

William Penn on Public and Private Affairs, 1686

An Important New Letter

IN the early autumn of 1686, William Penn was in London, living in Holland House, a vast baronial mansion in Kensington, and frequenting the court of his friend King James II. When he had left Pennsylvania just two years before, he had expected to be away only a short time. Though he was still confidently hoping to return within a few months, it would actually be thirteen years before he would see his province again. Meanwhile, there was plenty to keep him busy in London. The immediate crisis which had brought him to England—his dispute with Charles Calvert, Lord Baltimore, over the right to the three Lower Counties on the Delaware—had been brought to a happy issue with the confirmation of his title by the Lords of Trade and Plantations. But the broader boundary problems remained unsolved. And while there were men and women in prison or in danger of their lives for conscience' sake, William Penn could not be idle.

Everywhere in Europe religious freedom seemed to be in eclipse. In England a Catholic monarch was on the throne and the prisons were crowded with Protestant dissenters—many of them Quakers. In France Louis XIV, by revoking the Edict of Nantes, had placed all Huguenots in terrible jeopardy. In the Rhine Valley, where the Protestant Elector Charles had died without issue and the electorship had gone to a bigoted Catholic house, the future of Protestantism looked black. In the mountains of Savoy the age-old persecution of the Waldensians had been resumed once again after a brief respite.

No cause was closer to William Penn's heart than religious freedom. Earlier in the year he had published his *Persuasive to Moderation*, a powerfully argued plea for toleration. Now he was using all

his personal influence at court with some success to secure the release of imprisoned Quakers. For the Huguenots, fleeing from France, he held wide the doors of his province, eager to provide a refuge for harassed Protestants and, incidentally, to attract Huguenot wealth and enterprise to his colony. The past summer he had spent traveling in the Low Countries and the Rhineland, visiting Friends' meetings, encouraging emigration to Pennsylvania.

He was just back from this trip when he sat down, on September 21, 1686, to write the letter that is printed here for the first time. It was addressed to Thomas Lloyd, the president of the Council of Pennsylvania, the man to whom, with the other councilors, he had delegated the executive authority of the province during his absence. Penn was not pleased with the way things were going in Pennsylvania. No doubt the almost constant bickering and complaining of the colonists seemed to him petty compared with the tragic plight of their fellow Protestants in Europe. At any rate, Penn was blunt and brusque in presenting the two urgent problems that were on his mind: the imminent royal review of Pennsylvania's laws and his own pressing financial needs.

By the terms of his charter from Charles II, all laws passed in the province must be transmitted to England within five years for review by the Privy Council. The government of Pennsylvania was almost five years old and its laws would soon have to be laid before the Committee of Trade and Plantations (to which the Privy Council delegated the function of review). He knew he had been generous in granting privileges to his people and that the Assembly had been even more generous in legislating rights for themselves. As the time for the first quinquennial review approached, Penn grew nervous. What if the Lords of Trade should find the laws too liberal, out of line with those of England and the other colonies? They might even raise inconvenient questions about the charter itself.

To forestall this possibility he proposed an extraordinary expedient: let the legislature at its next sitting repeal all the laws it had passed and enact them again with suitable omissions and modifications. He knew Pennsylvanians well enough to anticipate a howl of protest, but he instructed Lloyd to explain that what he was proposing was really for their best interest. And if they were not persuaded, Lloyd was to remind them that Penn was, after all, their Proprietor,

that he could easily annul all their laws himself with the scratch of a pen. (Neither his assurances nor his threats, as it turned out, had much effect in Pennsylvania. The Council considered his proposal on February 2, 1687, and decided unanimously that the laws should "Remayne and be in force without annulling variations or supply of additional bill or bills at this time."¹)

Just as urgent in Penn's mind was the problem of his income from the province. Before he had left Pennsylvania, the Assembly had levied an excise upon all liquors and other merchandise imported into the province and earmarked the proceeds for the Proprietor's "supply" as a token of their gratitude for "his great Care, Charge, and Liberality towards them."² When he and the Council had sought to farm the excise to certain Philadelphia Quaker merchants, however, he had found them unco-operative. In fact, they flatly opposed collection of the tax—they were all concerned in importing and selling liquor and feared that the tax might spoil business. They had made a counterproposal: if no effort were made to enforce the excise law, they would undertake by voluntary subscription to raise £500 for the support of government. Penn, not wishing to hinder the economic development of the colony, had accepted this proposition.³

