VIOLET OAKLEY
Photo by Florence Maynard
Foremost among the treasures in the Capitol at Harrisburg are the mural paintings by Violet Oakley, depicting William Penn's vision and its fulfillment. Miss Oakley, whose unique position in American art is so well known as to place her beyond the need of introduction, here tells how she came to paint them and what they mean to her. The illustrations are her own reproductions in black and white of paintings in the Governor's Reception Room, the Senate Chamber, and the Supreme Court Room.

The Vision of William Penn*

Mural Paintings in the Capitol of Pennsylvania

BY VIOLET OAKLEY

Prologue

MY OWN FAITH IN AN ORGANIZED WORLD GOVERNED BY INTERNATIONAL LAW dates from my first study of the life of William Penn and his “Holy Experiment,” as he called the unfortified Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1682.

The study was begun when I was asked to design and execute the series of mural paintings in the Governor's

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Reception Room in the (then) new State Capitol of Pennsylvania. I named this series

THE FOUNDING OF THE STATE OF LIBERTY SPIRITUAL.

Some years later the study was continued when I was commissioned to decorate also the Senate Chamber and the Supreme Court Room in the same building. The themes, as they developed, became respectively


Deeply was I impressed when I found that not only had Penn established his Colony successfully in the Wilderness, in the midst of alien Tribes, with no military power whatever, but with his far-seeing vision—so illuminated by the "Inner Light"—he wrote and published, in 1693, a detailed plan for a

PARLIAMENT OF NATIONS and AN INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE.

Viewed in the light of the Ideological struggle in the world today, and the enforced development of international cooperation, the pages of the Notes in the original Portfolios of "The Holy Experiment" and "Law Triumphant" take on a new significance: the outcome so urgent upon us now—foreshadowed in the Pennsylvania Paintings—being but a fulfillment of the Vision and the Prophecy of the Founder of our Commonwealth.

For William Penn and those early invulnerable, incorruptible Quakers of the Seventeenth Century made a complete demonstration of Security based upon absolute Justice. But, as a scientific laboratory test, Penn’s Holy
Experiment has not been sufficiently understood or studied.

When the book with pen and ink drawings of all my paintings in the Pennsylvania Capitol was finally brought out, in October, 1950, in presenting it to the subscribers I said:

"I present to you a Book on The LAW, the Law of LOVE and WISDOM, as exemplified in the Life of a man, our William Penn, and its effect upon our subsequent history and institutions.

"This Law, when lived, renders War unnecessary—as unnecessary as it is undesirable. 'And the Desire of All Nations shall come.' The outmoded, clumsy carnal weapons are laid aside for the more powerful mental, and spiritual, and ideological weapons demanded by the progress of today."

The Founding of the State of Liberty Spiritual

The Frieze in the Governor's Reception Room

THE FOUNDATION OF THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA was laid deep in the hearts and characters of the men and women who founded it, and in the condition of thought of the times in which they lived, suffered, endured—and finally triumphed.

To understand what these influences were, it is necessary to approach the subject of the great religious upheaval during the period of William Penn and the early Quakers. Penn himself, before joining the Quakers, had been what was then called a "Seeker."
WILLIAM PENN, STUDENT AT CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD, 1660, stirred by his own Vision of Light and consecrated to God’s service. He believed that the seal of Divinity had been put upon him. In the center of the light are the words, “He shall build My City and he shall let go My Captives.”

Later in life, when writing of Pennsylvania, he said: “I had an Opening of Joy as to these parts when a Lad at Oxford.”

From time to time, from the days of his early childhood, he had had these experiences, when alone in his room in deep meditation, of a sense of Inner Comfort and Light, and at the same time an Outer Light filled the room. He was distinctly conscious of the Being of God and that the soul of man could hold communion with Him.
PENN MEETS THE QUAKER-THOUGHT IN THE FIELD-PREACHING at Oxford. He turns from the world to listen to its Message.

