THE FOUNDING of colonial Pennsylvania was a great success.
Let there be no misunderstanding in regard to that matter.
The facts speak for themselves. From the very beginning colonists
came to the Delaware Valley in great numbers. Philadelphia grew
rapidly and was eventually the largest town in the British colonies.
The area under cultivation expanded steadily; Pennsylvania con-
tinued to grow throughout the colonial period, and her pecuniary
success has never been questioned.

The Proprietor granted his freemen an enlightened form of
government, and gradually accepted a series of proposals by the
citizenry for liberalizing the constitution. As an outgrowth of the
Quaker belief that all men are children of God, the colony granted
religious toleration to virtually all who wished to settle, made a
practice of treating the Indians in a fair and just manner, opposed
(as a matter of conscience) resorting to war, experimented with
enlightened principles in regard to crime and punishment, and
fostered advanced ideas concerning the equality of the sexes and
the enslavement of human beings.

As a colonizing venture, the founding of Pennsylvania was a
triumph for William Penn and those who joined with him in the
undertaking.

On the other hand, conditions which prevailed in Pennsylvania
in the first decades caused Penn untold grief, and results fell far
short of what he had envisaged when he wrote concerning the

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as a Reformer and "Quaker Landmarks in Early Philadelphia" (in Historic
Philadelphia, published by the American Philosophical Society, 1953). The
present paper, which grew out of a new study of Pennsylvania's first twenty
years, was read at the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Asso-
ciation, October 23, 1953.
establishment of a “holy experiment.” In fact, it is not too much to say that the “holy experiment,” as Penn himself understood the term, was a failure. That is the thesis of this paper.

The first task is one of definition. It is necessary to consider as carefully as space will permit, what William Penn and other Quakers meant by the term, “holy experiment.” The remainder and major portion of the study will be devoted to an examination of the fifteen years which ended with the return of Penn to Pennsylvania in 1699, for the purpose of explaining both why and how the "holy experiment" failed.

Seventeenth-century Quakers believed that their earthly existence and their spiritual life were closely interrelated. When Penn was granted Pennsylvania in March, 1681, he expressed his thoughts in these familiar words: “For my country, I eyed the Lord in the obtaining of it, and more was I drawn inward to look to him and to owe it to his hand and power, than to any other way. I have so obtained it, and desire that I may not be unworthy of his love, but do that which may answer his kind providence, and serve his truth and people; that an example may be set up to the nations; there may be room there, though not here, for such an holy experiment.”

Penn hoped to plant a utopian community; he hoped to establish in the New World a government, a society, which would serve as an example to all mankind.

Quakers believed in direct communion between God and man. They believed that there was something of God in every man, and they referred to it as the “Inward Christ,” the “Light Within,” or the “Seed of God.” Because they believed that man held a divine spark within him, they believed it was possible to live in accordance with the highest Christian ethic, and they tried to practice the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, they proclaimed to the world that they were creating a society patterned upon the Apostolic Church.

2 Examples of his political views may be found in the following: England's Great Interest in the Choice of this New Parliament, etc. (1679), original broadside, Quaker Collection, Haverford College; The Excellent Priviledge of Liberty and Prbperty, etc. (Philadelphia, 1687), original pamphlet, Quaker Collection, Haverford College.
3 In 1696 Penn wrote a pamphlet entitled Primitive Christianity Revived in the Faith and Practice of the People Called Quakers.
Penn expected this deep spiritual quality to permeate every facet of life in the plantation, and particularly the government. In the Preface to the First Frame of Government, Penn wrote: “government seems to me a part of religion itself, a thing sacred in its institution and end.” However, he added: “Governments, like clocks, go from the motion men give them, and as governments are made and moved by men, so by them are they ruined too. . . . Let men be good, and the government cannot be bad; if it be ill, they will cure it. But if men be bad, let the government be never so good, they will endeavour to warp and spoil to their turn.”