Two years had passed, and very little of the promised "supply" had reached him. The expense of maintaining his establishment at Holland House and his countryseat at Worminghurst while frequenting the court and traveling abroad was very heavy. Again he resorted to un-Quakerly threats. He intimated to Lloyd that he might be driven to institute legal action against the delinquent subscribers. And if that course should not produce results, he added, he could easily obtain his "supply" by simply declaring all improperly registered lands forfeited to him as Proprietor. (Again, it may be noted, his threats were fruitless. The Council reacted by repealing the excise law! To the end of his life Penn's letters would echo with mournful laments over the great expense Pennsylvania had been to him and the paltry return he had had from its ungrateful inhabitants.)

¹ Minutes of the Provincial Council, *Colonial Records* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1852), 198.

² *Charter to William Penn and Laws of the Province of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1879), 138.

³ Votes of Assembly, *Pennsylvania Archives, Eighth Series* ([Harrisburg, Pa.], 1931), I, 53-57; *Colonial Records*, I, 99-100, 111, 112-113; William R. Shepherd, *History of Proprietary Government in Pennsylvania* (New York, 1896), 78.

There is much more in the letter—arch allusions to Lloyd's recent marriage, news of the court and of English Friends, reports of new settlers on the way, an urgent plea to Thomas Holme to complete his famous map of the province, messages and greetings to Penn's special favorites in Pennsylvania. The letter brings out many of the paradoxes, the inner tensions and contradictions, that make Penn's career and character such perennially fascinating puzzles: the Quaker at a Catholic court, the apostle of liberty consorting with statesmen of reaction, the advocate of popular rights and representative government obviously out of patience at their exercise in Pennsylvania, the benevolent proprietor resorting to threats to coerce his people. As usual, Penn scribbled at top speed, touching on a multitude of topics, darting abruptly from subject to subject with logical and syntactical abandon, tacking on postscript after postscript as the missive lay waiting for the next ship to Pennsylvania.

The letter, one of the longest from the Proprietor's pen, has never before been published in full, although Robert Proud, the eighteenth-century historian, printed a few sentences from it in a footnote to his *History of Pennsylvania*.⁴ Two of Penn's biographers, Clarkson and Janney, also referred to the letter, but it is likely that they knew it only through Proud's excerpt.⁵ The Historical Society of Pennsylvania recently acquired the manuscript by purchase. It is here transcribed as Penn wrote it, except that his many abbreviations have been expanded.

Swarthmore College

FREDERICK B. TOLLES

DEAR FRIEND T. LLOYD

The Salutation of my love is to thee, in the truth and thyn, with thos that fear God in Sincerity and love the prosperity of his heavenly way more then their unquiet and nerves mindes and wills. Dear Thomas, I have divers letters from thee at my arrivall from Holland and Germany, of the third, fourth and fifth months. I am

⁴ Philadelphia (1797), 303.

⁵ Thomas Clarkson, *Memoirs of the Private and Public Life of William Penn* (London, 1813), I, 482-483; Samuel M. Janney, *The Life of William Penn* (Philadelphia, 1852), 274.

glad thy affaires at N. Y. and the affections of thy friend P.⁶ allow thee any time for that poor Province. I hope Patience will, for my Sake, and which is more, for the truths, give thee up some times; for thy ingenuous, sober and expediting frame of Spirit must be of good Service there; and tho I own thou hast little inducement, *yet if I am able to reward such Labour of Love, I shall do it to thee or thyn.* now I perceive, that my absence is extreemly uneasy to the Province, but Dear Thomas know, that it is more so to me; for next the Life of me and myn, of all earthly things, 'tis that I pray with my whole Soul to God, my father, that he would please to bring me among them, and so, thou mayst averr to all; for as my wife and children were to me when there, so are you to me, now I am here, worthy or unworthy, for I hear how things stand,⁷ I regard it not; I have faith to beleive much of that will vanish when I come, that rise since I was there. In new and mixt Colonys, disorders will be, tho at all times they are wounding; and if our neighbours, that time or neglect have given leisure to observe us in our disorders and infirmitys, vallue them selves or under vallue us thereupon[,] time and the good Providence of God may disapoint them by an extraordinary Improvement and reforme. use thy endeavours to satisfy our folks in my unpleasant stay. how can they think I can budge from hence till I hear that Baltimore owns the authority I came to for the Settling our dispute. Just when I was prepareing to goe hence, comes packet upon Packet of the abuses of his people, both as to Surveys and the fort.⁸ Should I hurry theither and as soon back? by no means; I aime at Americanizeing my famely, and come prepared accordingly; therefore lett them be so wise as to be patient, that I may not leave the

