*Review Essay**

The Perplexing Mr. Penn

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What do we do with William Penn? The question began with his father, who was not certain how to handle a son who first got himself sent down from Oxford for religious nonconformity and who went from bad to worse by converting to Quakerism. Next came the Quakers, who welcomed the young convert's gifts of pen and tongue but who quickly found themselves trying to bring him under control. Then there were successive British monarchs—Charles II, James III, and William III—who were alternately amused, perplexed, and angered, to the point of treason charges, by that ultimate contradiction in terms, a Quaker courtier, particularly one who was not reluctant to challenge established authorities. Then there were the inhabitants of Penn's colony, Pennsylvania, where a combination of cheap and fertile land and religious toleration drew thousands, but who found their proprietor exasperating in his pretensions. Finally there are the historians, who have struggled to find consistency in Penn's voluminous writings on religious subjects, to reconcile Penn as a champion of liberty with the would-be colonial benevolent autocrat, and to make sense of an English politician of the 1670s and 1680s who somehow managed to combine ties with leading Whig thinkers like Algernon Sidney with being one of the most public supporters of the policies of King James II between 1685 and 1688. And, in the "Black Lives Matter" era, Penn the founding father of liberty and democracy has been recast as Penn the enslaver. In short, to make sense of William Penn is to struggle with making sense of a person of paradoxes, if not contradictions.

* Andrew R. Murphy, *William Penn: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019) 488 pp., $34.95 hb., ISBN 9780190234249. Page references appear in parentheses within the text.

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Andrew R. Murphy, a historian of political thought at Rutgers University, is the latest to take up these questions at book length. He previously gave us a compelling treatment of William Penn's political thought, *Liberty, Conscience, and Toleration*.[1] He has now expanded this into what is unquestionably the best biography of Penn that we now have.

William Penn was born in London in 1644. His father, also William, ultimately Sir William, came from a West Country gentry family who had become merchants in Bristol. The elder William was a firm supporter of Parliament during the civil war that broke out in 1642 and went into the navy, rising to the rank of admiral. He made his peace with monarchy at the Restoration in 1660, winning a seat in Parliament, and kept not only his rank but also the estates he had acquired in England and Ireland. As the eldest son, the prospects of young William were promising.

The younger William, however, proved to have a mind of his own. When he entered Christ Church College, Oxford, he quickly found, as Murphy puts it, that his "intense piety was clearly out of place in Restoration Oxford, and his alienation from the established church solidified during his time at Christ Church" (26). Instead, he fell into Dissenting circles and was sent down to face his father's wrath, "whipping, and beating, and turning out of doors" (28). Next was a Protestant academy at Saumur in France, combined with European travel, then brief study at Lincoln's Inn in London, cut short when his father called him to act as a messenger between the fleet and the royal court. Then young William went off to Ireland, charged with bringing order to the tangled titles and leases of the Penn lands there. Instead, by the fall of 1667, he was in jail in Cork, arrested at an illegal Quaker meeting for worship.

As Murphy notes: "To say that casting his lot with Quakers was not part of Sir William's grand plan for his son, and that he was displeased by the events of the fall of 1667, would be rather an understatement" (51). It is difficult to comprehend just how radical a repudiation of upbringing and family honor it was for the young William Penn to embrace Quakerism in the 1660s. The admiral pleaded, stormed, and threatened disinheritance, but his son was not to be moved. Ultimately, the two would be reconciled, the elder Penn apparently impressed by his son's devotion to his faith, as incomprehensible as it was.

The precise circumstances and process of William Penn's conversion to Quakerism are maddeningly mysterious. Quaker preacher Thomas Loe was apparently the central figure. But once "convinced," to use Quaker terminology, Penn threw all his talents and resources into the unpopular movement that most people of Penn's class, and many others, regarded as an amalgam of blasphemous theological speculation and social subversion. Quakerism repudiated many of the central doctrines not only of the Church of England but also of most of the established Dissenting churches. Quakers had no use for a learned clergy, believing

[1] Andrew R. Murphy, *Liberty, Conscience and Toleration: The Political Thought of William Penn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

