

LIV.

THE FRIENDS IN NEW YORK.

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THE SECT.

THE sect usually called Quakers are known to each other as Friends. They are not numerous, and cannot well be. The large portion of them are wealthy, and live in fine style, surrounded with all the appliances that belong to cultivated life. Their children enjoy every advantage of education and culture that can be secured. They mingle with the world, catch its customs, and withdraw gradually from the plain and simple manners of their parents, wear the gay attire of fashionable life, and when they settle down, take the position which their wealth and culture presents. It is a common thing in New York for the children of wealthy Friends to leave the plain and unostentatious worship in which they have been trained, and attend the imposing services of some liturgical church. The sect in New York ranks among our best and most wealthy citizens. On 'change they are foremost among the solid merchants of New York. They are eminent in works of charity and humanity. The up-town

movement, which has driven from the lower part of the city so many houses of worship, has not spared the Friends. Their fine down-town meeting-houses have been abandoned to gas companies, public schools, livery stables, places of amusement, and to trade.

A QUAKER MEETING-HOUSE.

These buildings are among the institutions of the city, and have marked peculiarities. The Friends do not go to church, but to meeting. Their places of assembly are called, not churches, but meeting-houses. Such a building looks like an oasis in a desert. It stands in the centre of a plot of ground made up of several lots. The grass is green, and is kept in the neatest manner. The house is of brick, very large, and barn-like in its appearance. Amid merchandise, the confusion and turmoil of city traffic, it stands in the quiet of its own position, guarded by the substantial wall that surrounds the lot, indicating repose and thrift. Nothing can be plainer than the inside of the meeting-house. No part is painted except the front of the gallery. The seats are mere benches, scoured to a snowy whiteness. The men and women sit apart, and the house is so arranged that the two parts can be closed for the transaction of business if necessary. When business is transacted, the women and the men hold separate sessions. The old custom of seating people according to rank and age is to be found in the meeting-house of Friends. The greatest deference is paid to age and infirmity. No rudeness, or impertinence, or forwardness on the part of children is allowed. The respect and deference paid to their superiors during public

service, by the younger portion of the congregation, are very marked. The youth have seats assigned them in the gallery, which they occupy. In the place where in modern churches the pulpit stands, in the Friends' meeting-house there is reared a gallery for the elders. These "chief seats" in the assembly are filled by the rulers of the meeting. Over their heads is a broad canopy not unlike a New England sounding-board.

SABBATH SERVICE.

The Friends are not strict Sabbatarians. They take literally the command of the Apostle,—“Let no man, therefore, judge you in respect to a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days.” The first day of the week is not unobserved, but other days are as sacred. Meeting is held on our Lord's Day, and great interest clusters around the house when the hour of service arrives. Men pass into the plain structure whose garb gives small indication that they are of this peculiar people. Their names are well known among merchant princes and among the professions. Carriages line the sidewalks, fine turnouts drive up to the door with footman and coachman in livery. The old line of Friends wear the costume of the last century. Many compromise the matters in dress so that it is difficult to tell whether they belong to the meeting or to the world. The larger part of the meeting, however, are dressed in modern style, and conform to the fashions quite sharply. Some of the ladies who on First Day are plainly dressed, and yet with great elegance, are leaders of fashion at Saratoga and Newport. No one out-dresses them in style or ornament

at the opera. They manage the matter by having two styles of dresses — one for the world, the other for devotion.

THE PREACHING.

In a fashionable locality up town can be found the leading Friends' meeting-house of New York with its stone front. I attended service one Sunday in that place. The exercises commenced promptly at half past ten, by a general silence that lasted half an hour. This was broken by an old man of ninety, who made an address on the words, “That thought upon His name.” Silence followed the address for thirty minutes. An English preacher then spoke on the “wedge of gold and the Babylonish garment.” He drew a sad picture of the defection and worldliness of the people whom he addressed. He especially mourned the defection of the younger members of the society, who, seduced by the pomp and show of other services, found in these the attractive wedge of gold and the fascinating garment of Babylon. His voice was thin; he paused long after each sentence; he grasped the rail with both hands with earnest energy, and was followed by silence so long that I thought it would not again be broken. The wife of the English speaker at length arose, and with great deliberation divested herself of bonnet and shawl, and commenced speaking. Her address was composed of passages of Scripture most beautifully joined together. Her utterance was very distinct, her cadence peculiar, and her voice so sweet that it rings in the ear like the melody of a beautiful song. The sentiments uttered and the manner and spirit of the meeting would have been regarded as evangelical anywhere. The

address of the lady was followed by a longer pause. Many were employing the moments in devotion. But I saw the usual number of sleepers that adorn the assemblies of other sects. The leaders at length arose, and shook hands with each other. This was the signal for a general rising, and the audience dispersed.

YEARLY MEETING.

This annual convocation of Friends is very interesting, even to "the world's people," as the Friends call outsiders. Most of the business is private. But there are daily public meetings to which all are invited. Not far from two thousand Friends come to this city to hold the Yearly Meeting. Prominent men from all portions of our country and from Europe attend as representatives. Old men are not at a discount among the Friends. It is customary in other sects to consider a minister acceptable according to his youth. When all is got out of him that can be got, and a minister is old, he is turned aside for a younger man. Among the Friends, age is a passport to the highest honors and the most respectful attentions. When an old man comes into a meeting, young men meet him at the door and escort him to the chief seats. When an aged woman comes in, the young women arise and lead her to a comfortable place, and put cushions under her feet. This respect for age is patriarchal. It recalls the plains of Mamre and the fields of Boaz, and might safely be imitated by other denominations. In the Yearly Meeting the women have their leaders, as do the men. They hold their own business meetings, and admit and cut off members. Except in some matters that demand

the approval of the other house, they are as independent as if there was not a man in the land. Like other denominations, the Friends are broken up into parties and cliques. Radicals disturb the peace of this quiet fold; conservatism, refusing to stir, puts on the brakes. They know the divisions of the Old School and the New. Those who believe in, and those who deny the divinity of the Savior, bear the name of Friends. In common with all devout people, they mourn the degeneracy of these days, and sigh for the better times in which their fathers lived. The custom of cutting off those who marry outside of the Meeting takes from the sect the life blood by which it is to be nourished, and carries its strength to other churches.