

if any woman find herself of such a decidedly masculine type as to wish to practise as a barrister and wrangle in the Law Courts, or be an M.P. and do battle with an outrageous Irishman or a hard-headed Scot, she should be forbidden to do so by any absolute law of exclusion. Let her go and play the legal or the Parliamentary Amazon, or even the soldier, as *La Pucelle* did at Orleans, in the reign of Henry VI., if that suits

her genius. But in such fashion to unsex themselves publicly can never be the interest or the policy of normally constituted women. The more they confine themselves to those professions and occupations that offer the greatest scope for their peculiar virtues and graces, the better for themselves and for the society of which, when worthy of themselves, they are always the better half.*

SOME CURIOUS QUAKER CUSTOMS.

BY A MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.



AN OPEN-AIR MEETING.

ALTHOUGH the numerical strength of the Society of Friends has, I believe, remained stationary for the last few years, there is no doubt, alas! that most of its quaint old habits and customs are gradually dying out. I admit there may be good excuses for many of those members who are discarding the dress and manners of their parents; they may not be convenient or becoming to all, and younger Friends will say that these old customs arose at a time of great social corruption, and as a protest against the bigotry, the senseless extravagance, and the licentiousness that prevailed at the end of the seventeenth century. Whether *we* are more tolerant, less wasteful, or more pure, is a question I will not attempt to decide, but at any

rate we are more advanced, and owing to the enormous increase of education, the power of the press, and the easy modes of communication, our righteous grievances are more likely to be attended to in the natural course of justice than by our wearing any special dress or adopting an unusual formula. Notwithstanding all this, I, for one, sincerely regret the soft grey and dove-coloured skirts, the graceful shawls, and the immaculate lawn or muslin kerchiefs and caps we so seldom see amongst us now.

Talking of dress, I may mention that when this Society was *first* organised by George Fox, there is no record of any special dress, only a passing notice that the members generally wore black hoods and green

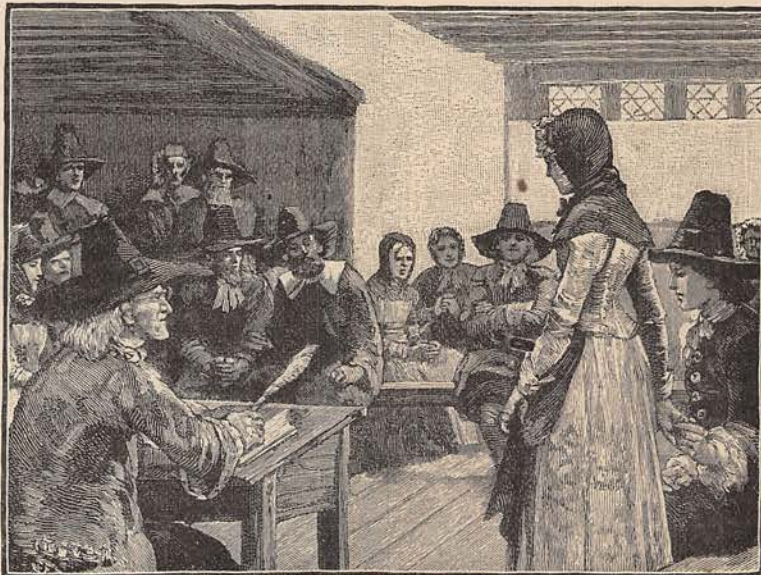
* The writer alone is responsible for the views expressed in this paper.—Ed.

aprons; and a story is told, which I cannot vouch for, that about that time an ancient Friend rose to preach, and instead of saying, "Oh, my friends," she began, "Oh, black hoods and green aprons, saith my soul," &c. There is also an old picture still extant showing George Fox preaching from a stool in the centre of the meeting, with many of the Friends round him attired in this quaint fashion. In 1700 an increase of gaiety was reprimanded amongst the "younger female Friends," who began to wear a "headgear known as the skimming-dish hat," and seventeen years later a minute passed the Meeting to protest against "the immodest fashion of wearing hooped petticoats," and also against men Friends "wearing hat and clothes after a beauish fashion." Wigs were only to be allowed to the old and bald, and even then they were to be very moderate in size and arrangement. The reason Friends keep on their hats in a sacred building is by no means because of want of reverence, but because they do not consider the *building* itself ought to have any superstitious respect paid it, and they will only stand bareheaded before God; when prayer is uttered, all the congregation stands up, and the men uncover their heads. George Fox used at one time to attend public worship in the Established Church, but when the preacher uttered sentiments he could not agree with, he would most solemnly put on his broad-brimmed hat, and only take it off when a welcome strain of doctrine recurred. If he had sat with his hat on for very long, and the sermon was still distasteful to him, he would slowly rise and silently walk out. It was originally for *purposes of habitua' protest* that Friends sat in places of worship with their hats on. From the rise of Quakerism there has always been a dislike to display or show in dress. For many years George Fox was known in the North as "the

