

Meeting for Reading

Meeting for Reading is a column that offers reviews of new and forthcoming books intended to nurture spiritual deepening among Friends. The books selected are particularly useful to Meeting book discussion groups.



The Kendal Sparrow: A novel of Elizabeth Fletcher by Barbara Schell Luetke, PhD. QuakerPress, 2020.

*Not since the work of Joseph Besse, published in 1753, has the faith, commitment, and sheer courage that defined the first Friends been so clearly revealed than in *The Kendal Sparrow*.*

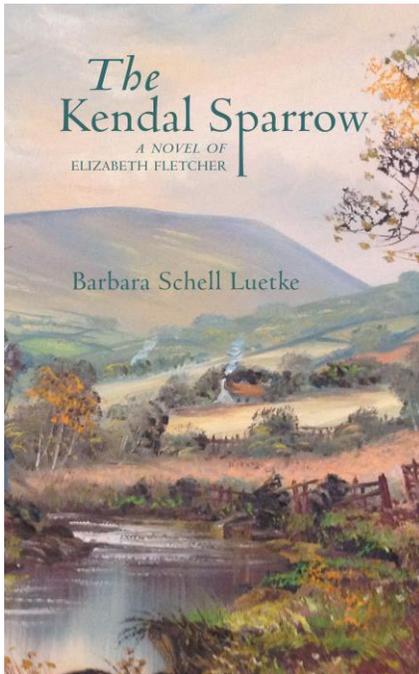
By Ellen Michaud

Richly imagined, grounded in truth, and inspired by its author's deep awareness of being led, *The Kendal Sparrow* is a stunning first novel from Quaker educator and scholar Barbara Schell Luetke.

Rooted in her extensive research at the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Center and nourished by months of travel among small, country towns and villages along the coasts of northern England and Ireland, Luetke's fictionalized account of the young farm girl Elizabeth Fletcher shows us how and where the seeds of a radical faith were planted in the 17th century, then reveals how those seeds produced a living energy that has travelled to us over the centuries—an energy that has encouraged us to

become the Friends we are today in our meetings, on the streets, in the halls of Congress, and around the world.

Carefully researched, this novel captures the excitement and risk that Quakerism offered its early converts, how outcasts could find meaning in life of ministry and preaching, and how loving friendship bound the Quaker network together. Deftly paced and very moving. —Ben Pink Dandelion, Director of the Centre for Research in Quaker Studies at the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre.



Emerging from small villages in the wake of George Fox's travels to preach the heretical notion that individuals could communicate with that which was holy directly—without translations offered by clergy and influenced by the landed gentry who paid them—Elizabeth Fletcher and other early Friends walked and occasionally rode from village to village throughout northern England and coastal Ireland. They slept under trees, in stables, or beside dusty roadsides, bathed from secluded streams, and ate whatever fruits, vegetables, bread or eggs a poor farmer along the way could offer.

Entering a town, they stopped in one village marketplace or churchyard after another to speak their truth as they were led. In response, they were beaten, imprisoned, tortured, raped, stripped naked, and dragged through the streets throughout both Britain and Ireland.

It may be hard to imagine as we sit on the polished benches of our 21st century meetinghouses. But Luetke's straightforward storytelling brings the lives of these early Friends into sharp relief. She gives a voice to those whom we've heard only at a distance through the tunnels of time, and she uses Elizabeth as an effective device for us to meet one historic Friend after another who is led to preach. We are privileged to follow them across the English countryside and the Irish Sea as they speak their truth, and suffer the consequences.

Barbara Luetke brings to life the intensity and power of the earliest Friends, giving flesh and bone to Elizabeth Fletcher and twenty other young adult Quaker women and men who risked everything in the name of Truth. —Michele Lise Tarter, editor of New Critical Studies on Early Quaker Women, 1650-1800.

As a result, Luetke's work allows us to hear the passion and the suffering of these early Friends. She allows them to emerge, fully fleshed, from the shadows of Quaker histories tucked on the back shelf of our meetinghouse libraries and brings them into the warm, blessed light where we can see them, hear them, know the truth of their words, and experience the resonance of their faith within ourselves.

In addition to Elizabeth's fictionalized story, Luetke also includes an extended appendix with a short, documented biography of the young woman's life, and brief biographies of those who travelled in the ministry with her—including many of the "Valiant Sixty" such as Richard Farnsworth, Mary Fisher, James Parnell, and Thomas and Elizabeth Holme.

Luetke also includes a study guide for book discussion groups—one that will challenge today's Friends to compare their lives in the 21st century with those of the early Friends who gave us life.

Ellen Michaud is an award-winning author and editor who has written for the New York Times, Washington Post, Ladies Home Journal, Better Homes and Gardens, and Prevention Magazine, where she was the editor-at-large for six years. Her book Blessed: Living a Grateful Life (Readers Digest) was named the #1 Spiritual/Inspirational Book of the Year by USA Book News. Ellen was also the 2012 writer-in-residence at Earlham School of Religion.

[Buy the book here.](#)