the 1837 Rebellion may be found in the following: Rebellion Papers, P.A.O. (a statement signed by Charles Doan, David Willson's son-in-law, on December 15, 1837, regarding his part in the Rebellion); John Beverly Robinson Papers, P.A.O. (Records of the Special Commission for Trial of Treason and Misprison); Envelope 2361, The Mackenzie-Lindsey Papers, P.A.O. (a letter from Maria Wait to Murdock McLeod, a member of the Children of Peace; dated at London, England, February 8, 1840). I am indebted to W. John McIntyre's note in his article, "David Willson and Government, Politics and Society in Upper Canada," The York Pioneer, 1974, p. 15, for pointing out these sources.

8 Letters in the Baldwin Papers, kept in the Baldwin Room, Metropolitan Toronto Central Library, Toronto, from Willson to Robert Baldwin, give the details of the nature of the correspondence the two men maintained.

9 Scadding, Toronto of Old, p. 489.

10 David Willson, The Impressions of the Mind: To which are Added Some Remarks on Church and State Discipline, and The Acting Principles of Life (Toronto: J. H. Lawrence, 1835), p. 254.

11 Impressions, p. 123.

12 J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1962), p. 39.

13 See H. W. Turner's From Temple to Meeting House (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979), for a detailed study of the theology of space.

14 Cirlot, p. 215.

15 Impressions, p. 123.

16 Impressions, p. 277.

17 Impressions, p. 115.

18 Impressions, unnumbered page.

19 Impressions, p. 63.

20 Impressions, p. 66.

21 Impressions, pp. 77-78.

22 Impressions, pp. 113-114.

- 23 Impressions, p. 119.
- 24 Impressions, p. 125.
- 25 William Blake, Complete Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), p. 776.
- 26 Blake, p. 617.
- 27 Impressions, p. 170.
- 28 Impressions, p. 192.
- 29 Impressions, p. 217.
- 30 Impressions, p. 252.
- 31 David Willson, The Book of Sacred Record (ms. book in the collection of the Sharon Temple Museum and also available in photocopy form in Special Collections, D. B. Weldon Library, U.W.O.), p. 305.
- 32 Impressions, p. 219 and p. 225.
- 33 Impressions, p. 228.
- 34 Impressions, pp. 230-231.
- 35 Impressions, p. 233.
- 36 Impressions, p. 26.
- 37 Book of Sacred Record, p. 611.
- 38 Book of Sacred Record, p. 612.
- 39 See Chapter II above.
- 40 Impressions, p. 14, p. 17, pp. 18-19.
- 41 Impressions, pp. 219-220.
- 42 Impressions, p. 241 and p. 244.
- 43 Impressions, pp. 20-21.
- 44 Impressions, p. 22.
- 45 Impressions, pp. 185-196.
- 46 Impressions, p. 196.

- 47 Impressions, pp. 274-275.
- 48 Impressions, p. 276.
- 49 Impressions, pp. 277-278.
- 50 Impressions, pp. 279-280.
- 51 Impressions, pp. 280-281.
- 52 David Willson, Letters to the Jews (Toronto: W. J. Coates, 1835), p. 7.
- 53 Jews, p. 6.
- 54 Jews, p. 9.
- 55 Impressions, p. 242.
- 56 Jews, pp. 9-10.
- 57 Jews, pp. 22-23.
- 58 Jews, p. 53.
- 59 Jews, p. 68.
- 60 Impressions, p. 62.
- 61 Impressions, p. 241.
- 62 Impressions, p. 249.
- 63 Impressions, p. 259.
- 64 Testimony to the Quakers; p. 5. Quoted more fully above, Ch. III above.
- 65 Impressions, p. 268.
- 66 Impressions, p. 316.
- 67 Impressions, p. 317.
- 68 Impressions, p. 337.
- 69 Impressions, pp. 351-352.
- 70 Impressions, p. 358.
- 71 David Willson, The Sinner's Friend or Guide to Life (Toronto: W. J. Coates, 1836), p. 5.

72 Sinner's Friend, p. 8.

## CHAPTER VII

### WILLSON'S PUBLICATIONS OF THE 1840's: HYMNS

This chapter about Willson's hymns will begin with a sketch of the Upper Canadian literary milieu in order to suggest the kinds of writing being published during Willson's career. During the years Willson was writing, a number of other writers who either visited or settled in Upper Canada were also producing works of lasting interest. Outstanding in the area of politics -- next to religion, perhaps the most controversial topic of the period -- are William Lyon Mackenzie's newspaper enterprises: The Colonial Advocate, 1824 to 1834, and, after 1834, The Advocate. These weekly publications present a large quantity of Mackenzie's essays stressing the urgent need for reform of the colonial system in Upper Canada, while preserving a lively picture of various aspects of life in the newly-settled province.

Including Mackenzie's, Upper Canada supported eight weeklies in 1825. This number increased to thirty-eight by 1836.<sup>5</sup>

For his reformist activities, Robert F. Gourlay (1778-1863) was deported from Upper Canada. He presented the factual basis for his critique of the administration in his Statistical Account of Upper Canada (1822). William "Tiger" Dunlop (1792-1848) published his own Statistical Sketches of Upper Canada in 1832. Unlike Gourlay's similarly-titled Account, which is factual and politically-oriented, Dunlop's Sketches is basically a novel of manners, a forerunner of Leacock's Sunshine Sketches.

Adam H. Burwell (1790-1849) published a poem, "Talbot Road," as early as 1816. He published other poems in the British idiom, and went on to edit The Christian Sentinel, an evangelical periodical, published in Three Rivers beginning September 3, 1830. Anna Jameson (1794-1864) also portrays Colonel Thomas Talbot in her Winter Studies and Summer Rambles of 1838, an important volume of travel literature. From British backgrounds similar to Jameson's, but writing from the point of view not of visitors, but of settlers, Catharine Parr Traill (1802-1899), a naturalist, published The Backwoods of Canada in 1836, and many more books subsequently; and Susanna Moodie (1803-1885), Traill's sister, published Roughing It in the Bush in 1852,



and Life in the Clearings in 1853. Including these classics of Upper Canadian literature, and the books cited in Chapter V above for their descriptions of David Willson, about one hundred travel and emigrant books dealing with Upper Canada were published between 1815 and 1840. All but Thomas Rolph's Brief Account (Dundas, U.C., 1836) were published in Britain.

Major John Richardson (1796-1852) was a prolific writer who used his own experiences as a soldier in the War of 1812, and memories of his family's stories about their involvement in the Pontiac uprising at Fort Detroit in 1763, to shape the best early novels of Upper Canada: Wacousta; Or, The Prophecy (1832) and The Canadian Brothers; Or The Prophecy Fulfilled (1840). Abraham S. Holmes anonymously published Belinda; or The Rivals: A Tale of Real Life, another interesting novel, in 1843.

Of Upper Canadian poetry contemporary with Willson's publications, the bulk of the works with lasting value appeared in the 1850's. To give a sense of what else was being produced while Willson was writing, the following poems should be mentioned: Tecumseh; or The Warrior of the West (1828) by John Richardson; The U.E.: A Tale of Upper Canada in XII Cantos (1846) by William Kirby (1817-1906), also the author of The Golden Dog (1877), a novel; The Revolt of Tartarus (1853) and Saul (1857) by Charles Heavysege (1816-1876); The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay

(1856) and The Hesperus (1860) by Charles Sangster (1822-1893); and Lyrics (1858) and The Emigrant and Other Poems (1861) by Alexander M'Lachlan (1818-1896).

David Willson's literary activities subsequent to the prolific mid-1830's diminished to the extent that, besides memorial broadsides and occasional poems in newspapers, Willson published nothing until 1846. In that year he collected and printed Hymns and Prayers for the Children of Sharon. In 1849 Willson published more Hymns and Prayers. As with the earlier hiatus of 1818 to 1824, in part, this dearth of writings may be on account of a Children of Peace building project: the Second Meeting House and school, constructed from 1834 to 1842. Of this beautiful structure only a few timbers remain, in the form of a derelict driving shed in Sharon. In addition, the grievances at the root of the Rebellion of 1837 inspired the Children of Peace to participate more actively in political affairs. Willson's role in local politics may be discerned in letters from Willson to Baldwin during the early 1840's. Willson acted as Baldwin's contact person in the Sharon area of Fourth York riding, advising Baldwin about appointments and the moods of the electorate, as well as playing host to Baldwin when he visited the district.<sup>6</sup>

In his Early Writings of David Willson, John McIntyre holds that during the 1837 Rebellion Willson's authority had been undermined seriously because twelve Children of

Peace took part, contrary to Willson's advice. McIntyre continues:

In attempting to reestablish his role as leader in the community, Willson himself was forced to become actively involved in local politics in the years following the Rebellion.<sup>7</sup>

In his article, "David Willson and Government, Politics and Society in Upper Canada," McIntyre says something quite different and more accurate than the foregoing:

The years immediately following the Rebellion of 1837 were years of attempted healing and rebuilding. For a while, Willson seems to have maintained the position of isolation into which he had been forced by the events of 1837.<sup>8</sup>

Willson had not been forced into isolation, but had chosen this position prior to the Rebellion's outbreak. Lord John Russell's Ten Resolutions, introduced into the British Parliament on March 2, 1837, may have precipitated the following stoical statement by Willson, dated in his notebook, August 1, 1837:

When the Constitution of Britain becomes no more a law for administration -- Our thoughts are lost from the means for improvement -- That Constitution that is one thing today and another tomorrow, it is beyond comprehension what will be administered to us next day -- and how to enter any mode of meeting the coming Exigencies is beyond the comprehension of our present thought. Therefore as reformers we are inclined to preserve chaste our home Institution, and reserve our independence for the coming day.<sup>9</sup>

This "coming day" turned out to be the time of the

reemergence onto the political scene of Robert Baldwin, and Baldwin's drawing Willson into a political role.

During a tour of Upper Canada, Lord Sydenham (Charles Poulett Thomson) visited Hope on September 16, 1840.<sup>10</sup> The Governor General, like so many other British tourists, visited the famous Temple, by then ten years old. This showing of the flag by Queen Victoria's representative in the colony, an event undoubtedly highly-charged symbolically at the time, appears in retrospect to be the signal that marks David Willson's return to active involvement in the province's political life. Willson's role, as mentioned, was as a loyal and helpful follower of Baldwin's Reform Party. Further details of Willson's political involvements, such as his correspondence with William Lyon Mackenzie in the 1850's,<sup>11</sup> lie outside the scope of this thesis. The point here is to suggest possible reasons for the scarcity of publications by Willson during the decade after 1835.

