HENRY, BISHOP OF LONDON.
William Penn's treatment of the aborigines has justly given him enduring fame, and made a bright page in the history of the Society of Friends; although the Quakers were not the first white men who gave to the savage an equivalent for the soil, and apparently did not, like independent discoverers, think out for themselves that piece of justice, for they did not even reinstate, but merely continued, a local practice so agreeable to conscience. It is sufficient for their glory that they adopted and pursued such conduct without incurring suspicion of bad faith during the fifty and more years prior to the location of the Walking Purchase. When that came to be located, the government of Pennsylvania had ceased to be a Quaker theocracy, and against the conduct of the Proprietaries' agents, the head men of the Society stirred up a protest. The real author of the policy of the Founder of Pennsylvania and his companions was probably some moralist, statesman, ruler, or pioneer who spoke or acted long before the Duke of York's conquest of Manhattan.
If the Quakers were guided, not by the custom they found in the locality, but by their own theorizing or a stranger’s advice, it must have been before the date of the settlement of Friends in New Jersey. Were it not for this criterion, we should find in certain words of Penn himself sufficient proof that one of the hierarchy of the Church of England was the author of the policy. In a letter to the Lords of the Committee (of the Privy Council) for his Majesty’s Plantations, dated Philadelphia, August 14, 1683, Penn says:

“I have exactly followed the Bishop of London’s counsel [spelt ‘counsel’] by buying and not taking away the Natives’ land, with whom I have settled a very kind correspondence.”

Our object in these pages is to show what we must conclude from this statement of indeed the best of witnesses. Only in recent years has any popular writer taken note of it, although the letter was printed by Proud in the first volume of his History, with the omission of the word “exactly,” which we find in the certified copy in possession of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Clarkson and Janney, biographers of Penn, seem never to have read the letter through. The clause above quoted is by itself strong enough to allow an inference that he who wrote it had at first thought no more than many Anglo-Saxons of any claim by nomads to keep land which civilized people were desirous of cultivating, but that he had yielded to the views of the prelate, who, we may imagine, reasoned to himself with more justice that the Indian chiefs had as much moral right to their hunting grounds as the great lords of England or of any agricultural country had to their pleasure parks. But the accompanying circumstances do not let us press the signification of Penn’s words so far.

The Bishop referred to could only have been the Bishop then in office, and moreover one of the Lords to whom the letter was addressed. He was Henry Compton, who had superintended the religious education of the Duke of York’s daughters, Mary and Anne, afterwards Queens of
England, and is known to readers of history as an important actor in the Revolution of 1688. Compton was consecrated Bishop of Oxford on December 6, 1674, was Dean of the Chapel Royal from 1675 to 1685, and, having been translated from Oxford to London in December, 1675, held that see thirty-seven years and five months, including the year of his suspension in James II’s time. Under this bishopric were in a certain way the churches in America, and Compton, a Privy Councillor since 1676, became a member of the Committee for Plantations before 1680. Apparently he was never one of Penn’s intimate friends, being twelve years his senior, considerably his superior in birth, a hearty objector against his religious teachings, and perhaps at all times a distruster of his politics. Compton was born in 1632, 6th and youngest son of Spencer Compton, second Earl of Northampton, who, having raised 2000 men for Charles I, fell in battle at Hopton Heath. Nearly every son of the Earl took a conspicuous part on the side of “The Royal Martyr” or his successor; even the future Bishop is supposed to have engaged in some rising, and to have served against Cromwell’s army in Flanders. At the Restoration, Henry was made a cornet in the horse guards. He is said to have entered the ministry of the Church of England because of representations to him that it had need of men of noble birth. Years after he had turned, like Penn, from military service to preaching, he, unlike Penn, took up again the “carnal weapon,” and accepted the colonelcy of a regiment to further the cause of the Prince of Orange, and appeared at the head of a troop in a purple cloak with sword drawn. Compton’s piety and his faithfulness in visiting the parishes under his episcopal care have been eulogized. He is said to have desired to make a voyage to America to visit the churches there. He gave so much in charity, as well as church building, that he died poor. Among those whom he assisted were many Protestant refugees from the Continent. His violent Protestantism led him to rigorous action against Roman Catholics, on which point
he was opposed to William Penn, who went on a mission to William of Orange in 1686 to secure the Prince’s agreement to the abolition of the Test Act, while Compton considered the Test essential to the safety of England; but to Protestant dissenters, at least those who were orthodox, he was very tolerant. He had at heart a scheme of bringing into unity with the Church of England those at home or across the Channel opposed to the Papacy. He died in 1713, leaving the present cathedral of St. Paul’s, London, as the physical monument of his occupancy of the see. Mr. George Harrison Fisher, in an article in the Pennsylvania Magazine, vol. xxvii, on Trinity Church, Oxford, Philadelphia, has pointed out how much the Episcopalians of our State owe to this Bishop. When it was proposed to give the vast region west of the River Delaware to a colony in which Quakers would be supreme, he secured in the fundamental law toleration for his own church. At the meeting of the Committee for Plantations, January 15, 1680–1, he being absent, a letter was received from him asking that Mr. Penn be obliged by the charter to admit a chaplain of his Lordship’s appointment on request of any number of planters. This being referred to Chief Justice North, the clause was inserted that if twenty inhabitants should at any time desire any preacher or preachers to be approved of by the Bishop of London to be sent unto them for their instruction, then such preacher or preachers might reside in the province without molestation. This provision, which had been animadverted upon by some, was surely a small concession to the faithful of the National Church and to the official intrusted with its colonial department. On February 24, 1680–1, when the draft of the charter was finally read before the Committee, the Bishop of London, then absent, was desired to prepare a draft of a law to be passed “in this country” (evidently Pennsylvania) “for the settling of the Protestant religion.” Nothing ever came of this. Possibly it was with some idea of appeasing this important personage and his colleagues that Penn, in the letter we have referred to,
certainly made a merit of doing what the Bishop had enjoined, and, it would seem, the others approved, about the Indians. The merit was greater, the greater the earnestness of the Bishop. The letter is not one dealing compliments around, and if Penn was tactfully complimenting this member of the Committee, it was only in naming the policy as his when Penn himself had never thought of any other.

