

# **Search**

## **A Journey Through Personal Chaos**

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*There is a faith which is of a man's self, and a faith which is the gift of God; or, a Power of believing which is found in the nature of fallen man, and a power of believing which is given from above. As there are two births, the first and the second, so they have each their faith, . . . and seem to lay hold on the same thing for life.*

*But some may desire to know what I have at least met with. I answer, I have met with the seed.*

Isaac Penington

## Foreword

*Search, a Personal Journey through Chaos*, is a narrative of first hand experience rehearsing with exquisite discernment memories of temporal events connected by a single thread of eternal validity. Under circumstances of acute need and bitter tension, positive action expressing human sympathy and goodwill appears from time to time in the “hurricane of universal grief” to soften anguish and kindle hope.

Though letters of thanks have flowed in year after year to the offices of relief agencies, the recipients of their care have seldom attempted to add to the statistical surveys and the many statements of purpose and method what might be called the “critique by eternity.” We have here a glimpse of the relationships between the relief worker and the persons who, through man-made disorder, present the occasion for his ministrations. These pages written by an experienced writer will encourage faith in emergency measures for relief of suffering and experiments for promoting international understanding. Though such measures are as yet insufficient to stem the tide of global conflict, yet they bear witness to the fact that mankind does not unanimously assent to mass belligerency and hate. From these experiences it is also apparent that personal inadequacy on the part of the worker limits and may even vitiate the best endeavors.

*Search* was written at Pendle Hill, a center maintained by members of the Society of Friends for adult study of religious and social subjects. Here, as a staff member over a period of years, Ruth Domino has herself taken part in

training relief workers. These men and women have gone abroad under the American Friends Service Committee.

Though this is the first time these episodes have been described, other stories by Ruth Domino have appeared in print. "The Shared Bed" in the Kenyon Review, taken from the life of refugees in France, is a notable example of her work.

The present pamphlet will serve as a welcome reminder to those to whom Ruth Domino's teaching has proved a safeguard and a blessing. To other readers it will bear witness to the "power of believing which is given from above."

Anna Brinton  
Twelfth Month, 1949

## Search

My life, as it has had to be lived, has been a life of many places. My intention is not to write a treatise on the spiritual problems of today, but to show various circumstances under which I myself have met them in several countries. Meeting them, I have met many friends of many conditions. My encounters with those Friends who are called Quakers were often of a passing nature until I came to live at Pendle Hill, a center in America for advanced study. Looking back now on the different episodes in which I became aware of Quaker work, I see a bright thread stringing together periods of overwhelming distress and giving them special significance. It seems to me that these episodes carry a challenge for all those of religious faith and life.

At the time in which I was growing up, the Christian State Church of my country, Germany, failed to influence the youth in any decisive manner. Many a searching soul turned away from it and left its message to the lukewarm people and those patriots who hailed war and conquest. The inquisitive and the religious were often not the same. Often the most honest minds were found among the questioning skeptics who could not see the message of Christ to the poor and suffering men as a living experience, realizable in daily acts. That such an experience was possible, I discovered much later in life, and I owe this partly to the Friends.

I cannot present this discovery as a remedy or state it in terms of dogma. I can only sketch a picture from which

it evolved. It is the picture of a German girl growing up during the events of World War I, the Revolution, the breakdown of the middle class during the inflation, and finally the painful decline of the German Republic with Hitler's rise to power. Nothing extraordinary has happened to this girl beyond the common fate of her generation whose members aligned themselves with Nazism, faced and survived the danger of Nazism, faced it and did not survive, or chose to flee instead.

A deep gap seems to open between those who left and those who stayed, a gap filled with cruel experiences or opportunism bitterly paid for. Now in Germany there is a new generation which has been imbued with Nazism; many of this generation are in confusion and disillusionment. But under the hard crust there is alive the same longing I knew so well in my own generation: the yearning for a peaceful faith that justifies existence and hardship, and gives something worth looking forward to. To me this seems remarkable enough to justify the attempt to write down certain personal events in my own experience for those who search and for those who are setting out with the Quakers to help others search.

### Fatherland And God

The existence of God was first impressed on my mind during the First World War. In its beginning God seemed to bless the German weapons; at least, the director of our girls' school in Berlin told us so. After each German victory, we were called to the great assembly hall, a hymn was sung, the director made a little speech, and we were allowed to go home before our class schedule was finished. We wore little black-white-red ribbons in our pigtails, and we recited poems in which God was shown to be punishing the English, blessing each bullet which killed a Russian and the bayonets

which turned against the French. God seemed to be clad in the black and white and red German banner, and from him the Kaiser received special telephone messages.

Toward the years 1917 and 1918, God seemed to be busy with other affairs, forgetting the Germans. We children wore wooden sandals in the summer without stockings, and in the winter shoes made of cloth with wooden soles. Somehow God provided us children with strange fun, I thought then. I did not mind the shoes, but I minded the chilblains on my toes and the unheated rooms.

The big house of my parents in a quiet suburb of Berlin was cold, too. The rooms downstairs with thick carpets and long rows of books began to smell of turnips, and turnips seemed to be everywhere — in the bread, in the coffee and in the marmalade. My father, a Prussian civil servant, who was not drafted because of heart trouble, lay often sick in bed. He had never been an openly religious man, but having Lutheran pastors as grandfathers, he could not help mentioning God occasionally. He did so shyly, with a streak of anger in his voice. Although he avoided admitting it, he did not like the idea of God combined with a mad patriotism.

Religion was my favorite subject in school, not because it demanded faith, but because it stirred imagination. The stories of the Bible fascinated me. I got my best marks in religion. But in the turnip winter of 1917, the period of the English blockade, I received my first defeat. I fainted over the story of Solomon and the two quarreling mothers, for all of a sudden I could not believe any longer in the happy outcome of this story. I imagined that God had left us and would permit the cutting into halves of the innocent child, and this was more than I could bear on an empty stomach. I was sent home and there read the story aloud to my little sister. The wisdom of Solomon was lost on us. All that mattered was the child; and when I came to the passage in which Solomon ordered his sword, I stopped again, and sister

and I burst into tears. Death had never come to our house, but the newspapers were filled with black-rimmed obituaries and black crosses; and on the streets women would sometimes cry. In such a time God was willing to permit anything, we thought, and suffering was a dark, menacing power.

