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EMMA THOMAS IN ENGLAND, SWITZERLAND AND ITALY

– A LIFE DEVOTED TO EDUCATION

Acknowledgements:

Thanks go first of all to Emma Thomas for thrusting me into a marvellous new world of people, women in particular, whose strength of character, determination, vision and self-abnegation have astonished me.

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The following document which I found on the internet proved invaluable: *Switzerland Yearly Meeting History and Biography Project "Let Their Lives Speak", A Resource Book*, by Michael and Erica Royston, Summer 2005. The project deals with Quakerism in Switzerland. Research was done for the 60th anniversary of the annual meeting, which fell in 2007. Mrs Royston put me in touch with the Geneva Monthly Meeting archivist, Michel Mégard, who very kindly sent me a photo of Emma Thomas and a page from '*Marguerite Gobat: le pacifisme au féminin*' by Stéphanie Lachat et Dominique Quadroni, *Memoires d'ICI*, which mentions Miss Thomas. The Fellowship School postcard on the title page of this article was also taken from this page.

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Without internet, all those people, institutions and so forth that have uploaded information, and without digitisation of books and documents, this small research would have been much more laborious and time-consuming.

Note: should anyone who reads this have any corrections to make or information to add, please contact Gerry Blaylock at: gerryb@lillinet.org

Introduction

I came to Emma Thomas through an Italian who intrigued me immediately the first time I read an essay about him: Aldo Capitini (1899-1968, see Appendix 2). Subsequently I read various biographies and some of his output, which led to the translation of the aforementioned essay and two of his works. Miss Thomas met him in Rome when she was in her seventies and decided to move to Perugia, his native town, to work with him mainly, but not only, on religious reform and Gandhian non violence. Though I had been interested in Capitini for over ten years, and had read references to Miss Thomas in various books and in Capitini's reminiscences of her shortly after her death (see Appendix 1), I never tried to find out more about her. It was a meeting with some Italian scholars of Capitini in Capitini's flat, where part of his library remains, and which is the headquarters of their association, that the interest was sparked.

It has been far more satisfying and instructive than I had imagined: I wanted to get to know a little bit more about Emma Thomas and I found myself making the acquaintance of inspirational people, many of whose names appear in the chapters that follow, and got sidetracked because of my desire to read more about them along the way.

It is a world inhabited by philanthropists and activists in the realms of peace, women's rights, human rights, education, social work, welfare ... ; of organisations and movements like the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, Service civile internationale, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, L'education nouvelle, the League of Nations ...

This small research was made to try to understand something about her life before she went to Italy. To confirm and attempt to fill out what Capitini wrote about her life (Appendix 1) before they met and started working together. A lot of gaps, however, remain to be filled.

Chapter 1 – Emma Thomas in England

'The Elementary Education Act, 1870, is a statute which is calculated, more than any other of recent times to elevate the masses of the people; and is the result of many years agitation by the various religious denominations and political parties in the State. The object which it will accomplish may be stated in a very few words. It will place an elementary school wherever there is a child to be taught, whether of rich or poor parents ; and it will compel every parent and guardian of a child to have it taught, at least, the rudiments of education, and without reference to any religious creed or persuasion.'¹

The above quotation is the first paragraph of the Preface to the book mentioned in the footnote. The government introduced School Boards, which were local providers of education in the Metropolis, municipal boroughs, the local Board of Health in the district of Oxford, and in all parishes in England and Wales. School Board members were elected by ratepayers and those whose names were on the burgess role in a borough. The children concerned were between the ages of five and thirteen. The weekly fee for the children's education was to be paid for by the family, or partially or totally by the board for a certain period of time, and in any case not more than six months, if the family was poor.

Emma Thomas's education benefited directly from this act and led to a life devoted to teaching in one way or another right up to the end.

Biographical information

Emma Thomas was born in Lewisham, Kent on 8 February 1872 to James Thomas, a master bootmaker, and Emma Thomas née Cornell. She was their first child, to be followed over the years by three brothers and three sisters. In the 1881 census we find the household comprised of father, mother and five children (a daughter, Edith, aged seven is missing from the list), plus a servant and a lodger. Emma is listed as a 'scholar'. Ten years later she and her sister Florence, aged sixteen, are both School Board pupil teachers. A record from the Stockwell College² alumni list archives states: "Emma Thomas, year of 1892". In the 1901 census she was down as an Elementary teacher. University College of London records show that in 1905 she enrolled at the London School of Economics and graduated in 1909 with Social Sciences as a special subject. The 1911 census tells us that she was an assistant teacher in a London County Council (LCC) school.³ In 1915 she enrolled at University College for a part-time, one-year course on practical phonetics, obtaining a free place through London County Council. Miss Thomas remained a teacher until she retired. She continued to live with her parents at 28, Limes Grove, Lewisham until some time between 1901 and 1911, for in the 1911 census she is living in 26,

1 The Elementary Education Act, 1870, with introduction, notes and index, and appendix containing the incorporated statutes. By W. Cunningham Glen, Barrister-at-law. London, Shaw and Sons, Fetter Lane, 1870.

2 This was a Teacher Training College at the time.

3 London County Council was created in 1889 as a result of the local government act 1888. The L.C.C. developed secondary education.

Limes Grove with her younger sister, Edith, who was head of the household and a widow aged 37.

A paper on private property

It is not known whether she was born into a Quaker family or became one later on. There is a small book in the Friends House Library, Euston Road, London entitled *The Next Step in Social and Industrial Reconstruction – being papers prepared for meetings of the committee on war and the social order (appointed by London yearly meetings of the Society of Friends) Together with minutes recording the considered views of the committee and a short bibliography*. It was published in 1919 and of the ten contributors only one is female; Emma Thomas's contribution is *Private Property*.⁴ She begins by pointing out that the institution of private property derives from two separate origins: individual instinctive or innate emotions in animals and humans, and the communal life of primitive peoples. She gives many examples from anthropological studies across the globe, focussing also on penalties for violating rights to private property. Then she states that private property is a 'means to an end', which could be self-assertion, satisfaction in exclusive ownership of the object, or self-esteem, for example. A moral limit is reached where 'the development of one personality comes to encroach on the necessities to existence or means of development of others, as the ideal is to utilise all the forces of the universe, especially those which express themselves in humanity ... Virtue is pre-eminently social, and anything which tends to loosen social ties and relations is to that extent immoral.'

The ethical problem consists in either managing to neutralise the non-social tendencies private property appears to arouse, or to find a way to stimulate the above-mentioned desirable activities in other ways which would not have the defects that the system of private ownership is prone to. In the first case, once its fundamental characteristic, exclusiveness, is got rid of, the whole institution comes tumbling down. As regards the second case, if the feeling of property is instinctive, it will be difficult to root out 'in anything short of a biological period.' If, on the other hand it is a complex feeling which is the product of simpler innate tendencies, other means can be found to satisfy it.

