

## The Convincement of William Penn

In *Penns and Peningtons of the Seventeenth Century*, 1867, pp. 173-80, Maria Webb gives an account of the early religious experience of William Penn based upon a manuscript then in the possession of a Huntley of High Wycombe, to which she had access. She freely paraphrased and in part quoted the MS. The MS. was recently offered for sale and has now been purchased by the Library at Friends House. It is here printed in its entirety for the first time and has been divided into paragraphs with spaces introduced between unpunctuated sentences. The MS. bears evidence of having been carefully written, for the writer made slight verbal and literal corrections at numerous points. No record has been found at Friends House which enables Thomas Harvey to be identified with certainty. The paper is dated 1729, some seventy years after the events narrated and is our only source for some of them. It contains three details of interest which it is believed will be new to students of Penn. These are referred to in footnotes.

**A**N account of ye Convincement of W<sup>m</sup> Pen deliver'd by himself to Thom Harvey about thirty years since wch Thos: Harvey related me in a brief manner as well as his Memory would serve after such a distance of time.

1729. While he was but a child living at Cork with his Father Thos. Low coming thither, his Father proposed to some others (when it was rumour'd A Quaker was come from England) to be like ye Noble Berean's to hear them before they Judg'd 'em and sent to T.L. to come to his House where he had a meeting in ye family, and tho' W.P. was very young yet observed what effect T.L's Doctrine had on ye Hearers so that a Black of his Fathers could not contain himself from weeping aloud & he looking on his Father saw ye Tears Runing down his Cheeks also; he thought in himself wt If they should all be Quakers [ ]\* opportunity he never forgot at times, Afterward, he was sent to Oxford where continued till he was expell'd for writing a book ye Preists did not like then was sent to France to prosecute his Learning & when return'd came to Ireland his Father not being there then he wanting some Cloaths

\* Unreadable.

went to a woman Friend Shop he had knowledge of about ye time of that Meeting—

She not knowing him, told her who he was and also of ye Meeting at his Fathers she admired at his remembering that he told her he should never forget it also if he knew where ye person was if 'twere an Hundred Miles he would go to here him again.

She told he need not go far for ye Friend was lately come thither and would be at meeting ye next day to wch he went another appearing first he was not Effectuated wth his Testimony but when T.L. stood up was exceedingly reach'd so that he wept much and it seemed to him as if a Voice sayd stand on thy feet How dost know but somebody may be reach'd by thy tears so he stood up that he might be seen, After ye Meeting some friends took notice of him and he went to a friend house with T.L. in discourse T.L. was saying he should want a horse either being without one or his own being not fit to travell, W.P. offer'd him his Sumtured horse he had brought from France but T.L. said he was not willing to take his, wch made W.P. think he was not friend enough to have his horse accepted

however he went to meetings there till they was disturb[ed] once a soldier came up into ye Meeting making a Great disturbance W.P. Go's to him takes him by ye collar and would have throw'd him down stairs but a friend or two come to him desireing to let him alone for they was a peaceable people and would not have [him] make a disturbance there then he was very much concern'd he had caused friends to be uneasy by his roughness—The soldier went to ye Magistrates and brought ye Officers wch broke up ye Meeting and made several of them prisoners, and him among ye Rest

when they was brought before ye Magistrate he knowing W.P. told him he did not think him a Quaker so would not send him to Goal but Wm told him Whether he thought him so or not ; he was one and if he sent his friends to Prison he was willing to go wth them then ye Magistrate said he should Go with 'em (As he went to prison he gave his sword to his man & never wore one after)<sup>1</sup> but writes a letter to ye Govenor that he had commit'd W.P. prisoner among ye Quakers the Govenor sent order that he should be released also another to his Father wch acquaint'd him of his son's

being a Quaker wch occasion'd him to send order to his son to come to him in England wch order he obeyed and landed at Bristoll where he staid some meetings to strengnen himself know[ing] his Father would not be very pleasant upon him.

