

## Developing Silent Worshippers

By LEONARD S. KENWORTHY \*

One of the glaring weaknesses in the Society of Friends today is its failure to train its young people in the art of silent worship. A study of the attendance of young Friends at meetings for worship at home or in C. P. S. Camps, or an objective appraisal of the effectiveness of the meeting in almost every Friends school would verify this statement. Because silent worship never becomes meaningful to them a large percentage of young birthright Friends become infrequent attenders at meeting or ineffective worshippers if they do come. Likewise a large number of young people in Friends schools are lost to the Society of Friends because they have not been helped in their appreciation of silent, group communion with God.

There are, of course, those for whom worship in silence is the most satisfying and strengthening kind of worship from their very first experience in it. For them little explanation or experimentation in such worship is needed. A large number, however, find silent worship extremely difficult and demanding, if not altogether baffling at first. To them silence is the opposite of the physical activity by which so many of them judge the worthwhileness of other phases of their lives. Their storehouse of experiences and their knowledge of the Bible and other literature is quickly depleted in a meeting for worship. All too often prayer to them is a superstition. The ministry is by adults and for adults. To them meeting is a meaningless rather than a meaningful experience.

What can be done to help such persons? The following suggestions are made in an attempt to answer that question. They have been tried in one place or another and are advanced in the belief that meeting for worship can be made a more meaningful experience for far more young people if further thought and experimentation is carried out along lines like these.

It seems highly important that the meaning of meeting for worship be presented to young people fairly frequently in small enough groups to permit discussion on experiences, attitudes, and methods of worship. It seems important, too, to present written explanations of silent worship. Douglas Steere's pamphlet on "Quaker Meeting," the chapter on "Group Meditation" in Hornell Hart's *Living Religion*, and the account of a Friends meeting in William W. Comfort's *Just Among Friends* can all be used with mature young people, but material is as yet lacking for others in the teen age.

Members and attenders at Friends meeting should

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likewise know a great deal about prayer, since silent worship at its best is a period of prayer. Because of the trend of the times outside and inside the Society of Friends, many young people have little or no idea of what is meant by prayer. The statement of Dr. Alexis Carrel in the March, 1941, *Reader's Digest* under the title "Prayer Is Power" is the kind of explanation which appeals to young people. Harry Emerson Fosdick's *Meaning of Prayer* appeals to some high school students, and Douglas Steere's *Prayer and Worship* and Muriel Lester's *Ways of Praying* can be used with value to some. Again the oral presentation by someone who knows the power of prayer is commended in dealing with young people.

### Aids in Worship

For those who find it difficult to plunge immediately into the silence, certain helps have proved stimulating. They should be used, however, as a swimmer uses water wings—as temporary rather than permanent aids. Otherwise the beginner in silence is retarded rather than helped in learning to worship. Some of these aids follow.

(1) In some meetings, particularly in schools, music has been used at the beginning of the period of silent devotion to help create a mood for worship. In such cases the music should be *good*, preferably carefully selected recordings. Organ and symphony music have been used with marked success. The words as well as the music of the Negro spirituals sung by Roland Hayes or Marian Anderson or the Fisk Jubilee Singers have been most helpful in experiments of this kind. Not having the music visible tends to focus the thought and emotion of the worshipper on the mood of the music or the words rather than on the artists. In other meetings the group singing of a particularly worshipful hymn has aided some searchers in their quest of God in the silence.

(2) Similarly a work of art placed at the entrance or in the front of the meeting room is likely to help many make their meditation more purposeful. Durer's "Praying Hands," Michelangelo's "Jeremiah," Penrose's "Presence in the Midst," and the various concepts of Christ's life portrayed by Chinese artists picturing him as a fellow Chinese, are the kind of picture which can help create a mood for meditation. For such an experiment the group must be small because of the difficulty of finding suitable large reproductions. The flashing of such a picture onto a screen for the first few minutes of meeting is perhaps the only way of producing such an experience in a larger group. The pictures must be selected with extreme care, since the theological concepts and portrayals of religious themes by most artists do not appeal to the average young person.

