

MILDRED BINNS YOUNG  
**The Candle, The Lantern, The Daylight**  
PENDLE HILL PAMPHLET 116

PENDLE HILL PAMPHLET 116

**The Candle,  
The Lantern,  
The Daylight**

Mildred Binns Young



PENDLE HILL PUBLICATIONS  
WALLINGFORD, PENNSYLVANIA

ABOUT THE AUTHOR Mildred Binns Young was born in Ohio and attended Friends' schools and Western Reserve University. With her husband and three children, she lived for some years at Westtown School, where Wilmer Young was Dean of Boys. The Youngs, then lived in the South, working under the American Friends Service Committee for fifteen years. From this rural living came four Pendle Hill pamphlets: *Functional Poverty*, *Standard of Living*, *Participation in Rural Life*, and *Insured by Hope*. Since finishing their project in South Carolina in 1955, they have been in residence at Pendle Hill. Mildred Young's 1960 Pendle Hill Mid-Winter Institute talk was issued as a pamphlet last year, *Another Will Gird You*. The present pamphlet was given at the 1961 Mid-Winter Institute.

If the soul knows God in His creatures, that is only evening light: if it knows His creatures in God, that is morning light: but if it know God as He who alone is Being, that is the clear light of midday.

Meister Eckhart, translated by Bracey and Payne in *Mysticism East and West*, by Rudolf Otto, copyright by The Macmillan Company.

set time is the practice of prayer; beyond it lies the gift of prayer.

And I am no longer reluctant to use prayers written or spoken by others and learned by heart. They begin in others, but by using them we root them in ourselves. We make them our own and when the heart is unable to open toward God, these prayers can act as keys. Once the heart is open, it finds its own words until that moment comes when it needs none.

Now, aware that much remains unknown and even unguessed, but grateful for the candle, grateful for the lantern, and grateful for daylight, I rejoice in the possibility of sunrise — yes, in the hope — yes, in the expectation of it.

### Notes

1. The poem by Iqbal has been translated by A. J. Arberry, and appears in *The Mysteries of Selflessness*, a Philosophical Poem by Muhammad Iqbal; John Murray, London.

There was once a woman who arose before dawn. Her house was one of those old-fashioned, roomy, rural ones, without water or electricity. Rising in the dark, she took a candle which she lighted with a match, and first she made a fire in the cook-stove. When it blazed up soundly, she began to put together the ingredients of breakfast, laying the table, slicing bread, putting coffee on the fire. As she moved about from cupboard to pantry to table, she carried the candle with her. Needing a pail of water, she lighted a lantern and carried it with her to the well to draw water. She was occupied with her work, and preoccupied too, and she moved about at her tasks without noticing that dawn had come, until suddenly she found that now she was working in the light. It was not sunlight yet, but neither was it a pool of light amid dark or dusk, such as candle and lantern provided; it was daylight and it reached to every corner.

The thesis of this parable, if a parable is allowed to have a thesis, is that, although candlelight or lantern light cannot compare with daylight when it comes, and although we do not yet know what the sunlight may be, by comparison with dawn, still we can begin the day's work by candlelight or lantern, and go on with it in the dawnlight.

In my life, the candle was tradition. It may have partaken somewhat of the "dead hand of the past," but still it was a guidance. The lantern was the vision of human need, the kind of human need that can be met. It may have been a sentimental and unrealistic vision, but it lit the way.

Let me take the tradition first. I grew up in the nearest thing there was then (and even now to a less extent, it exists) to a primitive Quaker community; it was one of the so-called Wilburite meetings of the middle west. My parents were very young themselves when I was a child, and I do not know how much they had thought out their approach to the rearing

and religious education of their children, and how much it was the product of their own rearing and education.

I do not remember when I was first taken to Meeting for Worship. My first conscious recollection of meeting is of being on “the men’s side” of the meeting house with my father when the partitions were being drawn down to divide the two sides during the separate men’s and women’s meetings for business, following Meeting for Worship. The partitions made a grand hollow rumbling as they came down. There is no sense of strangeness recalled so I am sure I must have been already well accustomed to meeting at the time of this first memory. I liked meeting, then and later, and not because I was a very good child; the word rambunctious was sometimes applied to me. But I think I knew how to enjoy quiet from an early age.