man with the leathern breeches," and partly on this account he was often received amongst the people with superstitious dread, whereas he had in reality only adopted this curious garb as he found cloth was not sufficiently strong or durable for his rough wanderings in the dales. Just before 1800 I find mention of a wedding which much shocked the Elders of the Meeting, owing to the "gaudy attire" of the assembly, and more especially the appearance of a "black boy in sumptuous livery, who attended the bride to her coach door;" and in 1839, Isaac Wright wrote a circular, in which he said, "Methought one good effect would be caused by the disuse of the muffs, tippetts, and boas, which appear so commonly amongst us; and also may I not suggest whether, for example's sake, the veil should not be dispensed with?" This Friend seems to have been rather unfair, as he only finds fault with the women, and I should have thought muffs and boas might have been considered useful, and not luxurious articles of attire.

Although the celebrated Elizabeth Fry was a born Friend, she was not "convinced" until she was grown up; and there was a very interesting account given of this event by one of her sisters, who stated that on a certain First Day morning dear Betsy was very restless in Meeting; *she had on purple boots laced with red!* but she was so impressed by William Savory's eloquent address that she there and then was moved by the Spirit to commence a new religious life, from which she never departed.

Apropos of Quaker bonnets, I was told last year that some antiquarian, wishing to obtain a complete dress belonging to this sect, asked the younger members of an old Friend family for some of their grandparents' garments. One can hardly imagine the horror inspired by the answer. "Oh, you can have all the



AN OLD-TIME QUAKER WEDDING.

broad-brimmed hats, but there are no bonnets left, as we took off the silk, and used them as footlight shades in our theatricals last holidays. I am so sorry, but they did capitally!" Oh, that the descendants of the old Quaker stock should have so little reverence left for the memory of their ancestors!

The Society of Friends has always been remarkable for the energy of its women members. From the very first we find mention of their perseverance, their strength under persecution, and their eloquence and influence. In 1650, before the Society had taken root in London, two women Friends were distributing tracts and aiding George Fox in the North, and they came to town later to continue this work under circumstances of great difficulty, and even danger. It appears that as early as 1668 there was some sort of idea that the men and women should sit on different sides of the Meeting, and in 1678 a complaint was made that "the young men would sit too near the women, and made too great a crowd;" this same year it was ordained that they should sit apart. The very first meetings held in dwelling-houses seem to have been mostly silent, though "one Isabel Buttery sometimes spake a few words;" but Elizabeth Hooker is recorded to have been the first formal woman preacher. Two years later, when the persecution had begun, and the use of meeting-houses proscribed, Friends met together in the open street rather than hold treasonable or secret services, and on one of these occasions the popular feeling was so strong against them that the coachman of one of the justices drove up and down through the little crowd to disperse it, and although he injured several persons, and "ran over a delicate female Friend," there was no redress to be obtained.

Notwithstanding the numberless acts of cruelty and injustice, the account of which belongs to history and not to these pages, we find the little sect rapidly increasing, and in 1671, out of eighty-four ministering Friends, thirty-five were women. Again and again, during the years of persecution, records are to be found of wives and widows who opened their houses for meetings, and who lodged and fed the travelling Friends. One of the first testimonies of denial was also, unfortunately, against a woman, one Elizabeth Nicholls, who appears to have "spread base reports and scurrilous inventions" against the Society she was then a member of, so in 1694, at Devonshire House, a minute was passed to disown her. We must not forget the courageous Mary Fisher, who, with two other Friends, travelled about this time to Turkey, *to convert the Sultan*, having felt she was moved of the Spirit to undertake this journey—no easy task in those days. On their arrival they found the Sultan was camping out, and that he was surrounded by soldiers; but, nothing daunted, Mary Fisher went on alone, and either by her determination or the strange nature of her mission, she was received by his Majesty, and told him she had been sent of God. After listening attentively to her long sermon, the Sultan thanked her for coming, and offered her a guard to escort her safely back, but this she declined, and returned as she came. This mission was, I fear, as unsuccessful as that

undertaken by several Friends a few years later, who were "moved" to journey to Rome to convert the Pope. To the worldly mind there may be something very ludicrous in these journeys, and in many other "Quakerish notions," but at any rate there is a certain simplicity and single-heartedness about them which should forbid intolerant judgment, even if they cannot command respect.

