

Three Letters of William Penn

Edited by FELIX HULL

THE following three letters were recently discovered among a collection of family papers¹ and beyond the fact that they are unrecorded, have little intrinsic importance. All were written by Penn to Governor Grey of Barbados between May 1700 and April 1701. They fall into the period of Penn's second and last visit to his colony during which he was constantly concerned with administrative duties. They are primarily examples of Penn's personal letter-writing to the head of a neighbouring colony.

The Hon. Ralph Grey was appointed Governor of Barbados in 1698 and remained in office until 1701, when, on the death of his brother, the Earl of Tankerville, the barony of Grey of Werk fell to him. He returned to England, though he continued to show considerable interest in colonial affairs, especially in those of the island in which he had resided. Grey seems to have been a successful and a popular Governor although holding office for such a short period. One historian of Barbados says that, "Governor Grey's administration was a happy one; his urbanity and disinterested conduct endeared him to the inhabitants, and his close application to the duties of his office proved that he had the welfare of the island at heart."² William Penn seems to have recognized Ralph Grey as one who would forward the interests of both colonies in a genuine fashion and also as a man who made a pleasing neighbour.

Penn had returned to the western hemisphere in 1699 and was therefore acting Governor in Pennsylvania for about the same period as Grey in Barbados. Unfortunately no record is discoverable of the other side of the correspondence, nor, although both men returned to England in 1701, do they seem to have written to each other after they relinquished office. Though Penn does refer to the mutual profit which good trade would afford, at one point only do political affairs enter into the correspondence. In the second letter Penn refers to a change in the method of collecting revenue in Pennsylvania. This change is not mentioned by Janney or Jenkins, though the latter does say that an impost on liquor yielded between £500 and £1,000.³ It is understandable enough that Penn should have thought fit to mention suggested duties on sugar and rum to the Governor of Barbados when both commodities were provided in part by that island. The note of the sugar duty is a little obscure, for Penn altered his original figures, but it seems to be an impost of five shillings on every hundredweight.

¹ This group of papers of Ralph Lord Grey of Werk is included in the Braybrooke MSS. from Audley End House recently deposited in the Essex Record Office, County Hall, Chelmsford. (Catalogue mark D/DBy 025.)

² Sir Robert Schomberg, *History of Barbados* (1848), p. 309.

³ Howard M. Jenkins, *Pennsylvania, Colonial and Federal* (1903), i. 337.

The personalities referred to in the letters are few. Two were captains in the colonial service who appear to act as intermediaries and to know most of the desires and affairs of both principals. The Earl of Bellomont referred to in the second letter was an Irish peer who was, it seems, in charge of the British fleet in colonial waters, for an appeal was made to him about 1700 for a man-of-war to guard Delaware Bay.¹ The other person mentioned is the Earl of Tankerville. He was elder brother of Ralph Grey and a Whig politician of note. At the time of these letters he held the post of the First Commissioner of the Treasury and later, of Lord Privy Seal.

For their personal interest the three letters are here printed unaltered in order to show Penn's idiosyncrasies of writing and his use of abbreviations and punctuation.

I

My honored Friend

Pennsylvania 16 3^m (May) 1700

I was favour'd with thy obligeing letter, by the hand that presents this, and vallue my self extreamly upon the hopes it gives me of the kindness of a Neighbourhood of somuch honour and powr; and doubt not but the one will use the other in our favour, as aften as we deserve, as well as need it: Assureing thee of all the returns our low and infant Colony can make. You are under the neerer and nobler influences of the Sun, and therefore abound in Raritys; we, at a greater distance, in things more common, tho not less usefull: But the nature of our scituation makeing us mutually beneficiall since both want the product of each other (which is an Union of Interrest) I hope it shall be a common care to preserve it.

I begg leave, my noble Friend, to take a share in the prosperous Issue of thy publick affaires. It has, I own, given me a generous impression of the people of that Island. They deserve a gentle and prudent Governour, that show they know so well how to vallue his Conduct. I hope it will augment thy esteem, for a Command, that is so very Honorably Considered by them that are under it, and prolong thy stay among us; tho I know more Ease and Proffit must needs (now) waite for thee neerer home, where Ld. Tankervils great abilitys (long deserved) have obtained great powr: Tho, to my reluctancy not in so direct a Channell for y^e Service of y^e Plantations as I wisht, which should, I confess, have been my Choice above any station in the powr of y^e king to have given me, since it is to nourish and preserve so very great an empire, as is that of the Crown of England in America. Pardon this excursion, tis a partiality for poor America y^t occasion'd it. I begg the earle may favour my regard for him, with his acceptance, and then will please to continue me in thy Good opinion, who, with the best wishes, am

Thy very faithfull and Respectfull Friend

Gover^r: Grey

Wm. Penn²

[Endorsed] A letter from Mr. Wm. Penn Governour of Pennsylvania dated y^e 16th of May 1700.

¹ Howard M. Jenkins, *Pennsylvania, Colonial and Federal* (1903), i. 335.

² Catal. mk. D/DBy 025/2.

II

Newcastle 12 9^{br} 1700

Honored Friend,

I was pleased to have so good an hand to present this by, who will not be ungratefull, since in the family and interests of the Earle of Bellomont, so well with the earle of Tankerville, and by himself a very honest Gentleman.

I shall be glad to hear the request of Barbado's to keep their possession of so gentle and prudent a Governour, is answered to their satisfaction, both by the king and thy selfe too : for Good Neighbours in this part of the world, is what renders it y^e most supportable.

Since my last, our Assembly has thought fitt to change the way of their publick aids or revenue, and for two years, to make, as they think, the Marchants help to support the Govern^{mt}. under which they have augmented, if not gotten their estates ; so y^t y^e Rum, and Sugar pay something, the first 3d. per Gall. and Sugar very considerable, about : 05 ss. per Ct. Indirectly, else nothing.

We have been sickly, but not mortall agues and feavers. I am glad, by Cap^t Kirle, to receive the good news of yo^r better state of health, the Continuance of which, with the Governours felicity, is much the wish of

Thy very reall and Respectfull Friend

Wm. Penn¹

III

Philadelphia

Honorable Friend

23. 2^m. 1701

Tho' the Bearer be a much better letter, he was not willing to leave this behinde, by w^{ch} I take the freedom of renewing the assurances I have given and must ever make, of my Cordial regards and respects for Governour Gray, and that for reasons w^{ch} will pass currant every where, for their own intrinsick vallue, His honorable and moderate Conduct a Character that kings cannot give, and dont always reward ; tho the wise of them make it the rule of dispenseing of their favours. I heartily wish thee the continuance of those good qualitys w^{ch} have made thee the love and honour of the Island and the esteem of all thy Friends, and of them, praying leave to be admitted one, of

Thy affect and respectfull Frd

Wm. Penn²

I leave the rest to Cap^t. Gritton, who favours a close commerce between that and this Province.

Gov^r Gray

¹ No endorsement. Catal. mk. D/DBy 025/4.

² No endorsement. Catal. mk. D/DBy 025/21.