

The Authorship of "A Word for the Common Weale" (1650)

THIS pamphlet is ascribed by Joseph Smith¹ to Penington's father, Isaac Penington senior.

His ascription seems improbable. Penington (junior) was writing in just such a vein at that very time, whereas his father wrote only in collaboration with others to defend the acts of his mayoralty in reply to specific charges brought against him and his colleagues.²

The reasons Smith gives for denying the authorship to Penington (junior) are two. First, that it is not mentioned in the review of his writings which form the second part of J. Gurney Bevan's *Memoirs of Isaac Penington*. But this is no argument at all, since this book was not written till a century later (1784), and then only in such terms as these: "Our author's next piece of which we have an account, and of which copies remain, is. . . ."³ And there is an obvious reason for the omission, in that Bevan based his work on Whiting's catalogue,⁴ which does not mention it (giving indeed nothing of his earlier than 1654). More impressive is the argument that for long he was accustomed to sign himself "Isaac Penington (junior)". But here again, we find that his earliest works were anonymous, and that it was only after the date of *A Word for the Common Weale* that he began to put "Isaac Penington (junior)" on the title page.

Accordingly, a possible theory seems to be that his earliest works were anonymous; that he then issued one—this *A Word for the Common Weale*—signed "Isaac Penington", and that when he found confusion as to the authorship resulted from that mode of signature, then, and then only, did he see the desirability of signing himself "Isaac Penington (junior)" for the future, to avoid further such mistakes. On his father's death, he returned to the old mode of signature.

There seems then no real reason for doubt as to the authorship of *A Word for the Common Weale*, which the British Museum Catalogue ascribes to him unhesitatingly. The internal evidence of style and sentiment is so strong as to seem alone conclusive, and the matter is settled by the discovery that a page advertising "books by the same author" at the end of the *Divine Essays* of 1654 (only four years later) includes *A Word for the Common Weale* among other books which are indubitably by "Isaac Penington (junior)".

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¹ *A descriptive catalogue of Friends' books* (1867), ii. 334-5. [Wing: P1148].

² *A Declaration and Vindication of Isaac Penington*, Feb. 1642; *A Humble Remonstrance . . . in vindication of the Honourable Isaac Penington*, 1643 (O.S.).

³ 1830 ed. p.138.

⁴ *A catalogue of Friends' books*, by John Whiting (1708). It gives (p.124) nothing of Penington's earlier than *The way of life and death made manifest* (1654).