The name of the Children of Peace's village was changed from Hope to Sharon on February 6, 1841, to eliminate confusion with Port Hope.<sup>12</sup> Besides the mundane facts of Post Office pragmatism, the essence of this change is explained by reference to Isaiah 32-35. These chapters, a source for some of the imagery in the Revelation of St. John, describe the Lord's vengeance on sinners and how the Lord transforms the hell he visits upon the earth into joy

and fruition for the righteous. The following verses present the alteration:

The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth: he hath broken the covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth no man.

The earth mourneth and languisheth: Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down: Sharon is like a wilderness; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits.

Now will I rise, saith the Lord; now will I be exalted; now will I lift up myself.

Ye shall conceive chaff, ye shall bring forth stubble: your breath, as fire, shall devour you.

And the people shall be as the burnings of lime: as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire. (Isaiah 33, 8-12)

The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?

He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil;

He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.

Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off. (Isaiah 33, 14-17)

For the indignation of the Lord is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to their slaughter....

For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion.

And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become

burning pitch....

And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be an habitation of dragons, and a court for owls.

The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest.

There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with her mate.

Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them.

And he hath cast the lot for them, and his hand hath divided it unto them by line: they shall possess it forever, from generation to generation shall they dwell therein. (Isaiah 34, 2: 8, 9; 13-17)

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God....

No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there:

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (Isaiah 35, 1, 2; 9, 10)

From these excerpts, it becomes clear that the change of name from Hope to Sharon is a further sign that the Children of Peace considered themselves to be the righteous who once had hope in God while he was terrorizing the

nations, and that their hope in God had flowered: the rose of Sharon. As the "ransomed of the Lord," the Children of Peace had returned to Zion, once a wilderness, "with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads." The songs, of course, are the hymns Willson wrote for the Children of Peace's worship services, selections of which he published in 1846 and 1849.

To delve deeply into the enormous topic of hymnology<sup>13</sup> is not necessary here, but a few notes on ancient Hebrew hymns and modern Christian hymns will help to provide a general background for understanding David Willson's hymns. The Old Testament contains Hebrew hymns -- the Psalms -- that often express, in a communal sense, victory and celebration, or lamentation for the sufferings inflicted by their God's wrathful behaviour. Even Psalms that seem to have originated as lyrics by individuals about their own experiences, are, according to G. Margoliouth in an article on Hebrew hymns in the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics,

considered to represent a true aspect of Israel's relation to Jahweh and the world, fully owned and echoed by the community at large, so that the original 'I' of the poet has everywhere become the symbol of the great communal self, of which he was, in truth, the genuine mouth-piece, uttering individually the religious emotions of the great body to which he belonged.<sup>14</sup>

This aspect of the voice in Hebrew hymns of the Old Testament was well understood by Willson, as he wrote his

hymns to be sung as their own by the Children of Peace. In the imagery and range of emotions of his hymns, Willson also used the Hebrew hymns as models.

The other major influence on Willson's hymnody is the modern Christian tradition that begins with the Reformation. In Hymns and Human Life, Eric Routley shows how Martin Luther's humanism combined with his love for music, and resulted in the encouragement of hymn-writing and singing in Lutheran worship. Of Luther, Routley states:

A stern critic of what he judged, in the light of his experience of the grace of God, to be ugliness and perversity in the organization of the church, he was not one of those theologians to whom system and discipline, personal or intellectual, is the foundation of all things. Less than any of his reforming brethren was he concerned to prune, to restrict, to canalize; more than any of them he desired richness and fullness of religious life, and his charge against the peddlers of indulgences and sellers of benefices was that they withheld it from the common man. Luther was a musician and a poet, and he would not exclude music and poetry from the church. He was enough of a son of the Renaissance to respect the creations of men, provided the creators themselves were obedient to and forgiven by their own Creator.<sup>15</sup>

Many of these descriptions of Luther could be applied to David Willson also: his desire for a rich and full religious life, his concern for the common man, his being a musician and a poet, his belief that human creation is an extension of God's Creation. In total contrast with



Luther, John Calvin (1509-1564) believed in mankind's total depravity. Therefore, as Routley states:

one of the results of this was that such human compositions as hymns were, for the Calvinist tradition, ruled out of public worship as being quite unsuitable and misleading....

Nothing but the best was good enough for public worship. This view was so logical, and the literature of the book of Psalms so rich, that for two hundred years the official view of English Protestantism was the same....

Calvin's hymnody... is all psalmody of the strictest kind -- metrical psalms not deviating from the original nor interpreting it nor adding to it, but reproducing it in such a way that a congregation could sing it to something that had not the associations of plainsong, namely, a metrical hymn tune.<sup>16</sup>

Ironically, however, as Routley observes:

In Calvin's Psalters, from the first (1539) to the last (1562), we have the cream of hymn-music, the archetypal hymn-tunes, the tunes which inspired the great English and Scottish psalm-tunes, and which are therefore the foundation of English hymnody. We owe the passion of the words to Luther, but we owe the poise and simplicity of our best hymn-tunes to John Calvin....<sup>17</sup>

In the English tradition there are primarily three hymnodists who translate the Lutheran and Calvinist traditions into Britain. Of Isaac Watts (1674-1748), the Calvinist, Routley says:

Watts was the father, and also the liberator, of English hymnody, and the manner in which he used his new freedom was characteristic. He used it to express wonder.... The quality which is common to all Watts's work, even the most trifling and incompetent of his verses, is this wonder,

which is the essence of John Calvin's message. Let a man wonder and share his wonder with his fellows in the church -- thus said Watts, and where did he get this but from the Psalms themselves? Where is there such cosmic vision, such pure and self-denying wonder as there?<sup>18</sup>

John (1703-1791) and Charles Wesley (1707-1788) originally added the Lutheran devotional stream to the heritage of English hymnody. Routley summarizes this contribution:

Charles Wesley's hymns were written for private devotion and for the enormous open-air congregations to which he and his brother ministered; so for the Wesleys the church discipline was tempered by the educated devotional tradition of the Holy Club on the one hand and the enthusiasm of mass-preaching on the other. Watts's people would have been impatient of anything that cost them much trouble in understanding the words or learning the tunes. Wesley's people were, in the one context, educated enough to pick up new metres and tunes, and in the other, enthusiastic enough to sing anything that met their fervid emotional needs.

We have, therefore, established Watts as the father of the liturgical hymn and Wesley as the father of the enthusiastic or devotional hymn in our language.<sup>19</sup>

Routley considers the century, 1750-1850, to be "The Great Century"<sup>20</sup> of hymnody, largely because of the works of John Newton (1725-1807) and William Cowper (1731-1800). In the large perspective of English-language hymnody, then, David Willson's hymns may be viewed as participating in this flowering. Certainly, in the context of Canada, Willson is the major hymnodist.

The manifestation of the British tradition of hymnody with which Willson was likely most familiar is the

Presbyterian metrical Psalms. These exhibit many qualities that suggest Willson knew them. Moreover, Willson himself states that he was born of, "poor, but pious Presbyterian parents."<sup>21</sup> The Presbyterian kirk, following Calvin's strictures concerning liturgical music, for long maintained the the "Church's Only Manual of Praise"<sup>22</sup> is the Psalms from the Bible. As stated above, the rationale for this position is based on the belief in man's depraved nature. In their book-length treatise expounding the exclusive use of Psalms in their worship, four Presbyterians on a committee in 1858-59 state the case against any hymns other than Biblical Psalms:

If human ingenuity once begin to meddle with the devotions of the people of God, where shall it be arrested? where can it be arrested? Hence, with wise and beneficent forethought, as well as with jealous regard to His own glory, as the Church's only King and Head, our God and Saviour has excluded from His Church every invention of man; has stamped upon every institution and ordinance the impress of His own sovereign and most gracious authority. He has left us but the office and the privilege of studying His Word, that we may ascertain His will; and then, follow it with a jealousy and vigilance like His own.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, the Presbyterian elders found quite acceptable the singing of versions of the Psalms not only translated into the English vernacular, but into simplified metres in order to facilitate their singing and accompaniment. This type of "human ingenuity," which first arose in Scotland,<sup>24</sup> is acceptable, according to the

Presbyterians on the 1858-1859 committee, because the approved versifiers, such as Thomas Sternhold (d. 1549), John Hopkins (d. 1570), and Francis Rous (1579-1658), faithfully adhered to the "sentiment of the Holy Spirit."<sup>25</sup>

The paraphrased Psalms were couched in one or more of three metres, normally: common, long, and short. These and a few variants, such as double common and hallelujah, were standard throughout the nineteenth century and they adapt easily to the wide variety of tunes also composed in these metres. The accompanying illustration of a book of Watts's Psalms shows one technique of matching appropriate words and music.<sup>26</sup> It will be noted that Watts provides words for Psalm 2, for example, in the three normal metres.

The title of an 1831 version of metrical Psalms indicates the qualities prized by worshippers:

The Psalms of David in Metre. Translated and Diligently Compared with the Original Text, and Former Translations. More Plain, Smooth, and Agreeable to the Text than any Heretofore.<sup>27</sup>

To emphasize the anonymous translator's fidelity, for the Presbyterians who read Hebrew, the texts of the Psalms in that language are printed alongside the English. Psalm 33, as translated in this Psalter, is a good example to show the similarities between the styles of the metrical Psalms and Willson's hymns:

Ye righteous, in the Lord rejoice;  
                   it comely is and right,  
 That upright men, with thankful voice,

THE  
**PSALMS OF DAVID,**  
 IMITATED IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE  
**NEW-TESTAMENT,**  
 AND  
*Applied to the Christian State and Worship.*

By ISAAC WATTS, D. D.

All things must be fulfilled which were written in... the Psalms concerning me.  
Luke, xiv. 44.

David, Samuel, and the Prophets... That they without us should not be  
made perfect... Heb. ix. 22. 40.

EXETER, N. H.—J. J. WILLIAMS, PRINTER.

1819

VI. Title pages and hymns from Watts's Psalms of David, showing variability of tunes and words

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A VALUABLE COLLECTION OF  
**SACRED MUSICK,**

ADAPTED TO THE VARIOUS MEURES IN WATTS

---

GEORGE, J. J. WILLIAMS, PRINTER  
1844

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A VALUABLE COLLECTION OF

**SACRED MUSICK,**

ADAPTED TO THE VARIOUS METRES IN WATTS

EXETER, J. J. WILLIAMS, PRINTER.  
 1819.

**ADVERTISEMENT.**

*THE public is here offered a valuable collection of approved tunes bound with Watts' Psalms, in such a manner that any tune may be presented to the eye with any psalm or hymn. This construction, the benefit of which is secured to the inventor by patent, it is believed will be found convenient for the purposes of public worship; and with an anxious solicitude that it may have a fair experiment, the plan is respectfully submitted by the proprietor to the judgment and patronage of the public.*

**MOSES ELLIOT.**

October, 1818.

118525



PSALM 2.

