WILLIAM PENN’S WRITINGS: AN ANNIVERSARY ESSAY

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THIS autumn marks the three-hundredth anniversary of the birth of William Penn, which occurred, according to our present way of reckoning dates, on October 24, 1644. Penn lived seventy-four years, and except for the last six, when mental and physical decay overtook him, he lived boldly, dangerously, and effectively. He was not one of that rare company of universal spirits whose achievements are the timeless truths of history, for he dwelt in the court, the council chamber, the market place, and even the jails rather than in the scholar’s cloister or the philosopher’s den. He was of the world, worldly. His days were spent with issues, with men, with policies. He played the game of political intrigue with consummate skill and remarkable success;¹ he devoted much of his energy to developing and defending his extensive private fortune, which he never ceased to regard as one of his major responsibilities; and like any mercantilist he looked upon government as a means of attaining material prosperity and national power. Yet supporting his worldliness was a complex and highly vocal spiritual life.

Widely read, extensively educated, endowed with a keen intellect, Penn regarded information and ideas as weapons rather than as ends, as tools rather than as products. He had no desire for philosophic detachment nor any intention of rising above con-

flict. Indeed, he lustily entered into the most critical struggles of his age and fought with intelligence, understanding, and impressive courage. He was a man of action, espousing great causes in seventeenth-century England’s long travail, and as the passage of time gives a permanent meaning to discrete instances of transitory conflict, so his various victories have lifted his name out of the turmoil of forgotten issues and won for him an enduring place in the history of human liberty.

It is as a man of action that Penn is remembered: as the rich and well-born youth who became the champion of religious dissent, as the one-time soldier who became a Quaker minister, as the moderate Whig who steered his course between the extremes of Shaftesbury and the schemes of Charles II, as a proprietor of West Jersey and the founder of Pennsylvania, as the missionary traveler in Holland and France and Germany, as the loyal companion who cheerfully accepted imprisonment as the price of his loyalty, as the dissident defender of Catholic King James, as the instigator of the Gracechurch trial, a landmark in the development of civil law. Pennsylvanians knew him as a practical and capable administrator motivated by exalted ideals of social justice; Montesquieu hailed him as the “modern Lycurgus.”

Those who lived closest to him respected Penn for all these attributes and activities, but in their estimates they included a word which it would not occur to a modern person to use. They called him “scholar.” In their candid way the Quakers did not spare him criticism for the deficiencies with which his temporal affairs were managed; nor was the failure of his mind overlooked in the memorials that the Reading Yearly Meeting spread upon its minutes when he died. He was greatly praised, however, as a man and a friend—“learned without vanity; apt without forwardness; facetious in conversation, yet weighty and serious—of an extraordinary greatness of mind, yet void of the stain of ambition”—and the highest encomium of all with which the Friends climaxed their tribute was reserved for his books:

... he may, without straining his character, be ranked among the learned, good, and great; whose abilities are sufficiently manifested throughout his writings, which are so many lasting monuments of his admired qualifications, and are the esteem of learned and judicious men of all persuasions.
These writings, once thought to be "lasting monuments," are all but forgotten now. Even special students of the seventeenth century rarely consult them, and such were the prose fashions of Penn's time that today's general readers would find enforced perusal of many of them a cruel and unusual punishment. Yet they were very important to Penn, and they constitute a major part of his achievement. Surprisingly enough, this unusually busy man found time to produce, apart from an enormous quantity of letters and documents, more than fifty separate pamphlets and books, which formed a pair of large folio volumes of nearly two thousand pages when most of them were first collected in 1726. With this considerable amount of writing as a tangible literary legacy to posterity Penn cannot be entirely understood unless he is regarded as a man of thought as well as a man of action.

To be sure, the purpose of these writings was frequently to stimulate action. Most of the titles are controversial tracts associated with the obscure quarrels of early Quakerism, in which a modern reader's interest can be only oblique at best. Argumentative tracts are properly suspect as serious literature. But Penn was not at any time a trivial man, and his tracts, however occasional their motivation, were produced never in light mood but always with the highest seriousness of purpose. Special pleading undisguised though they were and created for the moment, they nevertheless evoked the deepest thought and most ardent application. "The end of Controversie," Penn once remarked, "... is the advancement of the Truth."

Indeed, it is their controversial, argumentative character which gives these writings their significance for us. From them we get the picture of a shrewd man defending in debate the things

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2 President Comfort in his recent William Penn, A Tercentenary Estimate devotes a final chapter to an evaluation of Penn as a man of letters. Even so sympathetic a critic can find little to praise in Penn's style.

3 A Collection of the Works of William Penn, in Two Volumes. To Which is Prefixed a Journal of His Life. With Many Original Letters and Papers not Before Published. (London, 1726.) All the passages quoted in this paper may be found in these two volumes, although the citations in the author's notes refer to the original editions in the collections of the Huntington Library and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. It was not considered necessary to append references to each quotation, since the material is either well known or readily available and since annotation would unduly burden so general a treatment as this discussion.
of life he valued. We see Penn drawing ideas from his reading, his experience, and doubtless also from conversations and correspondence and using these ideas as an advocate for a cause. We see at times the twisting and torturing of an argument of the opposition to suit his own purpose. And since we perceive no great original ideas or unique interpretations—for Penn was not an original thinker—we have in these works a fruitful example of the manner in which the thoughts of previous ages and the ideologies of many conflicts become pawns in social struggles.

Of contentiousness and argumentation there is such an abundance that those with a taste for polemics would find the pages full of excitement. But even sincere admirers of Penn could scarcely regard them as great literature. They gain their effect cumulatively. Read as a whole, they take one inside Penn's mind and disclose the kind of a world in which and for which he lived. Of the half-a-hundred tracts only a handful are worth consideration individually as separate books. *No Cross, No Crown* (1668) is a blast against luxury, a preachment to the Quakers on simplicity and virtue in the most rigorous, austere mood of contemporary Puritanism. It has been occasionally reprinted and has had a long vogue as a handbook of moral teaching. Its importance rises above the Sunday-school level when its doctrines of frugality are articulated with the ideas of human nature and political obligations Penn expressed elsewhere. The connection between Puritanism and the economic theories of mercantilism has never been satisfactorily made; it raises worthwhile speculations concerning this connection to reflect that Penn was advocating for moral reasons the same sumptuary standards that the national planners, for quite different reasons, were recommending.

