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CHAPTER 2

NEW WORLD EXPERIMENTS: ENGLAND'S SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY COLONIES

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FOLKWAYS

College students are a well-traveled lot and have experienced for themselves some of the regional diversity that still characterizes the United States. When asked to describe such differences, they immediately mention sectional accents. Many students have also noticed regional differences in food, architecture, and what is vaguely referred to as "style." Considering all the forces working to homogenize American culture, it is amazing that the United States still retains vestiges of cultural diversity that can be traced back to the colonial era.

Early American historians have only recently begun to appreciate the astonishing variety of English cultures in the seventeenth century. England was a small island of little more than 4 million people in 1600, yet its residents lived in a series of subcultures that were often incomprehensible to one another. The basic division was between the heavily populated southeast and the still forested northwest, but differences between counties, or even between villages, were enormous. Only those who grew up in the vicinity, for example, would have understood that someone "stabbed with a Bridgeport dagger" had actually been hanged, the point being that Bridgeport produced excellent rope. Only local residents knew that a "Jack of Dover" was warmed-over food.

Of greater interest are those English cultural traits that crossed the Atlantic. The high-pitched nasal twang of East Anglia migrated to Massachusetts Bay and became the "typical" Yankee New England accent. People in the west of England tended to speak in a soft drawl, drawing out their vowels until "I" sounded like "Ah." It was possible in seventeenth-century Hampshire County to hear people say, "Ah be poorly," meaning "I am ill." That style of speech, it is assumed, laid the foundation for today's U.S. "Southern accent."

Students should be reminded that many of the immigrants counted as British had little in common with the people called English. Cornish was still a living language and ancient Gaelic ways of life held the allegiance of the people of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. Some historians today argue that it was the Celtic immigration that brought into America what is sometimes referred to as "Cracker culture." If we further consider the large-scale German immigration of the eighteenth century and the even larger

influx of Africans, we can easily understand that English culture, varied as it was from the outset, would be transmuted into yet more varied regional subcultures in colonial America.

PROFIT AND PIETY: COMPETING VISIONS FOR ENGLISH SETTLEMENT

The author uses the refusal of Massachusetts and Virginia to aid one another during times of crisis to illustrate the remarkable diversity that quickly characterized the different colonies. Although they were all English, they differed in religious practices, political institutions, and economic development.

BREAKING AWAY

The English came to America for different reasons and with different backgrounds. Some wanted an opportunity to worship God in their own way; others wanted land. Some came in the early part of the century when England was relatively stable; others came at the end of the century after England had experienced a civil war. In America, the colonists had to adjust to different environments. The result was the development of different subcultures: the Chesapeake, New England, the Middle Colonies, and the Carolinas.

THE CHESAPEAKE: DREAMS OF WEALTH

The English colonized the Chesapeake because they believed they could obtain instant profits. These dreams faded, but they left behind the colony of Virginia, England's first successful effort in America.

A. Entrepreneurs in Virginia

The London Company settled a colony at Jamestown in 1607 that met immediate disaster. The location in a swamp had been a mistake, but even worse was the failure of the colonists to work together for the common good.

B. Spinning Out of Control

Captain John Smith, a tough professional soldier, saved the colonists by imposing order. The London Company helped, too, by reorganizing the government of the colony and investing more money in the enterprise. Even so, Jamestown was actually abandoned for a few days in 1610 and was saved only by the coincidental arrival of a new shipload of colonists.

C. "Stinking Weed"

Tobacco had been growing as a common weed in the streets of Jamestown before John Rolfe recognized its value. He improved its quality and found a market for it in

England. Finally, Virginians had discovered the way to wealth. The London Company, under Sir Edwin Sandys, encouraged large-scale immigration to Virginia by offering "headrights," grants of land given to those who paid for the cost of immigration, and by giving the colonists a form of self-government in an elected body called the House of Burgesses.

D. Time of Reckoning

After 1619, a rush of immigrants arrived in Virginia; few, however, survived for long. It was impossible to establish a normal family life because men outnumbered women by about six to one. The colony, therefore, could not count on a natural increase in its population. Disease and Native American attacks continued to take their toll, especially the sudden outbursts of violence in 1622 that almost wiped out the colony. Virginia remained a place to make a quick fortune and then leave before becoming a mortality statistic.

