

THE QUAKER CENTRE IN GENEVA

In *The Friend* – November 2nd, 1923

DIE GENFER QUÄKERZENTRALE

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Transcriptions

Geneva Monthly Meeting – 2007

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In the heart of the oldest part of the city of Geneva, under the shadow of the Cathedral, and close to the church of John Knox, the Quaker Centre has found a permanent home at 5, Place de la Taconnerie. By the courtesy of Professor Bovet, the Group has held meeting there for some time past, but the room being in the occupation of the Institut Jean Jacques Rousseau, it was only available for the use of Friends on Sundays. The Institut having removed to other quarters, the premises became vacant, and the Council for International Service, and the American Friends' Service Committee, have rented jointly three rooms on the ground floor. The house is an old and historic one, having originally formed part of the old University Buildings, and recent excavations have brought to light the interesting fact that it is built upon part of the old Roman wall, the ancient stones now uncovered being a source of great interest to archaeologists.

The approach from the street is down a covered passage leading to a courtyard where an old carved stone basin is supplied with water from an ornamental bronze spout surmounted by a crown. Passing through a small vestibule, where arrangements for making tea suggest the social side of Quaker activities, a padded door, such as is familiar to visitors to continental churches, gives access to the quiet, sunny meeting room, with its French window framed by an ancient vine, leading into the old-world garden. On good authority, Calvin, Farel, John Knox and others must many a times have found peace and quiet here. In the centre stands a fine cherry tree, but the surrounding borders await the offer of some lover of flowers to replenish the exhausted soil, and refresh the eye with something more attractive than the leaves of perennial sunflowers, now the only plant flourishing there.

The meeting room, which will seat from thirty to forty people, has been plainly furnished with bookshelves for the library, and old-fashioned straw seated chairs, the aim being to preserve for it an air of quiet simplicity.

Opening out of the meeting room through large folding doors is another room not so large, which has been provided with tables, comfortable easy chairs and a couch, for reading, writing, and quiet rest. It is hoped that it will also furnish opportunities for social intercourse, and with the doors thrown open, accommodation could be provided in the two rooms for sixty persons for a conference or lectures. The third room is set apart for a small office, supplied with desk and cupboards, and by the kindness of an American Friend the telephone has been added.

Through the efforts of Herbert and Ethel Jones and the kind help of several other Friends, the means for preparing and furnishing these rooms has largely been provided apart from Committee funds. Two kind gifts have been received in memory of relatives who lost their lives in the Alps, one from Mrs. Fryer, of Smelt House, in memory of her son Joseph Bigland Fryer, and the other from Mrs. Edward Backhouse in memory of her husband. The members of the group in Geneva have also taken a keen interest, and helped in the work.

During the time that the rooms were being got ready, Friends were invited to hold their meetings at the headquarters of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, where they were warmly welcomed by Miss Holmes, the present hostess. The meeting was

thereby made more widely known, and was frequently attended by residents in the house. A bookcase set apart for the display of Quaker literature attracted much interest.

The meeting on Sunday morning settles quickly into the spirit of true worship, the silence becoming a deep and living one. The vocal ministry of those resident in Geneva is in French, and, though English is largely understood, any attempt on the part of a visitor to speak in French, though imperfectly, is much appreciated. But there is generally someone present who can give a brief résumé; and more than once the message has gained in fullness and helpfulness by passing through a sympathetic mind. Representatives of many nationalities are often present, eight having been noted on more than one occasion.

Visits from English and American Friends have been much valued this summer, several having so planned their holidays as to spend a week-end in Geneva, and it is earnestly hoped that all Friends travelling to Switzerland may be able to arrange a visit to the meeting.

The number of the group is small at present, and it has been hampered in the past by lack of premises, but the city of Geneva with its University and other educational interests, and as headquarters of the League of Nations, offers a wide field for work and service. To many other international causes represented there, has now been added a Quaker Centre, which will be known locally as Le Foyer International de la Société des Amis.

Gertrude Beck.

