

Friends around Pymont in the early Nineteenth Century

THE beginnings of Quakerism in Germany date back to the years 1656-57 when William Ames from England visited some European countries including Germany. Around 1677 there were also visits from George Fox, William Penn, Robert Barclay, George Keith and others. They came to Holland and lower Germany. George Fox visited Oldenburg, Delmenhorst, Bremen, Münsterland, Hamburg and Friedrichstadt. William Penn and Robert Barclay were in Herford, where they made the acquaintance of Princess Elisabeth, daughter of the Elector Palatine, Frederick V. Afterwards she corresponded with William Penn and George Fox. The Princess was impressed with the ideas and thoughts of the Friends, and so was her companion the Countess Horn, but they did not join Friends. However, she was a great help to Friends, who were suffering on account of their faith. William Penn visited many places, amongst them Paderborn, Kassel, Frankfurt/M., Kriegsheim (where he found a little group of Friends, which had been started by William Ames), Cologne, Cleve, Emden, Wesel, Düsseldorf, Mülheim, Duisburg. From most of these places German Friends emigrated to America, mostly to Pennsylvania. Many groups were formed there, but they had a hard time because they refused to pay church-dues or war-taxes, refused oaths, objected to military service, etc. Conditions of life for Friends were most uncomfortable and many emigrated—others joined the Mennonites. In Friedrichstadt Friends had their own Meeting House; however, in 1771 there was no longer any Friends' Meeting. The Mennonites used the Meeting House and it is reported they kept it in good condition through the help of English Friends. The house was sold in 1860.

In 1786 Sarah Grubb and Joshua Beale from Ireland and George Dillwyn from England brought their message to a small group of people in Pymont, who had quite separated from the Church and held their own religious meetings. Also in the neighbourhood of Pymont, Sarah Grubb and her Friends paid many visits, and the Governor of Rinteln,

General von Lassberg, is especially mentioned. He already knew of Friends and was impressed by their principles.

The spiritual leader of this little group in Pyrmont was Ludwig Seebohm, who had had to leave Prussia on account of his religious views and had settled in his birthplace Pyrmont again. The liberal-minded Prince Friedrich of Waldeck gave permission for him to settle just outside Pyrmont with his two brothers in a little valley, which they afterwards called Friedenstal. The name can be translated into "Vale of Peace". They were even supported by the Prince with money and building materials and built themselves houses. They were also allowed to enjoy coffee, which was otherwise the monopoly of Pyrmont. Very soon they were joined by others. A man named Schüttemeier from Hohenrode b/Rinteln is mentioned. He was much liked by the community, and he refused to submit to the church regulations and to let his child be baptized. All friendly persuasions were without success and he was fined and sent to prison, but this had no effect either and in the end his property was sold and he and his family had to leave the district. A similar fate befell a man called Schöning of Rinteln and both came to Pyrmont, where they received a warm welcome from the Pyrmont Friends at Friedenstal.

In 1790 Ludwig Seebohm was summoned, because he criticized the Church authorities and their regulations. Also Heinrich Meier, who refused to pay the Christmas dues and who insisted on working on a Feast Day. Both were supposed to be turned out of their homes, but to the great surprise of everyone concerned came the verdict of the Prince Friedrich von Waldeck (1791) that he was not willing to punish good and industrious citizens with deportation, and that he acknowledged the Quakers as a special church but with the instruction that they had to pay the general Church dues, as before. Nothing was mentioned of an exemption of military service or war taxes. They refused to pay these but bailiffs collected value in kind. To this the Friends made no objection; they were helpless in this case.

On 25.11.1789 Georg Ludwig Seebohm married Julianne Antoniette von Borries from Minden. They had altogether nine children. His wife died 22.4.1807. Ludwig Seebohm then (in 1815) married Henriette Eisel from Rinteln and by this marriage he had four more children. During the visits

of Queen Louise of Prussia to Pyrmont in 1798 and 1804 she visited Mrs. Seebohm very frequently, and it is known that she helped her by knitting and mending stockings for the large family.

