

MEETING HOUSES OF FRIENDS IN THE SOUTHERN AND FRONTIER STATES OF AMERICA.

In the course of my journey in America I was often grieved at the condition of the meeting houses of Friends, especially in the Southern and Frontier States. Many are deplorably out of repair; and in not a few cases where there is quite a community of our people they have no house of their own. On making careful enquiry as to the meeting houses in North Carolina Yearly Meeting, I ascertained that there are twelve places where new houses are much needed; and that in four others, where houses have been commenced, the necessary funds to complete them have not been raised. In the Southern Quarterly Meeting, where there are ten meetings, Friends own but two houses that are in creditable condition; and in another Monthly Meeting the three houses are all quite discreditable.

In Kansas the need is as great, or greater. In Walnut Creek Quarterly Meeting, on the northern line of the State, Friends are in some cases meeting in "dug-outs," earth-caves, such as they also have for dwellings. There are six meetings in this Quarter that need helping to better houses; and the number of cases in the newly-settled districts in the centre of the State is about as large.

Let it not be thought that American Friends are unmindful of their duty: they have done a great deal; but they have claims upon them in this direction to which we in England have no parallel. Since 1850 thirty-one Quarterly Meetings, and about two hundred particular meetings, have been established west of the Alleghanies; and as the Quarterly Meeting houses would seldom be adequate if they would not seat four hundred persons, and the others require an average capacity for one hundred and fifty, it will be seen that new meeting houses are a serious tax on our brethren across the water, and one that falls, be it remembered, the most heavily on new settlers, who seldom have much money at command. The sacrifices made are often great. I know an aged Friend, in North Carolina, whose estate was estimated at only £120, who gave £20, or a sixth of his whole property, towards the new meeting house that was required. At Indiana Yearly Meeting, last year, the reason given for the absence of one representative was that he had given so largely towards the new meeting house in his neighbourhood that he could not afford to come. North Carolina Yearly Meeting has built sixteen new meeting houses since the war,—an average of one a year.

Through the kindness of a few Friends I have lately sent help in two specially pressing instances, in one of which the Friends having no money have sowed thirty acres of wheat, which has been consecrated to God, and they are asking Him to bless

the crop, so that enough may be realised to provide them a house to worship in. While this remittance was on its way the tidings reached me that the meeting house for the coloured Friends at Hickory Ridge, near Helena, Arkansas, has been shattered by a tornado, and it is out of the question to think that the poor people there can replace it without help.

A fund applicable to such cases would, if wisely administered, be a great blessing, and I am glad to know that the Baltimore Association, which has always so satisfactorily dispensed whatever means have been entrusted to it, is willing to undertake the service. Is it too much to ask Friends of London and Dublin Yearly Meetings to raise a "Meeting House Fund" of at least £1000, to be applied, as far as practicable, under the following conditions:—That the application of the fund be distributed over a period of five years. That after the payment of the first £200 no further remittance shall be made until American Friends have contributed an equal sum, and so with every subsequent instalment. That no money shall be paid on any meeting house till information is received that it is already roofed and underpinned, and that the contributions shall not, as a rule, exceed one-fourth the whole value of the house, the remainder being raised by the Friends of the Meeting.

The amount suggested may seem small for the work proposed to be done; but in districts where wood is cheap, where the Friends are ready to give much manual labour, and where great simplicity characterises all the arrangements of the community, a little money goes a long way.

The need is not altogether confined to Kansas and Carolina; there are other places somewhat similarly circumstanced, in which the interests of our Society are suffering, because the meeting houses are neither conveniently situated, nor respectable in their appearance, nor comfortable to sit in; and the knowledge that there is a fund available for their help will, I believe, stimulate Friends to exert themselves where otherwise they might think it hopeless to make the attempt.

STANLEY PUMPHREY.

P.S. I have submitted the above statement to some prominent members in each of the American Yearly Meetings, from many of whom I have already received replies expressing grateful and hearty approval. I have no doubt that most, if not all, will do what they can to promote the object. Their only hesitation seems to be as to asking the help of English Friends, when they have already done so much in aid of American objects, and have so many interests of their own to support.

N.B. Subscriptions may be paid either to STANLEY PUMPHREY, Worcester, or to CHARLES HOYLAND, 12, Bishopsgate Street Without, London, E.C.