E. Corruption and Reform

As the colonists died in large numbers, the London Company sank into mismanagement and corruption. In 1624, King James I dissolved the London Company and made Virginia a royal colony. Despite this change, life in Virginia went on as before. The House of Burgesses continued to meet because it had become so useful to the ambitious and successful tobacco planters who dominated Virginian life. The character of daily life also remained unchanged. A high death rate, a feeling of living on borrowed time, and the constant takeover of Native American lands so that more and more tobacco could be grown were the themes of early Virginia history.

F. Maryland: A Troubled Refuge for Catholics

The founding of Maryland resulted from the efforts of George Calvert to find a place of refuge for his fellow English Catholics. After his death, his son, Cecilius (Lord Baltimore), received a charter to settle Maryland in 1632. Lord Baltimore expected that he would govern the colony along with a few of his wealthy Catholic friends, but he knew that most of the immigrants who would come from England would be Protestant. He therefore issued a law requiring Christians to tolerate one another.

Lord Baltimore failed to create the society he wanted. His wealthy friends were unwilling to relocate to America, and the common settlers in Maryland demanded a greater voice in the government. Above all, religious intolerance wrecked Baltimore's plans. Protestants refused to tolerate Catholics, and the Protestants were strong enough to take up arms and seize control of the colony in 1655. Maryland's early history differed from Virginia's, but aggressive individualism, an absence of public spirit, and an economy based on tobacco characterized both colonies.

REFORMING ENGLAND IN AMERICA

Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay were the most important of the New England colonies. Plymouth was settled by the Pilgrims, a group of Separatists who refused to worship in the Church of England and who had fled to Holland to escape persecution. As they saw their children grow more Dutch than English, the Pilgrims decided to leave Holland for the new English colony of Virginia. They landed instead at Cape Cod and remained there. Led by William Bradford and helped by friendly Native American neighbors, the Pilgrims survived and created a society of small farming villages bound together by mutual consent (the Mayflower Compact). The colony, however, attracted few immigrants, and Plymouth was eventually absorbed into Massachusetts Bay.

A. "The Great Migration"

The second colony planted in New England was Massachusetts Bay, the home of the Puritans. The Puritans often have been caricatured as neurotics and prudes; in fact, they were men and women committed to changing the major institution of their society. Unlike the Separatists, the Puritans wished to remain within the Church of England, but they wanted the Church to give up all remaining vestiges of her Roman Catholic past.

Puritans were also intensely nationalistic and desired a foreign policy that would align England with the Protestant states of Europe. They hoped to accomplish their goals by working within the system, but when King Charles I decided to rule the country without consulting with Parliament, the Puritans despaired. Some of them, led by John Winthrop, decided to establish a better society in America. The Massachusetts Bay Company was formed, and Charles, thinking the company no different from other joint-stock companies, granted it a charter in 1629. Ordinarily, the company would have kept its headquarters in England, where the king could supervise it, but the leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Company secretly agreed to bring the charter with them to America.

B. "A City on a Hill"

The Winthrop fleet established settlements around Boston in 1630. The first settlers were joined within a year by two thousand more, and the Bay Colony enjoyed a steady stream of immigration during its first decade. Because the settlers usually came as family units, because the area was generally healthy, and because most of the Puritan colonists were willing to sacrifice self-interest for the good of the community, Massachusetts Bay avoided the misery that had characterized colonization in the Chesapeake.

Puritans proved to be pragmatic and inventive in creating social institutions. They had no intention of separating from the Church of England, but immediately dispensed with those features of the Church they found objectionable. The result was

Congregationalism, a system that stressed simplicity and in which each congregation was independent. Puritans created a civil government that was neither democratic nor theocratic. A larger proportion of adult males could vote in Massachusetts Bay than in England because the only requirement for voting was a spiritual one. If a man was "born again" he became a "freeman," or voter, whether he owned property or not. The rulers of the Bay Colony were not democratic in our sense, however; they did not believe that elected officials should concern themselves with the wishes of those who had elected them. On the local level, Puritans created almost completely autonomous towns, and it was on this level that most men participated in public life. Village life was intensely communal even though townships were commercial properties, shares of which could be bought and sold.

