

Macaulay Rejects a Slur on William Penn

IT is said to be news when a man bites a dog. By the same token an instance when Macaulay defended Penn from slander is newsworthy, because it also is unexpected. This is recorded in an autograph letter acquired in December, 1960, by the Quaker Collection at Haverford College. The addressee is not known, but the handwriting and signature are those of the well known historian Thomas B. Macaulay. The letter, quoted with permission, reads as follows:-

Sir,

Dec. 23. 1850

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter which has followed me to the country. Your address I hope to find on my table when I return to London. I have not the smallest doubt that every person who takes the trouble to examine the original evidence will, unless he be blinded by prejudice, admit that I have dealt very leniently with the fame of William Penn. As to the outcry of the Quakers I was of course prepared for it; and I laugh at it.

I cannot but distrust the correctness of the anecdote which you mention. I have not at this moment books to consult. But I am quite confident that Penn had declared himself a Quaker long before Monmouth was of an age to have mistresses. Indeed Penn made a high religious profession before he left college.

I am much obliged to you for directing my attention to the Westover MSS. I have little doubt that I shall be able to find a copy in the British Museum.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your faithful Servant, T. B. Macaulay

The letter deals with two points, the first vindicating the writer, the second vindicating William Penn. Macaulay had published in December, 1848, the first two volumes of his *History of England*, in the former of which he made the serious criticisms of phases of the conduct of William Penn that have since become famous. When he wrote this letter, he had already heard some Quaker reactions to this feature of his work. On 5th February, 1849, he was waited upon by

five Quakers and he describes the occasion in his diary as ending in their total rout.¹ There is evidence that the Quakers, of whom J. Bevan Braithwaite was one, felt differently about the interview. The last named apparently in 1885 transmitted his impressions to Allen C. Thomas, who in turn includes them in an article on "William Penn, Macaulay and Punch."²

Printed objections to the treatment of Penn were not wanting. A non-Quaker journal, *The Tablet*, called attention to the charges against Penn in its issue of 10th March, 1849. The Quaker periodicals on both sides of the Atlantic were not behind. Their references or refutations began in the *Friend* (London), vii.23 (February, 1849); the *British Friend*, (Glasgow), vii.42 (Feb. 26, 1849); *Friend* (Philadelphia), xxii, pp. 213f. (Mar. 24, 1849 and six weekly continuations). William E. Forster's more elaborate and influential answer was published in 1849 (reprinted, Philadelphia, 1850). He was still a member of the Society of Friends. W. Hepworth Dixon's biography of Penn with an extra chapter on the Macaulay charges was issued in London and in Philadelphia in 1851. It has been followed by several other non-Quaker refutations up to recent times.

In the second half of the letter Macaulay expressed his disbelief in an anecdote about Penn referred to by his unknown correspondent. It had to do with mistresses of the Duke of Monmouth. The reference to the Westover MSS. enables us to find the clue. These are the writings of William Byrd of Westover, Virginia, "written from 1728 to 1736 and now first published" according to the edition of E. and J. C. Ruffin, Petersburg, 1841. In his classic narrative, *The History of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*, dealing with a survey made in 1728 but not finished as manuscript for nearly a decade, he begins by discussing the other British Colonies on the mainland as carved out of Virginia. It is in connection with New Jersey and Pennsylvania that one finds the episode evidently intended by Macaulay's correspondent. Byrd himself is not too friendly to Quakers in general, as can be seen by

¹ G. O. Trevelyan, *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, 1876, ii.220. No trace was found in his papers that he changed his mind on this matter.

² *Bulletin of Friends' Historical Society*, vii (1916), 91-96, *Punch* published on February 17th, 1849, a caricature of the interview with verses, strongly anti-Quaker in tendency.

his casual references to them here and elsewhere. Since the passage is apparently not familiar to Quaker historians it may well be cited in full.¹ The work has been republished in 1866 and 1901. In 1929 it was published again together with a more racy parallel manuscript called *The Secret History of the Dividing Line*, by William K. Boyd (Raleigh, N.C.); but the latter has nothing parallel to the following excerpt from pages 8-10 of this edition (first edition, pages 6, 7).

The Proprietors of New Jersey, finding more Trouble than Profit in their new Dominions, made over their Right to several other Persons, who obtained a fresh Grant from his Royal Highness, dated March 14th, 1682.

