



MILTON'S HOUSE AT CHALFONT ST. GILES.

THE GRAVE OF WILLIAM PENN.

"Around the sacred scene
Waves the tall tree; her buds of emerald green
Sports the gay cistus; o'er the hallowed bier
Blushes the rose-bud; to the opening year
Springs the young lark, the leafy bowers among,
Spreads her light wings, and pours her matin song."

OF all places of pilgrimage in the "old home" dear to Americans none should be held in more reverent esteem than the little meeting-house and graveyard wherein lie the mortal remains of the founder of Pennsylvania. At one time the grave of the great colonizer and philanthropist bade fair to be forgotten; but there is no fear of it becoming so now, since the near approach of the two-hundredth anniversary of the founding of Pennsylvania has put it in the minds of some to honor the occasion by the transference of William Penn's ashes to the land that bears his name, and to the welfare of which he gave so many years of his life. One can understand the sentiment which prompted the desire for the removal, at the same time that one feels that any molestation of the remains that have rested so quietly in the little graveyard of Jordans for over a century and a half would be a desecration. All probably will see the matter in that light when they come to see how thoroughly in keeping with his life and his contemplation of life is his last earthly home.

Jordans is situated near the southern extremity of Buckinghamshire, a county that may be said to be the very heart of England, so deeply at all times has it throbbed with the best of English blood. The names of Hampden and Milton, to mention no others, are imperishably connected therewith. As we journey from Rickmansworth, a quaint little town just over the Hertfordshire border, to Jordans, we are strongly reminded of the great Puritan poet, not only by his house at Chalfont, but by the scenery, which is that of "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso." The two idyls breathe the free air of this charming rural district, which, comparatively speaking, has hardly changed since Milton's time. Chalfont St. Giles is several miles from the nearest railway station and remote from any high-road, is reached by narrow winding ways through a richly wooded and undulating country. Jordans can be reached a little more conveniently from the neighboring village of Chalfont St. Peter, but it is pleasant to take the other route, as Milton's house is then passed toward the upper end of the one long street that constitutes the village. It is a quaint little cottage, and presents much the same appearance now that it did when occupied by the poet, the only alteration being the removal of a pleasant porch, in which Milton was wont to receive his friends.

It was at the time of the great plague that the poet of "Paradise Lost" took up his abode at Chalfont, and it was through the instrumentality of a common friend of his and William Penn's that this retreat was selected. Thomas Ellwood, the Quaker, had made Milton's acquaintance in

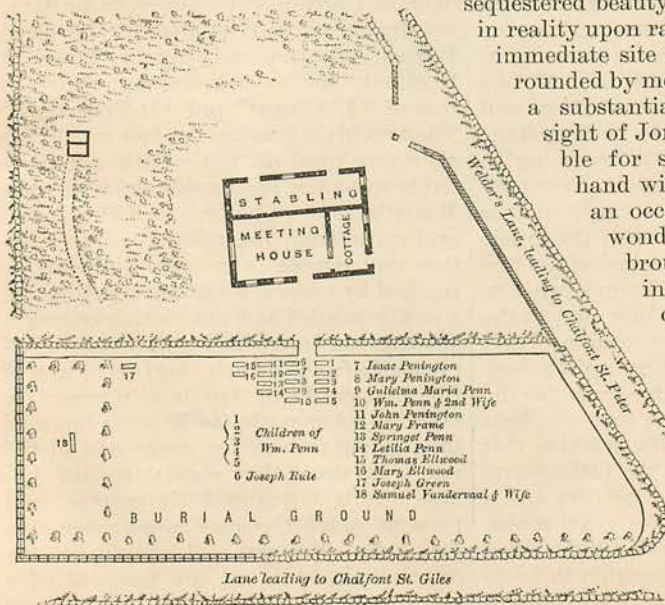


JORDANS MEETING-HOUSE.

London some years before, when hunted out of house and home by the Bucks justices, and read Latin to him in his lodging in Jewin Street. When the plague grew fierce in the city, the blind poet bethought him of his one-time secretary, and asked him to find him some retreat in his neighborhood. Ellwood took this "pretty box" for him; and it was here that he suggested to him the idea of "Paradise Regained." Milton had handed him the manuscript of "Paradise Lost" to pass his judgment on. "I pleasantly said to him," Ellwood relates in his *Life*, "'Thou hast said much here of Paradise lost, but what hast thou to say of Paradise found?' He made me no answer, but sat some time in muse; then broke off that discourse and fell upon another subject. After the sickness was over, and the city well cleansed, he returned thither; and when afterward I went to wait on him there, he showed me his second poem, called 'Paradise Regained,' and in a pleasant tone said to me, 'This is owing to you, for you put it into my head by the question you put to me at Chalfont, which before I had not thought of.'"

