

Marriage Discipline in Early Friends

A Study in Church Administration illustrated from Bristol Records

There is a Christian obligation incumbent on every member of yt holy body and society whereof Christ our Lord is head to watch over one another & to be reprovng one another in the spirit of meekness & of sound judgment; not that thereby only we may respect the particular good of such member of the body but yt alsoe a true regard may be had to the glory of the name of the Lord, that soe his power & spirit may bee exalted over all.¹

THESE words, written in 1669 in a brotherly letter from Bristol Men's Meeting to Friends in Virginia and Maryland, give due emphasis to the two aims which the discipline had in view: the welfare of the individual Friend and the needs of the whole "society" of Friends.

The marriage discipline among Friends probably shows more clearly than any other by what means and with what measure of success they translated their ideals into practical policy. By its sheer volume too the marriage business gives more insight than lesser branches of discipline into the working of the system, for as meetings for business were established and began to preserve records, something like a quarter or a third of all minutes recorded concerned marriages.

In 1653 George Fox

waited upon the Lord, and saw in his Eternal Light, that all that did Marry, they should lay it before some faithful Friends in the Wisdom of God, that they might see into it.²

From this elementary principle developed the whole marriage discipline through the business meetings. In replacing the accepted forms of marriage ceremonial, early Friends retained features of church procedure and of the Commonwealth civil registration which they could accept and which served a useful purpose. This aspect has recently been illustrated by Ruth G. Burt in her article on "The Quaker Marriage Declaration" (*Journal, F.H.S.*, xlv, 53-59). As Friends'

¹ Copy of letter from Bristol Men's meeting to Virginia and Maryland, 28.x.1669; Bristol Friends' records, 105, p. xlv.

² George Fox: *Epistles* (1698), no. 317, p. 359, dated from Swarthmoor 12.xii.1675 [1676].

discipline developed, care was taken to make preliminary enquiries into the freedom of the parties who came before the meeting wishing to be married; and as soon as the period of written minutes is arrived at, this aspect is seen to be developing rapidly into a series of carefully considered sanctioning minutes and certificates of consent, which figure largely in many older minute books.

It was with some care that Friends arranged for publicity for marriage proposals so that no charge of clandestine irregularity might be laid against them. In the earliest surviving paper of advice from Bristol Men's Meeting, the witness of God was declared to be against any who "have contrary to the practice and good order of the People and lawes of God come together in marriage in any private way out of unity of the ye people of god."¹

Evidence is to seek that Friends usually went so far as did Richard Snead, a leading Bristol Friend, in asking the advice of Friends in the city before proposing to marry. The minute in which Bristol Men's Meeting intimated to London Friends Richard's clearness and their consent, states that he had

proposed his desires of taking Bridget Sharpe of London to wife, with submission to the councell and advice of friends here, that soe hee might not take her to wife, but in unity with freinds.²

More often it was the other way: some Friends found the discipline irksome; a couple being dealt with for marrying in church, replied that they had indeed proposed their marriage to Friends, but Friends had put them off.³ Mary Dedicott was reported to have said

that her husband fownd soe much dificalty in the bringing about the marriage of his former daughter that he was not willing that his daughter (lately maryed [at church] to Thomas Taylor) should come amongst them and moreover said to this purpose, She would not make them hipocrites to perswade them to it.⁴

In 1667, when Bristol Men's Meeting minute books begin, records of marriage proposals made to the Meeting were not kept, but within a couple of years written minutes recording procedure appear, and from then on there was a steady

¹ Paper of 27.vii.1669; Bristol Friends' records, 98, p. 2.

² Bristol Friends' records, 195, p. xlix; 12.iv.1671.

³ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 13.x.1669. Friends were usually willing to assist in speeding proposals where a case could be made out for it.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.vii.1669.

development and filling in of procedure until the close of the century. In its final form the outlines of which become quickly clear as one studies the records of the meetings for business, marriage proposals took just over a month to pass through the meetings. At the first meeting the parties proposed their intentions and produced consent of relations; if Friends approved they appointed two Friends particularly to make inquiries to be satisfied that the parties were free to marry. At the second meeting the two appointed Friends reported how they found it and the couple produced any further evidence of the consent of interested parties which the first meeting may have called for; if Friends approved they gave permission for the intention of marriage to be announced at the end of a public meeting for worship. At the third meeting, Friends had before them a certificate recording the publication of the marriage and that there had been no objection made against it, and they gave permission for the couple to fix a day for the wedding.

THE PROPOSALS MADE TO MEN'S MEETING

Turning to the actual process through the meetings: in 1670 the Men's Meeting began to insist upon the attendance of both parties to the marriage, when they brought their proposals. Thomas Pearce attended on 7th February, 1670, to propose his intention of marriage with Joan, daughter of Peter Hiley, and he was asked to be present at the next meeting "with his freind Joan & her mother". In the following April a firm rule was laid down

Upon consideration of some inconvenience in the making Certificate of friends marriages, It is ordered yt for tyme to come both the persons concerned doe present themsealves to the meeting at the first signifying of such their intentions.¹

Two years later, consideration of a proposal was deferred for the attendance of both parties, and this seems to show that by that time the practice had become well established.² Only very special circumstances were allowed to override this general rule. "Exterordinary occations" called Sampson Coysgarne into Cornwall in 1686 when his marriage was before the Men's Meeting, and he wrote asking them "to

¹ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 4.ii.1670.