2 He loves to explore his morning light  
Amongst the stars of the Lord;  
And opens the vast fulfils of night  
With pleasure, pouring forth his word.

3 He, like a plant by gentle streams,  
Shall flourish in immortal green;  
And heaven will shine with kind beams  
On every work he sends to men.

4 But sinners find their realms decay'd,  
As chaff before the tempest fly,  
So shall their hopes be blown away,  
When the last trumpet shakes the sky.

5 In vain the rebel seeks to stand  
In judgment with the pious one;  
The dreadful Judge, with thy command,  
Divides him to a different place.

6 "Straight is the way we saints have trod,  
" 'Tis not the path, and sure it plain,  
" But you would choose the crook'd road;  
" And down it leads to endless pain."

PSALM 2.—S. M. [a]

Translated according to the divine pattern.

Act. vi. 14, &c.

*And this is the beginning of his reign.*

*And this is the beginning of his reign.*

*And this is the beginning of his reign.*

*And this is the beginning of his reign.*

*And this is the beginning of his reign.*

*And this is the beginning of his reign.*

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*And this is the beginning of his reign.*

*And this is the beginning of his reign.*

*And this is the beginning of his reign.*

*And this is the beginning of his reign.*

*And this is the beginning of his reign.*

3 The Lord derides their rage,  
And will support his throne;  
He who hath rais'd him from the dead  
Hath own'd his Son.

PSALM 2.

6 Now he's ascended high,  
And asks to rule the earth;  
The merit of his blood he pleads,  
And pleads his heavenly birth.

7 He asks, and God bestows  
A large inheritance:  
For as the worlds remote extend  
His kingdom shall advance.

8 The nations that rebel  
Must feel his iron rod;  
He'll vindicate those honours well  
Which he receiv'd from God.

9 "Be wise, ye rulers, now,  
And worship at his throne;  
With trembling joy, ye people, bow  
To God's exalted Son."

10 If once his wrath arise,  
Ye perish on the place;  
Then blessed is the soul that flies  
For refuge to his grace.

PSALM 2.—C. M. [b]

**W**HY did the nations join to slay  
The Lord's exalted Son?  
Why did they cast his laws away,  
And tread his gospel down?

2 The Lord, who sits above the skies,  
Derides their rage below;  
He speaks with vengeance in his eye,  
And strikes their spirits through.

3 "I call him my eternal Son,  
" And raise him from the dead,  
" I make my holy hill his throne,  
" And will his kingdom spread."

FARNHAM. S. M.

PSALM 2.

2 He loves to display his morning light  
Among the stars of the Lord,  
And spend the weak full hours of night  
With pleasure, pouring forth his word.  
3 He, like a plant by gentle streams,  
Shall flourish in immortal green;  
And heaven will bless with kind benedictions  
On every work he hands begun.  
4 But sinners find their end in the end  
As chaff before the tempest flies,  
So shall their hopes be blown and lost,  
When the last trumpet shakes the skies.  
5 In vain the rebel seeks to stand  
In judgment with the just and true,  
The Great First Judge, with stern command,  
Decides him to a different fate.  
6 "Strike him the way the nations have tried,  
And let the path of sinners be plain,  
But you shall choose the crooked road;  
And down it shall be well to pass."

PSALM 2—S. M. [6]

Trial and scourging in the divine pattern.

1 Pet. v. 24, 25.

*Why did the nations join to slay*

*The Lord's anointed Son?*

*Why did they cast his laws away,*

*And tread his gospel down?*

*Why did the Gentiles rage,*

*And Jews, with one accord,*

*Herd all their counsels to destroy*

*The anointed of the Lord?*

*Why did they call him mad,*

*And deem him vain conceit,*

*Against the Lord their power to raise,*

*Against his Christ they vainly strive.*

3 The Lord derides their rage,  
And will support his chosen;  
He who hath raised him from the dead  
Hath own'd him for his Son.

PAUSE.

6 Now he's ascended high,  
And asks to rule the earth;  
The merit of his blood he pleads,  
And pleads his heavenly birth.

7 He asks, and God bestows  
A large inheritance:  
For as the world's remotest end  
His Kingdom shall advance.

8 The nations that rebel  
Must feel his iron rod;  
He'll vindicate those honours well  
Which he receiv'd from God.

9 [Be wise, ye rulers, now,  
And worship at his throne;  
With trembling joy, ye people, bow  
To God's exalted Son.

10 If once his wrath arise,  
Ye perish on the place;  
Then blessed is the soul that flies  
For refuge to his grace.]

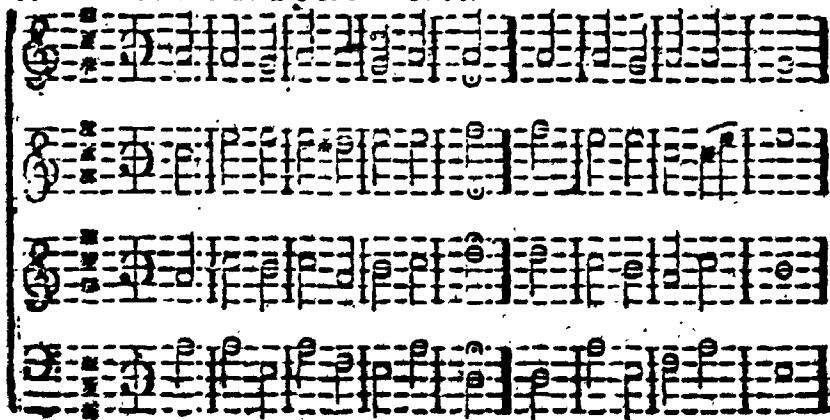
PSALM 2—C. M. [6]

**W**HY did the nations join to slay  
The Lord's anointed Son?  
Why did they cast his laws away,  
And tread his gospel down?

2 The Lord, who sits above the skies,  
Derides their rage below;  
He speaks with vengeance in his eye,  
And strikes their spirits through.

3 "I call him my exalted Son,  
"And raise him from the dead,  
"I make my holy hill his throne,  
"And will his kingdom spread.

16 CANTERBURY. C. M.



should praise the Lord of might.  
 Praise God with harp, and unto him  
 sing with the psaltery;  
 Upon a ten-string'd instrument  
 make ye sweet melody....<sup>28</sup>

For Willson, the move to expressing his own beliefs in a form similar to the metrical Psalms, with which he was probably acquainted, would not have been too difficult. Willson's Hymn LXXI of 1849, "Manifestations of the Love of God," is in the same metre as the above Psalm 33, and it expresses beliefs familiar to readers of the Impressions:

O Lord, the mind's thy dwelling place,  
 The heart is all thine own.  
 The tabernacle of thy grace,  
 Thy judgment and thy throne.

For there thou dost our actions try,  
 The balance and reward  
 'Tis where the stone of ages lie,  
 The building of the Lord.<sup>29</sup>

It is also plain to see why Willson could with justification, and without the presumptuousness charged to him by casual acquaintances, consider that he was continuing the work of King David, the writer of the Bible's Psalms.

In anticipation of the question, why all of this attention should be focussed upon the Psalms, a contemporary statement by Daniel Berrigan is relevant here. In the "Introduction" to his book, Uncommon Praise: A Book of Psalms, this political activist describes what the Biblical Psalms mean to him:

I remember saying them in the rubble and bomb shelters of Hanoi, in the Baltimore

courtroom, in Danbury prison.... The psalms were my freedom songs.

Saying the prayers in prison had a certain piquancy. The psalms were not in the nature of a placebo or a joint (though plenty of both were available, it was a matter of inmate ingenuity or official cataracting). No, in the midst of the sublime public ministries of Nixon and Mitchell et al., the psalms induced a measure of personal balance, created a world of sense and symbol, an underworld of the spirit really, which had in fact always existed (as the psalms said in a hundred ways), a world of humans similar to ourselves, who in the grip of mischance and public violence had undergone God, and lived to sing it out....

The psalms spoke up for soul, for survival; they pled for all, they bonded us when the world would break us like dry bones. They made sense, where the "facts" -- scientific, political, religious -- made only nonsense. For me, the psalms gave coloration and texture to life itself....<sup>30</sup>

From what has been said about Willson and the Children of Peace in earlier chapters of this thesis, it is clear how they stand in the line of people over the ages who have been oppressed by large forces and yet, as Berrigan says, "lived to sing it out."

The epigraph of Willson's first collection of hymns, Hymns and Prayers for the Children of Sharon to be Sung in Worship on Sabbath Days (1846), indicates that he is not using the term "children" figuratively, as in the name, "Children of Peace." The epigraph is Matthew 21, 16:

Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings  
thou hast perfected praise.

These words are Jesus' response on the first Palm Sunday to the chief priests and scribes in Jerusalem, who were "sore

displeased" (Matt. 21, 16) both by Jesus' having cast out of the temple the bankers and merchants, and by "the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the son of David" (Matt. 21, 15). One implication of the Biblical story, the one encapsulated in the sentence Willson chose for his book's epigraph, that literary or theological sophistication are not required in order to recognize and respond to the truth, is a familiar theme in Willson's works. He reiterates it in Hymns and Prayers for the Children of Sharon, in a prefatory note, "To the Public":

The composer of this little work has not tried to imitate the skilful and learned Poet, in rhyming hymns; but rather to aim at simple truths by sentences easy to be understood, yet comprehensive in their measure; without even pretending to publish the eloquence of poetry, but the likes of experience: without the least sense or sentiment of this work being superior to others; but to be received as that which is according to divine favour, justly our own.<sup>31</sup>

The final description of the work in this sentence, "justly our own," strikes an aggressive note that proclaims confidence and pride in the achievements of the Children of Peace, as well as their independence of worldly considerations. Perhaps the suggestion of complacency in Willson's words may be interpreted most appropriately as evidence of his sense of the vindication of the Children of Peace's principles, as the group peacefully prospered in

their village, proving fallacious the nasty judgments many outsiders had been making since the break with the Society of Friends in 1812.

The one hundred and fifty-three hymns in Hymns and Prayers for the Children of Sharon mostly partake of the traditional pastoral vision in that they simplify complex matters and express abstractions through concrete images. In the very first hymn, in fact, two different shepherd figures appear. This is the hymn, entitled, "The love of God to little Children":

O Lord, thou art a Father dear  
 Thou art our shepherd and our bread,  
 And when we weep thine ear doth hear,  
 By thee we're cloth'd and we're fed.

Thou dost our house and home prepare,  
 There to receive thy children's feet,  
 Thou givest us songs of praise and prayer  
 On every sabbath to repeat.

We have a shepherd soft and kind,  
 From thee we know his spirit came;  
 He feeds our heart and clothes our mind  
 With songs of glory to thy name.<sup>32</sup>

This idyllic hymn is succeeded by Hymn II, "Children loving the Lord," in which Willson's awareness of the dualities of life begins already to become manifest. Willson gives the children beautiful similes for themselves to sing in the first two stanzas, but in the third, there are hints of the conditional nature of blessings:

We love our altar; and our praise  
 We offer on the sabbath days;  
 We love to in thy house be seen,  
 Like young cedars, fresh and green.