After his return to England Penn wrote to the colonists on one occasion: “Be most just, as in the sight of the all-seeing, all-searching God; and before you let your spirits into an affair, retire to him . . . that he may give you a good understanding, and government of your selves, in the management thereof; which is that which truly crowns public actions, and dignifies those, that perform them. . . . Love, forgive, help and serve one another; and let the people learn by your example, as well as by your power, the happy life of concord.” These were not words addressed to the Quaker meeting for worship. Penn was offering advice and direction to the five men he had just named in February, 1687, to govern the colony as Commissioners of State.

To William Penn the “holy experiment” was to be far more than a good government under which liberal ideas prevailed; it was to be a community motivated by an awareness of the indwelling spirit of God; it was to be “Primitive Christianity Revived.”

The colony was founded under auspicious circumstances. Penn obtained a charter for Pennsylvania from Charles II in 1681, and came to the New World the following year. The land along the Delaware was not entirely uninhabited by Europeans, and the

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Swedes on the west bank as well as the English Quakers on the east bank, aided hundreds of new settlers to establish themselves. Penn prepared a constitution for the province before leaving England, but agreed to modify it to fit the needs of the colonists, and in 1683 the Second Frame, or Charter of Liberties, was drawn up following conferences between the representatives of the freemen and Penn. It provided for a two-house legislature, a Council and Assembly. The Council was to serve as the real legislative body, while the Assembly was virtually limited to approving or defeating bills proposed to it by the upper house.

Penn had been given a proprietary charter by the Crown, and he granted land to the settlers with the proviso that they owe him a quit-rent forever. The rate was one shilling for each hundred acres. Thus Penn was not only spiritual leader of the religious community and head of the government, but he was also landlord of every settler, and expected to receive a yearly rental from each landholder.

Penn's stay in the plantation was cut short by a boundary dis-

*Charter and Laws, 155-161.*
pute between himself and Lord Baltimore of Maryland, and he returned to England in 1684 to defend his grant, placing the guidance of the government in the hands of the Council. He left in Pennsylvania a small colony which was constantly growing, peopled by a community of fellow worshippers, prepared to govern themselves under a liberal charter. Surely William Penn had done a magnificent piece of work in launching the "holy experiment."

Not long after Penn returned to England he became embroiled in a dispute with the colonists which continued to be a perpetual source of conflict. He expected the colony to raise money through taxation to support the government, and assumed that the colonists would pay him their quit-rents. During the period under consideration the colonists seldom fulfilled either of these expectations. In the early years the settlers had little money, for Pennsylvania was a new, struggling colony. Later, when they were in a better financial condition, they still refused to support their own government or to pay their rents to Penn. On his part, Penn nagged the colonists, and all idea of the "holy experiment" was forgotten by both sides long before 1699.

In letter after letter Penn begged the freemen to send him money. On one occasion he declared that he would sell the shirt off his back before he would ask the people for money again, writing, "This is no Anger, tho I am grieved, but a cool & resolved thought." But he never ceased to demand the money which he felt the colonists owed him. In 1696 Penn wrote to Robert Turner, "I have not seen Six pence these twice six years, my Plantation expensive & yet ruinous, a lovely place & good beginning, but every one minding their own things." By the end of the century, the Proprietor estimated that he had spent £20,000 upon the colony, with very little return.

Penn was frequently inconsistent in his fiscal relations with the colonists, and this did not ease the situation. He once asked his Land Commissioners to collect quit-rents in money rather than

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1 January 28, 1687. Penn MSS, Domestic. John Blackwell, the Puritan sent to govern the colony in 1688, to restore order and respect for Penn in the colony, wrote that whenever he attempted to collect the quit-rents, "I finde more than usuall dis-composure." April 9, 1689. Gratz Collection, Governors, HSP.

2 December 25, 1696. Dreer Collection, Penn Letters. HSP.

3 Penn to Lord Romney. September 7, 1701. Penn MSS, Granville Penn Book. HSP.
in produce, and turned around in the same letter to promise each of the men ten bushels of English wheat as their payment from him for their services. Unaware of his own inconsistency, Penn pointed out to the colonists the contradiction between their protestations of love for him which constantly flowed from Pennsylvania to England, and the failure of the people to pay their quit-rents. "Methinks the country yt desires me so much should have some care to get my own easily."