I was not the only child who fainted in school. There were others who slumped at their desks during the spelling or counting hours. We all had pale hollow cheeks whether we came from big houses or crowded flats. Our school was located in Steglitz and attended mostly by daughters of officers and civil servants. The strict code of honor among those people, who were often on limited budgets, forbade the acceptance of black market offerings. Yet I knew that my mother sometimes secretly dealt with peddlers at our back door in order to give us some butter or milk, and that other mothers might be doing the same. There were a few children in class who ate regular sandwiches with cold cuts instead of marmalade or mustard, and although they were envied they were also looked down upon; only merchants and profiteers could afford such sandwiches, it was said, not people who lived for the honor of their country. I had become doubtful of this honor and tried hard to elaborate a system in which God had some connection with it. I pictured Him as the peak of a difficult pyramid of officialdom with many irritating minor officials, between the top and the base, passing ration cards to the waiting hungry people. I thought these were accompanied by terse permission to see Him, but no one succeeded, and Christ was weeping in a locked, dark room. However, I came to like the idea of sacrifice and asceticism, so that I swallowed the turnips and dry slices of bread with the vague conviction that this was right, while the others eating fat sandwiches were wrong and would utterly miss their chance.

When the war was over, I stood with my father and watched the soldiers coming home from the front. They

looked wretched, and so did some of the officers marching at the side of their columns. People sobbed, and women in black gripped one another's hands. For a moment it struck me that suffering made people in my neighborhood better than did luck. My father had taken his hat off. "Peace, my child," he murmured, and we went home without saying a word.

In the year 1919, the food situation had not bettered. I was chosen with other pale children of my school to receive some extra feeding during school time. We were told that the cocoa and the white rolls were sent to us by the Quakers in America. Some parents felt ashamed to have their children fed like beggars, but some mothers, like my own, were worried about their children's health, and they were glad of the extra food. I, the child, felt impressed, not only by the holiday interruption of the dull school routine, but also by the thoughtfulness of this action. I formed the idea that the Quakers were relatives of ours, some kind of uncles. I did not think of them as rich people because richness did not impress me; I thought my parents rich because they had so many books and taught us that learning mattered, not wealthy appearance and good food. All that I cared for was the fact that this "uncle," although he had never visited us and seen our meager meals, was concerned about our well-being. Through this concern I sensed vaguely the meaning of compassion and sympathy for suffering. That this understanding was motivated by Christian faith, the example of Christ's life, must not have been sufficiently explained to us hungry school children.

At the time my mind, although unformed, groped eagerly for any illumination which would shed light on the dark world I saw. And the world seemed dark in those years, although the war had ended, even to a child of a relatively protected home such as mine. Women went around in black mourning garments, the rooms were not lighted; the schools were closed for weeks in the winter time, either because

of a grippe epidemic or lack of coal. After 1918, strikes and conspiracies of fanatic patriots swept through the impoverished country. Often shooting could be heard from the workers' section. We children stayed home for days, and toward evening there were not even street lights burning to break the spell of darkness.

Once for a whole week I huddled in the corner of our nursery, with its red roses on the wallpaper no longer gay, and broke my head about the words *Justice and Mercy*. My younger sister was tossing around in her bed with high fever; she had the grippe, which took so many victims in those years of undernourishment. *Justice and Mercy* — I knew these words from books and the religion class; their very sound had been promise; now they contained a menace punctuated by my sister's coughs and the shooting outside. *Justice and Mercy* — dissolved from the solid context in books, committed to the life of unrest, they now grew to a challenging enigma.

Someone had told us that the women of the poor sections were looting stores, and that the workers would come and occupy the better-off people's houses. I was afraid, and at the same time I wondered: why shouldn't they come and dispossess us? We lived badly, too, but we lived in a fine big house while they lived in those grey crowded blocks of drab streets without trees that I had seen from the tramways.

Times of uncertainty and crumbling values contain a lesson, even for children, that all events have many sides, many faces; so must God, I concluded then, although I saw the dark faces of suffering much clearer than the face of true happiness. I also dimly sensed another lesson in the unlighted nursery: that I was no longer able to see the existence of God clearly and without trouble, that the gift of an early, serene faith was denied to me as it must have been to many others who grew up under similar conditions. My father brought home many leaflets and pamphlets

distributed on street corners. Some of them said that Christ, should he have come back, would have been crucified again by the generals and cannon producers, others that Germany had been betrayed by pacifists and socialists. I looked at all these “documents of our time,” as father called the leaflets, and felt deeply puzzled: so many outcries for justice, so many dead, and one searching voice behind them all: “Cain, where is your brother Abel?”

We sold our house, since my parents had lost all their savings in the inflation crash following the war. I was relieved, feeling that privileges were obstacles in the search for truth. Much later I realized that those big rooms in which I had time and space to brood had given me a sense of free choice, and that those who had never experienced this choice facilitated by external circumstance must feel ironical if not embittered about the message of voluntary poverty.

The truth is that, although feeling relieved, I was sad when we moved from the house in which I had spent my early childhood. The furniture was torn out of place and heaped crudely on the street before the big moving van drawn by strong horses. Our cook was allowed to pick out whatever she liked as a farewell present, since we could not keep her any longer. She and her fiancé, clad in the rough blue dungarees of a worker, stood for a while before a group of holy pictures, among them Raphael’s *Sistine Madonna*. Draped gracefully in a wide garment, with the Christ Child in her arms, the Madonna looked touchingly out of place on the pavement. “Sche-en, nich wahr?” the woman said in her broad slang, and seemed willing to choose this picture for her future home. But the man at her side, his cap in his hand, shook his head and said, “They have never been with us, really.”

I did not quite understand this remark, but I sensed the disapproval in it. Two years later, an incident brought the words back to me.

It was in another school in another town, but teachers and girls were of the same kind, patriotic middle class people. We no longer wore our hair long in pigtails but pinned up in braids. We still sang hymns at the Monday morning worship; sometimes afterwards the director would make a little speech about the betrayed Fatherland; and we would write compositions about the badness of the Versailles treaty and the “stabbing in the back” by socialist traitors. On the first of May, a beautiful sunny day, we stood on the broad stone steps before the big school gate and ate our sandwiches. A huge procession of workers marched by behind a red flag. All the nice girls, usually so well behaved, curtsying deeply before their elders, now shouted ugly words of disdain. The marching people on the street, mostly elderly men in awkward Sunday suits, hats in their hands, did not pay any attention to the girls. On they went, with solemn expression on their faces. What was the meaning of all this? Then I remembered the words: “They have never been with us, really,” addressed to the picture of the beautiful Madonna with the Christ Child. I understood now that the words had not been spoken to the religious image. They were condemning those to whom religion, Christ’s last agony and his voluntary death as redemption for the evil of this world, had never meant any commitment to life.