*The Great Case of Liberty of Conscience Debated* (1670) is the most elaborate discussion of toleration that the Stuart period produced. The *Rise and Progress of the People Called Quakers* (1694) is an acceptable history of the first decades of the Society of Friends which can be read as a single piece with profit and with some gratification, for it is the most accomplished in style of all Penn's works. His *Letter to Lord Arlington*, written from
his cell in the Tower in July, 1669, is a trenchant bit of political argument that touches the greatest issues of civil liberty. The political student will find England's Present Interest Discover'd (1675) a suggestive collection of current constitutional and legal doctrines regarding private property and its free enjoyment. It is an epitome of the Whig view of English history, flavored with the author's extensive reading in theological literature.

But far outshining all the rest, competent to be judged apart from the whole structure of his thought, are the productions of Penn's fiftieth year, his year of sequestration, when his political activities were suspended, his colonial enterprise seized, his personal freedom jeopardized, and his sect imperiled. In the tensions of the revolution of 1688 Penn had never forsaken his loyalty to James II, though he was three times called before the council to defend himself. In 1691 an informer betrayed his presence at the funeral of George Fox, and he narrowly escaped arrest. The next year (October, 1692) the government of Pennsylvania was removed from his control. For two years Penn lived in complete retirement, watched but not molested by the government. He was free on sufferance, only because the king had no particular reason to place him in custody. He found these two years uneasy and trying. All he had wished for was still at stake, but he could not fight openly without risking imprisonment, banishment, or even the execution that had been the lot of Russell and Sidney—any of which fates would destroy his hopes for domestic and colonial improvement.

In these two years Penn did his most remarkable writing. The man of action was forced to live the life of contemplation, to sustain the elevation of the spirit for a longer period and with less of the animating exercise of the sinews of power than ever before or (in his active life) ever again. What he wrote in this period may be regarded as the best of which he was capable, for he was then freest from the immediate pressures of conflict. For a brief span of months his motives were didactic, not political. Out of enforced detachment, of what seems to have been at times a desperate hermitage, he brought forth "this sweet, dignified, and wholesome book," as Robert Louis Stevenson called it, Some Fruits of Solitude in Reflections and Maxims Relating to the Conduct of Human Life.⁴

“Man being made a Reasonable, and so a Thinking Creature,” Penn wrote, “there is nothing more Worthy of his Being, than the Right Direction and Employment of his Thoughts; since upon This, depends both his Usefulness to the Publick, and his own present and future Benefit in all Respects.” For the right direction and employment of thought he compiled his book of maxims, a work which is like La Rochefoucauld’s Maximes in form and is reminiscent in places of Franklin’s homely apothegms, with both of which it has frequently been compared. But Penn was in spirit neither cynical nor homely. He was appealing to the highest in men, with an ingenuousness that left no room for scorn. “His heart is on his sleeve,” Edmund Gosse remarked; “he will take you aside, although he sees you for the first time, and tell you everything.” He described his “Enchiridion” as “the Fruit of Solitude: A School few care to learn in, tho’ None instructs us better.” The hustle and bustle of life concerns us so much, he said, that we miss the right way of happy living, “And till we are perswaded to stop, and step a little aside, out of the noisy Crowd and Incumbering Hurry of the World, and Calmly take a prospect of Things, it will be impossible we should be able to make a right Judgment of our Selves or know our own Misery.”

Few books of the seventeenth century afford more genuine pleasure than this one, for few open such a window into the writer’s soul. Its strength does not lie in its wisdom, for its insights are not exceptional. The maxims are the kind of thing a busy, successful man with no illusions about himself might say in looking back over his career. But they are said with such charm and such modest confidence, so ingratiatingly, so amiably, that Penn captures his readers in a conversational intimacy bridging the ages. The little volume is quiet and reposeful, strangely relaxed for one of Penn’s robust moods—a book of philosophical poise from a man usually discovered in the front ranks of civil strife.

“There are some Men like Dictionaries,” Penn tells us; “to be lookt into upon occasions, but have no Connection, and are little entertaining.” Such men’s knowledge is miscellaneous, and, while it may be wide, it is unified by no systematic formulation of the principles by which life moves. The Fruits of Solitude
needs no unifying system of philosophy, for it serves itself as an
expression of simple and enduring belief that gives system, mean-
ing, depth, and stature to the manifold activities of Penn’s varied
career. The essence of conviction which, crudely understood,
had guided action is here developed into rule and precept. We
learn what Penn thought of education, of studies, of teaching;
what he considered the true office of worship and the highest
purpose of religion. We discover that he preferred the country
to the city, that he liked his art to be functional, that he thought
government officials should be paid, and that he believed conversa-
tion to be dull when it was disputatious. We have forty maxims
on government and many more on the characters of governors.
As in Castiglione’s Courtier, with which the Fruits of Solitude
is worthy to be compared, the ideal social man and the ideal
prince are both described. The one must rule with justice, the
other live with honor. Freedom was the goal of the state, but
obligations waited upon freedom. Penn was not fearful of power:
“Where the Reins of Government are too slack, there the Man-
cers of the People are corrupted: And that destroys Industry,
begets Effeminacy, and provokes Heaven against it.” Oppression
would drive desperate people to rebellion; but “Where the State
intends a Man no affront, he should not Affront the State.”

Penn reached the plane of universals in his thinking, but
throughout the maxims he used sentences so peculiar to his age
that they jerk us back over the years and make us realize that
we are reading a work of other times. He described the pre-
vailing mercantilist idea of the division of employments in the
state and wondered which calling should be favored. He had
confronted the serious problem of labor shortage in his Penn-
sylvania affairs, and his preoccupation with this national diffi-
culty led him to endorse a sort of job-freezing program: “As it
is not reasonable that Men should be compell’d to serve; so those
that have Employments should not be endured to leave them
humorously.” This topicality, this inability to remove himself
from the problems of his age, was characteristic of the man. It
would have been strange indeed had he, even in retirement,
abandoned his intense convictions on current issues.