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that anyone, educated or not, male or female, could be called to preach and minister. While steeped in biblical language, early Friends urged the paramount importance of continuing revelation, that the same Holy Spirit that inspired the Scriptures still spoke to humans, and that all had within themselves an Inward Light, or "the Light of Christ inwardly revealed" that guided everyone toward salvation, even those who had never heard the Gospel preached. (Murphy refers to this as the "Inner Light," a source of consternation for some contemporary Quaker historians, who point out that this term was not used until the nineteenth century at the earliest.)[2] Combined with these doctrinal heresies were practices that put Friends (Quaker was originally an insulting nickname) at odds with the society around them. Murphy provides a succinct summary: "a refusal to doff hats in the presence of social 'superiors' and to swear oaths, an insistence on plain speech (thee and thou), and an eagerness to proselytize in often confrontational ways" (45). The founder and unchallenged leader of the movement after 1660 was George Fox (1624–1691), and Penn soon became a fast friend and loyal lieutenant.

Penn's conversion to Quakerism quickly made him a public figure. For the next half century, he would be significant in three ways: as a Quaker leader, author, preacher, and controversialist; as a statesman and politician, that most unlikely of creatures, a Quaker courtier; and as a political thinker and theorist whose significance Murphy affirms. Murphy is generally skilled at navigating Penn's evolution as a Quaker; makes a credible case for some controversial positions in evaluating Penn as a statesman; and is unsurprisingly at his best in examining Penn's political thought. He is also conscious of how all three elements were intricately and inseparably bound together in Penn's life.

Within a year of his "convincement," Penn had gone into print in defense of Quakerism. His second book, *The Sandy Foundation Shaken* (1668), landed him in the Tower of London on charges of blasphemy. Murphy does not explicate the substantial work fully, summarizing it as "justification of Quakers' conduct and a defense of their theological positions on the Trinity, atonement theory, and the divinity of Christ" (59). Penn's presentation of the divinity verged on Socinianism and was certainly anti-Trinitarian, so much so as to trouble even some other Quakers. Penn procured his release a year later with another book, *Innocency with Her Open Face*, in which, as Murphy puts it, he affirmed "his belief in the divinity of Christ" and "insisted that *The Sandy Foundation* had been misunderstood and that he had never held the views attributed to him" (62).

As Rosemary Moore, who probably knows the Quaker literature of the early period better than any other living person, has noted: "Penn wrote so much, and at such length, that it is difficult to find a succinct statement of his beliefs, which moreover developed during his lifetime."[3] Murphy's analysis of Penn's Quaker

[2] Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion, introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies* (ed. Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 7–8.

[3] Rosemary Moore, "Quaker Expressions of Belief in the Lifetime of George Fox," in *The Quakers,*

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writing emphasizes how much of it was situational, responding to particular attacks by critics or problems facing Friends. Thus, when in 1668 a Norfolk Anglican priest, Jonathan Clapham, included Quakers among groups that could not possibly be considered Christians in his *Guide to the True Religion*, Penn responded with *The Guide Mistaken, and Temporizing Rebuked*. The titles of other works in the 1670s bespeak Penn's readiness to take on critics: *Truth Rescued from Imposture, Plain-dealing with a Traducing Anabaptist*, *The Counterfeit Christian Detected; and the Real Quaker Justified,* and *A Just Rebuke to One and Twenty Reverend Divines (So Called)*. Many of Penn's controversial works grew out of public debates in which Penn showed a talent in "the raucous religious and political atmosphere of Restoration London" (57). His talents were not limited to debate. Partly because of his social prominence, but also because of a real gift for public speaking, Penn emerged as a noted Quaker preacher, or "Public Friend," as Quakers at the time would have said.

Three of Penn's published works proved especially noteworthy. During his stay in the Tower, Penn embarked on a work that he entitled *No Cross, No Crown*. The first edition appeared in 1669 and was a "systematic articulation of the social practices that distinguished Quakers from many of their contemporaries, such as their refusal to swear oaths and remove hats in the presence of their social superiors, as well as plain speech and opposition to finery and ornate apparel. In just over a hundred pages, Penn laid out dozens of reasons for Quaker positions and buttressed those arguments with testimonies from ancient and modern statesmen and philosophers, church fathers, and Reformers" (61–62). A much longer (almost six hundred pages) edition came out in 1682, no longer as much "a head-on denunciation of worldly practices" as "a more contemplative, devotional text about the virtues of self-denial and the 'daily bearing of Christ's Cross'" (152–53). Of all of Penn's works, this was the one that would have the most enduring popularity among Quakers. More popular in the larger world was *Some Fruits of Solitude*, first published in 1693. The result of another imprisonment, this time during the reign of William and Mary, it was a collection of maxims that has never been out of print since it appeared.