The paper ends with two considerations: firstly, an important item for discussion is how far possession aids self-assertion, which seems to be necessary at a certain stage in the development of personality, and goes on to consider that like Feudalism, which served its temporary purpose of developing societies and survived with its evils intensified long after those societies no longer had any need of it, so the institution of private property might well remain an obstacle to higher development once its function had been accomplished. The second consideration is that private ownership leads to an enormous amount of waste – the waste of a life led 'in riotous living', in a lack of co-operation, through 'fraud and the like.' She goes on to write, 'The economical use of the materials and forces of nature appears to need a larger vision

4 *The Next Step*, cat. 050.6.

than that of the individual, even if he be well-meaning. It is interesting to watch the rapidly growing realisation of this truth at the present day, indeed we appear to be in danger of a too violent swing of the pendulum in this direction, which may lead to a corresponding reaction later.' She concludes that 'The object of these few notes has been to suggest that the right to private property beyond a certain narrow limit, has never been considered absolute; that it has varied greatly according to the conditions of contemporary society, that it had a beginning, and that therefore it may have an end.'

She was in a good position to write this paper as one of her professors at the L.S.E., L.T. Hobhouse, one of the first professors to hold the chair in Sociology at the University of London, wrote widely on the subject.

The Fellowship of Reconciliation

The outbreak of the Great War was a source of deep discomfort for men and women who could not reconcile war with their beliefs. Little by little small groups came into contact with each other and at the end of 1914 a hundred and thirty people gathered in Cambridge and after much discussion founded the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Their statement can be summed up as follows: only love can overcome evil, a world order established on love can only come about through the personal witness of those who offer themselves to God so that he might work through them. It recalls the first part of St. Francis of Assisi's prayer: *Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.* In her book on the story of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation⁵, and referring to the Fellowship founded in 1914, Lilian Stevenson writes '...its special testimony was in regard to war but, from the first, its founders realised that the law of love is violated to-day in many other directions and that, to eradicate any one form of social strife, one must go deep down to the roots of all. They were convinced that the whole structure of society needed refashioning on a different basis, that the present social order should not be accepted as inevitable; that those who held these convictions were called to search resolutely for the Will of God for modern life and to unite with men and women in all lands in a common quest after an order of society in accordance with the mind of Christ.'

The Lester sisters

In an attempt to '[do] Jesus Christ the honor of taking Him seriously, of thinking out His teaching in terms of daily life, and then acting on it even if ordered by police, prelates and princes to do the opposite'⁶, two sisters, members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Muriel (1883-1968) and Verona Doris (1886-1965) Lester, gave their lives unselfishly to the poverty-stricken people of Bow in the east end of London. With financial help from their father they founded Kingsley Hall, a gathering place ('a

5 Lilian Stevenson, *Towards a Christian International*, International Fellowship of Reconciliation, Gordon St., London W.C.1, 1941, p.2.

6 Muriel Lester, *It Occurred to Me*, Harper & Brothers Publishers, New York and London, 1937, p. 42.

teetotal pub' at the beginning) for all the people of Bow. It developed into a nursery school, an adult school, men and women's clubs, a football club, a penny bank, a place of prayer, a series of talks, a group called Brethren of the Common Table, a provider of all sorts of social services for the neighbourhood, and a Children's House to whose design the people of Bow contributed enormously. Gandhi stayed there while he was involved in the Round Table Conference in 1931.

I think we can be sure that Emma Thomas knew about Kingsley Hall. She may have known the Lester sisters personally or someone connected with them because it seems she might have benefited financially from the Brethren of the Common Table for the school she set up in Switzerland after retiring. What *is* certain is that she met Muriel Lester later on in Switzerland, as we shall find out in the following chapter.

To round off this chapter mention must be made of the founding of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation in October 1919 when around fifty men and women from ten nations met in Bilthoven, Holland, on the invitation of Henry Hodgkin⁷ and Cornelis Boeke⁸. It now has member groups in Africa, America, Asia and Europe.

7 Henry T Hodgkin (1877-1933). Quaker. First chairman of the Central Committee of the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

8 Cornelis (Kees) Boeke (1884-1966). Dutch. Came to England, became a Quaker, married Beatrice Cadbury (1884-1976). They became Quaker missionaries, but returned to England in 1914. He made public speeches saying the Germans were our brothers, which eventually led to his being expelled as undesirable alien (Muriel Lester writes of a 'jingoistic campaign' against him). He and his wife went to live in Bilthoven, near Utrecht, where they set up a Brotherhood House.

Chapter 2 – Emma Thomas in Switzerland

Capitini tells us that after 30 years of teaching, Emma Thomas decided to use her savings to set up an international school in Gland, Vaud, Switzerland. According to Robert J. Leach⁹, when Miss Thomas arrived she became involved with the Geneva Monthly [Quaker] Meeting, giving new impulse to it and becoming its clerk till 1936. Gland is very close to Geneva, which must have been a vibrant, stimulating environment at that time, and which was also the centre of important international offices, for example the International Labour Organisation started up in the summer of 1920, the League of Nations moved there from London on November 1 1920, the Headquarters of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom were transferred there from Zurich around 1920, The International Peace Bureau moved its offices there in 1924. Furthermore, there was also the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau (or Académie De Genève) founded in 1912 by Édouard Claparède, a psychologist interested in education. It became an international centre for experimental research into child psychology. Claparède criticised traditional education's view of the child as an imperfect adult and its method of filling the child with what were believed to be essential things to know. On the contrary, said Claparède, it is the school that should adapt itself to the child, not the other way round, and this can only occur in an 'active' school where the staff is assisting the child's development according to his or her natural abilities and attitudes and is investigating and trying to understand which 'functions' in his or her make-up are helping or hindering that development. Apart from Claparède, other famous names associated with the Rousseau Institute are Paul Bovet, Adolphe Ferrière and Jean Piaget.

New Education

'New Education' was in the air. Naturally, it comprised a plethora of approaches and philosophies. In 1921 the *Ligue Internationale pour l'Education Nouvelle* was founded as the result of a congress in Calais. New Education was based on putting the child at the centre of education and aimed at social reform, international understanding and promoting world peace through education.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom had already directed its attention to education right from the Hague Congress in 1915. A resolution adopted then mentioned the need to educate children in such a way that their thoughts and wishes be directed towards the ideal of a constructive peace.¹⁰

In 1923 there was a World Conference on Education in Oakland, San Francisco. It was attended by delegates from 50 nations, and thousands of individuals besides. In his speech, Dr. P. W. Kuo, chairman of the Chinese delegation, said: 'The fundamental purpose of the conference is to consider how to promote world peace through education. We are ambassadors of peace, sent on a mission to promote

9 Robert J. Leach : A short history of the Friends Meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 1920-1960, Geneva, 1963, pp.5,21.