Mid-week meeting was the most impressive. My father walked up from his work in town; the farmers left their ploughing or haying and drove in from the farms in carriages; and our school, a Friends’ school of a dozen or fifteen children of various ages, interrupted its usual schedule. Each of us recited aloud the verses of Scripture we had memorized the night before, one verse for a very small person, five or ten as one got older, or more if one liked to memorize. One would have said these verses over to one’s mother before leaving for school, and great would have been the consternation if one had ignorantly chosen something unsuitable to say in public, and it was now too late to memorize another passage.

After Scripture, we all walked quietly by twos to the nearby meeting house and the girls sat in a row with the teacher, always in my time a young woman. The boys, fewer of them invariably in any school year, sat on the other side of the partition and were watched over by somebody’s father or uncle. Our mothers would be there, having postponed their ironing or mending until the afternoon, donned tidy dresses (but not their Sunday ones) and brought the pre-school children and babies with them. The older Friends,

I do not think I was taught much, or perhaps anything, about sin when I was a child. The ministers of our meeting must not have stressed it or its consequences much. I think my impression was that sin was to an adult as naughtiness was to a child, i.e. disobedience. I did not know enough to ask: who is adult? of whom then may we demand the obedience obligatory for an adult? and who then may be accused of sin? The sense of sin, I think I have always lived under, as some people do, while others clearly do not. It seems to me this is one of the ways, at least for some temperaments, in which the holy dread, the sense of Presence, comes to us. It comes as a measuring of our fraction against the Whole, a weighing of our infinitesimal against the Infinite, at once a judgment, a demand, and a promise. I am sure that the sense of sin is transcended in those reaches of prayer where God is no longer besieged or beseeched by us, but is fully met. But on this, I must speak from hearsay only.

I have never outgrown a sort of naïve surprise and delight which I felt when I found out that there is one single thing that one can have without limit and not deprive anyone else — the love of God, His Presence. If my friend is with me, he cannot also be with someone else who may equally need him; even his love cannot be indefinitely divisible so that others, known and unknown, may have an equal share in it with me. But, with the love of God, the more insatiably I could take it into myself, the more of it there would be available for all. The more I might dwell in His Presence, the more He would be present also for others. This is an incomparable richness set over against the poverty of having physically to live and thrive upon what many people lack.

And this richness comes through prayer. I can no longer accept the theory that, since prayer is given rather than achieved, no time should be set for it. The set time is the minimum; the maximum is the prayer without ceasing. The

For me, coming out of the tradition I have described, and with such experiences as I have had, the teachings of Jesus are the very paving blocks of the way I must try to walk. This teacher is the Jesus who lived and worked and taught in Palestine, and left behind him in a few followers a knowledge of the experience of God so incontrovertible that out of it grew the Church. I have not learned to identify this Jesus with that inward witness which we Friends find to be present in the human heart, both timelessly and universally: that which John Woolman called “a principle that is pure placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names.” Nor can I call this Jesus by the name *God*, the sacred syllable by which we denote that which is “the One without a second.”

But when Peter responds to Jesus’ question, “Will ye also go away?” by saying, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life,” my whole being echoes him, for these are the words of life. If I should turn away from them to any other teaching, however in itself pure and true, I should exile myself from that which makes, for me, “a world that is house and home, a dwelling for man in the universe,” (to borrow Buber’s words). I know that the ideal is out of my reach, that the commands even so far as I understand them are beyond my capacity for obedience, but the imperative in them is the law that I know. Like Peter again, I follow a long way off, because I know nothing better, nothing that comes so close to my need as to do any possible part of what Jesus taught and showed. So — he is Lord and Master.

I can accept the fact that for people brought into another tradition, as I have been brought into this one, the same invincible imperative may be mediated by some other teacher. This need not change the reality for me. Not to succeed in doing this bidding is failure; not to try to do is sin. In that sense, this demand and the demand of God are identical.

and those most likely to speak, were seated in the galleries, facing us.

The meeting house was a large one, dim and cool, with a high ceiling containing a ventilator that looked like a whirling wheel. I do not know whether I ever heard anyone preach from Ezekiel, with his visions of wheels, but I suspect someone did, for to me Ezekiel’s wheels *are* this wheel. The silence was profound even with us children there, all the deeper because one would hear during the meeting the workaday weekday world going about its business outside: horses clapping and the bread- or ice-wagon rumbling on the cobbled street, or boys whistling to each other.