### The Kingdom Of God

One year before I left school at the age of sixteen, my sister and I were prepared for confirmation. The act of confirmation in the Lutheran Church is a ritual settling young Christians on the right way; it also means a coming of age in the religious sense. There were months of preparation preceding it. We went to a special class conducted by the pastor of our parish. We learned more prayers and passages from the Bible and from Luther’s catechism. Our pastor was a mild man with a white pointed beard; he did not make

life too hard for us, but he seemed tired and unconvincing. There were no soul-searching questions, and answers were formalized through the text of the catechism, a routine proceeding that prevented any blunt or shy confession about our state of mind toward the Holy. Most of us were at the age of fifteen or sixteen, and we were looking forward to the ritual as a pleasant holiday with visits and presents from relatives. I did not experience any kind of religious fervor. The only case of religious conviction I had met before in my school was that of a young girl whose intensity about the coming of the kingdom of God had impressed and repelled me. One day she did not come back to class, and we were told that she had a nervous breakdown. Most of the girls had laughed about her since she was so different, pretty but with a raptured gaze in her eyes and a strange oblivious stride.

In the confirmation class no one was different from the other. On the contrary, we went there in order to do the same thing that others did. Discussions whether we all should wear black silk or dark blue velvet dresses assumed great and pleasant importance. Fortunately, or unfortunately, times were too bad for any expensive purchases, and most of us had to wear what could be afforded, whether a made-over dress or just a modest garment of subdued color. That broke the strict law of external conformity and made most of us think a little about the meaning of what we were doing.

Sometimes when reciting passages about the Holy Trinity, I stopped and began to wonder what it was all about; the strange dove-like bird, the third essential of the holy household, struck me as miraculously incomprehensible. However, the traditional words seemed to lead so easily away from my troubles. My inarticulate questioning in the dark room came back to my mind, and I wished I could find a prayer of my own to approach the miracle of mankind's Savior in its threefold revelation. Sometimes I hoped that

it would reveal itself suddenly to me — in a golden cloud or in the roaring wind — but this did not occur. Much later I learned that sudden revelations have to be prepared and labored upon for a long time. In the narrow scale of my life then, there stood only one great experience: doubt of accepted values. It is said that in times of excitement and unsettlement, the minds of people are awakened to inquiries which the existing system of religion does not satisfy. It was in such times that the Society of Friends was born with its leader George Fox. But it has to be added that with the shaking of uncritical loyalty to any kind of tradition it is much harder to find faith, especially for a childish mind untrained in religious emotions, and not ready for theological reasoning.

When I hinted at my troubles to my father, he shook his head and told me it was not wise to leave the church as many people did in those days; the church was necessary to regulate the relations between men and their restless striving for something higher than themselves. Without the church there would be nothing but rebellions and upheavals. He also added that it was not safe to be an outcast in one's later career; he wanted me to have an easy life, and it was hard to live lonely.

So ran his explanation. From it I gathered, wrongly or rightly, that one of the causes for becoming an outcast might be a strong idealism, and began to read diligently in the many books of our library. I soon found a strange company of "outcasts," early Christians, mystical sects through centuries — among them the Quakers — and rebellious atheists in modern times: all equally fervent and self-denying for the sake of a utopia ruled by true kindness and equanimity. Some called it the "Kingdom of God," others a state of justice on this earth; and none of them had lived a happy life of complacency, although joy was the goal for which they were sacrificing and dying. To many of them had come moments of deep agony in which they had asked like Christ: "If it is possible, take this cup from me."

My confused reading was a strange preparation for my day of confirmation, and I entered on it with feelings of expectation and uneasiness. When the church bells rang on that early spring morning, I still hoped for a sudden vision. My sister, younger and therefore less troubled by doubts, and I knelt side by side before the altar. When the organ sounded and the sun glowed in the stained glass window, I felt overtaken by an emotion, but at the same time I was suspicious of giving way to feelings which, I felt, might be spurious and momentary when so easily gained. Each of us recited a Psalm, received a scroll with the image of Christ and a passage of the Sermon on the Mount. When I left the church, I felt disappointed. But from this day on I began to realize that visions do not grow suddenly out of young doubting. The road that leads from doubt to conviction is a long one which has to be traversed step by step, sometimes through shocks, sometimes through utter despair.

It was through such a shock that I discovered first a tiny fragment of a new reality which I had missed in my solitary and comfortable brooding. In the last year of my high school attendance, my class was joined by a Jewish girl. She was avoided by my classmates. There was nothing wrong with this girl — except that she had thick black hair and most of the girls in this northern town had fair hair. The only reason that the girls would give for their behavior was that she had other looks and belonged to a different type of the human race. Some said that the Jews had betrayed the Fatherland; but this argument did not hold, for the girl had told me that her father had been decorated in war. I passed on this information, but the girls went on treating her like an outcast. I had become sensitive to the conception of “outcast,” but there was nothing in her which I associated with it, no peculiar strength. During visits to her home, I saw her gay and chatty. Only the relationship to her mother was somehow different from that to which I

was used, more like a friendship between equals, more tender and confidential. It seemed that this thoughtful, elderly woman wanted to imbue her daughter with a special strength in taking her into her own more mature reflections upon life.

In class, Gerda — this was her name — was subdued, smiling sadly into the empty space which separated her from the other girls' games and laughter. Soon we became friends, and I went around with her in intermission times. Some of my other friends began to wonder about us. I searched for reasons to convince them that their behavior was wrong. Then it occurred to me that there had been occasional hushed-over remarks in my own family, implying that my mother had come from Jewish stock, although her father had been baptized. I began to ask mother and father about it, and found it was so. My mother seemed deeply embarrassed. After several sleepless nights, I made up my mind I had to break this spell or accept its curse. On the morning following the decision, I took an empty seat next to Gerda, and announced that I was partly Jewish, too. "There is nothing wrong in it," I said. "Now take or leave it, I stick to Gerda." But my heart throbbed. Nothing much happened afterwards. I lost some friends and gained some better ones. And yet something had happened; a little window had opened in the dark space of doubts pushed up by my conscience, a window with a new vista.