10 M. G. Suriano, *Donne, pace, non-violenza fra le due guerre mondiali: La Women's International League for Peace and Freedom e l'impegno per il disarmo e l'educazione*, Ph.D. thesis, Bologna University, 2007, p. 311. Online version: <http://amsdottorato.cib.unibo.it/623/>

friendly relations, one with the other. Our common and only aim, therefore, should be to consider how we can, through education, turn the nations that are enemies into friends, and make more friendly those that are friendly. We must teach the nations of the world to realize that true greatness and nobility in a nation does not depend upon its bigness, nor upon its military power, nor upon its wealth, but upon just dealing and unselfish service to others. We must remove through education and other effective means all selfishness, pride, hatred, revenge between nations, and cultivate in their place the spirit of good-will, of sympathy, and of mutual confidence. I share with others the belief that if five millions of teachers and educators of the world are fully convinced of the evils of war and the necessity for peace and are willing to dedicate themselves to the task, they can make a great contribution to the cause through the various educational agencies at their command. Their greatest service will naturally be the bringing up of a new generation of people possessing the right kind of ideals of international relationship.¹¹

A new world

The school Emma Thomas founded was an experimental school. One of the teachers there wrote an article which shows they believed they were engaged exactly in what Dr. Kuo expressed: '*Nous avons besoin d'un monde nouveau, ... C'est ce monde nouveau qui se prépare dans l'école de Gland.*'¹² [We need a new world, ... This is the world that is being prepared for in the school at Gland.]. The idea of a 'new world' crops up often in the writings of the time: Lilian Stevenson, who has already been mentioned, writes on the subject of suitable reading for children, 'Let it be a quest among old books and new, but a quest from a fresh standpoint – that of the new world which is to be.'¹³ In her book on 'pioneer peace-makers', Vera Brittain recalls the first editorial in October 1915 of *The Venturer*, the Fellowship of Reconciliation's monthly magazine, 'The war is the nemesis and the end of an age ... This is the most terrific and the most critical hour since Calvary ... It is very little of the old world that we shall carry over into the new ... The task before us is none other than the creation of a new world.'¹⁴

Writing about the Great Britain branch of International Fellowship of Reconciliation in the post-war years, Lilian Stevenson writes, 'With the passing of the sense of crisis associated with the war, the abolition of conscription, and the release from the strain of more than four years, direct peace effort tended somewhat to slacken. While the iniquity and menace of the peace treaties was widely recognised, hope was cherished in the League of Nations in spite of the sanctions clauses. ... The immediate reason for maintaining branches was felt to have passed; a period of 'dispersion' began;... and the witness of the Fellowship tended to become less corporate and more individual....

11 From the Bulletin of the World Conference of Education (Oakland-San Francisco, June 28 to July 6, 1923, under the auspices of the National Education Association of the United States), pp.3-4.

12 M. B. Thornton, *Aujourd'hui: feuille d'éducation*, January 1923, p.6.

13 Lilian Stevenson, *A Child's Bookshelf: Suggestions On Children's Reading, With An Annotated List Of Books*, Student Christian Movement, London, 1918, p. 11.

14 Vera Brittain, *The Rebel Passion*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London, 1964, p. 41.

Others felt drawn to help in remoulding education in the spirit of Christianity and fellowship. Experiments like Riverside Colony, on the one hand, and institutions like Children's House in East London [Doris Lester] and the International "Fellowship School" at Gland, Switzerland, with its training in service and freedom, on the other, were the outcome.¹⁵

The Fellowship School, Gland

What follows is information about the Fellowship School from the founder, Emma Thomas, from somebody that worked for a time as a teacher there, P. Natarajan, and from one of the pupils, Gioconda Salvadori.

In the article written by Miss Thomas¹⁶ we learn that the school was founded in October 1921 with help from the Fellowship of Reconciliation. From the first eleven pupils of three nationalities it grew in 1924 to thirty-two pupils from eight countries: Switzerland, England, France, Germany, Holland, America, Austria, Italy. A French friend of theirs, M. Paul Richard who knew Tagore promised to put them in touch with him with the aim of arranging an exchange of teachers and pupils. She mentions an amusing story of a young German boy, Hans, who on the first morning of his stay asked a boy, 'Wilfred, avez-vous gut sleep?' But she goes on to mention that young children seemed to be able to learn two or three languages at the same time and manage to keep them distinct. A female Dutch teacher, follower of the Montessori method, devised a way of teaching three or four languages together, and the pupils found it fascinating to compare them. Arithmetic problems were studied in French as soon as the pupils were proficient enough; Bible reading was in four languages. The teaching of history took on new meaning when there were six nationalities in the class. After she had been at the school a few weeks an English girl remarked, 'Mòtò, I always used to think the Germans were quite different from us English, but they are just like us, aren't they?'

The school regularly put on shows for the people of the village and often they had to repeat them two or even three times to packed audiences. The locals were very friendly towards them as were the doctor, the young pastor and a schoolmaster. The doctor told them to preach their pacifism by their actions among the 'practical peasants' of Gland. The pastor gave them lectures with what we would call a slide-show (Miss Thomas writes 'lantern lectures') and provided the lighting for their shows. One of his lectures was a friendly criticism of their 'lack of order'. The schoolmaster quickly became one of them and accompanied them on a trip to Florence. School trips were seen as an active part of their internationalism. On a cycling trip round small towns in northern Lombardy in 1923 they often held spontaneous public meetings in cafés because the locals were so interested in what they had to say. One unexpected but happy outcome of the trip to Florence was that the school became a refuge for the Salvadori family, who were being persecuted¹⁷.

15 Lilian Stevenson, *Towards a Christian International.*, pp. 61-62.

16 The collected edition of THE FRIEND in the Friends' Library, London, NEW SERIES no. 64. Page 770. Dated 5 Sept., 1924.

17 Florentine fascists tortured and almost killed Guglielmo (called Willie) and Max Salvadori, father and 15-year-old

Apart from going to visit other towns and cities abroad, the school also welcomed visitors, and they received many from all over the world. According to Miss Thomas the happiness that emanated from the members of the school had the effect of making others ready to discuss their ideas 'sympathetically'.

Once a week there was a newspaper talk from English, French or sometimes German newspapers. Politics was uninteresting because it was meaningless; articles about the latest developments in aviation, in the wireless, Einstein's discoveries and climbing Mount Everest, for instance, caught their imagination.

Miss Thomas closes the article with the following: 'Some people smile at us and say frankly, "What difference can you make to the world?" We do not waste time in thinking about that. We are just trying hard to begin to establish the kingdom in that small spot of earth where alone our will rules.'

A teacher at the school

Now we come to a teacher's point of view on day-to-day activities at the Fellowship School. P. Natarajan¹⁸ (1895-1973) met Miss Thomas at the Geneva Meeting. He had taken a post-graduate Licentiate in teaching at Saidapet Teacher's College, Madras, in India, and was doing research during his time at the school in Gland for his Ph.D. thesis at the Sorbonne, entitled 'The Personal Factor in the Educative Process'. He points out that the freedom given to the pupils sometimes led to chaos in the classroom, sometimes there was little difference between the school working day and a holiday; penmanship and the three R's¹⁹ suffered.

Let us look at some other aspects: when Natarajan was there, ca.1928-1933, the staff comprised Negro, Chinese, German, French, British and American teachers, the ratio being 12 teachers to 40 or so girls and boys. Everyone who worked in the school, including the directress, cook and gardener received a hundred Swiss francs a month. Those who lived on the premises had board and lodging included. The teachers were called Pitar followed by name if a man, and Moto followed by name for women. Pitar is Sanskrit for father, Moto is Emma Thomas's version of the Sanskrit for mother, Mātā. The food was vegetarian, and at mealtimes tables were made up of a male senior member, a female senior member, a senior male student, a senior female student, and three or four children of different ages. Each year, usually at Easter, there was a school outing, called a pilgrimage, often to southern climes. There were months of compulsory preparation classes for both staff and pupils. Natarajan mentions visits to Arles in the south of France; Venice and environs; Rome; Milan-Rome-Naples-Syracuse, including their performing a dance recital at an ancient Greek theatre near Palermo for a large audience of tourists; Zermatt; and Singen, in Germany.

son in a street in Florence. They were saved from death by an Army officer passing by. The fascists, however, promised to go round to the Salvadori house sometime to finish the job. Thus the family decided to leave the country as quickly as possible. To understand how they ended up at Miss Thomas's school see Gioconda Salvadori's testimony later in the chapter.

