

**HISTORY OF THE RELIGIOUS
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS, CALLED
BY SOME THE FREE QUAKERS,
IN THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA**

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History of the Religious Society of Friends, Called by Some the Free Quakers, in the City of Philadelphia by Charles Wetherill

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CHARLES WETHERILL

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BY
CHARLES (WETHERILL.)

1894.

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PREFACE.

On the Southwest corner of Fifth and Arch Streets in the City of Philadelphia, there stands a small substantially built brick Meeting House, which has for many years been occupied by the Apprentices' Library Company. The gable end of the building fronts on Arch Street, and has built into it a marble tablet bearing this inscription:—

“By General Subscription,
For the Free Quakers, erected,
In the year of our Lord, 1783,
Of the Empire 8.”

Nearly every building of the old City has, since this date, been torn down and replaced by edifices suited to the changing needs of commerce; but this house stands, the memorial of a past age, and is the only monument now left of the heroism of certain members of the Religious Society of Friends, in the stormy time of the Revolutionary War.

The story is now nearly forgotten, and if not recorded may perhaps soon be lost entirely, and it is for the purpose of preventing this; and to answer questions which the author of these notes has often been asked as to the origin of the Free Quakers, that he now attempts to revive from the torn and faded records of the old times, the history of that Society.

C. WETHERILL.

March 8, 1894.

I. Introductory—Colonial Period.

In considering the history of any Society, it is of the first importance to note its origin, and if it is a branch, or formed out of an older Society; then the antecedent history of the parent organization should be examined for that purpose.

As the Free Quakers were originally Orthodox Friends, their history will not be complete without some consideration of the nature of the Quakers and their peculiarities of faith and practice, for before the Revolutionary War the societies were identical. This is now briefly to be done, at the risk of repeating what has been better said before.

The organized followers of the religious teachings of George Fox called themselves "Friends," for they professed themselves to be friends, not merely of each other, but of all mankind. Their more common appellation of "Quakers" was applied to them in derision by their enemies.

Their belief was based upon this idea :—

They conceived it to be their duty strictly to follow the Divine commands, as contained in the Bible, according to their understanding thereof, and from this they made the further deduction that where God's command and human law seemed to them to be in conflict, they obeyed what seemed to them to be the Divine command, and willingly suffered the consequences, whatever they might be. They understood the Bible to contain an order to all men "to swear not at all," from which they inferred not only that

profane swearing was forbidden, but also that the oath taken by witnesses and jurors in judicial proceedings is equally immoral and wrong.

They read in Holy Writ that "all men are equal in the sight of God," and they therefore spoke of and addressed men of all ranks by name and not by title, and refused to show any mark of respect to any earthly magistrate.

They read the Divine command, "so far as possible to live at peace with all men," and interpreted this to mean a total prohibition of all war or strife, offensive or defensive, and they thereupon refused to serve in the army, or to make or trade in any munitions of war, or even to pay military taxes laid upon them, with their fellow subjects, by lawful authority.

They read that the Apostles "left all they had to follow the Lord," and were mostly poor and unlettered men, enlightened directly by the Spirit of God. They thereupon concluded to lead lives of extreme simplicity, and separate themselves from the vain follies of the world, and that the Gospel ought to be taught freely to all men, and that not by a priesthood supported by the government, or separated from the ordinary avocations of mankind, but by any person who felt impelled by the working of the Spirit within him to bear his testimony; also for this reason they refused to pay all tithes or taxes levied for the support of the lawfully established Church of England. Another consequence of their objection to a priesthood or ministry was, that, as there was no one to officially conduct or solemnize marriages among them, the marriage ceremony of the Quakers is a solemn contract signed and entered into by the parties themselves in the presence of witnesses, without the intervention of any priest or magistrate.