In 1794 there arrived at Pyrmont John Pemberton from Philadelphia with his companion Alexander Wilson. Pemberton helped very much in consolidating the Meeting and he advised them to unite with the London Yearly Meeting. Many of the Pyrmont Friends had had this idea before, but several were very much against the proposal, because they did not wish to have the material advantages, which might come out of it. However, they did join London Yearly Meeting and this caused the first split in the group. Five of the Friends left the little Meeting, amongst them being the above-mentioned Schüttemeier and Schöning. This happened in 1795. Pemberton came to Pyrmont in a very weak state of health but his health improved and he visited many places in the neighbourhood. At Lemgo an inflammation of the lungs obliged him to return to Pyrmont, where he died on 31st January, 1795. He was the first to be laid to rest in the newly acquired Friends' burial ground. After being reminded by the Church-Official to pay taxes due, Alexander Wilson wrote a long letter of protest in a very unfriendly way. A number of the Friends did not agree with him. The Official who was attacked by Wilson gave a suitable reply, but stated that he would renounce the right to his dues so far as he was concerned, but he could not say anything about his successors.

In 1795 there came another good addition to the little Meeting in David Frank from Exten, near Rinteln, where he had a forge, which he had built up through hard work and industry. He was suffering very much under the Church. His conscience would not let him submit and so he, too, decided to go to Friedenstal, to join the little group. In company with Ludwig Seebohm and his brother Friedrich Seebohm David Frank started a forge again, which made good progress. In 1817 it was taken over by another Friend, Heinrich Mundhenke from Pyrmont who continued it until his death. About 1825 it came into the hands of other Pyrmont people, but on account of hard competition and other misfortunes, the forge stopped work in 1878. In 1912 it was destroyed by fire and today another private house

stands in its place. A Friend, who knows Sheffield, England, very well told me there was a firm of steel manufacturers of the name of Seebohm in Sheffield, who in 1914 at the beginning of the first world war, went out of business rather than to supply steel for war purposes.

Ludwig Seebohm was the owner of a cotton spinning and weaving mill, erected in 1797 with the help of English and American Friends, which however, had to be liquidated seven years later in consequence of the war. Old English Friends visiting Friedenstal have told me that in the olden days it was considered unseemly for women to work in the fields as they were doing in Friedenstal and so the mill was set up to provide work for the women. They also told me that the wool came from John Bright's mills at Rochdale to go through some processes here and then was returned to Rochdale to be spun. There was also a soap factory, which was managed by a Judith Bawier, who came from Schwaben and was married in Graubünden, Switzerland. She was a widow, but was attracted very much by the Friends and their belief and made her home here; she did not become a member. After some time she saw that this factory was not very remunerative, and she thought her abilities worthy of better things than a soap factory, so she came to Pymont and started a boarding school for girls, teaching them reading, writing, arithmetic, English, French, housework, etc. There were also printing works, in which many of the Friends' publications were printed. Seebohm wrote various school books for their own school, and marbled paper was printed, which had a good sale. But as they were very strict, and would not print any worldly papers or books, they could not get enough work for their printing press. Ludwig Seebohm was an intelligent all-round man and had plenty of initiative. He had also a school under his direction. It was founded in 1797 with Friedrich Schmidt as teacher and he worked there for thirteen years. The school was in the house of Friedrich Seebohm. In July, 1798, there were 25 children in the school. Later on Theodor Maschhausen, a very intelligent man, continued the same work. He was so taken with the ideas of the simplicity of Friends, that he gave up his music; of which he was very fond; he did not play again.

In 1796 came Friends George Dillwyn and his wife from London, David Sands from New York, William Savery and

Benjamin Johnson from Philadelphia. These Friends tried to clear up all the differences, which had been caused through Alexander Wilson, and they asked him to leave Pyrmont.

In 1798 Sarah Harrison from Philadelphia, Charity Cook from South Carolina, Maria Swett from New Jersey and William Farrer from Liverpool arrived. Amongst other things they had an opportunity to bring their message before a large company of people in the Kurhaus. Ludwig Seebohm translated all the speeches.

In the year 1800 the Meeting House, adjoining the burial ground in the Bomberg Allee, was built and finished. At the dedication on the 6th of July, 1800, more than 1,000 attenders were present. The ground was about 3,000 square yards, which cost 300 thalers. The building costs were about 4,000 thalers including a wall around the burial ground. Most of the money came from English friends and as the expenses were higher than expected, some difficulties arose, but at the end everything was put in order.

In 1801 came Richard Jordan from North Carolina, whose services were very much appreciated.