It was this same responsiveness to the stimuli about him that
had guided Penn’s hand in another work of his retirement, pro-
duced a few months earlier—An Essay Towards the Present and Future Peace of Europe By the Establishment of an European Dyet, Parliament, or Estates. This is a work that has a peculiar appositeness in 1944, two hundred and fifty years after its appearance and three hundred after the birth of its author.  

In 1693/4 Europe was wallowing in the sixth year of a great war. England, led by her Dutch king, was the spearhead of opposition to Louis XIV and had committed the resources of all her empire to the struggle. "He must not be a Man, but a Statue of Brass or Stone," Penn declared, "whose Bowels do not melt when he beholds the Bloody Tragedies of this War, in Hungary, Germany, Flanders, Ireland, and at Sea: the Mortality of sickly and languishing Camps and Navies, and the mighty prey the Devouring Winds and Waves have made upon Ships and Men since 88." In his house by the side of the road, as "the Fruit of my solicitous Thoughts, for the Peace of Europe," he wrote the little essay that in spite of a certain quaintness stands as one of the bold and significant books in the history of peace thought. He examined the benefits of peace, which, he said, were never appreciated until men smarted under the vices and penance of war. Peace preserves property, encourages trade, fosters expenditures, excites industry, stimulates manufactures, and "gives the Means of Charity and Hospitality, not the lowest Ornaments of a Kingdom or Commonwealth." War, on the other hand, "like the Frost of 83, seizes all these Comforts at once, and stops the civil Channel of Society." Of all the means of peace only one—law—was sure. Law could keep peace between government and people; it could do the same between nations. As peace was the result of law, so law was the result of government. Therefore international government, "an Expedient against Confusion . . . the Prevention or Cure of Disorder, and the Means of Justice, as that is of Peace . . . ," ought to be created which would serve all peoples and all nations.

Penn proposed an international legislature, "a General Dyet, Estates, or Parliament," which would make laws for all sovereignties and have powers stronger than any government or league could resist. He outlined many of the details of a constitution, letting his mind roam over the numerous facets of his idea. Some

*The most easily available editions are those in the Old South Leaflets (vol. iii, no. 75) and in W. E. Darby, ed., International Arbitration: International Tribunals, fourth ed., American Peace Society, 1925.
of these details are curious and colorful. The representatives were to meet in a round room, with many doors, so that no questions of precedence would arise. Voting was to be secret, so that the delegates, he almost suggests, could take their bribes from the highest bidders but still vote as they pleased. A three-fourths majority would be required for all measures, so that corruption of the assembly would be at least expensive if not impracticable. The records would be kept in a chest with a separate lock for every ten representatives, and there would be a clerk also for each ten representatives. No state would be allowed to refrain from voting on any issue, thus to prevent alliances and cabals, he hoped; and debates would be either in Latin or in French, "the first would be very well for Civilians, but the last most easy for Men of Quality."

There were some arguments against the plan, Penn recognized. Great states would oppose it; smaller states would hesitate to surrender their sovereignties; and, since armies would decay, careers for younger sons would be restricted. But the real benefits would far outweigh these objections. Blood would no longer be spilled; Christendom would become a peaceful example to the heathen; money would be saved; the ravages of war would give way to the prosperity of peace; international amity would result; the Turk would be repelled by a united Europe; and princes could choose wives for love rather than for politics. And so, Penn concluded, "till the Millennium Doctrine be accomplished, there is nothing appears to me so beneficial an Expedient to the Peace and Happiness of this Quarter of the World."

The great plans for world peace have come from a strange assortment of pens. In Dante, in Pierre Dubois, in the whole magnificent achievement of medieval Christendom the memory of the Roman Imperium, one state, one church, had been preserved. But the awful devastation of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century national wars brought new motives and new problems to those who dreamed of peace. Penn, like Newton, stood on giant shoulders. Emeric Crucé in 1623 had proposed that all nations send ambassadors to a European parliament at Venice to settle those commercial jealousies which caused wars. Hugo Grotius, believing world peace to be the end for which international law should exist, had outlined a vast system of arbitration among nations. A hundred years earlier old Professor Vitoria at Sala-

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*Darby, *op. cit.*, publishes the texts of the major plans produced before 1910.*
manca had pleaded the rights of the people rather than of the sovereign as the basis of enduring peace. And the duc de Sully, while forging absolutism in France, had produced his Great Design of the federation of the fifteen Christian states of Europe, with a council empowered to raise an international police force. All or at least most of these proposals were known to Penn. As their propounders had been moved by the contemplation of other wars, so Penn in writing his Essay was moved by the prolonged struggle of his time against Louis of France; and in like manner the Abbé de Saint Pierre, Leibnitz, Kant, Bentham, and later Woodrow Wilson and still later Clarence Streit were prompted to formulate for their warring worlds their various designs for peace. Penn made no claim to originality. Indeed, he declared that he was only urging what Sully had proposed and what the federated history of the Dutch Provinces had proved could be done—merely putting an old idea "into the Common Light for the Peace and Prosperity of Europe."

But new or old, the ideal of the universal dominion of peace and the erection of effective machinery to establish it was a worthy cause to champion. Penn's advocacy has won him the "esteem of learned and judicious men of all persuasions."

Penn was at his best in the two works of his retirement under discussion. Had he never written anything else, his reputation as both thinker and stylist would doubtless have been greater than it is and we should regret the paucity of his production. But we have so much from his pen that we have now to regret that he did not in the balance of his writing maintain the intensity and depth of the Essay, the charm and breadth of the Fruits of Solitude. I propose not to examine any other work in detail but rather to try from a survey of the whole of his writing to draw a few general conclusions as to his literary and intellectual habiliments, his notions of the political structure of liberty, and the pattern of his thinking on man and the state."