18 Nataraja Guru, *Autobiography of an Absolutist*, DK Printworld (P) Ltd., New Delhi, 2011, pp. 209-11, pp. 214-215, pp. 217-219, p. 225, p. 229, pp. 246, p. 248, p. 250, p. 252, pp. 254-257, pp. 259-261.

19 Reading, writing and (a)rithmetic.

A pupil

Gioconda Salvadori (1912-1998), better known in Italy as Joyce Lussu, described her stay at the school in Gland in *Portrait*, a memoir about certain people and events in her life²⁰, and also recounted many of her memories in recorded conversations with Silvia Ballestra²¹. She was the youngest of the Salvadori family, already mentioned in Emma Thomas's article on her school (and in note 17), and was 12 years old when she arrived. In *Portrait* she writes, 'During those days [in Florence while the family was deciding where to flee] an English spinster turned up in Florence. She had light-coloured eyes and pink skin below her straight white hair. She had brought us greetings from some English cousins of my mother's, feminists and pacifists. She was called Emma Thomas and was the director of a very new type of school based on the principles of nonviolence and fellowship among all peoples; it was called the Fellowship School and was situated on Lake Lemano, between Lausanne and Geneva ... There was a series of bungalows in a lovely garden which overlooked the lake ...

'Children, teenagers and teachers of all ages and nationalities lived in the bungalows. The teachers were called Môtô and Pitar (mother and father in Sanskrit: research on common linguistic origins was one of the school's subjects, and anyone who wanted could learn Esperanto), and they taught their subjects, generally in French or English, only if requested by a group of children. However, many other languages were spoken. There was a Dutch family, the Prins (the parents were teachers and their children students), the German brother and sister, Georg and Charlotte Metz. A pale Russian teenager, Alexander Katznatcheff, who had lost his parents in the commotion during the October Revolution, had wandered around with his grandmother in the midst of terrible violence. Then there was Wanda from Poland, Karl from Hungary, Walter from Wales, David, an afro-American, Joan from Tasmania, Zouzou Zèzette and Georgette from France, and many others.

'Then there was our cousin Lilian²², a pretty red-haired lady, a hardline suffragette and feminist, with her son Percy and three younger siblings; they had rented a villa called La Falaise near the school, and were often visited by other relatives of ours ...

'Famous pacifist celebrities came by: from Romain Rolland to Kudenhove-Kalergi, from Bertrand Russell to Pandit Nehru (then young and handsome with his tight-fitting, cream-coloured Indian jacket and cap at a jaunty angle). Other interesting but not so famous people who were passing through came and gave lessons or started up a debate. The only ones to hold regular lessons, following the British school syllabus, were Môtô Sarah and Môtô Simone, two rather neurotic girls, one very blonde and the other very dark, who were very deeply attached to each other. But we thought their courses were tedious and didn't go to them since our motto was: *je ne suis pas obligé*.

20 Joyce Lussu, *Portrait*, TRANSEUROPA, Bologna, 1988, pp. 30-33. New edition, L'asino d'oro edizioni, Roma, 2012.

21 Silvia Ballestra, *Joyce L. Una vita contro*, Baldini & Castoldi, Milano, 1996, pp. 98-100.

22 Lily Ermengarde Grant Duff had married Gerard Collier, who was a cousin of Gioconda's mother. Gerard Collier, who had been present at the founding of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, died in 1923 aged 44.

'However, we happily accepted to do manual work all together. Cleaning the rooms, cooking the meals (healthy food with no salt), and looking after the garden were done by groups of children and adults following a rota scheme. We all learned to cook, wax and polish the lovely parquet floors, look after flowers and the vegetable garden. Creativity was encouraged, so we could sing and dance, draw and paint, try to play various instruments and organise shows.

'But that experiment of a new form of education and a culture of peace, stimulating though it was, did not produce the desired results. Tensions and conflicts arose for futile reasons, and Miss Thomas was lacking in the cultural maturity and depth that could have smoothed things over. Though she had the sweetest of smiles below her white hair, she was basically authoritarian and irritable, and every so often exploded into fits of anger which were anything but pacific and educative. Once Zézette and I were victims of it. My French friend Zézette and I shared a room and we had decided to give rein to our imagination and decorate it in very odd ways. One time, when we had transformed it into a harem after searching for a long time for suitable furnishings: curtains, carpets, cushions absolutely everywhere, dimmed lights, goblets full of sweets and burning perfumed sticks with their thin wisps of smoke and the two of us dressed as odalisques with flashy boleros decorated with silver sweet wrappers, Môtô burst in like a fury, threw the window open, threw the curtains and cushions all over the place and called some of the children and staff that were passing by to come and see, called us dirty, untidy girls and enjoined us to restore it to its primitive austerity. In the end, our parents took us away ... '

In her conversations with Silvia Ballestra she describes it as a strange, extraordinary place and remarks that in the field of education as she was speaking (1995) very modest progress had been made in comparison with the daring set-up in Gland. It seems the pupils demanded a lot from their teachers, and since it was they who had asked for the lesson, attention was guaranteed. She remembers that the school was in an enchanting spot on Lake Lemman and she felt very well there thanks to the equal relations between staff and pupils.

In 1933 Joyce's brother Max Salvadori (Massimo Salvadori Paleotti) was in London. In a letter to her dated 11.10.1933 he wrote: 'I saw Miss Emma and we spent several hours together in sweet conversation (don't tell my wife anything about this!). She is well, very well. She wanted to write to you but she did not know your address. If you let her know it, I'm sure she'll write: she's fond of you and remembers you with pleasure.'²³

Georgia Lloyd

Daughter of Lola Maverick and William Bross Lloyd. Following her parents' divorce in 1916 she lived in Winnetka with her mother, brother and two sisters. Lola Maverick Lloyd was co-founder of the Women's Peace Party and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. In connection with her activity as a

²³ *Joyce Lussu Una donna nella storia*, edited by Luisa Maria Plaisant, Cooperativa Universitaria Editrice Cagliaritano, 2003, pp. 40-41.

pacifist, in 1926 she went to Switzerland with the children. Georgia attended the Fellowship School there²⁴. In a conversation published in 1996²⁵ she mentions that the school had 36 pupils from 14 different nationalities. Georgia Lloyd became a peace activist, women's rights activist, advocate of world government, socialist and philanthropist.

