

THE BRITISH FRIEND: A Monthly Journal,

CHIEFLY DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein."—JER. vi. 16.

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FRANDLEY MEETING BI-CENTENARY.

The holding of the Cheshire Monthly Meeting at Frاندley on the 14th ult. marked the bi-centenary of the first recorded meeting of Friends in a meeting-house at Frاندley, and the circumstance was adverted to in a short paper on the establishment of Friends' meetings in that district, which was read in the Ancient Women's Meeting-house after the Friends (who had assembled from various, and some from remote, parts of the county to that hamlet remote from railways) had partaken of a substantial meal, liberally provided by the Friends of the little meeting. The following notice is submitted:—

Nothing is certainly known respecting the earliest dissemination of the principles of the Friends at Frاندley. The first reference to the district in George Fox's journal is under date 1657. During the latter part of the previous year he had journeyed from London along the southern part of the island to the West of England. At Exeter he attended a general meeting, to which Friends flocked from the counties of Devon and Cornwall, and even from distances so remote as Land's End. Thence he returned to Bristol and crossed into Wales, following the southern coast of the principality until he reached Swansea, where his face was turned northwards. From North Wales he proceeded eastwards and called at Shrewsbury, "where," he records, "we had large meetings and visited Friends up and down the country in their meetings till we came to William Gandy's in Cheshire, where we had a meeting of between two and three thousand people, as it was thought, and the everlasting Word of Life was held forth and received that day."

At this time George Fox was not going about as a pioneer, but rather as one visiting and confirming the churches which were then in active operation. A meeting attended by two or three thousand persons would be a very large assemblage even in any of the most important cities in the provinces, for the population of England was not then one-fourth of what it has attained at the present time. It is scarcely possible that such a multitude could be

collected in a secluded country district unless the preacher were much sought after and his followers were so numerous as to make known his arrival to the inhabitants of the country for many miles round. Therefore we may reasonably suppose that the Friends were at that time a numerous body, keeping themselves pretty much apart from others, maintaining their distinguishing views and prepared to suffer for them at the time of the gathering together of the great meeting under the majestic oak, under the shadow of which the meetings of Friends have been held ever since.

At that time Friends had existed in the district for some years. True, they possessed no system of discipline, no Meeting-houses, no burial grounds, and no complete system of registration of marriages, births, and deaths. There was no inter-communication between the Friends of one district and those of another except that which arises from the passing visits of itinerant preachers. On the authority of Sewel we learn that so early as 1648 divers meetings were set up, and that the number of Friends had greatly increased during the two preceding years. Probably he refers chiefly to the counties of Leicester and Nottingham. From George Fox's journal we find that meetings were assembled in private houses in the neighbourhood of Ulverston in 1652. There is reason for thinking that some of the inhabitants of Wilmslow had joined the Friends as early as the year 1650, and in 1653 six of the more prominent of their number suffered the restraint of their goods for attending a meeting not two miles from their own residences. The thousands of farmers and husbandmen, tailors, cordwainers, and smiths who flocked to Seven Oaks to listen to the persuasive words of Fox did so at some real peril to themselves, for even four years previously the brave Richard Hitchcock had been cast into prison at Chester and was suffered to remain there for fifteen weeks for no greater offence, and in the year previous to the meeting the same undaunted man, in expiation of the alleged crime of addressing a few words to the people in Chester after the clergyman had ended his service, was incarcerated in a noisome dungeon named

the Deadman's Room, the condemned cell of the prison. This place was so foul that the narrator declared that it was infested with snakes and other venomous creatures. It was thought that the prisoner would have laid down his life away from his wife and numerous children, but after undergoing much privation for thirteen weeks, one of Oliver Cromwell's servants had him brought before the judge by Habeas Corpus, and as his custody was shown to be illegal he was set at liberty.

But all Friends in Chester did not so easily escape the jaws of the lion; and indeed, while the thousands were listening to the gifted preacher as he exhorted them from the aged oak, Richard Sale was suffering the most inhuman treatment in Chester. In 1656 he was imprisoned for thirty-three weeks, "in all which time he was not suffered to have any fire, but was kept in a cold open room though in the coldest time of the year." There formerly existed at Chester, and it may remain to this day, a place called "Little Ease," which was thus described:—"This Little Ease was a hole hewed out in a rock; the breadth from side to side is seventeen inches, from the back to the inside of the great door at the top seven inches, at the shoulders eight inches, at the breast nine inches and a half, from the top to the bottom one yard and a half, with a device to lessen the height as they are minded to torment the person put in by drawboards which shoot across the two sides to a yard in height or thereabouts." For the offence of preaching in the streets and occasionally testifying against the conduct of a cruel priest, and for the audacity of complaining to the Mayor "that the said professor thrust him forcibly into a dirty lake, and with the help of his wife and several rude boys dashed him with mud and dirt from head to foot," he was repeatedly forced into "Little Ease" for periods of time varying from three to eight hours.