There was nearly always speaking, mostly from the gallery. The Scriptures were repeated much and with all their poetry intact. They were not often expounded, but they were visibly enjoyed and revered as having meaning for our lives. I am not likely ever to read the 80th Psalm without hearing, in the stentorian voice of a minister long ago laid to rest, that trumpet-like opening:

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength and come and save us. Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

The speaking of such a Psalm in a sermon was the nearest thing to “set” prayer that we ever heard. I do not think I ever heard even the Lord’s Prayer repeated in meeting. We children were not taught any forms of prayer nor taught to “say” prayers of our own at bedtime or other times. Our grace before meals was, and was called, silence. Family worship consisted of Bible-reading, occurring daily with the whole family gathered together before the youngest children were put to bed. My father read, and he was a good reader;

he read in a natural though serious tone of voice, and he read consecutively, whole chapters, and without sparing us the hard or tiresome passages, except sometimes genealogies. Following the reading, there was silence for some moments, not as prolonged as some families had.

We never discussed the Scriptures either at home or at school, and there was no Firstday School. The reason for this was that Friends of that group at that time felt that, as the meaning of the Scriptures could only be opened to the human mind from within, during its times of reflection and quiet, any explaining of them was futile and could be dangerous to the development of the individual insight.

There was a similar feeling about prayer: that true prayer is always “given,” can arise only from the inward pressure of the Divine on the soul. To “say” prayers that had been learnt by heart was not prayer, and was not thought likely to lead to prayer either. So we were left entirely to ourselves as far as overt training in prayer went. But just as we heard the Bible much and regularly read and spoken, so we also saw and heard people engaged in prayer. We participated by being present, and I think we sometimes participated more than that.

Prayer, however, was always called “supplication.” I grew up with an impression that “prayer” is not a word Friends use, just as we did not say “church” but “meeting house.” Spoken supplication was much more frequent in meeting than it is now. It was the most solemn form of ministry. The minister knelt, and then waited while the whole meeting rose to its feet. If any of the men had kept on their hats in meeting, as some few of the plainest Friends still did then, they now took them off. Sometimes my mother had a baby asleep on her lap so she would remain sitting while we older girls stood beside her. Out of the deep hush, the addressing and supplicating voice would ascend, drawing down the Presence to hover close above our heads. How authentic was the vocative! how deep the submission! how

ourselves, they still had need to say: teach us to pray. And he gave them that great, stark, packed prayer that has been clattered through so often in hurried and indifferent concert, but has also been the central jewel on the chain of Christian prayer, glowing like a ruby amid the poor treasure of many inarticulate and untutored hearts.

*Our Father which art in heaven:* acknowledgment of the side-by-side relationship; acknowledgment of the authority over us; acknowledgment of the eternal paradox — completely ours, completely “other” — both at the same time.

*Hallowed be thy name:* hallowed in our hearts, hallowed on our lips; “Holy, holy, holy.” The eleventh discourse of the Bhagavad Gita takes at least fifteen verses to say this one thing, and there is breathless majesty in the saying. But the majesty in these four words is no less. “Hallowed be thy name.”

*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done:* in my heart, by my hands, in my house, in my meeting, in my community, in my country, throughout the whole round world: as in heaven so on earth, thy will be done. So comes the Kingdom.

After this flight away from ourselves comes the return to our own infinitely inferior need, the acceptance of its satisfaction as also part of the Father’s carefulness.

*Give me this day my daily bread:* my daily necessity, the humble and humbling provision by which alone body and soul can be kept together.

*Forgive me my offences* in so far as I also forgive others their offences against me. The Irish psychologist, Jonathan Hanaghan, has remarked that this is the single forgiveness Jesus taught us to ask for: forgiveness for encroachment upon others.

And then comes that mysterious petition, which baffles our intellect, but finds a response in our hearts: *Lead us not into temptation:* bring us not to ordeal, test us not, but deliver us, *deliver us from the evil,* against which we have no power of our own.

blow fall upon others. Some people say that nothing is laid upon us except what we need or can bear. But am I to suppose that the small child hopelessly afflicted, or the saintly elder stricken with loss and pain, needs this discipline and I do not? If this is, by some boundless intention, a training and cleansing process, why does it not come to those who need it most?