WILPF summer schools

In 1926, from 26 July to 4 September, and in 1927, from 25 August to 8 September, the International Fellowship School hosted a Women's International League for Peace and Freedom summer school, something that had begun in Salzburg in 1921. They were generally held in countries or regions where internal conflict was present, e.g. Czechoslovakia (Podebrad, 1923), or where Foreign Policy was a source of possible conflict, e.g. Northern Italy (Varese, 1922, which, however, had to be moved to Lugano out of fears for the delegates' safety because local fascist bands were creating trouble a few months before the congress was due to begin). After the congress in 1923 it was decided to form a working group on summer schools under the direction of Andrée Jouve. We find Emma Thomas's name among the members of the working group confirmed by the congresses in Dublin (1926), Prague (1929), Grenoble (1932).²⁶ The 1926 summer school in Gland *A Training School for Peace Workers* was an anomaly in more ways than one. First of all, it was 'imposed' by the American section of the League in order that the delegates, especially Jane Addams, President of the League and renowned international figure, who were in Dublin for the congress, might reach out to a wider audience. The audience was a very specific group of people, those working in international institutions in Geneva, instead of the broader audience that other summer schools reached out to. Finally, it lasted more than a month, instead of the usual fortnight. Naturally, it led to a few ructions within the League. The 1927 summer school was on *Relations Between White and Coloured Races*. It went back to the normal format, but does not seem to have interested a broader audience, nor did it make any radical declarations regarding colonialism.²⁷ To bring this chapter to a close we shall return to Kingsley Hall, mention Gandhi, a trip to America and three well-known people who worked at the school.

Funds for the school?

Muriel Lester and a small group of like-minded people who frequented Kingsley Hall decided to form 'The Brethren of the Common Table.'²⁸ This group was made up of those with a surplus of cash and those with a lack. Each member gave detailed information of what he or she had earned during the previous month and the items he or she had spent the money on. After hearing details of a poverty-stricken household's

24 PDF document by Laura Ruttum (February 2007). *Georgia Lloyd Papers 1915-1994*, Mss Col 1787. The New York Public Library Humanities and Social Sciences Library Manuscripts and Archives Division.

25 <http://winnetkahistory.org/gazette/georgia-lloyd-reminisces/>

26 M. G. Suriano, op. cit., pp. 464, 466, 470.

27 M. G. Suriano, op. cit. I am indebted to her for all this information.

28 This name was suggested by Bernard Walke, rector of an old church in Cornwall. Gerard Collier and his wife moved to Cornwall for Gerard's health and collaborated closely with Rev. Walke.

shopping list, the well-off members in the group realised that there was much they could do without, and many decided to curb their spending on inessentials, leading to a greater surplus at the end of the month. After a person had spoken, any money he or she had left over was put on the table and anyone who was lacking cash took it. No thanks expected. During one of those meetings a thousand pounds was earmarked by one member for a new international school in Switzerland²⁹ – it may well have been Miss Thomas's.

Gandhi in Switzerland

After the Round Table Conference in 1931, Gandhi returned to India via France, Switzerland and Italy. A group of people was invited to accompany him, among them was Muriel Lester. In Switzerland Gandhi spoke to large public meetings in Lausanne on 8 December and Geneva on 10 December organised by Swiss Pacifists led by Edmond Privat and Pierre Cérésole, and had two private meetings with activists in Lausanne. P. Natarajan refers to a meeting at the Quaker Centre in Lausanne.³⁰

Miss Thomas in America

Sometime between the opening of the school and 1929 Emma Thomas went to the United States. It is not known why, perhaps the World Conference on Education or the fourth congress of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in 1924, which was held in Washington. Whatever the reason, we know she visited the experimental school 'Manumit' because she is mentioned in the autobiography written by one of its teachers, Sarah Norcliffe Cleghorn.³¹ A propos of Manumit, one of its teachers, Anna F. Gifford, had taught at the International Fellowship School before working there.³²

Three well-known people who taught at the school

Three other people whom we know worked as teachers at the International Fellowship School were Pierre Cérésole, Marguerite Gobat and Truda Weil. Pierre Cérésole (1879-1945) was at the first meeting in Bilthoven out of which sprung the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. He will always be remembered as the man who founded *Service Civil International* in 1920 (the British branch was called The International Voluntary Service for Peace), an international voluntary force of men and women which travelled to areas devastated by war or natural calamities and began reconstruction. He taught at Gland from around 1920[?] to 1924, according to an English translation of his *cahiers*.³³

29 Muriel Lester, op. cit., p. 92.

30 Nataraja Guru, op. cit., pp. 259-60.

31 Sarah Norcliffe Cleghorn, *Threescore*, Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, New York, 1936, p. 272-3. 'But the children were sometimes unkind to each other than they would have thought of being to animals. Teasing, that hateful vice, was brought up in vain at a community meeting - it obstinately continued. I remember that when Miss Thomas, the founder of the Fellowship School in Gland, Switzerland, came to see Manumit, the children asked her, "What's the worst thing in the Fellowship School?" and when she said, "Teasing", our children exclaimed, "It is here, too." '

32 From Manumit school brochure 1929, <http://manumitschool.com/ManumitDocs/Brochures/bro1929.htm>

33 *For Peace and Truth: from the notebooks of Pierre Cérésole*, translated and edited by John Harvey and Christina Yates, Bannisdale Press, London, p. 80.

Marguerite Gobat (1870-1937) was the daughter of Nobel Prize laureate (1902) Albert Gobat, lawyer, politician, superintendent of public education for the canton of Bern, member of the National Council of Switzerland, director of the Interparliamentary Bureau, director of the International Peace Bureau. From around 1890 to 1914 she was her father's secretary and after his death she remained at the International Peace Bureau. From 1915 to 1920 she worked at the Union mondiale de la femme pour la concorde internationale (World Union of Women for International Concord). From 1915 to 1922 she was with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Then from 1922 to 1927 she was a teacher of French at Emma Thomas's school – incidentally, in French the school was called: école internationale "Les Rayons" –, and at the same time continued working for the WILPF and in 1924 was present at the fourth congress of the Women's League for Peace and Freedom in Washington. As far as education was concerned, she was an admirer of Pestalozzi. She went on trips with the school to Venice, Verona, and to Provence in 1925. She left Miss Thomas's school at a time when "the personnel is almost as numerous as the pupils!" because "I think I might be able to do something more useful elsewhere. We'll have to see!"³⁴ After leaving the Fellowship School she eventually opened up a children's home in Macolin.³⁵

Truda Weil, American, (d. 1971) executive secretary of the Teacher's Union of New York City from 1923 to 1928, and New York Teacher's Guild 1935 - 1936, taught at the Fellowship School while P. Natarajan was there.

The school closes

The International Fellowship School shut its doors around 1936 and, according to Capitini, Emma Thomas went back to London, was an air-raid volunteer during the war and later on took under her wing 15 children who were evacuated to the countryside. She taught English to Italian prisoners³⁶ and at the end of the war insisted on being given a permit to go to Italy to work with the aim of bringing the two peoples together.

34 Archives de la Ligue internationale des femmes pour la paix et la liberté, microfilm 86, letter from Marguerite Gobat to Myrrha (?), 26 January 1927, Palais des Nations, Genève. In: Stéphanie Lachat et Dominique Quadroni, *Mémoires d'Ici, Marguerite Gobat: le pacifisme au féminin*, pp. 147-9.

