

# **FAMILY RECORDS**

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Family Records by Charlotte Sturge

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**CHARLOTTE STURGE**

**FAMILY  
RECORDS**



# FAMILY RECORDS.

BY

CHARLOTTE STURGE,

DAUGHTER OF THE LATE

CHARLES ALLEN,

OF

COGGESHALL, ESSEX.

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*[For Private Circulation only.]*

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## P R E F A C E.

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“ That whole day they spent among the portraits and the family pictures, \* \* and learned the romance of a great house whose history has been preserved. It makes one weep to think how our middle-class people neglect their genealogies, so that they know nothing of their own people, and have no pride, and learn no lessons from the past. Cannot something be done, my friends? Can we not write the annals of our own generation, each for his own family, so that whatever the fate of our children and grandchildren, they, too, may feel that they have ancestors who lived, and loved, and hoped, and made a little success, perhaps, and died, and were forgotten, as they, too, in their turn, shall die? ”

BESANT AND RICE.

## FAMILY RECORDS.

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**M**UCH interesting information in families is constantly lost through the neglect of their members to commit to writing the personal details connected with their private history. These would, in many cases, be very useful to those who come after, and in most would be instructive or amusing. There is scarcely an individual of middle or mature age who knows not of some history, or some anecdote connected with the early life of himself or his predecessors, which would be of interest to the generation then rising on the scene. As he becomes older, and one by one his elders have passed away, he is at last the only person who can recall these early family details, and at his death they are entirely lost ; often hardly even a tradition remains of what may be well worthy of record to the immediate descendants. In this way it comes to pass that, in most families, many of the branches can barely tell the names of their own grandparents, and if they know even as much as that, they have no idea what manner of people they were from whom they have descended ; their manners, their dispositions, their personal appearance, the hereditary tendencies which have been transmitted, are a perfect blank.

We cannot but think that this is a great disadvantage; for though few would be worthy of a published memoir, yet in every family it would surely be well to have some general private history of the ancestral line. It would often elucidate much that is strange, and show the source from which hereditary peculiarity has arisen. Abilities of a certain order, or defects of some special kind, would be clearly traced to ancestors who had gone before, whether direct or collateral; and the progress of disease, or its unexpected appearance in some distant member, would be accounted for if the antecedent history of the family could be known. So, partly that it may possibly be useful, and partly that it may be interesting, I propose to gather together a few of the details with which I happen to be acquainted, respecting the former history of my family. And as my own name was originally Allen, I will commence with that branch.

Settled at Thorpe Salvin, in Yorkshire, but not a native of that place, was William Allen, my Ancestor in the fifth degree, and from him came my Great Grandfather, William Allen, who was born on 11th February, 1730. He came to London from Thorpe Salvin, when quite a young man, and settled there in business. I know nothing of the way in which he at last became a brewer in the East End of London, nor how he became acquainted with the Society of Friends, but he must have joined it soon after his settlement in London. A sister, named Elizabeth, must have also come about the same time, for she lived with him and kept his house, and also became a Quaker, afterwards marrying a Friend named Prior. Of this sister a not very pleasing story is related, showing that she must have been of a severe and arbitrary disposition.

After he was settled in business, William Allen was married



to Ann Birkead, my Great Grandmother, 12th October, 1752, and when the time came for him to present his credentials before his Monthly Meeting, preliminary to their marriage, he wrote to his parents to obtain their formal consent, in accordance with the rules of our Society in that respect. To his surprise and annoyance no reply reached him, and day after day went over without his having the desired consent. At last he wrote to his father again, and in due time received a letter from his parents stating that they had sent him the necessary document when he first applied for it. On hearing this he enquired of his sister whether she knew anything about it, when she reluctantly drew from her pocket the missing paper. The crafty woman had quietly suppressed it, in displeasure at his marrying at all and so displacing her as his housekeeper.

William Allen's married life was not of long continuance, for his wife died in 1759, leaving three children, Priscilla, Ann, and John. He retired from business after realizing some property, and lived at Ware, in Hertfordshire. He was a much esteemed minister among Friends, and died on the 15th October, 1808, at the age of 79, and was buried at Ware. It is related of him that, even at that age, he had never lost a tooth, a testimony to the good health he must have enjoyed and the regular life he must have led.

A singular circumstance occurred at the time of his death, which happened suddenly in the night, he having retired to rest apparently as well as usual, and being found dead in bed in the morning. About five miles from where he lived, an old and intimate friend resided, named Special West, also a minister well known at the time among Friends. In the middle of the night Special West awoke his wife and said to her, "My dear! William Allen is dead." She

asked him how he could possibly know that? To which he replied, "I saw him crowned." She naturally expressed some doubt of his knowledge of the fact, but he persisted in the truth of his assertion, and so fully did he believe in his impression that, after having breakfasted the next morning, he set off to walk to Ware to enquire after his friend. Arrived midway, he met a young man on horseback, who on seeing him, at once pulled up and said, "I was riding over to thy house, Special West." "Yes," said the latter, "I know what thou art coming for. Thou art coming to tell me that thy grandfather is dead." In extreme surprise, William Miller replied, "How could'st thou possibly know that? for we have only just discovered it ourselves; Martha (the servant) found him dead in bed this morning, and he was quite well when he went to his room last night." "Oh," said Special West, "I saw him crowned," and then related what had passed in the middle of the night. There is no doubt of the accuracy of this story, which I give without comment.

Before I leave the account of my Grandfather, I will relate an anecdote of a favourite parrot which they had. He was very fond of imitating the men who, at that time, frequented the streets, crying out "Old clothes—Old clothes," and on a certain Sunday he began his usual cry; when Martha said to him "Polly must not call 'Old clothes' on Sunday." The creature immediately changed his note and said "Old rags,"—to the great amusement of those present.

William Allen's daughter Ann married a Friend named Miller, in 1777, but soon died, leaving one son and one daughter, William and Esther. William married Fanny Vaux, a woman of great mental power, by whom he had several children, and their eldest son, William Allen Miller,

became M.D., F.R.S., and Professor of Chemistry at King's College, London, and in that science attained to great eminence. He died suddenly after attending the Meeting of the British Association in 1869, aged 52. Esther married Robert Jermyn and left a son, Robert, and a daughter, Emily.

Priscilla, William Allen's eldest daughter, married William Knight of Chelmsford, in 1782, and became the mother of seven children, all of whom died childless. She was a very singular woman, combining unusual strength of mind with great eccentricity of character, of which she gave many proofs. I remember seeing her, when a child, and was astonished at her odd appearance. She was then a widow and more than 70 years of age, with a very plain face, rendered more peculiar by straggling, ill-kept, grey hair, and patches of black plaister on her cheeks. The latter were fixed under her eyes in order to counteract a weakness of the muscles of her under eyelids and prevent them from closing up over the eyes. She wore a Quaker muslin cap not too carefully put on, and a large wrapping gown of some stuff material, girt round the waist with a cord and reaching to her feet. She lived with a son and daughter in a rustic cottage home in the outskirts of Chelmsford, and when my father and mother, with one or two of us, pulled up to call on her, as we drove past, she came to the front door and stood in the porch, which was covered with climbing plants; and as the leafy trellis work closed round her like the framework of a picture, she looked, to my childish eyes, like a hermit of the middle ages emerging from his cell.

I have said that Priscilla Knight was a clever woman but very eccentric. It was doubtless a hereditary tendency, for we have seen it exemplified in her aunt, when suppressing her brother's letter, and it also appeared more or less in her