Like to the rose in Sharon grew,  
 Blest with the rain and silver dew;  
 Array'd like flocks around thy throne,  
 We praise thy name and bless our home.

To thee, O Lord, we humbly pray,  
 Be with us every sabbath day,  
 Nor let us wander far abroad,  
 The day that we should praise our God.<sup>33</sup>

By Hymn VI, "The wicked shall be forgotten of the Lord," the loss of pastoral innocence is overtly confronted. Although the piece is called a hymn, its form suggests that it may have been recited or read as a poem by the children:

How mournful, Jesus, I must be,  
 If thou dost cease to care for me;  
 How in the desert I shall cry,  
 I'm sick, and in my sins I'll die.  
 I see my father for me weep,  
 My mother mourns and cannot sleep;  
 Where'er I stray they follow me,  
 And all my sinful deeds they see.  
 They pray for mercy and for care,  
 But Christ has gone and left me there;  
 I'm like the lamb that has no rest,  
 My mind is wand'ring and distress'd;  
 Oh! children dear, my sorrows see,  
 And never be a child like me.<sup>34</sup>

The next hymn (VII), "A time to mourn," pursues this threatening theme, but hymns VIII and IX, "The Children's Blessing" and "Children rejoicing in the favours of God," move to an awareness of redemption through Jesus. The latter hymn, especially, conveys a sense of the living nature of Christ that children could understand easily:

Now we sing our joyful blessing,  
 See our sin and sorrows o'er,  
 Jesus is his own embracing,  
 Jesus has the richest store.

He is like the morning beaming,  
 Like the sun with spreading rays,  
 He is like the water streaming,  
 From the fountain of his praise.

He, the union cord is binding,  
 Now we sing the songs of love,  
 Every day we seek, we find him,  
 Wise, and harmless as the dove.

He delights to walk before us,  
 Heaven and joy are in his way,  
 To him we sing the lasting chorus,  
 Teach us Lord to sing and pray.<sup>35</sup>

With this series of nine hymns -- because most are addressed to God, they are also prayers -- Willson demonstrates through simple, vivid words the doctrine of the individual's progress from paradisaical innocence to the fall that inculcates a consciousness of human inadequacy and the need for God's redeeming love; and from this stage to a life of following Jesus' commandments, a life of praise and thanksgiving. The two closing verses of Hymn XIII, "The blessings of God to children," summarize this cyclical movement and present the miraculous sense of the change as a child might perceive it:

Why, O Jesus, didst thou love us?  
 We are oft inclin'd to sin,  
 Heaven and God are far above us,  
 Hast thou come to take us in?

Thou hast come with crowns of glory,  
 Prepare, O Lord, my sinful head,  
 Let me e'er repeat the story,  
 Jesus has my spirit fed.<sup>36</sup>

This resolve to "e'er repeat the story" also stated in Hymn I, and in many other of Willson's hymns, is an



important concept for achieving an overview of Willson's hymnody. Repetition, as shown above in relation to the Children of Israel and the Children of Peace (Ch. VI), the overlapping of times in an eternal perspective, operates both macrocosmically and microcosmically. Most succinctly, this perspective is achieved through Willson's understanding of the Genesis story of Creation: it occurs in the mind of Moses and all mankind, but also, macrocosmically, in the world after Adam. Clearly, for Willson repetition is a universal and fundamental principle. Repetition -- ever repeating the story, as Willson says in Hymn XIII -- operates in the individual's day to day life. The "story" Willson refers to is the Bible, and at the same time it is the life of Jesus the Bible teaches, and that individual human beings live or repeat. This taking on the life of Jesus is the broad meaning of "praise" as Willson uses the word. To repeat the praise of God for the mercies he shows is a primary component of the Christ-like life. In Hymn XXVII, "The visions of light," the image of the church as a mother at once focusses the phenomenon of repetition on the verbal and the experiential levels:

I see the Church in glory shine,  
 And children at her feet;  
 And every song she gives sublime  
 For children to repeat.

She shows to us a naked breast,  
 And wisdom's drawing there;

We see, with her, the saints at rest,  
And a Redeemer's prayer.

With kingly glory she's array'd,  
And with a golden crown,  
Salvation bears upon her head  
From heaven she came down.

The stars of light around her shine,  
Each servant of the Lord,  
Both in the old and latter time  
She doth in truth record.

She celebrates King David's name,  
Her son sits on his throne,  
And oh! she comes to us again  
To make her glory known.<sup>37</sup>

For Willson, enclosed in the worldly confines of time and space, the process of repeating praise is the most appropriate and effectual way to gain release in order to participate in eternal reality.

Hymns and Prayers for the Children of Sharon continues to enact the cyclical movements from joyous unity with God to an elegiac sense of sinfulness and loss, and back again to unity through Christ's love, a pattern that parallels the Bible's structure. For children, the singing of these hymns would have been both an education in the ways of life on earth, and a source of consolation. For the people listening, the children's voices singing Willson's words must have been very poignant also.

In some of these hymns for children, Willson's ecstasy lifts him to heights of beauty that he expresses with directness and simplicity within his metrical frame. To quote just one example, this is Hymn XXX, "The thoughts of

the righteous":

When I think on the works of God,  
How wonderful, how kind,  
My spirit flies so far abroad  
I hardly know my mind.

Why am I born? my soul doth say,  
A God so kind to see?  
His works in heaven, so far away,  
His stars of light to me.

To see the glory of the sun  
So often set and rise,  
And to believe there's worlds to come  
More glorious in mine eyes.

To see the often changing moon,  
And tides and oceans roll,  
To think upon the silent tomb,  
The purpose of my soul.

My heart doth swell, I burst in tears,  
To think I have a foe;  
But a still voice is in mine ears;  
All this doth glory show.<sup>38</sup>

The titles of many of the hymns towards the end of Hymns and Prayers for the Children of Sharon indicate that Willson intended them for special occasions. There are eight "Hymns for Christmas Morning;" six "For the Illumination Evening," the planting and harvest festivals held in the Temple, and eleven hymns "For a Communion Day." These occasional hymns suggest how far removed from the ways of the Society of Friends the Children of Peace had grown over the years: Quakers hold that every day is sacred to God and that special holy days are superfluous.

In 1849 Willson published a collection of three hundred and thirteen hymns under the title, Hymns and

Prayers Adapted to the Worship of God in Sharon. This book, like its predecessor for children, begins with a note, "To the Reader," that disclaims any literary pretensions, but states the purpose of the hymns as "the offerings of a simple people unto God."<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps, after all, Willson's modesty regarding the literary merits of his hymns is unnecessary, because most people realize that, as Routley puts it in Hymns and Human Life,

Hymns are the folk-song of the church militant. They are, essentially, the people's music. If a hymn cannot be sung by the congregation present, it has become for that occasion not a hymn but a choir-anthem or even an organ solo.... A hymn, moreover, must be sung by people whose minds are directed not primarily to poetic or musical but to religious values; which means that the poetry and the music have to be the kind of poetry and music which do not fight against religious values; they have to fit into the ancient scheme that prevailed in the Middle Ages when there was no difference between goodness and piety in art. This is a discipline, but not a limitation.<sup>40</sup>

John Beckwith's observations about Willson's hymns in particular are relevant at this point. In the article on Protestant hymnbooks in the Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, Beckwith states:

[David Willson] wrote over 1000 hymn verses, which were published in two volumes without tunes. They have a clarity, sincerity, and found-poetry charm comparable to the naive painted banners of the sect.<sup>41</sup>

Beckwith might also have added that the hymns are

expressions of Willson's theological doctrines, as shown above in connection with the children's hymns published in 1846.

The momentum of spiritual energy that one perceives in reading the Hymns and Prayers (1849) derives less from diversity in the hymns' content and form, and more from their similarity, which imparts an experience of mantric repetition. Willson's focussing on a relatively few images and concepts is another aspect of the hymns' being called "Hymns and Prayers": one of their purposes is the purpose of prayer, namely, to guide a person to a higher state of consciousness.

The concepts that inform Willson's Hymns and Prayers (1849) are the same ones this thesis has explored already. Preeminently, these are the role of evil in generating an awareness of individual inadequacy, the need for God's intervention and mercy, and the practising of Christ's teachings as the way to enjoy salvation, the state of peace on earth.

To express his doctrines, Willson employs many images that also commonly appear in the Bible. In the traditional manner, Willson uses the shepherd figure, and flocks; the healing of sores, relief from the burdens of sins, and release from captivity; the rock of ages, the cornerstone, the home, and the source of light, as images for God; clouds for fear; chaff for idle hours; the balance of

judgment; the worm of time's destructiveness; the olive tree of fruition; the binding cords of love; and the arrows of Christ's calls.

Besides these and other images familiar from the Bible, Willson uses a few images exceedingly often. One set of such repeated images is the cluster comprising Jesus' cleansing blood, the baptismal stream, and the spring of love. An offshoot of this group is in the direction of spiritual sustenance: feeding images, bread and wine, the cup, the dew and manna. Another offshoot from the "cleansing" group is in the direction of clothing and nakedness, and building. The fourth of the most common image groups is the journey motif which appears both as a way consciously followed, and as the experience of being lost or wandering, sometimes in stormy seas.

An image that occurs in almost half of the Hymns and Prayers (1849) is the "name": Christ's name, God's name, Abraham's name, David's name, and others. Willson uses "name" metonymically, to stand for the power or individuality of the named one, and also to stand for the named one's descendants. These usages are the way "name" is used in the Bible also. Hymn XCVIII, "Time to come," is a little anthology of the foregoing commonly used images:

The Lord's before us in the way,  
His hand doth gently lead,  
He calls the flocks that are astray  
To where the shepherds feed.

His soul doth water with his love  
 And cloth'st his own with prayer;  
 He gives us bread from heaven above,  
 And bids us enter there.

He bids us drink eternal peace,  
 And feed upon his will,  
 He bids our praise to never cease  
 But all our foes be still.

He gives us cups of precious wine,  
 His spirit to enjoy,  
 To build our house by rule and line,  
 And every hand employ.

To sing his praise by every tongue,  
 By every tuneful string,  
 His name be known, his praise be sung,  
 Our God, our Priest, our King.<sup>42</sup>

Along with the tendency to repeat metres, themes and images in Willson's hymns, another trend is also evident. This layer of meaning begins to manifest itself through the fact that Willson claimed never to use the same hymn twice, and in evidence of this, the massive number of hymns he wrote, beginning with the earliest writings of his, from 1814 onwards. The village of Sharon with its beautiful buildings, and the Children of Peace's creative, altruistic lives during much of the nineteenth century, are also indications of the spiritual stage that is corroborated by the hymns. Hymn, CLXXII, "The Revelation of God," puts this condition into words:

My hearts unseen, unfathom'd deep,  
 Oh, could my life thy measures know;  
 In thee mine eyes are taught to weep,  
 From thee do endless pleasures flow.

