

A Quaker Newswriter

Continued from vol. xxi, p. 40

ANOTHER letter from Richard Cockin to his niece, Mary (Sanderson) Fox, refers to some adverse comments on remarks made by his niece at the last Y.M., with expression of his avuncular concern lest there should be any lowering of the religious principles for the upholding of which her father, John Sanderson, had passed through much trial from the opposition of his parents and in other ways.

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“ 19th of 5th mo. 1837. . . . After last Yearly Meeting divers Friends who were at it, expressed to me their surprise, and some the sorrow it occasioned them, some observations thou made in the Womens Meetings, which had impressed them, as if thou was in danger of supporting those Members of our Society, who were publikly disapproving of some of the practices and sentiments which the Society, from being first gatherd to become united in religious fellowship, had professed to believe in—my hearing thereof made me very sad, and at the same time I could not believe it would be the case that thou would be induced to doubt the soundness or scriptural accordance of those religious Principles, which cost thy beloved Father [John Sanderson (1781-1841)] so much humiliating subjection of his natural inclination ; at the time he through the clearist conviction of it's being his duty to embrace them—and also the risque of incurring the displeasure of his affectionate Parents and the loss of the esteem of those whose confidence he had gained ; indeed my Father told me that his Parents were so afflicted with sorrow on thy dear Father's first hinting to them the secret attraction that he had felt towards the Society of Friends, that he went to inform his Landlord

therewith ; who, instead of (as he expected) would have advised him what steps to take to prevent his Son from indulging such thoughts, told him, that he rather ought to be glad that his Son thought so much about religion, when so many young Men were so thoughtless about it, which tended very much to reconcile his Parents—and altho' thy beloved Father had many conflictingly trying exercises to pass through during his being in the family of Alderman Newman, in the having to addop't a change of Apparel, language, and deportment, which produced self-abasing humiliation ; yet such was the fact that when he informed Alderman Newman with his prospect of commencing business he was told that if he could recommend a Friend to succeed him he should be allowed liberty of conscience.

“ It was at the time thy dear Father was in that situation, in the early part of the year 1776, that I went to London ; and our Parents living in the same village [Arthorpe, near Doncaster], and we having gone together to Doncaster to School, also having been apprentices in the same Town, I very early after getting to London, went to see thy Father, whose different appearance, solid deportment, and watchful, circumspect behaviour was very striking, and his great kindness in inviting me to come and see him in an evening, altogether had an attractive influence over me.

“ And at this time thy Uncle Shillitoe was Clerk to Smith, Wright & Grey, where I first used to call upon him, at the Banking House in Lumbard Street. . . . We used to meet frequently in evenings at my cousin, Eliz. Boultons : whether thy beloved Father and Uncle were then received Members of Society, I can not recolect, but they both were before me.

“ It was not by reading R. Barclay's Apology, or by hearing extraordinary Preachers that we became convinced, that the religious Principles of Friends were more in accordance with the spirituality of the Gospel dispensation and doctrine of Christ and His Apostles, then what we have been educated in, but from the emediate unfolding of the Holy Spirit and by searching the Scriptures in order to ascertain that we were not deceived.

“ Within the last two or three years, on my hearing the part that some of the Ministers of our Society were acting

(some of whom I had in years that are past highly esteemed), has again and again caused me to seriously meditate how deplorably awful it would be, now at my eleventh hour, to have been for many years holding erroneous sentiments on what my eternal happiness depended, and I have afresh endeavoured to solicitate Divine assistance to enable me to ascertain with clearness whether the religious Principles I had adopted, were not in accordance with the Divine will, or not in accordance with the revealed written declaration of Jesus Christ and His Apostles."

After the expression of a hope that his niece would not in any respect be hurt by his noticing this—"uniting with those who appeared to be disposed to obstruct what (in the judgment of Friends generally) was calculated to promote the best interests of our Society," R. Cockin continues:

"I am told that a Friend who I for many years loved and esteemed as a Minister, has now published in print that quakerism proceeds from the bottomless pit; and another Minister who I also much esteemed, has commenced administering the typical ceremony of water baptism, and that some of the Members of our Society residing at Leeds and at Kendal have been to Manchester to have this ceremony performed upon them—but how it is administered or what efficacious effects are attributed there to, I have not been informed. . . . My thus hearing such extraordinary reports makes me ready to say, what shall I next hear?"

"But it is high time for me to turn from these afflicting considerations, and consider what I can inform thee with that is of a pleasanter nature."

Then follows a relation of the visits of Friends on the way to Y.M.—Jonathan and Hannah Backhouse, who, "after accomplishing their visits to the Meetings of Friends in various Counties, intend to reside some time at Manchester before returning home"; and Edward Pease, "one of my long loved correspondents."

The date of the letter would incline us to suppose that the subject known as the Beacon Controversy was in some way referred to at Y.M. 1836 by Mary Fox.

To be continued