### A New School

Schools are usually considered a preparation for life, but the life for which German school children were prepared in the twenties was a chaos of insecurity. The value of money had dwindled away, filling people with new anxiety. During the war, hunger had been understandable and the enemy visible. But now every menace, intangible yet present,

seemed to float in the air we breathed. Millions of people were plunged into despair, and although its extent was vague to me, I sensed its burden. Often I looked at the sky and tried to decipher the shifting contours of clouds, as if they were messengers of the last judgment day.

We still had many books at home, but they were crammed into a few rooms and there was dust everywhere on their fine bindings. Mother had no time to care for our house and no maid to help her. She was busy running errands and buying food before prices went up further. My father received his salary day by day, but even this was not quick enough for coping with the race of devaluation.

School was no longer a preparation for life but an escape for me; there I tried to anchor my mind in lasting values like history and poetry; but even in studying favorite subjects I felt the general fear that everything might prove futile. I was still too young and probably too secluded to swim in the wave of cynicism which swept through the country. Girls and boys a few years older than I were already engaged in all kinds of bartering and speculating with foreign money. A new group of profiteers developed — among them young bank clerks — who gained and lost their money overnight. These people filled the night bars and amusement places; there was the gaiety of carnival with the misery of Ash Wednesday around the corner.

When I had finished the lyceum and entered a new school preparing for university studies, the inflation had stopped and a more sober period of stabilization had begun. But the fear of insecurity and of loss had gripped us all; the older people were filled with helpless depression, the younger ones with impatience for a better start.

I had decided upon going to a modern school which would give me a survey of old values, as well as new, in order to form a more complete picture of the world. The school in Hamburg which my parents and I had chosen

seemed to fulfill my wish completely. There I found not only understanding teachers but also a cross-section of pupils from various backgrounds. There were children of workers beyond ordinary school age and also children of wealthy people. High schools in Germany were quite costly, and it was only through the educational reforms of the Weimar Republic that a new group of persons was given the chance to reach out for better education. In my former school, the children of a privileged group were primarily represented; hence there was a more limited outlook on life. Now I had a chance to know a much greater variety of young people. The children of the working people were serious students; some had worked already in factories and sweatshops, and they knew what it meant to be pressed by circumstances and to try to rise above them. I found that our general standard of knowledge was lifted by their presence, although I later heard some older university professors complaining about the low standard of education set by this new group of underprivileged students.

When I look back now at my various classmates, I realize how closely they reflected the restless search for new values in the Germany of those days. There were socialists, pacifists and communists, all tied up in various youth movement groups, but there were scarcely any religious minds except for a few born Catholics. The pressure to take part in a movement which would lead to new ideals was very strong, especially among the idealistic and rebellious youths who had gathered in this particular school. None of them wanted to become cynical; all longed to sacrifice for a cause worthwhile — a cause which could not be torn to pieces, and which, although derived from circumstances, would finally triumph over them. The Christian faith, however, had in their eyes become a tool of selfish or narrow-minded powers, so much so that most of us turned away from it. Above all, most of these young

people felt helpless to find a solution alone, and they felt the need of a supporting group amid chaos.

Anxiety about discovering the right way often took hectic outlets among the more sensitive active natures. I remember the case of a high-strung boy who had changed his opinions three times in the two years we shared school life together. He was the son of an officer who lived on a small pension. Brought up in absolute loyalty to his country, he had begun to realize the narrow human basis of his outlook. But he could not live in a vacuum with his strong emotions and had to shift them to other and firmer ties. Each of his changes involved him in great problems and soul-searching, followed by undivided concentration on the new cause. Later he disappeared, and no one knew whether he was in a cloister or an institution for the insane. Although unbalanced, he best depicts the feverish plight of the youth of his time and the yearning for an ideology of total claim.

### Visit To England And The Quakers

One of the wise features of our school was travel into foreign countries. These journeys were considered part of our school program, and the different subjects taught in class — history, sociology and art — were focused on countries to be visited by each form. At the end of the school year, papers were written on topics inspired by these journeys, and the marks were part of the teachers' evaluation of their students' work.

Our form went to England. The journey was made possible through the help of English Quakers and peace organizations, special money collections being arranged for the needy pupils. All the money available was put together and distributed equally so that, whether we came from rich or poor families, we all received the same amount of pocket money during the journey.

It was in June 1927, that we set out for England by way of Holland. In the English harbor we were greeted by a delegation of young English pacifists and were marched through the whole of London behind a banner with the word “Peace” written on it — and a policeman. We were lodged in a Friends’ Meeting House in one of London’s east sections. It was not an elegant district, and since it was summer it was very hot on our street; there were no trees; the asphalt was melting in the sun; and the smell of sizzling oil from cheap fish restaurants was everywhere. The hard wooden meeting house benches covered with mattresses were our beds; we found them soft at night after a day filled with a thousand new impressions. Weekends we were invited to visit English Friends living in the country. There for the first time in my life I took part in silent meetings for worship. I sat on the same sort of bench I had occupied in London for sleeping, but I was awake now and my mind was seeking.

The year 1927 was filled with excitement; the English newspapers brought news about the great miners’ strike, and the German papers *pro* and *contra* opinions about the Dawes plan. But in the quiet barn where I was seated all external distractions seemed banned; there were no ornaments to attract the eye — except the big beams on the ceiling — no eager voices to convince or argue. From time to time, someone would rise and speak a few words, then merge into silence again. I knew I was not able to address a prayer to a power incomprehensible to me, but I also knew that whenever I should discover the meaning that gave life the tragic or serene dignity I now sensed, I would also find its immediate yet lasting justification. This time I was not sitting alone in a dark room, but was surrounded by other human beings, radiating strength in their silent, common search. I was not pushed by slogans or promises whose fulfillment had not been revealed to me.

I am sure others must have felt similarly. Some of the most ardent atheists in our class said so, and among them were the very ones who were most hurt and troubled by the iniquities of this world.

