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OF THE  
FRIENDS' HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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### Announcement

The next annual meeting will be held on Thursday, 6th July, at 6.15 p.m. at Friends House, when Alfred B. Searle will deliver his presidential address entitled "Friends and Arbitration."

Officers for 1951—two will be appointed at this meeting.

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### Local History

QUAKER historians are always likely to be amateurs rather than professionals. This has certain advantages which everyone must appreciate. The Friend who lives and moves among members of his local meeting has unparalleled opportunities to observe and record the customs and traditions current among Friends; he has more opportunities to study the local records, and possesses the local knowledge which can readily appreciate the significance of the material he finds there. On the other hand his outlook may be restricted in historical matters through lack of knowledge of comparable periods of political, social and Friends' national history. This may cause him to give undue emphasis to the commonplace events of Quaker studies—the regularity of the records, the care for the local poor, the method and amounts of collections, the discipline exercised in cases of delinquency—and to overlook or fail to appreciate any significant local variation from normal practice. He may also pass over the fields of activity in which preparative and monthly meeting are met by quarterly and yearly meeting, and may not sense the interest to be found in relating and comparing local phenomena with national trends of development among Friends.

To overcome this the amateur, as the professional before him, must read widely. Before embarking on a local study he should have read a history of Quakerism, be acquainted with the standard general

histories of Quakerism in so far as they illustrate his subject and bear on local events, and have read the local histories of the district which he desires to cover. In the course of his studies the historian may find special topics on which he would appreciate information from an outside or national standpoint. Such subjects immediately spring to mind in the case of periods of persecution under various acts of Parliament, in the comparable activities of the local authorities in care of poor, or in the attitude or action of other religious bodies in similar situations.

The historian aiming at a true picture of Quakerism in his chosen area and period owes it to himself to survey the whole field of the surviving records dealing with his subject. Only thus, and with the benefit of previous research in the form of printed histories to fit his own discoveries surely into a wider pattern, can he give a judgement based on full evidence, well considered and with due weight given to all the facts at his disposal. This does not mean that the would-be historian must read diligently every page of minutes, epistles and accounts, but he should be familiar with and appreciate the significance of the types of material found among the records of the meetings he studies.

The writer with some new fact of significance to bring before the world has, on the whole, an easy task in presenting his thesis. In such a case, stating the plan of the work, enumerating his discoveries and placing them in their local and national perspective, is a work which can lead naturally to a satisfying conclusion and a rounded complete work. But the Friend who sets out to give a history of his meeting can, without thinking, find himself lost, and lose his readers or his hearers in a maze of detail and local instances.

There are certain questions which every local meeting history should answer, or, if they cannot be answered, state why not. Friends can pose these questions for themselves; beginning with the questions on early history, development, and sufferings, which provided a framework for the *First Publishers of Truth* (F.P.T. 3). To these a modern student would add: What changes have taken place in the constitution of the meeting? Who were the leaders of local meetings? What social classes were represented? What was the strength of the meetings? What part did Friends play in commercial and industrial, social and political affairs? How well were Friends' testimonies observed? What local manifestations appear of movements which affected the Society as a whole, and what points of difference from the main stream of Quaker development are visible?

That so many local histories fail to answer these questions in any certain manner is probably due more to the fact that the authors do not ask themselves these questions than that they do not know the answers. Although one may not produce a "standard" history of a local meeting to which all, all over the country, would be bound to conform, attention to the answers to questions such as those propounded above would translate the welcome and necessary interest of local Friends in their history into studies and articles which would present to the general student more uniformly useful and reliable material.

R.S.M.