

March 4, 1984

Earlier this week I was traveling on the island of Jamaica visiting Friends Meetings there.

Although Jamaica is a small island, perhaps about the size of Connecticut, the mountainous terrain gives it the grandeur of a continent. One of the Quaker meetings my two colleagues and I were scheduled to visit was located high in these mountains, and to get to it required traversing a difficult, tortuously winding road which ran steeply uphill along the sides of a precipitous canyon, down the center of which rushed the waters of a very lively stream. From time to time along the way we encountered a small settlement whose inhabitants we would see doing laundry in the stream, or carrying water from it for some other household purpose. Eventually, very high up, where coffee is grown on the astonishingly steep slopes, we reached Cascade Friends Meeting, so named because from it, in the distance, yet higher overhead, one could see a long slender waterfall which fed the stream we had seen along the way.

The Friends of Cascade Meeting were very proud of the local crop, known as Blue Mountain Coffee, which, although seldom consumed in its pure form, is regarded as an essential ingredient of the finest blends, and is shipped all over the world.

The various local Quakers who had laid down their daily occupations to greet their foreign guests served us a wonderful lunch of curried goat, rice and peas, and a punch of tropical fruit juices given a definite zap with a generous dollop of ginger flavoring.

And as we spoke over lunch, delicate mists began to gather around the jagged peaks which surrounded us. I felt certain that if a geologist had been among us he would have confirmed that the rugged landscape which we had traversed had been created by the wearing away of these blue mountains by the babbling stream we had passed, which in turn was fed by the condensation of these mists which, in their delicacy, seemed so striking a contrast to the rugged rocks around which they collected.

Human beings at their best are like that mountain stream. They live close to the earth, seek the common level of life, and serve as they go along, as has been said, without regard to likes and dislikes.¹ Rooted in a spirit of gentleness like the mist, we can succeed with quite patience in wearing away what is brutal and hard in human nature. And as I sat with our co-religionists amid the steep slopes of that mountain, I thought of the Sermon on the Mount, and of its promise that the meek would indeed inherit the earth.

For there is in the beautiful message delivered on that mountain two millenia ago a Truth which can fill any emptiness.² Our awareness of emptiness is our greatest treasure, for it is what propels our search for Truth. And the interesting thing about Truth is that those who long for it with humility and sincerity eventually themselves seem to radiate the very Truth they seek, as if the very price at which Truth is purchased is the very longing for It itself. It is for this reason that we are rightly told that if we seek, surely we shall always find.

1. Reference to earlier ministry
2. Reference to earlier ministry.