Indian rights, we are convinced, were the invention of neither Compton nor Penn. A quarter of a century before the birth of either, the question was raised in England against the settlement of Virginia: "by what right or warrant we can enter into the lands of these savages, take away their rightful inheritance from them, and plant ourselves in their places, being unwronged and unprovoked by them."

Robert Gray, in "A Good Speed to Virginia," says that some persons held the view that the Indians had no particular property in any part, but only a general residence; but he declares that there was no intention to take the land by force, for the savages had offered, on reasonable conditions, to yield more land than could for a long time be planted. While for sixty years this dream of amicable acquisition was scarcely anywhere realized where Englishmen were the pioneers, the Swedes and the Dutch on the Delaware bought their lands.

When Compton, although thirty-four years old, had been but recently ordained, and Penn, ten years younger, had just returned as "a modish person," from his travels the General Meeting held at Hempsted, Long Island, by the Duke of York's Deputy Governor, on March 1, 1664, published a law to regulate future acquisitions from the Indians, requiring that leave be obtained from the Governor, and the sachems and right owners be brought before him, and acknowledge satisfaction and payment.

Philip Carteret, the first Governor sent over by John, Lord Berkeley, and Sir George Carteret, Proprietors of New Jersey, found soon after his arrival in 1665, that it would be very foolish to occupy any ground without the
savages’ consent; so, although the concessions to the settlers made no provision for bargaining with the Indians, this Governor exacted it of the settlers, except where the land was embraced in a former bargain, in which case they were to pay their proportion of the cost of what had been given to the Indians. Subsequent instructions from the Proprietors ordered that purchases should be made in their own name as occasion required by the Governor and Council. Apparently Compton had nothing to do with the adoption of this course. As far as any available list of Compton’s printed works shows, he never addressed the British public on the subject of the property rights of the Indian. We have found no letter by him to any leader of emigration. The advice which Penn attributes to him must have been given in private or in some official conference. It is of course possible that upon first hearing that Lord Berkeley had sold his half proprietorship, or that a new class of settlers were going to New Jersey, Compton may have communicated his views to some one interested. We believe that his first appeal was to Penn in connection with the grant of Pennsylvania. The later any such argument was made to Quakers, the more surely had they been already convinced. When the first emigrants of this sect actually landed in New Jersey, they had no choice but to do like their predecessors in the matter. In 1676, Penn, who had decided a quarrel between the two Friends who had bought Berkeley’s moiety, signed instructions with Lawrie, Byllinge, Lucas, and Warner ordering among other things the purchase of a certain tract from the Indians, and four years later Penn is supposed to have written a large part of the argument begging the Duke of York to order a discontinuance of the levying of duties in the latter’s name on the eastern shore of Delaware Bay, which argument maintained that every right of government was included in the purchase from the Duke, otherwise nothing at all was bought, “for,” the paper continues, “the soil is none of his, ’tis the natives’ by the *Jus Gentium*, by the law of nations, and it
would be an ill argument to convert to Christianity to expel, instead of purchasing, them out of those countries.

* * * It is now purchased again of the natives there too."

Compton may have known nothing of Quaker transactions in New Jersey. It is not likely that he ever saw the paper last mentioned. He had before this become estranged from the Duke, having brought about the banishment of the Duchess's Roman Catholic secretary, and it was supposed that the Duke's influence had prevented Compton's elevation to the Archbishopric of Canterbury. Any attempt to approach the Duke or his agents would not have been made through Compton. He was thus in all probability ignorant of Penn's sentiments towards the Indians when the application for the grant of Pennsylvania was made. On the natural supposition that the Bishop's advice was known to the other Lords of the Committee, we conjecture that it was given at a meeting. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania has a transcript of the minutes of the meetings of the Committee, and we find that the Bishop of London was present on June 14, 1680, when the application was first taken up by the Committee, and was absent from all subsequent meetings at which it was considered. Penn was called in on June 14, and, although the minutes do not mention it, we must conclude that the Bishop, always very outspoken, then expressed a hope that no land would be occupied without the consent and compensation of the natives, and that Penn gave assurance that he would be extremely careful in this respect. This explanation, which allows to Penn an original intention to do justice to the Indians, leaves a noble solicitude to the credit of Compton. If it be surmised that sound policy rather than stern justice dictated his remarks, there was at least a solicitude for the welfare of the colony, and a desire to avoid the shedding of blood, in one who was always ready to shed his own. We confess some disappointment that practically all which Penn's letter enables us to do is to enroll Bishop Compton on the humanitarian side. He did not change history. We
believe that we have established the fact of a colloquy, which, however unimportant, was a beautiful point of contact in careers of frequent opposition, factional and ecclesiastical, between two politicians and preachers who were also patriots and philanthropists, the author of "No Cross no Crown," and the mitred peer who ordered cut in Greek on his tomb at Fulham: "Except in the Cross."