From the New Testament we have the phrase “counted worthy to suffer.” So are we to suppose that God looks upon some of us as not worth bothering about (beyond help, maybe) that he leaves us unscathed? But this is a contradiction in terms, for God is defined, in part, as the utmost caring we can conceive. Again, if he tempers the wind to what each one can bear, why do we see so many people broken and demoralized, or even brutalized, by suffering? Why also do even light blows that happen to ourselves often make us worse — and we know ourselves to be worse — rather than better people? And what can God’s intention for us have to do with great natural catastrophes, or even less with brutal and willful man-made catastrophes, with all the piled-up, one-by-one suffering they bring?

I simply have to leave all these questions alone; they are beyond my ability to understand. From the storm of such questions, there is no shelter in the reason. I am grateful that we can pray. Julian of Norwich wrote: “As the body is clad in the cloth, and the flesh in the skin, and the bones in the flesh, and the heart in the whole, so are we, soul and body, clad in the goodness of God and enclosed ... and we may with grace and his help stand in ghostly beholding ... and may ask of (Him) with reverence all that we will.”

One of the most poignant sayings in the Gospels is the plea of the disciples: “Lord, teach us to pray.” There they had been with Jesus, as we suppose, day and night on roads and in houses and in the wilderness. Yet, like

urgent the petition! After the voice ceased and the people had sat down, the silence resumed threefold.

In the preaching, we were often exhorted in the words of Jesus, and his parables and the incidents of his life and death and resurrection were often put before us. But here too, I do not recall any exegesis. I do not remember being given at home or at meeting any explanations about Jesus, what I was to think about him, believe about him, how attempt to fit him into my own life. But he was there, full scale, represented in the words of all four Gospels, and almost no other words, except those of St. Paul and of the Epistle of James. He was an inseparable part of the worship and of the supplication, though never I think the One addressed in supplication.

We did not know any hymns as such, since there was no singing among Friends of that time and place; and so there were no hymn books about. And we did not use pictures much, nor have prints of famous paintings. The only picture purporting to be of Jesus that I recall from my first decade was the Holman Hunt called “The Light of the World.” There was a reproduction of this on the cover of a little copy of the poem “Lead, Kindly Light,” that we had and memorized. Under the picture were the words, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.”

We never went into churches — I was twelve when I first did — so we did not see the usual representations of Christ in stained glass, statues, and tapestry, which aim to teach certain things about him. I remember with what horror I first heard, at seventeen or so, that some people thought Christ had atoned for our sins by dying on the Cross. If this had even been implicit in what was preached or said to us, I had not been capable of taking it in.

If one were to balance the fullness with the inadequacy in all this program of teaching or non-teaching, the narrowness with the open freedom of it, the strength with the weakness, I do not know how the sum would come out.

But when I remember the way in which religion was put before us, and the central place that it occupied, I can only think of the words: “he shewed me the river of the water of life bright as crystal.”

We were kept on a short leash as to our reading. But I was a reader not to be stopped. I am rather surprised that I never read the Bible to myself, for pleasure. Maybe that was the effect of the atmosphere of special reverence that surrounded it. Before I was ten, I was a regular reader of the *Friend*, which was then literally the “square” *Friend*, being printed in one large piece folded in four. Impossible to find out on what principle, if any, the columns continued, and I just used trial and error until I ran across a place that seemed to make sense. As the sense of many articles was beyond me anyhow, probably I often missed the continuation. We had also two huge volumes of bound *Friend* papers, as we called them; this was a rich mine to dig in. I don’t mean to imply that I had a taste for religious literature more than any healthy child; I just had a taste for literature and whatever was there, I read. Some of it soaked in and it undoubtedly formed a very different background for later reading and experience than children’s stories, fairy tales, or myths would have done.

None of this picture changed much as long as I was in school. But after I had finished school came a new era. My high school years, which had been spent in a Friends Boarding School, had exactly coincided with the First World War. In 1915, my family had moved to a large city where there was no Friends meeting. By 1918, I was ripe for all kinds of rebellion. Probably it was fortunate that further education had to be postponed until I had saved some money; meanwhile I had a job which required my fulltime presence but left a quick worker with much time to herself. I had access to a good library, and now my reading branched in all directions and contributed to the shaking of all foundations.

the pure, the unwatched-over, which one breathes in and unendingly knows, but not desires....