Amongst the Englishwomen who have been distinguished for philanthropy, patience under persecution, charm of manner, and intellect and wit, combined with pure and devout hearts, I think we may fairly claim high places for the names of the Quakeresses, Elizabeth Fry, Margaret Fell, Giulielma Penn, Mrs. Opie, and Caroline Fox.

Although for many years Friends' weddings were illegal, and no licence could be obtained, they had a certain formality and order of their own. George Fox ordained that notice must be given beforehand of an intended marriage, so that the matter might be inquired into, and objected to if thought unsuitable, and that the greatest care was to be taken that every birth, marriage, and death were properly entered in the register kept for the purpose at the Meeting-house. He also insisted that no wedding should take place without at least twelve witnesses. It is curious to observe in 1731 that "A Testimony was issued against a Friend for unwarrantable marriage with his deceased wife's sister;" and intermarriage between first cousins or very young people has never been approved by the Society. If a widow desired to marry again, an inquiry was always instituted to see if, beforehand, she had made proper provision for the first husband's children. An instance of this is given when George Fox married the rich widow Fell, as he insisted that all her wealth should be willed to her own children before the wedding. It is only quite lately that the ring has been used at a Quaker wedding, and the only form or ceremony, except the signing of the register, is the declaration made by the bridegroom and bride in turn. The man first stands up and says, "Friends, I take this my friend, A B, to be my wife, promising, through Divine assistance, to be unto her a faithful and loving husband until it shall please the Lord, by death, to separate us." And then the woman repeats the formula, after which silence prevails. To my mind, the words "by death" show the olden Friends would not admit the idea of divorce. A story goes that there was once an old Friend going to be married who was very fond of emphasising his sentences by little additions of his own, and when making the declaration, he finished up, "until it shall please the Lord, *in His infinite mercy*, by death, to separate us."

From its earliest days the Society seems to have been composed of people in every class of life, and the poor were always, as they are now, looked after by the richer members. A very interesting table is given in "London Friends' Meetings," compiled by William Beck and T. F. Ball, stating the social positions of Friend bridegrooms. In this I notice that whereas in or about 1680 there were thirty-nine shoe-



GEORGE FOX PUTS ON HIS HAT IN CHURCH.

makers and tailors, and not one banker, married at Meeting, about 1780 there were seven bankers and only fifteen shoemakers on the register.

Friends have always thought the outward forms of baptism and black mourning unnecessary, and advice was given that funerals should be conducted in a very simple and inexpensive manner; at the same time it was thought desirable that during lifetime some suitable spot for burial should be secured; and when, in 1678, the act for burying in woollen was passed, Friends "doe agree that the compliance therewith is a civil matter, and fit to be done." Twenty years later some women were censured for wearing black after the death of relations, "as too much imitating the world's custom in that they call mourning;" and "dinner in public-houses," "costly treats, giving of gloves," and "sleeping in Meeting," were found to be "hurtful to our profession."

Nowadays the life of a Friend family is very little different from that of any other. The old language is gradually being dropped, and this, I think, is a sincere matter for regret; every other country has its "tutuoiement," and it will be a great pity if ours, though it be only local, is allowed to lapse. We must remember that when "Friends" arose, the "thee" and "thou" were more or less offensive terms, and only generally used to inferiors, but our little Society considered them grammatical and more truthful, and frequently enraged the judges and clergy by using them. I have heard of an excellent, though ungrammatical, old Friend who is reported to have said, "I had rather die as a dog in a ditch than use the plural *verb* 'you.'" As we know, the objection, founded on Scripture, to taking the oath was so strong, that a law has been passed

allowing an affirmation; and in many other ways than this the influence of Friends' principles will leave their mark on history. George Fox objected to saying "good morrow," as he said that *nothing* God made could be bad, and that this salutation implied a doubt; and when Elizabeth Fry held a meeting in the Palace at Berlin before all the royalties there, she began each sentence, "If the princes and princesses will permit," no doubt feeling this to be courteous, without being servile.

In every philanthropic movement, Friends have always been to the fore. As early as 1671 provision was made for "servants out of place;" and six years later, twelve hundred pounds (no mean sum in those days) was subscribed for the widows and orphans of poor Friends. The mentally afflicted were also an object of care, and William Tuke was the first to propose providing homes for them. This idea was considered so absurd at the time, that a clergyman said he thought William Tuke ought to be the first inmate himself, as he must be mad to suggest such a plan.

In these practical days, when we find so little faith of any sort, many of us must deplore the fact that Friends' numbers are not increasing; and though we may differ from many of their views, even the most sceptical will allow that both in past and present times the community at large has been, and often is, benefited by the influence of this Society, and by the example of purity and truth shown by most of its members. Also, although we may not agree with all their tenets, we must admit that there are not many sects who can show so "clean a record" on the pages of history, nor whose leaders have led such blameless and useful lives.