J. Coal went with him to London also to his Father's house to see how he was likly to be entertain'd but his Father kept his temper while J.C. was there but at night observing him use thee or thou was very angry W<sup>m</sup> told him 'twas in obeydiance to God and not in any disrespect to him however then his Father told him he might thee & thou who he pleas'd except ye King ye Duke of York and himself but them he should not (thee or thou) but he answer'd he must speak in ye singular number both to ye King ye Duke & himself wch made his Father very angry, but as he was Going up stairs to bed his Father bid him rise in ye Morning for he should go out in his coach with him wch caused Wm. to be so uneasy that he could not sleep that night fearing he was to be had to court ;

in ye Morning they went in ye Coach together but Wm. did not know Where they was Going However ye Coach man was order'd to Drive into ye Park then he found his Fathers intent was to have private discourse wth him his Father beginning with him told he could not tell what he could think of himself after he had train'd him up in Learning and other accomplishments for a courtier—as for an Ambassador or other Minister that he should become a Quaker he Answer'd 'twas in Obediance to ye Manifestation of God in his own Conscience but a cross to his own Nature also told him of that Former meeting which was of his own promoting also how he observed his Father in tears at that time and that he beleive[d] him to be convinced of the truth of ye Doctrine of ye Quakers as well as himself only ye Grandure of ye World Was to Great for him to Give up therefore had Got over ye Reaches he had received

after more discourse they return'd and at a tavern his Father proposed taking of a Glass of wine when they came into ye Room his Father lock'd ye Door then Wm. expected he was to be caned but instead of that his Father laying his hands on ye table told him he would kneel down and pray to God that he might not be a Quaker nor go to any more of there meetings ; Wm. open'd ye Casement and sayd before he would hear his Father pray after that manner he

would leep o[ut a]t winder ; A Nobleman was Going by ye Door in his Coach [seeing] Sr W<sup>m</sup>'s Coach stand there st[opt] his coach to speak wt [Sr] W<sup>m</sup> came and knockt at ye [door] which stopt his Father's prayer the door being open'd he came in first came up to W<sup>m</sup> and saluted him then turn'd to his Father told him he might think himself happy in a son that could Dispise ye Grandure of ye world & refrain from ye many vices they were running after which very much encouraged W<sup>m</sup>: after more discourse they parted then W<sup>m</sup> and his Father went to another Noblemans house wch Nobleman also spoke much in favour of W<sup>m</sup> to his Father ; they returned home :

after some time W<sup>m</sup> went to bear a friend company to [ ]† as they rod a long ye Road Wm. thought his two taild wigg which he had not yet left off, was burdensom to him took of his hatt turnd his wigg of his head behind him not looking back to see what became of it<sup>2</sup> he had some hair tho' but short when he came to [ ]† they had a meeting where Wm's Mouth was first open'd then went to several other places at one place ye Magistrate knowing who Wm. was sent to one of ye Secratarys how Wm. with other were causeing tumults by preaching the Quakers Doctrine at that his Father finding where to send to him sent him orders to return home the friend he was with advised him to obey his Fathers order which after some little time he did,

coming to London went to a meeting before he went to see his Father after meeting went up into ye Room where a Friend brought Guly Springett wch was ye first time he saw her who was afterwards his wife ; but returning home his Father told him he had heard what work he had been making in the country and after some discourse his Father bid him take his cloaths and be Gon from his house for he should not be there also that he should disposed of his Estate to them that pleased him better Wm. Gave his Father to understand how great a cross 'twas to him to disoblige his Father not in regard to his Estate but from the Filial affection he bore him but as he was convinced of ye Truth he must be faithfull so Go's up stairs and packt up a small bundle comes down again first Salutes his Mother and Sisters then tells his Father how unpleasen[t] his Displeasure was to him

† Place names omitted in MS.

but should always think himself obliged to pray for his Father so left his father's house only with his small bundle as he went out of ye house heard Great cry's by his mother & sisters but was not Got far before a servant was sent for him to return when he return'd his Father was gon out of ye way so he soon got to his Room till his Fathers displeasure was something a bated.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This statement conflicts with the traditional story that Penn later sought George Fox's advice about his sword and received the answer, "Wear it as long as thou canst", related in Janney: *Life of Penn*, p. 50. Janney's story is in a verbal tradition from James Simpson of Philadelphia, born 1743.

<sup>2</sup> This incident recalls the complaints made later by some over zealous Friends that Penn's wig was an offence against true simplicity. To this George Fox replied in a letter dated 25.iii.1677, defending Penn's wig as "a very short civil thing" which was necessary because he had so little hair of his own. A copy of this letter in William Penn's own hand is in the Library. (Port. 10., 64.)

<sup>3</sup> William Penn was twice turned from home by his father, the first time on being sent down from Christ Church, Oxford. Besse and later writers state that the second banishment placed him in poverty, which was relieved by Friends and his mother. The present account makes the second banishment to have lasted less than a day, though possibly the estrangement lasted longer; Cf. Besse's "Life" in the *Works of William Penn*, and W. Penn: *Travels in Holland and Germany*, 1694, p. 182. Penn himself does not mention the second banishment.