Penn was entered at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1660—the year of the Restoration—at the age of sixteen. In 1662 he was expelled from College for attending the Quaker Meetings and neglecting Chapel Services.
ADMIRAL SIR WILLIAM PENN DENOUNCES AND TURNS HIS SON FROM HOME because of his sympathy with the despised sect of Quakers.

The Admiral had been most ambitious for his son, desiring that he should become a great courtier and statesman and hold some important position under the Crown. He was infuriated and humiliated by William's expulsion from Oxford.

Through the intercession of his Mother, his Father was afterwards reconciled to him.
Panel 9-A: PENN'S ARREST WHILE PREACHING AT MEETING—under the Conventicle Acts, which made unlawful any service except that of the Church of England.

Panel 9-C: WRITING IN PRISON: "THE GREAT CASE OF LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE once more briefly debated and defended, by the authority of Reason, Scripture, and Antiquity."

In this most scholarly treatise, which won him his liberation, he quotes from innumerable authors of ancient and more modern times to prove that the Divine Principle of Toleration has always been consonant with the wisest idea of government. Throughout the darkest times of persecution the voice of the truly great has always declared it.
Having been liberated through the force of his own writings, PENN SEEKS TO FREE OTHER FRIENDS IMPRISONED, and makes use of the powerful influence with the crown, inherited from his Father, to secure their liberation. Much of his fortune was spent in this work.

“By his knowledge shall my righteous Servant justify many ... therefore will I divide him a portion with the Great.”

The desire of his life was to bring out of Captivity all those who were oppressed for conscience' sake, whatever their creed or belief. He saw himself as leading the multitudes from prison—to take them to a Land of perfect Freedom.
PENN'S VISION: "BEHOLD MY SERVANT WHOM I UPHOLD HE SHALL NOT fail nor be discouraged till He have set JUDGMENT in the earth . . . to open the Blind Eyes, to bring out the Prisoners from the Prison, and Them that sit in Darkness out of the Prison-House. Sing unto the LORD a New Song, Ye that go down to the SEA."
ACHEIVEMENT OF HIS PURPOSE: THE CHARACTER OF PENNSYLVANIA receives the King's signature, March 4, 1681, granting to William Penn this great tract of land almost as large as England itself, in payment of a debt of £16,000 which the Crown owed to his Father's estates for assistance rendered by the Admiral in the Restoration of Charles II to the Throne.

"By the greatness of Thine Arm they shall be as still as a stone, till Thy People pass over, O Lord, which Thou hast purchased."

Panel 12, east wall

Original painting 6 ft. by 6 ft. 6 in.
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PENN'S FIRST SIGHT OF THE SHORES OF PENNSYLVANIA, as he ascends the River—"from whence the air smelt as sweet as a new-blown Garden."

"Thy God bringeth thee into a good land—of brooks of water—of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills—a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass."
THUS THE PAINTINGS IN THE GOVERNOR'S Room were so planned as to deal exclusively with the Foundation of the State and stopped just short of recording any event within the life of the State itself—bringing William Penn, in the prow of the ship Welcome, only within sight of his Promised Land.

These paintings, which I had begun in 1902, were completed just before the new Capitol building was finished and dedicated, and they were set in place the following month, at Thanksgiving Time, 1906.

The Creation and Preservation of the Union

FIVE YEARS AFTER THE PAINTINGS IN THE Governor's Reception Room were set in place, and soon after the death of that great American painter, Edwin Austin Abbey, I was asked by the Board of Commissioners to undertake that part of his contract with the State which at the time of his death he had not even begun. I was not asked, as has been mistakenly reported, to finish any of the Paintings which he had begun or planned. That was done by his own Assistant in his Studio in England.

The work which thus fell to me consisted of the Mural Paintings in the Senate Chamber and the Supreme Court Room.