Penn also suffered during these years from financial difficulties at home. It is no wonder that he cried out in desperation to his colonists, but they remained impervious to all requests for assistance. It is apparent that the "holy experiment" was besmirched by unseemly striving over worldly treasure.

In the first years after Penn returned to England in 1684, the colonists were given every opportunity to govern themselves. The Proprietor left the exercise of executive authority in the hands

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20 February 1, 1687. Society Miscellaneous Collection, Philadelphia County. HSP.
21 October 22, 1687. Penn MSS, Domestic.
of the Council, which was elected by the freemen. The result was unfortunate for a number of reasons. Councillors would not attend meetings. Sometimes there was an interval of five months between sessions. When the Council met there were often quarrels which were not a good example to the community. When Penn reprimanded the Councillors for quarreling, Phineas Pemberton answered that "The Councill Ever Since thou went has been very agreeing and unanimous wch has been a great Stay to us and I hop the lord will preserve and raise the heads of them who are true harted to him and the govermt [,] above the surging waves of ye pestiferous apostates & runagadors that would flow over them." The words used by Pemberton to describe the opposition in the Council indicate the hard feelings which abounded. Finally, the Council and Assembly quarreled bitterly over the powers and prerogatives which each held.

In addition, there was trouble in the courts. Nicholas More, who was not a Quaker but very prominent as president of the Free Society of Traders, was one of the provincial judges. He was impeached in 1685. Among the charges which were brought against him, was one that he abused witnesses who appeared before him. Penn felt it necessary to urge the colonists "to give the lye to thos vile & repeated slanders cast on ye Province, or you rather & the rest of the Magistracy."

Penn stood by helplessly and watched the breakdown of the "holy experiment." He sent letters of counsel to the government, mentioning the "scurvy Quarrels, that break out, to the Disgrace of the Province [...] there is nothing but Good said of the Place, and little thats Good said of the People." In February, 1687, he sent word that there would be a change in the government, and announced that thereafter five Commissioners of State would assume the executive responsibility in Pennsylvania. Penn sent explicit directions for the reform of the government by these men.

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10 April 3, 1687. Etting Collection, Pemberton. HSP.
11 For the Free Society of Traders see Joseph S. Davis, Essays in the Earlier History of American Corporations (Cambridge, Mass., 1917), and Shaw Livermore, Early American Land Companies, etc. (New York, 1939).
13 December 21, 1687. Penn MSS, Domestic.
14 November 20, 1686. Ibid.
Apparently the colonists did not approve of this change, which took the executive authority from the elected representatives and placed it in the hands of men appointed by the Proprietor. Penn's order was ignored. Penn became suspicious when conflicting letters began to arrive in England, some from the Councillors and their friends indicating that the change had been made, others that the government was unchanged.  

Penn was desperate. The quit-rents were unpaid, the Council would not meet, the members of the government quarreled with one another, the courts did not command the respect of the colonists, his orders were flagrantly ignored, and some men had resorted to deliberate misrepresentation to deceive him. He decided to send a strong deputy governor to the colony to straighten out matters.

The naming of the Puritan, John Blackwell, as Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania was an admission by William Penn that the "holy experiment" was either a failure or teetered on the brink of failure. The Quakers and the Puritans had long been foes in England. The appointment of Blackwell, in 1688, was a deliberate slap at Pennsylvania, and it was so interpreted by the Quakers.

Penn wrote to the Commissioners of State in regard to the coming of Blackwell: he is to "confer in private with you, & square himself by your advice, but bear down with visible authority, vice and faction. . . . If he does not please you, he shall be layed aside for it is not that I am displeased with your care, or service." To Blackwell Penn gave instructions that he was to enforce the Charter and laws in a strict fashion, maintain peace and justice, see that the quit-rents were collected, and do other things necessary to the well being and prosperity of the colony and of the proprietor. In other words, he was to do everything which the colonists had failed to do, and, at the same time, was to remain subservient to the provincial Councillors. William Penn had placed
Blackwell in an impossible position before he ever arrived in the colony.