² *Ibid.*, 18.i.1671-72.

suffer my business to goe on" notwithstanding that he could not attend in person.¹

Strangers proceeding towards marriage in Bristol were sometimes allowed (after one personal appearance before the Men's Meeting) to be represented by a Bristol Friend when the matter came again before the Meeting. Richard Snead performed this service in 1689 for Richard Richards of Port Isaac, proposing to marry Mary Day, and in 1692 for Robert Ingram of London, marrying Christobel Coal.² A similar case had come up in 1683, when John Lloyd wrote from Shropshire asking that his brother might attend the Meeting on his behalf to receive Friends' approval of his intended marriage, "inasmuch as that my present residence is considerably remote by reason whereof I cannot conveniently attend".³ In all cases the Meeting reserved the right to demand attendance. For instance, when Thomas Lloyd and Sarah Young were unable to come to one meeting they were asked to come the next time:

Samson Lloyd on behalfe of Thomas Lloyd and Peter Young on behalfe of his daughter Sarah (Tho. Lloyd being not well, could not well com abroad) desired concent of the meeting for ye publication of the intended marriage . . . They have concent . . . Butt in that the parties is not present at this meeting, tis expected they both present themselves yet once again to the meeting before they doe approve of their marriage.⁴

In 1670 the Men's Meeting

order that for the future every person whatsoever that shall propose the entention of a mariage, bee desired to withdraw after the proposall thereof that so every freind may the more freely offer what hee hath to say in the matter; & that any freind that shall for future bee privy to anyones intentions of mariage doe advise them to cause some freind of the meetinge to propose the same for them & they to bee in readines to attend the call of the meeting.⁵

One feature of these attendances at Men's Meetings for their consent to marriage proposals was added only in 1692—over twenty years later, and arose out of a particular difficulty at our Friends marriages in this citty the parties that marry, Espeasially the Wooman, manytime Speakes to[o] low. Sometimes soe low that they are not heard nor understood by halfe the Meeting which they assemble for wittnesses, which is become a trouble upon friends

¹ Bristol Friends' records, 139, p. 49. Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 5.v.1686.

² Men's Meeting minutes, 1.v.1689, 11.v.1692.

³ Dix MSS. (Friends House), E.8.

⁴ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 31.xi.1697.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.xi.1669.

that observe it & many therefore are not free to subscribe as witnesses to the Certificate of their Marriage.¹

Thereupon the Men's Meeting decided, in

hopes to enure them in speakeing, that at their first proposeing their intention of marriage at the Mens meeting that both the parties doe first express their intentions & desires before questions be asked them, and then as friends may see occation at the same meeting may advise them both to appeare at the second meeting in like manner, and when they shall have matters cleare as the Meeting see meete may advise them that when they consumeate their marriage that they both speake out soe cleare that the parties which they shall invite together for wittness may all heare & be satisfied in what they say.

On the first attendance of couples proposing to marry, the Men's Meeting would enter a minute in form as follows:

Edward Harford Son of Charles Harford of this Citty soapmaker and Elizabeth Jones daughter of Charles Jones of same Citty soapmaker signified their intention of marriage & desire to accomplish the same in the way & manner of friends. All their parents are here present testefieing their concent and aprobacon.

William Taylour & Wm Itheld to Enquire.²

Proposers were required to attend twice before publication was permitted—usually of course for the receipt of the report of the two Friends appointed to enquire into clearness, but even if clearness was very well known to Friends and apparent at the first attendance, the proposers would “for order's sake” be desired to attend another meeting before consent was given.³

ENQUIRIES CONCERNING CLEARNESS FOR MARRIAGE

Specific appointment of two or more Friends to enquire into clearness was not made regularly in the period before 1682, but during the persecution of 1682-86, when attendance at meetings for discipline was small, it became the practice to appoint two Friends to enquire further into the case of each proposal, and this procedure (adopted to suit special conditions) remained part of standard marriage procedure when persecution had passed.⁴

¹ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 26.x.1692.

² *Ibid.*, 26.vi.1689.

³ *Ibid.*, 1.vii.1673. For an exception see minutes for 9.vii.1678.

⁴ The usual number for these general enquiries was two Friends, although in one case three Friends were appointed, but in this case also the two-Friend standard appointment appears to have been the original design because between the first two names appears an “&”, struck through when the third name was added (7.ix.1687).

