

A few Remarks on the Society of Friends in St. Austell, Cornwall

THE first record we have of Friends begins at Tregongeeves about one-and-a-half miles from St. Austell. It was the residence of Loveday Hambly, who was Aunt to Thomas Lower who married Judge Fell's daughter Mary. He had a brother, Dr. Richard Lower, known to fame not only as Court Physician in the reign of Charles II, but as a medical writer of high standing; he used his influence with some lords of the Royal Society to procure Margaret Fell's release from prison. The Earl of Mount Edgumbe gave him a piece of a field on the Tregongeeves estate for Friends to use for a graveyard, which for some time was the only one in the county and was used by people from Falmouth and Wadebridge, etc.

The Lowers belonged to an ancient family of Cornwall, where they had a handsome estate about four-and-a-half miles from St. Austell, and about one mile from Grampond. When George Fox was imprisoned in Launceston Jail, Thomas Lower was residing with his Aunt, Loveday Hambly, at Tregongeeves. Hearing, no doubt, of his extraordinary character, he and his aunt paid a visit to the imprisoned reformer, and the conversation that ensued so reached both their hearts, that they left the prison thoroughly convinced of the truth of the doctrines preached by Fox. Thomas Lower compared the force and clearness of the conviction that shot through his soul to a flash of lightning. This was in the year 1656, when he was about twenty-four years of age. Near the close of the same year, he attended a general meeting of the Friends of Cornwall and Devon held at Exeter. George Fox was present, and describes it as a "blessed heavenly meeting, in which the Lord's everlasting power came over all."

The graveyard at Tregongeeves was filled, we suppose, because, when the turnpike road was being improved,

the top of the hill was taken off and the earth was thrown into the graveyard, and filled it up six feet deep, so that we are using the ground again. Some fifty years ago a grave was dug in the top layer of earth, when they came down to a grave stone lying flat with the name Daniel Elliott, Falmouth, 1711.¹ This was taken up and put into the wall as near to the grave as they could put it. Joshua Treffry was at the later funeral, and spoke from the words, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." He was interested to read afterwards in the journal of a Ministering Friend in the early times of the Society that this Minister had attended the funeral of Daniel Elliott and had spoken from the same text!

The first meetings in the county were held in Loveday Hambly's kitchen, where a Monthly Meeting for the county was held; then a small house was taken at the lower part of the town; when that grew too small, a larger one was used, about a mile up the hill on the other side of the town; when that became dilapidated, a piece of ground was purchased on the opposite side of the road and the present substantial meeting-house built in 1829.

In the early times the Vicar's daughter joined the Society which greatly grieved her father, so that he put her in the church porch with her feet in the stocks as the people were going to church.

At one time there were about sixty members at a village, four miles from St. Austell, Nanpean and St. Stephens but they fell away from want of care, and there is no trace of them left.

About sixty years ago there was a farmer belonging to St. Austell Meeting who had about half-a-dozen daughters. They were interesting girls, but there were not husbands for them in the Society; they were very loyal members and refused to marry any of the young men around them unless they would join Friends. One young man wanted one of them. He was a miner at Liskeard and applied for membership there, but a mine-owner there objected to him. He had been in his employment and he did not think him a suitable member for a Christian Church, so the young man told the young lady there was a "Friend at Liskeard

¹ Daniel Elliott, of Austle, was buried 1711. 6. 27—Cornwall Register.

who was like Ne-buch-chad-na-zer, whom he would he set up and whom he would he put down." Then they applied for membership at St. Austell and the meeting there wishing to help them received the young man, and he forthwith dressed in a coat without a collar and addressed single people as thou instead of you. The union passed pleasantly during the young wife's life; they had a son and daughter, who were very successful. Then the mother died and the young people went to America, leaving the father to himself; he soon drifted downwards and frequented the public-house, boasting that his coat could never go to the workhouse. But he grew so bad he lost his membership, and in his old age had to go into the workhouse. I remember him coming in his workhouse clothes to meeting. One day, when Joshua Treffry had not given an address, he went to him outside and said: "Joshua, give me sixpence." Joshua said: "No, William, I will not give thee sixpence." He said: "No wonder thou'rt shut up in meeting," a taunt which he knew would be very cutting to the sensitive mind of the Minister.

Some years ago we had a Vicar in this parish who was strong in ceremonials. He heard that the rector of the neighbouring parish had a bell-ringer who was not baptized, so he called on him and admonished him. The rector said: "What about your own ringers; I know one of them who has never been baptized." The Vicar said he would see about that. He found the man and asked him if he was baptized. He said: "No!" Then he said: "You must not ring the church bell until you are baptized." The man said: "Can I get to Heaven without being baptized?" The Vicar said: "Not from this parish." The man said: "Well! what about James Veale and the Quakers?" The Vicar was quite in a fix, and said: "Well, God is very merciful and the Quakers are very few, perhaps He may let them in without."

The Veale family upheld Quakerism in the town all through the last century. They were a large family of ten children, eight sons and two daughters. The sons were employed as woolstaplers and manufacturers of blankets and cloth for great coats. They had a great influence in the neighbourhood for miles around, buying wool from the farmers and supplying small shops in the villages. Some of them had a

grocer's shop and were very successful. The older ones made moderate fortunes and built themselves houses outside the town, and let the younger ones have their turn.

The James Veale mentioned above was a grocer; he was a Minister, and soon made enough for himself and wife to live comfortably, then gave his time to visiting meetings in the county and holding meetings in chapels with George Cornish. He was greatly beloved by everyone who knew him. The chief theme in his ministry was the love and mercy of God. His visits to the sick, afflicted and aged were much appreciated. The brothers were very different one from the other, but each was occupied with his own spiritual gift and the result was a continuation of spiritual life through the century. The widow of the youngest brother died about four years ago, which brought the family to an end, as her only son was killed in a motor accident some years before and was not married. He was the only representative of the eight brothers.

ELIZABETH FARDON.

Swarthmoor Hall in 1772

The following reference to Swarthmoor is taken from a MS. account belonging to Mrs. Vere O'Brien (née Arnold-Forster), of a tour by William Forster (1747-1824), schoolmaster, of Tottenham, and others:

"4th day, 8th, 7 mo. About six this Morn: took a Walk with Fr^d Chamly to see Swarthmore Hall, the late Residence of George Fox. It is in a fine situation. The House, which is a large Stone Building, with spacious rooms, wainscotted thro'out, large old Windows, is much come to Decay, as well as the Offices and the Gardens and many fine Walks, in a ruinous Condition, the many fine Pines which were in the Groves were fell'd, and the whole Estate, which was very considerable, much out of repair. It was then inhabited by Farmers, whose Poverty rather pleaded an Excuse for their Keeping it in a miserable Condition; there had been several fine Walks in the Garden & some Brooks of Water, but it now only forms an unpleasing appearance & occasion'd serious reflection on the difference a few years had made.¹

¹ The descendants of Margaret Fox sold the Swarthmoor estate in 1759.