Thus it happened—after these five years—that I had to take up again the threads and weave on the tapestry the History of a State, symbolizing now the great Structure whose deep Foundations I had before seen in the laying. What might not be the Destiny of this State built upon such Foundations of pure and complete
Spirited Liberty? I saw the building of it rise—in strength and piercing beauty—to the Stars, up and up to the very CITY of GOD.

"It was only a 'holy experiment,'" wrote Isaac Sharpless, "but it is one of the exalted scenes of History. Here in Pennsylvania was the chance to make the Divine LAW and the Human ONE."

I burned to build a great Monument, not only as its Memorial, but that it might live again—"For there is hope of a Tree—if it be cut down—that it will sprout again and that the tender branch thereof will not cease."

In the Foundation Stones of PENNSYLVANIA were laid these Sapphires:—

The Testimony of the Friends against carnal warfare;
The Testimony of the Friends against human slavery;
The Doctrine of universal "Inner Light";
Civil and Religious Liberty; and
The Spiritual Equality of Man and Woman.

The same fearless, trumpet-speaking voice of the Founder foretold, also, what should be built thereon: "That it may be the Seed of a NATION, for THE NATIONS need a PRECEDENT."

TWO GREAT EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF Pennsylvania are noted in these paintings in the Senate Chamber: The CREATION and the PRESERVATION of the UNION—"The Constitutional Convention, 1787," and "The Dedication at Gettysburg, 1863."

The inscription on the first is from the words of Washington: "Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair—the event is in the hand of God."

Over the second are the words from Lincoln: "It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated to the unfinished work."
Of our Constitution Gladstone has written: "The American Constitution is the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of Man." John Fiske has said: "The great puzzle of civilization—how to secure permanent concert of action without sacrificing independence of action. Thus we have seen the real purpose of American Federalism. . . . To have established such a system over one Great Continent is to have made a very good beginning towards establishing it over all the WORLD."

IS NOT THE TIME ALMOST RIPE, THE BLEEDING WORLD ALMOST ready, for another "HOLY EXPERIMENT," a trial of UNITY? I invoke the spirit

of PENN
of WASHINGTON
of FRANKLIN
of HAMILTON
and
of our FATHER ABRAHAM!

Of Alexander Hamilton it has been written: "He prevailed upon his countrymen to make a trial of UNION, and by the audacity of his procedure he filled a written Charter with the Spirit of Life."

—F. S. Oliver

In 1912, two years before the outbreak of the Great War, this theme for the Senate Chamber was planned. That it had reached this point of development at the moment when the great Conference of Peace was holding its sessions in the city of Paris—where a practicable plan for a League of Nations was known to be the only "just and sane" guarantee of the peace of the world—was corroboration and justification enough, my sufficient reward
for daring to paint the great panel overhead, "International Understanding and Unity" at a time when the idea of the Federation of the World was considered by the vast majority of mankind a most wild and forlorn Dream of Visionaries.

The Opening of the Book of the Law

A UNITY OF IMPRESSION, IN THIS SERIES of paintings in the Supreme Court Room, is gained by an arbitrary unity and simplicity of style adapted from the illuminations of ancient manuscripts. IT IS THE OPEN BOOK OF THE LAW, UNSEALED—as a scroll unrolled—upon the wall—to be read by all.

As Tyndale said that he would make of the Bible a Book "to be easily understood of the people," so we would make of the hosts of LAW a Code, to be seen and comprehended of all.

The first paintings in the Senate Chamber were unveiled on Lincoln's Birthday, 1917, and dedicated to the Cause of Peace—a few weeks only before the country entered the World War. Ten years passed. On the 23rd
of May, 1927, the paintings in the Supreme Court Room were also dedicated “To the Cause of Peace.” For it is to The Law we look, to Law that the whole world looks for the permanent establishment of Peace, and the disestablishment of the now lawless method of settling the puzzling disputes which still arise between Nations.

