

GEORGE AND EMILY WALTON

No history of Newtown Meeting would be complete without inclusion of the great contribution to the Meeting and the Society of Friends made by George and Emily Walton.

George A. Walton, born on August 23, 1883, grew up with his three brothers on the ancestral farm close by Fallowfield Friends Meeting near Coatesville, Pa. His father Joseph was involved with education all of his adult life, in 1901 becoming the second principal of George School. George Walton received his B.A. degree from the University of Pennsylvania, and then combined his graduate study there with a teaching position at Wilmington Friends School. In 1906 he married Emily Ingram, who was his devoted wife until her death in 1963. Paul Blanshard said of her, "She was a special woman and special for him." Alumnus Jacqueline Parsons James called Emily "a woman of incisive wit, unpretentious competence and clear goodness--an inner balance wheel for all his accomplishments." The story has been told of the second Walton daughter saying, when she was told she had another little sister, "If this keeps up, we'll all be girls." And they were--all five of them--a joy and a credit to their parents.

The untimely death of Joseph Walton at age fifty-six forced the Committee on George School to choose a successor in 1912 to maintain the strong intellectual discipline and friendly principles already established at the school, and they asked George Walton to be the one. Some few felt his extreme youth might be a handicap in getting the job done. One is reminded of another instance when still another Friends school committee had reservations about appointing a young headmaster. When the new appointee was announced and introduced, Harold Taylor, then president of Sarah Lawrence College, commented in his opening remarks, "I don't think the Committee has anything to worry about, for one grows older in a hurry in this job." And so did George Walton. For the next thirty-six years he had a profound influence for good on generations of George School students and faculty.

John S. Hollister, chairman of the George School Committee, said of him, "Few students and faculty were unmarked by some personal touch of his. How can one describe the touch? The great warmth of human spirit, the roll of voice in the morning Bible reading, the expressive hands grasping his lapels when speaking in Meetings for Worship, the slow benign smile, all these and more were the irresistible marks of a man who believed in people and who believed that faith could indeed work miracles. He was many things to the school: educational leader, innovator, teacher, administrator, parent in absentia, mediator, moderator, disciplinarian, pastor, "the Pope."

Birk Mendenhall, one of his valued teachers, said of him, "George Walton certainly was a sane and practical progress-

ive; he was an experimentalist; he strove constantly to inspire his teachers to do their best; he thought of his students as human beings; he had complete faith in democratic values and in the basic Quaker educational principles. Those who knew him best could say, 'Here is a Friend with the courage of his Quaker convictions.'" Because he believed, as Walter Mohr has said, that "education can channel the idealism of youth in order to make them not only nationals of one country but citizens of the world," he strongly supported Walter Mohr's creating and carrying out the School Affiliation program in the early 1930's.

Richard McFeely wrote of him, "George Walton felt himself charged with the holy duty of helping to develop the character and ability inherent in young people. With this attitude, it was inevitable that he would reject the authoritarian approach to education. He could never be considered as a major puppeteer who pulled the strings and decided the movements of his puppets, whether in faculty meetings, in student committees, working with the student council or with individuals. He was never one to deny the group or an individual the experience of thinking through problems, of making decisions and of assuming responsibilities. He considered Meeting for Worship the heart of the entire program and life of George School and was never much perturbed by those students who rebelled against attending. He recognized that question and doubt were a necessary part of any adolescent's religious and spiritual environment." The McFeely family lived in Orton on campus for a number of years, and George Walton's tall silhouette was outlined to us each morning as he made his way from Sunnybanke to Main to assume the tremendous responsibilities of his job. In time, we were to learn why some days his step was slow and his lean frame seemed stooped and weighted down as some unsolved human problem of a student or teacher awaited his arrival in his office.

During those years of almost total involvement in the life of the school, there was little time or energy to participate in Newtown Monthly Meeting's activities, except to add to the vocal ministry when he was able to attend. However, upon retirement in 1948, when he and Emily Walton had settled in their home in Southampton, he was free to work in the Society of Friends at the "grass-roots" level rather than at the "top" level. He remained true to his word in his letter welcoming Richard McFeely back to George School as his successor, that he was available should his advice and experience be needed, but only if it was asked for. He accepted Clarence Pickett's invitation to become co-director of American Friends Service office for the Affiliation program, and to emphasize cultural and personal exchanges. In 1950 when Thomas and Eliza Foulke led a call for the split in the Society to be healed, George and Emily Walton were appointed to go with the Foulkes to an Arch Street session and propose

reunion. This led to George Walton's appointment as chairman of a joint committee on Faith and Thought. It took five years and forty-one pages to become the central statement of faith in the revised Book of Faith and Practice. The remaining active years of his life, after Emily's death and he had taken up residence at the Newtown Friends' home, his energies were spread over Newtown Monthly Meeting, Bucks Quarterly Meeting, and The Newtown Area Council of Churches and Meetings. He served as chairman of the Worship and Ministry Committee in Newtown Meeting. His messages, inspired by years of seeking and finding, were rewarding to Friends.

Walton Center on the George School Campus, dedicated to Joseph and George Walton, stands as a memorial in brick and mortar to one of those rare individuals whose destiny on earth seemed to be as a born leader of men. Paul Blanshard put it succinctly when he said, "The many years and thousands of George School people whose destiny he helped shape are bigger than George School. To have contributed to the human intellect is a satisfaction. To have reached both mind and heart is a reward. To have done this for young and old, on campus and in the larger world, is abundance. Of course a lifetime is but the mosaic of deeds accomplished. George Walton has seen that we are here on a journey together, doing for each other, using all that we are so that the whole human family can travel in peace and freedom. In his witty, simple, personal Christian way, he saw this. He did the deeds. For all the days and ways of our lives, you and I are the beneficiaries."

Nancy W. McFeely