The Psalmist, who had learned praise beyond most mortal singers, could rarely sustain pure praise for more than a few sentences. It was always breaking over into praise *for* — thanks *for* — and from there it is only one step to petition and special pleading, even to complaint and self-justification (and the Psalmist was a rare one at that, too.) A soaring exception is Psalm 100, where the note never once breaks:

O be joyful in the Lord, all ye lands: serve the Lord with gladness, and come before his presence with a song. Be ye sure that the Lord he is God; it is he that hath made us and not we ourselves; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. O go your way into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him and speak good of his Name. For the Lord is gracious, his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth from generation to generation.

But if praise and thanksgiving are the beginning of prayer and worship, they are not the whole of it; for we are entitled, and we are bound, to cry for help out of (as Kelpius says) “a sensibility of our indigences.” I have not been able to come, so far, to any sort of clear conviction about the principle, or the method, or policy (if one may use any of these puny terms) upon which “our indigences” are dealt with in this life. I mean: the question of suffering, and of righteousness or sin, and reward.

A dear friend of mine, who has had much to suffer, says, “God does not make any mistakes.” But if we are to speak in these terms, we must surely be entitled to ask why then he deals so gingerly with some of us and lets blow after

Guidance to them that are being drawn unto It, and a principle of Illumination to them that are being enlightened; a Principle of Perfection to them that are being perfected; a Principle of Deity to them that are being deified; and of simplicity to them that are being brought into simplicity, and of Unity to them that are being brought into unity.”

Gandhi in our own time has put it very simply: “He is a personal God to those who need His personal presence. He is embodied to those who need His touch. He is the purest essence. He simply is, to those who have faith ...One may banish the word ‘God’ ... but one has no power to banish the Thing itself.”

As for us, insignificant as we look and often feel, He has made us for Himself, as Augustine said, and there is no rest for the human heart except in seeking Him. “When thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.” (Ps. 27:8)

I feel very sure that the beginning of prayer is praise and the beginning of worship is thanksgiving. But how hard we find it to put aside our urgent longings and give ourselves to praise without petition, or give ourselves to thanks without stipulation. Before ever they can lift the hymn of thanks, the wings of our prayer draggle in the muddy pools of self-doubt: am I returning thanks that I am one of the favorites who have enough and to spare while others lack? who am healthy while another is sick or in pain? whose pet projects have flourished? who has been by-passed by loss while others weep above ragged graves?

We long to give thanks the way the oriole sings or the flower opens into the light, simply pouring forth glorification without object or reservation. But it is the condition of our humanity that, as Rilke says:

We have never, not for a single day,  
 The pure space before us, into which flowers  
 endlessly open ... never ...

Here is the point where I want to testify to the serviceability of a staunch tradition. During a shaking of foundations, such a tradition can make one capable of holding all new things in solution, and judgment in abeyance, until something that is real for oneself precipitates out of the mixture. Iqbal, a Muslim poet, has a nearly perfect statement of what I mean here, though he is speaking of the community rather than the individual life. This is the poem:

The present age has many tumults hid  
 Beneath its head; its restless temperament  
 Swarms with disorders. The society  
 Of ancient nations in these modern times  
 Is in confusion; sapless hangs life's bough.  
 The glamour and the glitter of our days  
 Has made us strangers to our very selves,  
 And robbed our instrument of melody;  
 Filched from our heart its pristine fire, and dimmed  
 Within our breast the radiance of the flame  
*There is no God but God.* Whene'er decay  
 Destroys the balanced temperament of life,  
 Then the Community may look to find  
 Stability in strict conformity.  
 Go thou thy father's road, for therein lies  
 Tranquility; conformity connotes  
 The holding fast of the Community.  
 In time of Autumn, thou who lackest leaf  
 Alike and fruit, break never from the tree,  
 Hoping that Spring may come. Since thou hast lost  
 The sea, be prudent, lest a greater loss  
 Befall thee; the more carefully preserve  
 Thy own thin rivulet; for it may hap  
 Some mountain torrent shall replenish thee  
 And thou once more be tossed upon the breast  
 Of the redeeming tempest.<sup>1</sup>

When the candle of tradition had played for me its guiding and staying function, the lantern I spoke of came to hand. One did not have to be supersensitive in those post-war years to receive the full force of the vision of human need, but my instinctive response was to ward it off with resentment. Early in my third decade, however, my life was joined to that of one who has, from his youth, understood his service to God as service to his fellowmen. I have often wondered whether love of his fellowmen came naturally to him, or whether he had to learn it. Such love was not a natural attitude for me. I liked many people and I loved my family and friends; mankind at large I rather despised. I imagined that I might become a great writer, on some scholarly subject, as soon as I had amassed the necessary learning, and that I would not need to touch humanity much.

