

Friends' International Service.

I. The Geneva Centre.*

"Hark! Hark! a Voice amid the quiet intense,
It is thy duty waiting thee without—
Open thy door straightway, and get thee hence,
Go forth into the tumult and the shout!

G. MACDONALD.

Exactly a year ago, June 6th, the first meeting for worship of the Society of Friends was held in Geneva,—a little meeting of four resident Friends and two visitors from England. This first year of life has been one of extraordinary interest. The little circle has seen down avenues of wide international service along which Friends could travel, if they would; has seen a year of *invitation to unite* in all that is going on, and of the throwing open of doors in all directions, through which they have been pressed to enter. It has been a year of such hearty welcome, and proffered friendship, that we have felt ashamed at how little we have been able to respond. How can one tiny group of Friends enter in, and take its share of the responsibilities and burdens abounding in a city of such international interests as this, take its share in the struggles and woes, the despairs and the sadness, which are another side of the city life, inevitable in a centre crowded with refugees from all countries and whose existence here is just one stage better only than it would be if they returned to their respective homes?

"To have a friend you must be one!" . . . The work that falls upon the members of a Quaker centre, in a city like Geneva, in simple *friendliness* is indeed varied. Let us take a few illustrations. A little group of Russian and Armenian women students at the foyer of the Student Christian Movement, having a gay time over their English lesson with their instructress, whose French is a source of endless amusement!—students who must learn English, if they are to get on, but who, having fled their countries during the war, have no money to pay for the ordinary lesson, and are deeply grateful for this instruction free of charge; who pay all the time by their merry bursts of laughter! A happy series of informal socials, circles or singsongs through the winter months, at various houses, nine and ten nationalities meeting at a time and where, at least for two hours, some who are desperately lonely and in need, and others who have had terrible war experiences, are able to forget themselves, and are *at home* amid the games, the music, the readings and the songs. Or again groups that quietly enjoy more serious literary evenings, and the happy sense of oneness and fellowship.

Again there are friendships to be made and followed up in the Student Christian Movement; support to be given to their meetings, their doings to be shared in and they to share in ours. Picture half-a-dozen Student Christian Movement men sitting on the floor and 'going on,' in just the same way as they do in England—Dutchmen, Egyptians, Belgians, Swiss, &c. Every afternoon is practically kept as open house for the receiving of friendly visits varied by the paying of such, and here perhaps one gets into closest touch. Again and again the question has been asked "This is an English *home*, is it not?" and again, "It is a *home* for us to come to!" and yet again, "Is this what is called a *home*?" We hope so. It is at these times that hearts are opened, and histories are discovered, or questions are asked about the Quakers, and books are borrowed. Students like to come in, especially on a Sunday afternoon, or strangers arrive, visiting the city,

* These articles are intended to illustrate the work being done in centres in Europe and elsewhere in connection with the Friends' Council for International Service.

and it does not take long to discover that the privilege is on *our* side, and that we are in the presence of "a citizen of no mean city." Of the kindness of our friends here, and the wonderful way in which they have received us into their homes, it would not be suitable to speak, as copies of THE FRIEND go into many houses. We go to a painfully bare apartment, in workmen's quarters. A Russian aristocrat of the old régime, a lady, of the highest culture of between seventy and eighty, lives there, whose forebears were prominent Generals at the siege of Sebastopol. Look in on certain sunny afternoons, spring outside, and you would find her all animation, brightness and enthusiasm, lost to her present privations and discomfort in giving a two hours' informal talk on Greek art, Ancient Rome, or personal experiences in the world of music, and eliciting scores of personal touches reminiscent of her own travels, and back at last in her own imagination in her old life.

Again, the widow of a Russian judge now machining shirts at 60 centimes per shirt, and, in between, keeping the apartment for her older sister, her grandson, and for a daughter who is out all day, cataloguing books in a library. The small remuneration earned by this daughter *plus* the shirt machining keeps the home together. Brave hearts, never complaining, never mentioning their hard circumstances, occasionally coming to meeting: "Si paisibles!—si tranquilles" they say of the meetings.

