

## ROBERT TURNER.

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**T**HIS person was never a resident of New Jersey. Being a man of large estate, he became interested in the various speculations going on in England, touching the settlements in America, and rendered much service to such as desired to remove, but had not the means wherewith to accomplish that end. He was an Irish Quaker, engaged in merchandise. He resided in the city of Dublin, where he much advanced the spread of the religious doctrines which he had espoused; and this brought upon him an equal measure of persecution from those who conceived their authority to be absolute.<sup>1</sup> In 1662, he, with many others, was taken from a religious meeting of Friends, and confined in the Bridewell prison. Two years before he had been locked up in Newgate for a like offence. In 1665, he was imprisoned and despoiled of his goods, and, in 1669, had his property again taken for the reason that he had refused to pay tithes. His estate seems to have had an attraction for such as, in those days, went about with religious zeal to punish those who differed with them in opinion.

Immediately upon the consummation of the grant of territory in America by the king to William Penn, he closed his business in Ireland, and removed to Philadelphia. He came in the ship "Lion" of Liverpool from Dublin, with the certificate of the Men's Meeting of Friends from the last named place, and arrived in Philadelphia on the 14th of the eighth month, 1683. He brought with him his family and some twenty

<sup>1</sup> Lib. B1, 52.

persons as servants. With William Penn he was on the most intimate terms, having been associated with him in his various religious difficulties; and he was frequently his companion in his travels in England. From among the extensive correspondence that occurred between them, it may not be uninteresting to copy a letter, in which an explanation is given of the way in which the appellation that his territory now bears, was fixed, showing how fearful he was that the same might appear egotistical. It runs as follows:

“TO ROBERT TURNER.

5 of 1st Mo, 1681.

Dear Friend: My true love in the Lord salutes thee, and dear friends that love the Lord's precious truth in those parts. Thine I have, and for my business here. Know that after many waitings, watchings, solicitings and disputes in Council, this day my country was confirmed to me under the great seal of England, with large powers and privileges by the name of Pennsylvania—a name the King would give it, in honour of my father. I chose New Wales, being as this is a pretty hilly country, but Penn being Welsh for *a head*, as Penaumoire in Wales, and Penrith in Cumberland, and Penn in Buckinghamshire, the highest land in England, he called this Pennsylvania, which is *the high or head Woodland*; for I proposed, when the secretary, a Welshman, refused to have it called New Wales, *Sylvania*, and they added *Penn* to it; and though I much opposed it and went to the King to have it struck out, and altered, he said it was past, and would take it upon him. Nor could twenty guineas move the under secretaries to vary the name, for I feared least it should be looked on as a vanity in me, and not as a respect in the King as it truly was to my father, whom he often mentions with praise. Thou mayst communicate my grant to friends, and expect shortly my proposals. It is a clear and just thing, and my God that has given it to me through many difficulties, will, I believe, bless and make it the seed of a nation. I shall have a tender care of the government, that it will be well laid at the first. No more now, but dear love in truth. Thy true friend,

WILLIAM PENN.”

In this letter are disclosed the real sentiments of the writer upon the subject in question, as well as the history of a matter now of much interest to all. In a money point of view, this grant discharged a debt which the creditor feared never would be paid, and about which there had been much controversy and dispute. The influence of William Penn with the king was a cause of jealousy among those who surrounded him, and who sought the same position that he undoubtedly held at court. This was the secret of all the opposition to the settlement of the claim, and the fact that hindered its consummation.

The charter, which contained "large powers and privileges," has become a venerable document. It has been framed, and it now hangs in the office of the secretary of the commonwealth at Harrisburg. It is ornamented with heraldic devices on strong parchment, and, at the top of the first page, displays a finely executed likeness of Charles the Second, king of England, &c.

The letter contains one other sentiment worthy of note, which is that this grant of land, and the laws that he proposed to establish there, would make the colony "*the seed of a nation.*" Whatever may have been the expectations of this great man in regard to the people that should spring up on his new acquisition, or whatever he hoped that time would develop in the resources and advantages of the soil within its bounds, he never could have contemplated any such advancement as the present generation beholds at this day. He only knew it as it lay upon the river Delaware; which stream would offer all the water communication that was necessary for the wants of the people. The immense forests, the inexhaustible mineral resources, the advantages of water power for manufacturing purposes and inland transportation, as well as the extensive agricultural districts that lay within the bounds of his purchase, were things beyond his view, and beyond the scope of his imagination. The "tender care" which he had for the government, that emigrants might be assured of justice to all, marked him as a man of foresight and deserving merit, and in this he certainly planted the "seed of a nation."

