

Quakerism in Friedrichstadt, 1663-1724

The following summary is based on a study and translation of the Friedrichstadt minute books in the Library at Friends House, kindly made by

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APART from scattered notices in the journals of travelling Friends little is known of the meetings in Germany which were united on the formation of Amsterdam Yearly Meeting in 1696. This study attempts to fill in the outline for one such group and is largely written in the words of the quarterly and monthly meeting minutes of Friends in the north-west centred on Friedrichstadt in Schleswig-Holstein where a meeting existed for about sixty years.¹

Friedrichstadt an der Eider itself was not old. Situated at the confluence of the Treene and the Eider, about fifteen miles up-river from the North Sea coast, some eighty miles from Hamburg, it had been founded in 1621 under Duke Frederick III of Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorp by emigrating Arminian Dutch Remonstrants. Travellers thither would come by water from Brunsbüttel, and the comparative ease of sea communications kept alive the original connection of the town (and indeed the whole of this marshy Hansa coast) with the Netherlands. It is not surprising therefore to find most of the Friends had Dutch names and that the meeting minutes were kept in that language.

How Friends started holding meetings in Friedrichstadt is told in these words: "In the spring of 1663 the first Friend who witnessed of the Truth came, and with his son began first-day and fellowship meetings, waiting in silence upon God." After three years their faith was rewarded and "they were gathered three of them together," and a year later "the meeting had been augmented with a few Friends." In 1670 the first Friends from England came "who visited us in the love of God, and in the service of the gospel they declared the Truth, namely

¹ See also the account in W. Hubben, *Die Quäker in der deutschen Vergangenheit* (1929), 102-105.

G.K., F.S. and S.C.,¹ upon which the Truth of God found more entrance in the hearts of some." With the encouragement of William Penn, Friends decided in 1671 to meet morning and afternoon on first-days.

In 1677 when the meeting numbered ten adults, and on the heels of their resolve to "meet monthly on the fifth day, the last week of the month to talk over and arrange things which Friends have in common and concerning the meeting, thereto encouraged by the esteemed G. Fox," "the decision was made to build a meeting place." Before winter the timber had been prepared, and in the spring the building was begun, and the structure completed by seventh month, 1678. "The builder thereof was our dear Friend Hendrik Simons. It cost 2,200 gulden, and Friends each voluntarily contributed to it, and had given besides what they had laid up, namely 1,000 gulden." On the house they borrowed 1,200 gulden from David Louerens at 5 per cent. "In 1682 our dear Friend Wouter Onterloot out of love for the Truth, gave towards it 200 gulden."

The house was probably made of wood, but most likely it had a stone foundation, for the accounts mention payment to a mason and the minutes note a cellar. In 1698 it was insured against fire for 1,200 marks. Not only was it used for meetings, but also as a dwelling and storehouse. Like contemporary Dutch houses the attics were a feature of the place, and "at first Friends decided to reserve the use of the attics and the place under the roof," but later an entry in the Receipts Book notes "Attic rent from a stranger who kept oats there during the winter, 13 gulden."

Meetings were held on the ground floor, and when they were in progress silence was required from Friends renting the upper rooms (the exact number of these is not clear, but at one time front and back rooms were let to different persons). At one time "the living house with attics and garden was let for the sum of 50 gulden, the tenant agreeing to scrub the passage after the meeting alternate weeks or whenever required, and to be a good tenant and

¹ William Ames had visited the town on his continental journey, 1657-58; see W. I. Hull, *The Rise of Quakerism in Amsterdam, 1655-1665* (1938), 45. The three Friends mentioned are probably George Keith, perhaps Frances (Swinton) Sonnemans, and Steven Crisp. Crisp was at Friedrichstadt in the summer of 1670; see C. Fell Smith, *Steven Crisp and his correspondents, 1657-1692* (1892), xxxii.

not sprinkle sand on the floor." One tenant, Antje Jans, received 6 gulden for acting as doorkeeper and caretaker.

How rural the surroundings were may be guessed by the complaints that "Dirk Bauman flings the dung of the cows against the fence of the garden belonging to Friends." After twenty years, when a spiral staircase was inserted, leading up from the kitchen, an alcove bed put in and drainage pipes provided, a door was made leading into this garden and to the "field for bleaching." In 1697, just about this time, Friends bought a piece of land for 182 gulden, for what purpose does not appear. Not for burials certainly, for twelve years later Friends were being recommended to procure a burial ground—interments apparently taking place at the Remonstrant cemetery.

So far as is known this was the only meeting house in north Germany. It later came into possession of English Friends, and according to Professor Schumacher the building was destroyed by the Danes in 1850. Members of the Friends Ambulance Unit failed to find any trace of it there in 1946. Friends sold the property in 1860,¹ but an eighteenth century plan still shows where the "Quaker Saal" once stood.