35 Stéphanie Lachat et Dominique Quadroni, op. cit. p. 149.

36 According to the Imperial War Museum there were 75,000 Italian POWs in Britain, and at the height of the war there were 600 internment and POW camps. With the passing of time conditions became more relaxed and the POWs were able to arrange night-classes and forms of entertainment.

Chapter 3 – Emma Thomas in Italy

We know from Capitini that Emma Thomas was in Rome teaching in various language schools, organising Quaker Meetings and giving aid to the needy. Capitini also mentions collaboration with an educator named Washburne. Who was he?

C.W. Washburne

C. W. Washburne (1889-1968) was a famous American educator and superintendent of schools in Illinois, developer, in 1919, of the famous 'Winnetka Plan', a series of innovations in the school curriculum. This educational experiment involved elementary schools and its aim was to break loose from the restrictive, uniform grading system which kept all children to the same rate of progress, in order to allow children to develop under their own steam. There was grade work in the three R's and spelling, creative periods and physical activities. As soon as a child had mastered a unit in the grade curriculum, he could move on to another; sometimes a child might be working on more than one unit at a time. Since the creative and physical activities were not graded, the child dedicated as much time to them as he or she wanted.

After the allies had occupied and gradually liberated Italy, various bodies of the 'Allied Military Government of Occupied Territory' started operating. One of these dealt with education: re-establishing the institutions, working on new curricula, rewriting textbooks, training teachers in new methods and so on. Washburne was called to coordinate work on primary and middle school education, and made responsible for the regions of Milan, and later, Rome and Naples. He then became vice-director and finally director of the allied subcommission on education. He was also president of the USIS (United States Information Service), whose headquarters were in Milan, and contributed many articles in 1945 and 1946 to a monthly bulletin on education, psychology and social welfare, his aim being to introduce the American scholastic system to Italy and improve educators' understanding of new educational and psychological research and their application, which he held could be useful for the reconstruction of Italy. In 1946 he contributed to setting up the New Education Fellowship in Milan. In 1948 he was a speaker at a congress in Rome on the popular school [scuola popolare], which had recently been founded. Jean Piaget was also among the speakers³⁷.

Where does Emma Thomas come into this? Well, we know that she was in Rome teaching. She had many years of experience in elementary education, was part of the New School movement and had visited the United States. She may have met him in America, she may even have visited some of the Winnetka schools. Perhaps they had had the occasion to meet at the World Conference on Education. On the other hand, Washburne had written a book, *New Schools in the Old World* (1926), describing new schools he had visited in Britain and Europe. One of them, Glarisegg, was in Switzerland. Might they have met while he was there? Or perhaps Miss Thomas had heard him speak somewhere in Rome and met him afterwards. One can imagine the

³⁷ Tina Tomasi, *La scuola italiana dalla dittatura alla repubblica*, Editori riuniti, Roma, 1976, pp. 16, 84, 206, 237.

value of a person like Emma Thomas with her experience in education and knowledge of the local language to a newly-arrived functionary from America who was learning Italian on the job, as it were.

Edmondo Marcucci

We know she was resident in Rome at the start of 1952, Edmondo Marcucci tells us that, and he also tells us that by September of the same year she had moved to Perugia. Edmondo Marcucci (1900-1963) was born in Umbria, but spent most of his life at Jesi, close to Ancona in the Marches Region. His interests were: religions; pacifism; what we would call today animal rights, and hence vegetarianism; Tolstoy and Jules Verne. From his autobiography we can see that he was incredibly active and travelled far and wide for meetings and conferences on the themes above. He and Capitini were as thick as thieves, consequently he came to know Emma Thomas. Here is what he tells us about her in various extracts from his book.³⁸

'On 30 January 1952, we met in Perugia at an "International Conference for Nonviolence" on the occasion of the anniversary of Gandhi's death (30th January 1948). The tireless Capitini came up with the idea and had excellent collaborators in Emma Thomas, an English Quaker living in Rome (vegetarian, getting on for eighty years of age, but incredibly active and young-at-heart), and Maria Camberti (a Florentine who had lived for 40 years in Germany. A friendly, jovial polyglot). The aim of the meeting was to present specific principles, methods and decisions of non violence in relation to the present moment. The aim was essentially practical, not at all academic. A lot of circulars were sent all over Italy and abroad.

'We met at the Brufani Hotel, in a room that had been prepared with a display of books, newspapers and posters (written beautifully by Miss Thomas in large letters) with sayings of St. Francis and Gandhi, together with portraits of these two great advocates of non violence³⁹... Then Miss Thomas read the Beatitudes from Matthew's Gospel in English, followed by sig.ra Zilli in Italian. At 5:00 pm we paused for some minutes of silence and recollection in memory of the hour of Gandhi's death⁴⁰....At 10:00 am on 31 January we went to Assisi to St. Francis's tomb. There, under the silent vaulted ceiling of the great Basilica, Miss Thomas read in English an "Appeal to the Peoples of the Western continents"⁴¹.

'On 11 and 12 [September 1952] I was in Perugia for a study meeting organised by my unflinching friend Capitini and Miss Thomas at her home, which had also become the home of a "Centre for Religious Orientation" (the latest ramification of our movements which began in Perugia in October 1946). The first conference of its kind. Very few people spoke (I think vegetarianism is a plant that is unlikely to thrive in Italy!)⁴².

'From 28 to 30 August [1954] I was at the second congress of the Italian Vegetarian

38 Edmondo Marcucci, *Sotto il segno della pace – Memorie*, Jesi, Centro studi per la pace Edmondo Marcucci, 1983

39 Ch. VI (1950-1952) p. 145 section 12

40 *ibid.*, p. 147

41 *ibid.*, p. 148

42 Ch. VII (1952) p. 166 (section 10).

Society, followed by the annual meeting of the East-West Society. The usual small international gathering (about fifteen all told, and the foreigners made up 50% if not more) in via dei Filosofi, 33, Perugia, home of the Centre for Religious Orientation and of Miss Thomas. She has a ready smile on her lips, is nimble (over eighty), thoughtful in offering tea to the police in civvies who never miss a meeting out of homage to democratic freedom (the police headquarters in Perugia don't want politics to be talked about at Miss Thomas's home, since she's a foreigner – something that astounded one of those present, the French-Argentine naturist Prof. Juan Estève-Dulin, and which vexed me)⁴³... Miss Thomas told us about the World Religion Congress which was held in Japan this spring; the big, fat Contessa di Caporiacco (from Florence, whom Sig.ra Zilli, also present at the congress, knows) spoke about women's rights (divorce and so on, herself a victim of the current marriage system)⁴⁴. 'From 31 July to 6 August the large World Vegetarian Congress [Cité Universitaire, Paris], organised by the International Vegetarian Union ... Miss Thomas was there, too⁴⁵.'