My interest in the Friends decided my term paper, *The Social Work of the Quakers*. To get more material, I visited the slum projects. In big rented rooms, young people from the neighborhood were gathered and entertained in a simple, feast-like manner at tea and after-supper gatherings. It was a highly personal approach; it could not solve the problem of poverty. My more socialistic friends were critical about it. However, they recognized the attitude of simple helpfulness in this work and appreciated the absence of the self-righteousness which so often characterizes deeds of charity and hurts the pride of the recipient. I myself felt as I did later, in the year of France's downfall when I was seeking help from the Friends in that country, that the effectiveness of limited relief depends strongly on the individuals administering it. Only persons with radiant or honest kindness are able to communicate spiritual strength; and it is through this state of mind that they equal, or even excel, the effectiveness of the great administrative machinery that tries to meet suffering by extensive means.

Among the English Friends I visited during my stay in England, I found many sympathetic, even-minded people, blessed by a lack of national and group prejudices. The greatest impression on me, however, was made by our guide, who conducted us around the various places connected with Friends' activities. He looked neither weighty nor well-to-do, but slightly shabby, like a white-collar worker. However, there was an untiring enthusiasm about him that brightened his whole appearance. He would fall into reverie when he listened to our German folk-songs and would tell us after our singing how he had had to think

back to times when, during the World War I, hatred and confusion had made German words impossible. He had lost wife and child and was happy around young people. He might have been pathetic if it had not been for the expression of gentle joy on his thin face. Although seemingly insignificant, he belonged to those marginal figures who bring out the deeper meaning of a large picture and imprint it better and more lastingly on our minds.

### About Faces, Suffering And Pity

In everyone's life there are years which seem to pass without leaving visible traces until a sudden series of shocks thrusts the mind back to the dormant questions of adolescence, the quest for the meaning of life and death. After many preliminary warnings, these shocks began for me with Hitler's rise to power and the wave of persecution and intolerance that followed. During that time I was in Austria as a student of philology. I had determined to settle there for good, for I had really fallen in love with the country which bridged so many different cultures of South and East Europe, and which, furthermore, was headed by a progressive government generous in reforms. There seemed to be no place for racial prejudice and oppression. But then I witnessed the bloody end of the Socialist government in Vienna, saw young disappointed idealists departing to Spain where the fight of the loyalists seemed to promise a new realization of freedom, saw refugees coming from Germany bearing the marks of cruel injustice, and I decided to voice my attitude toward Hitlerism whenever I had the occasion.

Being anti-Hitler was for me a human credo rather than a political opinion — Nazism menaced humanists as much as political fighters — and finally it led me into exile in France after the occupation of Austria by Hitler. This

flight, partly chosen, partly imposed, brought a great change into my life. It was not a heroic change — heroism was with those who had already suffered for their ideas or were ready to stay in order to work from within — but it ended my personal aspiration and cut me off from familiar ties. In a strange country with a new language, a foreigner scarcely tolerated, I looked at life and people with new eyes. Above all, I learned that the less people have, the more they get to know without words. I now had to learn all over again. Inwardly I had come again of age, and memories of childhood mingled with the problems of a world at war.

There were many other exiles in France who had left their countries for racial, political or religious reasons. Suffering and discomfort were often accepted in high spirit among these outcasts. If asked for what they suffered and went on living, they would answer according to their different beliefs. All these beliefs were tied up with the conception of freedom — freedom from oppression — and this had as many facets and reflections as my early idea of God. The deeper sources that fed the spirit of brave endurance were not so easily recognized as the words and reasons given for it. There were more people among us who went to political meetings than to places of worship; those who went to churches and synagogues talked rarely about their observance: it was as much a part of their inner selves as their sleepless nights. Faith in brotherhood and in its hidden seeds was interspersed with the petty sorrows of daily life and the ever-current problem of how to get by from day to day. Some, who lacked papers, lived in prisons. Others peddled, mended or washed clothing, or wrote and tutored as I did.

Now, when I turn back to those years, I find my own experience scattered over many different human features and the fragments of fate related to them. Only in conjuring them up, can I form a tentative pattern of meanings

painfully mingled with hope, whose total sum I find in a woodcarving that accompanies me wherever I settle down. It is a copy of a primitive figure of Christ made in Peru. The features under the crown of thorns, engrossed by physical suffering and utter exhaustion, show the subtle flicker of a smile, suggestive of the Christian enigma, mankind's redemption by the son of man and the son of God: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend."

On the whole, the misery we encountered in Paris was still of a frozen and subdued kind. Tragic defeat was not yet in the open. Therefore, the faces I remember from those early days appear to me plain and deeply worn; later reports alone have revealed to me the look of courage in the presence of death or defeat.

I remember our laundry man with his tired, slurring steps. He had been a lawyer once; now he and his wife made their living by scrubbing linen. Often the wife was sick and the laundry not ironed: the man would smile then, uneasy and pleading, although we did not mind much the grey, creased pieces he turned over to us. Among his customers were a gentle Jewish philosopher and a poet famous for his rebellious songs. Each lived absorbed in his own realm of thought. When the Nazis overran France, the two committed suicide. Sudden exhaustion of despair had overwhelmed them while the always-tired lawyer and his wife went on enduring life under the stress of fear.

Then there were two German refugee women, neighbors in a small hotel. On warm summer evenings I would sometimes meet them at the bridge over the Seine. There is nothing so acquiescent as Paris at night. Although the city is full of life, the silhouettes of old churches and the medieval names of streets and squares give a sense of detached continuity. We would exchange a few words with the women before we parted. Nothing in their ordinary faces disclosed the poignant memories they concealed. The father

of the younger, a trade-union man, had been murdered by the Nazis, and his mutilated body leaned against the door of his daughter's house; the husband of the older, a Communist, was decapitated after a cruel trial. His last letters from prison, then circulating in a pamphlet, showed unflinching compassion and human endurance.

I felt about all these people as I had felt toward the religious girl at school: I should have liked to ask them about their ultimate source of conviction. But I had learned by now that words, whether religious or political, do not really answer the question which arises from the thin edge where death and faith meet. I had also learned how to accept all the reports about violent death — to know, but not to comprehend them.

One force that bound together fighters and dreamers in exile sprang from compassion, as compassion springs from pity. But pity is a feeling as many-faced as freedom. It can bring, as ancient Sophocles showed in *Antigone*, either peace or the sword of revenge; it can be a sociable trait whose root in human hearts may reveal another nature when cut off from human companionship. Dying men take their last vision with them and leave us only their last words. Among the seven students executed in Munich were sister and brother Scholl, practicing Catholics, who died after having taken the sacraments. Their last words are reported by the prison priest: the boy's were from the first Corinthian letters. Others died with the words freedom on their lips.