"The balance of these remarks is a summary of some parts of a larger manuscript on Penn's political thought prepared in 1936-1937, publication of which seemed unnecessary after the appearance in 1939 of Edward C. O. Beatty's careful study, William Penn as a Social Philosopher. I had the benefit of helpful suggestions and criticisms from Professor W. T. Root, Dr. Julian Boyd, and Professor Merle Curti, but it would be a trespass on their kindness to hold them responsible for any of the material or arguments presented.
Penn was not an original thinker; this we have already perceived in the *Essay,* and it may be seen throughout his other works as well. But it does not follow that he was the eclectic representative of the dominant ideas of his age. He was a man with a cause who approached his cause with a bias. To compare his writings with John Locke's is to recognize the great gulf which could separate two Whig leaders with many goals in common. Penn was the proponent of a very particular point of view, a much more restricted one than Locke's and one with which very few of the leading minds of his time could have precise agreement. He was a theological student of considerable attainment, but he was disputing political questions, for which his reading had not thoroughly equipped him. A study of the books in his library and a careful listing of all the authors whose works he quoted or to whom he referred produces a very long but a very curious collection of writers. One concludes that Penn must have been a voracious reader but not a systematic or a selective one; that he did not know a surprising number of the principal works of political thought but that he did know a surprising number even of obscure books on ancient and modern religions, travel, and science, sometimes of indifferent merit. He combined with rather undiscriminating reading habits a thorough familiarity with the history of English law and the leading constitutional texts. As a result of his miscellaneous learning and of the fact that his ideas were tempered in controversy the several recurring motifs running through his works omit some of the leading typical ideas of his times, while they include some that seem scarcely of general application. Perhaps this is one reason why Penn did not influence the thought of the eighteenth century as extensively as did Locke.

Another reason lies in the fact that Penn was essentially a conservative thinker, seeking to preserve the interests of a man of property in a political order based on property, convinced that the English monarchy was the safest guarantee of property that existed. He believed that the “men of estates” gave stability to society. He even attributed the success of Pennsylvania to its beginnings by men of wealth. He was by no means the only Quaker of great property; indeed, there were some forty other

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8 When the family library was sold in London in February, 1872, a catalog of some of Penn's books was issued by the auctioneers, Puttick and Simpson.
conspicuously rich Friends who associated with him as investors in colonial adventures. But the spectacle of a wealthy courtier involved in dissent with the most radical of sects remained incomprehensible to many. “I vow Mr. Penn I am sorry for you,” said Sir John Robinson, lieutenant of the Tower, as he committed Penn to prison. “You are an ingenious gentleman, all the world must allow and do allow you that, and you have a plentiful estate. Why should you render yourself unhappy by associating with such a simple people?” Had Sir John known history better or understood human nature more thoroughly than he did, he could have answered his own question, for society has never been without its rich adherents of the lower classes. Motives of philanthropy and benevolence, of enthusiasm and sympathy, are difficult to explain, but they exist. Yet first of all Penn was a man of estate with property to maintain. He wished on the one hand to secure equality and recognition for the Society of Friends but on the other to receive a guaranty of the inviolability of his property, a sort of security in which toleration and economic liberty prevailed side by side harmoniously. With these two criteria, toleration and security, the one economic but full of ethical content, the other ethical but big with political and economic implications, he measured society. They were the large values he formed from groups of small values. Somehow he succeeded in ejecting incompatible elements and in welding the two together in a social program. In the homeliest terms, he ate his intellectual cake and had it too.

There was every reason why the seventeenth-century Quaker should have been on the most advanced fringe of social thinking. His religious belief, his social position, his economic status, and the disabilities he suffered might well have placed him among the group whose aim was the reform of political institutions and the creation of an equalitarian state. But the clouds of Penn’s property interest that he trailed with him into the Society of Friends moderated his religious radicalism. There was nothing of the Leveler in his thinking; nothing of the equalitarianism of Overton, the communism of Walwyn, or the socialism of Chamberlen; nothing of the enthusiasm for realism and reform that had always animated “honest John” Lilburne. Penn belonged rather in the same realm with a man like Samuel Hartlieb, who also desired reform within the existing governmental and economic system.
His program, placed along side that of Overton, Lilburne, or even the inoffensive Hartleib, seems no radicalism but only a practicable, pragmatic, and rather mild liberalism.

There were, Penn declared, three fundamental rights of man in society—property, consent to laws, and jury service. "The First of these Three Fundamentals is Property, that is, Right and Title to your own Lives, Liberties and Estates: In this, every Man is a Sort of Little Soveraign to himself: No Man has Power over his Person, to Imprison or hurt it, or over his Estate to Invade or Usurp it." The English government was a legal entity, with legal power only. Law allowed it a certain scope. If it went beyond the law, it was exercising not legal power but tyranny and was not then truly a government at all. "Now the Law is Umpire between the King, Lords and Commons, and the Right and Property is One in Kind through all Degrees and Qualities in the Kingdom: Mark that." The laws of England, Penn observed, gave the most protection to property that there was throughout the world.

Thus Penn founded his political thinking on the subject's right to property and his right to share in government in order to protect his property. One's estate was conferred upon him by the "great Charters of Nature and Scripture," not by the State and certainly not by religious opinions. Was it not wrong therefore to deprive a man of his possessions because of his religion? "... my plain and honest Drift has all along been neither more or less than this," he asserted, "to show that Church Government is no real Part of the old English Government; and to disentangle property from Opinion." Penn asked the restoration of the traditional rule of the laws of England, whose cry had ever been "Property more sacred than Opinion, Civil Rights not concerned with Ecclesiastical Discipline, nor forfeiture for Religious Nonconformity."

In a generation that had produced social radicalism of all kinds, invariably associated with religious radicalism, Penn embraced the latter without the former. A mystic like Peter Waldo of old, devoted like him to the primitivistic concepts of original Christianity, he nevertheless retained an affection for property interests more reminiscent of de Montfort than of Waldo, more suitable to a Hampden, a Pym, a Shaftesbury, or milord Bishop of London than to a latter-day mystic. At least it is certainly less than ac-
curate to claim, as an historian has recently done, that Penn "was in advance of his time in the lengths to which he was willing to go in liberalizing the government and in safeguarding the rights of the people." It will not lessen our regard for the benevolent motives which actuated him to realize that he was truly far behind, rather than in advance of, many of his contemporaries in the "lengths to which he was willing to go" in governmental reform. Penn's ideal state was a paternalistic government assuring to subjects the "possession and enjoyment of their own." But the paths to social happiness were not so narrow as such paternalism, and we cannot but believe that the large body of literature which came from the lower-class movements of the midcentury strife and had its descendants in the restoration years made more thorough recommendations for political reform and met more intimately the serious issues of poverty, labor, and food than did the writings of William Penn, cast as they were within a frame of reference limited by the interests of a property-owning middle class. It may well be argued that Penn's program was similar to that of the great defenders of property rights who were his contemporaries, such as Locke; it may be advanced also that his ideas were more nicely calculated to secure at least some support than the extremist pamphlets of the Levellers and reformers, which would frighten a landed and mercantilist parliament into more severe repressive measures. This is probably true. It is true too that Penn is a more important character for us today than any of his more radical contemporaries. But shall we say the reason is that he reached closer to the truth or grappled more intelligently with problems at stake than did other writers or that he proposed solutions which could be worked out within the social framework already existing, solutions which the entrenched elements in society to which he belonged could adopt without prejudice to their dominant position?

