

SOME MEMORIES OF SUTTON MEETING

The first time I attended Sutton Meeting was at the old Dashwood Hall in, I should think, 1937. The first Friend I spoke to was William Curtis, It was William Curtis himself that attracted me - his direct friendly approach and his rugged sincerity just struck for me the right note and to my enquiring mind I saw Quakerism through him and found in it what I wanted.

It was also at Dashwood Hall that I met Jessie Ritch and soon fell under the spell of her remarkable ministry. The contribution of Jessie to the growth and shape of Sutton Meeting will remain incalculable. To me, then a youngish man, what she said in Meeting with such conviction and clarity was indeed bread from heaven.

The most distinctive quality that I found in the Meeting was what might be described as its gift for natural religion - people I noted did not change the inflexion of their voices when they spoke of God and of Christ. They spoke with reverence but not with the sense of forced piety that I had in other places found so unpleasant. Here in Sutton I observed the eternal truths were spoken about with the same delight that a good man displays when he speaks about children, home and other worthwhile things of life.

This wholesome quality of natural Christianity which I found at Sutton - simple, often profound, sometimes wise and full of gaiety, joy and good humour has I think always been the hallmark of our Meeting. It is in this sense, inspiring and gratifying to think of the many families that have come into the Meeting and have contributed their own rich quota to the happy treasury of Sutton Meeting. Whether one can get to Heaven through the doors of Sutton Meeting is a matter for conjecture but it is clearly manifest that no one can remain for long in our Meeting feeling dull and miserable.

Then here I must pay tribute to the home life of the Meeting. The Meeting House at Worcester Gardens is the place where we gather to worship (and how indebted we are to the home upstairs for all the friendliness that has radiated downstairs) but are not all the homes in our Meeting little Meeting Houses in themselves, sub branches so to speak of the main Meeting House? The kindly welcome that is always given to one when visiting these homes is something that is deeply appreciated particularly by those of us who have no fixed homes of our own. Sutton Meeting is indeed a family group closely knit together and it is because of this factor that with God's blessing it gains its greatest strength.

One could I am sure fill the whole of this newsletter with memories of Sutton Meeting so I must restrict myself to only a few. To sit in the Meeting room at worship when the sun suddenly shines through the window at the garden end is for me always a memorable experience - the austerity of the room somehow helps my heart to leap along the shafts of sunlight... Then to watch Sunday by Sunday the

cycle of the year as the trees of the garden change from blossom to fruition and then to the stark tracery of their winter branches, that too is memorable. Or sometimes to catch a glimpse of a Friend's face during worship and to know what John meant when he wrote about 'a light that lighteth every man'. The days too when we entertained the German POWs. at Worcester Gardens. The never to be forgotten spectacle of little Judy Finch playing a game with a delighted group of POWs, her eyes sparkling with happiness as she persistently threw double sixes out of the dice cup.

The marriage of Margaret and Maurice Arnold at the height of the flying bomb activity. Then the miracles of catering performed by our women folk (the gathering of the fragments) during the days of acute shortage. The children one Christmas Sunday morning during the war, singing 'Silent Night' and a Friend taking up the theme in the ministry of the Meeting.

All the summer outings and the New Year parties, the Study Circles at Dutch Cottage and Clare Cottage and at the Meeting House. The friendly Walter Ludwig standing in the door of the Meeting room saying goodbye to us. The sunny day at Dutch Cottage when we had the garden party and the sweet memory of Jessie Ritch as the hostess and the recollection of Edwin Tallack playing the barrel organ.

The young children with bright sunny faces coming into Meeting. The meals I have had with Friends coming back from Monthly Meeting and at other times at a now famous little restaurant at Morden. Dorothy Vickers' never to be forgotten dog that was a frequent visitor at Preparative Meeting - and so I could go on....

But most important of all the occasions in Meeting for Worship when together in the silence we have arrived at a quiet and certain place, when in such moments we have experienced a compelling sense of unity, when individually we have been made new, being conscious that something closely akin to the Spirit of Christ has been amongst us₀

Dennis V. Scott
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