DIVINE LAW is both the first and the last panel in the series, the “Alpha and Omega” of the law. The great divisions of the law are symbolized as notes in a musical scale, an octave, the keynote of which is Divine Law.
A great monogram fills the panel, made up of the illuminated letters L A W. Subsidiary letters forming the words Love and Wisdom are put in place by the winged figures of the Seraphim and Cherubim, symbolically garbed in red and blue.

The other notes in the musical scale are:

2. Law of Nature;
3. Revealed Law;
4. Law of Reason;
5. Common Law;
6. Law of Nations;
7. International Law.

In the last note we return to the keynote:


Conclusion

IN THE SPRING OF 1927, THE PAINTINGS IN the Supreme Court Room were completed; the following month of June I sailed for Europe on my determined way to the City of Geneva, where I wished to observe the development of International Law—the seventh note in my Musical Scale of the Law. I finally arrived in September, in time for the opening of the Eighth Annual Assembly of the League of Nations.

William Penn seemed to have gone in advance and prepared the way for the study of the people now carrying on his own far distant vision of a Parliament of Nations, the study I was to make during the months of September and October in 1927, '28, and '29.

In 1929, at the end of my stay in Geneva, where I had prepared my portfolio of the Men of Geneva, I wrote
in my Journal: "My thought retraces the steps of the progressive development of the Pennsylvania Paintings . . . to its first theme, 'The Founding of the State of Liberty Spiritual'; then the second (in the Senate Chamber), 'The Creation and Preservation of the Union,' by which I never meant anything less than the Union of the whole world; and then—'The Opening of the Book of the Law' (in the Supreme Court Room). Already the title of the group of Geneva Drawings is decided upon and is to be called 'The Miracle of Geneva.' Perhaps the future work may be revealed as still further pertaining to

THE BUILDING OF THE CITY OF GOD,

DE CIVITATE DEI."

When composing the Foreword to the Book of "The Holy Experiment: Our Heritage from William Penn," in the summer of 1949—vingt ans après—at Caux, Switzerland, I wrote this Note:

"A companion Volume to this Book is now in contemplation, to include a selection of The Geneva Drawings, together with some of the late Drawings of Delegates to the United Nations, in New York, 1946. To these will be added a group of the studies of Delegates to the World Assembly for Moral Re-Armament at Caux—in 1949. The title of this second volume will be

THE COMING OF THE CITY OF GOD."
Epilogue

1953

The experience in Korea may seem to illustrate the far greater force of intelligent Ideas in settling disputes, and their superiority over military armaments of destruction.

When the American General, Mark W. Clark, in command of the United Nations armies in Korea, signed the Armistice, he said: "I cannot find it in my heart to exult in this hour. It is rather A TIME FOR PRAYER."

Let us fervently hope that we are all accepting this challenge—and taking full advantage of this time for deep meditation and the realization of the Power of Prayer to remove mountains of disagreement between the differing Peoples of the Earth: to give strength to the Mental and Spiritual Arms of the United Nations, and to bring all the Nations of the World into one great Family of Nations.

Soon after it had been proposed that the Truce negotiations should be resumed in Korea, President Eisenhower's wonderful speech, on April 16, 1953, was broadcast to the world and published in the newspapers. It was a call to all Nations to "join in devoting a substantial percentage of the savings achieved by Disarmament to a Fund for WORLD RECONSTRUCTION."

He outlined the monumental benefits that would flow from an ERA OF PEACE and Dedication of the World's Energies to wiping out Poverty and Need.

"This would be a new kind of Warfare," he asserted.
The monuments of this new kind of Warfare he described as Roads, Schools, Hospitals, Homes, Food, and Health—comparing them with the cost of Armaments.

"LET US THEN TRY WHAT LOVE WILL DO:
FOR IF MEN DID ONCE SEE WE LOVE THEM,
WE SHOULD SOON FIND THEY WOULD NOT HARM US."

—William Penn