

The Annual Meeting

THE Annual Meeting of the Friends Historical Society was held in London during Y.M. In the absence, through illness, of the President, William Frederick Miller, William C. Braithwaite took the chair and delivered an address, of which the following is a summary :—

The Friends Historical Society does a most useful service to all engaged in Friends' literature. Anyone who attempts historical work has a double task: first, the collection of material, and then the use of those materials for historical purposes; and the collection of materials is sometimes by far the most laborious part of a man's work. There is, in the case of the Society of Friends, such an immense body of material that it almost daunts the courage of those attempting to explore it exhaustively; it is, therefore, of the greatest service to have bodies of this material made available in a reliable shape, so that the man who is doing historical work does not need himself to spend time upon examining the original documents, but has them prepared for him in a form in which he can make use of them. That quarrying work, as A. Neave Brayshaw has well called it, provides the block of marble out of which you try to hew your more complete historical statue, and justifies the existence and munificent maintenance of the Friends Historical Society. Without that Society the historical work now being done could not have been done at all, or would have been done with additional imperfection and additional slowness, and, therefore, all who are associated with the Society may feel they have a definite share in the fuller presentation of our history which is now taking place.

Our old records are probably unique. Many of us can trace back our ancestors with the most minute exactness in every branch right to the origin of the Society, and we may even find four or five entries in Society documents respecting each separate marriage. But even in the case of our documents the tooth of time has gnawed away a good deal, and the negligence of Friends

has perhaps taken away more. Friends have not always been zealous custodians of their records. Thus Margaret Fox's Account Book was rescued a hundred years ago from a small shop in the outskirts of Lancaster where its leaves were being used by the owner for wrapping up parcels ; we have heard of copies of Magna Charta being used in that way, here is a similar case—a man buys a piece of soap and wants it wrapped up, there is a leaf of Margaret Fox's Account Book handy, and in such mean uses the book begins softly and silently to vanish away.

The Wilkinson-Story separation was also responsible for some destruction of Quaker records. At the beginning of the Wiltshire Quarterly Meeting Minute Book, under date, 1st of 2mo. [April] 1678, there is this entry :—

Upon some occasion of disturbance given, it was several times offered and desired that the reason of our coming together might be minded, and the work and service of the meeting—which is to serve the Lord and His people—might be proceeded in. And, as to what occasioned any difference or stir amongst us, it was earnestly and several times desired that it might be suspended till some other convenient time to avoid all occasion of trouble in this meeting, that so the work of the day might in peace have been carried on. But it would not be assented to by several, but in a very unfriendly manner went away from the meeting to an Inn and ketched up and carried away the Quarterly Book from the meeting with them, and would not send him again nor return themselves, although some Friends went unto them from the meeting and earnestly desired it of them.

In this way the old Minute Book up to 1678 was captured by the Separatists. The result is that, deposited at Devonshire House, there are no less than three copies of the succeeding Minutes for several years, for Wiltshire Friends were very anxious that the act of capture should not be repeated. At Bristol, the proceedings that had taken place in Wiltshire caused great perturbation. Their principal business meeting was a Two Weeks Meeting, which fulfilled in itself the functions of a Preparative, a Monthly, and a Quarterly Meeting. The Minutes for the first thirteen years, 1667-1680, have been copied over in a clearly written duplicate (Bristol Records : C.1842, C.1), and at the beginning of this duplicate we have the following entry, furnished me by A. Neave Brayshaw.

Richard Snead, the writer, was a Mercer, and chief author of *An Exalted Diotrophes Reprehended or the*

Spirit of Error and Envy in William Rogers against the Truth, 1681.

The entry runs :—

The reason why this book was made was a fear that I and several other Friends had, lest when that unhappy difference was among Friends touching the two Johns [John Wilkinson and John Story] and strongly supported by several Friends of this city and mostly by W^m Rogers, (who earnestly endeavoured for a separation, not only in discipline but also as to religious meetings on account of worship to God, he urging often that we differed in principle as well as in some particular things that might be deemed circumstantial), I say the reason of making this book was a fear lest said W. R. and others with him would have taken the Mens Meeting Book from us here, as we had understood that some of the same party with them had taken away Friends Meeting Book in Wiltshire, which we thus judged would not only be a wrong-doing in them, but also be a great loss to us on the account of Truths service. And this was the very cause and reason thereof. John Higgins he done it, and I paid him, myself, for doing thereof near 40/- in the year 1680. RICHARD SNEADE.

It was not only these divisions which caused difficulties about Minute Books, for sometimes the Friends, in whose custody the books were, lost or mislaid them. The oldest Record Book in Westmorland Quarterly Meeting is a thinnish foolscap volume with brown leather cover and green silk ties. It contains old documents of considerable importance with regard to the collections that were made to supply the "Treasury of the North" out of which the expenses of itinerating work were being paid.¹ This book has only been preserved through the care of Thomas Rebanks, a Kendal Friend of the eighteenth century. Inside the cover is written "Thomas Rebanks meeting with this book in town,"—that is, in Kendal—"purchased it and thought proper it should be preserved amongst our Church records, so gives it to the Meeting and another old manuscript I met with, which I deposited in the Closet at Meeting House, which had also been lost if I had not taken care of it." The other old MS. is a white parchment volume which contains the Accounts of Westmorland Friends from about the year 1658, with Q.M. and M.M. Minutes, and also bears a note, "This being mislaid, if care had not been taken, would have been lost, Thos. Rebanks therefore took care to bring and deposit it with other Friends' MSS."

¹ See *Beginnings of Quakerism*, pp. 325, 327, 328, 337.

To take one last case. In my own Q.M. of Oxfordshire, our oldest Quarterly Meeting Minute Book is lettered outside, "Orders at Quakers' Meetings. MS." I think we may be quite sure that was not put on by Friends. Why is the label on the back of the book? The reason is this. The Book was in the hands of a Friend who was disowned, but although he was disowned, the Friend kept the book. He lived for many years afterwards, and got out of touch with the Society, and when he died Friends did not notice the fact of his death. His effects were put up for sale in 1809, Friends did not attend the sale, and the book was knocked down to a bookseller at Abingdon, who sold it to Dr. Routh (1755-1854), the President of Magdalen College, Oxford. Dr. Routh regarded this book with a great deal of interest and at last showed it to some Friends. The Oxfordshire Quarterly Meeting came to know he had the book, and suggested that he might like to return it. He, with a self-denial which all tortious possessors of other people's books will appreciate, "restored it to the proper owners in 1828. In acknowledgment of this gratuitous restitution he afterwards received from the Quarterly Meeting of the Society of Friends for Berkshire and Oxfordshire, ten works, written by members of their Society, which he accepted with respect and gratitude." The above particulars are entered at the beginning of the volume, and are also referred to in THE JOURNAL, v. 172.

These are only a few of the cases. I suspect there are still old Minute Books in private hands up and down the Society of Friends, which, if unearthed, might be of considerable value to the Society.

It would be very desirable to have what may be called a Visitation of the Quarterly and Monthly Meetings which would result in a catalogue of all the documents, and the question might be asked with fruitful results, "Are there any records in private hands which should be brought into the Monthly Meeting?"

WILLIAM C. BRAITHWAITE.

They have a right to censure that have a heart to help.

WILLIAM PENN, *Reflections and Maxims*, i. 46.