

Gleanings from the Minute Books of the Quarterly Meeting of Sussex

AN ancient minute-book, in perfect preservation, is kept in the safe at Brighton Meetinghouse, and records the fact that, in 1668, George Fox met Sussex Friends at the house of Richard Bax, at Capel, just over the Surrey border, to organize a Quarterly Meeting for the County of Sussex.

One woman, Margery Wilkinson, was present, but, for many years after this date, women's names only appear as objects of charity or of discipline. In the year 1740, however, a women's meeting must have been in existence, for the men kindly condescended to "lend them seventeen shillings"! There were eighteen men present at this first meeting, besides George Fox. A list is given of the Meetings which had been settled after the "great conviction," when G. Fox and his friends had evangelized the county some years before. Only four of these are still in existence. Then follows the "names of such Friends as are judged fit to keep y^e Monthly & Quarterly Meetings." "Three papers given by dear George Fox" were read at this meeting and copied into the records in full. One was "Friends Fellowship must be in y^e Spirit."¹

The second Q.M. was held at the house of Widow Scrace at Blatchington,² a tiny hamlet on the Downs near Brighton.

Q.M. was held several times at Hurstpierpoint, but there does not appear to have been a meetinghouse there, and several were held at Hurstmonceux.

BUSINESS TRANSACTED

Until 1784 when Mary Pryor, of Hertford, and Hannah Wigham, of Yorkshire, are mentioned as attending, I have found hardly a hint that the quarterly gatherings were for any purpose than the careful allotment of funds and a little

¹ See *Journal of George Fox* (Camb. ed.), ii. 416.

² See *My Ancestors*, by Norman Penney.

discipline of members. But we may be sure that there was some stronger motive than material needs which drew these new converts to Quakerism together. There was doubtless a meeting for worship whenever they met. Indeed, we get a glimpse in the following minute that they were none too ready to stay for the meeting for business: "Representatives to go to Quarterly morning meeting with the Friends of the ministry, and to consider some means to prevent the abrupt parting & over hasty doing business at Quarterly Meetings."

ISLINGTON WORKHOUSE

Among various money grants was one of £10 15s. 10d. for a year's maintenance of Sophia Sayers at Islington Workhouse. In 1760 the Meeting complains of the "great charge for the maintenance of the children of Ben Rickman³ at the workhouse in London," and after various negotiations they were brought back to Sussex and established with relations at Lewes and Hurstmonceux, the Q.M. still paying for their board.

YORK RETREAT

In 1803 William Marten collected and forwarded to Samuel Tuke the sum of £123 for the York Retreat, a handsome contribution from the farmers and tradesmen of Sussex.

APPRENTICESHIPS

The apprenticeship of children was often referred to. In 1720 an orphan, Josiah Shaw, was apprenticed with the fee of £10, to Francis Hogg of Ifield, at the tender age of five years! That such care was appreciated is shown by a minute about 1710: "Margaret Robinson is apprenticed to Mary Grafton. She, having been herself apprenticed for £10, in grateful sense of Friends' love and the blessing of God upon her industry, took Margaret Robinson free. This good example is worthy of imitation of all good people." Another apprenticeship agreement closes with the words: "If he should happen in that time to have the small-pox, Friends to pay the necessary charges."

³ Benjamin Rickman (1707-1751), son of John and Abigail (Reynolds) Rickman, married Elizabeth Manchester and left numerous descendants.

OLD COINS AND NEW

From a M.M. at Hurstpierpoint in 1696, no funds could be forwarded to the Q.M. : "Whereas the great interruption of the coin, the ould being refused in payment and little or none of the new yet among people, has hindered the collection."

A BREACH OF PROMISE CASE

In 1671, John Martin appealed to Friends because Mary Bennet refused to marry him. At the next Q.M. there is this minute : "Mary Bennet hath appeared this day, at y^e desire of y^e meeting and given a positive testimony before us that she neither hath, nor ever intended to have, any thought of joyning with John Martin by way of marriage." At the next Q.M. four weighty conclusions are recorded :

"1st. That John Martin hath done amiss in prosecuting that for which he had no true and sollid ingagement from Mary Bennet.

"2nd. That he ought not to presecute it any further unless she express her inclination voluntarily thereto.

"3rd. That Mary Bennet condemn her folly and childish actions in this matter, and that in time to come she avoyde such actions.

"4th. That there never was any solid engagement with truth between them, and on this account they are free of and from each other."

But even this did not satisfy the disconsolate lover, for at the next Q.M. : "John Martin hath made complaint to this meeting that Thomas Moseley [a leading Friend] hath in some indirect way been y^e cause of averting Mary Bennet's mind from him. This meeting having examined Thomas Moseley, do not find any just cause to judge the said Thomas Moseley."

Three months later : "John Martin seemed to object to something more concerning Mary Bennet. John Shaw to see him if he remain unsatisfied. Mary Bennet is cleared from the said John Martin." And so the matter ended.

YEARLY MEETING'S COMMITTEE.

At a Q.M. at Ifield in 1777, a Yearly Meeting's Committee was present, consisting of Edmund Gurney, Jun., Jeremiah Waring, William Squires, Joseph Elgar, George Gibson, Richard Baker and Thomas Wagstaffe. After this visit the following Minute was made : "We have cause to

thankfully acknowledge our Heavenly Father's merciful care in that His gracious visitation is still extended in this visit of Gospel love, in which many spirits have been tenderly reached." Before they left the County these seven Friends wrote a letter to the Q.M., which is copied in full in the minute-book, in which they say that they "were sorrowfully affected in every Monthly Meeting that many in profession with us are very deficient in due attendance at meetings for worship. The lukewarmness and unconcerned state of many hath greatly affected us and caused us to go heavily on our way."⁴

BANKRUPTCY

Many minutes occur in 1795 as to the bankruptcy of the Brighton Friends, John and Sarah Chalk. John had neglected his business and Sarah had been extravagant in her household. They were "very disrespectful when visited" by a committee who were only anxious to help them. At last comes the minute: "The difficulties with J. and S. Chalk are to be buried in oblivion." Their son John was sent to Ackworth School at the expense of Friends, in 1796, and later two more children, Catherine and Thomas, were also sent, for four years. But Thomas paid for his training, for he became a much esteemed Minister, and did excellent work in Kingston-on-Thames in starting schools for poor children and in connection with the Bible Society.

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⁴ This was at the time known as "the revival of the Discipline."
See *London Yearly Meeting during 250 years*.

FICTION. The novel *When the King came South*, by Helen H. Watson, London, 1912, pp. 369, contains several references to George Fox and his followers (pp. 53, 60, 80, etc.). The story circles round Borwick Hall, near Carnforth, N.W. Lancashire, where lived young Sir Robert Bindloss. Sir Robert is mentioned in *The Journal of George Fox*. Some of his servants abused Friends in the year 1652, and he fined Robert Widders for attending a meeting in his own house. See *Camb. Jnl.* i. 104, 415, ii. 105, 390, 394. The Borwick chaplain, Richard Sherlock (1612-1689) also appears in the book and in *Camb. Jnl.* i. 415, and *Smith's Adv. Cata.*