⁶ Lloyd had recently married Patience Story, a widow, at New York. She was his second wife, his first having died soon after her arrival in Pennsylvania in 1682.

⁷ Disquieting reports had reached Penn of racketeering in land titles, of immoral goings-on in the old caves along the Delaware river front, of laws passed without mention of either his name or the King's, of an un-Quakerly spirit of faction rampant in the Assembly.

⁸ Despite the royal order awarding the Lower Counties to him, Penn had received word that the Maryland Proprietor was still surveying and granting lands there. Moreover, the Marylanders had built and occupied a fort at Christina Bridge (at the present site of Christiana, Del.). When one John White tried to cut hay nearby, they ordered him to stop, and threatened to pitch the hay into the creek. Major English, who was in command, taunted him by saying: "if Thou wilt say you Drunken Dogg, ned Inglish lett me Cutt hay, I will give you Leave." The Pennsylvania Council advised White to "use no Violence but bear with Patience, not Doubting but the King will soon put an End to all their hostile actions against his Collony." *Colonial Records*, I, 189.

thing unfixt, I came on purpose to obtaine. besides, I would have them consider, that my being here, has not only advanced the reputation of the Province, and gained many great Persons into our Interest, but prevented a Storm as to us, that is falling upon other Colonys,⁹ and secured my point in a great measure with the King who is very perticularly Kinde to me; and Friends there should be Satisfied in it, for I have been an instrument to open the Prison Doors for our Brethren all over the nation,¹⁰ and am now upon nationall Expedients to prevent impendant miserys that threaten the nations: at least, doing my indeavours, that cannot omitt to have influences upon America too. this I beseech thee to read from house to house to the Sober and discreet, friend or other. the Lord bless you with his Spirit of wisdome and of a sound minde, which keeps solid, tender, quiet and virtuous.

Now I have one thing more to Communicate, that is of great moment to us all to be done, with Speed, with care, with wisdome. our laws with the Laws of other Provinces are like to be called before the Committee of Lords for Plantations, and because I know the franchises and constitution of them, Exceed what is elsewhere, and intended to be elsewhere; to the end we may use the advantages the Pening of my charter give us (and by Sir William Jones,¹¹ was intended to me and the Colony) with what Success we are able, Know, that if once in five years, ours are presented to the said Committee, or the King rather, it is as much as we are obliged to. my Councell therefore advises, that the very next Session after the receipt of this, a Bill be prepared to vacat all the Laws as they now stand, and prepare another with such abrogations, alterations and additions of laws as shall palliate the thing, that shall be read next to the other, so that the distance will be but the time of reading one and the other, and by this, the laws will have been but probationary, and will take

⁹ The Lords of Trade were intent upon bringing the corporate and proprietary colonies under direct royal control. The charter of Massachusetts had been annulled in 1684, and writs of quo warranto were out against all the other chartered colonies with the exception of Pennsylvania.

¹⁰ King James had issued a general pardon in March and, later in the same month, a royal warrant, directing the release of scheduled lists of Friends. All told, some thirteen hundred Quakers were liberated from jails in England and Wales.

