

Attitude of Friends under Persecution.

It is interesting to compare the attitude of early Friends under persecution with that of other contemporary Nonconformists.

In the *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, vol. ii. pp. 387 ff. (1906), a manuscript in the Congregational Library, London, entitled, "The Experiences of Mary Franklin," has been reproduced in full, and is well worth careful reading. The writer's husband, Robert Franklin, was in Aylesbury Jail in 1670.

The following quotations will be read with interest:—

"There arose troubles by reason of informers who got warrants to seize on our goods; who, getting some officers to attend them, did several times watch for an opportunity to get into our house. A friend of ours, perceiving of them, came to the window to give me notice of it. I opened the window to hear what he said; the informer, being behind, flew up to the window, snatched it out of my hand, and got up into it presently. But my husband, being in the room, *thrust him back again*,¹ and got our friend who was without to lift up the shutter, so they were at that time prevented. . . .

"There arose new troubles by reason of informers, but we, having some warning before, *did remove some of our goods out of the house*. The manner of their coming was this: November, 1684, *the door being some way or other carelessly left open*, they got into the meeting place, which joined to our house, and one of them knocked at the kitchen door gently, but I, *looking through a hole made for the purpose*, did suspect him. I immediately *laid up the bars of the doors*, and ran up to my husband."

The full account of this latter event makes it appear as though the minister's house was strongly barricaded against the assaults of the informers.

The Quaker policy of non-resistance is in contrast with the above. Many instances could be cited of Friends' action, or rather want of action, often under great provocation. It is summed up by Professor Masson, in his

¹ The italics do not appear in the *Transactions*.

Life of John Milton, in words with which all Friends should be acquainted :—

“ . . . They held their meetings regularly, perseveringly, and *without the least concealment, keeping the doors of their Meeting Houses purposely open that all might enter*—informers, constables, or soldiers, and do whatever they chose. . . .”

Mary Franklin's *Experiences* present also interesting parallels with those of Friends, as, *e.g.* :—

“ The example of Daniel came often into my mind (*when some friends were speaking of our forbearing for a while, and omitting our duty of meeting together*). . . . My husband had the oath tendered to him as before, and he, refusing it, was sent to Newgate for half a year. . . . One of the justices did pull down some part of our meeting-place, though at the time we had no meeting. But *about a month after, the Lord called him to account ; he died very miserably.*”

Mistress Franklin suffered much in her private life in consequence of the troubles which came upon her husband and his Church. Several of her children were either still-born or died shortly after birth. The sufferings endured by Friends had a like effect on the mothers of the early Quaker day. The birth-registers reveal a very high rate of infant mortality.

Further references to the attitude of Friends under persecution compared with that of others may be found in the following works :—George Fox's *Journal*, ii. 86 ; *History of Thomas Ellwood* (Graveson edition), pp. 101-107, 234, 256 ; *Journal of John Gratton*, pp. 30, 39, 88 ; *London Friends' Meetings*, 1867, p. 140 ; Evans's *Friends in the Seventeenth Century*, 1876, p. 298. See also extract from the MS. *Journal of George Fox*, given in *The British Friend*, vol. xvi. (1907), p. 203.

You profess the Holy Scriptures ; but what do you witness and experience ? What Interest have you in them ? Can you set to your Seal they are true, by the work of the same Spirit in you that gave them forth in the holy Antients ? Penn, *Call to Christendom*, 1694.