

6. Let us be willing to make experiments in various directions and to lay ourselves open to meet every variety of need and opportunity.
7. In some of our big centres Friends should consider ways of reaching the large number of people who frequent the streets on Sunday evenings. This is a special problem requiring bold experiment and adventure. Any efforts to deal with it would probably be most effective on neutral premises or in the open air, and would need to combine popularity with an educative evangelism. The possibility of co-operating with other religious bodies would have to be considered.

In all such work as this we need to be filled with the Divine energy and love, but our sense of spiritual poverty is no excuse for leaving the work undone. As we enter upon it with courageous faith and under a living concern for men, we shall receive God's gifts of wisdom, discernment and power.

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Spreading our Message

OR

Our Sunday Evening Meetings.



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Our Sunday Evening Meetings.

"I believe that there are three or four types of Friends' Meetings, in all of which we may have personal responsibility and group fellowship and the spiritual power and guidance of Jesus Christ."

W. C. BRADTHWAITE.

Introductory :

How many of us as we have read of the remarkable spread of early Quakerism, of the new-found joy and hope it brought to a people who were bewildered in the search for truth, of the eagerness with which it was received by thousands, have longed that to us too might be given the joy of such service? Have we answered such a longing by saying that times and conditions have changed? True, they have, yet the call and the opportunity, though different, have never been greater. Many men to-day are restless and distracted, and are seeking for a new way of life. Some look to the future with despair, others with a dawning hope. Many have thrown over the faith of their fathers and are asking for a religion that can explain the meaning of the world. Many are burdened with a sense of embittered despondency and long for a faith that can match the experiences of life. Everywhere there is a crying need for a vital religious fellowship that brings men into vital touch with God and with one another.

Have we a message that will speak to the conditions of men to-day, and have we found the most effective way of giving that message?

Not only outside our borders but amongst ourselves there is a great spiritual and intellectual hunger.

How often have we heard the longing expressed for more of a teaching ministry, for more education in Biblical and Quaker subjects, and the problems of religious life, or the lament that so few Friends throw themselves whole-heartedly into the service of our meetings or of humanity?

morning, and thus numbers of people who worship under the same roof do not come into contact with one another. What opportunities for social and spiritual fellowship are thus lost!

2. There is plenty of scope for *expository addresses*, especially those that interpret our distinctive Quaker message. Our primary business is to publish the Truth as we know it, and careful thought should be given to the best means of doing this, including the advertising of all meetings. It is often desirable to give permission to ask questions at the close of such addresses.
3. Men are asking for a *fellowship* that is real. Then let us abandon all stiffness and formality, and be willing to gather sometimes on Sunday evenings in a natural, simple way, say, round the fire (in winter) or in a garden (in summer), for the free discussion (under qualified guidance) of religious questions. After such discussions it would be desirable to have an opportunity for quiet worship.

Further, many of our members who would not address a formal meeting, would gladly read a short paper or open a discussion at such a simple Fellowship Meeting.
4. We should recognise that *singing* may have a right place amongst us, and under suitable circumstances provision should be made for this.
5. Sunday evening affords a valuable opportunity for social intercourse. Why should not Friends come together (say monthly or bi-monthly) on Sunday afternoons for a common meal before the evening meeting, or why not spend an hour together, sometimes after the meeting for conversation, music, and hymn singing?

just because the constituency in almost every place is varied, therefore, most places would be well advised to vary their type of meeting, having, e.g. Quaker or Biblical teaching on one Sunday, a Meeting for Worship on another Sunday, "conversational interchange of thought", on a third Sunday, and a publicly advertised address on the fourth Sunday. Short courses of teaching addresses might be periodically arranged for several consecutive Sundays.

In holiday resorts special efforts should be made to reach visitors in the summer season. This can be done by publicly advertised addresses in the Meeting House or in some public hall, or in the open air.

The important point is that our methods should permit of constant variation as may be found necessary or desirable. Stereotyped or conventional methods must not be allowed to hinder the spreading of truth. In these days men do not want to be "preached at." They will listen to those who have something to say, but they demand opportunity for asking questions and discussion. Most important of all is that we should have a vision that people are waiting to be gathered, that in our hearts there should be a real desire to share with others the spiritual discoveries we have made, that we should know some sense of what Paul meant when he said, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel."

What has been said may now be summarised in the form of

Some Practical Suggestions :

1. There should be in every meeting at least a nucleus of Friends who are concerned for the spreading of truth, who make it their business to be present regularly at their evening meeting, and feel a sense of responsibility for the right holding of the meeting.