¹¹ A friend of Penn's, Sir William Jones as attorney-general had had the opportunity to review the charter and make alterations in it before it passed under the Great Seal.

a new alteration, from experience, and thus have a speedy resurrection. a thing we have already done in the Province, and in the wisest of ancient Governments was observed. now if any object the Fundamentals, I answear, they only are to be feared here, and the danger of this method, is none at all, they terminateing but a moment before they live again, and it is done for their Sakes not mine, for the less free they are, the more free I am; but as I ever desired the best of laws for them, so I would advise the ways, most easely in a disorder'd time, to preserve them to them and theirs. This must be insinuated to the wiser only, and to thos that are exceptionous, deal with them apart in my name; lett them see their interest and my good intention; and such as are captious, and that desire to make a fair show in the flesh, lett them know how much they are in my power not I in theirs; and the less, for being here, in such a raign, where powr is more then a little preferr'd. and for their Ingratitude, that so basely cosoned my generosity about the customs, I cannot putt it up, but desire and order thee In my name to summon them and warn them to bring in the mony they agreed to pay, or Else that the provinciall councell by the Attorney Generall of the Province, proceed against them in a cours of Justice. for the members of the Councell are wittnesses against them. Instead of Supplying me here (haveing publickly engaged to bear the charge of this expedition) to refuse a man so much as £20 there that left some hundreds here in my hands.¹² 'tis true, he saught it, and that is my excuse, I mean to leave it here, and have it there, or I had been justly ashamed. nay J. Harrison¹³ persues me with bills for famely matters, tho my whole quitrents are now due, the vallue of £500 per Annum at least, and can't gett a Penny. what Governor would come on such terms. God is my wittness, I lye not, I am above Six thousand pounds out of pocket, more then ever I saw, by the Province,¹⁴ and throw in to boot my paines,

¹² One Joseph Cart, before leaving England for Pennsylvania, had advanced Penn a considerable sum on the assurance that he could collect from the guarantors of Penn's "supply" in Philadelphia. Penn to the Commissioners of State, Mar. 28, 1688, Dreer Collection, Letters and Papers of William Penn, 24. All manuscripts cited are in The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹³ James Harrison was Penn's steward at Pennsbury.

¹⁴ Penn was never very precise about money matters. In a letter to James Harrison, written two days later, he puts his losses in Pennsylvania at £5,000. Penn Papers, Domestic and Miscellaneous, 29.

care and hazard of my life, and leaving of my Dear famely to serve them.

I desire thee, on receipt hereof, to summon a few of the most discreet and reputable together, and impart so farr of thes things as may be convenient, especially to R. Turner, Cosen Markham, T. Holmes, J. Sim[cock] J. Blunston, J. Clayp[ool] J. Eccle[Eckley] Tho. Ellis,¹⁵ especially as to my not comeing and the supply; for that of the laws, to as few as thou wilt at first. the Great fault is, that thos who are there, loose their authority, one way or other in the Spirits of the people and then they can do little with their outward powrs. Show such parcells of this letter as may be requisit. If I can, I shall write a publick letter too by this Ship.¹⁶ for Governor Dongan and the Sasquhanagh,¹⁷ I shall watch my time to gain the King in it; that also, helps to stop me; likewise that of the head of the bay; and if possible, an accommodation amicable with Lord Baltimore by means of his Roman Catholic Lords and Priests I shall endeavour. Gray is a Benedictine monck of St. James's, left them and his vows, is married there, the congregation has spoak to the King about him, and to me.¹⁸ Keep this to thy selfe, and give him the inclosed, lett

¹⁵ These men, all prominent in provincial affairs, formed a little circle of the Proprietor's special friends. Robert Turner, Thomas Holme, John Simcock, James Claypoole, and Thomas Janney were, or had been, members of the Provincial Council. William Markham, Penn's cousin, was secretary of the province. John Blunston of Darby was a member of the Assembly. John Eckley, one of the provincial judges, was within a few months to be appointed one of five commissioners of state (with Lloyd, Turner, Claypoole, and Nicholas More). Thomas Ellis was a leading Friend of the Welsh Tract.

¹⁶ On Sept. 25 he wrote a "publick letter" to the president and Council dealing in somewhat more circumspect language with some of the same topics. It is printed in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, XXXIII (1909), 304-306; the original is in the Dreer Collection, Letters and Papers of William Penn, 17.

¹⁷ Before leaving Pennsylvania, Penn had tried to buy the lands lying along the Susquehanna River from the Five Nations. The Indians had refused to sell. He had then requested Governor Dongan of New York as suzerain of the Iroquois to buy the lands and turn them over to him. Dongan had no intention of doing so; he wrote to the King that Penn's control of these lands would be detrimental to New York's interests. *Calendar of State Papers: Colonial* (1685-1686), 327-328.

