

19 April, 2005

Hello again F/friends, and relatives--

After a time at Woodbrooke, I send greetings from Ireland, with "Following Job, Part IV"

Scott Journal , Part IV

April 4-7, Monday-Thursday- Woodbrooke. Was invited to explain to a group of Japanese Friends here about the 19th century splits and the rise of pastoral Meetings among Friends in America.

Walked to Bournville, home of Cadbury's Chocolate, founded by Quakers noted for the enlightened way they dealt with their workers--good pay, decent housing, opportunities for education and recreation, all at company expense. Paternalism? Maybe. But most workers of the time were terribly exploited, and had few options for education or anything else. Bournville village is frozen in time somewhere about 1950--I suspect courtesy of the Bournville Trust, which owns all the land. But in a tiny shop I bought a spool of thread out of a set of shallow drawers of a sort that I haven't seen since I was a child. (Thread from Brazil, not Lancashire, as it would have been--but you can't have everything.)

However, the workers' recreation ground in the back of the factory is now a parking lot for "Cadbury World"--which is just what it sounds like--the huge souvenir shop has everything from the usual hats and tee shirts, to tea pots shaped like giant chocolate drops. The Cadbury s must be spinning in their graves.

April 8, Friday--"Oh to be in England now that April's here...." It's snowing.

April 9, Saturday--Into the city center. New Street, the main shopping street, is now "pedestrianized"--full of people, street performers ("buskers"), balloon sellers--and a bunch of people collecting signatures on petitions to "Save Rover!" (the car company, which has just sunk into irretrievable bankruptcy). Poor Rover--sorry for the workers, but failed to see how signing petitions is going to rescue anybody from decades of greedy mismanagement .

To the Art Museum, to see a special exhibit of Middle Eastern objects collected by a couple of Quakers. And discovered that in another gallery there were several paintings by a Quaker artist, Joseph Edward Southall.

April 12, Tuesday--Dublin. After several fruitless attempts from Woodbrooke to reach someone--anyone--in the Dublin Meeting, threw myself on the mercies of the Tourist Bureau at the airport for accommodation; wound up in a B&B about half hours walk from the city center.

Dublin's changed enormously--even in '88, it was a leisurely, cheerful sort of place. Now there's new building everywhere, triple the number of people, and a pace as frantic as everywhere else. I can't wish for it to go back, because there was too much unemployment, poverty, and all the attendant social problems. But affluence has its own

set of problems--and Dublin is now one of the world capitals of the new technology industries. More crime, more drugs (still less than we have, though). Large numbers of immigrants proving difficult to integrate, and straining social services. New motorways and housing (including second homes) eat up the beautiful countryside--though not too far from Dublin (yet). People work very long hours, and complain about lack of leisure or family time. But from my perspective--been there, done that--can't humans figure out how to rise out of poverty without destroying the environment and themselves?

Well, smoking is banned in pubs and restaurants--though people still seem to smoke and drink heavily. In supermarkets you must ask--and pay for--plastic carrier bags; they don't just hand them out. And there are two lovely new forms of mass transit--the Dart--a light rail system, and the Luas--a super-elegant tram. Signs of hope?--I'll believe it when they ban overwork, or when people themselves realize that "convenience," and the ownership of lots of "stuff" is not good for us. (Off the soap box, Marnie!)

March 13--Wednesday--Accidentally discovered a bit of Job Scott's Dublin while wandering around looking for something else. Found myself at the entry to Eustace St., a tiny narrow street barely wider than an alley. Thinking, "I know that name" I went down to find the "modern" Meeting House--in use since 1987, but meeting in premises adjoining the old Meeting House--the present rooms once housed the Eagle tavern, bought by the Meeting in 1817 as an investment property. Right next door is the Irish Film Institute, which in 1987 bought the big old Meeting House and remodeled it. The Meeting started building there in 1692, and had an entrance on the little lane in back, Sycamore Alley, which is how Scott would have come in. A very large Meeting House was built--big enough to hold the Yearly Meeting gatherings. The Film Institute has retained the central courtyard--now an attractive atrium, with tables for sitting with your Danish and coffee. Still has some of the original walls. (The entrance to the Women's Meeting room now leads to a small movie theater.) (Did Job touch this brick right here?)

March 14--Thursday--Arrrrgh! Frustrating day--more cold and rain, and after many efforts to find out about getting to Archives, finally discovered that I had to take two busses and a very expensive taxi. They have moved to a brand new site and brand new building on the far southern edge of the city. This is now HQ for Ireland Yearly Meeting--lovely place, views over the hills and the city below--but designed for people with cars. The place is hard to find, and nobody in the tourist office had a clue how to get me there--I finally found a phone number and got some reasonable directions.

