

THOUGHTS OVER 80 YEARS

by Ken Bulled

THOUGHTS

I was born in the well-known town of Axminster, the fifth child of wonderful Christian parents. My father was a wheelwright and made most of the furniture for our small terraced house. Though working long hours during the week, he cycled many miles on Sundays to other towns and villages, taking services in chapels, as he was a local Preacher for the Wesleyan circuit in the area.

We children attended Sunday School at about 10.30, then chapel at 11.00. After midday meal, Sunday School again occupied us for an hour or so, and in the evening we were in the chapel again for another long service. Sometimes a Prayer Meeting followed the evening service.

Just before my fifth birthday I started school at a Church of England establishment, so walked one and a half miles each morning. There I was taught the 3 R's, but was already versed in them as my mother had begun the good work at home.

At ten years I moved to a Grammar School, having passed the scholarship exam.

There I was particularly interested in Maths and Science, but we all had to do well in several other subjects.

In those days the qualifications for entrance to University were passes at good levels in English, Maths, a foreign language and two other subjects, all at the same exam.

I was fortunate and went to the University College of the South West, Exeter. It was an external college of London University.

At college many of us attended chapels and churches on Sunday, so I know something about the procedure in those of Methodist, Congregational, Baptist, Plymouth Brethren, Spiritualist, C of E and Unitarian.

I had also read about the Quakers. Leaving College in 1932 I was unemployed. My father had died when I was 17, so the family were not well endowed. However the three older children were all employed and supported my mother and me. I went to the committee of the unemployed group and was secretary of the Allotment Association, so I was in contact with Friends House. Seeds were sent to me, which were allocated to many poor people, and they were very grateful.

After a year of unemployment (no dole) I obtained a teaching post in Banstead. There I attended the Methodist Church and was very fortunate in meeting a wonderful partner who has been with me for more than fifty years - Kath. When the war came I registered as a CO. However, many of the Methodists were not supportive, so Kath and I attended the Quaker Meeting in Sutton. I am the only one of my original family who has never joined a religious body. For nearly 40 years I went to Meeting at Sutton.

MEETING HOUSE CHAIR

Each Sunday morning my cross I do bear
As I lower myself gently on Meeting House chair.

For full sixty minutes my bones are aware
Of increasing discomfort from Meeting House chair.

The postures and antics of others declare
They too are troubled by Meeting House chair.

My wife sits beside me with never a care;
Nature made her well padded for Meeting House chair.

I hope that in Heaven, if I should go there,
I'll not be confronted by Meeting House chair.

I'd rather join Judas in Lucifer's lair,
Than Peter forever on Meeting House chair

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MEETING HOUSE THOUGHTS

Do you ever on a Sunday
As in Meeting House you sit,
Find your thoughts are apt to wander
Just a teeny weeny bit?
I do too.

Do you ever look at others,
From them try to get inspired,
Make a concentrated effort,
Though you're feeling awfully tired?
I do too.

Do you ever think of cricket,
When the match you're in will start,
And with great athletic prowess
You will play a leading part?
I used to do.

Do you ever think "How slowly
Moves the hand
Upon the clock which times the Meeting;
When 12.00 comes, won't it be grand?"
I confess, I do.

Do you ever think of dinner?
Was the oven left set at 4?
Will thick smoke come out to greet you
When you open up the door?
I never do.

Do you ever from another
Across the room a smile receive
And so gratefully return it,
Loving thoughts so pleased to weave?
I sometimes do.

Do you ever feel quite happy
When at last the hands are shook
And on every relaxed visage
Comes a really cheerful look?
I always do.

"THANKS BE TO GOD"

To me, God is just a word.
To thank God is quite absurd.
But it's very pleasing that I can
Say "Thank you" to my fellow man.

I've thanked the one who sweeps the road,
The coalman with his heavy load,
Those who keep the park so neat,
The cheerful policeman on his beat.

Some folk I have to thank by letter,
Though face to face is always better.
I couldn't send a note to God,
Addressed to Heaven - it's much too odd.

So I'll continue in my way
Thanking someone every day.
A little thanks to a neighbour shown
Is better than much to a God unknown.