There is evidence from one meeting in 1688 that women were present at the Men's Meeting when marriages were proposed, and although no report is recorded, this may possibly have been in order to set on foot enquiries in the Women's Meeting.¹ It is not until 1698 that we find reference to the concern of the women in the enquiries, although silence in the record may not be evidence that participation did not take place. The two men Friends appointed to enquire were asked to inform the Women's Meeting in order that the women might make enquiry among themselves and appoint a woman Friend "as the Center of their Intilligence" and to certify the result.²

In earlier times, appointments were made for enquiry only if special cause arose, as when

Arther Russell & Joan Houlder proposed their Intention of Marriage . . . but inasmuch as the meeting hath little knowlidg of Arther they have desired Wm. Lane & Erasmus Dole to inquiry among som friends that know him & acquaint this meeting how they find it, yt soe wee may be more cleare in our proceedings therein.³

When Thomas Speed proposed his marriage with Ann Sherman, Friends

appointed some amongst themselves to speak with her, shee being unknowne to most of them both as to her purson, & principle in relation unto trueth.⁴

Enquiries of this sort continue throughout the period, and the reports often make good reading. Thomas Clarke, not well known to the meeting, was visited, and the Friends report they

take the man to be a simple hearted man. And though he haue not much to say to commend himselfe in respect to his knowlidg or growth in the truth, yet soe farr as wee can learne he is honest in his conversation and desires to owne & be owned by the friends of truth.⁵

If on report Friends were satisfied that the parties each acted as and could be owned by Friends the marriage proposed was allowed to go forward, but if not, it might be deferred for further observation or stopped if the persons could not be owned.

¹ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 12.i.1687-88.

² *Ibid.*, 25.ii.1698.

³ *Ibid.*, 8.ii.1678.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.iv.1668.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.ii.1699.

MARRIAGES DEFERRED

Deferment was the lot of Thomas Morrice when he proposed to marry Joan Howell, for Friends were

not satisfied that the said Thomas was so far convinced of the principle of truth as to have a reall sense of truth upon his spirit, therefore doe they admonish him, and her, to waite patiently until the Lord in his time brings them sense of that with which friends have unity.¹

One unfortunate woman had her marriage deferred for the sins of her mother

being soe much scandelous in her conversation and soe infameous, as reflects soe much on her famely & those that frequents her house that friends cannot be free to countenance their marriage amongst friends untill they have better satisfaction.²

One man, having "not made a profession off (nor walked as a friend Convinced of) Truth as wee proffess", asked the Meeting's advice when his marriage proposal was not approved

they Answered him if he pleased he might waite some time longer to see whether friends could receive satisfaction therein or not.³

In some instances naturally the parties lost patience and went to church to be married. Friends anticipated this danger and might appoint Friends to visit one or both of them "in order to their preservation". One interesting instance of deferment and subsequent marriage comes from 1698 when

Eliz: Hodg signified to this meeting that she had been ingadged in inclyneation to marriage to Henry Monck for neare six yeares past, the first 3 yeares of the time they nither was convinced of the truth, but this last 3 yeares she has been convinced & hee for this last yeare have frequented our publick meeting. She desires yt friends would consider her case.

The Men's Meeting advised

that she waite in the patience, and not be hastie or forward in proceeding untill friends could have som farther knowledg and more freenes to them. ⁴

After six months

The Meeting, being moved on behalfe of Henry Monck who have inclineacon: to joyne in marriage with Eliz. Hodge, have answered

¹ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 21.xii.1669-70.

² *Ibid.*, 14.iii.1694.

³ *Ibid.*, 27.vi.1688.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.iv.1698.

. . . that this Meeting doth give leave for them to lay their intentions before this Meeting when they see meet.¹

The proposals were made at the next Men's Meeting.

Friends would not concern themselves with forwarding marriages with people "differing from our principles". The Meeting refused to countenance "unequall yoakes"

that wee might not open a gap for our Children to Joyne their affections to those who doe not profess the truth with us.²

In addition to the deferment and refusal meted out to those whose connection with Friends was doubtful or of no significance, Friends enquired to see that the Friends proposing had been faithful in their actions so that Friends could accept them as in good standing. One aspect (which comes up more frequently than any other) may suffice to illustrate this. Young men Friends who had served their apprenticeship, had to take up the freedom of the city in order to set up shop unhindered and gain the privileges of a burgess. Before 1697 this required an oath and Friends refusing to take the oath could not legally take up their right. Some few did take the oath and evidence of the Men's Meeting's displeasure is to be found in the minutes.

When Isaac Partridge appeared to propose his marriage with Margaret Gush, the Men's Meeting noted that he had taken the burgess oath, and recorded

although he declares that he hath had troble and condemnation on him for it, Yet friends hath a sense that he hath not soe past through judgment as to cleare himselfe, nor take off the reproach thereof from friends and therefore cannot at present have unity with their marriage, but desires him to waite on the lord for som farther testimony to arise from him to cleare the truth of that reproach.³

Two years later, Friends were appointed

to vissit Tho. Taylard & by advice & assistant to him to helpe him out of the snare he hath fallen in by his underly dealing in & takeing the oathes.⁴

The Meeting expected some evidence of contrition before

¹ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 12.vii.1698.

² *Ibid.*, 6.iv.1687.