The Council opposed him at every turn, and soon made him sorry that he had ever left Massachusetts. Thomas Lloyd, former President of the Council, led the opposition to Blackwell, though he was not a member of the Council at the time. Blackwell wrote to Penn complaining that Lloyd was "indeavoring to keep all your affayrs in the same posture of Laxness and confusion, wherinto by his management of them they are reduced." Blackwell finally instituted impeachment proceedings against Lloyd, in his capacity of Keeper of the Great Seal, charging him with eleven high misdemeanors, crimes and offences, but the Assembly took no action against him.

Blackwell took up various topics with the Council, such as the operation of the courts, the collection of quit-rents, or the establishment of some means of defense, but all of his suggestions were rejected. Frustrated at every turn, Blackwell wrote to Penn that the freemen paid no attention to anyone in authority because of "the whistling ayr in somen mens heads [which] would not admitt a hearing, . . ." and added that the colony needed to be purged, for there were many who had eaten more of the "Honey of your concessions . . . than their stomachs can beare."

Blackwell arrived December 17, 1688. By April 9, 1689, he had resigned and was pleading with Penn to rescue him from his intolerable situation. He said of the Quakers, "Tis admirable Sr, That coming from under persecution, No person though Ever so respectfull, if not under the dialect of a Friend, can have civill treatment, or justice done against so high a Criminal if a Friend . . . the thing aymed at, is, That the Criminall [Lloyd] may Succeede me. . . ." On another occasion he wrote, "I can have no more charity towards such satanickal spirits."

While it would be patently unfair to accept the criticism of the Quakers voiced by Blackwell at face value, nevertheless it is apparent to anyone who reads the Minutes of the Council and the correspondence of the period that the Quakers utterly refused to

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25 January 25, 1689. Society Miscellaneous Collection. HSP.
26 April 2, 1689. Penn MSS, Blackwell Papers. HSP.
27 January 26, 1689. Society Miscellaneous Collection.
28 April 9, 1689. Gratz Collection, Governors. HSP.
29 January 13, 1690. Society Miscellaneous Collection.
An Historical and Geographical Account

OF THE

PROVINCE and COUNTRY

OF

PENSILVANIA;

AND OF

West-New-Jersey

IN

AMERICA.

The Richness of the Soil, the Sweetness of the Situation
the Wholesomeness of the Air, the Navigable Rivers; and
others, the prodigious Increase of Corn, the flourishing
Condition of the City of Philadelphia, with the stately
Buildings, and other Improvements there. The strange
Creatures, as Birds, Beasts, Fishes, and Fowls, with the
several sorts of Minerals, Purging Waters, and Stones,
lately discovered. The Natives, Aborigines, their Lan
guage, Religion, Laws, and Customs; The first Planters,
the Dutch, Swedes, and English, with the number of
its Inhabitants; As also a Touch upon George Keith's
New Religion, in his second Change since he left the
QUAKERS.

With a Map of both Countries.

By GABRIEL THOMAS,
who resided there about Fifteen Years.

London, Printed for, and Sold by A. Baldwin, at
the Oxon Arms in Warwick-Lane, 1698.
see any good in Blackwell, and treated him in an un-Christian manner. Less than a year before Blackwell arrived, Penn had written to the colonists: "They that live near to God will live far from themselves, & . . . have a low opinion of themselves; & out of that low & humble Frame of Spirit it is that true charity grows . . . there can be no Union, no comfortable Society without it. O, that the People of my Province & Parts annexed felt this gracious Quality abounding in them, my Work would soon be done."30 There had been little evidence of "low opinion of themselves" by the members of the government.

The Quakers had written to Penn concerning Blackwell, describing his arbitrary ways. In addition, they confessed their former errors and professed great love and respect for Penn. One letter closed with these words: We "see the difference between an affectionate & tender father whose children we know we are, and a Severe hardhearted father in law who hath no share nor lot nor portion among us."31 Penn was deeply touched by these protestations of love and affection, and returned the executive authority into the hands of the Council. Unfortunately, the colonists did not profit from the experience with Blackwell. A quarrel soon broke out between Pennsylvania and Delaware.32 Pennsylvania was growing rapidly, while Delaware, the older settlement, remained relatively static. Pennsylvania was largely a Quaker colony, while the Lower Counties, as they were called, were primarily non-Quaker. The government usually met at Philadelphia, instead of convening in alternate years at New Castle. Feelings were so high between the two provinces that the Delaware members of the Council and Assembly finally stopped attending sessions in Philadelphia in 1691.