Luisa Schippa

A close collaborator of Capitini's, Luisa Schippa, in her introduction to Capitini's memoir on Emma Thomas (see Appendix) tells us something about the Centre for Religious Orientation and Miss Thomas. 'She bought a small flat with two smallish bedrooms and a large living-room which was given over to the Centre for Religious Orientation's meetings, where friends and acquaintances of Capitini that were interested in his commitment to religious reform and the study of Gandhian nonviolence gathered. These meetings were held every three weeks on religious or social topics. Somebody gave a talk on the topic, then the discussion was opened to everyone. Emma was full of initiative, attentive to the needs of everyone she came into contact with: students of English and people from all walks of life. She went around town on foot, sometimes walking kilometres to get to the Post Office at Fontivegge station to send letters to friends, apart from the letters she sent daily to Capitini in Pisa, where he had returned at the end of 1946 ... Emma had a religious outlook that gave her faith in humanity, in our ability to communicate and come together through the help of a higher power. Her faith allowed her to be everybody's friend, without criticising or judging religious convictions different from her own. She believed each human being carries within lofty values which manifest after meditation and recollection in silence.'

Some topics Miss Thomas spoke on during CRO meetings

The following is a list of topics, translated into English, on which Emma Thomas spoke at some of the meetings: 8 & 15 Nov. 1952 *My Beliefs*; 9 July? 1953 *Religion and Freedom*; 30 Oct. 1953 *Comment on the Nonviolent Person?*; 16 Jan. 1955 *Pierre Ceresole and Service Civile Internationale*; 8 March 1955 *An Economy*

43 Ch. IX (1954) p. 197 (section 4).

44 *ibid.*, p. 199 (At the East-West Society Congress).

45 Ch. X (1955) p. 208 (section 4).

Founded on Giving; 13 May 1955 External Authority and Individual Conscience; 22 June 1956 A Marching Saint: Vinoba Bhave.

Conclusion

This small research ends here. More material may come to light later on; possibly from various archives e.g. the Capitini archives in Perugia, those of Marcucci in Jesi, of Joyce Lussu in Fermo, or elsewhere. When British Census archives for 1921 become available in seven or eight years time, they may yield one or two more details.

Appendix 1

EMMA THOMAS – Her life and ideas (by Aldo Capitini 1960)

Emma Thomas was born in Lewisham, Kent in England on 8 February 1872, the eldest of seven brothers and sisters. Her father was a bootmaker and her mother often worked in his workshop, as a consequence Emma had to take care of the housework. She studied at Stockwell College and was the first woman to graduate in social sciences in the famous school of economics where her lecturers were Hobhouse, Haddon and Westermarck. She was awarded a scholarship to go to France and the following year came back to London to take up a teaching post. After thirty years of teaching she retired in 1921. She did not settle down to a life of ease, but opened her own school, using her savings, in Gland in Switzerland (International Fellowship School), where she was able to put her ideas of a freer, more whole [holistic] and cooperative way of educating into practice. She was called “Môtô” (sanskrit for mother). There were pupils from several nations. Romain Rolland was a friend of this school, Gandhi among the more illustrious visitors and among the teachers were Pierre Cérésolle and Truda Weil. The school was closed down after fifteen years and Emma Thomas returned to London. During the war she worked in rescue teams during the air raids and later on took under her wing fifteen children evacuated in the countryside. She taught English to Italian prisoners and at the end of the war she insisted on being given a permit to come to Italy and work with the aim of bringing the two peoples together. In Rome she collaborated with the educationist Washburne and doing propaganda for the Union for the united nations. She remained in Italy teaching in various schools, among them the Anglo-American, organising Quaker meetings and aiding the poor.

She was often to be found at conferences organised by myself or friends of mine in Rome from 1947 on regarding questions related to religious reform and nonviolence. Once, having come to know that starting from 1944 I had organised in Perugia the Centres for Social Orientation open to everyone for periodic discussions on questions about local administration and general social and political issues (something new in Italy, different from authoritarian Fascism), she told me she intended to settle down in Perugia to help me set up a Centre for Religious Orientation for periodic open discussions on questions related to religious life and nonviolence. She came to Perugia and bought the top floor of a house under construction in via dei Filosofi 33. From 1955 onwards weekly conversations have been held in this centre following a quarterly programme, together with East-West conferences. The Italian Vegetarian Society was founded and a seminar on Gandhi held. Until she was taken into hospital it was she who constantly prepared the Sunday afternoon meetings, often speaking herself with very incisive contributions. Emma Thomas worked assiduously as secretary, translator and inspirer of the Centre for Religious Orientation and the International Coordination for Nonviolence, also keeping in touch with religious and

nonviolent souls all over the world. She was also a teacher of English, which she loved, and gave help frequently to the needy. She was loved and held in esteem by all who knew her in via dei Filosofi and in town.

Her strength was on the wane for a couple of years. In January 1959 she was taken to hospital with serious pneumonia. Doctor Benda, who had been one of her students of English, cured her, but she stayed in hospital because she was weak. After a while she went back home, but she wasn't the same person. She went back into hospital in February this year because of weak lungs and heart and problems with her blood circulation. The doctors have always said she was able to resist and gain strength again. Her mind was always clear. She had a cataract removed.

Over the last few months in hospital she became weaker and weaker. The doctors and nurses gave her all their attention. Some months prior she had given her flat over to the Centre for Religious Orientation because she wanted it to continue, be she ill or dead.

On Monday 18 July her situation became graver, confined to bed, alternating between drowsiness and unconsciousness to moments of lucidity. Signora Anna Ascani was like a sister to her: with her in her room night and day. Over the last few days she had periods when she spoke unclearly sometimes in Italian, sometimes in English. The day before she died she called for her friend Lilian a lot. She did not suffer. Her body by now was consumed.

Her funeral took place on Monday 25th at six in the evening without any Catholic ceremony. On her coffin was her name and a cross. Posters and an announcement in the papers informed the townsfolk of her death. During the funeral a speech was read in the name of her friends. There were a lot of flowers. Her body was placed temporarily in the tomb of Giancarlo Sargenti, one of her students. In a few months' time it will be placed in the tomb belonging to friends of the Centre for Religious Orientation.

Emma Thomas loved opposites: space and barriers, openness and exclusion, life and death. She thought that creating closed systems, erecting barriers, coming up with too many definitions all suffocated life, which is a manifestation of the divine spirit among us. Christianity has declared the authority of the Pope and the holy book (while the Bible is only a period in the development of religion). The Society of Friends (or Quakers) do better by declaring the immanence of authority and truth, and thus has no priests, rites or dogmas, because the divine seed is in each man, woman, child. We must let this seed grow: the energy which spreads outwards is creatrix, the energy which goes within is ruinous, cancerous. She often quoted Eddington: "The miracle of creation is not accomplished once in some confused past, but continuously by an aware mind".

Just as bodies are individual, and not even two blades of grass are the same, so, much more, are souls. Emma Thomas always insisted on the value of an individual, its singularity, difference, un-equal-ness. Religion is the expression of the intimate relationship of the individual soul on the one hand with God, on the other with other beings: the life of the One-is-all. Each one of us has a unique, indispensable

contribution to make to the kingdom of God on Earth, and nobody else can do it in his or her place.

Evolution takes place through infinite variation. Life works always through wider harmonies, towards cooperation – so it is in the physical organism, so it is in societies. And the struggle against that certain inertia which must be undertaken by life in the individual and in society is more a stimulus to growth than an obstacle. 'There is no absolute, no perfection, not even in God himself, since that would signify a negation of life, whose essence is infinite change. Life cannot stop'.