A VALENTINE CARD

Upon this page I'll write your name,
And let you know I'm glad I came
On that great day upon the stair
At head of which so sweet and fair
You stood: as goddesses do

With lips apart and head askew,
And turned my heart which was like steel,
To one so soft, that it could feel
Thy power of love to give: and take
The action which I ought; to make
This world, divided now by class and race,
A peaceful and a happier place.
About your name I've changed my mind
And send my love to all Mankind.

[Written for a Valentine Social at Sutton Meeting]

WHAT ARE THEY THINKING?

They are there in many sizes,
Different shapes and postures too,
Sitting silently and pensive
As their custom is to do.

They make up a Quaker Meeting,
Humble seekers after truth.
Some are looking very ancient;
Others show the bloom of youth.

Are they thinking that the Unions
Now they are strong are doing fine,
Condemning torture in Southern Countries,
But not Closed Shop on the Northern Line?

Why have they not decided
Now's the time to make a stand
Against oppression, not in Jo'burg,
But in England's troubled land?

Was their Leader indicating
Membership is not the key
To brotherhood and happiness
When He said softly "Follow me"?

If He sat with them one Sunday,
Would they shake His hand quite hard
But refuse Him work on Monday
If He had no Union Card?

Are they really so contented
With the splendid Powers That Be,
That they tolerate the intolerance
Of the Almighty – TUC

PASSING THOUGHT

You don't need to be a dietitian
to enjoy good food

An RA. to appreciate a
beautiful painting,

A professor of theology to
recognise a loving person

- and perhaps become one yourself.

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ME

I'm glad I wasn't born a worm

To live in the earth, tunnel and squirm.

It must be awful down there in the dark,

Never to see the sculptured bark of a chestnut tree.

I'm so glad I was born me.

THANKSGIVING DAY

Written for reading at a Sutton Meeting Social Evening. Based on personal memories of life in the 30's in a country area in Devon. After leaving University with a Science Degree and Teacher's Certificate I was unemployed for some time and had no dole money. I was on the local Committee for the Unemployed and dealt with the distribution of seeds received from FRIENDS HOUSE in London. The first part of Thanksgiving Day was written with a scene in my mind of an area in Axminster close to where Susan and Kit Hill now live. The man who had the large marrow lived in a cottage quite close to the Hill's residence.

George had enjoyed the morning service; the hymns, which he knew by heart, had gone with a swing and as the chapel was almost full, the volume of sound rising to the wooden-clad ceiling was tremendous.

It was fortunate that Barney (the simpleton who usually pumped the organ) was away. So the organist was able to provide an unbroken accompaniment and no noises, like the braying of a donkey in great pain, which occurred when little air was left in the bellows. The whole building looked so colourful and homely, with the masses of flowers and vegetables.

On his way home he made a detour, going down the steep hill towards the river; past the iron foundry, now no longer in use, and the brush factory where he had worked for a

number of years after the war. Now, alas, it too was closed and many of his friends and acquaintances were, like himself, unemployed. The huge water wheel, which had driven all the machinery, had been still so long that green weed was drooping from its sides.

But George was not despondent. He could just about manage on his dole money and local people were very kind. He thought of the cattle-dealer who frequently gave him a chicken, always saying as he did so "Don't forget to vote Tory at the next election."

So he walked on in bright sunshine, stopping at a field gate to talk to a horse which was rubbing its neck on the top bar.

And he remembered with pleasure that it was in this hedge that as a young boy he'd found the special thrush's nest. Nearly every day he had visited it, in secret, so that no one else should know of his great discovery. For many weeks he'd watched the hen bird as she sat so still, incubating the eggs, and later mothering four lovely babies. He thought that Nature was still as beautiful and interesting as it was in those far off days.

Soon he was at his cottage - opened the gate and stood a little while in the garden admiring the few flowers still in bloom. Then his eyes moved to the vegetable patch where leeks, parsnips and sprouts were arranged in neat rows. There were also one or two marrows. But the largest one he'd grown was seen in a prominent place in the chapel that morning. The season had been a good one, so that he and his sister, with whom he lived, never wanted for vegetables, and indeed were able to give much to neighbours.