³ *Ibid.*, 3.ii.1671. The marriage stood in abeyance for four months before the proposals were allowed to go forward (7.vi.1671).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.viii.1673.

they could approve his marriage. Another Friend was advised "in patience to waite untill the lord shall give him true repentance".¹ Four months after his former appearance

Thomas Taylour againe presented himselfe . . . & he Accnowlidgeth his former transgression soe farr to the satisfaction of friends as that they permitt him to publish their intentions in our meetinge.²

An interesting sidelight shows that some Friends had their doubts about their special marriage arrangements, and were inclined (like other Dissenters) to go to church for the solemnization. Edward Knee and his wife were by the Men's Meeting summoned

to be present here the next meeting, to see what satisfaction they can offer for the abuse done to this meeting by them, in their desiring to be married among friends after they had been privately maryed by a preist.³

Friends in good standing were allowed to put forward their proposals for marriage in the Men's Meeting. The Meeting required them to show themselves clear from all others and that they had the consent of persons who had particular charge of them or special interest in their welfare.

CONSENT OF PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

The desirability of gaining the consent of parents or guardians was increasingly recognized by Friends, and became marked as the second generation grew up in the church. Fox, in his epistle "To all the elect", directed

all are to speak first to their Parents, and have their Consent, before they engage the Affections of the Children; and this Order is settled by the Power of God, in the Men and Womens Meetings; for some formerly did speak to neither Father nor Mother, till they had drawn out, and entangled the Affections of the Daughter; and that brought great trouble and discontent upon the Parents, and among Friends. And therefore this is to be enquired into, in the Men and Womens Meetings, where their Marriages are to be spoken of.⁴

Soon after, Bristol Men's Meeting recorded that friends have a sence that Inconveniency and Griefe hath hapened to som friends, by some young people amongst us in their entangling

¹ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 16.viii.1671.

² *Ibid.*, 19.ix.1673.

³ Bristol Friends' records, 96, 17.xii.1672. On another occasion the Men's Meeting wrongly suspected a couple of having acted similarly (Men's Meeting minutes, 6, 20.vii.1680).

⁴ *Epistles*, no. 317, p. 360; copy in Bristol MSS. V., 8-9. Dated at Swarthmoor, 12.xii.1675.

their affections each to other in relation to marriage before they have acquainted their relations therewith.¹

The Meeting drew up a paper of advice against hasty or disorderly marriage, advising the parties timely to seek the consent of their parents "this being the most likely meanes wee could see for the preventing the Enemies snares in this kind."²

The problem was perennial.

One early minute recording the marriage proposals of John Weare and Hester Guest, asked her to produce a certificate of consent from her mother and step-father. The Men's Meeting added "& in as much as the said Hester hath not yet acquainted them therewith, in that respect friends judgeth she hath not don soe well".³

Parents giving their consent might be present with the persons proposing marriage, or might send a certificate with them in such terms as the following:

These are to Certify all persons whom it may conserne that whereas our son Henry James of Bristoll have made us aquainte of his intentions of marriage with Ann Harris of Bristoll wee . . . Henry James & Elizabeth James father & mother of the said Henry doe give our free consents to the aforesaid marriage intended.⁴

If not brought at the first attendance, the proposers would be asked to produce one at the second appearance.

Where only one parent survived the consent of him or her was required, but where none were living other members of the family were sought. One Friend "haveing noe parrents liveing, Friends expects he should procure a certificate from his eldest brother or next relation yt had the care of him of his or their aprobacon."⁵

Cases are on record of requests for a stepfather's consent. Three grandparents were present when Mary Jones and William Penn jr. were before the Men's Meeting.

Wm Penn his father is present; soe is Charles Jones her father, together with Charles Jones, Anne Jones & Jane Wathin, her grandfather & grandmothers, all signifying their concent.⁶

¹ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 25.i.1678.

² Men's Meeting paper, dated 6.iii.1678; Bristol MSS., V, 117.

³ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 16.iv.1679.

⁴ Bristol Friends' records, 102, 13: certificate dated from Painswick, 15.iv.1684.

⁵ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 3.viii.1692.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.viii.1698.

On occasion, consent of brother and sister or uncle and aunt were recorded in the Meeting; but nothing quite so comprehensive as the consent signified by Margaret Fell's relations in the Men's Meeting on 18th October, 1669, has been recorded elsewhere.

John Rowse & Margaret his wife, Thomas Lowre and Mary his wife, Issabell Yeamans and Rachell Fell daughters of the said Margaret Fell have all of them one by one not onely declared their free assent to said intended mariage butt also have for the most of them signified that they have had a sence that the thinge intended to bee accomplisht doth stand in the Covenant of light and life & therefore doe rejoice for that the accomplishment thereof draweth nigh.¹

Failing relations, a guardian's consent was sought. Nathaniel Allen's daughter, left in England after her father's emigration to Pennsylvania, being under the care of four Friends, procured from them a paper to certify their consent.² Overseers and executors of the wills of deceased parents were also to be asked, or informed "as a comendable thing".³ In this connection, the marriage proposal of Robert Ingram and Christobel Coale daughter of George Coale deceased, may be quoted. A certificate was produced

from the two weekes meeting in London, whereat was present Wm Ingram & Wm Philips two of the executors in trust apoynted by the last will of George Cole, from which meeting is signified their approbation on their procedure to marriage. R. Sneade on[e] other of the executors in trust is present . . . testefieing his approbation and that also Walter Grimes, the other executor in trust has been acquainted therewith & is not in opposition.⁴

When neither parents nor relations nor guardians were forthcoming the proposers might bring other Friends to give testimony for them. Thus servants would ask their masters and mistresses to come, and on one occasion Jane Wathen told the meeting that Jane Bayly "hath behaved her selfe as a fathfull servant with her & yt she doth approve of ther intentions".⁵ True as this may be, it seems scarcely of great moment.