A pleasant walk of about two miles from Chalfont St. Giles brings us to Jordans meeting-house. It is difficult to imagine the sequestered beauty of this spot. It stands in reality upon rather high ground, but its immediate site is in a wooded dell surrounded by meadows. Only one house, a substantial farmstead, is within sight of Jordans; and one may ramble for some distance on either hand without passing more than an occasional habitation. One wonders what could have brought a place of worship in so solitary a spot, until one remembers two facts

—first, that at the time Jordans was erected the rural districts of England were more populous than at present; and secondly, that the church rates had not yet succeeded in driving the majority of Friends to



PLAN OF MEETING-HOUSE AND BURIAL-GROUND.

the towns. Moreover, in those days, to the earnestly religious, a tramp of a few miles to a place of worship was as nothing compared with greater security from interruption by the "officers of peace and justice," which was not of infrequent occurrence.

Jordans meeting-house itself is a plain brick building, with tiled roof and lattice windows. There is a cottage attached

font St. Peter respectively, as indicated by the plan. Meeting-house and burial-ground are embosomed amid magnificent limes and beeches, which, when the writer paid his last visit to the spot, were in their richest summer foliage, and vocal with the songs of birds. On entering by the little wicket into the grave-yard, the eye at once lights upon two sets of graves, one on the right hand and the other on the



WILLIAM PENN'S GRAVE.

containing three rooms—a ground-floor and two chambers. The principal chamber was evidently used in former days as a gallery at times of overcrowded meetings, as it communicates with the meeting-room by means of shutters, and there the women Friends now hold their meetings for business. Behind, but under the same roof, is capacious stabling, capable of accommodating from eighteen to twenty horses. This part of the premises is very essential, as when it happens that a meeting takes place here, which rarely occurs more than once or twice a year, Friends come long distances out of the neighboring counties to attend, and the nearest railway station is nine miles away.

In front of the meeting-house, and divided from it by a low fence and wicket, is the "dead garth," an oblong piece of ground, bounded on two sides by the lanes leading to Chalfont St. Giles and Chal-

left. The group on the right consists of eleven graves, arranged in three rows, there being five in the first row, four in the second, and two in the third. The group on the left, with one head-stone, consists of five graves, occupied by five children of William Penn.

The grave farthest from the wicket in the first row of graves on the right is that of Penn and his second wife. It bears the inscription, "William Penn, 1718, and Hannah Penn, 1726." The grave next this is that of Gulielma Maria Penn, his first wife, who died in 1689, while the next two are occupied by the remains of her mother and step-father respectively. In the second row are the graves of two other of Penn's children, those of Letitia and Springett Penn. In the third row is that of Thomas Ellwood, the simple-hearted man who read to Milton when blindness had befallen him; also that of his wife.

For periods of from one to two centuries all these graves were without memorials, as are still many others in this out-of-the-way burial-ground. A few years ago it might have been said with entire truth, in the words of Wordsworth:

"In our church-yard
Is neither epitaph nor monument,
Tombstone nor grave; only the turf we tread,
And a few natural graves."

A few graves and flower-grown hillocks within a narrow inclosure fronting a plain cottage-like structure, over which the trees swayed and the birds sang in their season: that was all there was to mark the last earthly resting-place of one of the world's noblest heroes, surrounded by those he loved. The simple headstones they now bear were erected some seventeen or eighteen years ago by those who have the custody of the little meeting-house and its attached burial-ground. The records of the district meeting contain the minute that in July, 1862, a committee was appointed "to place grave-stones over such of the graves at Jordans the identity of which had been ascertained." The committee reported in June, 1863, that this had been done.

The graves of the Penns, Peningtons, and Ellwoods are fitly placed close together: all formed one community when living, rejoicing and suffering in common. Isaac Penington lived at the Grange, in the neighboring parish of Chalfont St. Peter. He became the second husband of Lady Springett, the mother of Penn's first wife, and was one of the intimate friends of Milton. Gulielma Maria Springett, the future wife of Penn, is described as being a most accomplished woman, "as good as she was beautiful, and as beautiful as good." The friends who knew her best were they who testified to her worth. Ellwood, who had known her from a child, and who early fell in love with her, though without daring to confess his affection lest he should be rejected, speaks of her "as wanting nothing to render her completely comely both in outward person and in the endowments of her mind, which were every way extraordinary." Again he speaks of "being sensible of the real and innate worth and virtue which adorned this excellent dame."