In the meantime, a political division had developed in Pennsylvania which roughly paralleled a religious split. Known as the Keithian Schism, it is named for George Keith, a well educated Scotsman, one of the leading theologians among Friends.33 He

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30 December 27, 1687. Parrish Collection, Proud Papers (copy).
31 Seven members of the Council, to Penn. April 9, 1689. Penn MSS, Official Correspondence. HSP.
32 Penn had prevailed upon his friend, James, Duke of York, to give him Delaware, to guarantee that Pennsylvania would not be cut off from the Atlantic by an unfriendly colony on the shore of the Delaware Bay. The two colonies came back together for a time, but were permanently separated in 1703.
denounced certain theological concepts held by some Friends, and also criticized political leaders, implying that Quakers should refrain from participating in the government. He had drawn up a statement of belief or creed, demanding that all Friends subscribe to his ideas, but the suggestion was rejected. In 1691 a faction had been formed which supported Keith, while the majority of Friends remained with Thomas Lloyd, Samuel Jennings, and others. Keith's criticisms of the government and of certain individuals reached such extremes that indictments were eventually issued against Keith, William Bradford who printed his pamphlets for him, and several other Keithians. The schismatic leader finally left the colony and returned to England to gain support. The Keithian Schism scarcely enhanced the chances of a successful "holy experiment."

By this time a new threat to the "holy experiment" had appeared. When James II was forced to abdicate his throne in 1688, persons who had been associated with him were suspected of disloyalty by his successor, William of Orange. William Penn, who had been a personal friend of the deposed ruler, was arrested and held in jail three times in the following two years. At the same time, war having broken out between England and France, called King William's War in America, Pennsylvania refused to participate in the defense of the colonies by contributing either money or men, pleading conscientious scruples. In addition, the Crown had received reports of internal disorders in the colony.

When William III determined to seize the province, he placed it under the supervision of Benjamin Fletcher, Governor of New York, who ruled the colony through his deputy, William Markham, for two years, beginning in April, 1693. Fletcher organized in Pennsylvania a government similar to those found in other royal colonies. His primary interest was to raise money to aid in financing campaigns by New York troops against Canada. For three

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84 One charge against Keith was that he defamed "Samll Richardson he being a magistrate of this County, in Bidding him go home to his Whores And calling him heinious old man said he took up maids Petticoats [,] Exposing his reputation before some hundreds of People Contrary to that Law in that Case made & Provided." Penn Letterbooks, I. American Philosophical Society.

85 When he failed to convince English Friends that he was right, he joined the Church of England, and returned to America as a representative of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge.
years the Quakers in the government had rejected all pleas for money on the grounds that they opposed war on principle. Now, however, since Penn was no longer their proprietor, they were deprived of the privileges which they once enjoyed under his Charter and laws. When Fletcher agreed to confirm them in the liberties and privileges which they formerly held under Penn, if they would appropriate £760 for the war effort, they reluctantly agreed to compromise their Quaker principles in exchange for their political liberties. 36

Fletcher made this comment about the Philadelphians: "I have spent some weeks there but never yet found so much self conceite [...] they will rather dye then resist with Carnall weapons, nay they would perswade me their Province was in no danger . . . their minutes of Council and Assembly which are now Transcribing for you, will appear a farce." 37

In 1694 Penn came out from under the cloud of royal opprobrium, and was again allowed to appear in court. He soon persuaded the Crown to return Pennsylvania to him, and, as a part of the understanding, promised that the colony would obey all requests for money or men. 38 Knowing full well that Pennsylvania Quakers would resent this promise, he wrote them: "wee must Creep when wee cannot goe and it is as Necessarie [.] a word to the wise is enough." 39 This pragmatic attitude towards one of the fundamental beliefs of Friends, by the leader of Pennsylvania, made the "holy experiment," which Penn had held up to the world to examine in 1682, seem shopworn and tawdry to the observer in 1694.