In periods of sickness in a dreary hotel room in France, I myself had come close to death in a solitary but not heroic way. There was no one to speak to; slowly my flesh seemed to be stripped away, and in the few moments of rest between attacks of pain, I felt that around the corner a silent neighbor was waiting with me, and that he guarded the words and visions of those who had died in faith.

## Panic And Fear

The impact of mass panic and fear came upon me fully when I was fleeing southward from Paris in the summer of 1940 after the Germans had broken into France. But this experience was intermingled with unexpected consolation. In the midst of defeat, solitary fear gave way to compassion and unity.

The wheat stood high in the fields, and clouds of dust arose from the thousands of feet tramping the roads. I was with a young woman and her three-year-old son. We both had bicycles, and the child was seated in a basket before her. From time to time a German airplane would strafe the road, and we would creep with all the others into the field, burying our faces in the fragrant herbs. Later, for three days we rode in a truck of French soldiers. Even at night the truck did not stop. Some of the soldiers took turns holding the little boy in their arms. Sitting in the shadows of pointed machine guns, they rocked the child tenderly and talked haltingly about the catastrophe that had befallen their country. Sometimes they spoke about God and death while the clear stars were shining down upon us.

During the day, we would meet desperate mothers who had lost their children in the crowd of fleeing people. "Didn't you see a little girl with a checkered scarf?" they would ask, crying, and the soldiers would shake their heads almost crying, too, then murmur, "Why, it might have been my child."

Wherever we stopped we found helpful people sharing whatever food they had. Stupor and pity had opened men's hearts, and for a short while we were all as one, engulfed together in the stream of fleeing people.

Sometimes the villages we entered were almost empty — except for a few dead people lying on the streets where the bombs had hit them. Dogs and chickens strolled

peacefully around them, and vagrants, unmolested, ransacked deserted stores.

One night we found refuge in a barn, crowded with exhausted people. We stumbled over groaning sleepers in the dark until we found a free corner, and were dozing off amid the heavy smell of hay when we were harshly awakened by the roaring of airplanes, followed by detonations. We rushed out with all the others. In the moonlit night we could see the swastikas on the planes and the frightened faces of the people around us. There was an old peasant with a barrel from which he tapped wine, handing the filled cup to all who wanted it. This was wine from his own vineyard, he cried out in drunken exhilaration. He had carted it on a wheelbarrow for miles on his flight, and he did not want to die without having tasted this last vintage. Some people drank with him, and some of them knelt down and prayed, waving cup or folded hands frantically heaven-wards. "Hail Mary, Mother of Christ..." A few old people just sat on the ground and stared into space. The airplanes plunged down to the barn, flew up and came back again, raining destruction, forcing desperate piety or resignation down upon us. It seemed that fear of God and fear of man had become one, leaving no space for other emotions.

My friend and I never found out how many people were killed that night. We crept deep into a wheat field and fell asleep, the little boy clinging tightly to his mother. When we woke, red poppies were bending down to us in the early morning breeze, and the golden wheat shafts were lighting up under the rising sun. It was a morning of glory.

### There Might Be A House

As long as the armistice was not announced, we went on tramping the roads. Ten days after we had set out from Paris

we reached Toulouse by many detours. The war was finished — in at least its first phase.

In peaceful days, Toulouse is a student and tourist city with memories of troubadours and legends of mystical heretics, but now it was crowded with refugees. Not far from the railroad station, we met long columns of people waiting before the door of a house. They looked more downtrodden and way-worn even than the fleeing people on the roads. There were many young women among them, with babies in their arms, and many children without shoes. They all spoke with subdued anxiety. Their tongue was Spanish; they were refugees from the Spanish Civil War, now caught in another defeat in a strange country. They told us that this was the house in which they and their children might get food and rest, that every Spaniard knew that it was the place of the Quakers. For a moment I had a strange sensation, as if nothing had changed. I was still a child, searching for God in a dark room, in a dark time that never ended; and there were the Friends emerging again in apocalyptic space, pilgrims of compassion from nowhere. As in a fairytale in which people meet in disguise, I could not help asking: “And who are the Quakers?”

“God may know,” answered another woman in broken French. “They are not from here.”

“Isn’t it enough that they care for us Spaniards and our children?” asked a young woman with a baby on her arm. The child wore nothing but a jacket over its bruised body.

“Who will care for us?” I asked. “We are strangers, too, although not Spaniards.”

“There might be a house of the Quakers in Marseille for all strangers,” said a little girl. “They say they help all and are everywhere.” It sounded as if she had formed a fairy tale in her mind. And as in a fairy tale I was not to find this house until the end of my story in Europe.

## An interlude

The friend with whom I had traveled had decided to settle down temporarily in a small town near the Pyrenees. Her husband was interned in a camp not far from this town, and she did not want to lose track of him. It was hard then for a woman to live alone, so I stayed with her and did not regret it. During the few months of this interlude, we lodged in the small house of an old peasant woman whose son was a prisoner of war in Germany. The Red Cross paid for all refugees in this town: we ate in a communal kitchen, helped with all domestic tasks and picked grapes in the vineyards for the peasants. It was a quiet time, like a lull between storms, almost an idyll, like one of those rare days in which all frictions seem to dissolve in the mellow light of autumn and the blue shadows of mountains.

As in many small French towns, two worlds met here, two different periods of France's history. There were touches, reflected in some understanding and helpful municipal officials, of the enlightened rational days of the French revolution with its passion for human freedom and equality. There was also the world of the Catholic Church manifested in many church buildings, among them a cathedral built by the Jesuits. Church bells rang through the whole day, and old women clad in black followed their summons. There was also a small library, *bibliothèque populaire*, with all kinds of good books that fed the hungry minds of the people. In those transitory days of peace, these different worlds met in a generous spirit and tried to ease the life of the refugees. Many of the religious peasants felt deep pity for the Spaniards and gave them all kinds of support without asking after their creeds, and friendly officials provided them with food tickets and advice.

Our old landlady did all that was in her scanty power to help us. As soon as the cold autumn winds had started, we found every evening a hot brick, wrapped in paper, in the

feather beds. Although the Germans had inflicted sorrow upon her whole life, she would never reproach us for our German origin. Her husband had been killed by the Germans in World War I, and now her son was taken prisoner. She missed him badly, missed also his help in fields and garden. Like many simple people, she regarded war as a catastrophe for which great lords were responsible.