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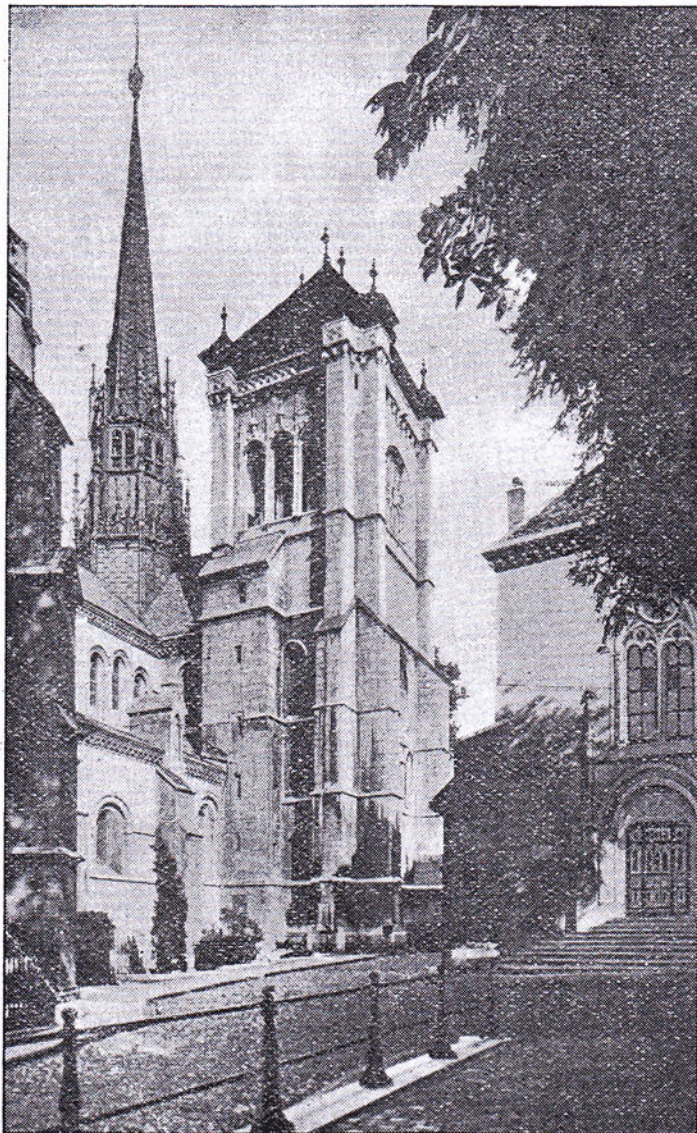
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GERTRUDE BECK.



The Cathedral at Geneva, John Knox's Church on right.

Die Genfer Quäkerzentrale

Im Herzen des ältesten Teiles der Stadt Genf hat die Quäkerzentrale im Schatten der Kathedrale, nahe bei der John-Knox-Kirche an der Place de la Taconnerie Nr. 5 ein dauerndes Heim gefunden. Infolge des Entgegenkommens von Professor Bovet hat die Gruppe dort schon seit einiger Zeit ihre Versammlungen abgehalten; aber weil der Versammlungsraum ursprünglich dem Jean Jacques Rousseau-Institut eingeräumt war, stand er den Freunden nur Sonntags zur Verfügung. Da das Institut nun andere Räume gefunden hat, wurde das Gebäude frei, und so hat der Council for International Service gemeinsam mit dem American Friends Service Committee im Erdgeschoß drei Räume gemietet. Es ist ein altes, ehrwürdiges Haus; es bildet einen Teil der früheren Universitätsgebäude, und bei kürzlichen Unterkellerungen kam die interessante Tatsache zutage, dass es auf der alten Römermauer erbaut ist; die jetzt freiliegenden alten Steine sind für Archäologen von großem Wert.

Von der Straße kommt man durch einen bedeckten Gang auf den Hof, auf dem ein aus Stein gehauenes Wasserbecken sich befindet, das aus einer mit einer Krone geschmückten Bronzeröhre gespeist wird. Man durchschreitet einen kleinen Vorraum, der mit seinem Teegerät die gesellige Seite der Quäkertätigkeit zeigt; dann führt der Weg durch eine gepolsterte Tür, wie sie den Besuchern der Kirchen des Kontinents vertraut ist, in den ruhigen, sonnigen Versammlungsraum mit seinem von uraltem Wein umrankten französischen Fenster, das auf einen Garten hinausführt. Nach glaubwürdigen Berichten haben Calvin, Farel, John Knox und andere hier oftmals Ruhe und Frieden gefunden. Im Mittelpunkt steht ein schöner Kirschbaum; aber der übrige Garten wartet auf die Hand eines, der mit großer Liebe dem erschöpften Boden dazu verhilft, dass er wieder Blumen trägt und das Auge durch etwas Anziehenderes erfreut als durch die Blätter wildwachsender Sonnenblumen, die jetzt hier den einzigen Schmuck bilden.