Art thou the mystery of the Lord,  
 A secret, crowns cannot reveal?  
 Art thou a volume of record

Of which the father keeps the seal?

Mysterious life is hidden there,  
For wisdom keeps the opening door?  
In thee the fruitful vine doth bear,  
And sin doth cease and be no more.

Oh, is my spirit with the Lord?  
Or dare my tongue presume to say  
That life's to me a seal'd record,  
And all I have one shorten'd day.

The Lord is life, and hope, and fear,  
I am his, but nothing is mine;  
And every day which doth appear  
Reveals the measure of my time.<sup>43</sup>

In The Great Code, Northrop Frye describes this state that Willson communicates in his hymns as almost inevitable:

Metaphors of unity and integration take us only so far, because they are derived from the finiteness of the human mind. If we are to expand our vision into the genuinely infinite, that vision becomes decentral-ized. We follow a 'way' or direction until we reach the state of innocence symbolized by the sheep in the twenty-third Psalm, where we are back to wandering, but where wandering no longer means being lost.<sup>44</sup>

From the centripetal urges and images achieved in his Impressions of the Mind, Willson -- perhaps inevitably -- transposes to the centrifugal mode, the faithful innocent wandering in God's care. When one considers Willson's theology and his understanding of creation, this return to Eden that both Sharon, Upper Canada, and Willson's hymns express, should not come as a surprise. "Foreknowledge," Hymn CCLXVII, also very distinctly presents the nature of the innocent state:

If with my God my spirit dwells,  
My frame on earth below,



As God to man his heart reveals,  
Is all that he can know.

He's subject to a boundless God  
When he doth grace pursue,  
His feet are in an endless road,  
His journey's never through.

Oh man! what can thy soul relate?  
The measure thou contain'st,  
Is but a servant at the gate;  
By boasting thou profan'st!

If God may give thy watchful eyes  
A measure to foresee,  
So far he's made thy spirit rise,  
No further canst thou see.<sup>45</sup>

A more detailed examination of the hymns David Willson published in the 1840's and 1850's is not possible within the confines of this thesis, but the major background and motifs of Willson's hymns have been sketched out in this chapter.<sup>46</sup> With Willson's having attained the spiritual plane he conveys through his hymns, one might wonder what there is left for him to accomplish. The following chapter on his memorials and writings of the 1850's and 1860's will complete this survey of Willson's works.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Literary History of Canada, ed. C. Klinck, et al. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), I, 498.

<sup>2</sup> L.H.C., I, 156.

<sup>3</sup> L.H.C., I, 156.

<sup>4</sup> L.H.C., I, 156.

<sup>5</sup> L.H.C., I, 454.

<sup>6</sup> These letters are in the Baldwin Room Collection, Metropolitan Toronto Public Library (Central Branch), Toronto, and on photocopy at the D. B. Weldon Library, U.W.O. Another facet of Willson's political activity may be inferred from this poem, "On parting with Robt. Gourlay," dated July 20, 1840. Sharon Museum ms. #971.28.74.

<sup>7</sup> W. J. McIntyre, Early Writings of David Willson (Toronto: York Pioneer and Historical Society, 1974), p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> W. J. McIntyre, "David Willson and Government, Politics and Society in Upper Canada," The York Pioneer, 1974, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> David Willson, Ms. volume "C" of the Pinder Collection, entry for August 1, 1837. Quoted by McIntyre in The York Pioneer article, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Newspaper article from The Mirror, no date; envelope 2361, Mackenzie-Lindsey Papers, P.A.O.

11 Mackenzie Papers, Ms. 516, reels 10 and 13, P.A.O. contain letters from Willson to Mackenzie of the 1850's.

12 A "Department Order" of the General Post Office, dated Quebec, 6th February, 1841, reports that the new post office at Sharon had been commissioned. The document is from the Public Archives of Canada, Records of the Post Office, Record Group 3, vol. 1171. Robert J. Terry, a teacher in Sharon around the turn of the century, replied to a query from the Geographical Department in Ottawa in a letter dated Sharon, Nov. 10th '05, with the following account of the name of the village:

This place was originally named Hope. The P. O. Department asked that the name be changed to prevent confusion with Port Hope.

The matter was referred to David Wilson who was leader and Pastor of the religious society here called "The Children of Peace."

The letter is from File 31D/3 of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical names, Ottawa. Thanks to Maureen Ryan of the Government Documents Department, D. B. Weldon library, U.W.O., for help in locating these items.

13 Good introductory articles and bibliographies on the subject of hymns are contained in the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, VII, and the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, pp. 356-358.

14 G. Margoliouth, "Hebrew Hymns," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, VII, 43.

15 Eric Routley, Hymns and Human Life (London: John Murray, 1952), pp. 33-34.

16 Routley, pp. 38-39.

17 Routley, p. 39.

18 Routley, p. 64.

19 Routley, p. 74.

20 Routley, p. 75: chapter subtitle.

21 David Willson, A Collection of Items of the Life of David Willson (Newmarket: G. S. Porter, 1853), p. 8.

22 From the title, The True Psalmody; or the Bible Psalms: The Church's Only Manual of Praise, by J. M. Willson, J. T. Cooper, R. J. Black, William Sterret (Philadelphia: W. S. Young, 1859).

- 23 The True Psalmody, p. v. ✓
- 24 See H. A. Glass, The Story of the Psalters (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., 1888), p. 12.
- 25 The True Psalmody, p. 226.
- 26 Isaac Watts, The Psalms of David, Imitated in the Language of the New-Testament, and Applied to the Christian State and Worship (Exeter, N. H.: J. J. Williams, 1818).
- 27 Anon., The Psalms of David in Metre (Edinburgh: D. H. Blair and M. T. Bruce; London: Samuel Bagster, 1831), title page.
- 28 The Psalms of David in Metre, p. 24.
- 29 David Willson, Hymns and Prayers Adapted to the Worship of God in Sharon (Newmarket: G. S. Porter, 1849), pp. 50-51.
- 30 Daniel Berrigan, Uncommon Praise: A Book of Psalms (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), p. xi.
- 31 David Willson, Hymns and Prayers for the Children of Sharon (Newmarket: G. S. Porter, 1846), unnumbered page.
- 32 Willson, Hymns and Prayers (1846), p. 1.
- 33 Willson, Hymns and Prayers (1846), p. 2.
- 34 Willson, Hymns and Prayers (1846), p. 6.
- 35 Willson, Hymns and Prayers (1846), pp. 8-9.
- 36 Willson, Hymns and Prayers (1846), p. 13.
- 37 Willson, Hymns and Prayers (1846), pp. 18-19.
- 38 Willson, Hymns and Prayers (1846), pp. 20-21.
- 39 Willson, Hymns and Prayers (1849), p. 3.
- 40 Routley, p. 3.
- 41 John Beckwith, "Hymnbooks, Protestant," Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, eds. H. Kallman, G. Potvin, K. Winters (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 442.
- 42 Willson, Hymns and Prayers (1849), p. 67.

43 Willson, Hymns and Prayers (1849), pp. 115-116.

44 Northrop Frye, The Great Code, p. 168.

45 Willson, Hymns and Prayers (1849), pp. 176-177.

46 Willson published two collections of hymns in 1853: Hymns of Praise, containing Doctrine and Prayer, adapted to the Worship of God in Sharon (Newmarket: G. S. Porter, 1853); and Sacred Impressions of the Mind, in Praise and Prayer, Devoted to God in Worship by the Children of Peace in Sharon (Newmarket: Jackson and Hendersöh, 1853).

## CHAPTER VIII

### LAST THINGS

Willson's eschatology developed both on the personal and the symbolic levels throughout his eighty-seven-year long life. As early as 1815, Willson wrote a farewell note to his friends and acquaintances (quoted above, chapter IV). In 1815 he was only thirty-seven. As spiritual leader of the Children of Peace, Willson composed funeral hymns and memorial poems for deceased members of the group, and conducted their burial rites at the Sharon cemetery a mile south of the village. He outlived most of the original Children of Peace, including his closest friends. Young mothers -- even Willson's own daughters, Mary (d. September 6, 1848, at thirty-four) and Sarah (d. April 18, 1853, at forty-nine), -- and babies are the subjects of many of Willson's memorials. Death impressed itself often on Willson, and, as the ever-increasing frequency of

memorials testifies, death became more and more a part of his life as he grew older.

"Signs of the parting day," written by Willson on January 28, 1840, presents a personal intimation of the author's mortality, and what death means to him:

Farewell, dear children, long farewell,  
 My soul must go and leave you here.  
 One solemn truth to you I tell  
 I must before my God appear.  
 Long time I have your parent been,  
 A watchful shepherd of the fold,  
 My spirit's been forever green,  
 Bearing the fruit that was of old.  
 Although my flesh shall see decay,  
 My life within will never die,  
 And though this body pass away,  
 My spirit will ascend on high.  
 Oh, may you my remembrance keep,  
 God's will and truth to you I've told,  
 When others would destroy the sheep,  
 I was your watchman round the fold.  
 You have no time in mirth to spare,  
 From the practice come away,  
 You have the name of God to bear.  
 'Tis time for you to watch and pray,  
 My spirit is no longer here,  
 The angel that of old hath swore  
 The Lord in justice will appear  
 And times has been is now no more.  
 There is a purpose in the call,  
 I hear the tidings, come away,  
 Stand, stand apart from great and small,  
 The Lord will be thy judge this day.  
 There is a stone to men unknown,  
 Plac'd for my feet to stand upon;  
 Children tare not and are mine own,  
 'Tis there your father's mind is gone.  
 Lift up your eyes and upward look,  
 For heaven above must be your care,  
 And him by whom Mount Horeb shook,  
 Your judge and saviour will appear.  
 I've heard the tongue that did despise,  
 I've drank the frowns that are my due,  
 To heaven I must lift up mine eyes,  
 Oh, house of God, farewell to you.

In contrast to this mood of resignation, a poem Willson wrote almost two years later, on December 2, 1841, "Mourning and Death," resounds with despair. The poem is an extreme expression of his sense of death's sting:

When I look on the coming grave,  
My name and interest I must leave,  
And see my children far abroad  
From the direction of my God.

It chills my soul, my limbs doth shake,  
Mine eyes from Earth's repose awake,  
My thoughts from Earth doth far remove,  
Where shall I find a saviour's love?

