

The Wilkinson and Story Controversy in Bristol, also Notes on early use of the words “Friends” and “Disown.”

It is well known that the opposition to George Fox, headed, at the beginning, by John Wilkinson and John Story, was strongly supported by William Rogers, a merchant of Bristol. In the earliest minutes of Bristol Monthly Meeting his name often appears as taking a leading part among Friends in that city, and every now and then we come upon some point which may have a bearing on his subsequent attitude towards women's meetings and other matters in dispute. Concerning this I may write further at some future time; at present I will do no more than draw attention to the following:—

For some considerable time I have been making a detailed study of the aforesaid minutes, which are kept at the Friars Meeting House in Bristol. They begin 20th of 3rd mo. [that is, May], 1667, and are written in seventeenth century handwriting, being, in places, very difficult to read. Two points may be mentioned in passing. The first minute is concerned with arrangements for making a collection at the close of a meeting on First-day, the collection being “for the poore & other services relatinge to truth,” and the members of the congregation are spoken of as “Friends,” simply. The other point concerns the word “disown.” Its first use (16, x., 1667, and 13, xi., 1667) is in the sense of the Meeting disowning a marriage that had been irregularly conducted in the Meeting House. In other cases (*e.g.* 16 viii. 1671; 30, vii. 1672, etc.), the word is used of an individual disowning his own wrong doing. In the minutes of 30th of 1st mo., 167 $\frac{2}{3}$ [*i.e.* 30th of March, 1673], we come upon what, I believe, is, at present, the earliest known use of the word in its modern sense, that of the Meeting disowning an individual:—“William Rogers is desired to draw up a paper against the deceit of Charles W——,¹ And to Informe Joseph Adlam (who, as freinds

¹ The name is given in full, but, even at this distance of time, one hardly likes to make public record of it.

are Informed, doth Jmploy him) that friends disowne him as a deceiptfull pson, & warn him to beware of him."

To return to our main subject. I have lately come upon a duplicate of the original minute book, written in a more modern handwriting, and, for the most part, more easy to read than the other, although the advantage does not always rest with it in consequence of the ink having faded. It is lettered on the outside, "C. 1842, C. 1"; it is not kept (at present) in the same safe as that in which the original is kept. At the beginning there is a note written and signed by Richard Snead, in seventeenth century writing, and very crabbed in addition. Richard Snead was a leading Friend in Bristol; his name occurs eight times in Besse's *Sufferings*, see vol. i. pp. 53, 55, 56, 58, 59, 67, 73 (not 72 as stated in the index), 74. The following is the note:—

Copie of freinds Men's Meting Booke, began 20th
3^d Mon, 1667.

The reason why this booke was made was a feare y^t I and severall other freinds had, Least when y^t unhappie difference was among freinds touching the two Johns, & strongly supported by severall freinds of this Citty, and mostly p William Roggers, who earnestly Jndeaverd for a Seperation, not only in dissipline but also as to religious metinges on Account of worship to god; he urging often y^t wee differd in principle, as well as in some ptcular things, y^t mite be demed Circumstantiall—I say, y^e reason of makeing this book was a feare Least sayd W. R., and others with him, would have taken the mens meting book from us here, as wee had understood y^t some of the same pty with them had taken away freinds meting booke in Wiltshere;² wch wee thus judged would not

² From the Wiltshire minute books deposited in D., we extract the following:—

Q.M. at the Devizes, 1st of 2 mo., 1678.—Vpon some occasion of disturbance given, it was seuerall times offered & desired that the Reason of our coming together might be minded and ye worke and service of ye meeting . . . might be proceeded in . . . but it would not be assented unto by seuerall, but in a uery unfriendly manner they went away from ye meeting to an Jnn & katched up & carried away ye Quarterly booke from the meeting with them & would not send it again nor returne themselues, although some friends went to them from the meeting & earnestly desired it of them. EDS.

only be a wrongdoing in them, but also be a great Loss to us, on the Account of truths service. And this was the very Cause and reason therof. John Higgins he [? doen, *i.e.* doing] it, and I payd him, my self, for doeing therof near Forty Shillings, in the yeare 1680.

Richard Sneade.

The last minute thus copied is dated 18th of 8th mo., 1680. It was in 1680 that William Rogers published, in five parts, his attack on George Fox, under the title, *The Christian Quaker, Distinguished from the Apostate & Innovator*. The controversy lasted some years longer; the best account of it has been written by John Stephenson Rowntree, in a pamphlet, entitled, *Micah's Mother, or a Neglected Chapter in Church History*. There is a good deal of information on the subject in Barclay's *Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth*, beginning on p. 441 and continued through chapter xix.³

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Service in Sackcloth.

Here is Elizabeth Harrise some tymes goes forth to steple houses in sackcloath, and she hath much peace in this seruice. There was some seemed rather to be ag^t it, w^{ch} troubled her a litle. She spoke to me wth many teares about it seuerall weekes agoe, and J said J thought J might write to thee about it, and she desired J might. After she had beene at Cambridge, it came to her, she might goe to Manchester the sixt month, and so she would be glad to haue a line or two from thee about it, before she goe.

From a letter from John Stubbs to George Fox, in 1664; original in D. (Crosfield MSS.)

³ This Controversy, so far as it concerned Reading, is described in THE JOURNAL, i. 57. See also *F.P.T.*