So he was grateful to a group of people up in London, who through the local Committee for the Unemployed, provided him and many others with free seeds. They were called Quakers - peculiar people he'd heard, a bit like Plymouth Brethren - but he'd wished they could have seen his garden this summer. And so he entered the cottage - a cheerful man.

After the evening service Tom Giles walked at his usual steady pace, through the narrow lane and over the stile to the footpath, rising gently through the fields towards the hills where his farm lay.

Below him, in the valley, he got glimpses of the slow-moving river, like a silver thread in the light of the bright Harvest Moon. It was almost bright enough to read.

But he was thinking back over the last twelve months. He pictured himself ploughing the fields and scattering the good seed of winter corn, in the same way as it was done in Bible times - broadcasting it by taking a handful from the bag hanging at his waist and swinging his hand so that a thin stream of seed fell evenly to a distance of about three yards.

He remembered the next Festival when snow lay thick on the ground and a group of young folk had trudged up to the farm carrying lanterns and cheered him and his wife with tuneful renderings of well-known carols.

A few months later he'd been busy with the sheep in the fields. One or two ewes he'd had to help with a difficult birth and several newly born lambs had had to be given the kiss of life. Next he pictured a scene which he would always cherish. The vixen and her four cubs outside their hole at the foot of a large oak, the youngsters playing together like the kittens back at the farm.

By this time he'd reached the lane where was the small wood of elm, oak and beech which provided a wind-break for the farm just below. He leaned on a gate and looked back down the valley where a few lights twinkled in the town streets.

Not a sound broke the stillness and in Hardy's words, 'The silence impressed him rather as a positive entity than a mere negation of noise.' And he walked down to his door, another thankful man.

THE BEST CHRISTMAS GIFT

St. Paul stated that love is greater than faith or hope. Christina Rossetti wrote "Love came down at Christmas." But surely love has always been around somewhere. It is when love is missing in a human's, especially a child's, experience that problems arise.

About twenty-five years ago I took a photo of a little girl who was living with an elderly foster mother in Newdigate. That was really the only close contact we had with her until long after we left that village.

Twelve years ago a member of Newdigate Church 'phoned and asked if we would visit this teenager. Apparently no one who remembered her could make the journey to Epsom.

Just before 25th December we went to the Adolescent Unit in the Mental Hospital. The few little gifts we gave her were received with polite thanks. As we were leaving we gave her a loving embrace and kiss. I shall always remember the way her face lit up as she said "Thanks. That's made my Christmas."

CLOSED SHOP

John Woolman wrote in 1763: "Oppression in the extreme appears terrible; but oppression in more refined appearances remains to be oppression; and where the smallest degree of it is cherished it grows stronger and more extensive. To labour for a perfect redemption from this spirit of oppression is the great business of the whole family of Christ Jesus in this world."

Carl Heath wrote in 1922: "It is not, I am persuaded, political compromise that is the enemy of religion, but the method by which such compromise is reached, the method that is falsely called democratic, of reaching an agreed end by immoral surrender of principle and by voting down and coercing one another. There is a wide difference between the Quaker method which includes but transcends compromise, and the method of a party deal and a political coercion.

Carl Heath also wrote:- "More than ever this age, with its rapid mechanisation of existence, cries aloud for strong, free, rebellious spirits; people who cannot be moved by mass-suggestion and are not to be subjected to mass neurosis; men and women of the stamp of the fourteen Dutch Anabaptists, burnt at the stake in various English cities in Henry VIII's reign, because no threats could tempt them to say that they believed what they did not believe."

In Sutton Meeting House there was recently a petition which one was asked to sign, protesting about Torture. Could there not be one, a little more specific, protesting about the mental torture which surely must be caused by the Closed Shop. If, as is often suggested, a person who does not join a Union should not avail himself or herself of any advantages gained by Union actions (though more often than not, the gains, if any, are obtained by repeated inaction (strikes), then it would appear equally valid that such a person should not have to suffer any of the disadvantages and inconvenience caused. When electricity is not available to Union members because of a strike (or must it be called Industrial In-Action?) surely it must be still supplied to Non- Unionists. For the latter must never be treated as if they are members.