Murphy's primary interest is not in Penn's spirituality, however. He treats it largely as it affects his attempts to influence the world around him. Thus it is not surprising that he gives more attention to a third work by Penn, *The Great Case of Liberty of Conscience Once More Debated and Defended*. It appeared in both Dublin and London. As Murphy summarizes it, it was "not merely a defense of Friends against their critics or a diatribe against the theological errors of others, but a preface and six substantive chapters laying out a systematic examination of the foundations of liberty of conscience, and a vigorous, principled defense of freedom of worship" (71). The immediate context was the passage by Parliament

1656–1723: The Evolution of an Alternative Community (ed. Richard C. Allen and Rosemary Moore; University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018) 159.

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of the Second Conventicle Act, which effectively outlawed religious gatherings outside of the established church.

Closely linked to Penn's advocacy of freedom of worship and liberty of conscience was his role in a landmark legal case. On August 14, 1670, Penn and another Friend, William Mead, were preaching to several hundred outside of a Quaker meetinghouse in Gracechurch Street in London. Legal authorities had closed the building. So, undeterred, the Friends tried to worship in the street. The authorities promptly arrested the two and charged them with unlawful assembly. The trial was held before the lord mayor, Sir Samuel Starling, who not only had, as Murphy notes, a "zealous animus against Dissenters" but "harbored a particular grudge" against the Penn family (76). Penn turned "a trial about unauthorized preaching into a full-fledged assault on the Restoration state-church and its persecutory foundations" (78). He raised the stakes by challenging whether such a prosecution could be based merely on the common law: "Unless you shew me, and the people, the law you ground your indictment upon, I shall take it for granted, your proceedings are merely arbitrary" (78). The question was, as Penn asserted, "not whether I am guilty of this indictment, but whether this indictment be legal" (78). The lord mayor was unimpressed, but the jurors had a different response. Showing unexpected refusal to defer to authority, they ignored instructions designed to produce a conviction and reported that they could not agree. Sent back to reconsider, they announced that they found Penn "guilty of speaking in Gracechurch street," which, as Murphy notes, was "not the charge against the defendants, and arguably not a crime at all" (79). Enraged, Starling ordered them to reconsider, with the court recorder threatening, "I will have a positive verdict, or you shall starve for it" (80). They then returned with a positive verdict—not guilty. The jurors were fined, and Penn and Mead went back to jail for contempt in refusing to remove their hats in court. But Penn had established himself as a martyr, not just for Quakerism, but also for the rights of Englishmen, and an important legal precedent had been set: guilt and innocence were the preserve of juries rather than of judges.

The 1670 trial led Penn toward an expansion of *The Great Case of Liberty of Conscience*, in which he laid out definitions that would have influence beyond Friends. Murphy highlights two of Penn's definitions. First,

> [T]hat plain English, of liberty of conscience is this; namely, the free and uninterrupted exercise of our consciences, in that way of worship, we are most clearly persuaded, God requires us to serve Him in (without endangering our undoubted birthright of English freedoms) which being matter of faith; we sin if we omit. (83–84)

Penn was expansive in laying out the implications of such a vision of liberty:

> By liberty of conscience, we understand not only a meer liberty of the mind, in believing or disbelieving this or that principle or doctrine, but the exercise of ourselves in a visible way of worship, upon our believing it to be indispensibly required at our hands . . . Yet we would be so understood . . . not

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> to contrive, or abet any contrivance destructive of the government and laws of the land, tending to matters of an external nature . . . but so far only, as it may refer to religious matters, and a life to come, and consequently wholly independent of . . . secular affairs. (83–84)

Penn concluded that it was wrong for government to place any imposition in the way of peaceful religious worship, that, as Murphy puts it, "liberty of conscience includes protection not only of the rights to belief, but also to worship and assembly. . . . Communicating and meeting with others, . . . served an integral purpose to the exercise of individual conscience" (84).

This conviction led Penn into politics. Quakers, while disclaiming any interest in pulling down or setting up governments, had long shown themselves quite willing to try to influence governments to relax persecution and recognize rights of conscience. With his connections at the highest levels of English society, Penn was a natural figure to lead in such efforts. He early approached King Charles II with complaints about not only persecution in general but specific acts of misconduct by officials: "the use of perjured informers, the imposition of fines without warrants, and the collection of two or three times the amount of fines allowed" (112). Ultimately, Penn found himself pulled deeply into the complicated and unpredictable politics of England between 1675 and 1688.