Where are the offerings I have made?  
Or where have I my tribute paid?  
Oh where did I repeat my praise,  
Or give to God my offerings days?  
In mourning before his face,  
Judged by the dictates of his grace,  
Oh where shall I for refuge flee,  
That's lost my life in vanity?<sup>2</sup>

These two poems, "Signs of the parting day," and "Mourning and Death," seem to have been written during Willson's blackest moods. In contrast, his doctrine of death is quite different.

Besides his own death and the emotions associated with it, Willson contemplated death in two ways: death as a spiritual event within life, and death as the physical end to life. The latter aspect of death receives Willson's attention through the memorials he was often called upon to compose. His most common strategy in these memorials is to reflect on the life and death of the dead person through that person's own perceptions, as Willson imagines the dead



one to be speaking. The scenario that this technique establishes is, that death is a gate and the dead person is speaking to the living from the other side of a fence. The suggestion of spiritual immortality is strong, and could have been of solace to the bereaved at the various funerals. A typical example of such a memorial is "To the Memory of Martha, Daughter of William and Mary Reid, deceased December 24th, 1843, aged 49 Years and 4 days":

This day I from my kindred part;  
 The Lord hath call'd my life away,  
 I languished with a bleeding heart,  
 Until I saw my dying day.

My memory I on record leave,  
 The number of my dying pains;  
 My habitation is the grave,  
 Where none around of grief complain.

Near to my mother, down I'll lie,  
 And my dear sister by my side;  
 No living friends, nor kindred by  
 That hath my thirsting lips supplied.

Alone with these I'll ever be,  
 With tombs of friendless bodies there;  
 But brothers dear will come to me,  
 Their visage will with mine compare....<sup>3</sup>

On a few other occasions, Willson's memorial verses express their author's feelings about the dead person. Concerning Rachel Lundy, an intimate friend of Willson's, and one of the original Children of Peace, he wrote, on January 5, 1844:

Dear children for a mother mourn,  
 But not because her person's gone,  
 Her faith her living soul did keep,  
 Faith was the garment she put on.

And so she past her tedious years  
 Amidst a world of pride and scorn;  
 May it be number'd in our ears,  
 Her spirit was of mercy born.

She took what others did reject,  
 And walk'd as she had light to see.  
 When on her lifetime I reflect,  
 She's been a sister unto me.

Her faith in others did arise,  
 Likewise a mother she became;  
 Her life is present in mine eyes  
 While I am writing down her name.

And as an infant to the breast,  
 She did my words to hers receive,  
 So lived untill her time to rest,  
 As she at first did so believe.<sup>4</sup>

The surviving copy of this memorial to Rachel Lundy is in Willson's own handwriting. Usually the memorials were printed at the Era's shop in Newmarket, to be circulated and posted up around Sharon. This custom of posting memorials is still observed in many European villages.

As Willson grew into old age, the subject of death's religious significance occupied him in his writings, particularly in his final book, The Practical Life of the Author (1860).<sup>5</sup> In the following excerpt from this work, Willson distinguishes physical from spiritual death, showing their relationship:

The Spirit of Christ, or the Word of God, bounds the whole human family; and without the bounds of the mind of a Redeemer, there is not any thing revealed to us; and the death of Christ is open conviction for sin, and the grave is the end of misery to the converted; for the Son of God put off the wages of sin in his death; but the salvation of the soul pertaineth not to the death of the body, but the change of the mind; his death and

resurrection was in the body -- the inheritance of the mind was Eden -- the first condition of man. In his death he passed the narrow way to life, which straitens the human mind. He passed through the wielding sword -- the sacred flame -- through which the spirit of sin; or human invention cannot live; and by so doing, he hath opened a door for all nations, great and small, without partiality to the tree of life.<sup>6</sup>

Later in The Practical Life, Willson emphasizes what physical death means to the living person:

The death of the body is only a chastisement from the Lord, to purify the soul with fear, lest the human mind should not be ready for the immortal change. All that God doeth it is forever; and not any thing is lost that God has made or created, therefore, eternity is with us, because God liveth, and all are with him in spirit in his own mind.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly to his understanding of the role of evil in life, Willson sees physical death as an experience akin to the sacrament of baptism: "to purify the soul with fear." As the first excerpt from The Practical Life makes clear, the purification must take place within the "Spirit of Christ," because, "without the bounds of the mind of a Redeemer, there is not any thing revealed to us."

For Willson, spiritual death within physical life most often appears to him in the form of isolation and solitude. His rejection by the Quakers in 1812 was for him a type of death.<sup>8</sup> In the description of the events that led up to the break with the Society of Friends, presented by Willson in The Practical Life, isolation plays a large part. Through his death to the physical world, Willson

discovers communion with the spiritual world, even before he joined the Quakers:

Stillness of the tongue and a retired life hath been my schoolmaster, and the impressions of my own soul my education. I have been separated from all flesh, religious and profane by the moving of a Spirit to me then unknown, but the impression was with belief that it was good; and I obeyed the vision, and my action became according to the law of my heart. Although I hungered for communion, I could not comply without transgressing my inward law. Thus I passed seven years in retired life, beginning in 1801; often seeking lonely places wherein to retire and worship the Spirit that had received my soul in trust, to which I gave full credence and did obey. I was comforted with many visions of light which gave understanding to my soul.<sup>8</sup>

For many years, Willson writes, he kept silence, choosing to retain his "secret impressions as sacred from the ears of all flesh,"<sup>9</sup> even while he was working as a member of the Society of Friends. At last he was moved to speak, to relate his spiritual understandings to his fellows in faith. The consequences of Willson's attempt to convey his vision were disastrous. The events, as Willson tells of them nearly fifty years later, move to a rhythm of alternating birth and death in the physical and spiritual realms. As a Quaker, Willson recalls, he experienced a great tension between the two planes of existence:

I continued with them seven years in obedience, fulfilling many appointments conferred upon me in support of their system, in which period of time I was greatly straightened with my own concerns and the impressions of my mind. My soul was not only separated from all

flesh as to my inward feelings, but from all religious records, even to the Bible, and I was constrained to live by my own knowledge of the Word of God operating upon my mind. My lonesome and solitary life was beyond expression to convey to another, but is known this day to the Giver of gifts, and the purpose for which they are given.... And before I thought myself ready, I found the sentence written in the law of my heart, -- to arise and speak of the Lord in the society of Quakers, of which I was then a member in good esteem, by elders and ministers, and the keepers of the fold.... But, oh! the disappointment that followed my few words of utterance cannot be conceived within the bounds of human skill. The pillars of the house apparently removed from their standing, their love to me became hatred, and condemnation rose where justification had been, and I was set at nought by my brethren.<sup>10</sup>

This painful ostracism, however, contained a spiritual meaning of importance:

I continued to follow the guide of my soul, and parted with all on earth for my Redeemer's sake; and who demanded my heart at my hands as a sacrifice for sin, and the salvation of my life.<sup>11</sup>

A few people joined with Willson, and a great gulf opened between the Children of Peace and the Society of Friends, the gulf between life and death:

But lest I had not done justice to my former friends, I stated my case to superior meetings, for we were in Upper Canada, and far from the throne of judgment in that society. My long travels and distant visits were like attending at the tombs, all were silent though error was the sentiment abroad and at home.... Our members increased; censurers did abound; scoffing was without limitation; the religious and profane both joined in one song, and we became the sport of all that passed us by. We were as the dead by the way side.<sup>12</sup>

From this condition of death-in-life the Children of Peace

were to be reborn, no matter what former friends and other outsiders did or said. This sense of spiritual rebirth, indeed, became the basic tenet of their doctrine about death that Willson expounds in The Practical Life:

We believe in the resurrection of the spirit of the deceased, but are not confirmed as to the return of the person; but believing the resurrection to arise by the word of God, is calling us to arise from the death of our sins to a life unto God in which he hath full power over us; and that the sinner shall rise to conviction we entertain no doubt, but that regeneration will bring the sinner and saint into one communion through the baptism of the spirit; and they that did not know the Lord by experience to declare the glory of his name.... It hath appeared unto us that it is the will of God that we should live independent, and borrow not of the clergy or christian churches, but of him alone. And we have accordingly been recompensed beyond our expectations, and abundantly satisfied with the measures we have received, and we know that God hath given.<sup>13</sup>

Dependence on God, then, may lead to ostracism by human society, but this isolation from society became an independence exceedingly fruitful for the Children of Peace.

From the foregoing account of Willson's eschatology, it is possible to see the whole context in which his visionary experiences -- "spirit revelation" -- occurred. Willson's visions emerge from the death-like suffering of solitude that actually enabled him to communicate directly with his God, and then return to help renew his small society. In The Practical Life Willson recounts in minute detail two visions that are fundamental to the pattern of

life the Children of Peace created.

Willson characterizes his "First Vision" as a "description of the Church of Christ."<sup>13</sup> To this vision, he assigns the date, June 21, 1812, which was a few months before the official break with the Quakers. The vision commences with an erotic depiction of the Church as a beautiful woman:

The first that I saw was her breasts in the east, and they appeared like two mountains of snow beneath the rising sun, and they were filled with wine and milk to the support of her children. Her mantle was opened and they were bare before me, and I saw that with their beauty she would tempt the nations to her love. Her face was like the sun; her countenance sharper than steel, and the words of her mouth was sharper than a two-edged sword to the defence of her children. Her mantle was red as scarlet, stained with the blood of saints and martyrs, (which was her children) slain since the days of Jesus Christ, from which my blood was not free. -- She was girt about with a girdle of pure gold, which is faith in God.... And as I looked upon her she appeared to be alone and in a mournful condition, and there was no one near to grant her any relief. I also saw all kinds of four footed beasts of prey lying at her feet, and they lay as though they slept; yet they slept not; but they lay and watched with their weapons concealed under their garments to destroy her children as soon as they should be brought forth. And as I beheld her condition my sorrow increased, and I was exceeding sorrowful before God, for she was ready to bring forth children.<sup>14</sup>

This image is reminiscent of the one in Revelation of the "woman clothed with the sun... travelling in birth," who "fled into the wilderness" (Revelation 12: 1, 2, 6). Also, Willson's vision incorporates parts of St. John's descrip-

tion of the "one like unto the Son of man" (Revelation 1: 13), the glorified Christ, when he appears in the isle of Patmos, and tells St. John what to write to the seven churches. St. John writes:

out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. (Revelation 1: 16.)