A New Testament writer says: "If anyone says 'I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar." (I John 4:20) But I was no liar; I did not claim to love either God or my brother. Hasidism says that if one loves God but does not love his fellowmen, he is lost; but if he does not love God but does love his fellowmen, there is hope for him. It was a long slow road for me, that road of hope, before I began a little to love my fellowmen. In the end, it was the poor who were to be my teachers, and while I was beginning to learn, it was the enforced knowledge of their need that was a lantern in my hand.

It is said that one should never attempt the works of charity unless the motion springs from love in the heart. But God can lead us by more ways than one. Some he makes ready before he sends them out; others he sends out that they may be made ready.

In my childhood, our lives were spare, our house and possessions plain, our recreations simple and few. But I never experienced necessity, not hunger, or cold, or the deep humiliations of poverty. Six years after the end of the First World War, I once saw, down on the eastern borders of

are aware of it, than when we use some more descriptive word, such as Reality, the Eternal, the Ultimate, etc. All these words limit as any description limits. Indian religion uses the sacred syllable OM, and I do not see that our word GOD is anything else but a sacred syllable. If we think it describes and limits, that is because we have made images to ourselves, and others have made images for us. I doubt if we banish the images by using a more descriptive word, though we may change the images. But in the meantime, we have lost all the increment of meaning that centuries of use have given the sacred syllable. The essential thing is not to make for ourselves images of a small, constricted, insufficient, or national, or sectarian God. The sacred syllable points to no graspable entity.

Many of us, however, being perennial beginners, and perennially human beginners, need a personal God, and it is part of the grace that this need is met and yet God is not limited by it. Howard Brinton has said that the personal God is that face of God that is turned toward us. Indian religion says that the superconceptual Brahman includes a personal God. Jesus taught us to say, with him, "Our Father." The personal God, the God who can be addressed as Thou, is not diminished by being known as a part only of that which Plotinus called "the Absolute"; that totality of which Tillich says that It is "not a being but the power that gives Being to every being"; of which the Kena Upanishad says that It is "the adorable being in all beings"; and of which it is said in the mighty words attributed to Dionysius "... that It is the Cause and Origin and Being and Life of all creation. And It is to them that fall away from It a Voice that doth recall them and a Power by which they rise; and to them that have stumbled into a Corruption of the Divine Image within them, It is a Power of Renewal and Reform; and a Sacred Grounding to them that feel the shock of unholy assault, and a security to them which stand: an upward

long for the knowledge of God, for His Presence, we still hesitate and hang back, pushing away the experience. We are like a child who hangs back from a stranger who offers an exotic gift. He wants the bright treasure but is afraid to take it from that hand. Or we are like a starving man offered a feast, who had only asked for a crust.

I had been hungry all the years;  
 My noon had come, to dine;  
 I, trembling, drew the table near,  
 And touched the curious wine.  
 'Twas this on tables I had seen,  
 When turning, hungry, lone,  
 I looked in windows, for the wealth  
 I could not hope to own.  
 I did not know the ample bread,  
 'Twas so unlike the crumb  
 The birds and I had often shared  
 In Nature's dining-room.  
 The plenty hurt me, 'twas so new, —  
 Myself felt ill and odd,  
 As berry of a mountain bush  
 Transplanted to the road.  
 Nor was I hungry; so I found  
 That hunger was a way  
 Of persons outside windows,  
 The entering takes away

Emily Dickinson

The other day a schoolboy asked me: "Have Friends come to some agreement about what God is?" — I am not even sure I have come to any agreement with myself, but there are a few things I find I can say. One thing is that I feel easier when we use the word "God" for that which (for that One Whom) we feel and know as present and operative in our own lives and throughout the universe, as far as we

Poland, an old woman and her daughter living in a hole in the ground. They were some of the few still living in such conditions out of thousands who had lived so during and after the War. In Warsaw too, I once passed through the corridor of the huge Jewish hospital where long rows of the sick and lame and disfigured poor were waiting for care. In Kentucky, in 1932, working during the summer in the coalmining "camps," I got to know whole townful of families whose houses the depression and unemployment had stripped of all but the last necessities, where women sat idle daylong because they had nothing to work with, while their children went hungry and in rags. All these were only token glimpses of the spectre of human want. It has not been my lot to see the great desolations of want and fear that war creates.