Meetings for worship, after the manner of Friends, have been held in Geneva every Sunday at 10.30 a.m. and 5.30 p.m. for some months. These take place in the Jean Jacques Rousseau Institute, in a room kindly lent for the purpose. During the summer the evening meeting is not being held. This brings us to that pleasant, sunny meeting room of the photograph. A large French window at one end wide open in spring and summer; a vine with its bright, green leaves, running along a trellis of a foot high across the bottom of the window, for the room is *an upper room* looking down on to a little old-world Swiss terrace-garden with some old trees. A wistaria and a vine, one or two benches to sit on, ferns and rock work, and one or two blackbirds to sing, who love this quiet corner, fill the garden. We are practically in the Cathedral Close, and here, close by, is the ancient church that John Knox preached in for two years, and from which come the sound of the organ and the chanting of psalms and hymns, floating in at the window.

On the table lies a small portion of the work of the Literature Department. Here is work enough for anyone who will come to Geneva. It entails hours of work and correspondence. For there is a wide circulation of literature going on, quite apart from the meetings, though they are the main source. French Quaker literature comes here from the Paris Quaker Embassy; German from the Friends in Berlin; English and Esperanto from London or Philadelphia. All are in demand in Geneva. The circulation of leaflets and pamphlets, issued from Devonshire House, from the Council for International Service or from other sources, to a wide circle, including journals, pasteurs, and an astonishing number of people who have expressed interest, involves much labour, as does also the seeing that books are returned in due course, and that others are offered in their place. Again and again this leads too to a visit being paid for further talk. A request came from a pasteur the other day, living fourteen miles from Geneva, who had seen in *La Revue Mensuelle*, the full French translation of "To Friends and Fellow Countrymen," as to whether Friends in Geneva had a Life of Stephen Grellet and also a copy of Barclay's Apology, which

he remembered, many years ago, when he was a young man, being shown to him by a Quaker at Tunbridge Wells (Joseph Gundry Alexander). Should anyone think that inability to speak French is an obstacle to having a 'call' to help, all here, it may be said, or practically all, speak English, and many understand who do not speak it!

All the members of the little meeting pull their weight in the boat, lead and support the discussion meetings, held every month during the winter. All contribute also to the social gatherings. This group of Friends in Geneva,—Swiss, British, American, Japanese and Rumanian, is one of the most truly international groups of Friends to be found anywhere. One is clerk of the monthly business meeting, another types the notices. All take turn as doorkeeper. One is treasurer, another librarian. All through the past winter there were discussion meetings every month, including a consecutive course on the Principles and History of the Society of Friends.

And in case it is thought that members and attenders at the meeting know nothing of the happenings of the Society in England, it may be well to say

here that there is a wide circulation of **THE FRIEND** going on weekly. A dozen copies are going round, and still we want more. There is a waiting list of requests for it, still unsatisfied. We should be grateful if others who are interested in the International Service of Friends would share in this really valuable piece of work, and would send us their names and addresses so that we may put them in

touch with some of those who are asking to receive a copy. To us here, members and attenders alike, this sending of **THE FRIEND** is an extremely valuable service rendered, for it opens our eyes and helps us to realise as we could not do in any other way, what we belong to, and what the Society is, and is doing, in England and elsewhere. It creates the sense of international unity in a binding and enlightening way and is a real strength to the little meeting:

