

Early Quakerism in Newcastle upon Tyne

Thomas Ledgard's *Discourse Concerning the Quakers*

IN his article on William Coatesworth and the early Quakers of Newcastle upon Tyne, Henry Cadbury has drawn attention to the vigorous outpouring of anti-Quaker literature from the ministers of the town and from "one Thomas Ledgerd."¹ Although the study of anti-Quaker literature is an important part of the history of Friends, Ledgard and his work have received scant attention. It has long been assumed that none of his writings have survived, and consequently there has been little investigation of either him or his views. In fact, a copy of one of his tracts does exist in the Library of the Society of Friends in London; this is the pamphlet *A Discourse Concerning the Quakers set out by T. L.* There are, moreover, several references to it and to its author in contemporary tracts of both Quaker and non-Quaker origin, and information about the author and his own views can be extracted from the records relating to the town of Newcastle during the Interregnum.

The tract itself is a brief one, containing only eight pages. No date and no place of publication are indicated, nor is the author identified except by the initials T. L. The clue to the date of publication and the author's name is, however, provided by one of the tracts written in response to the *Discourse*, George Bateman's *An Answer to a Discourse Concerning the Quakers*.² On the title page of this work, Bateman identified the initials T. L. by the phrase "or as I understand the significance of the Letters Tho: Ledger." This is, without doubt, the Thomas Ledgard whose name figures prominently in the records of the Newcastle corporation after 1645 and in the account by George Fox of his second visit to the town in 1658. At the end of the tract,

¹ H. J. Cadbury, "Early Quakerism at Newcastle upon Tyne: William Coatesworth," *Journal of the Friends' Historical Society*, vol. 50, no. 3 (1963), pp. 91-96; see particularly p. 92.

² G. Bateman, *An Answer to (vindicate the cause of the Nick-named Quakers of such scandalls and untruths as is falsly cast upon them in a lying pamphlet otherwise called) A Discourse concerning the Quakers* [n.p., n.d.]. There is a copy in Friends House Library, London. Wing B 1094.

Bateman gives the date of 16 July, 1653, which provides certain evidence that Ledgard's *Discourse* was written in or before 1653. The first known Quaker answer to the tract, James Nayler's *A Few Words Occasioned by a Paper Lately Printed stiled a Discourse Concerning the Quakers* was dated by the London bookseller George Thomason as appearing on 17 March, 1654, but it is apparent from the preface to the reader that a long enough interval had elapsed since the publication of the *Discourse* for the author to have written another tract.¹ It is also suggestive that the period 1653-1654 marked the beginning of the steady stream of anti-Quaker publications written by men with Newcastle connections. The vast majority of these were published by the Newcastle press of Stephen Buckley, and it is possible that Ledgard's *Discourse* may be a hitherto unidentified product of that press.² The fact that Thomason did not include Ledgard's work in his collection provides an additional suggestion that the tract was not readily available in London and that it probably was not published there.

Who, then, was Thomas Ledgard? The answer, surprisingly enough in view of the lack of attention he has received, is that he was one of the most prominent merchants and politicians in Newcastle after the reduction of the town to parliamentary control in 1644. He had taken up his freedom of the town of Newcastle in 1633 as a draper.³ At about the same time, apparently, he became a member of the Hostmen's Company, the guild of coal traders who were the chief powers in the economic life of the town.⁴ Although he does not appear to have made a great mark as a merchant before the Civil War, he had achieved some status by the late 1630's when he became a member of the monopolistic South and North

¹ E 731(23). J. Nayler, *A Few words occasioned by a Paper lately printed stiled a Discourse concerning the Quakers* (London, 1654). The interval is mentioned in the preface by A. P. (Anthony Pearson). Wing N 279.

² On Buckley's press and its products, see R. Welford, "Early Newcastle Typography," *Archæologia Aeliana*, 3rd Series, iii (1907), pp. 56-58; H. R. Plomer and R. A. Peddie, "Stephen Buckley, Printer," *Library*, New Series, viii (1907), pp. 42-56; R. Davies, *A Memoir of the York Press* (Westminster, 1868), pp. 57-69.

³ M. H. Dodds, ed. *The Register of Freemen of Newcastle upon Tyne chiefly of the seventeenth century* (Newcastle, 1923), p. 17.

⁴ F. W. Dendy, ed., *Extracts from the Records of the Company of Hostmen of Newcastle upon Tyne* (Durham, 1901), p. 268. His entry is recorded in an undated list of hostmen admitted between 1617 and 1642.