Sometimes she showed me letters from her son. He worked for German peasants, and his labor on their fields made him think of home. Once he wrote his mother how he had helped with the potato crop and had thought that the potatoes were much smaller than hers. He also asked her to send him some chocolate bars for the peasant children since they liked sweets so much and he was good friends with them. So the mother, despite her scanty savings, would add special little gifts for the German children in her monthly packages to her son. Each morning she went to early Mass and prayed for him. Then she would work as charwoman in a hospital and in the afternoon go to her fields. In the evenings she would sink to bed deadly tired, but not without exchanging a few friendly words.

I should have liked to spend the rest of my life in that small town if it had not been for the warning the officials gave us one day. We were told that for the refugees from foreign countries more rigid laws were expected: we might be sent to an internment camp as the Spanish refugees had been; therefore it would be better for us to go to Marseille. On the early morning when we left town the peaks of the Pyrenees were covered with fresh snow, and the winds blowing over the plain were harsh with the breath of winter.

“There might be a house in Marseille,” a house of the Quakers, I thought, shivering in my summer dress. It was like a petitionary prayer, but I felt the warning that always overcomes me when I hear people praying for the fulfillment of everyday concerns.

## Prayer

Since my childhood the idea of prayers had worried me in my search for meaning of life. It seemed to me that the involved pattern of fate manifesting a power beyond men's reach was too great for personal requests. The saying of the Psalmist was on my mind: "He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their souls."

The atmosphere in Marseille, however, was such in the winter of 1940 that I learned to understand the ways of prayer better than before. All refugees live on legends of hope, and there is no hope which is not fed by some sort of faith. Here I have to think of Leocadia, a young Spanish refugee woman who was one of my dearest friends in those days. I learned to know her in a hotel under police supervision in which all strangers were cleared and provided with some sort of identification papers after they had proved their whereabouts and intentions. As long as we stayed there we were free and yet detained. We had much time to talk to one another. Leocadia was a gentle person, filled, despite her great despair, with deep yet troubled faith. She came from Barcelona and had married there just before she fled to France. Her story about her honeymoon consisted of odd recollections, endless roads, dying people, bombed-out houses and nights of fear. After their arrival in France she and her husband were interned separately. After one year of internment, exactly on the first anniversary of their marriage, the husband, yearning to see his wife, broke out of camp. He was arrested and sentenced to prison for a number of years. Leocadia's sadness was great, and increased with each visit to the prison, when she could see her husband's face only through a crisscross of barbed wire and could converse with him only in short snatches. Furthermore, she was excluded from the wave of optimism which seized the Spanish refugees

after a promise of the Mexican government to send boats and provide refuge.

Sometimes, when sitting on the edge of her bed, she would say: "I was praying today," and then shyly add in formal Spanish way, "O friend of mine, do you believe in prayers?" I would answer by another question. "Do you pray for the liberation of your husband?" She shook her head, "I pray for him; I do not seek fulfillment of my wishes, but it gives me peace." And her lips trembled.

Later she visited me often in the Quaker hostel while she was lodged in a house of the Mexican government. I tried to persuade her to stay with me since she seemed unhappy and forlorn. But she would shake her head again, in the mixture of despair and gentleness so peculiar to her. "I don't belong here with this good people. I am not good any longer." She paused, then whispered: "I have learned to hate: they are so cruel to my husband."

"Do you still pray?"

"That's the only thing left to me: it is like being at home again."

## The House

Thinking back to the Quaker hostel that meant so much to us, I have to look at it in two different ways: as a symbol and as a relief station. As a symbol, it stood at the beginning and end of my European Odyssey. We came to it as in the parable of the prodigal son. Only it had not been dissipation that led us astray but the turmoils of a shaken world. We almost expected to be greeted by loving parents.

As a relief station, this hostel was involved in many practical problems, such as administering temporary help and coping on a limited budget with the requests of too many people. Such problems require a special administrator, a personality that combines tact, efficiency and deep affection

for people, a rare combination. People can hardly live up to the pure outlines of a symbol, and if others expect them to, it can only lead to disappointment. Whenever I meet desperate seekers now and observe their all-too-easy acceptance of disillusion, I must think of that hostel and the various sensations it brought into my life.

It was like nothing but coming home through the dark. The house was located on a long drab avenue. After an arch of triumph, the street became squalid with little run down houses and deserted lots where many homeless children camped. Then the house loomed up in the scanty light of a lantern, a friendly three-story brick house with great windows. As soon as one rang the bell, clattering steps would be heard approaching beyond the big wooden door. One of the refugees in charge of the door had come to open it; his short glance at his wristwatch indicated that the newcomer had just made it before nine o'clock. After this nobody was admitted. With a sigh of relief, one would slip into the big hall, tiled in red and white, gay and spacious.

Once this house had been a Norwegian sailors' rest home: there was still an air of sea and cleanliness about it, but because of the winter's scarcity of fuel it was cold. After a big bowl of the lentil or bean soup that made our steady diet, the guests would go down into the great-windowed dormitory, always filled with chatter in the daytime and the groaning of restless sleepers at night.

The home-life in this house was affected by various influences and one might say by various aspects of Christian faith. Before admission, there was an interview at the office in another section of town. These interviews were pleasant. The understanding questions of the interviewers, even if not promising of immediate support, conveyed a warmth that would stay with one in the cold streets.

But in my time, the directress of the hostel was very different from the people in the office. She was an elderly

American woman. She stressed the fact that she was a Christian, but not a Quaker. She was more stern than affectionate, believed in Christian obedience rather than in love, and thus gave to the house a disciplinary order instead of a cooperative spirit. She managed with great efficiency. In spite of the shortage of soap and food, the house was always clean and the pots always filled with food for our hungry stomachs. Yet there was chill in the atmosphere, the chill of charity administered with an unloving spirit, unlike that of the Friends. There were no silent meetings for worship, no pauses of quiet search that would extinguish the harshness of frictions, but there were a number of reasonable rules for cleanliness whose breaking was considered sinful.

“How different Christians can be. Think of the people in the office,” said a young girl painter with whom I was ordered to do the house laundry. Laundry meant washing the big sheets in cold water, with hard brushes, without soap. The girl threw the brush against the stone basin and stretched her thin fingers, now blue and swollen.