If his characteristic defense of property was Penn's first political principle, his second was his nationalism. "I love England," affirmed the Quaker, "I ever did so, and . . . am not in her Debt. I never valued Time, Money, or Kindred, to serve her and do her Good. No Party could ever byass me to her Prejudice, nor any Personal Interest oblige me in her Wrong." He proposed that national feeling ought to cure religious disagreements. "I am sure it has been my Endeavour," he said, "that if we could not all meet upon a Religious Bottom, at least we might upon a Civil One,
the Good of England.” This was the end all religions could strive together to foster, but only by obliterating doctrinal differences could it be served. “Certain it is, that there are few Kingdoms in the World more divided within themselves, and whose Religious Interests lye more seemingly cross to all Accommodations, than that we Live in.” Penn addressed a book to the question, “What is most Fit, Easy and Safe at this Juncture of Affairs to be done, for quieting of Differences, allaying the Heat of contrary Interests, and making them subservient to the Interests of the Government, and consistent with the Prosperity of the Kingdom?”

Penn felt that England had the freest government in all the world. Since “it hath pleased Almighty God to cast our Lot in a Kingdom, whose Constitution is more than ordinarily careful of the Liberty and Property of its freeborn Inhabitants,” what foolhardiness was it which desired the overthrow of the established institutions and organizations of the nation? To be an Englishman was “to be a Freeman, whether Lord or Common.” This was the government which stemmed from the Great Charter of Liberties, this was the government which protected the rights of men, this was the government that stood between English Protestants and French Catholics, between English merchants and Dutch men-of-war. Te renounce it was to lose all, to undermine it was to undermine the foundations of landlordism, mercantile wealth, private property, and all else which Penn meant by the word liberty.

The freedom of Englishmen came from the constitutional limitations which confined government to its proper sphere and preserved the private rights of all the subjects. Penn accepted without question the conventional doctrine of the social contract and the rights of nature which had attained general currency in the crises of the seventeenth century, but he accepted it with some peculiar reservations. While he did not embrace fully the discredited theories of the divine right of kings, he did assert that government was divinely ordained. Yet he was placed in the inconsistent position of opposing government as power when he sought to win civil rights for the Quakers. The reconciliation he made among the contradictory theories of the natural rights of men, the divine origin of government, and the oppressiveness of government as power is a foggy part of his thought, but it is nevertheless the key
to his political philosophy. Government, he said, was indeed the mandate of God, but the all-important element was the purpose of that mandate: to achieve the good of the whole. Government was an expedient, necessary but not innately desirable, forced upon men to control the anarchy of nature. Every man had a royalty of his own which he lost by combining in government; yet by entering society he received protection in exchange for sovereignty. "And if he be Servant to others that before was free, he is also served by others that formerly owed him no Obligation. Thus while we are not our own, every Body is ours, and we get more than we lose, the Safety of the Society being the Safety of the Particulars that constitute it. So that while we seem to submit to, and hold all we have from Society, it is by Society that we keep what we have."

This philosophy was the familiar theory of the social contract. But when he came to the problem of political obligations, Penn departed in a measure from convention. The government on its side had duties of justice as well as of protection, and the maintenance of justice was the spirit of true government. The Quakers, he said, were enemies not to government in general but only to injustice wrought by governments or by anyone else.

... we believe Government to be God's Ordinance, and... that this Present Government is established by the Providence of God and Law of the Land, and that it is our Christian Duty readily to obey it in all its Just Laws, and wherein we cannot comply through Tenderness of Conscience, in all such Cases, not to revile or conspire against the Government, but with Christian Humility and Patience tire out all Mistakes about us, and wait their better Information, who, we believe, do as undeservedly as severely treat us, and I know not what greater Security can be given by any People, or how any Government can be easier from the Subjects of it.

It will be noted that Penn did not claim the right of revolution, though the sentence just quoted might easily have ended with the assertion of this right of nature instead of promising "Christian Humility and Patience." The question was so much in the air that we have the uneasy feeling that he was shying away from the
logical results of his argument. But more was at stake than the syllogistic perfection of a logical system of politics. Penn was not only pleading the Quaker cause; he was also pleading the cause of property, to which revolution was abhorrent. He was trying to convince a timid governing class that Quakerism could be tolerated without danger to governmental institutions, that it could quietly exist within a state governed as England was governed. The question of majority will, the definition of general will, the matter of consent—these and many other aspects of his belief would have to be examined to throw the clearest light on his “stopping at the half-way house.” Yet the Quakers did constitute a danger to the ruling Anglican and Presbyterian interests, a danger greater than differences in religious dogma; so our ultimate judgment of Penn will rest on whether we believe the kind of argument he used or the threatening gesture he might have used to be the stronger persuasive for his cause.

At any rate Penn felt his obligation to the state more important than those limitations his sphere of private rights imposed upon the state. He contended that this obligation was to the state as law, not as sovereign or prince. It was the rule of law he was defending. Law must be supreme. It governed ruler and ruled alike. It was the glory of the English king that he was a prince by right, not might; by law, not power. “He has Power, but from and according to Law, not that he makes his Will and Power Law.” These were the two alternatives in government: will and power, “Condition and Contract. The one rules by Men, the other by Laws.”