But Query--Is this forward looking, or backward?

But I did discover a fair amount about Job--records here indicate he warned the Ireland Half Yearly Meeting that an "overflowing scourge" was about to pass through the land, but the "handful" of faithful would be unharmed. I'd been wondering why his messages in England and Ireland started to emphasize the imminent coming of the Wrath of God. It may well have been because the French Revolution had begun in

1789, and very soon after Scott arrived in England, Great Britain declared war on the revolutionary government of France. There were most certainly “wars and rumors of wars” in the air.

When he got to Ireland, there had already been anti-militia riots. He also discovered at a Quarterly Meeting in Waterford that there were disputes among Quakers in Tipperary, “Something of disunity having got in among Friends.” Spiritual termites, perhaps?

Actually, according to a brief history of Irish Quakers that I’ve been reading, a very serious set of disputes was brewing among Irish Friends, involving major theological and practical differences--it led to some very ugly quarrels and disownments.

Other interesting tidbits from the Archives--a very affectionate poem to his wife (“I love thee more than pearls or or gold”), written on leaving for an earlier journey. And perhaps related--In Ireland, his closest social confidantes seem to be women.

One interesting historical note that has nothing to do with Scott--there was a very well known Quaker boys school in Ballitore (where Scott died); its most illustrious alumnus was the great British statesman and member of Parliament, Edmund Burke, known for trying to explain to the British that they were doing some very stupid things in the American colonies which were going to cause problems--maybe even a revolution. Burke never became Quaker, but retained very close ties with the Shackleton family, who ran the school.

April 15, Friday--in the National Library--lovely reading room--elegant half-dome in a soft robin’s egg blue, with a white bas-relief of cherubs and vines around the bottom. Nothing on JS, but some very useful background on Quakers of the time. Getting some insights into the psychology of devout Quakers--among many, there seemed to be a puritanical fear of anything pleasurable or amusing. Hunting for sport was condemned not for its cruelty, but because it was an amusement. Reading newspapers was condemned as a distraction from “better contemplations,” and children were admired for the sort of smarmy piety that now makes us wonder if they haven’t been brain-washed.

April 16, Saturday--moved from my B&B to the Mother House of the Sisters of Mercy--no, I haven’t converted. It’s less expensive and closer to the center. They mostly take in sisters who are on leave from assignments elsewhere, so women come from all over the world. A sister who was at Woodbrooke suggested it.

Walking on Grafton Street--the great “pedestrianized” shopping street of Dublin--somewhere around the middle, I actually encountered such a mass of humanity I could not go forward. Human gridlock. What it’s like in summer I can’t imagine. I managed to wedge my way to a side street and escaped. Friends, this is not “progress.”

Afternoon in the central Dublin city library--which took a while to find--again, the Tourist Office unhelpful. The library lurks deep inside a huge shopping mall. There they referred me to a branch library where most of their local history stuff is kept. But I found one book there--on the Uprising of 1798--that proved invaluable. I already knew about the uneasiness in England over the war with the French. Turns out that in Ireland, things

were even more uneasy. Scott wasn't the only person who felt that something really terrible was about to happen. He interpreted the coming terror as the Wrath of God.

Well terror was coming--though it didn't burst out fully in Ireland until 5 years later. And if it was the Wrath of God, God must have had a very bad aim, because many perfectly innocent people died, much property was destroyed and people were driven out of their homes. Every Irish citizen knows about this ill-fated uprising--many of the famous rebel folk songs (like "Rising of the Moon" and "Wearing of the Green") either come from or refer to this time. Far from achieving any great victory for peace, liberty, and justice, the uprising led directly to yet more oppression for the Irish people--partly because there was considerable pro-French sentiment among many Irish (the enemy of my enemy...) And indirectly it led to the later bitter division between Catholics and Protestants. (In '98, many Catholics and Dissenters--non-Anglicans--and even some sympathetic Anglicans--had found common cause). Quakers (and Moravians) fared relatively well in the bad times, though as always, there were those who interpreted Friendly efforts to help the wounded and displaced on both sides as treason. After one especially dreadful battle, Friends on their way to Meeting had to make their way past bodies left lying in the streets. The tensions that led to this had been brewing for many years, and back in 1793 Scott was not imagining the sense that some terrible violence was near at hand.