Willson's vision unites the Christ-figure and the bride of Christ, the Church; but the vision divides when Willson hears a voice:

And as I mourned, I heard a voice say unto me, -- Bow thy shoulders and wash her feet; set her feet upon thy shoulders, or bear her sorrows, and bear her away, and set her feet upon the waters or the wind, that the inhabitants of the earth may behold her beauty, and that she may bring forth her children in peace; that her mantle may be no more stained with blood, for beasts of prey cannot walk on the waters. 15

Wilson then envisions his own role to be that of a midwife in the bringing to birth of God's kingdom on earth. One notices again that the visions of birth -- the spurs to action that Willson receives -- arise out of his suffering and mourning, death-like conditions. The vision concludes by focussing on the new-born child. Willson presents a full exegesis of the vision as he relates it, showing his deep understanding of the symbolic structures he employs:

I cried alone as one forsaken of the Lord, because there was not anyone to hear my lonesome cry, nor sympathize with me in the mournful feelings of my mind. Then appeared unto me the following vision from the Lord: -- And the first that I saw was a stream of pure



water descending from the east; pure water is the signification of clear grace from the Lord, and as it was from the east it is an expression of ancient wisdom being restored to the world, and the naked infant walking therein implies walking back to ancient simplicity, -- when the heart of man had communication with God; and being naked implies a new born soul that is born of the Lord, and has no help but God alone, -- and being naked has a signification of putting off the old man with his deeds, and is prepared to receive a new garment from the Lord. And this child is the offspring of the Church or mother above described to the world. And the end of the vision is a plain expression of being at peace with God....<sup>16</sup>

Willson's expression, "being at peace with God," reinforces one's sense that this vision is Willson's mythical way of defining the motivation behind the Children of Peace.

The "Second Vision" occurred after the Quaker disownments of late summer, 1812, the beginning of the Children of Peace. This vision is a continuation of the first, and ends in a startling way:

And as I was beholding the course of the water I saw an infant travelling therein against the current and towards the east; it was the size of a new-born babe -- it was without food or raiment, and was altogether naked before me.... It looked neither to the right hand nor to the left, nor gave any attention to any thing that dwelt upon the face of the earth, but followed the course of the water through all.... And the word of God said unto me 'dress the child and keep it clean.' And I followed the child three days and three nights; for I had received nothing wherewith to clothe the child, or yet keep it clean; therefore I did watch the course thereof until I saw it ascend a sea both still and calm, and the infant became a virgin, clothed with a white robe, girt about with a band of gold, which she put on in memory of the faith of her infancy. Her hair was the color of pure gold;

her face was fair as the eastern sun; her breasts were bare, and she was without shame... and her song was glory and honor, and thanksgiving and praise unto Him that liveth for ever.... And she told me that her song was a song of everlasting praise, and that I must return to the earth and declare the ways of the Lord unto the people; and as I had guarded her in her infancy, so she would guard me in my old age, and when I had done with all things below I should return to her and partake of all her glory, and she would learn me to sing the song of immortality and eternal life, thanksgiving and praise unto Him that liveth for ever and ever.<sup>17</sup>

Clearly underpinning the "mother to child to virgin", the "river to sea", "west to east", and the "old man returning to the younger singer" imagery, is the motif of the circle coming to completion. It is a motif slightly altered from Impressions, where the trend of the images is a reaching towards the circle's mystical centre. In 1860, writing his Practical Life, Willson sees his own long life with the Children of Peace as a never-ending circle.

When he looked back over his life in Upper Canada, the impression of the various circles of death and rebirth on a variety of levels must have been an awe-inspiring revelation to Willson. From the Lake Ontario shipwreck that turned into a safe arrival, with his family clinging to the rim of a spinning wheel; from his active career with the Society of Friends that turned into disownment and bitterness in 1812; from private isolation, despair and suffering that turned into the creation of works of literature, hymns of joy and praise, beautiful buildings, and a thriving

community; from the spring festival in the Temple to the autumn harvest illumination there; from the deaths of the old people, young mothers and their babies, to the joys of children being born and educated in the schools of Sharon: all of these elements of Willson's life form circles of renewal that suggest an eternal process. Unlike some mystics who insist that their visions are ineffable and beyond words, Willson himself, and his fellow Children of Peace, made a tangible reality out of "being at peace with God."

Two years before The Practical Life, Willson published Mysteries of the Mind; or Operations of Grace. In this work he reaffirms the necessity of acting upon one's principles and beliefs:

God reveals himself to man by action. Man practiseth; God receiveth of us whether our deeds be good or ill.<sup>18</sup>

Fifteen years earlier, in "The Creed of Sharon," a broadside, Willson expressed this principle in these words:

Practical life is experimental knowledge, and is alone worthy to be taught for doctrine. The law of Moses leads to practice. The Gospel of the Son of God is a line of a practical life -- mysteries revealed by works and rewards....

Practice brings justification to the soul, and practice destroys the heart, and it becomes a consuming flame of conviction for sin. -- This is the resurrection of the good and the evil.<sup>19</sup>

Willson's practice in this give-and-take cycle between people and God, of course, is in his creation of books,

hymns, buildings and a peaceful human society.

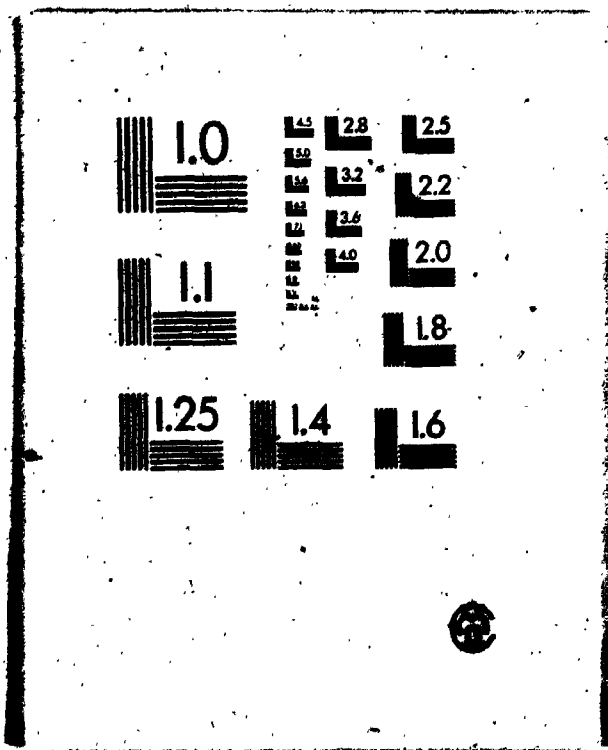
Mysteries of the Mind also contains a couple of poems that are probably the most personal self-portrayal that Willson wrote. Significantly, -- and predicatably by now -- the circle motif is strongly felt in both. "Life" (October 29, 1857) evokes the faith that is the seed of Willson's achievements:

I only write, as I can see;  
 I know there is a God to me,  
 And in my mind's a dwelling place,  
 Where I receive the light of grace.  
 And this I know from first to last  
 I know the time and life I've past;  
 In all my glory I am dust;  
 And have a life in God to trust,  
 I have no treasure of mine own,  
 For man is to himself unknown;  
 Nor can his soul within him see,  
 What God is now, or is to be;  
 In time and life he must depend,  
 From his beginning to his end.<sup>20</sup>

"Life to Come" (December 9, 1857), the poem that concludes Mysteries of the Mind, enacts the very phenomenon it describes as "The time is now and is to come." Not only is Willson writing about a future, but about exactly what the Children of Peace were doing and had been doing all along:

Full half my spirit is the Jew,  
 The other half is Christian too;  
 There is an empty space between,  
 Where Jew nor Christians never been:  
 And there the Lord hath laid a stone,  
 That is to all the world unknown;  
 The time is now and is to come,  
 When all the tribes of earth are one.  
 And there Jehovah's placed his name,  
 And there he will forever reign;  
 And what is now still is to be,  
 My God, when all shall worship thee.

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Nor tribes nor sects divide no more,  
 But be as man hath seen before;  
 When God alone o'er man did reign,  
 Is time that is to come again....<sup>21</sup>

According to The Newmarket Era, Willson, "although advanced in age beyond the common lot of man, conducted the services with more than usual ability and earnestness, and spoke with much feeling"<sup>22</sup> on June 3, 1865, the previous spring's festival, at which over five hundred people attended. The last illumination at the Temple in Sharon that David Willson attended was held in the autumn of 1865. For this illumination, Willson wrote a poem, "Preparation for a feast," on the only surviving copy of which is recorded, "Written by David Willson by the request of the cooks who prepared the dinner for September Feast on Saturday, 2nd 1865."<sup>23</sup> Shortly after, Willson composed a memorial for William Graham Willson, a one-year old baby who died on October 12, 1865. The final work of Willson's that is known is a manuscript copy of a hymn he wrote for Christmas Day, 1865: "Children owning the Love of God on Christmas Day." Considering all that has been observed about the significance of circles to Willson, one finds this address by an old man to young children to be an extraordinarily apt conclusion to Willson's writing life;

Dear little children of my love  
 Your confidence I feel  
 The Lord looks down from heaven above  
 And doth his love reveal.

Ye little young and chosen few  
 The name of God to bear

May he be with you life-time through  
And in the end be there....<sup>24</sup>

The Newmarket Era of January 19, 1866 presents our final glimpse of David Willson:

During the week he has been called to suffer the loss of the partner of his life, which, together with his former extreme weakness and decrepitude, is fast sinking his once strong and vigorous frame.... For some years the partial loss of his sense of hearing has militated against free conversation; but his powers of mind and quickness of perception are quite as good as when we first became acquainted with him some thirteen years ago.<sup>25</sup>

Phebe Willson had died on Sunday, January 14, 1866,<sup>26</sup> and Willson actually died on the 19th, the date of the above note in the Era. The obituary in the Era of January 26, 1866 summarizes Willson's career very sympathetically, ending with these words:

But the old patriarch has gone, -- a long life has been devoted zealously to the elevation and instruction of his adherents, and everything used in worship where he has so long stood, bears the impress of mourning. He leaves behind his three sons and a large circle of friends to mourn his loss.

Appended to the obituary is a poem by Willson, "Preparations for Death," that was read at his funeral. His loving spirit shines throughout the lines. In addition, the poem harmonizes the personal and doctrinal meanings that death held for Willson:

Farewell, ye hills, and fields, and plains,  
To fruitful vales and shading groves:  
Farewell to great and honoured names --  
Death, on my trembling spirit moves.

Ye heavenly lights that on me shine,  
 To whom the kindred nations bow --  
 No more your comfort can be mine;  
 I bid farewell and leave you now.

Farewell to you my morning suns,  
 It once was joy to see you rise;  
 But as the shade of death now comes,  
 I see your light with weeping eyes.

Farewell ye harvests of the field,  
 And flowers that in the valleys grow;  
 Nor grazing flocks their pleasures yield --  
 My thoughts are in the grave below.

Farewell, ye little winding streams,  
 That through the growing meadows run;  
 And flowery gardens clothed with green --  
 No more to me your pleasures come.

My feathered friends of morning songs  
 Whose homes the green and spreading bough,  
 I lent mine ear to hear your tongues --  
 It yields no joy to hear you now.

Farewell to you, my walks abroad,  
 The limbs that bore my frame gave way;  
 A withering plant before my God,  
 I am to friends and foes this day.