¹ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 18.viii.1669.

² *Ibid.*, 5.x.1687.

³ *Ibid.*, 19.x.1698.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.iv.1692.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.v.1677.

CERTIFICATES FROM OTHER MEETINGS

In their consideration of marriages the Men's Meeting might call for certificates from other meetings to witness to the freedom of the parties proposing marriage. The Horsham certificate of 8th January, 1696, is already known to Friends, but as it relates to William Penn it may bear reprinting. Horsham Friends wrote to Bristol concerning their investigations on his marriage proposal, that on

Enquirey both in city and countrey there being nothing found that may impead or hinder his intention, but to the best of our knowledge he is free and cleare from all other persons on the accounte of marriage, soe that he may proceed in Truths way to the accomplishment of the same, and we leave it to the wisdome of God in you and your Christian care to see that all things been cleare on the said Hannah Callowhill and her relations parte.¹

Horsham Friends had no need to fear for any hasty procedure in Bristol. The Men's Meeting there was holding up consideration of the marriage until a satisfactory account was received from Sussex. A study of the minute books reveals that marriage proposals might be rejected because the parties were not in good standing as Friends, because conflicting claims could not be cleared (earlier engagements or promises not dissolved, and the like), or because of a withdrawal by one of the parties when the matter was already under consideration by the Meeting. But when all matters seemed clear and enquiries revealed no impediment, the next step was to order publication of the proposed marriage in a meeting for worship, "that upon such publique notice, if any have ought theragainst they may have opportunity to acquaint friends".²

PUBLICATION

This procedure probably dates from the earliest form of marriage discipline among Friends, and it was doubtless adopted as the most convenient means of publication, like the banns in church. If one can judge from the following minute, however, the object of publication in this manner does not appear to have been widely recognized. In 1673 the Men's Meeting recorded that

¹ Bristol Friends' records, 102, 97. Certificate dated Horsham, 8.xi.1695. (Cf. Horsham M.M. minutes, printed *Journal F.H.S.*, viii. 32.)

² Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 24.xii.1667.

Friends desires for the future that when publicacon shall be made in our publick meetings of the intentions of Friends marriages, that the Friend that maketh that publicacon shall signify the reason of the publication thereof, which is that if any hath any thing reasonable to object against the intended marriage they may signify the same to the next Men's Meeting.¹

On one occasion, Friends ordered notice of publication to be given to one claimant who had failed to produce evidence for a claim he made to the hand of a woman who was proposing to marry someone else. The person who delivered the notice gave the Men's Meeting a certificate that he had been asked

to goe to Thomas Pugsly to his lodging, & to give him notis that Sarah Cornish was to be axt or published to Richard Bird in ye Meeting howse of ye people caled quakers ye next Fryday neare fowerth hower in ye after noone, which notice was accordingly given, about three dayes before ye publication thearof . . . & if that he had any thing to objectt against it that he mighte appeare, & forbide the proceedings.²

Friends were not very happy about this case and they kept all the papers about it, although there seems little doubt that their decision to allow the marriage to go forward was the right one.

At latest since 1671, and probably before then, marriages were regularly announced at the Friday weekday meeting for worship.³ It seems probable that when the Men's Meeting passed a marriage for publication in open meeting for worship, a paper or certificate authorizing it was given to the parties for them to hand to the Friend by whom they desired the announcement to be made. This procedure may be inferred from the phrases used authorizing four Friends to act for the Meeting in a marriage case where some further information was asked for, that "if they do receive satisfaction in it, to give order that it [the marriage] may be published".⁴ In 1687 at any rate, this method was established:

Its the desire of this meeting yt when Friends have concent of this meeting to publish any intention of mariage, that a line or two to certefiy the same be given from this Meeting to the end that those who shall publish the same may be satisfied it is by concent of the

¹ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 13.viii.1673.

² Bristol Friends' records, 139, 26; 3.xi.1676.

³ This procedure was settled by minute of 6.i.1670-71, and probably reflects previous practice.

⁴ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 19.ii.1669.

Meeting, & also for conveniency may when published signe their name & day of publication, which, upon its retorne will signify to the Meeting what may be nessesary to remaine with them.¹

Then follows a specimen entry, in a form which had long been in use:

Viz. Richard Mittings & Mary Hollister have the concent of this Meeting to cause their intention of marriage to be published amongst friends as is usuall.

