

**MARY STEPHEN POWELSON**  
**1885 to 9-20-1978**

At the Monthly Meeting for Business of Friends Meeting of Washington on November 12, 1978, the Meeting recorded deep gratitude for the life of Mary Stephen Powelson, our member who died on September 20, 1978, in Mount Holly, New Jersey at the age of 93. She became a staunch convinced-friend in her middle years. Following a late retirement from the nursing profession in New York City, Mary Powelson moved to Washington and soon transferred her membership to this Meeting.

She declined committee assignments that involved night meetings, but gave freely of herself in other Quaker ways. While she was able, she was a child-sitter extraordinary for a few Friends families and, indeed, served as sitter for Davis House when the Directors were away. A hostess with natural grace, she showed warm appreciation for the international guests, whose countries she often knew from her wide travel and reading. She wrote thoughtful letters to the Editor of the Friends Journal - though not all were mailed - and enjoyed monthly trips to Woodlawn on first Sundays.

Until shortly before her 93rd birthday, when she moved to the Cadbury, a new Friends retirement home in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, Mary Powelson faithfully participated in three Meeting activities. (1) She tenderly nurtured a veritable garden of coleus plants, grown from her own seeds, to be offered for sale at the Annual Quaker Bazaar. (2) Each month she walked from her Calvert Street apartment across Taft Bridge, down Connecticut Avenue to the Meeting House to join the faithful volunteers gathered there to stuff the Newsletter. (3) Whenever able, she traveled the same route early on Sunday mornings to worship with the nine o'clock group in the Meeting's Library-Parlor. One Sunday, After introducing herself to a young attender, Mary. Powelson commented with her usual wit, "I am almost 93, so I can't come to Meeting when it is too hot, nor when it is too cold. Since this is Washington, that is most of the time. But I am still a member of this Meeting!" For this latter fact alone, Mary Powelson's friends in Meeting are grateful

She possessed a rare spirit; an inquiring, self-trained mind; a healthy body - thanks to her own wise care; a love for the beauties of nature; and a warm heart, filled with concern for all people. Yet, determined and independent, she did not want to burden others - including her children - with her problems. It is no small wonder that the Director of the retirement home, where she was a charter member, called her their oldest, yet in many ways youngest, resident.

During her memorial service one Friend marveled at Mary Powelson's self-sufficient life style in her nineties, then concluded, "I wish I had known her when she was younger!" Jack Powelson responded with the moving story of his mother's life. Now, handwritten, copies of his account may be read in the Meeting Library. It has special appeal for all who have heard Mary Powelson reminisce over a cup of tea at home, or with friends at the Meeting House or newsletter stuffing day.

With great enthusiasm he told of her childhood and youth on a farm, on Orkney Islands, the "middle daughter" among eleven children in a strict, but kind, Presbyterian family. When a

young woman, she emigrated to the United States and trained as a nurse in a New York City Hospital. She later traveled to France to care for the sick and wounded during World War I. A shipboard romance developed that culminated in marriage and a happy family. Widowed during the Depression, Mary Powelson returned to nursing in order to support her three children and educate them in the best schools - a privilege she herself was denied.

Family responsibilities had prevented her from realizing a worthy ambition that had been here since childhood - to care for eye-patients in a missionary hospital. In order to compensate, she urged upon her children the need to serve everyone in difficulty and was justly proud of their response. Furthermore, she included The Lebanon in her travels after retirement and nursed, as a volunteer, in a Beirut Hospital. She concluded her mission there when she discovered that the free service she was giving might hinder the employment of a Lebanese nurse who, as Mary Powelson many years before, desperately needed a salary.

Interwoven with Mary Powelson's recollections there were always bits of wisdom - perhaps quotations from the Bible, or from the philosophers and historians whose books she often read. Some of these inspiring thoughts she had recorded she had recorded through the years in a notebook, occasionally with her own comments. Others, from childhood onward, were written indelibly in her mind. This was the case with four stanzas from a hymn in the old Scottish Psalter - Words from her Presbyterian past - that, in Quaker fashion, spoke to her condition during her declining days. Indeed, this hymn speaks truly of Mary Powelson's life:

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform;  
He plants his foot-steps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.

Ye fearful souls, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust him for his grace  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan his work in vain;  
God is his own interpreter,  
And he will make it plain.