¹⁸ John Gray, the former monk, settled in Burlington, N. J., where he was known as John Tatham. Penn to the Commissioners of Property, 1687, Dreer Collection. He was a man of considerable wealth and built a "Great and Stately Palace" on the north side of town. The crucifixes and Roman Catholic books listed in the inventory of his estate suggest that he did not give up his faith when he abandoned his monastic vows. Gabriel Thomas, *An Historical and Geographical Account of Pensilvania, and of West-New-Jersey in Narratives of Early Pennsylvania, West Jersey, and Delaware*, ed. by Albert Cook Myers (New York, 1912), 346 and note.

him know only that I was much desired to send it carefully. if he speaks to thee of it, or should talk of moveing, lett him know this, and that I shall do him what good offices he can expect of me in reason. A great many Dutch and Germans come next year; the french goe much to carolina; indirect means have been used for it, that I shall endeavour to prevent¹⁹; but a cirtificat from the french there, especially the minister that went in conway²⁰ would do much. pray lett And. Doze, my french man at Schoolkill²¹ know, I have writt to him at large, and hear nothing of him, I would know what he does with the vineyard, if it produces or noe.

For news, I referr thee to the Captain and the Dutch Barron if he goes, that speaks Englesh.²² I am personally well yet with our Grandees. meetings open, large and sweet, I was last fourth day at Gr[ace] ch[urch] Street, first day following at the Bull and Devonshire house,²³ all full and precious meetings. yet, over Urope, cloudws hang. I shall not forgett thee to Lord Powess²⁴ and A. Newport²⁵ who has layd down his place in the Custom house. there are great changes of hands in Irland²⁶ the ffarmers need not repent; a Parliament expected to sitt in november here. I add no more, but my dear love

¹⁹ In a subsequent letter Penn says the Huguenot emigrants were "dishartened by the Carolinians, as not being hott enough"—i.e., someone had told them that Pennsylvania was too cold. Penn to James Harrison, Jan. 28, 1686/7, Penn Papers, Domestic and Miscellaneous, 32.

²⁰ The minister was Charles de la Noe, a Huguenot pastor and a skilled vineyardist, who had recently arrived in Pennsylvania after an adventurous crossing. He had set out in a ship commanded by one O'Connor, alias Conway, who, according to Penn, had "played the villian and carried the people to Bermudas and there left them or sent them to a worse place," before going off privateering. De la Noe settled on Penn's manor of Springettsbury, on the east bank of the Schuylkill, to work in his vineyards, but died after a few months. Penn to Thomas Lloyd, Oct. 2, 1685, *ibid.*, 15; John F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1909), II, 437.

²¹ Andrew Doz, a Huguenot who had come to Pennsylvania in 1682, was in charge of Penn's vineyards at Springettsbury.

²² This "Dutch barron" eludes identification.

²³ Gracechurch Street, the Bull and Mouth, and Devonshire House were the three principal Quaker meetinghouses in London.

²⁴ William Herbert, Earl of Powis, a prominent Roman Catholic nobleman, had often intervened to protect Quakers from persecution. The Herbert family had estates near Dolobran in Montgomeryshire, where Lloyd had lived.

²⁵ Andrew Newport, formerly a Member of Parliament from Montgomeryshire, now sitting for Preston.

²⁶ "The Roman Catholics are mostly in powr in Irland, lands fallen there half." Penn to Robert Turner, Apr. 24, 1686, Dreer Collection, Letters and Papers of William Penn, 15.

to thee and thyn in the everlasting truth (unless something occurr I yet see not) and rest more then I can tell thee

Thy cordiall Friend
WM PENN

London 21th 7mo. 86.

I forgott to tell thee thy nephew C. LL. was in holland with me, is a pretty youth, I left him there; thy Bro[ther] ch[arles] is with his wife in Heref[ord] and intends to live there.²⁷

what ever thou doest, trye in my name to break that knott and soften them that bussle in Generall Assemblys. the noizes comes here to E. Bill.²⁸ who makes his market with it, tho his is a very sorry one. S. Jenings packet is miscarried I beleive in designe of some. Salute me to Friends on both sides; thos thou thinkest best deserve it; but I wish well to all. I commend thy care in that business of D. Davis,²⁹ J: Curtis,³⁰ the poor Schoolmasters children,³¹ and Major Dyer.³² Capt. Markham has been serviceable therein also, which I am glad of, and shall remember.