In consenting to the publication of a marriage the Meeting stipulated that they should receive sufficient proof that the publication had not produced any opposition, and thus gradually there came the need for the third attendance at meeting. A minute of 1669 records that the parties are permitted to publish such their intentions in the way of freinds in the publicke meeting house on next sixth day, and are desired to forebeare cominge together untill the next mens meeting.²

Some months later a similar clause was added to another minute; the parties

are desired not to consummate their mariage untill after the next mens meetinge that shalbee after such publicacon.³

This became common practice later, and the minute entering note of publication signified the successful passage of proposals through the Men's Meeting. Not until 1680 is a minute found directing attendance at meeting after publication, but this appears to have become usual by the end of the century.

Some persons did attempt to evade the discipline of the meetings. The most notable occasion in Bristol was the marriage of Nathaniel Wade and Ann Davis which Friends had refused to countenance (6th June, 1687)—doubtless because of their dissatisfaction about his former activities under the Duke of Monmouth in the rebellion. This marriage was published in meeting for worship, and the Men's Meeting recorded that the marriage when proposed to them, Friends had not freedome to incoradg or countenance such their proceedings in our meeting. And in as much as Wm. Foord [who made the announcement without the customary note for publication from the Men's Meeting] have in time past Joynt with us given forth from this our Mens meeting under his & severall of our hands a testimony against unequall yoakes & disorderly walkeing. Butt now he the said William Foord haveing on the 28th of the 4th mo. last unfriendly &

¹ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 14.xii.1686.

² *Ibid.*, 28.iv.1669.

³ *Ibid.*, 21.xii.1669.

disorderly, without the consent of the meeting, published their intentions in our publick meeting to the trouble greife & dissatisfaction of friends. This meeting doe now enter this our dislike or memorial thereof against such his disorderly practice.¹

Another similar unauthorized publication in meeting for worship is noted in the following year,² and the Friend who published that one received an admonition, like William Ford.

PROCEDURE IN TIME OF PERSECUTION

During persecution, when meetings were disturbed and many Friends were in prison, special difficulties attended the publication of marriages. In September, 1670, when the Meeting houses were closed, Abel Chandler and Mary Sterridge, having passed the Men's Meeting were "permitted to take a convenient opportunity to publish their intentions of marriage".³ In the following month, definite procedure was set down in the minute:

Whereas it hath been the approved practice of freinds to cause all marriages to bee publisht at their publick assemblies, & whereas also freinds are at this time forcibly kept out of their publick meetinge houses, it is therefore agreed that for the future ye intentions of all mariages amongst freinds bee publisht in their mens and womens meetings usually held once every fortnight on the second dayes of the weekes untill such time as that they have admittance into their publique meetinge houses againe, when the former practice & order on this behalfe is againe to take place.⁴

During the persecution in the 1680's, the smallness of meetings for worship and the unrepresentative number of those able to attend the Men's Meeting constrained Friends to desire the parties to intimate their intentions to prisoners and to the Women's Meeting "to the end [as the minute runs] if they find noething meet to obstruct it there might be their joynt consent with this of ours" for proceeding.⁵

This special procedure is explicitly stated in a minute of April, 1683, asking a Friend

to cause his said intentions to be mentioned at ye Meeting of our Women Friends as alsoe among the Friends in Prison, viz. Newgate & Bridewell, which done and an account thereof given to this Meeting

¹ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 4.v.1687.

² *Ibid.*, 24.vii.1688.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.vii.1670.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.viii.1670.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.xii.1681.

of theyer satisfaction . . . [the proposers] may proceed to ye accomplishment of theyer intended marryedge when they shall see meet.¹

Copy of the minute consenting to the intimation of the proposals to prisoners and the Women's Meeting was given to the party,² that the Friends to whom he made application might be satisfied of the approval of Friends still at liberty, and that the Friends to whom he applied might in their turn sign some certificate "of their concurrence", which could be returned to the Men's Meeting.³

When returned, note was made of the receipt of these certificates—as

This meeting haveing received a Certificate from our friends at both prisons and also from the Weomens Meeting that there was publickca- tion of the intent of marriage betwixt William Gravit & Martha Frye & that they could find nothing meet to obstruct them therein.

They have concent of this meeting to finish such their intended marriage when they shall see meete.⁴

Six of these certificates are preserved among the Dix Manuscripts at Friends House, all dated between 1683 and 1685, and there are doubtless some others among family archives dating from the same period.⁵ They have much the same form; a recitation of the proposals made to the Men's Meeting, and the order from that Meeting for the publication among the prisoners and at the Women's Meeting. After the preamble follows the note of publication and signature. For Robert Lux and Margaret Taylour it was stated (Dix MS. E7)

These are therefore to Certefie friends of the mens meeting that the said Robert Lux hath accordingly acquainted friends and that nothing hath apeared to or knowlidge meet to obstruct their said Intention to wch wee Subscribe or names

noe obstruction apearethe before friends
at Newgate

{ Charles Harford
Paul Moone
at Newgate.

it was published in the womans meting &
thare apeared no thing of obstrucken

Sarah Moone
Ann Jones
Jane Warren

{ at Weomens Meeting—
ye 7th of 3d mo. 1683

¹ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 2.ii.1683 (typescript copy of rough minutes in Bristol Friends' records, p. 210).