Farewell ye altars and my pen,  
 I'm drawing near the close of time;  
 Farewell to you fault-finding men,  
 I'm weak to write the sacred line.

Farewell to you my dearest friends,  
 That hath with me my sorrows bore --  
 On God alone my soul depends,  
 For you can strengthen me no more.

Farewell to you my little ones,  
 In whom I have had great delight --  
 Where I had joy now sorrow comes,  
 My mornings are like shades of night.

Like plants that in the garden grow,  
 Set by your heavenly Father's hand:  
 No more shall I your blessings know,  
 I'll cease to at your altars stand.

My heart I leave in sacred praise,



'Twas heaven above that moved your tongue;  
 I bid farewell to pleasant days,  
 To Sabbaths where your praise is sung;

Farewell to melody and strains  
 That once did fill my listening ear --  
 Ye joyful band that peace proclaims,  
 I leave you with a glistening tear.

Farewell to you my house and home,  
 But a few groans shall I repeat,  
 My last companion is the tomb,  
 And then my ancient friends I'll meet.

Farewell to age and sorrow worn,  
 The staff and pillow of my head;  
 Age and infirmity I've borne --  
 A painful night and restless bed.

Farewell unto the House of God,  
 Where long my trembling frame hath stood;  
 Farewell to all that are abroad --  
 To friends and foes I wish all good.<sup>28</sup>

Over the twenty-five years following Willson's death, the Children of Peace gradually declined. Their services at first consisted in part of readings from David Willson's works. These readings were done by Willson's son, John David, who had to be replaced after 1876, when he became too infirm to carry on. Financial and legal disputes, as well as the influx of other religious groups to Sharon, further retarded the energy of the Children of Peace. The feasts of old became Sunday-school picnics held sporadically. By 1890, the buildings had been sold.<sup>29</sup>

It seems that in spite of Willson's attempts to minimize his own leadership role, insisting always on equality, he was indeed the driving force, without whose contribution the Children of Peace could not continue. The

dependence of the Children of Peace on the creative energies of Willson, built up over fifty-five years, must have been substantial. However, more abstractly, it is also plausible to see in the practice of reading Willson's old sermons at the services after his death, a contradiction of one of the fundamental tenets of Willson's faith, that "the children's bread is ever new." The reading of old sermons may be interpreted as evidence of the survivors' failure of faith in God whom Willson loved and trusted so fully, with such substantial rewards. The financial and legal quarrels of the 1880's suggest the total breakdown of love among the Children of Peace, and certainly the end of the peace they had enjoyed.

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To conclude this thesis on David Willson, I will state briefly what it has accomplished. It is the first full-length treatment of Willson, and the first to attempt a detailed overview of all of his works. During my research I discovered two publications of Willson's, A Testimony to the People Called Quakers (1816) and A Present to the Teachers and Rulers of Society (1821), and a large collection of manuscripts that never had been noted by anyone working on Willson. To assemble the most complete bibliography of Willson's works to date, I helped catalogue

and photocopy the collection of manuscripts and books at the Sharon Temple Museum. (Copies are now in Special Collections, D. B. Weldon Library, U.W.O.) In these ways, this thesis is a beginning for scholarly and popular appreciation of an important early Canadian writer.

The thesis both locates Willson in reference to external influences, and explores some of the internal achievements of his writings. In the former areas, the thesis demonstrates Willson's participation in the Western mystical tradition through his knowledge of George Fox and the similarity of Willson's insights to those of Jacob Boehme, the chief mystical influence on Fox. Made possible by a close examination of Quaker documents in Philadelphia, New York, and Canada, the thesis presents the details of Willson's relations with the Quakerism of his day. Some of these details are historical: the date of his joining the Society of Friends, and that he joined for the first time in Upper Canada, probably with the encouragement of his wife, Phebe. Some of the details are theological. In describing the committees Willson served on, the thesis shows how these involvements influenced Willson's beliefs. The thesis establishes the relation of the Children of Peace's break with the Society of Friends in 1812 to the Hicksite/Orthodox controversy and schism of 1828. In regard to Upper Canadian history, the thesis touches on documents that show Willson's relations with Upper Canadian govern-

ment policies early in the nineteenth century, with the early Quaker settlers near York, such as Timothy Rogers, with Archdeacon John Strachan, with William Lyon Mackenzie and the Rebellion of 1837, with Robert Baldwin and the Reform Party. The thesis briefly indicates the kinds of literature being written in Upper Canada contemporary with Willson, as well as the view of the Children of Peace recorded by some travelling writers. In this area Willson is related to contemporary utopian experimentation. Willson's hymnody is related to the traditions of English hymnody, in particular, the Presbyterian metrical Psalms. Finally, the thesis advances a hypothesis about the cause of the Children of Peace's demise after Willson's death.

Within this external or contextual framework, the thesis examines Willson's literary works chronologically. It studies the development of Willson's theology, the major topic of his writings, from its mystical bases in Boehme and Fox, through a reaction to the dogmatism of contemporary Quakerism, and ultimately to his own formulations. Especially important to an understanding of Willson's works, the thesis establishes, are the themes of judgment and discipline; the problem of evil; the relations of nature with spirit; Christ's role as mediator and guide on the return to paradise through repentance, love, and forgiveness, -- the cycle recorded in the Bible from Revelation to Genesis to paradise; and his eschatology;

death as physical and spiritual event.

The most important motif in Willson's writing (and in his architecture) is the circle. The thesis examines the circular principle in Impressions, where the direction is centripetal; in Willson's hymns, where the direction is centrifugal; and in his last works, where the perimeters of many circles on various levels of life -- seasons, youth, and old age, for instance, -- appear to Willson to be closing in sign of fulfillment and completion, yet with a sense of repetition. Willson also employs repetition to effect his perception of circular overlapping in time, such as in the Old and New Testaments, and as well, repetition in Willson's work often effects a mantric escape from time. Repetition is an important aspect of Willson's exegeses of levels of meaning in the Bible, as shown in his sermons: the macrocosmic creation Moses records in Genesis also takes place in the individual human consciousness; the Children of Israel are archetypes of the Children of Peace in their wilderness home and in the mercies God shows them; Willson himself, like King David, believed the meaning of life is to praise God in psalms, hymns, a temple, prayer and sacrifice. Biblical symbolism and imagery, with which Willson's work is saturated, reiterate this sense of circularity and repetition that Willson so strongly felt.

While most of the few previous writers on Willson have treated his writings as contemptible eccentricities, --

Dr. Reaney, John Beckwith, and Jean McFall are the main exceptions -- my orientation in this thesis has been to try to comprehend Willson in large perspectives, as just outlined. The result is that such former butts of ridicule as Willson's sympathy with the Jews and King David, and his visions, to cite just three examples, may be consistent with a highly respectable and sensible, if radically challenging, system of beliefs. Willson's lack of literary pretensions and the straightforward, "found-poetry charm," -- in Beckwith's phrase, -- that the writings display, until now have disqualified Willson from almost any attention except patronizing "literary" haughtiness. This thesis shows that in the larger perspectives afforded by the entire canon of Willson's work and the external contexts, these qualities of straightforwardness are positively valuable. Equality of all people was one of Willson's abiding principles, of which universal accessibility in his writings would have been a corollary. And, regarding Willson's visionary experiences, his skill, tenacity, and success in bringing them to life, are causes for admiration at least.

Two other impressions have become more and more certain as my work on this thesis has approached its conclusion. The first derives from the need I felt to restrain the thesis to the overview perspective rather than to follow my inclinations to delve into the minutiae of

Willson's work and career. Out of this sense, imposed by commitment to my prospectus and spatial limitations of a thesis, comes the certainty that many fascinating topics arising from Willson's writings remain to be explored. Even a glance at the bibliography forcefully confirms this.

The other impression that contact with Willson's writings has imparted to me is a blend of admiration for his achievements, mentioned before, with a belief that Willson's fresh religious vision holds great potential for the present. With politics and economics holding sway in our world, it seems we have lost our sense of the truly human aspects of life. Willson's emphasis on practical religion -- universal love as the way of life -- seems archaic and naive in our sophisticated age of nuclear diplomacy and billion-dollar deficits. Nevertheless, I think the Children of Peace lived much closer to the truth of human life than the position where the most powerful people of our world have led us today. That this thesis may help to make Willson's kindly, peace-filled voice from the Canadian wilderness even a little more audible amidst the terrible confusion of our time is my hope.

## Notes

1 David Willson, "Signs of the parting day," (January 28, 1840), Sharon Temple Museum ms. 971. 28. 73. Punctuation added.

2 David Willson, "Mourning and Death," (December 2, 1841), Sharon Temple Museum, ms. 971. 28. 75. Punctuation added.

3 David Willson, "To the Memory of Martha, Daughter of William and Mary Reid...", Sharon Temple Museum ms. 971. 28. 21.

4 David Willson, "Remembrance of the belief of Rachel Lundy, (deceased in Sharon, January 5, 1844." Sharon Temple Museum, unnumbered ms. Punctuation added.

5 In 1852 Willson had published A Collection of Items of the Life of David Willson... (Newmarket: G. S. Porter, 1852), the ten pages of which are incorporated into The Practical Life.

6 David Willson, The Practical Life of the Author (Newmarket: Erastus Jackson, 1860), p. 25.

7 The Practical Life, p. 57.

8 The Practical Life, p. 7.

9 The Practical Life, p. 8.

10 The Practical Life, pp. 8-9.

11 The Practical Life, pp: 9-10.



- 12 The Practical Life, p. 10.
- 13 The Practical Life, p. 17.
- 14 The Practical Life, p. 18.
- 15 The Practical Life, pp. 18-19.
- 16 The Practical Life, pp. 19-20.
- 17 The Practical Life, pp. 21-22.
- 18 David Willson, Mysteries of the Mind; or The Operations of Grace (Toronto: Leader and Patriot Steam Press, 1858), p. 5.
- 19 David Willson, "The Creed of Sharon" (March 7, 1843), Sharon Temple Museum ms. 971. 28. 27.
- 20 Mysteries of the Mind, p. 17.
- 21 Mysteries of the Mind, p. 85.
- 22 The Newmarket Era, June 9, 1865.
- 23 David Willson, "Preparations for a feast," Sharon Temple Museum ms. x975. 442. 7.
- 24 David Willson, "Children owning the Love of God on Christmas day," Sharon Temple Museum, ms. x975. 442. 12.
- 25 "Personal," The Newmarket Era, January 19, 1866.
- 26 Jean McFall, "The Last Days of the Children of Peace," York Pioneer, 1973, p. 22.
- 27 The Newmarket Era, January 26, 1866.
- 28 The Newmarket Era, January 26, 1866.
- 29 For full details of the demise of the Children of Peace, see McFall's article cited above in note 26.

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