By 1936, many influences — the depression, the work camp idea which was new then, and the teaching and example of Gandhi as brought to us by Richard Gregg — had flowed together into one current which brought us to a point where we were driven to leave our comfortable place in life and undertake the conditions of intentional poverty. This is never the same as involuntary poverty; it never grinds with the same abrasiveness, but it has some of the same features. For almost twenty years we were under the tuition of this form of discipline.

One of the lessons I learned the hard way is that the hand that gives must touch the hand that receives. Thus there is interchange, thus partnership and nourishment. When Lowell, in "The Vision of Sir Launfal," put into the mouth of Christ the words:

Who gives himself with his alms feeds three —  
 Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me

he left off the corollary: "And the giver himself can no otherwise be fed." The gift given without the giver is one bane of our modern world, in which charity must of necessity

(I admit the necessity under the conditions) be organized and flow through official channels. Neither donor nor recipient is nourished at the heart.

Whenever we deal with each other as objects, even objects of compassion, there arises between us a false relationship — no, there arises absence of relationship — and we become the victims of that meaninglessness or emptiness, that “dreadful contingency,” which is such a common complaint against life. Part of this contingency, or “wound of existence,” which is always unhealed, is surely the sense of our inability to live at all except at the expense of other life, and our powerlessness to expiate this guilt, to clear this debt toward other life. We can never give enough to be rid of it. It is said that “Jesus died that we might live.” Here the debt has been raised to the substance of worship. But myriad other lives have also died that we might live. In so far as we must always know our debt to them, and in so far as we must always try to clear it, but never can, we are doomed to pain. Yet if ever one had succeeded in completely paying his debt to the environment of other life, if ever one man had stood completely free of this costly dependency, there we should have seen emptiness and loneliness indeed. God must have given us the suffering of this close interdependence so that we may learn that we are not alone, but that our single life is — not just tangent to, but — locked and interlocked with the lives of others and of animals and the whole creation. He gives not separation but union, union in separation, confirmed and stressed by the paradox. And underneath this stupendous symbiosis, the everlasting arms.

But one learns slowly, and I was hoping I could do good without being good. I was hoping I could help my neighbors without letting them help me, a far harder skill to learn. I hated, for instance, to take time to visit people unless there was nursing needed or other help to be given. I didn't want to sit on porches brushing away flies, and

listening to people talk, when I might be reading, or gardening, or hearing music. One finds advice in unlikely places, and I found myself described and reprimanded in Boswell: “... a lady endeavoured to vindicate herself from blame for neglecting social attention to worthy neighbors, by saying: ‘I would go to them if it would do them any good.’ (Dr. Johnson) said: ‘What good, Madam, do you expect to have it in your power to do them? It is shewing them respect, and that is doing them good.’ ”

A few days ago a young man said to me that he thought the most impressive thing about the Peace Witness in Washington in November was the visible fact that all those Quakers were willing to take that much time, not reading, not preaching, not discussing, just standing there offering their time in witness to their conviction. It is easy to waste time but hard to be generous with it.

I do not know when I began to work by daylight instead of by candle and lantern light. When daylight comes the different things in a room fall into relationship and take on perspective. Instead of peering at them one by one, each separately picked out by the small flame of the candle, one now sees them in the round and all together. And one sees beyond the room too, for now all the windows come to life.

And not by eastern windows only,  
When daylight comes, comes in the light ...

I suppose the need of others, which I was so little able to meet, joined forces with my own need, which others were so little able to meet, to bring me to that posture of seeking which is already the beginning of finding. Buber tells of the Rabbi of Kotsk who asked, “Where is the dwelling of God?” and then answered his own question: “God is wherever man lets him in.” We have only to open the door, but even that is done in us, done for us, by some ineffable graciousness. As much as we long for the door to be opened, as much as we