

THE FRENCH EMIGRANT SCHOOL.

THE following particulars of this school, in addition to the description given by Sir Philip Rose, at the meeting of the Society (see page 285), will be read with interest.

In the earlier part of 1796 Edmund Burke found active occupation in founding a school for the destitute children of emigrants who had perished by the guillotine or the sword of the revolution. With the view of being under his immediate superintendence, the house of the late General Haviland, at Penn, was selected for that purpose. It was already the property of Government, having been leased in 1794 from the person to whom it had been sold by the devisees of the deceased, as a retreat for a few of the superior, but houseless, French clergy, a design which, from unexpected obstacles, did not take effect. Being still in charge of the barrack department, it was applied for by the Marquis of Buckingham and others, through the representations of Burke. Mr. Pitt gave his assent, with an annual allowance of £600 per annum. The trustees were, in addition to the Marquis and Mr. Burke, the Duke of Portland, the Lord Chancellor, Mr. Windham, and Dr. Walker King. The Abbé Maraine formed the head of the establishment, aided by the learned and esteemed Abbé Chevalier. A few notes on this subject were exchanged between Mr. Pitt, the Marquis, and Mr. Burke.

An antiquarian correspondent connected with this institution as treasurer after the death of the original founder, having politely communicated to me a few memoranda concerning it, they cannot perhaps be better given than in his own words.

“In April, 1796, the emigrant school was opened, and Mr. Burke, for the remainder of his life, watched over the institution with the solicitude, not merely of a friend, but of a father. He visited it frequently, sometimes daily, being about three miles distant from his house, and often supplied the table of masters and scholars from his own. His smiles might be said to have gladdened the hearts of the exiles; I have witnessed many interesting scenes there of that nature; they were doomed, alas! too soon to lose their kind protector. At the annual distribution of prizes, the senior scholar delivered a Latin oration in the presence of a large assembly of nobility and gentry, in the great hall, in which Mr. Burke was always alluded to as their parent and friend. He assigned to these youths a blue uniform, wearing in their hats a white cockade, inscribed ‘Vive le Roi:’ those who had lost their fathers had it placed on a bloody label; those who had lost uncles, on a black one. The Marquis of Buckingham made them a present of a small brass cannon, and a pair of colours, which were displayed on public days as a source of youthful pride by those descendants of suffering loyalty. After the death of Mr. Burke, I was appointed treasurer, and received from the Lords of the Treasury fifty pounds per month for the support of the establishment. Upon the restoration of legitimate monarchy in France in 1814, the money was remitted thence, until the dissolution of the institution, on the 1st of August 1820, when on the departure of the superior and the pupils, the colours were presented to me as a token of remembrance, and I retain them with satisfaction, from the interesting associations they recall. Many of the youths educated in this college, so humanely founded through the influence and under the auspices of Mr. Burke, at present (1825) occupy important stations in various parts of the dominions of the King of France, and for their success in life they ought ever to regard with sentiments of gratitude and veneration the memory of that great and good man.”*

* He thus describes the house: “Penn, in Buckinghamshire, to which Mr. Burke frequently resorted as the friend of General Haviland, and latterly as patron of the emigrant school, lies about three miles north-west of Beaconsfield. Tyler’s Green House, the residence of General

The superintendence of this school became a source of occupation and amusement, to divert occasional gloom, or as a relaxation from heavier labours. The interest which Burke took in its success and continuance may be judged by the earnest manner in which he bequeaths it in his will to the protection of the noble persons joined in the trust, while the wish is expressed that it may be placed under the immediate care of Dr. Walker King and Dr. Lawrence. These gentlemen, as his personal friends, and from their greater acquaintance with the details, he thought would take more interest than strangers in securing stability to an institution to which he had given existence.

The above are extracts from the "Life of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke," by James Prior, Esq., F.S.A. ; and practically the same, but a less detailed, account is given in "Life and Times of Edmund Burke," by Thomas Macknight, pp. 657-8-9-60-61, vol. iii.

See also "Correspondence of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke," edited by Charles William, Earl Fitzwilliam, pp. 331-3-7, 345-6-50-54, 378 of vol. iv.

Haviland, was formerly the property and residence of the Bakers, ancestors of the Earl of Sheffield, of Sheffield Place, County of Sussex. It is now no more ; 'nought could relieve the tottering mansion from its fall.' In 1822 it was sold by auction in lots, of course pulled down and carried away, so that scarcely a vestige now remains to mark the spot where senators were wont to converse, and wit, whim, and eloquence to flow in no ordinary current amid the social circle formed by the Burkes. Previous to the destruction, I had a correct drawing made of the front, which I have placed among my illustrations of the County of Bucks.

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However incredible it may appear, it is vouched as fact by persons of respectability in the neighbourhood, that the cannonading at the reduction of Valenciennes in 1793, was distinctly heard by the inhabitants of Penn. This, no doubt, will be laughed at by many as utterly beyond belief, but there are many authentic instances on record of the distance to which sound occasionally travels, depending, no doubt, on a peculiar state of the atmosphere at the time ; it is understood, beyond question, that the cannonading on that occasion was heard at Dover. During the late war, the firing of cannon when ships were engaged at sea, during the night, has likewise been distinguished at Penn ; the time has been frequently noted, and the fact shortly afterwards ascertained from the public papers."