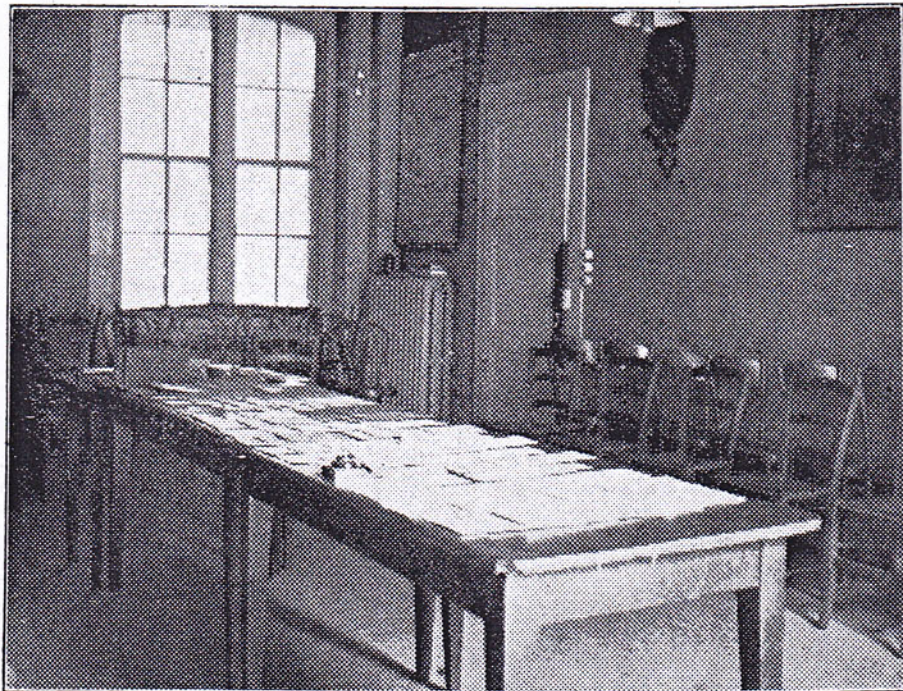
In respect to wider international work, apart from the meeting for worship and its claims and interests, the centre has more opportunities of giving help and support than it can possibly fulfil. Everyone here in this city, crowded with Bureaus of International work and interests of every description, is permanently overworked. There are secretaries thankful for proffered voluntary help, if only to fold, index, stamp and address halfpenny wrappers an hour or two a week! There are breakdowns from time to time. There are Committees to serve on, meetings of all sorts needing support, and lectures, addresses, and 'talks' to give. If you can 'talk,' or if it is thought that you can, you will be seized

on at once in Geneva for service. Moreover there are the International Conferences and Congresses, and the General Assembly of the League of Nations.

Co-operation and personal service! "They first gave *themselves* unto the Lord." Has not "the vision appeared" again and again during the last years—the man standing, and beseeching, saying, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us"? Co-operation and service is the keynote of life to-day. The Society of Friends must *go out* like others unto the great, main streams; not out for propaganda for its own particular little 'ism! But it needs to be willing to be 'hopelessly lost' in the bringing in of the Kingdom of God. It needs to come out into the light of things, to see what things look like on this side of the water, in Germany, France, Austria, Poland, Russia, Switzerland and elsewhere, and for its members to be willing, alongside with others already in the field—"to present our bodies—a living sacrifice . . . which is our reasonable service."

During the war, we older Friends may often have wondered if our turn would not come next to get out into some special service. Sacrifice may now possibly be asked of us, as older Friends, to help

to win the Peace, a real and lasting Peace, in these stricken countries that suffered and shared in the actual conflict, in a much closer way than we ever did at home in Great Britain, and which are still in the miseries and sufferings caused by the workings of the disastrous treaties. During the war our young men and women threw up everything, losing prospects, reputations in many



THE FRIENDS' MEETING-ROOM, GENEVA.

Photo by S. J. Jennings.

cases, for what they felt to be a higher ideal, sacrificing prosperity, the hopes of marriage, and a home, with no hope of ever being in the old, secure position again; gave life itself. What would our service be? When they came home, when once more they had earned the right to settle down, might the call not come to us, that, having sufficient for our needs, we should leave to them the carrying on of home affairs, make room for them, and perhaps give them chances that they would not otherwise have, and we ourselves, be liberated to go forth "into the tumult and the shout"? Why should not the call come to older Friends, to come out for three or six months, or a year or two; and whose very presence would be a lending of the hand?

The Society of Friends may step out, if it will, and add its quota in this and other centres to the great international work of healing and reconstructing. After all, it is *being* and not *doing* that counts most. What is wanted is *living* men in the midst of the actual misery and distress caused by the blockade, by revolution, by the continual wrong doing of humanity in these after years of war.

ETHEL JONES.