C. Limits of Religious Dissent

To protect individual rights and to clarify the responsibilities of citizenship, the General Court of Massachusetts Bay issued the *Laws and Liberties* of 1648. This code of law marked the Puritans' considerable progress in establishing a stable society.

Not everyone was happy in Massachusetts Bay. The two most important dissidents were Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson. Williams, an extreme Separatist, condemned all civil states, even one governed by Puritans. He was expelled and settled in Rhode Island. Anne Hutchinson believed she was directly inspired by the Holy Spirit, and that once a person was "born again" he or she need not obey man-made laws (Antinomianism). Because of her religious ideas and because an assertive woman threatened patriarchal authority, she was also expelled and went to Rhode Island.

This topic is discussed in the Feature Essay; see below.

D. Mobility and Division

Massachusetts Bay spawned four other colonies: New Hampshire, New Haven, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. Of these colonies, New Hampshire remained too small to be significant in the seventeenth century, and New Haven became part of Connecticut. Rhode Island received the Bay Colony's outcasts (religious dissenters and Quakers for the most part), who continued to make as much trouble in Roger Williams's colony as they had in John Winthrop's. Connecticut, a well-populated colony that owed its first settlement to Thomas Hooker, duplicated the institutions and way of life of its mother colony.

E. Allies and Enemies

Puritan settlement in New England faced opposition from Native American tribes in the area, most notably the Pequots. The Pequots resented the colonists' involvement in the fur trade, which had previously been conducted between the Pequots and Dutch traders. These hostilities reached their peak in the Pequot War, which decimated the Pequot nation.

DIVERSITY IN THE MIDDLE COLONIES

No section of the English empire was more diverse in its history, its ethnic and religious pluralism, or its political institutions than the Middle Colonies of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware.

A. Anglo-Dutch Rivalry on the Hudson

The Dutch settled New York after the voyages of Henry Hudson. The colony became the property of the Dutch West India Company, which gave New York little attention and sent incompetent officials. New York was Dutch in little more than ownership. Few immigrants came from Holland, so the Dutch population remained small. Even so, it was polyglot. Finns, Swedes, Germans, and Africans made up sizable minorities in the colony, and these people felt no loyalty to the Dutch West India Company. When England sent a fleet to take New York in 1664, the colony fell without a shot being fired.

New York became the personal property of James, Duke of York (later King James II). His colony included New Jersey, Delaware, and Maine, as well as various islands. James attempted to rule this vast domain without allowing its inhabitants a political voice beyond the local level, but he derived little profit from the colony.

B. Confusion in New Jersey

New Jersey has an especially complex history. It first belonged to the Duke of York, but he sold it to two friends, Lord Berkeley and Sir George Carteret. When these proprietors found how difficult it was to collect rents, Berkeley sold his interest to a group of Quakers, a deal that made it necessary to split the colony in two. The Quakers introduced a democratic system of government into West New Jersey, but both halves of the colony were marked by contention, and neither half prospered.

QUAKERS IN AMERICA

Pennsylvania, the most important of the Middle Colonies, owed its settlement to the rise of a religious group, the Quakers, or Society of Friends, that was formed by George Fox in England in the 1650s.

A. Quaker Beliefs and Practices

Quakers believed that each man and woman could communicate directly with God. They rejected the idea of original sin and predestination, and cultivated an "Inner Light" that they believed all people possessed. English authorities considered Quakers to be dangerous anarchists and persecuted them.

B. Penn's "Holy Experiment"

William Penn, the son of an admiral and a wealthy aristocrat, converted to the Society of Friends and became one of its leaders. He used his contacts to obtain a charter for Pennsylvania, which he intended to settle as a "Holy Experiment," a society run on Quaker principles. In 1682, Penn announced a plan of government for Pennsylvania that contained some traditional features and some advanced features. Nearly all political power would be held by men of great wealth, but an elaborate system was designed to protect the rights of those without political or economic power. The scheme, however, proved too complicated to work.

