

The Convincement of John Coughen 1663

THE following two letters were taken from a copy of the originals (presumably), preserved in **D**, written on one sheet in the handwriting of Thomas Ellwood. The sheet of MS. was presented by Thomas Thompson, of Liverpool, to Thomas Mounsey, of Sunderland, in 1846. The presentation is referred to in a letter from Thomas Mounsey to his uncle, Thomas Robson, dated 10 vi. 1846. The writer mentions the account of Coughen in Croese's *History* (**D**, J. J. Green Collection).

I

Anthony Sparrow¹

These are to acquaint thee y^t y^e Lord of infinit mercy hath affected & perswaded my heart to own y^e glorious truth of God witnessed out by those contemned Christians w^{ch} in scorn are called Quakers; insomuch thou canst not expect y^t J should any longer officiate at Bury. J have been out of town ever since tuesday morning, & therefore do not know whether thou hast answered my lett^r wrot on monday last or noe, but if ther be any lett^r ther for me, J have ordered a freind to send it back unto thee wth this: As concerning y^e mony J writ for, J do not desire it now, having been too long a preacher for Gain. J wish thee to tel y^e Bowser [burser] J intend (God willing) to be at Cambridge not many days hence & to discharge my debts, so J bid thee heartily farewel.

Thy freind in y^e truth,

JOHN COUGHEN.

Essex May 15th 1663

¹ An application for information made to Walter G. King, of Bury St. Edmunds, in 1906, brought the following reply: "Anthony Sparrow appears to have been the Incumbent at one of our churches and was in receipt of £500 a year from the Town Council. He also seems to have had Probationers working under him or with him, and I think John Coughen must have been one of these but I could find no mention of his name."

II

Alderman²

Since J have been out of town, J have been clearly convinced y^t those despised people called Quakers are y^e true worshippers of God, who being a sp^t must be worshipped in sp^t & truth, & not according to y^e fond imaginations of men; so y^t, whatsoever J have done heretofore, J can no longer joyn my self unto those whose devotions are for y^e most part terminated in y^e worship of an unknown God, J mean of a God unknown, unseen or unfelt in y^e heart, wher his kindom or residenc is, as truth itself testifies, y^t we are not to mind those y^t tel us of a Kingdom of God here or there, confining to any visible worship or place, since y^e Kingdom of God is within us, & ther is silence to be waited for. J thought fit to acquaint thee wth thus much, y^t thou mightest understand y^e reason of my absenting my self, & so J bid thee farewell.

Thy freind in y^e truth

JOHN COUGHEN.

15th May, 1663

Little has been found among usual sources of information respecting Coughen, and it is therefore somewhat surprising to find a considerable account of him in the *History of the Quakers*, written in 1695, by Gerard Croese, a Dutch historian, of doubtful reliability. This account follows :

. . . . At this same very time [c. 1665] they were likewise bereav'd of John Coughen, so fam'd and renown'd among the Quakers, who tho he was not taken out of the World, yet deserted his Station, and separated himself from the Society of Quakers. This Man being born in Holland, of English Parentage, went over into England, where he finish'd his Philosophical and Theological course in the University of Cambridge, that Nursery of Learning which boasts so much of her integrity, that she never emitted any Disciples that prov'd corrupt or unsound in Religious matters: He afterwards became Minister to a Church in that Country, being ordain'd by Reynolds Bishop of Norwich; but he had not long exercis'd this function when he made defection to Quakerism, at the same very time that he was most busy in confirming and fortifying himself and his hearers, against the influences of that sect.

² W. G. King thinks that the letters were written to different persons as Sparrow's name is not in the list of Aldermen of 1663.

There was a young Virgin among the Quakers, fam'd for her dexterity and skill in Preaching, whom many of the people us'd to follow, Coughen having under-stood that she was to preach in a certain place goes thither himself in his Canonical Robes, in order to preserve his hearers from being seduc'd by her discourses. But so soon as he came to hear her, he was so moved and affected, that he not only not opposed her, or her Doctrine, but appear'd for its defence, and spoke publicly for it at that same occasion, and returning home, abandon'd his Ecclesiastick habit, joyning himself to be a member of their Society ; in which he afterwards became a Doctor and Preacher, and was much caress'd and applauded by them. But not long after this he return'd to Holland again, and meeting at Harlem with Edward Richardson, Minister to the English Church in that place, and discoursing with him about Religion, he was so influenc'd by his company that he forsook the Quakers and their Society, betaking himself to Leyden, when he pursued the Study of Medicine. Which when he had finish'd he returns to England, and professes that Art of administring medicine to the sick, sequestrating himself all along from that Society, till at length some three years thereafter, he attempts to introduce a new Model of Doctrine and Discipline, (which had been so often endeavour'd by so many and so great Men) of obliging all Christians to concentrate in one common faith, and interpose their interest and power, for reconciling the differences of Religion amongst all who profess'd the Name of Christ (pt. ii, p. 27).

John Reckless, of Nottingham, and his Sons

In vol. vi. there is a full account of the family of John Reckless. The following will add to the interest of the article, written by Emily Manners :

(1) "This Sheriffe [John Reckless] Received the Truth, and Left divers Sons ; Some of them are yet living and are honest ffriends in the Truth to this day. I have Lodged at Several of their Houses when I have been At Nottingham on Truths Account."

"Some of the Sufferings of God's People," under date 1649, by Thomas Thompson, of Skipsea, MS. in D.

(2) In the Diary of George Fox's Travels, written by Edward Haistwell (MS. in D, p. 11), we read :

"G ff : and L ff. passed thorow the Country to Nottingham to Jn° Recles house who when G ff first declared truth in that town, hee was y° Mayor [altered in another hand to 'Sheriff'], and cast G ff in prison, at w^{ch} time hee was Convinced, and so Remaines a good ffr^d to this day [addition in the same hand as above : '& his familly']."