Der Versammlungsraum, der etwa 30 bis 40 Personen fasst, ist ganz einfach mit Bücherborden für die Bibliothek und mit altmodischen Strohsitzen ausgestattet: man wollte gern eine ruhige Einfachheit wahren.

Durch weite Flügeltüren gelangt man aus dem Versammlungsraum in ein nicht ganz so großes Zimmer, das mit Tischen, bequemen, leichten Stühlen und einem Divan versehen ist, zum Lesen, Schreiben und Ausruhen. Es soll auch dem gesellschaftlichen Verkehr dienen, und wenn die Türen geöffnet sind, bieten die beiden Zimmer Raum für 60 Personen zu Sitzungen oder Vorträgen. Der dritte Raum ist als kleines Büro gedacht mit Arbeitstischen und Regalen. Durch die Freundlichkeit eines amerikanischen Freundes ist auch ein Telephon dort.

Durch Herbert und Ethel Johnes' Bemühungen und durch die freundliche Hilfe verschiedener anderer Freunde brauchten die Mittel für die Vorbereitung und Einrichtung dieser Räume nur zum weitaus geringeren Teile aus den Geldern des Komitees aufgebracht zu werden. Zur Erinnerung an Verwandte, die ihr Leben in den Alpen gelassen haben, sind zwei Schenkungen gemacht worden; die eine von Mrs. Fryer, Smelt House, zum Andenken ihres Sohnes, die andere von Mrs. Edward Backhouse im Gedenken an ihren Gatten. Die Mitglieder der Genfer Gruppe haben ebenfalls starke Teilnahme gezeigt und bei dem Werk geholfen.

Die Internationale Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit hatte den Freunden angeboten, während der Einrichtung der Räume ihre Versammlungen im Hauptbüro der Liga abzuhalten, wo sie von Miss Holmes, der augenblicklichen Heimmutter, herzlich empfangen wurden.

Dadurch wurde die Versammlung in weiteren Kreisen bekannt, und die Bewohner des Bundeshauses besuchten sie häufig. Ein besonders für Quäkerliteratur bestimmtes Bücherregal zog viele an.

Die Versammlung am Sonntagmorgen macht einen Fremden rasch mit dem Geiste wahren Gottesdienstes vertraut; die schweigende Andacht ist tief und voller Leben. Die in Genf gebräuchliche Sprache ist Französisch, und obwohl man zumeist auch Englisch versteht, wird doch jeder Versuch eines Besuchers, wenn auch unvollkommen, Französisch zu sprechen, dankbar begrüßt. Außerdem ist gewöhnlich irgend jemand zugegen, der eine kurze Übersicht über das Gesagte geben kann; und mehr als einmal hat die Botschaft an Fülle und Macht gewonnen dadurch, dass ein gleichgestimmter Geist sie übermittelte. Oft sind Vertreter mehrerer Nationen anwesend; mehr als einmal sind bis zu acht gezählt worden.

Die Besuche englischer und amerikanischer Freunde im letzten Sommer sind von großem Wert gewesen; einige der Freunde hatten ihre Ferien so gelegt, dass sie das Wochenende in Genf verbringen konnten; und man hofft ernstlich, dass alle Freunde, die durch die Schweiz reisen, den Besuch einer Versammlung zu ermöglichen sich bemühen.

Die Zahl der Gruppenmitglieder ist gegenwärtig klein, und sie war bis jetzt behindert durch den Mangel an einem geeigneten Zusammenkunftsort. Aber die Stadt Genf bietet mit ihrer Universität, ihrem großen Interesse an den Fragen der Erziehung und als Sitz des Völkerbundes ein weites Feld für Arbeit und Dienst. Zu den vielen anderen, hier vertretenen internationalen Einrichtungen kommt nun noch die Quäkerzentrale, die am Ort den Namen Le Foyer International de la Société des Amis führen wird.

Gertrude Beck im „Friend“ vom 2. Nov. 1923.