C. Settling Pennsylvania

Penn successfully recruited immigrants from England, Wales, Ireland, and Germany, and Pennsylvania grew rapidly in population. Many of these immigrants were not Quakers, however, and felt no sense of obligation to make the "Holy Experiment" work. Even the Quakers in Pennsylvania fought among themselves, and the people of Delaware, after Penn bought the colony from the Duke of York, preferred to rule themselves. In 1701 he gave in to the complaints of his colonists and granted them a large measure of self-rule. He also gave Delaware her independence. Even though Penn owned a colony that was becoming rich by selling wheat to the West Indies, it did him no good. At one point, Penn suffered the humiliation of being locked up in a debtor's prison.

PLANTING THE CAROLINAS

Carolina differed so much from the Chesapeake colonies that it would be wrong to speak of the existence of "the South" in the seventeenth century.

A. Proprietors of the Carolinas

King Charles II granted Carolina in 1663 to eight friends and political allies who expected to sit back and collect rents as the colony filled up. Unfortunately for them, nobody went to Carolina.

B. The Barbadian Connection

One of the colony's proprietors, Sir Anthony Ashley Cooper (the Earl of Shaftesbury), realized that a more active search for immigrants had to be made. He and John Locke, the famous philosopher, concocted a plan of government that would have given most power to a hereditary elite while protecting the rights of the small landowners. He also encouraged planters in Barbados, who were being crowded off the island, to take up land in Carolina. Cooper was somewhat successful. A string of settlements grew up around Charleston, but Cooper's plan of government failed. The Barbadians, who dominated early Carolina, wanted as much self-government as they had enjoyed in Barbados. The Barbadians, in turn, were opposed by French Huguenot settlers, who felt loyal to the proprietors. Carolina became a colony in turmoil. In 1729 the crown took over Carolina and divided it into two colonies.

THE FOUNDING OF GEORGIA

Georgia was founded in 1732 as a buffer to safeguard the Carolinas from the Spanish in Florida. Although conceived by James Oglethorpe as a refuge for persons imprisoned for debt in England, Georgia attracted few immigrants. By 1751, it had become a small slave colony, much like South Carolina.

CONCLUSION: LIVING WITH DIVERSITY

All of the colonies struggled for survival in their first phase, but as they developed, distinct regional differences intensified and persisted throughout the colonial period and even during the struggle for independence. Nevertheless, the colonists eventually saw themselves as a distinct people.

FEATURE ESSAY: THE CHILDREN WHO REFUSED TO COME HOME

Between 1675 and 1763, conflicts between England and France often spilled over into these nations' North American colonies. As a result, approximately 1,600 English colonists were taken captive by the French and their Native American allies. Many of these colonists were killed, but others were adopted by and absorbed into Native American tribes or converted to Catholicism and embraced French culture. One of these captives, Eunice Williams, became a nun. Often, when these captives had the chance to return to their homes and the Protestant faith, they chose to stay in their new culture, which confused and frightened Protestant colonial leaders.

LECTURE TOPICS

Compare and contrast the English and the French. Establishing colonies in America was a difficult task for the English, whether they sought wealth, greater freedoms and economic opportunity, or freedom to practice the religion of their choice. The challenges of adapting to the realities of geography, climate, and the need to provide food as well as shelter and mutual protection, took a grim toll. French attempts at town-building were not as successful, nor as necessary to the success of the fur trade, as the construction of strategically located forts that provided security as well as trade opportunities. Adapting to tribal requirements for trade also proved successful in solidifying alliances that provided access to rich beaver regions.

Choose one of the three major continental colonial regions. Lecture on the British background of the settlers in that region. How did the cultural mores of each geographical region of Britain impact the nature and characteristics of the various British colonial settlements?

DISCUSSION TOPICS (Broad Based/Theory)

Discuss the nature of colonial political development in the British colonies. How did the political institutions created in the colonies reflect British political tradition in terms of structure and function? Do today's state and federal political structures in America resemble the institutions created by the original British colonists? How does this reflect the element of persistence over time?