(3) Several Friends schools encourage the reading



of some devotional literature before meeting, but often there is a recess or brief intermission before the meeting starts and much of the effect of such reading is lost. The reading of very short passages from a modern translation of the Bible or the reading of a poem or brief inspirational passage at the outset of meeting can be inspiring to worship. A variation of this method is the mimeographing of a sheet of quotations focused on a theme such as friendship, faith, God or service. These sheets can be placed on the benches before a group enters the meeting room or passed out at the entrance to the room. Material for such "thoughts for meditation" may be found in many places familiar to readers.

(4) Friends have learned that the size of a meeting definitely affects the spirit of worship. Yet when it comes to most school meetings, young people are herded into one large room. If it is hard for adults to sense the spirit of worship in larger groups or to minister vocally in such large assemblages, how much harder is it for these less experienced worshippers and speakers! In some schools smaller groups meet from time to time. Too often, though, they are the same class or group each time and consequently know each other so intimately that a sharing of thoughts or prayers is psychologically impossible even though spiritually imminent. And too often the adults present are appointed by the administration rather than selected by the students. It might be well for some school to experiment over an extended period with small group meetings, rotating a part of the membership each time or trying a small group of the same persons for such a period, but choosing the membership from those who volunteer. Such a group might study the ideal of silent worship and experiment in various methods of helping their own devotions.

(5) Oftentimes opportunities for really moving meetings are neglected because the scheduled time for meeting has not been reached. An example of a good meeting at an irregular time is described in a recent letter from a teacher in a Friends school. He writes: "We held an Armistice Day session for the seniors. They read part of *In Time to Come*, the play about the Peace Conference at Versailles which draws a parallel about the attitude of Wilson, Clemenceau, Lloyd George and the peace that will be made after this war. They also read a scene from *Bury the Dead* and some appropriate poetry. Then right in class we held a Quaker meeting for thirty minutes and it was the most thrilling thing I have ever seen happen in any classroom. About twelve students spoke. . . ."

(6) It seems important to remember that novitiates find the place where meeting is held important. Many Friends Meetings and schools could make more use than they do of their beautiful grounds. Also, the experience of attending meetings steeped in tradition or beautiful in their location is one of those emotional factors in worship which are all too often forgotten. In at least one day school certain teachers have invited students to attend Sunday meeting with

them and spend some time in their homes.

Many of these suggestions apply best to Friends schools, but they can be adapted to local Meetings or young Friends groups. In presenting them the writer in no way wishes to question the beauty and power of silence as the basis of worship. These ideas are presented in the hope that many more may enjoy the same fruits of silence which so many of us have experienced. Should they harm rather than help in achieving such a purpose, the experiments should cease and cease immediately.

## Our London Letter

28 January, 1943.

The secret was certainly very well kept that Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt were both at Casablanca in Morocco with their staffs. Whether the emphasis on "unconditional surrender" laid by the President was altogether wise I am far from certain. My uncertainty arises because I believe that one of its effects is likely to be the welding of the people of Axis countries still more strongly behind their Governments, for the aim will be interpreted as a threat of annihilation. Indeed it is already being so interpreted in Germany. Therefore it is having the very reverse effect of what is needed, for what is wanted is for the people of Germany, in particular, to realise how they have been duped and ill-led.

A feature of wartime London is that when I get the train home just before 6 p. m. it has been impossible to buy an evening paper. At the railway book-stalls there are only books and magazines to be had, and the street sellers outside have gone home, their stock exhausted. It is the severe rationing of paper, of course, which is the explanation. Only so many papers may be printed and no more, whatever the demand.

Quite rightly the Chief Rabbi pointed out in a letter to the press yesterday that it is already five weeks since the Government made their outspoken statement of sympathy with the persecuted Jews in Europe—but that nothing further has yet been done. It is obvious that some prodding is still needed to turn words into deeds. The three archbishops of Canterbury, York and Wales last week contributed their "prod." They declare that "the sufferings of these millions of Jews and their condemnation, failing immediate rescue, to a cruel and certain death, constitute an appeal to humanity which it is impossible to resist." They state their belief therefore that it is the duty of the civilised nations, whether neutral or Allied, to exert themselves to the utmost possible extent to provide a sanctuary for these victims, and they call upon the British and Dominion Governments to give a lead in finding "immediate refuge in territories within the British Empire as well as elsewhere" whether for those just escaped or for those already in