² *Ibid.*, 20.xii.1681.

³ *Ibid.*, 30.ii.1683 (typescript copy, p. 211).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.i.1683-84.

⁵ Dix MSS., E6, E7, E9-12. Another is printed in *Journal F.H.S.*, ii., 15.

The certificate for Gregory Powell and Ann Sanders (Dix MS. E6), in common with most certificates now known, have signatures for Friends at both Newgate and Bridewell. It is dated 16th April, 1683, and the body of the work is in the hand of Richard Sneade, it records that the couple were advised to

acquaint friends at the Weomens Meeting Newgate and Bridewell. [The signatures follow]

“At Newgate—Richd: Sneade
At Bridewell
At Weoms. Meeting

As it have past throu you
so we do all so in bridewell let it pass
Bridewell—Rebeckeh Hhill
Womens meeting—Joan Dickson”

These certificates doubtless came from Bristol Meeting records, saved from among the bulk of “Certificates of ye Publications of Marriages with those of Parents & Guardians Consent thereto”,¹ mentioned in the 1737 catalogue of deeds and records in the Meeting, which were destroyed or dispersed by the Committee on Registers in 1842.

EXPEDITED PROCEDURE

Some proposals of marriage which came before the Meeting were from people who had reason to desire a swift passage.

Jonathon Packer & Sarah Baugh signified to this meeting their intentions of marriage . . . The said Jonathon being sudenly bound away to Virgina desires the speedy effecting thereof it also being the earnest request of her now dyeing mother: and things apeareing Cleare betwixt them.²

Friends allowed publication after the first appearance. Roger Hollard in like case, being “bound shortly to sett out on a Voiage to sea” was allowed to publish after first appearance “to the End that . . . they might have Concent of the next mens meeting for the accomplishment thereof”.³ Similar action was taken for Friends from away whose business concerns would not permit them long absences, like William Gravet, of Exeter;⁴ and William Walker, a London tailor:

¹ Bristol Friends' records, 124, p. 39.

² Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 26.vi.1678.

³ *Ibid.*, 1.ix.1680.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.xii.1683.

William Walker & Mary Kippon proposed their intention of marriage . . . And the said William Walker being an inhabitant of London saith his occasions there will not admitt of his being longe from whome without much prejudice, maketh his request to this meeting to give them concent to have their intentions published before next meeting to the end that if nothing appeare meet to obstruct their marriage they might have concent the next meeting to consumate the same . . . They have the consent of this meeting, to cause the same to be published on next sixth day, but not to consumate their marriage here without the concent & satisfaction of the next meeting.¹

For another case Friends appointed Thomas Callowhill to receive the return on a marriage publication before the next meeting, in order that, if clear, the parties might "proceed to Marriage . . . notwithstanding it be before next M. Meeting".² Similar means were more than once adopted to speed publication when it was only delayed for an awaited certificate. Benjamin Coole being before the Men's Meeting on proceeding to marriage with Joan Yeate

he have not yet a certeficate from friends in the County of Wilts nor can have untill their next monethly meeting which falling upon the same day as doe also our next meeting cannot be procured time enough to be presented to this next Meeting. Now therefore upon request of Benjamine Coole: This Meeting doe advise if the said Benjamine doe soone after the day of the next meeting bring such certeficate to Richard Snead & Tho. Callowhill or one of them & desire that publicacon of their marriage may be made before another Mens meeting that then the said Richard Snead or Tho. Callowhill may signify for this meeting their concent & allowance of such publicacon.³

After the return of publication of the marriage had been received, no further entries occur in the minute book; except in the marriage of Thomas Denham and Dorcas Willis. There the following note is added to the final passing minute: "yet before the accomplishment of their marriage Dorcas dyed."⁴ The wedding ceremony would take place in one of the meeting houses before the required attendance of "nott . . . les then a dossen Friends and relations".⁵ During the persecutions when the meeting houses were boarded up by the authorities, marriages took place in Friends' private houses. The Men's Meeting passed marriages for "accomplishment . . . at such

¹ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 20.v.1674.

² *Ibid.*, 14.xii.1685.

³ *Ibid.*, 18.ix.1689. Isaac Morss (Moss) of Manchester obtained a similar concession, 21.xi.1694.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.iii.1683.

⁵ George Fox's paper "Friends fellowship", copy in Bristol MSS. I, 5 (Friends House).

tyme and place as they [the parties] with their relations & friends of truth who shalbe acquainted therewith shall see meet".¹

SPECIAL CASES

Marriages with which Friends had not complete satisfaction were sometimes passed by the Men's Meeting, but it is clear that they did not receive the full approbation usually accorded. The minutes are sometimes obscure. In the case of James Wallis and Mary Gouldney perhaps Friends were not entirely satisfied with the faithfulness of one of the parties to Quaker principles:

James Wallis & Mary Gouldney haveing at the former meeting signified their Intention of Marriage, & there appearing nothing to the contrary but that they are both of them free from all other persons in relation to mariage, & it being also the desire & request of both their parents yt the same may be accomplished in ye way of friends, the meeting doth for conveniency sake permitt the publication therof in our publique meeting.²