This period saw the emergence of the earliest political parties in England, loose coalitions that became known as Whigs and Tories. Tories were generally supporters of royal prerogative and the established church. Whigs urged the hemming in of Crown authority by statute law and parliamentary supervision and, while not challenging the concept of an established church, were sympathetic to the rights of Dissenters. Thus, Whig leanings were natural for Quakers. One of Penn's close friends was Algernon Sidney, a leader of the Whigs.

But other factors complicated Penn's political maneuvering. The chief target of Whigs between 1678 and 1685 was Charles II's younger brother and heir, James, Duke of York. James had converted to Roman Catholicism in 1670 and was a persistent voice at court for relaxation of the penal laws against all religious nonconformists, whether Protestant or Catholic. Whigs feared that such views were simply a front by which the Catholic James, having removed the legal barriers to Catholic office holding (the Test Act of 1673), would pack the government with sycophants and fanatical Catholics and then impose a French-style absolutism. So Whigs not only held firm on laws that banned office holding by nonconformists, but also sought, ultimately unsuccessfully, to pass an exclusion act that would have removed James from the line of succession because of his faith.

The Penn family had long-standing ties with James, who, as commander of the English navy, had worked with Sir William. The younger William accepted James's professions of commitment to tolerance, and the two men became close personal friends. This relationship would be consequential in two ways, binding Penn and

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James together in politics and playing a critical role in the development of Penn's colony of Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania is, of course, what makes Penn significant in American history. Murphy argues persuasively that the development of the colony is inseparable both from Penn's thinking about liberty of conscience and his ties to the Duke of York. The duke was proprietor of the colony of New York, whose boundaries with Penn's colony were largely undetermined, and so his good will was critical. It was forthcoming. In 1681, Penn received a charter for a colony between New York and Maryland. Penn, of course, wanted to name it Sylvania, or woodland, but the king insisted on Pennsylvania to honor not Quaker William, but his father the admiral.

In fact, Penn had earlier experience with colonial projects. Between 1675 and 1680 he had been deeply involved in the colonies of East and West Jersey, both of which had strong Quaker connections. Murphy sees Penn's influence particularly in West Jersey's government: "juries, consent, representative institutions, liberty of conscience" (119).

In analyzing Penn's motives, Murphy steers a middle course. Quaker traditionalists asserted, in the words of Penn's influential nineteenth-century biographer, Samuel M. Janney, that Penn intended Pennsylvania to be not only "a peaceful home for the persecuted members of his own society, but to afford an asylum for the good and oppressed of every nation, and to found an empire where the pure and peaceable principles of Christianity might be carried out in practice" (139). At the other extreme is contemporary Penn biographer Mary Geiter, who argues that in obtaining the charter, "Penn sold out his Whig allies and showed his true colors: those of a courtier, more interested in access to the corridors of power and in making a profit than in standing up to the powerful" (139). Murphy argues convincingly that profit seeking and "a peaceful home for the persecuted" were not irreconcilable. Penn certainly had financial problems, but he had long argued that religious toleration was a source of economic prosperity. In his colony he could have his cake and eat it too.

Pennsylvania is appropriately central to the latter two-thirds of Murphy's book. The Fundamental Constitutions that Penn drew up served as a framework of government, with considerable consultation, so that both Quakers and non-Quakers embraced Penn's vision of a good society. Unsurprisingly, many have seen in them the foundations of future American democracy: a jury system, restrictions on imprisonment for debt, election by secret ballot, and, of course, "the free possession of his or her faith and exercise of worship towards God, in such way and manner as every person shall in conscience believe is most acceptable to God" (149). Still, Penn was a Quaker, and so he provided, in the Fundamental Constitutions, that there would be neither tavern nor alehouse "nor any playhouses, nor morris dances, nor games as dice, cards, board tables, lotteries, bowling greens, horse races, bear baitings, bull baitings, and such like sports, which only tend to idleness and looseness" (149). Significantly, Murphy questions the applicability of the famous

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phrase “holy experiment” to what Penn intended in Pennsylvania. Penn used it only once, and he may have intended it not in the sense of testing a hypothesis—that one could build a successful society on Quaker principles—but rather in the sense that contemporary Quakers did, “by experience.” Citing J. William Frost, Murphy concludes that “Penn saw his colony as a ‘holy place,’ or a place where holiness could be experienced, and not necessarily a controlled procedure to validate a hypothesis” (363).