Laws were of two kinds: fundamental, durable, indissoluble, and immutable; or superficial, temporary, alterable, and circumstantial. The latter were “Acts, Laws, or Statutes” made by men to meet specific immediate problems. The former—“all those Laws, that constitute the ancient Civil Government of England, and which make up those two words, English Men”—were defined generally as springing from “that Eternal Principle of Truth and Sapience, more or less disseminated through Mankind, which are as the Corner-Stones of Humane Structure, the Basis of reasonable Societies, without which all would run into Heaps, and Confusion; namely . . . To live Honestly, not to Hurt another, and to give every one their Right.”
Specifically Penn enumerated three privileges which were “the proper Birth-right of English Men”:

I. An Ownership, and Undisturbed Possession: That what they have, is Rightly theirs, and no Body’s else.
II. A Voting of every Law that is made, whereby that Ownership or Propriety may be maintained.
III. An Influence upon, and a Real Share in that Judicatory Power that must apply every such Law, which is the Ancient Necessary and Laudable Use of Juries . . .

These three privileges had been fundamental with the primitive Britons, he learned from “Caesar, Tacitus, and especially Dion”; the Saxons had preserved them in the principles of their government, and the Normans had shrewdly incorporated them in the great charters of the constitution. He cited “that great Father of the Laws of England, Chief Justice Cook” to support his arguments: “The Laws of England were never the Dictates of any Conqueror’s Sword; or the Placita of any King of this Nation; or (saith he) to speak impartially and freely, the Results of any Parliament that ever sate in this land.” Freedom had always been part of the English government; the governors were entrusted to preserve it, and “All Trusts suppose such a fundamental Right in them for whom the Trusts are as altogether indissolvable by the Trustees. The Trust is the Liberty and Property of the People; the Limitation is, that It should not be invaded, but inviably preserved, according to the Laws of the Land.”

The second privilege, consent of the governed, was necessary to preserve ownership and control of property against state power. Penn demonstrated its antiquity but was interested chiefly in pointing out to “superiours” that it was to their interest to foster consent. “. . . as paradoxal as any may please to think it, ’tis the great Interest of a Prince, that the People should have a Share in the making of their own Laws; where ’tis otherwise, they are no Kings of Free-Men, but Slaves, and those their Enemies for making them so.” He quoted from Ulpian and from Gratian and on the latter commented:

It is then (saith he) that human Laws have their due Force, when they shall not only be devised, but confirm’d by the Approbation of the People. 1. It makes
Men diligent, and increaseth Trade, which advances the Revenue; for where Men are not free, they wil never seek to improve, because they are not sure of what they have. 2. It frees the Prince from the Jealousie and Hate of his People; and consequently, the Troubles and Danger that follow; and make his Province easy and safe. 3. If any Inconveniency attends the Execution of any Law, the Prince is not to be blam’d; ’tis their own Fault that made, or at least consented to it.

Privileges were necessary for the preservation of property, for if the great ancient and fundamental laws of nature so often accepted and ratified in England “shall not be to our great Pilots, as Stars of Compass for them to steer the Vessel of the Kingdom by, or Limits to their Legislation, no Man can tell how long he shall be secure of his Coat, enjoy his House, have Bread to give to his Children, Liberty to work for Bread, and Life to eat it.”

The above extracts have been chosen to convey the spirit of Penn’s writings as well as the content; they cannot help but convey also the conclusion that the author did not have a well developed or carefully integrated political theory. There is much that is casual in his thinking, and there are some irreconcilable contradictions. There is a curious mixture of serious and trivial matter, and there is a strange marshaling of great moral principles side by side with the most worldly arguments. The mixed character of his appeal, combining worldliness, policy, and interest with the highest spiritual aspirations, is the hardest aspect of his writing for a modern reader to accept sympathetically. It seems to throw doubt on his sincerity, and it raises questions regarding his motives. The tone of his works led Mr. Russell-Smith to remark that Penn looked at the whole question of toleration from the point of view of policy rather than of religion. But I think one could as easily maintain the opposite position, namely, that toleration was the great lodestone of Penn’s thought, that in his writings Penn was addressing particular audiences whom he knew well, to whose interests he tuned his arguments; that in the course of his pleading for toleration he developed as much of the current political ideology as was helpful to his cause and consonant with Quaker belief; and finally that he failed to formulate a systematic political theory beyond that point because it was not

necessary to his argument. If this position be tenable, Penn's political theory may be regarded as a by-product of his advocacy of free worship.

Still, in those underlying assumptions that direct belief Penn had made basic intellectual commitments other than toleration. Even if we consider freedom of worship as the great goal for which he consciously strove, we must acknowledge that in his mind toleration was not an ideal separate from the stable government of the English monarchy or separate either from the stability of property interests which that monarchy represented. His toleration was a nationalistic, middle-class ideal. Penn desired not freedom of worship in the abstract but freedom of English worship under English institutions. The significant thing about his motives seems to be that it was toleration he wanted, rather than revolution. "It is not my Purpose to dispute for Liberty of Conscience," he declared, "but to recommend it."

When we turn to the writings addressed directly to the issue of toleration, we meet with a familiar William Penn. This was the cause he made so peculiarly his mark, especially in The Great Case of Liberty of Conscience Debated. He argued for religious freedom on three grounds: reason (the rights of man), scripture (the rights of Christians), and history (the rights of Englishmen). Offended at the persecution of his sect, he warned that such injustices as had been suffered could not be endured much longer. "... we who are nick-nam'd Quakers," he said, "have under every Revolution of Power and Religion been the most reviled, contemned and persecuted, as if God indeed had set us forth in these last Days as a Spectacle to the World, to Angels and to Men; and treated as if, by being what we are, our common Right and Interest in humane Societies were forfeited." But even more important was the fact that toleration was theologically necessary to Quakers because of the doctrine of the Inner light. Penn stated this doctrine simply in syllogistic form. "Every man ought to Fear, Worship and Obey God. No Man can do it aright, that knows him not. No Man can know him, but by the Discovery he makes of himself. No Discovery can be made without Light: Nor can this Light give that Discovery, if imperfect or insufficient.

in Nature; therefore all have a Sufficient Light to this Great End and Purpose, viz. To Fear, Worship, and Obey God; and this Light is Christ." The Divine Principle in man went by many names. To follow the guidance of that principle freedom of worship was necessary. By intolerance and repression mankind was "robbed of the Use and benefit of that Instinct of a Deity, which is so natural to him, that he can be no more without it, and be, than he can be without the most essential part of himself . . . such [rulers] as invalidate the Authority of this Heavenly Instinct (as Imposition and Restraint evidently do) destroy Nature, or that Privilege which Men are born with, and to."