Many difficulties occurred in regard to titles to land made by Penn, some concerning the boundaries, and others, the right of

possession; these troubles were frequently referred to Robert Turner, who mostly settled them to satisfaction. As Thomas Sharp, and those other adventurers who settled at Newton, came from Dublin, and took their land within the bounds of the Irish tenth, as laid forth in West Jersey, there can be no doubt that Robert Turner knew them before they came, and continued the acquaintance after their arrival here. In the memorial left by Sharp touching this part of their history, reference is made to the adjustment of a difficulty by Robert Turner in relation to land taken up by George Goldsmith. In this settlement he showed his good feeling toward Goldsmith by conveying him a portion of the survey whereon he had made his improvements. The remainder of this survey he sold to Isaac Hollingsham.

The Graysburys purchased a tract of land lying in Newton, which he had located on the south side of the main branch of Newton creek. He made other surveys in the township, some of which were bounded by Cooper's creek, and some by the river front, now included in the city of Camden.<sup>2</sup> For the five years immediately after the first settlement, he perhaps owned more land in this township than any other individual, and no doubt took much interest in its advancement and progress. In the sales of land, as made in Pennsylvania by William Penn to those who were settling there, and to many residents in England, and Scotland, and Ireland, who never came thence, the name of Robert Turner often occurs; and, at his death, his landed estates must have been large and valuable. In the city, he owned several squares of ground, which he, no doubt, used for farming purposes, but which are now in the centre of the metropolis.

The wife of Robert Turner was Susanna, daughter of William Welch, and their children were Edward, who married Catharine Carter. (He dying, she married John Baldwin.<sup>3</sup> She also survived him and married — Cloud of Chester county, Pa.);<sup>4</sup> Martha, who married Francis Rawle; and Mary, who married Joseph Pidgeon.<sup>5</sup> Mary Rawle, a daughter of Francis, married William Cooper in 1732, a son of Daniel and grandson of the

<sup>2</sup> Sharp's Book, 03. O. S. G.  
<sup>3</sup> Lib. G3, 379.

<sup>4</sup> Lib. E, 69.  
<sup>5</sup> Lib. BB1, 352.

*first* William.<sup>6</sup> Her husband settled with her in Philadelphia, where he remained until his death.<sup>7</sup> He was the owner of much land in Camden, coming to him from his paternal ancestors. Mary Pidgeon deceased in 1733, leaving one son, Joseph. Francis and Martha Rawle had other children than Mary, as follows: Robert, Francis, William, Joseph, John, Benjamin, Jane, Rebecca, and Elizabeth. Robert Turner died intestate.

Although not a resident of the colony, yet, in 1685, he was returned as one of the representatives of the third tenth in the Legislature of West New Jersey; but he did not appear at the first sitting thereof.<sup>8</sup> At the second session, his name appears, at which time he was appointed as one of the commissioners to regulate the sale of land, and to contract with the Indians for the purchase of their right in the soil. He was also appointed one of the committee to examine proxies sent by the proprietors residing in England, since some difficulty had arisen concerning their legality, the manner in which they were obtained, and the way in which they were being used.

The exercising of these privileges by Robert Turner would seem to show that he lived in West New Jersey for a short time, although nothing beside would lead to such conclusion; or that the custom prevailing in England at that time, and still, to some extent; followed there, of electing persons of one section of the realm to represent those of another, in this single instance obtained here. Supposing such to be the fact, the rule was much strained in this case, for he then resided in another commonwealth, based upon a different constitution and governed in many particulars by different laws. That he had large interests here is well known. He was also as desirous as the inhabitants were that wholesome regulations should be provided for the growing colony, in order that new comers could be induced to settle; for, as a consequence, the value of the land held for sale would be greatly increased. It would appear that Robert Turner's interest in New Jersey was not confined to the western division, for, in 1683, as one of the owners of East New Jersey,

<sup>6</sup> Lib. F, 03, Philadelphia Records.

<sup>7</sup> Vol. IX., 10, New Jersey Historical Society Proceedings.

<sup>8</sup> Leaming & Spicer's Laws of New Jersey.

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he, by his proxy, voted to confirm Gawen Lawrie as deputy governor of that province under the appointment of Robert Barclay, he being empowered so to do by the original covenant entered into with the proprietors.<sup>9</sup>

He was also one of the signers of the letter from the proprietors to the planters in that province, about the same date; in which is expressed a desire that equity and justice may rule, and that right shall be done to all who may transport themselves into that country. But little is said of him in the many histories and narratives of those early times; which is surprising in view of the large estates which he held in Pennsylvania, East and West New Jersey. He did not participate very much in the political affairs of these colonies, and is not known in any of the troubles that occurred in those times. His place seems to have been that of umpire in the settlement of personal troubles to the avoidance of law suits and other like scandal.

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<sup>9</sup> Learning and Spicer's Laws of New Jersey.