Ultimately, Pennsylvania proved anything but a holy experience for Penn. His time there was limited to visits in 1682–1684 and 1699–1701. It was a drain on his finances; Penn probably never recovered the funds he put forward to set up the colony. He found himself in a decades-long dispute with the Calvert family over the boundary between Pennsylvania and Maryland that not only was costly in legal fees but required him to be in England. Penn had intended to make money not only by selling land but also by collecting quit rents, or annual fees for land occupancy, from settlers. Pennsylvania’s colonists proved unenthusiastic about paying taxes for public works that benefited them. They were adamant in not wanting to continue to subsidize the Penn family once they had purchased their lands. The colonial assembly proved fractious, and the lieutenant governors that Penn appointed were at best an uneven lot.

Charles II died in March 1685, bringing Penn’s friend James, Duke of York, to the throne as King James II. This began the most controversial era of Penn’s life. James was determined to relax the penal laws against religious nonconformists. As noted above, his motives were disputed then and remain so now. James pursued an intentional policy of cultivating the support of Protestant Dissenters for the repeal of the Test Acts and other limits on liberty of conscience. When a strongly Tory parliament refused to cooperate in 1685, he dissolved it and pursued his goal through royal proclamations of indulgence that suspended the relevant laws. Some historians, most notably Scott Sowerby, have argued that James was sincere and that those who supported James’s efforts were part of a genuine campaign for liberty of conscience.[4] There is a longer historical tradition, going back to Thomas Babington Macaulay and advanced most recently by Steve Pincus, that James’s concessions to religious toleration were purely tactical and that his goal was the establishment of a Roman Catholic autocracy in England.[5]

Since Murphy’s focus is on Penn, he does not attempt to resolve the historical debate about the king’s intentions. He says simply: “What William Penn thought about the king’s persistence in his muscular and frontal assault on the Church of England, we do not know. Much of the documentary evidence from the period has been lost or, more likely, destroyed” (196). Murphy concludes that Penn the realist

[4] Scott Sowerby, *Making Toleration: The Repealers and the Glorious Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[5] Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II* (2 vols.; London: Longman, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1880–1883); Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

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probably thought that legal toleration of Dissent through parliamentary legislation was possible, but that repeal of the Test Acts, which would fully enfranchise Catholics, was not. Nevertheless, as tensions rose in 1687 and 1688, tensions that would culminate in James's overthrow by his daughter Mary and her husband, William of Orange, Penn continued to support publicly and vocally the king's policies. By the end of 1688, James had fled to France and would soon be judged to have abdicated the throne.

The years from 1688 to 1694 would accordingly be difficult for Penn. As one of James's favorites, his situation was, as Murphy puts it, "precarious" (201). He found himself in custody four times, sometimes allowed bail, sometimes imprisoned, on suspicion of being a Jacobite, or supporter of James's restoration. Many Quakers turned on him, criticizing him for linking Friends with the discredited James. Penn's real opinions are a matter of debate. And the government seized Pennsylvania, combining it temporarily with the colony of New York under a common governor. Mary Geiter, for example, titled the chapter covering this period in her biography of Penn simply "Jacobite."[6] After some letters that some thought incriminating turned up in January 1691, Penn went into hiding for an extended period. Murphy implies that the charges probably were not true, noting Penn's solemn avowal that he had not been part of any conspiracies against the new monarchs and the fact that, despite warrants for treason being issued, Penn was never brought to trial. Penn may have survived because he was factually innocent. But it helped that he continued to have influential aristocratic friends who were willing to act on his behalf and even to get bail for him.

After 1694, Penn continued to be active in Quaker and public affairs. He recovered his influence among Friends. In 1694, he also recovered possession of his colony. In 1696, he cemented his position in the affections of William III by campaigning for a Whig parliament. (William had by now thrown in his lot with the Whigs.) The reward was the passage of the Affirmation Act in 1696. Quakers took literally the command of Jesus, "Swear not at all," and thus refused all judicial oaths. This created a variety of problems, not so much in court proceedings as in business matters that required sworn statements. Friends perceived an affirmation as different and thus largely embraced the measure, although some still objected to being required to make affirmations "in the presence of Almighty God." Interestingly, when leading Friends called on Penn to defend the compromise Friends had made, he had reservations, worrying that public controversy was divisive and that open support would preclude a further relaxation.