Love is the fullness and superabundance of life, which spurs us to give, to serve, to lose our life in that of the others right up to our own sacrifice. Emma Thomas loved that well-known prayer of St. Francis: 'Lord, make me an instrument of your peace ... that I should not try so much to be loved as to love'. She would not accept that there should be eternal torments, hell. The universe has surely an end, we cannot live without ideals.

It seemed to me that in her writings and conversations Emma Thomas had assimilated into her very clear ideas – possessed strongly by her mind and tightly linked to practice – terms I used, like 'presence, centre, One-All, value, listen and speak, ever more, openness'. In her I met someone who lived and spontaneously created characteristics of the Gandhian spirit, like openness, nonviolence, loyalty, festiveness, rationality, constance. She was truly, as Gandhi said of himself, a 'practical idealist'.

Among the people I have met, among the many who conformistically repeat ideas received from tradition, like the pagans did, or who refuse them without searching for others, Emma Thomas was one who possessed sure, freely-formed ideas, and yet every day she wanted to reconsider, correct and deepen them: she put into practice the idea of the Centre for Religious Orientation.

Appendix 2

A profile of Aldo Capitini

Aldo Capitini (1899-1968) was born in Perugia, Umbria. This region is known as the 'green heart' of Italy and counts among its other famous towns, Assisi, Gubbio, Nursia, Orvieto and Spoleto. Capitini's father was a Town Hall employee and one of his duties was to ring the bells; the family had apartments in the bell tower. From up in his room Capitini could look over the plain to Assisi: a splash of pale-coloured stone on the western foothills of Mount Subasio. For a while he took lessons at a technical college, and then at a school for bookkeepers, but a natural inclination for literature and the classics led him to abandon the latter and dedicate himself wholeheartedly to the study of Latin and Greek, classical and modern literature. He studied alone, twelve hours a day from the age of 19 to 21, with serious consequences for his health and eyesight. He took the school-leaving exam, passed with flying colours and obtained a scholarship in 1924 to the *Scuola Normale Superiore*, a prestigious university college in Pisa.

Antifascism at college

He took his degree in Letters, became bursar of the university, became part of the anti-fascist group there, began studying philosophy, saw the Concordat between the Catholic church and the Fascist state as a 'betrayal of the Gospel', became fascinated with Gandhi and his non-cooperation, and would probably have remained at the *Normale* had its Rector, Giovanni Gentile, not asked him to become a card-carrying member of the Fascist party in order to keep him in his post. Naturally, Capitini refused. On the ninth of January 1933 he left the college, left Pisa and went back to his room in the bell tower at Perugia.

Antifascist tetralogy

From that moment to the liberation (25 April 1945) he worked tirelessly in the anti-fascist network and wrote what he called his 'anti-fascist tetralogy', books whose titles can be literally translated as: *Elements of a Religious Experience*, *Religious Life*, *Acts of Open Presence*, *The Reality of Everyone*. Although the content was anti-fascist, the titles made the police who were keeping him under surveillance, and their superiors, think he was some sort of religious oddball. Even if they ever opened these books very few of them would have been able to understand the contents.

Politics in the post-fascist period

After the liberation, political parties were formed for the new elections. Capitini refused to be involved with parties, which led to him being left on the sidelines despite all he had done and the contribution he could make to the founding of the Republic. It was not only political parties' desire for power that Capitini did not like, he found them too narrow: what he desired was a movement which would involve

everyone, nobody excluded; a bottom-up approach instead of the top-down one. To this aim he set up in Perugia at the end of the war a Centre which he called 'The Centre for Social Orientation' which was open to all and sundry for regular meetings on all kinds of topics: from roadworks to educating the young who had been brought up under fascism and brainwashed by it; from public order to controlling the price of foodstuffs; questions related to morals, religion, science, culture. Everyone was given space to speak, from the illiterate to the intellectual. This was an attempt at direct democracy, or 'omnicracy' as he called it, in action. It was a success and several other Centres were founded in the area and in other cities in Italy. They lasted about four years. The reason they died out was mainly due to the indifference of the political parties on the left.

A secular religious life

In 1946 he founded the 'Religion Movement' with a former priest, Ferdinando Tartaglia. The aim was ambitious: 'to bring secularism to the point where it could produce a new religious life as a substitute for the traditional one which derives from the Counter-Reformation.'⁴⁶ This lasted two years and petered out due to lack of interest. It was during this period that he and Emma Thomas first met at one of the conferences.

Criticisms of Catholicism

Capitini had various run-ins with the Catholic church, and one of his books was put on the Index. It must be said that due to his practice of nonviolence, Capitini's attitude was to criticise the mistake and not the person who made the mistake; nonviolent practice means that you also have to be open enough to see whether your position is mistaken, and act accordingly. Capitini's criticisms were firm and respectful, as always. The Church's behaviour, on the other hand, was petty and they hindered his university career at every turn. One of his famous disputes was with the Bishop of Prato (Tuscany) in 1958. The Bishop called a couple 'concubines' in public because they had been married in the registry office. Capitini intervened publicly, defending the secular nature of the State and people's personal freedom. The episode showed how much the Church dominated over those who had been baptised Catholics. What Capitini did next was a logical consequence of his battles against the church as an institution: he wrote to the Archbishop of Perugia and asked for his name to be erased from the baptismal register as he no longer considered himself a Catholic. By this time the Centre for Religious Orientation had been operating for some years. From 1952 onwards the weekly meetings were held in Emma Thomas's flat in Perugia. Capitini was a religious man who refused the myths and institution of the church. He believed the living and the dead could be joined in 'co-presence' through the operation of values like Truth, Justice, Beauty. He also held that religion and nonviolence went hand in hand.

46 Aldo Capitini, *Attraverso due terzi del secolo* (1968), *Scritti sulla nonviolenza*, Protagon, Perugia, 1992

The Perugia-Assisi peace marches

The most famous and longest-lasting nonviolent initiative connected with Aldo Capitini is the annual 'March for Peace and the Brotherhood of Peoples' from Perugia to Assisi, which began in September 1961 and has continued to this day, albeit with some breaks. He is the man who introduced nonviolence to Italy. For Capitini, nonviolence was the means to attain the end, which was a 'transmutation' of society, an example of which is the 'top-down' to 'bottom-up' revolution mentioned above. He founded the 'Nonviolent Movement' and its magazine *Azione nonviolenta*, which is still going. Gandhi's non-cooperation has already been mentioned. Well, Aldo Capitini used it as part of his antifascism. Non-cooperation with fascism meant first of all losing his job, then it meant actively working against fascism in the antifascist network and also trying to help youths, some of whom came to him for private lessons on various subjects, shake themselves free from fascist doctrine. To fascism's violence, closure and lies, Capitini opposed nonviolence, openness and non-falsehood.

University lecturer

Even though he was incredibly busy with the above-mentioned activities, at the same time he was also teaching at university: in 1946 he was back at the *Normale* in Pisa as a lecturer in Moral Philosophy. In 1956 he was at the university of Cagliari (Sardinia) teaching Pedagogy, which he continued teaching in Perugia when he was finally offered a position in his home town in 1965.

Operation and death

In 1968 Capitini had to undergo surgery to have his gall bladder removed. He had two operations but then died of complications on 19 October.