There are probably more slaves in England today than there were in America 200 years ago. Today thousands are forced to pay to become slaves in Unions. The Caste system is rife - you either join or you are cast out. And once out, no work can be obtained anywhere. Would you believe it - the Labour Government enacted these laws.

As a teacher I signed a contract with my employers and not with a Union. Today the Unions have become extremely intolerant and militant - at least many of their leaders have. It

is very likely that a large majority of the enslaved members would like to get on with their work and would in many cases be able to do more and better work if they were not threatened by shop stewards.

In South Africa one is an outcast if one's skin is the wrong colour; in Nazi Germany one was 'liquidated' because of one's ancestry. In England today one can be an outcast for being honest, hard-working, thoughtful and not a 'Yes Man'.

Our Unions to-day remind me very much of the scenes I saw and experienced in Germany in the 30's. In order to continue teaching, some of my friends in that, then unhappy, country joined the SA. One later saw his mistake and tried to show his pupils that they should think for themselves and not follow, blindly, The Leader. He was pronounced insane and sent to an asylum. Fortunately the professor who had to examine him was an old friend, so he was drafted into the army.

I shall never forget the few schools in which I was allowed to teach for a short while. Before and at the end of each lesson the whole class stood and with the teacher gave the Hitler salute. I was the only one in the school who never did.

When I saw Tony Benn, or was it Michael Foot, on TV some months ago, marching at the head of a Union demonstration in London, my mind returned to those sad and tragic days.

If I am told that the Unions do some very worthwhile things, my reply is "so did Hitler." There were no unemployed when I was in Germany. All those 'out of work' were required to do work of social value. I saw them draining marshland etc. But the world would have been a better place if Hitler's "Unions" had never been formed.

I am unable to understand why any Christian and especially any Quaker can be a member of a Union or of a political party. Joining formally any group, other than a cricket club or similar society, is to my way of thinking, restricting one's development and the ways in which one can help the whole of society. Christ did not restrict his help to his disciples. When the 5,000 sat down they didn't have to show their Union cards to get sustenance.

[Since writing the above I hear that Michael Foot suggests that any person out of work through refusal to join a Union should not be allowed Unemployment Benefit. Just like Hitler. Join or you are out]

Do other people in a Quaker Meeting have 'peculiar' but interesting thoughts as I do? Of course much of the time I'm still conscious of the uncomfortable chair, the tickle in my throat and often of how long an hour is as measured by the electric clock. So frequently I help the children with their singing, and then have a good excuse for reducing the 'torture' to only fifty minutes. Sometimes I'm quite happily occupied in working out a mathematical problem, thinking about the bit of carpentry I intend to do during the next week or what work should be done in the garden if the weather stays fine.

But this morning was a 'peculiar' one. I suppose that recent discussions about God and my disbelief in such a Person, Thing or Idea set me thinking about how to prove my point of view. You see, none of those people who have a belief, or say they have, are able to prove the existence of this Person, Thing or Idea - at least to my satisfaction.

It's strange how apparently unconnected thoughts come to my brain, mind, or whatever part deals with these super-sense rays. At any rate I had a vision in which I saw the outside of a large hospital and at first I was certain the name was South London Hospital for Women. But I must have been mistaken - these bifocal glasses are a nuisance at times - as when I looked again, on getting closer to the building, it clearly stated S. L. H. for Bacteria. The staff were well developed bacteria about my own size, which is towards the lower end of the human

range. All were volunteers who had been willing to undergo lengthy exposure to Nu Rays, which increased their physical dimensions and mental capacities many million times.

In common with all other bacteria, they had acquired as a species quite an amount of inside information about most other living things. This knowledge they were now using to aid their own fellows, whose living conditions were capable of improvement. So, although the wards contained humans, animals, birds, plants and trees, these were not the patients. Frequently the treatment enabled the human, animal, bird, plant or tree to return to the outside world, but only if that course was best for the resident bacteria. At times the habitations had to be destroyed so that better and healthier homes could be made available. But though they were extremely intelligent they still clung to a few of the beliefs of their ancestors. And like man himself, they thought of a Super Intelligence who had created all bacteria in HIS own Image - they call him Airetcab.