

Women's Meetings in Cornwall in the Early Days of the Society

THE active and responsible part which women took, at least in some localities, in the conduct and maintenance of the Society, is illustrated by a folio minute book, preserved at the Meeting House, Falmouth (numbered "3"), and lately examined by the writer. It contains the minutes of the Quarterly Meeting of Women Friends for the County of Cornwall from 1688 to 1734. On the 10th of Fifth Month, 1688, met at Marazion, they "thought it nesary to have a Book for the use of the weomens conserns for this countey which is hear provided for Recording of busness from each perticuler meeting or anything els which att these meeting[s] they have to comunicat together in the wisdom and counsell of god." The Meetings were held in irregular rotation at Marazion, Falmouth, Tregonjevs [St. Austell], Liskard, and occasionally at Minver. The names of those attending from the various Meetings were set down:—sometimes twenty-five or more, at others dropping to nine or ten in number. Amongst these may be noted some women of influence and leadership, and others who were ancestresses of families still known amongst us:—Margery Peters, Alice Bealing, Ursula Stephens, Tabitha Fox, etc.

We are already in 1688 in the second generation of Quakerism, and the stress of the earnest efforts made by these women, for they were deeply in earnest, was perhaps more to preserve the little communities of Friends in faithfulness to their high standard of life, than to extend their borders or influence the world beyond. Their care was given in the first place to the needs of the poor and sick, for whom a collection was brought to each meeting, and disbursed through trusted hands.

But their vigilant thought ranged over the interests of their sisters in the various Meetings in the county, and they issued letters of exhortation, warning and entreaty

to them, as occasion arose. One such long epistle is entered on the minutes :—

Given forth by Women Friends att the Q.M. held at Merrizion, 10.5.1688. And directed to the women friends belonging to the severall meetings of this county of cornewall.

Dearly Belloved freinds whome the Lord in his Infenite Love have made ptakers in Any mesure of his divine psence & whoe have ben senceable of y^e opperation of his power. by which hee maks knowne his requirings. . . .

It goes on to speak of the greate neede for all to waite from day to day for y^e Arrisinge of Life from God. . . . y^t none of us may take up a rest short of y^e perpetuall habitation of Life . . .

and concludes

in y^e Love of God we Dearly salute you & bid you Farewell.
Singed in the behalf of the meeting.

They took note also of cases of misconduct, even issuing a public testimony against offenders—perhaps subject to the approval of the men's Meeting, although this is not clear. Thus :—

A Testemony given forth from the weomens meetinge of falmouth against the excesive & vaine conversation of Jone —— late of trurow [Truro] who did frequent our meetings ; but being gon from the truth after having given her privat admonition and Reproufe itt become their consarn to testify publiquely against her & her evell conversation as being out of the unity of the truth—which testemony was first Recomendend the quarterly meeting held att falmouth the 24 & 25 dayes of the 11th month 1687—by which meetings advice itt was more att large sett forth and Published.

The earlier pages of the book are written with exceeding care and neatness, and full minutes are recorded down to about 1712, after which there is little but lists of names of representatives and collections ; but the meetings seem to have been regularly held to the close of the volume in 1733. After the earlier years the range of localities was extended : Looe, and later Penzance, were appointed as places for holding the Q.M., and even Port Isaac ; Minver early dropped out.

Great was their concern that the “pure TRUTH be kept clean,” and that all should wait on the Lord for wisdom. They took up also and enjoined some of the testimonies of Friends, especially that against tithes, and did not mince their words on such matters, writing of

“ that unjust & abominable practis of paying Tythes to Priests . . . neither to allow nor Conive att it to bee don for any of us ” ; this is taken from a minute of 1690/91.

A Minute of 1714 (12th of 2 mo., at Falmouth), may in conclusion be noted:—

The Lord haveinge favored us with this oportunity to see one anothers faces & to sitt together upon thys solem & waighty ocation ; in which we have ben mutally comforted together through the feeling of that power by which our life is maintained toward the god of our helpe for w^{ch} Remains an obligation on our souls to Bless his holy name.

R. HINGSTON FOX.

Hampstead.

Philadelphia v. New York

A QUAKER preacher from Philadelphia is a strong defender of the City of Brotherly Love. He loves to tell this tale : One day, a few years ago, on one of his numerous trans-Atlantic trips, he was introduced to a circle of idling passengers on the deck of the steamer as “ A Philadelphia Quaker.” A clever young lady from New York was of the group, and immediately said, “ Oh, you are from Philadelphia ! slow town that.”

The smiling response was, “ Some people think it slow, but I do not ! ” Then the battle of words was on, while each proceeded to prove the point before the impromptu audience.

Our modest Friend spoke of the great textile mills and other vast industries of his city, and was met at every turn by his clever antagonist. Finally, he told of the immense locomotive and car works, without which these United States, when it travels, might have to get out and walk. Then came the clincher. He intimated that when he wanted to show his child something really antique and interesting, as the relic of a by-gone age, he would take her over to New York and introduce her to the novel sight of a dingy old horse-car. That was humiliating to the girl from the metropolis, but she said, “ I know, but our street-car service is getting better every day.”

“ I am glad to hear that,” replied the Philadelphia brother, “ for you need it.”

Then impetuously said the New York champion, “ We have lately started a line in Brooklyn that is very fast—it goes so fast that it runs down one small boy every minute.”

“ O, that is nothing,” drawled the Philadelphian, “ over in our city our small boys are quick enough to get out of the way.”

WILLIAM C. ALLEN, in *The Westonian*, 11 mo., 1913.