

# **Martha and Mary**

**(Two scenarios inspired by Luke 10:38-42)**

**by Klaus Huber (Warwickshire MM)**

## *First Scenario*

It was a grey day when they buried Martha. She had been a social worker all her life and served on countless Quaker committees in what little spare time was given to her. Her sudden death, just before she would have retired, had come as a shock to many. Those who grieved most about her were the clerks of various nominations committees who had silently hoped to give Martha more responsibilities, once she would retire. Not only had they lost a member of the Society who, out of a mere sense of duty, would never say 'no' to an appointment, but also had to think of how to find replacements for Martha for the seven posts she had held at the time of her death.

Six months after Martha's death, following long and tedious acts of persuasion, six of the seven posts had been filled. But still no-one had been found to replace Martha as representative on one of the central committees. The sun had long gone down, when the clerk of the Monthly Meeting nominations committee read through the entire list of members for the forty-third time. There was only one left whom he had not yet asked: Martha's daughter Mary. "I know she's good for nothing", the clerk said to himself, knowing about Mary's idle character, "but what can I do?"

To his great relief, Mary agreed to the nomination. The "Hope so's" at her nomination sounded a bit tired and sparse, but no-one stood in the way.

Mary arrived late to her first central committee meeting. After a little more than an hour, she got up in the middle of a discussion and, under the disapproving eyes of some sixty other representatives, walked slowly out of the room.

During Mary's absence, the discussion became ever more difficult. Arguments hit on one another like a pair of sheathed swords, the air grew stiff and the hands on the big clock moved on without remorse. The two clerks at the table stared at each other, with sweat in their faces, thinking of some Quakerly terms for announcing a stalemate. Suddenly Mary walked back into the room, her face looking fresher than anyone else's. Without asking for permission, she went to the windows and opened them, one after another. Friends were startled and appalled. All the heads turned to look at Mary, either in wonder or in dismay. Mary did not pay any attention to this, but simply returned to her seat, and, for the first time this afternoon, the sun was emerging from behind the clouds.

The silence lasted for a long time, until a couple of Friends finally got up from their seats and, one by one, shut the windows again. After they had sat down again, Mary stood up. One of the clerks motioned her to speak, and she began: "I don't really understand what you've been talking about, but..." and then asked some questions. Her speech was simple and precise. And the questions were, to

everyone's amazement, clarifying the issue more than anything else that had been said. Ten minutes later, a minute was agreed with a loud "Hope so!" from everyone's mouth.

It may not surprise that, over tea, Mary was surrounded by several other committee members who happened to serve on some nominations committee. They urged her to take up this or that appointment. However, Mary refused. "But you're not working and you're only on one committee at the moment. You must have more time than anyone else.", one of them said to her. But Mary replied: "No, I don't have time." - "How can this be?", another Friend asked with a stern look, "What are you doing the whole day long?". And Mary said: "I listen to the birds in the sky, and I watch the leaves of the trees, as they swing around in the wind, and the changing colours and shades they produce. Also, there are so many books to read, so many languages to learn, so many places to discover that even a whole lifetime isn't enough for it all. Then there are so many old friends to meet and so many new friends to make. But most of all, I enjoy just walking up a hill, sitting down, becoming still and listen to God's whisper in the wind. Have you ever heard God's whisper in the wind?"

The Friends gave each other puzzled looks. God's whisper in the wind? All they could think of with regard to wind was the draught in the London underground.

### *Second Scenario*

Martha's retirement was a jolly occasion. Presents lay in a high pile on the table before her, glasses were clinking in endless succession. A sense of pure joy radiated from Martha's eyes and warmed the whole company. It was only the first of a series of 'retirements', as Martha had also decided to step down from her Quaker commitments, so that she could go and fulfil a lifelong dream: make a journey around the world. No-one in the nominations committees responsible for finding replacements for her was worried though. A single glance at Martha's face, at her eyes full of love and wisdom, surrounded by wrinkles originating from much laughter, showed what fulfilment and fun can be had in serving the Society. All her posts were filled in no time, usually with several names to choose from.

One of the volunteers for replacing Martha was her own daughter Mary who, until then, had never held a position within the Society. Martha had never urged Mary to become more involved, but instead had silently watched her daughter grow in the spirit, up to an extent where she realized, not without joy, that Mary's connectedness to the Divine had developed roots deeper than her own. Martha was convinced that Mary was destined to soon become a well-known beloved and respected Friend in her own right.

When Martha was waiting for the train that would start her off on her world journey, she was reflecting on the past behind her and heaved a sigh of satisfaction. Then her eyes began to sparkle, as her thoughts shifted to the adventures that lay ahead of her.