Considering the opposition to Friends, and their small numbers, one wonders that they built a meeting house. At one time, however, there were sixty members, trusting to enlarge their circle; and too, the town was a centre for Friends who from Bremen, Hamburg and Lübeck met for quarterly meetings. The business transacted was considerable. Care was taken of poor Friends and orphans, of the religious education of children, oversight of marriages and the needs of sufferers at home and abroad. Collections were made for suffering Friends abroad. Correspondence was kept up with England and Amsterdam, and among the letters, copies of Fox's epistles survive.

Visits to Friedrichstadt were probably noted events for Friends, but few details survive. An account is given in Thomas Story's *Journal* of Peter the Great's attendance at meeting when he was in the town.² Story relates in detail his own visit, and the private and public meetings arranged for him.³ He tells how the public, from the magistrates,

¹ *London Yearly Meeting Proceedings*, 1873, 43.

² 1712; related by Jacob Hagen; T. Story, *Journal* (1747), 494-5.

³ Aug. 18-31, 1715; *op. cit.*, 495-500.

chief inhabitants, priests and teachers downwards attended, though largely out of curiosity. In 1715 Thomas Story seemed well satisfied, but after much persecution Friends' life on the continent was in reality on the way to extinction. Gradually monthly meetings fell into abeyance, and in 1725 the last Friend (save for a few older members) left Friedrichstadt and went to live at Amsterdam.

Though in comparison with Danzig, Emden and Hamburg, Friedrichstadt suffered little from heavy persecution, Friends there were nevertheless constantly called before the burgomaster and council, and "told that, unlike the Remonstrants, Lutherans and Catholics, they had no privilege granted them to exercise their religion," but "had stolen in from other places." In 1673 the Duke issued a mandate ordering Friends to leave the town. They were charged with allowing women to preach, "drawing to themselves persons from other religions, truly scandalizing the entire community, and not appearing to be afraid" of any authority. Apart from clerical opposition by the Lutheran pastors, one of the main reasons for the townsfolk's displeasure was Friends' persistence in opening their shops at Christmas and New Year, "so-called feast days." Convicted for this, fines went unpaid and Friends suffered distraint of goods rather than betray their testimony.

After many such proceedings "Friends thought it would be advisable to present themselves before the court, so that it might become acquainted with Friends." Accordingly, on December 19, 1692, Friends Pauwels, Onterloot and de Veer set off for Schleswig. "On the evening of the same day at four o'clock they were received by the Chancellor." At the friendly reception "a simple address to the princely court of Schleswig-Holstein was handed in," but there is no evidence of a reply. Three years later, on the accession of a new Duke, Friends declared: "We the people of the Lord who are called Quakers recognize Frederick our Duke of Schleswig-Holstein¹ as

¹ Frederick IV, son of Christian Albert (d. 1694) and grandson of Frederick III (d. 1659). Frederick IV was killed at Klissow (1702) and his brother, Christian Augustus of Holstein-Eutin, Bishop of Lübeck acted as regent until 1718 for Charles Frederick (son of Frederick IV and Hedwig Sophia, daughter of Charles XI of Sweden) who married Anna, daughter of Peter the Great. Their son, Czar Peter III renounced his rights in the Duchies.

our liege sovereign, and promise to be faithful to him." Ten years pass, and after more trouble and threats a petition was sent to the regent Christian August. Upon this Hedwig Sophia and Christian August issued a declaration, dated Hamburg, June 10, 1706, favouring Friends and commanding the burgomaster and council "to stop arbitrary punishment, to treat them well, and to allow them to use their freedom and privileges; that you leave them unmolested, return them their distrained goods and refund them the costs." "Notwithstanding this princely decree to the magistrates here in Friedrichstadt," Friends complain, "the Bailiff Warning has not ceased to trouble us, and fine us." In 1711 they were summoned to appear at the town hall:

In 1724 on like occasion Friends were again called before the magistrate, and when "asked how many Friends we were—we said, over twenty. We were asked if we had a privilege—we said, no." Here the record ends abruptly, and nothing would be known but for the succeeding notes of the Daun von Bockholt family describing how Friends one by one left the town, some for America, some for Holland, some joining the Mennonites and the Lutherans, finally leaving behind only a few old people who remained Friends until death.

After reading of the persecution and tribulation of Friends in Friedrichstadt one is left with the impression that opposition from the authorities did not cause the end of Quakerism there. Once only are the minutes concerned with outward difficulties; more often Friends were exercised to see so few outsiders join them and their own weak spiritual state. From this evidence it seems certain that the decline of Quakerism was due to the fact that the people of Friedrichstadt in particular, and Germany and the Netherlands in general, were not ready to accept the Quaker faith. It may be that now, 250 years later, in this century we may see the full fruition of a continental Quakerism where the seventeenth century could only plant the seed.