What the Quakers demanded, Penn argued, was not unreason-able. By toleration they meant a liberty of the mind—the right to believe what doctrines they wished—and a liberty of worship—the right to act on their beliefs. Their coming together to worship would be without danger to the government or laws of the land and would result in their moral improvement and thus the moral improvement of the state. Religion, the noblest end of man's life, was the best bond of human society.

Penn directed his arguments at many targets. First, he ex-hibited that toleration would be advantageous to the king. The Declaration of Indulgence had granted toleration and had benefited the crown by doing so. Indulgence was no dangerous or obsolete thing, even though the declaration was gone. It was, on the contrary, prudent because it preserved concord. No kingdom divided against itself could stand. Tolerance by indulgence made the prince "peculiarly Safe and Great. Safe, because all Interests, for Interests Sake, are bound to love and court him. Great, in that he is not govern'd or clogg'd with the Power of his Clergy, which in most Countries is not only a Co-ordinate Power, a Kind of Duumvirateship in Government, Imperium in Imperio, at least an Eclipse to Monarchy, but a Superior Power, and rideth the Prince to their Designs, holding the Helm of the Government, a steering not by the Laws of Civil Freedom, but certain Ecclesiasti-cal Maxims of their own, to the Maintenance and Enlargement of their Worldly Empire in their Church.” It well became the prince to tolerate dissenting sects because thereby he not only promoted religion, “the noblest end,” but actually fostered its civil function, to bind society together. A prince who ruled with temperance, mercy, justice, meekness, and fear of God was assured
of respectful and loyal subjects. And in the year 1686, with a Catholic king in England, Penn added that toleration was a security to the royal family.

Second, Penn held that it was to the larger interests of the nation to tolerate freedom of worship. Here he was striking at the controlling groups in the parliament. He admonished them again and again that there could be no conviction except by the spirit, that to enact sincere conformity by law was impossible, for “as no Man can inherit the Kingdom of God, unless he be born of the Spirit, so no Ministry can beget a Soul to God, but that which is from the Spirit.” Intolerance would vitiate both peace and plenty, those twin goals for which government was instituted among men, because civil society could not exist if it was not the will of all that it should exist. Penn pleaded for equal rights for all dissenting groups, for an equilibrium attained by the pushes and pulls of many sects against each other. This balance would be the means of “overpoizing faction.” Thus he conceived of a sort of federation of religions within the state, all parts of which were bound to the state by self-interest, the churchman for his bounty, the dissenter for his very existence which, “being the last of Tyes, and the strongest Obligation, the Security is greatest from him, that is fancy’d most unsafe to Tolerate.”

Third, Penn attempted to prove that it was the best policy for the established Church of England itself to tolerate dissenters and maintain a balance among religions. There were three “church interests” in the kingdom—Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Protestant—and he believed that the two dissenting groups should be played off against each other by the established church so that neither might become too strong in itself. Both dissenting interests would benefit, for strife would be governed if not ended.

Fourth, Penn strongly urged the advantage toleration brought to the commerce and industries of the nation—a new argument introduced in the years following the Restoration. In language designed to appeal to the business instincts of merchants, shipowners, and colonial factors whose influence in Parliament was appreciable he warned of the results of intolerant and repressive measures and denied that toleration would lead to revolutions or civil strife. History had proved the opposite to be true. On toleration the empire stood safe; on intolerance it stood shaking, like a house built upon the sands. If intolerance persisted, there
would certainly be two dire results: impoverishment of the people and emigration of part of the producing class to other lands. If, on the other hand, toleration was adopted, prosperity would ensue and immigration of artisans and laborers into the country would be encouraged; for toleration fostered the useful arts and industry, attracted people to a country “where the Sweat of the Brow is not made the Forfeit of Conscience,” and engendered tranquillity, which would “at a Time when our Neighbouring Monarch is wasting his People, excite those Sufferers into the King’s Dominions, whose Number will encrease that of his Subjects, and their Labour and Consumption, the Trade and Wealth of his Territories.”

Finally, Penn appealed to the moral interest of all in society. He pointed out that the Quakers were a useful, productive, universally law-abiding, exemplary element in the civil state, instructed by their theological doctrines in respect for their superiors and obedience to law and devoted to simple living, virtue, and industry in the community. They should be protected in order to preserve the profit of trade and commerce. The kingdom had been weakened by five sins against nature—drunkenness, fornication, luxury in living, profuse gaming, and profaneness. The teachings of the Quakers would eliminate these vices by a return to primitive Christianity, simplicity in living, and ancient virtue. The modern Christians could have none of the Quakers’ character so long as they persevered in their vanity, superstition, and intemperance; in these respects it was the Catholic and the Anglican, not the Quaker, who undermined the moral foundations of the state.

Penn did not recommend the life of a recluse; that would have seemed barren to Restoration mercantilist and Quaker moralist. The Christian life was of a different nature. “What a World should we have, if every Body for fear of Transgressing, should Mew himself up within Four Walls?” The Quakers carried goodness and righteousness into all their activities, thus forming the part of society which should be valued most, for never was the hand of God raised against a righteous nation. “Kingdoms are rarely as short lived as Men, yet they also have a Time to die: But as Temperance giveth Health to Men, so Virtue gives Time to Kingdoms; and as Vice brings Men betimes to their Grave, so Nations to their Ruin.”
The ultimate problem of political thinking, which Penn frequently had to tackle, concerned the fundamental nature of human nature. To Penn's contemporaries this question was particularly significant, since by the social-contract theory government was assumed to be the result of an escape from primitive anarchy. If in his natural, presocial condition man had been essentially good, then the civil state was a dissent from his goodness; but if he had been bestial and savage, the state was an ascent to a higher, nobler plane. Though Penn nowhere developed his ideas on this subject systematically, he often expressed them, and there are ample indications throughout his works that he felt man's lot in society to be richer, more productive, and morally better than his life in presocial nature. He spoke of the freedom that comes through obedience and of the elevated condition of the social man, using terms that remind one of the idealistic position of English writers of a much later period.

