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Reminiscences of Some Old Edinburgh Friends

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IT may be interesting to recall a few of the more obvious "peculiarities" of our little community at Edinburgh as they strike one now in looking back some sixty years or more. Of course the separation of men and women in Meeting was rigorously carried out; and it used to be one of the most trying of the young doorkeeper's duties to shepherd "people of the world" who came in to Meeting, often men and women together, safely to their respective sides. Strangers frequently strayed in at the open gateway under "the Penn" in the Pleasants, and after looking curiously at the cat-haunted graveyard, advanced with cautious footsteps up to the very door of the Meeting House. It was the doorkeeper's duty, when he heard the crunching sounds of feet on the gravel, to slip out and accost the strangers with a courteous enquiry whether they would like to enter.

In those days there were no gravestones. These, with the simple record of name, date of death and age, were first sanctioned in 1850, to the no small concern of the more conservative Friends. In the back portion of the premises there still reposed a gruesome object, a large coffin-shaped cage formed of strong iron bars. This was provided with long spikes which

descended deeply into the ground. When the coffin was placed in it, the lid was brought down and securely padlocked. By this means a stop was put to the attempts of the "body snatchers," who made a regular trade of providing "subjects" for the Professor of Anatomy at the College. After a certain period the cage was removed and was laid aside until it was again required. I have a receipt for £1 11s. 6d., signed by David Doull as Registrar of Burials, for the use of the "safe," as it was called, in 1831. How much later it was in use, I know not. A Friend who saw it used, when as a very tiny child she was present at a funeral in 1835, remarks, it was "a ghastly business, but not so bad, my father said, as what he had seen—an opening made in the coffin and quicklime poured into the chest. Anatomical skill was dearly bought then; the Burke and Hare stories of our infancy were more alarming than any ghost tales." At Aberdeen, when, in 1830, the grave of a Friend was opened so that the remains of the Friend's husband might be laid beside her, it was discovered that the grave had been rifled, and an empty coffin only remained. After that, I believe there were no more interments in Friends' Burial Ground there.

In the principal churchyards of Edinburgh, and no doubt elsewhere also, watchhouses were erected where a night watchman was installed. The buildings still remain, though the need for them has happily ceased.

As the only means of lighting the Meeting House in an evening was with tallow candles, the second meeting on First-day was held in the afternoon, for several months in the year, which perhaps accounted for the answer to the Query as to the due and decorous holding of meetings being generally qualified by the clause "with the exception of some appearance of drowsiness at times."⁵ When, as occasionally happened, a meeting for the public was held in the evening in the Meeting House "at the request of a Ministering Friend from a distance" (the name was never given), the candles in the primitive chandelier

⁵ Drowsiness in Meeting was by no means a new experience, however. At Edinburgh Yearly Meeting for 1724, after the Queries had been duly read, it is recorded that "friends have agreed y^t there be an addition to the Querys with respect to the abstaining from sleep after this manner (viz.) and whither friends abstain from sleeping in meetings."

were supplemented by others on the window-sills and other coigns of vantage, stuck into improvised candlesticks of potatoes cut in half. On these occasions the sliding panels were removed from the passage, and "the loft" was thrown open, a gloomy apartment above the passage and Women's Meeting House, access to which was gained by narrow stairs issuing from "the Library."

Family visits from "Ministering Friends" were comparatively common in those days, and on the somewhat rare occasions when the "Public Friend" engaged in prayer, the family of course stood up. I remember the astonished reprobation with which a member of a by no means exceedingly "plain" Friend's family mentioned the report that the household of a well-known Halifax Friend all went down on their knees on such occasions. I think there were only two Friends at Edinburgh, David Doull and John Wigham, Tertius, who for many years kept up the old Puritan custom of holding their broadbrims in front of their faces in meeting during the time of prayer. One very occasionally sees this still done in church by a worshipper on entering, before sitting down, and I have seen the custom followed in some of the Calvinistic parts of Switzerland. When we stayed in the country during the summer holidays we always had our little gatherings together in silence at our lodgings on a First-day morning, and sometimes in the afternoon as well. No consistent Friend could have dreamt of countenancing "the will worship" of "a hireling ministry" by joining with the worshippers in church or chapel. My father very consistently carried out his principles under what, to a sensitive man such as he was, must have been very trying circumstances. Meetings in support of Anti-Slavery, Peace and other good works in which Friends were interested, and in which they united with other Christians, used to be held in one or other of the dissenting Meeting Houses at Edinburgh. It was a matter of course that the meeting was opened with prayer by the minister or a colleague, when everybody stood up. On one occasion my father had been persuaded, very reluctantly, to take the chair. Whether he had explained his scruples to the minister beforehand I do not know, but he sat quietly all through the lengthy

prayer, in the face of the standing assembly. He had a specially strong objection to the term "Reverend" as applied to any man, and felt almost as strongly about "Mr." and "Esquire." "Thou may esquire them if thou likes, Daniel, I never do," he once said to his friend and pupil, Daniel Wilson, who had been addressing some letters for him. The Established churches were not called by the name of the parish in which they were situate—St. Cuthbert's, St. Andrew's, as the case might be—(or if it was necessary in a formal document so to designate them, the words "so called" were always appended) but in ordinary conversation the name of the minister who preached there was employed. Thus Newington Parish Church, a conspicuous object from our windows, was always known as "Runciman's Church." So, too, with the dissenting places of worship: the U.P. Chapel in Nicholson Street was "George Johnston's," the Independent meeting place in College Street "Dr. French's."