At that time many of the Kur-Guests in Pyrmont came to the Meeting House and attended Meetings for Worship. Among them were Queen Louise of Prussia, later her son and his wife, and Wolfgang Goethe. Wolfgang Goethe was not impressed. He wrote that he visited the Friedenstal Forge of the "einsilbigen" Quäker (I think that this can be translated as "simple" Quakers) and then he went several times to their meetings at the Meeting House. These he could not accept after the first time and still less after a second time, as being inspired, and said "it is a sad thing that a religious institution of any kind can never be quite free of hypocrisy, if it becomes a custom in a certain place and time".

It is reported that in the year 1805 the Meeting consisted of 24 to 26 families, of whom most lived in Friedenstal; several were in Pyrmont and Löwensen, one in Sonnenborn and another one at Bückeberg; the latter attending mostly the Minden Meeting.

Stephen Grellet intended to visit Pyrmont in 1806, but he was prevented and wrote to the Friends, asking them to exercise more love and to keep better unity with the hope that he would be coming soon. And this promise was kept in 1814; he helped the group very much to get everything

in their community in good order and also did his best to straighten the rather strained connection with the Minden group. Eventually a Two-monthly Meeting between the two groups was formed. When Stephen Grellet left he took with him young Benjamin Seebohm, fifth child of Ludwig Seebohm, as an interpreter. Benjamin became the famous English historian.

Luke Howard in 1816 describes the Meeting: "We are at the Meeting on the first day in their large Meeting House, where the members of our Society are lost (during the season) in a crowd of strangers, whom curiosity for the most part attracts to the show of a Quaker Meeting. Their behaviour was on the whole becoming—a little whispering and circulation of snuff-boxes in the time of silence, but no further levity or disturbance. There were persons of some condition with military men and (we understand) Moravians among them." Luke Howard visited all the Friends, also at Minden and other places.

In 1818 it is reported that there is new life in the group, which consisted of 28 members although four of the older members have died. At the same time Friedrich Schmidt bought a house in the Linden Allee in which he placed a room at the disposal of Friends for meetings. English Friends gave him a grant of £70.

In 1820 John Yeardley with Thomas Shillitoe arranged special Reading Meetings for young people in Friedenstal.

1826 saw a ten days' visit from Maria Middleton, Hannah Middleton, Ann Alexander and Cornelius Hanbury from England.

In 1840 and 1841, Elizabeth Fry, then sixty years of age, came to Pymont on both of her last European journeys. She writes enthusiastically about the true German hospitality of the humble Friends, with whom there was a perfect understanding without words. They reminded her of the Friends in Congenies, though she found them "more entirely Friends". While here she influenced the leading authorities in Pymont to establish a "Society for Nursing and Caring for the Poor".

By this time the small group of Friends was greatly declining in strength. Difficulties, mainly brought about by their attitude towards military service, caused many families to emigrate to America. After 1870 no more meetings were held in the Pymont Meeting House. Louis Rasche, a Minden

friend, reported in 1885 to London, that the Meeting House and burial ground were in good order. He was responsible for settling all the affairs connected with the house with the London Office of the Society. The Colonial and Continental Society rented the Meeting House for their services during the season, and also the Reformed Church used the Meeting House for their services and paid a rent.

The garden was taken over by a member, H. Nettelmann, who later emigrated to America. In 1891 the Churches which used the Meeting House for their services made an offer to buy the house, but it was considered to be too low; however, two years later both stopped using the house as the Reformed Church built a church of its own, which is now the town's Youth House. English Friends saw no need for keeping the house any longer and they sold it in 1893 to Friedrich Volkers for 7,500 marks. For the benches they got another 300 m. The burial ground, however, remained the property of London Yearly Meeting. After the erection of our new Meeting House in 1932-1933 the burial ground was transferred to the German Yearly Meeting. It may not be used for burials now, but we are allowed to use it after cremation for urns, and the first to be so buried was Richard L. Cary of Baltimore in 1934.

In 1927 the old derelict Meeting House and ground was bought by an Order of Catholic Sisters, who had their own house on the neighbouring plot. In 1957 to 1958 they erected a Hospital on the ground where the old Meeting House had stood. Before the old house was demolished it had been used for some time as a stable for the donkeys who carried children up and down the Allee for 10 Pfge.

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The information for this paper has been drawn from the following books and papers:

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