The writer concludes the narrative thus:—"This poor man, being pretty corpulent, could not be put into that narrow hole without much violence, so that four men had much ado to force him in, and at several times, by the crushing of him, the blood gushed out of his mouth and nose. His health, by that frequent barbarity, was much impaired, and his body and legs swelled so that he languished about two months after this last time of being put there, and then died in the 6th Month, 1657, imputing the cause of his death to the cruelty of his persecutors."

The first records relating to Frandley occur during the year when Fox first visited the district as before adverted to. The earliest refers to the burial of Mary, daughter of Henry and Mary Burtinwood at Over Whitley on the 5th of 2nd Month, 1657, and the loss in numbers thus sustained by the infant community was restored by the birth of John, son of William and Katherine Gandy, which occurred on the 20th of the 10th Month in the same year. The father William Gandy is one whom we are glad to remember. Besides the mention of him in Fox's Journal, previously alluded to, he is referred to on three other occasions. In 1650, George Fox, on his way from Warrington to Stafford, accepted the hospitality of his friend William Gandy, and held a Meeting for Worship at his house, which was so largely attended that the company had to assemble out of doors, as the house could not contain them. During this year William Gandy, together with eighty-eight others, was imprisoned in Chester Gaol, and actually confined to a single small room. The ground of the imprisonment was refusing to take the oath of allegiance. The names of Edward and John Gandy are found among the names of the sufferers. It requires but little imagination to conceive the

degree of suffering that would arise from such fearful overcrowding. At best the prisons were foul and fetid, without provision for health or decency.

In 1666 Fox passed northwards from Stafford to Warrington and attended "a General Men's Meeting, wherein all the Monthly Meetings of the county were settled." We do not know where this General Meeting was held, but as the labours of the founder of our Society had proved so successful in the district of Frandley, and as that hamlet lies so directly in the route, it is very probable that the establishment of Monthly Meetings for the county took place near the renowned oak. It is certain that the Monthly Meetings were settled in this county before Lancashire. In 1669 George Fox once more visited his friend William Gandy on his return from Ireland. He not only attended meetings, which were seasons of spiritual refreshment, but he was also occupied in visiting his friends at their houses. The final visit of Fox to Frandley appears to have been in the year 1675.

In the following year William Gandy, of Seven Oaks, near Over Whitley, yeoman, conveyed to Robert Hatton and another a parcel of land, with a building thereon, in trust, to dispose of the rents for the use of the Friends of Frandley Meeting. There seems to be reason for believing that the land originally given was considerably greater than that which is at present held by the trustees as Gandy's bequest, and that it was lost by neglect in the renewal of the trust on the death of trustees. William Gandy died on the 14th of the 12th Month, 1683, and two days later his friends consigned his body to the earth in the peaceful graveyard at Over Whitley. The name of Gandy appears to have been not uncommon in the district. In that curious but far from refined rhyming narrative in Latin and English, "Barnaby's Journal," the ancient hostelry in the neighbouring village of Great Budworth is mentioned, and the name of its landlady is given as that of Gandy.

The first reference to a meeting-house at Frandley that has been met with is that a Meeting for Sufferings of the Friends in the county was held at Frandley Meeting-house on the 1st of 7th Month, 1684. Before the change of style, "September" was termed by Friends the 7th Month, so the recent meeting may be considered its bi-centenary. The meetings represented were Frandley, Newton-by-Middlewich, Rhadult or Ruddall, Malpas, Congleton, Wilmslow, Chester, Stockport, Norton, and Nantwich. Macclesfield and Wrexham did not appear until 1722, although meetings of Friends existed at both places at an earlier date. It may be remarked that prior to the accession of William III. it was very unusual for Friends or other Dissenters to possess meeting-houses, and if the building upon the land given by William Gandy to his friends was used as a meeting-place, the circumstance, at that early period, is very remarkable. F.

RELIGIOUS EQUALITY AT THE ANTIPODES.

A communication from Melbourne says: "While Dissenters in the mother country are deploring the existence of religious inequality, here, in Victoria, there are no Dissenters. The pastors of the various communions are all alike clergymen, and no religious body suffers civil disability in any of its members. While the cause of religion has the appearance of flourishing quite as vigorously as in Great Britain, there is an absence of jealousy between the sects and the prominent men of each. Many are the occasions on which they are found working together on a com-