Shields Salt Makers.¹ At the same time, however, Ledgard became a convert to the Puritan movement which had been growing steadily despite determined opposition within the town, and he appears as a correspondent of the Puritan lecturer, William Morton.² His Puritan inclinations were well known to the town authorities, for he was summoned on bond to appear before the Common Council to answer for them, and, in 1643, he was disfranchised as a supporter of the Puritans and parliament by the royalist oligarchy of the town.³ With the capture of the town by the parliamentarians, Ledgard came into a position of political prominence. He became an alderman in the Puritan corporation, served as mayor on one occasion, and as deputy mayor on a later one.⁴ His financial position was secure enough so that he could lend the town £450 out of his own pocket, and he had in his possession the no doubt profitable offices of bailiff of Gateshead and steward of Whickham.⁵

By 1653, when he wrote *A Discourse*, Ledgard was a well-established member of the town oligarchy, related by marriage to one of its most influential families (the Bonners), and thoroughly representative of the upper layers of a society which feared the disruptive effects of spreading sectarianism among the lower classes. His position of power in the town no doubt gave the tract added authority with the audience to whom it was directed, but the arguments which he produced against the Quakers were hardly original ones. Even at an early date, anti-Quaker literature had developed its stereotypes. He alleged that their "quaking" was either counterfeit or else that it was a product of the devil;⁶ the latter point had

¹ C. T. Carr, ed., *Select Charters of Trading Companies* (London, 1913), pp. 143-144.

² PRO SP 16/540/446 no. 33; R. Howell, "Puritanism in Newcastle before the Summoning of the Long Parliament," *Archæologia Aeliana*, 4th Series, xli (1963), pp. 135-155.

³ W. H. D. Longstaffe, ed., *Memoirs of the life of Mr. Ambrose Barnes* (Durham, 1867), pp. 161, 352; H. M. Dodds, ed., *Extracts from the Newcastle upon Tyne Council Minute Book 1639-1656* (Newcastle, 1920), p. 28.

⁴ C. H. Hunter Blair, *The Mayors and Lord Mayors of Newcastle upon Tyne* (Newcastle, 1940), p. 68. The first mention of him as an alderman is 4 October, 1645. Newcastle Chamberlains' Accounts 1642-5, f. 167. He officiated as deputy Mayor in March, 1651. Newcastle Council Book 1650-9, f. 69. He had been mayor in 1647-8.

⁵ Dodds, *Council Book*, pp. 65-66, 138-139; Newcastle Council Book 1650-9, f. 134.

⁶ T. Ledgard, *A Discourse concerning Quakers* (n.p., 1653), p. 1.

been the main burden of another attack on the Quakers published in the same year by the Newcastle press, Gilpin's *The Quakers Shaken*.¹ He asserted that the rule which they followed was not one which could be justified in the Gospels, another frequent complaint against the Quakers.² In view of his own position as a town magistrate, it is not surprising that he particularly stressed the characteristics of the early Quakers which were most upsetting to established authority in the seventeenth century, their refusal to pay "proper" respect to those in office by taking off their hats to them and by addressing them as sir and master.³ In amplifying this point, Ledgard introduced incidentally a point which may have been of more significance in the anti-Quaker literature than is generally supposed. He drew a connection between their public disavowal of respect to earthly authority and the relations between members of the family. It is certain that patriarchalism had a stronger hold on the general consciousness than the apparent shortcomings of the theory would seem to warrant. Historians are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that family rather than class was the pre-eminent social institution of the seventeenth century. Yet, as Ledgard appears to argue, the failure of the Quakers to show respect to authority was as damaging to this institution as it was to society at large. No one would dispute that conversion to Quakerism could entail a considerable strain on family ties, and this was obviously strongly marked in a society which could view the head of the household in terms of a magistrate.⁴

Ledgard's tract drew three known responses, two from Quaker sources and one from a sympathizer who was not a Friend. Although the replies varied somewhat in length and character, their main arguments were very similar, those of Fox and Nayler being rather more outspoken, on the whole, than that of Bateman. In answering Ledgard's arguments, George Fox did not spare harsh words:

¹ J. Gilpin, *The Quakers shaken or a Fire-brand snatch'd out of the Fire* (Gateshead, 1653). Wing G 769.

² Ledgard, *Discourse*, p. 5.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

⁴ On patriarchalism and the importance of the family, see the suggestive remarks in P. Laslett, ed., *Patriarcha and other political works of Sir Robert Filmer* (Oxford, 1949), pp. 20-33; P. Laslett, "The Sovereignty of the Family," *Listener*, 7 April, 1960.