At a later date the Men's Meeting passed another marriage, although

for divers reasons wee cannot aprove or incoradge their intended marriage; yet perceiveing they have ingadged themselves soe farr as not fairely to be disjoyned

it was allowed to go forward.³ In yet another case, the Meeting, not having "freedome to countenance their marriage in the meetings in the way & manner of friends", offered an alternative to the parties

either to waite longer for our better satisfaction: or to consumate the same assoone as they please amongst such friends as may be free to be present thereat: or otherwise as they shall see meet.⁴

The second alternative put forward may have been suggested with a mind to the procedure laid down some years before, when the marriage of a man and woman with child by him had been proposed. At that time the Men's Meeting recorded:

such a Marriage being not honourable may not be approved to pass in these meetings according to our accostomed manner . . . But if

¹ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 20.xii.1681.

² *Ibid.*, 4.viii.1678.

³ *Ibid.*, 10.ix.1684.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.ix.1687.

they [the parties] under a true sence and sorrow and brokenness of heart, being bowed downe under the Judgments of the Lord doe condemne their miscarriages, Then it is desired that some expedient may be found out to helpe such that they may not be lost.¹

A committee was appointed to consider the matter, so that the Friends concerned should not be left to the temptation of going to church for their marriage. As a result of the committee's deliberations, the following Men's Meeting recorded:

First, That our meetings may not be farther trobled with marriages of this kind, let five wise and prudent Friends of this meeting be nominated and appoynted by the meeting to take care & inspect the cases . . . to consider and advise the parties concerned . . .

Secondly, If any miscarriage happen of that kind . . . information be given to some or one of those friends apoynted . . . to make inquiry . . . And if they find a tenderness in them . . . That they advise them to give or signe a paper of condemnation against themselves . . .

Thirdly, Seeing they cannot with cleareness or safety be advised either to publish their marriage amongst us or goe to the priests, and there being a nessesity from the law of god & equity for their marriage; a forme of certificate may be allowed them of their takeing each other to be man and wife and of their promise each to other in that case to be signed by themselves and those who shalbe present at their marriage.

Fowerthly, That they be advised to procure such of their relations, neybour or friends as are free to be present at their marriage to be witness and signe such their certeficate, which in number shall not be less than Ten or Twelve.

Fifthly, That . . . friends . . . provide and signe a paper containeing a testimony for truth . . . And this said paper soe signed to be kept in readyness to produce as a deffence for truth . . .²

The marriage under consideration in 1674 appears to be the only one dealt with by this procedure.

MARRIAGES OUTSIDE FRIENDS DISCIPLINE

Marriages which the meetings for discipline had not approved could not be held after the manner of Friends, but there are a few cases recorded where the parties defied the Men's Meeting and persisted in holding their weddings as Friends were wont to do, persuading some Friends to be present as witnesses. In November, 1667, Henry Pritchard married Mary Smith, although previously the Men's Meeting

¹ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 31.vii.1674.

² *Ibid.*, 14.vii.1674.

had "denied to have to doe in his Mariage".¹ After dealing with him unsuccessfully, a paper was issued by the Men's Meeting stating that Friends

Doe Disowne the sayd Marriadge, as not being done in the Trueth, but in, & by a Lye; as alsoe the Manner of the doeing of it; & the Coming together of those whoe were present therat as a breach of good Order.²

Years later, Joseph Hort married his brother's widow after the Men's Meeting had refused its sanction. The wedding was held "in a Clandestine Manner" at their own house, "the Circumstances being Fowle and Reproachfull". Joseph Hort's action was strongly condemned, and the Friends whom "Brightweed Hortt had beguiled . . . to be present at her Son Joseph Hortts pretended Mariage with his brothers wife" were dealt with also.³ The Friends present at Henry Pritchard's marriage had been prevailed upon to sign a paper of contrition for their action. In the course of the paper they expressed sorrow

because our presence as witnesses to his marriage tends (as upon serious consideration wee have found) to the breach of good Order among friends. And therefore wee disowne the sayd Marriage, & our being therat.⁴

One Friend married in the Meeting without first consulting the Men's Meeting, and his action was condemned by a testimony signed by the Meeting:

Friends, being not satisfied with Benjamin Maynards taken to wife Ann [blank] in the Publique Meetinghouse without acquainting the Meeting of friends, & haveing their Approbation as to the Publication therof first . . . alsoe without any Publication of that his intent beforehand, as is right & meet, & the Order of Friends.⁵

The constant references to marriage discipline in the general papers of advice issued by individual Friends and meetings for discipline show the importance which Friends attached to this testimony for Truth. A study of the minute books reveals the difficulties Friends met with, and how far they translated in church administration their ideals into reality.

R. S. MORTIMER

¹ Bristol Men's Meeting minutes, 13.ix.1667.

² *Ibid.*, 13.xi.1667. Two years later Henry Pritchard expressed his sorrow for having spurned the Meeting's advice, 21.xii.1669.

³ *Ibid.*, 15, 29.iii. and 26.iv.1693.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.x.1667.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.xii.1667.