Conduct a classroom discussion that focuses on "freedom of religion." Have students discuss the irony of the fact that we often associate freedom of religion with the Puritans who came to America to escape religious persecution. To what extent was freedom of religion a reality in the Puritan community? How did these dissenters treat dissenters within their own ranks?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (Specific)

- Discuss the development of racism and its role in the enslavement of Native Americans and Africans.
- Discuss Puritan dissenters such as Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams. How did their beliefs necessitate their removal from the Puritan community? How did their experiences serve to expand the meaning of religious freedom in America?
- Compare and contrast the reasons and motivations for the settlement of each of the five main colonies and describe the relationship of each of the five settlements with the Native Americans of that region.
- 4 What made life in the Chesapeake so precarious?

CONNECTING TO THE PAST

John Smith's whole life was so filled with improbable adventures that some historians have written him off as a hopeless liar. In his *Generall Historie of Virginia*, printed in 1624, Smith described how he was captured by the Native Americans and rescued from imminent death by the Native American princess, Pocahontas (Book 3, Chapter II). It would be interesting to compare the story there with two earlier accounts covering the same period. There are striking discrepancies. Philip Barbour has edited *The Complete Works of Captain John Smith* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1986, 3 volumes).

William Bradford described the departure of the Pilgrims from the Netherlands and the last farewells exchanged between friends and relatives who knew they would never meet again. Bradford's simple, graceful prose expresses the anguish that must have gripped the millions of Europeans for whom a better life in America was purchased and the heartbreak of those who stayed behind. The best edition of Bradford's journal is the one edited by Samuel Eliot Morison, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (New York: Knopf, 1963).

POINTS OF MASTERY

- Explain the key ideas England used to organize her empire. How was control affected by the Glorious Revolution?
- Describe the changing population, social patterns, and daily life of the Chesapeake Tobacco Coast in the seventeenth century.
- Define the term "joint-stock companies" and identify the major ones involved in establishing the original British colonies in America.
- 4 Describe the importance of the tobacco economy to the development of the Chesapeake area.
- Describe the Massachusetts General Court and compare its structure and function to the Virginia House of Burgesses.
- Define the term "headright system" and explain how this policy promoted British migration to the New World.
- Discuss the differences and similarities between the earlier system of indentured servitude and slavery in the British colonies.
- 8 Describe the beliefs, social patterns, and character of village life of the New England Puritans in England in early seventeenth-century Massachusetts.
- 9 Explain the importance of the fur trade to the economic development of French holdings in the New World.

- Define the term "Separatist" and explain how these individuals affected British immigration.
- Understand the basic principles of the covenant theology, and understand the importance of religion as the cornerstone of Puritan culture and society.
- 12 Identify the Dutch West India Company and explain its activities in the New World.
- Outline the major features of economic and social life in seventeenth-century New York and Carolina.
- Describe Quaker beliefs and the efforts to build a peaceable kingdom in William Penn's settlement in Pennsylvania.
- Outline the formation of Georgia. Describe the intent of its founders and the regulations that were implemented.

SAMPLE RESPONSES TO CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

- 1. Would the first Chesapeake colonies have survived if the settlers had not discovered tobacco as a profitable cash crop?
 - It is certain that the first Chesapeake colonies would not have survived without discovering tobacco as a cash crop. Settlements in the area before the introduction of tobacco farming in 1617 failed due to starvation, disease, and conflict with Native Americans. Life was still short and brutal after the introduction of tobacco, but the crop offered a chance at wealth and drew settlers to the area. Despite the high mortality rate and slim chances of starting a family (men outnumbered women six to one), young settlers moved to the Chesapeake with dreams of becoming wealthy planters. Additionally, waves of indentured servants, hired to work the tobacco fields, helped grow the population of these previously failing colonies.
- 2. Would the historical development of New England have been different if the Puritans had developed a profitable cash crop like tobacco or rice?
 - It is likely that the development of New England would have more similar to that of the Chesapeake if a profitable cash crop had been developed in the region. New England attracted settlers from a variety of different European countries, and most of these settlers worked small farms or were tradespeople. Had New England's economy been built on a cash crop, it is likely that its population would have included a great number of poor indentured servants and that, as a result, a clearer social hierarchy would have been established, with wealthy planters who owned the majority of the land at the top. In the future, these indentured servants would likely have been replaced by slaves, as they were in the colonies built around cash crop cultivation—meaning that New England colonies might have become slave states.
- 3. How did William Penn's leadership style compare to those of John Winthrop and Captain John Smith?