Many may have the Scripture and deny the power of God which is the Gospel, many had the Scripture and the form, and stood against the Son of truth, Christ Jesus, the power of God, the Gospel; And as for thy other lies and slanders which are not worth mentioning, which comes from thy drunken spirit, when the spirit is awakened that suffers by it, thou shalt feel every word of thy own, thy burthen, and thou that dost set the Scriptures above Christ and God, and the spirit, art a heathen.¹

Bateman's answer to *A Discourse* was more moderate; he was not, of course, so personally involved as Fox, for he was not a Quaker. He challenged Ledgard to find scriptural support for the view that men should put off their hats to magistrates, and accused the alderman of confusing somewhat the ordinances of God and those of men. His summation of Ledgard's character was not, however, much kinder than that made by Fox. Ledgard was, he wrote,

one of those good thinking Proselytes, who thinketh they have God hard tyed to them in the chaines of a faire-seeking Forme, and through that great light he may imagine himselfe to have, may become captivated under a judgement, whose gates may prove as narrow as the eye of a Needle.²

The career of Ledgard subsequent to the publication of *A Discourse* is not entirely clear. He certainly remained a determined foe of the Quakers and was one of those who were, to a large extent, successful in keeping the Quakers outside the liberties of the town of Newcastle during the Interregnum. It has been asserted that he wrote two other anti-Quaker tracts, one entitled *Another Discourse*, the second called *Anti-Quaker Assertions*.³ It does not appear that copies of either of these tracts have survived. The latter one was answered by Fox; it appears to have been concerned mainly with the questions of the nature of sin and the role of the scriptures.⁴ Of the former, nothing is known, unless perhaps it is that work which Anthony Pearson referred to as "another paper come forth by the author of the discourse occasioned by something written in answer to it."⁵

¹ G. Fox, *The Great mystery of the Great Whore unfolded* (London, 1659), p. 257.

² Bateman, *Answer to a Discourse*, p. 8; Bateman denied being a Quaker, *ibid.*, p. 3.

³ J. Smith, *Bibliotheca Anti-Quakeriana* (London, 1873), pp. 265-266.

⁴ Fox, *Great Mystery*, p. 257.

⁵ Nayler, *A Few words occasioned by a paper lately printed*, p. 2.

Although it cannot be precisely documented, it is extremely probable that Ledgard clashed as well with the Quakers over the issue of education in Northumberland and Durham. Ledgard certainly displayed a keen interest in education when he was an alderman. He became a visitor of the newly-founded college at Durham in 1657. This was a creation towards which the hostility of the Quakers was strong since they viewed it as an institution for the making of priests. Although Ledgard was not mentioned by name (no laymen were) in the Quaker attacks on Durham College's Newcastle backers, the clergy who were mentioned were men with whom he had close connections.¹

Ledgard also took an active part in disputing with George Fox when the latter paid his second visit to Newcastle in 1658, although the discussion does not seem to have involved Durham College directly. According to Fox's account, in fact, the Quaker leader came to the town in direct response to the challenge of Ledgard that "ye Quakers would not come Into noe great toundes, but lived in ye ffells, like butter flyes."² The meeting of Fox and Ledgard was, not surprisingly, unfruitful. After exchanging mutual accusations, they parted, Ledgard and the rest of the Newcastle magistrates thinking that they had secured the religious peace of the town by keeping the Quakers out. Fox, rather more accurately, wrote that "As I was passing away by ye markt place, ye power of ye Lord risse in mee to warn ym of ye Lord yt was comeinge upon ym. And soe not longe after all those preists of Newcastle and there profession was turned out when ye Kinge came in."³

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¹ For Ledgard's interest in education, see Newcastle Council Book 1645-50, f. 176. The letters patent to Durham College (15 May, 1657) list him as a visitor, *Allen Tracts* (Darlington, 1777), no. 44. His father-in-law Thomas Bonner was one of those ordered to prepare orders and rules for governing the college. *Cal. S. P. Dom.*, 1655-6, p. 218. For a Quaker attack on the college, see *Some Quaeries to be answered in writing or print by the Masters, Heads, Fellows & Tutors of the Colledge they are setting up at Durham* [n.p., n.d.]. Ledgard had close connections with Samuel Hammond and William Durant, two of the Newcastle clergy mentioned by name in the tract.

² G. Fox, *Journal*, ed. Penney (Cambridge, 1911), i, 310.

³ *Ibid.*, i, 311.