

Letter from William Penn.

The conditions which called forth this letter were as follows :—

William Penn and eleven associates, mostly Friends, bought East Jersey for 3,400 pounds on the first of February, 1682. Each sold one-half his interest. The twenty-four proprietors selected Robert Barclay, of Urie, as Governor. His brothers, David and John, were among the proprietors. He appointed as a deputy, first, Gawen Laurie, a Friend, then Lord Neil Campbell, who had fled from Scotland after an unsuccessful invasion (a strange selection for Robert Barclay to make), and finally Andrew Hamilton, an Edinburgh merchant. Hamilton made a successful administration till 1697. Then an Act of Parliament required that all governors of colonies should be natural-born Englishmen, and he was declared ineligible. His successor was Jeremiah Basse (or Bass—see reference in the letter). Basse was never confirmed by the Crown, nor did he receive the endorsement of a majority of the proprietors, and yet, with this clouded title, he undertook to assume the government. Many of the people refused to recognise him and publicly disavowed his appointees. The Province was in a state of excitement till 1700, when it was decided that Hamilton, as a Scotsman, was not ineligible, and he was reappointed. This did not end the confusion, for the Basse party now refused to recognise the authority of Hamilton and his subordinates. Seditious meetings were held, justices and sheriffs were assaulted in the performance of their duties, and Hamilton himself was confined under guard for four days, on attempting to hold a court in Monmouth County. He gradually, however, got the better of the malcontents.

Such were the circumstances which led Penn to write this letter. He evidently sympathised warmly with Hamilton and his party, and wished the “rioters” put down with a strong hand. (Query, If the rioters had resisted, how far would he have pushed the “Coercives”?)

ISAAC SHARPLESS.

Philadelphia,
3. 2^m, 1701.

Honored friend.

J have had y^e surprizeing news of y^e Practices of some east-Jersians ; as unexpected by me as dishonorable & Licentious in them. Jt will be hard to finde temper enough to ballance extreams ; for J know not w^t punishm^t those Rioters do not deserve ; & J had rather live alone than not have such people Corrigible. Their heads should be eyed, & some forcd to declare them by y^e rigour of y^e Law, & those y^t are found to be such should bear the burden of such sedition, w^{ch} were y^e best way to be-head the Body without danger ; if Lenitives wont do, Coercives should, but tho naturally we would begin there, yet it is y^e end of wise men, & a remedy with regrett too.

J was Just comeing, as P. R^r knows, with a dozen of our most reputable people (tho Coll. Q., J. M., & J. Gu² seemed too much (y^e first especially) to take part with y^e mobs argum^{ts} tho not with their practice), till thyn to S. Jenings³ gave me y^e satisfaction of knowing thy more easy & honorable circumstances, & prospect of Loading them wth their own Confusions. Pray make not too much hast from them, but Clench y^e nale ; for examples must be made

¹ I cannot identify P. R.

² Colonel Robert Quarry, John Moore, and John Guest. Quarry was Judge of the Admiralty, and Moore Advocate of his Court. They were appointed by the Crown, hence independent of Penn. Guest was Chief Justice of the Province. The three were leaders of a little Church of England party, who sent unfavourable reports to England concerning disorders in Pennsylvania, pirates on the Delaware, and the impossibility of conducting the Province without oaths. Penn, in his mild (?) way; in another letter, says, "Quarry is the greatest of villains and God will, I believe; confound him in this world for his lies, falsehoods, and supreme knavery."

³ Samuel Jennings was one of a numerous class of men in Pennsylvania and New Jersey who were Ministers among Friends and also prominent in State affairs. He was the first Deputy Governor of West Jersey, but afterwards moved to Philadelphia, where he was Judge of the County Court (1690-1693). He vigorously espoused the Quaker side in the Keith controversy, and was attacked by Keith in a pamphlet which sent the author, and the printer, Bradford, into nominal confinement, and caused much criticism against the authorities for abridging the liberty of the press. Keith says Jennings was "too high and imperious in worldly courts." The controversy was carried to London, and Jennings went with it and wrote, *The Case Stated*. He afterwards settled in Burlington, N.J., holding many important offices, and, as a leader of the popular side, drove Lord Cornbury, the Crown Governor, from the Colony. He travelled extensively in the ministry among Friends.

by thee, of them y^t acted so unexemplarily. J assure thee Jt was my own thought y^t New York would be obliged to take Cognisance of it. Jt was at least an extraordinary Ryote, if not Rebellion in armes, to Jmprison a Gover^r, because one of his Justices refused to stand mute at his being insolently paraded by a Criminal, & in y^e solemnity of a Court. But y^e Gent afore sayd, tax L. M.⁴ with haveing used Bass just so, to extenuate this or recriminate. Jf by being an ould, & not y^e least Pretender to East Jersey, & a neighb^r, in my station, J can yet be serviceable, to compose or Countenance a just prosecution of Rebellious practices, let an express reach me before J leave these parts, & J shall Jmmediately take horse, God permitting. Time & a Crowd forbids to be more particuler, but with hearty regards J am

Thy ffaithfull and
affect. ffriend,



My salutes to Coll Mony⁵, R. Burnet⁶, J. B.⁷ etc.

⁴ Lewis Morris, a prominent citizen of East Jersey and a strong friend of Hamilton's. Penn's suggestion here is that the rebels are extenuating their acts by reporting that Morris treated Basse with equal insolence during his administration. In the following sentence he says that, as he is himself a proprietor of East Jersey and also interested in Pennsylvania, he will come if needed. The problem was, however, solved by turning the government of East Jersey over to the Crown the following year.

⁵ I cannot identify Coll. Mony.

⁶ Richard Burnet, one of the proprietors.

⁷ Probably John Barclay, brother of Robert, also Receiver-General and Surveyor-General of the Province.

[The original letter, which covers three pages of letter-paper, has been recently deposited in D. It is the property of Westminster and Longford Monthly Meeting, having been presented to the Library of Westminster Meeting by Samuel Bevan in 1873. With other letters and documents relating to Penn, it was reproduced by the autotype process, and published, by direction of Samuel Gurney, in a portfolio, by Samuel Harris and Co., of London. Portions of the letter appeared in the biographies of Penn written by Clarkson and Janney, and have also been quoted elsewhere.—EDS.]