When the government was restored to Penn, it was with the proviso that Markham remain as deputy governor. Markham's new commission arrived in Pennsylvania in March, 1695, and he gov-

37 To William Blathwayt. June 12, and August 15, 1693. Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York, etc. (Albany, 1853, 1854), IV, 31, 32, 37.
erned the colony until Penn's return late in 1699. Again a dispute developed within the province. The freemen could not agree to return to government under the Charter of Liberties of 1683. Over the objections of a minority, a new constitution was drawn up in 1696, called Markham's Frame. This charter, which continued the privilege granted under royal control of allowing the Assembly to initiate legislation, served as the frame of government for three years, although Penn never gave his consent to the use of it, and it was abrogated after his return.

One of the obstacles which faced those who attempted to establish a "holy experiment" in Pennsylvania was the fact that the province was in the British Empire. The Crown was moving in the direction of greater control over the colonies, as evidenced by the creation of the Board of Trade in 1696. Perhaps it was impossible for the "holy experiment" to succeed as a part of an imperial system, and particularly one which was frequently involved in warfare.\textsuperscript{40} Attacks by those who resented the Quaker government reached a fever pitch in the last few years of the

century. Reports from neighboring colonies, from royal officials, and from Anglicans in Philadelphia aroused the Board of Trade to such an extent that William Penn was forced to return to the colony in 1699.

The accusation was frequently made that Pennsylvania, because of its peace principles, was a haven for pirates and illicit traders. The fact that pirates and illicit traders visited nearly every colony in this period of history was conveniently forgotten by those who leveled criticism against pacifist Pennsylvania.41

More reprehensible was the connivance of some Quakers in using local courts to prevent royal officials from prosecuting persons engaged in smuggling and other illegal activities. After one such episode, Robert Quary, judge of the Admiralty Court for the Delaware Bay area, was provoked to write: "I very well knew them to bee a perverse, obstenant and turbulent People, that will not submitt to any power or Lawes but their owne . . . they have so long encourged and carried on a most pernitious Illegal trade . . . contrary to Law . . . that no ordinary meanes can make them part with it."42

The Anglicans, accustomed to the preferred position which they enjoyed as members of the established church in England, resented the fact that they were a minority in Pennsylvania, and complained loudly about real and imagined injustices. Concerning their complaints, Penn wrote: "We cannot yet be so self-denying as to let those that had no part in the heat of the day, not one third of the number, and not one fourth of the estate, and not one tenth of the trouble and labour should give laws to us, and make us dissenters, and worse than that in our own country."43

By the time that he returned to the colony at the order of the Board of Trade in December, 1699, to enforce respect for royal authority and restore the reputation of the plantation in the eyes of the Crown, William Penn had given up any thought of a "holy

42 September 6, 1698. Board of Trade Papers, Proprieties, 1697-1776. Transcribed from the original manuscript volumes in the Public Record Office of England for the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. 1697-1702, II, B 34.
"experiment" as he had once envisioned it. A short time earlier he had written, "The Reports are . . . that there is no place more overrun with wickedness [,] sins so very scandalous, openly Committed, in defiance of law & virtue [,] facts so foul, I am forbid [by] my common modesty to relate them." Thus did Penn in a moment of despair describe the colony which had been established as an "example to the nations."

The responsibility for the failure cannot be placed upon the shoulders of any one man or group of persons. The settlers in Pennsylvania, who might have made the utopian dream a reality, were in some measure responsible for the failure. However, it would be impossible to prove that any substantial portion of the colonists shared the dream of the "holy experiment" with Penn. If they shared it with him while he resided in the colony, they lost the vision after his return to England in 1684. Certainly William Penn, who has been granted an important place in history as the founder of the colony, bears, at the same time, a portion of the responsibility for the failure of the "holy experiment." In addition, the intrusion of external forces played their share in causing the breakdown of the hopes and desires of the founders.