Regaining possession of his proprietorship of Pennsylvania only caused new headaches for Penn. He faced two sets of intractable problems. One came from within the colony. Its politics were factionalized, as Murphy summarizes them: "a Philadelphia Quaker elite, a growing and increasingly assertive Anglican minority, and a largely non-Quaker population in the Lower Counties," what now

[6] Mary K. Geiter, *William Penn* (Profiles in Power; Harlow, UK: Pearson Education, 2000), 66–80.

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constitutes Delaware (262). Add to this, chronic difficulties over land claims and rights. The other set of problems came from England. Penn had regained his charter with clearly understood conditions: that he would enforce the trade laws known as the Navigation Acts, crack down on piracy (a source of trade and revenue in Philadelphia), bring Pennsylvania's legal code into line with England's, and support the war effort against France. The last requirement set the context for other events. From 1689 until Penn's death in 1718, England and France were at war nineteen of the twenty-nine years. Worried about new efforts to revoke the charter, Penn used his influence to meet the demands of the English government. But as Murphy concludes, by so doing, "Penn had made himself increasingly unpopular with his own colonists and ensured the unremitting hostility of David Lloyd," a colonial politician who would continually vex Penn (279). At the end of his second visit to Pennsylvania in October 1701, the embattled Penn agreed to a charter of privileges that gave the assembly new rights.

These disappointments set the scene for the last two decades of Penn's life. He continued to be an influential and respected Friend. But his financial position steadily worsened. Quaker he might be, but Penn always insisted on living on an aristocratic scale, and his debts mounted. Worse, he had inattentively signed agreements with his long-time financial manager Philip Ford that conceivably gave the Ford family claims on Pennsylvania. Early in 1708, Penn found himself jailed once more, this time for debt. By 1711, he was in active negotiations to surrender his charter. Then, in the autumn of 1712, while writing a letter to his Pennsylvania agent, James Logan, Penn suffered an incapacitating stroke. He survived in a "physical and mental condition" that "fluctuated wildly," until he died July 30, 1718.

Bound up with the trials of Penn's last years was his family. He married twice, both wives being faithful Friends. The first, Gulielma Springett (1644–1694), wealthy, beautiful, and accomplished, was the stepdaughter of Isaac Penington, an influential Friend. She gave birth to seven children before her death. Penn then married a much younger Friend, Hannah Callowhill (1670–1726) of Bristol. They had six children. Penn's children did not continue in their father's model; only his daughter Letitia Aubrey remained a Quaker. His oldest son, yet another William, was a particular disappointment. He renounced Quakerism and took up the life of an aristocratic grandee and rake. His sons by his second marriage, Thomas and John, inherited Pennsylvania, but, going over to Anglicanism, they regarded it largely as a source of revenue and were at constant odds with Friends there.

In his concluding section, Murphy offers a series of measured assessments of Penn's significance. First, he concludes, and demonstrates convincingly, that Penn shows "the inseparability of religion and politics in the early modern world. . . . [R]eligion and politics were inseparable for him" (360–61). Second, he argues that "we should not draw a sharp distinction between Penn the Englishman and Penn the American. . . . [I]n Penn's case English and American perspectives shared borders as fluid as the ocean that separated and connected them" (361). Finally,

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he makes connections with contemporary debates over freedom of conscience. He concludes his text: “Debates over the meaning, extent, and limitations of claims of conscience continue to unsettle political discourse in the United States and around the world. Perhaps it is in the persistence of these debates, rather than in the purported success or failure of any particular ‘holy experiment,’ that William Penn’s legacy will prove most enduring” (366).

Murphy has given us the best, most comprehensive biography of Penn to date. Given the length of Penn’s life and his wide-ranging interests on both sides of the Atlantic, it will probably not be the last word. Murphy is by no means uncritical of Penn. He decries his indifference to slavery, although noting that Penn in his will provided for the emancipation of the people he had enslaved. He likewise is candid about the contradictions between Penn the Quaker who praised plain living and Penn the aristocrat whose financial affairs were in a constant tangle of debts. His William Penn is at times arrogant, self-pitying, and unrealistic. Yet Murphy does not allow these real faults to obscure how much there was to admire in Penn’s life and how enduring his accomplishments were.

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