“It is not that,” she said looking at her hands. “It is how nice washing could be in a house that shelters you.”

I remember my homecoming on a cold windy Christmas day after a strenuous interview with the police. I marched through streets covered with snow, but inside I was glowing expectation. Christmas — even for such a doubtful mind as mine — meant hope beneath the snow, and warmth.

Our directress had prepared a tree and ingeniously invented a special brew for us since there was no tea to celebrate this occasion. The mystery of this fragrant drink was orange peel. We sipped and knitted happily around the Christmas tree, but we had also to listen to a strange sermon in which dirt was made equal with sin. These reproaches seemed specially directed to some poor Spanish

women whose babies were always short of diapers. They left the room with distressed faces.

These are fragmentary memories of the friendly house at the end of a long drab road. They are also the lasting impressions of one who received help. So that now when I see people setting off abroad I want to ask, not how efficient they will be in granting relief under stress, but what they will do to other people seeking help under stress. Along with the tangible contributions of practical support, what kind of spiritual resources will they be able to convey?

### The Farewell

I left the hostel as I had entered it through the office in town. Two months of shelter in the Quaker hostel was the maximum limit since there were so many more needy people.

Every detail of seeming insignificance matters in hard situations. I remember the shy nodding of farewell of the young refugee boy who opened and closed the office door, his red cheeks and mature but not precocious face. In the hostel all helpers wore the stern expression of the administrator. Here everybody was kind and committed to the sorrows they listened to but often could not mitigate. I recall the helpless smile of the receptionist when one had to wait. "Would you wait a few minutes? Mr. and Mrs. Smith are just drinking tea; they had such a busy morning." I waited gladly with the peaceful vision of a tea cup in mind. Whenever I drink tea now, I have to think of it.

And then the final visit of farewell when I wanted nothing but to tell the good news that, through the help of friends, I had obtained a Mexican visa and was able to leave Marseille. I received several things to add to my scanty equipment. I received also a small card with the address of

the Friends' Service Committee in Philadelphia, printed under a tiny star.

Although I thought I should never come to the United States, I treasured the card together with the quiet words I exchanged with the Friend who spoke with me. There was nothing remarkable about our conversation except that it was not a routine matter. Haltingly he told me about his life, that he was a teacher, and haltingly I recalled my past studies. But since there was no routine about it, these words and their shy sincerity led me beyond the temporary anxiety of those days. The other person who had come to help made me realize that I myself was not just a hunted animal living on charity and chance.

When I finally boarded the ship, I carried, as did most of the others, only a small bundle. There was nothing in it that tied me to my former life, no photos or letters. All my ties had been shattered. Left to me were only my memories of friends, dead, far away or struggling. There was also the little card with the sign of the star that had come into my life far back in my childhood.

## Epilogue

It took five years after my departure from Europe to find my way to the Friends' study center in America, Pendle Hill. During these years Europe had loomed in the back of my mind as I had seen it last from the boat in the narrow sea off southern Spain. Africa and Europe met there in the bare sun baked outlines of a rock with a fortress atop, as noncommittal as the prospect of my future.

An entanglement of incidents had followed my escape: the outbreak of a new World War and with it a series of events beyond my control that shunted me to the United States instead of Mexico. All these vicissitudes steeped me for months in greater confusion than the transitory life

that had preceded my voyage. I was now in safety, but freed from the burden of persecution, I did not know what I should look forward to. Europe lay far behind me, but in my thoughts the fortress I had seen from the boat grew to tremendous dimensions: it locked up tears and desperate courage, the unquiet graves of friends and parents, and a meaning I could no longer decipher.

Slowly I tried to get back to normal life, to a phase of my past that had stopped years ago in my student days. I had a teaching fellowship in a well-established eastern college, and for the first time in years, experienced the security and continuity of intellectual pursuits. Life in this college introduced me to the pleasures of casual relationships and free exchange of ideas without friction. Yet in all my activity, I could not forget that there were stronger and deeper values than those of scholarship. The amiable and slightly stale life of the well-ordered campus seemed to enhance my uneasiness.

When I received the offer of a teaching position at Pendle Hill, I felt it as an answer to a prayer, quite unrecognizable at first as most such answers are. In unpacking my suitcase after my arrival, I found the little card with the star given to me in Marseille. I had forgotten it; but there it was, a token of Europe pointing like a compass to the place I had just reached. It seemed an assurance that I should find again what I had seemingly lost, something intangible that I had thought buried in European soil.

Pendle Hill also had beautiful grounds and a peaceful landscape, but it was evident that the comforts of life were secondary to other concerns than those of external improvements and material security. The people I met had come to study and learn for the sake of better understanding and tolerance among men rather than for preparation for careers. Studies and housework were equally shared by teachers and students and there were no servants.

My special assignment was to give language instruction to relief workers who were being sent to Europe by the American Friends Service Committee in Philadelphia. My work linked me with the administering of benefits such as I once had received.

In the daily classes all the words that had puzzled and attracted me would come back to my mind; words like faith, justice and mercy. How well I knew from my former life that they could be stones, barriers or messages. Now I was given the chance to fill them with life and experience that could be passed on — beyond dividing frontiers.

While helping my students with the translation of passages from George Fox and John Woolman, something more than linguistic rules shines through the network of grammar, something stronger than all solecisms: urgent visions and sorrows of the early Friends about the suffering and iniquities of this world and a faith in things beyond them. These visions I cannot separate from the deep pauses of silence, preceding now, as in other years, the daily tasks of the Friends and all those seekers who set out to work in a world of controversies.

When the farm bell outside the kitchen rings loudly for morning worship, I hurry along the lane of maple trees. I feel sometimes as if I were wandering back again through the half-circle of my life — just in order to arrive in the low-ceilinged room with the wooden benches. There they sit, the Friends I heard of in my childhood, whom I had forgotten and met again, waiting in this morning hour for the Inner Light and the Inner Voice to speak out through human frailties.

Sometimes words of adoration and search fall into the silence as pebbles might drop into a pond. They stir the mind that goes on seeking, trying to form a meaning so often lost in troubles. This meaning rises and falls with the tide of memories, inconsistencies, bruises, blanks and

yearnings. It is the texture from which prayers are made and through which sometimes the short sharp knock of recognition can be heard.