But Penn had as his principal concern man in society and the motives that move most men most of the time to do what they do. Very early in his work he hit upon an idea (fully explained in a tract of 1679) which he continued to develop throughout the rest of his writing. This was the concept of "interest," the belief that the individuals and the groups struggling with one another in society formulated certain persisting and identifying values which they sought to effectuate either consciously or unconsciously and which could be relied upon to predict their reactions to any given situation. Men had interests as individuals and in groups as well. Some were primary, some derived. The elementary ones they all had in common. "Civil Interest" was the basis of all civil government (a sort of will of all). "National Interest" was the support of the nation.

Interest will not lye: Men embarked in the same Vessell, seek the Safety of the Whole in their Own, whatever other Differences they may have. And Self-Safety is the highest worldly Security a Prince can have; for though all Parties would rejoice their own Principles prevailed, yet every one is more solicitous about its own Safety, than the other's Verity. Wherefore it cannot be unwise, by the Security of All, to make it the Interest as well as the Duty of All, to advance that of the Publick.
Interest was a mutable thing in life. It could change in substantial ways, but it always functioned in the same way, as the sure determinant of individual action.

As I take all Men to be unwillingly separated from their Interests, and consequently ought only to be sought and discours'd in them, so it must be granted me on all Hands, *That Interests change as well as Times, and 'tis the Wisdom of a Man to observe the Courses, and humour the Motions of his Interest, as the Best Way to preserve it.* And lest any ill-natured, or mistaken Person, should call it Temporizing, I make this early Provision; *That I mean, no immoral or corrupt Compliance.* . . . For upon the Principle I now go, and which I lay down, as common and granted in Reason and Fact, with all Parties concern'd in this Discourse, that Man does not change, that Morally follows his Interest under all its Revolutions, because to be true to his Interest, is his First Civil Principle. . . .

Penn declared that the foundation of governments was the interest in government that men had and that when the government went beyond its function of fostering the interests of individuals, it overreached its own interest. He explained his terms thus:

The Word INTEREST has a good and bad Acceptance; when it is taken in an ill Sense, it signifies a Pursuit of Advantage without regard to Truth or Justice; which I mean not: The good Signification of the Word, and which I mean, is a Legal Endeavour to keep Rights, or argument honest Profits, whether it be in a private Person or a Society. By GOVERNMENT, I understand a Just and Equal Constitution, where Might is not Right, but Laws rule, and not the Wills or Power of Men; for that were plain Tyranny.

The good of the whole was the "rise and end" of government, but how could a man determine that good? Penn answered that he should consult his own interest: he certainly would believe that an undisturbed possession of his property was a "good" for him, and "the Construction he makes for himself will serve his Neighbour, and so the whole Society." Hence the preservation of property was one part of the good of the whole which government existed to enhance. When property ownership was insecure,
the government would be unstable. Where the line between obedience and interest could be drawn Penn did not know, but eventually the latter would triumph, even over the government.

In preserving the good of the whole (particularly property ownership) governments were but consulting interests they had apart from individuals or rather interests they had as the sums of individuals, for the "whole" would unite with the government in a general will for the good of the government. The interests of the subjects were the most potent force in society; the state was an instrument for directing them. Poring over English history, Penn proved by many examples the power of interest as a factor in government. All persuasions of religion were governed by their interests; they supported the rulers and the kind of a state which best served the interests they most highly prized.

But interest as a principle operated not alone in government. Several of the maxims in the *Fruits of Solitude* were designed to illustrate its importance in private life. "Interest has the Security, tho' not the Virtue of a Principle. As the World goes 'tis the surer side; For Men daily leave both Relations and Religion to follow it. 'Tis an odd Sight, but very evident, That Families and Nations, of cross Religions and Humours, unite against those of their own, where they find an Interest to do it. We are tied down by our Senses to this World; and where that is in Question, it can be none with Worldly Men, whether they should not forsake all other Considerations for it." Even art and literature were affected by interest. The biographer of the bishop of London, Penn remarked, concealed the bishop's sentiments in favor of toleration because it was to his interest to do so.

In Penn's use of the word *interest* we have what the writer conceives to be the most revealing indication of his notions of human motives. The term was employed so frequently, in so many contexts, that it became a sort of ubiquitous periapt in his writings. No consideration of his political thought would be complete without a notice of it. First let us observe that Penn did not mean by the term a materialistic determinism. The great business of man's life, he believed, was to glorify God. He abominated pride, luxury, avarice, and what he called "constancy to the world." He preached against display and against pleasure. But he did not despise commerce. The perfection of the Christian life extended, he felt, "to every honest Labour or Traffick
used among Men.” To acquire and enjoy property was decent and Christian. Interest, therefore, was not economic, though it did not exclude economic pursuits.

What Penn appears to have meant is that men act according to their notions of their own good, and if these notions are properly qualified by understanding, by moral goodness, and by regard for truth and justice, each man’s good will result in the good of society as a whole. This was an optimistic concept, for Penn believed the generality of men capable and desirous of attaining goodness. It was an individualistic concept, which regarded society as the sum of the true, valid, or good interests of all individuals in it. Thus, by the way, it seems comparable to the “invisible hand” doctrine of Adam Smith, with the basic economic assumptions of Smith replaced by basic moral assumptions concerning the nature of human nature.

Of course the concept was uncompleted, and there was the possibility of a serious inconsistency, for men’s property interest might frequently not coincide with their other social interests and with their interest to live frugally. An interest to “augment honest profits” has not always proved compatible with “a legal endeavor to keep rights.” But inconsistencies in social theory were resolvable in Penn’s mind by an appeal to the problem of evil, on which the Quaker had some very strong convictions.

Inchoate though it be, this notion of interest gives continuity to Penn’s thought and suggests the heights that the author might have reached had he spent his energies principally in the philosopher’s study. Dealing as we are with the works of a very busy man, who must be known as much through his actions as through his ideas, we are not unjustified in attributing to Penn a deeper consciousness and a more thorough understanding of political philosophy than he elaborated in his books. To place the writings alongside the public achievements and the private character of the man is to appreciate the full magnitude and variety of the colorful canvas of life Penn painted. The nationalist—not in the grand manner but in the manner of the landowning, trading, entrepreneurial middle-class Englishman; the colonial proprietor; the Quaker leader; the staunch advocate of Whig programs of liberalism—is part and parcel of the man of thought. All taken together amply support the deliberate judgment of Lord Acton, that Penn was the “greatest historical figure of his age.”