William Penn was a philosopher and a Quaker, who founded his government on the idea that property should be equally distributed among settlers to create a stable society. He also believed that rich and poor should have an equal voice in politics.

In contrast, John Winthrop established a government in the Massachusetts Bay Colony that was run by wealthy elected magistrates who were responsible to God. Although a large portion of the white male population in the colony had the right to vote ("freemen"), the leadership was by no means democratic. Even respected church leaders had no voice in politics.

Finally, John Smith governed Virginia strictly and practically. His approach to government was simple—no one had special privilege, and all must work equally hard to keep the colonies alive. Smith's approach was not democratic, like Penn's, but also not socially stratified, like Winthrop's. Although this earned him the hatred of many wealthy and higher class colonists, this approach saved Virginia.

4. How were the European migrants who were attracted to Georgia and the Carolinas different from the migrants from the Chesapeake and Middle Colonies?

Very few European migrants were attracted to Georgia. The colony was established primarily as a buffer between the English colonies in the North and Spanish-controlled Florida, and was intended as a refuge for Londoners who were facing debtor's prison. Despite the promise of freedom in this new colony, few English debtors were interested in relocating. Those who did immediately complained about the fact that rum and slavery were prohibited in the colony. The situation in the Carolinas was similar: Very few settlers moved to the colonies, and, as a result, the colonies recruited settlers from Barbados. In contrast to the European settlers in the Chesapeake and Middle Colonies, who came willingly to seek religious freedom and prosperity, migrants to these colonies were unenthusiastic and constantly fighting against regulations.

AUDIO/VISUAL RESOURCES

American Visions: The Promised Land, Time, Inc./BBC/Thirteen WNET, New York, 1997, 60 minutes.

This episode from the six-part series created by Robert Hughes depicts the origins of American ideas about art. Ranging from the Spanish West to Protestant New England to the aristocratic Chesapeake, Hughes takes a look at how American art began and flourished.

Colonization of North America, PBS Video, 150 minutes.

An exploration of early European discovery and settlement in the New World, including such North American locations as St. Augustine, Plymouth, and Roanoke.

Jamestown Rediscovery: A World Uncovered, A&E Video.

An examination of the search for the original Jamestown settlement, including footage from the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities.

CLASS EXERCISES

- Write a letter or diary entry describing the daily life of a typical inhabitant on a typical day in three of the five settlements in seventeenth-century America.
- For those with nearby local museums with eighteenth-century exhibits, a visit and brief description of items and their significance will enhance understanding of daily life.
- Do efforts to represent the past in terms that make sense to people today, such as the movie *The Crucible*, aid or obstruct in understanding the past? One way of approaching this question would be to compare Arthur Miller's play, first performed on Broadway in 1953, with the movie, which came out in 1996. How did the emphasis and portrayals of characters change?
- Give students shipboard lists (found in Donald M. Scott and Bernard Wishy, eds., *America's Families: A Documentary History*) of passengers headed for Massachusetts Bay and the Chesapeake. By studying these lists, students can see the different demographic characteristics of the different groups of settlers and speculate on social results. This idea can be adapted for large classes by the use of an overhead projector, with the instructor providing the analysis.
- Parts of the trial of Anne Hutchinson can be acted out for the purpose of discussion. (Excerpts can be found in Nancy Cott's *Roots of Bitterness*, and the entire record in David Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy*.) Students can see and discuss various levels of the conflict—religious, political, and sexual. This exercise lends itself to a presentation to a large group, followed by breaking into smaller groups for discussion.

MYHISTORYLAB MEDIA ASSIGNMENTS

- View the Map: The Colonies to 1740
- Read the Document: John Smith, "The Starving Time"
- Read the Document: James I, "A Counterblaste to Tobacco"
- Read the Document: Wessell Webling, His Indenture (1622)
- Read the Document: George Aslop, from "A Character of the Province of Maryland"
- Read the Document: John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity"
- Complete the Assignment: The Children Who Refused to Come Home: Captivity and Conversion
- Read the Document: Father Isaac Jogues, Description of New York, 1640
- Read the Document: William Penn, "Model for Government"
- Read the Document: Letter by William Penn to the Committee of the Free Society of Traders (1683)