But we have a still higher testimony in her favor from the pen of her husband, written after death. "She quietly expired in my arms, her head upon my bo-

som, with a sensible and devout resignation of her soul to Almighty God. I hope I may say she was a public as well as a private loss, for she was not only an excellent wife and mother, but an entire and constant friend, of a more than common capacity, and great modesty and humility, yet most unequal and undaunted in danger, religious as well as ingenious, without affectation; an easy mistress and a good neighbor, especially to the poor; neither lavish nor penurious, but an example of industry as well as of other virtues: therefore our great loss, though her own eternal gain."

It was his acquaintance with this lady that occasioned Penn's almost life-long connection with Buckinghamshire. Although the village of Penn, about eight miles from Jordans, is said to have derived its name from his ancestors, many successive generations having dwelt there, while several surrounding places, as Penn Bury, Penn Street, Penn Ho, etc., are supposed to furnish traces of several branches of the family, Penn himself is believed to have visited this locality first in the year 1670, when he was about twenty-six years of age. The express purpose of this visit was merely to spend a short time with his friend Isaac Penington, but the results were of lasting importance, for it was then he was introduced to Guli Springett, the step-daughter of his friend. In December, 1671, the following notice appears in the monthly meeting books: "William Penn, of Walthamstow, in y^e county of Essex, and Gulielma Maria Springett, of Tilers End Green, in the parish of Penn, in the county of Bucks, proposed their intention of taking each other in marriage. Whereupon it was referred to Thomas Zachary and Thomas Ellwood to enquire into the clearness of these proceedings, and to give an account to the next meeting." And in January, 1672, we find that "the consent and approbation of Friends was obtained thereto."

Thus both by pedigree and marriage William Penn was intimately connected with the neighborhood of Jordans, and doubtless it was on this account that he selected it as his burial-place. Although for some time he had lived at Rickmansworth, in a house which is yet in existence, he was at the time of his death, which occurred on the 30th of July, 1718, residing at Ruscombe, in Berks, whence his body was conveyed to Jordans, where,

in the presence of a large meeting of Friends, it was laid, in solemn silence, in the grave.

In a memorandum found among the papers of a former vicar of Penn named Anderson, and headed, "Some particulars relative to Jordans burial-ground, from my old school-fellow Adey Bellamy, and

From the years 1727 to 1799 monthly meetings were held at Jordans, after which they were altogether discontinued, as the ordinary meetings for worship appear to have been some years previously. But from the general interest taken in the spot, and the unanimous desire which was felt once more to renew former asso-



WILLIAM PENN'S HOUSE AT RICKMANSWORTH.

from Prince Butterfield, an old man who attends the meeting," we find that, contrary to the rest, William Penn's head lies to the south, and the remains of his wife, Hannah Callowhill, are laid upon his; also "that Prince Butterfield related that he saw William Penn's leaden coffin when the grave was opened to bury his second wife."

The estate and meeting-house of Jordans belong to the Friends of Upper Side Monthly Meeting of the county of Bucks. The deeds belonging to the estate show that in the year 1671 a portion of land was "sold by William Russell to Thomas Ellwood and others, for the use of Friends, commonly called Quakers." By referring to the Friends' register we find that this land was at once appropriated for a burying-ground, the first notice of a funeral at Jordans being in the year in which this purchase was made. The next conveyance is dated the 14th of December, 1688, and is for land and meeting-house.

ciations, it was decided in the year 1851 that a monthly meeting should be held there on the first Thursday of June every year, and this arrangement is still kept up. With the exception of an occasional special meeting, this annual gathering is the only time when the old meeting-house so intimately associated with the founder of Pennsylvania is used for public purposes. Curiously enough, the last meeting fell just about the time the rumor had got into the English newspapers that the Legislature of Pennsylvania had originated a project to purchase the grave of William Penn, and transfer his remains to Philadelphia; and although at that time no proposition of the kind had reached the trustees of the estate, the subject was discussed by the Friends present (and the number was so great that the meeting-house would not hold them), with the result that it was unanimously decided that nothing should induce the custodians of the place to allow the grave to be molested.