

Bristol Refuge Society

OUR Friend Wilfrid Grace, who is Treasurer of the Bristol [Female] Refuge Society, has sent us a copy of the Centenary Report, which contains interesting particulars regarding the foundation of the Society in 1814.

The foundress, Mary Milgrove, was admitted into membership in 1815, but left the Society, by her own wish, in 1835. From 1814 until her death in 1856, at the age of 91, she was the "honoured and beloved" matron at the Refuge, No. 6, Lower Castle Street, Bristol.

Richard Reynolds, the philanthropist, was the first Treasurer of the Society, and his son Joseph filled the office for over thirty-four years. The interest of the Society of Friends in the undertaking was by no means local, for it is evident from the first annual report that the financial support of Friends in various parts of the country was generously given to the Institution.¹ The Committee has issued a facsimile reproduction of the first annual report² in connection with the centenary celebration; probably no one but an expert could detect that this is a reprint.

¹ As proof that the subject of helping the "fallen" was much on the minds of Friends, it is interesting to note that about the same time an unsigned letter, supposed to be by Thomas Sturge, of London, was issued to Friends generally. It is headed "The Attention of Friends in Great Britain, Ireland, and Scotland, is respectfully solicited to the following Remarks." Printed by the Philanthropic Society, St. George's Fields, one sheet quarto, n.d. There are two copies in D.

After referring to work which had been done among unfortunate women from 10th month, 1812, to 3rd month, 1814, an appeal is made for a larger income, closing with the paragraph—"Thus, then, dear Friends, let not us, who cannot unite with our countrymen in missions to the East and the West, be backward in endeavouring to make use of every exertion to restore to society and to virtue this most wretched part of the Community. . . ."

² Copies may be had, gratis, on application to Wilfrid Grace, 9, Redland Green, Bristol.

The following extracts from the Bristol minute books have been supplied by Wilfrid Grace, and are interesting in connection with the resignation of Mary Milgrove.

FIRST MONTH 6TH, 1835.—A letter, of which the following is a copy, is received from Mary Milgrove. Gawen Ball and Jacob P. Sturge are appointed with two friends to be appointed by the Womens Meeting to visit her thereon and report.

“ To the Bristol Monthly Meeting of Friends.

“ Dear Friends,

“ I can truly say that it is in the way of the cross that I now address you ; but as I have for more than two years, not been easy to attend Friends Meetings, and have lately frequented another place of worship, it becomes needful for me (however painful) to resign my membership with you ; which I now do, desiring most sincerely for you an increase of every gospel blessing in and through our Lord Jesus Christ.

“ 11 mo. 25, 1834.

MARY MILGROVE.”

SECOND MONTH 3RD, 1835.—[Summary of the 4th Minute].—The Friends appointed reported that :

Mary Milgrove declined to enter into a discussion of her reasons for resignation, but had committed them to writing and placed them in a sealed envelope addressed to the Monthly Meeting. The Friends informed her that it was the “ usual course to submit letters to judicious friends to decide on the expediency of reading them. It was not desirable to bring controversial points before the meeting.” They did not discuss the matter further with her, but forwarded her sealed letter³ to the Monthly Meeting. The Meeting declined to read the letter.

SECOND MONTH 3RD, 1835.—5th Minute.—Upon serious consideration of the case of Mary Milgrove, and of the report of the friends who visited her, this Meeting thinks it right to accept her resignation of membership ; affectionately wishing her grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. The Friends on the appointment are requested to inform her thereof.

³ Many Friend readers will remember how, in their childhood, the Clerk of a Meeting would sometimes announce that he had a sealed letter. Whereupon two Friends of weight were appointed to take the letter out of Meeting, open it, and on their return report whether it was suitable to be read.