²⁷ Thomas Lloyd's elder brother Charles was, like Thomas himself, an M.D. from Oxford, but he devoted himself chiefly to the Quaker ministry and the family iron business. His son, mentioned above, was to follow in his footsteps as an ironmaster.

²⁸ Edward Byllynge, whose proprietorship of West Jersey had a checkered history, was embroiled in a dispute with the people of his colony over the right to control the government. Samuel Jenings, mentioned in the next sentence, though originally Byllynge's appointee as deputy governor, had gone over to the opposition.

²⁹ One David Davis had recently been brought to trial in Bucks County on suspicion of having murdered a servant. *Colonial Records*, I, 164.

³⁰ John Curtis, who owned an extensive farm on St. Jones Creek and represented Kent County in the Assembly, had been accused of "speaking of Dangerous & Treasonable words against ye King." The Grand Jury returned the bill of indictment ignoramus, and the charge of treason was dismissed. *Ibid.*, 158, 161, 164.

³¹ Christopher Taylor, register general of the province and master of a school on Tinicum Island, had recently died. William Penn having been named one of the executors of his estate, the Council undertook to appoint administrators. *Ibid.*, 185, 186.

³² Major William Dyer had recently been commissioned collector of customs in Pennsylvania and surveyor-general of the colonies. His conduct of this office was so unacceptable to the colony that when he was presently elected to the Provincial Council from Sussex County, he was refused his seat. *Ibid.*, 148, 197.

I forgott one thing, pray putt a stop to that Irregular way of disposing of land in the Lower Countys; there will come a day of Judgement about Surveys when I return; for I fear great wrong to me in that regard. Tell Tho[mas] Holmes, we want a map to that degree, that I am ashamed here; bid him send what he has by the first; he promest it two years since, and I upon his word: all cry out, where is your map, what no map of your Settlements! I entreat thee leave him not before this be done, tis of mighty moment.³³ I intend if God in his providence permitt, to sett forth in the first or begining of the Second month. vale

WM PENN

London 21st 7mo 86.

Two Arguments ought to prevale with them in Secreet for that of the laws and some Supply that may and ought to be discreetly and closely intimated. one, that *If I refuse to confirm your laws made since, all the laws fall, that are continued by them*, that is the first; secondly, *that all their lands are forfeited that have not register'd them, and that will be Supply enough to me and myn without more; besides the vexation of resurveys*. I write to thee only thes things, but would have Cosen Markham, J. Harrison, T. H. J. Claypole, G. Jones,³⁴ J. Simcock, etc. Informed as thou seest meet. pray press Governor Dongan who is leaveing you and the Lord Granard comeing in his Roome,³⁵ to do that Just and Generous act before he leaves America, that he may make over that they have given him, to me, and I shall be gratefull to him; who have served him here, and he will be a great man, but under great expense farewell. They true Friend

WM PENN

the 22th 7ber 86.

³³ Thomas Holme's great map of the province appeared in 1687.

³⁴ Griffith Jones was a wealthy Philadelphia merchant who had served in the Assembly. For the other individuals named here, see note 15. T.H. is undoubtedly Thomas Holme.

³⁵ Arthur Forbes, Earl of Granard, had recently been relieved by King James of the command of the army in Ireland. The report of Dongan's recall was only a rumor; he remained in New York until he was superseded by Edmund Andros in 1688.

*Endorsed in the hand of David Lloyd*³⁶:

Wm. P: Letter to Tho. Lloyd 1686

Where he promises to reward his Services

He makes the Service to those Nations the occasion or Excuse of his Stay

He orders a Bill to be prepared to abrogate all the Laws and prepare a new bill etc.

He orders to prosecute the subscribers about the Custome etc.

He intimates that the Advantage of forfeiture he may take for [lands?] not being recorded Would be Supply enough to him and his besides the vexation of Resurvey

Endorsed in the hand of Thomas Lloyd: 21: 7:mo 1686 To: T: LL:

³⁶ David Lloyd had only recently arrived in Pennsylvania and been commissioned attorney-general. It is impossible to tell whether this endorsement was written at the time of the letter's receipt or later, when he became the leader of the opposition to the Proprietary.