Several of the Grantees, being Quakers and Anabaptists, faild not to encourage many of their own Perswasion to remove to this Peaceful Region. Amongst them were a Swarm of Scots Quakers, who were not tolerated to exercise the Gifts of the Spirit in their own Country.

Besides the hopes of being Safe from Persecution in this Retreat, the New Proprietors inveigled many over by this tempting Account of the Country: that it was a place free from those 3 great Scourges of Mankind, Priests, Lawyers, and Physicians. Nor did they tell a Word of a Lye, for the People were yet too poor to maintain these Learned Gentlemen, who, every where, love to be paid well for what they do; and, like the Jews, cant breathe in a Climate where nothing is to be got.

The Jerseys continued under the Government of these Proprietors till the Year 1702, when they made a formal Surrender of the Dominion to the Queen, reserving however the Property of the Soil to themselves. So soon as the Bounds of New Jersey came to be distinctly laid off, it appeared that there was still a Narrow Slipe of Land, lying betwixt that Colony and Maryland. Of this, William Penn, a Man of much Worldly Wisdom, and some Eminence among the Quakers, got early Notice, and, by the Credit he had with the Duke of York, obtained a Patent for it, Dated March the 4th, 1680.

It was a little Surprising to some People how a Quaker should be so much in the good Graces of a Popish Prince; tho, after all, it may be pretty well Accounted for. This Ingenious Person had not been bred a Quaker; but, in his Earlier days, had been a man of Pleasure about the Town. He had a beautiful form and very taking Address, which made him Successful with the Ladies, and Particularly with a Mistress of the Duke of Monmouth. By this Gentlewoman he had a Daughter, who had Beauty enough to raise her to be a Dutchess, and continued to be a Toast full 30 Years.

¹ The *Bulletin of Friends' Historical Society*, iii (1909), pp. 15-17 quotes the section but omits precisely the piece of secret history in the fifth and sixth paragraphs.

But this Amour had like to have brought our Fine Gentleman in Danger of a Duell, had he not discreetly shelterd himself under this peaceable Perswasion. Besides, his Father having been a Flag-Officer in the Navy, while the Duke of York was Lord High Admiral, might recommend the Son to his Favour. This piece of secret History I thought proper to mention, to wipe off the Suspicion of his having been Popishly inclin'd.

The Gentleman's first Grant confin'd Him within pretty Narrow Bounds, giving him only that Portion of Land which contains Buckingham, Philadelphia and Chester Counties. But to get these Bounds a little extended, He pusht His Interest still further with His Royal Highness, and obtained a fresh Grant of the three Lower Counties, called New-Castle, Kent and Sussex, which still remained within the New York Patent, and had been luckily left out of the Grant of New Jersey.

The Six Counties being thus incorporated, the Proprietor dignifyd the whole with the Name of Pensilvania.

The Quakers flockt over to this Country in Shoals, being averse to go to Heaven the same way with the Bishops. Amongst them were not a few of good Substance, who went Vigorously upon every kind of Improvement; and thus much I may truly say in their Praise, that by Diligence and Frugality, For which this Harmless Sect is remarkable, and by haveing no Vices but such as are Private, they have in a few Years made Pensilvania a very fine Country.

The Truth is, they have observed exact Justice with all the Natives that border upon them; they have purchased all their Lands from the Indians; and tho they paid but a Trifle for them, it has procur'd them the Credit of being more righteous than their Neighbours. They have likewise had the Prudence to treat them kindly upon all Occasions, which has saved them from many Wars and Massacres wherein the other Colonies have been indiscreetly involved. The Truth of it is, a People whose Principles forbid them to draw the Carnal Sword, were in the Right to give no Provocation.

Macaulay's argument against the story of Penn and a mistress of the Duke of Monmouth is apparently purely chronological. The Duke was four and a half years younger than Penn. Penn's early acceptance of religion or Quakerism made their rivalry for the same mistress unlikely, Macaulay evidently assumed that after he became a Quaker Penn could be believed to be innocent of such amours. Penn himself had asserted to Sir John Robinson in 1671 his freedom since childhood from even lesser vices. But the historian may not have read or remembered the incident (recorded in the anonymous life prefixed to Penn's *Works*, 1726, pp. 38-39).

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