

The Official Records of the Society of Friends.

I have been interested in reading a note in the last issue of the "Transactions of the B.H.S.", respecting the publication of the "Minutes of the General Assembly of the General Baptist Churches in England," 1654-1728. As, in all probability, the readers of the "Transactions" do not know of the existence of similar Minutes connected with the Society of Friends, I venture to send a brief account of these.

Quakerism, as a religious organization, arose about the middle of the seventeenth century. Meetings for the transaction of Church business, such as the care of the poor, supply of the needs of travelling preachers, etc., were early instituted, were at first held in different parts of the county (as e.g. at Swannington, 1654; in Bedfordshire, 1658; at Skipton, 1660, see "The Journal of George Fox," and "Journal of the Friends Historical Society," vol. ii. pp. 56-63). The official records of some of these Meetings are still extant.

After 1660, probably in 1661, the Governing body of the Friends in Great Britain, known as "London Yearly Meeting," met at Devonshire House, London, and from 1688 to the present time this Meeting has been held annually without a break. The place of Meeting has been in London with the exception of the years 1905 and 1908, when the Y.M. assembled in Leeds and Birmingham respectively.

The Minutes of the Y.M. are continuous from 1672 and are contained in thirty-one folio volumes, totalling over 16,700 pages of manuscript, and preserved in one of the strong rooms at Devonshire House. These Minutes deal with a great variety of subjects and record correspondence with Friends in all parts of the world. They preserve the names of many Friends present.

There are also in existence in London and many parts of the country other long runs of Minutes of subordinate Meetings. The longest known to me is that of "Southwark Monthly Meeting," which extends in unbroken succession from 1666, a period of two hundred and forty three years.

There has never been any attempt to print this mass of historical material, or even an abstract of it.

Some thousands of original letters are also preserved at Devonshire House, many of them written during the early years of Quaker history.

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