Paintings were hardly ever seen on the walls of Friends' houses, and even engravings but sparingly. In the well-furnished house of John Wigham, Tertius, there was a copy of the engraving of "Penn's Treaty with the Indians," in the dining room. I remember too a wonderful fire-screen in coloured worsted work representing "the Flight into Egypt" which stood in one corner of the drawing-room. David Doull also had a copy of "Penn's Treaty" in one of his rooms; and John Wigham, Junior, went so far as to have engraved portraits of Elizabeth Fry and William Allen, and an engraving of the opening of the first reformed Parliament, in his drawing-room. At Hope Park, as was to be expected, the walls had more artistic adornment, but in connection with that I may recall that when paper-hangings were first substituted in the parlour for the dull-toned paint, which dated probably from my grandfather's time, my father had the first paper stripped off again and a much plainer one substituted, as, on seeing it on the walls, he feared that the one he had selected might, after all, grieve the feelings of some of his friends. I think at Meadowside, a single portrait in oils, by one of the old masters, was hanging in the dining-room, also a somewhat gaudy Swiss landscape with a village church spire in the centre in which a real going clock was

inserted! But that must have been after Alexander Cruickshanks's death. They had been brought from abroad by his youngest son, who had resided in Italy for some time on account of his health. He brought back another most unfriendly possession, according to the ideas of those days, a moustache, which caused great concern to his family. More than one of Alexander Cruickshanks's children developed a great love for the fine arts, two of them forming good collections of engravings.

Alexander Cruickshank himself, like other Friends of the period, had a great objection to having his likeness taken. Some of his children, however, without his knowledge, introduced into the house a local artist of some talent, Dobie by name, who, watching his opportunity, succeeded in making a good drawing of the all-unconscious old Friend whilst he was seated in his arm chair with his after-dinner book. The last illness of Ann (Christy) Cruickshank, in 1836, was a brief one, and her children were much distressed that they had no likeness of their mother. However, Dr. Barry and Alfred Blakey, enthusiastic young men, took a plaster cast of her face, from which many years later a good marble bust was executed. I fancy it was by the same sculptor that a bust of Alfred Blakey was afterwards made; but in this case, the vault had to be visited at dead of night, the coffin opened, and the needed cast of the features then taken.

In the family circle in those days, singing and all "instruments of musick" were of course strictly taboo, though many of the young Friends and even some of the older ones were—I was going to say *passionately*, but as that is hardly a Friendly word, let us say *exceedingly*, fond of music. Some of the young people, it was rumoured, played surreptitiously on the Jews-harp, for lack of a better instrument. It need hardly be added that dancing and concert and theatre going were still absolutely forbidden, but, curiously enough, acting Charades was a favourite diversion in more than one orthodox household. What dressings up there used to be in all manner of outlandish garments, including generally, on one pretext or another, an old Friend's bonnet and a broadbrim! Recitations were also encouraged, even those from Shakespear. Playing-cards, of course, were never seen, but

there was a game at "Poetical Cards," in which I think you had to guess the name of the authors of certain quotations, or perhaps the subjects of the verses. Several writing games, as well as "Cartoons," "George Fox's Hat" and "Clumps," were great favourites, and in the winter evenings we had "Blind Man's Buff," "Hunt the Whistle," "Neighbour, neighbour, I've come to torment thee," and other active games; whilst in the long summer evenings there were grand times in the garden over "Prisoners' Base," "I Spy," and "Brush." I fear the present generation of highly superior young people would have regarded our proceedings as unutterably childish and "slow," but they were a source of very great enjoyment to those who participated in them, and hosts of pleasant memories rise up as one recalls the hospitable houses where we used to meet, some sixty or seventy years ago.

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Note.—There are numerous references to Edinburgh and some of its Quaker inhabitants in *Memoirs of John Wigham Richardson, 1837-1908*.—ED.

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36.—Vol. II. p. 199.—A textual note should have been written to the reference "Acts 2.22.23," somewhat as follows: This is the reference as originally written. At some later period the figure denoting the chapter has been altered to 3, correcting the reference.

Thursday was married at the Quakers-Meeting in Gracechurch-Street, Mr. Bell,¹ a wealthy Hosier in the same Street, to Miss Falkener¹ of Wapping, Daughter of Mr. Falkener, late an eminent Merchant of this City, an agreeable Lady with a Fortune of 6000l.

News-cutting in D., dated 1743.

¹ On the 17th of Twelfth Month, 1742, Robert Bell, hosier, citizen, and Long Bow String Maker, married Margaret Falconer, daughter of John and Anne Falconer. (Friends' Registers.)