In some places the personnel of the evening meeting is almost entirely different from the

A Twofold Call :

Here then is a twofold call. How can it be answered? Is the opportunity Sunday afforded used to the full? Apart from Adult Schools, Children's Schools, etc., most Meetings have two gatherings. One of these must always be a Meeting for Worship. "The alternation of rest and work is necessary for the activity of life. Life, like music has its rhythm of silence as well as sound."* This meeting has been held in the morning in nearly every case and probably this will generally be continued, but why universally at that time? This type of meeting is vital to the spiritual life of the Society; it is the centre from which we derive driving force for all our activities. It is the power-house which generates heat and energy for the daily life and toil of our members, and it should, therefore, be held at the time when the majority of Friends can attend. In one Yorkshire town the Meeting for Worship has been given up because so few Friends find it possible to be out on Sunday morning; then why not hold this, the supremely important meeting, in the evening when most can attend?

The Sunday Evening Meeting :

But leaving this point, there still remains the question, What use can we make of the other opportunity—generally the evening meeting? We are bound to recognise that the attendance at our regular Sunday evening meetings is *for the most part* small and stationary. There are many reasons for this, some of which probably cannot be removed, but the greatest reason appears to be a lack of vision on the part of most of us as to the purpose to be served by this meeting. May it not be that in this gathering of the week is our golden opportunity of answering the double call which the present day brings to us?

The supreme importance of the Sunday evening meeting *cannot be too strongly pressed upon the attention of Friends.* It may be said without hesitation that Sunday evening is an exceptionally good opportunity for (a) the spreading of our message, and (b) providing religious instruction for our

* Hadfield—*Psychology of Power.*

members and attenders. There are psychological reasons for this which all will appreciate, e.g. freedom from the cares of business or professional life and the associations of the English Sunday evening for many generations makes the minds of men more receptive to religious influences. Large numbers of people have formed the habit of going somewhere on Sunday evenings. For most people (especially busy housewives), Sunday evening is a more convenient time than Sunday morning to attend a place of worship.

Let us turn, then, to a closer inquiry as to how this Sunday evening gathering may be used to respond to the call from (a) the outside public; (b) our own members.

(a) *The Outside Public* may be roughly classified as follows:—

- (i) *Seekers*—Unattached or loosely attached to any other place of worship—educated, or at any rate thinking people to whom the Quaker message primarily appeals. Those who are perplexed in mind and troubled in spirit.
- (ii) *The uneducated simple folk*, who appreciate simplicity and warmth of fellowship.
- (iii) *The regular Church and Chapel goer* who wants something else occasionally.
- (iv) Those who are *careless and indifferent* or opposed to religion.

It will be necessary for each Meeting to consider carefully to which of these groups they feel especially called upon to minister and to make arrangements accordingly, never forgetting that there is a special obligation resting upon Friends to give to the world that which is distinctive in Quakerism, and to set forth Christianity as a way of life, a religion of joyous adventure, a gospel of reconciliation and hope. When considering

what is Friends' special contribution perhaps the following points come most readily to mind:—

- (i.) Distinctive teaching on definite Quaker testimonies, e.g. Peace, Worship and the Ministry, Principles of Church Government, the Sacraments, etc.
- (ii.) General breadth of outlook on credal, biblical and other questions. Readiness to deal with intellectual difficulties and personal problems.
- (iii.) The value and meaning of silence in worship.
- (iv.) Simplicity and lack of the merely customary.

All this our programme should include. Let there be no fear of giving the true Quaker silence its full place; there are many who will not find that for which their soul craves, particularly in these days of restless uncertainty, until with wondering awe they are led into the one true "fellowship of silence." In some places Friends have felt it right to hold both their Sunday meetings as meetings for worship for the sake of the seeker who may visit them at the second meeting.

(b) *Our own members* in most places do not wish for a second Meeting for Worship. Sunday evening is often the only suitable opportunity for meeting their needs which may be summarised as follows—

- (i.) Biblical Teaching.
- (ii.) Quaker Teaching.
- (iii.) Teaching on missionary, industrial, social and international subjects—problems of the present day at home and abroad—including calls to service.
- (iv.) Social and intellectual intercourse and spiritual fellowship.

Different Types of Meeting :

These considerations clearly point to the conclusion that there may be *many useful types of evening meeting*. The type to be chosen should be determined mainly by the constituency, but