

# No Cross, No Crown

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## The Life Message of William Penn

Stephen McDowell

In December 1668, William Penn was thrown in jail for expressing his religious views. While imprisoned for over eight months he wrote the book, *No Cross, No Crown*, in which he states that “Christ’s Cross is Christ’s way to Christ’s Crown.” Penn’s life is a great example of one who bore the cross and, therefore, did bear the crown. He brought the crown to millions more as well.



### The Life of William Penn

William was born on October 24, 1644, in London, England, the son of Sir William Penn, a wealthy Admiral in the King’s navy. William had a good moral upbringing and education and was instilled with Puritan convictions. His father had high hopes that his namesake would follow in his footsteps, benefiting from the wealth, prestige, and noble friends he had obtained. When William, as a young man, began associating with the new religious sect called Quakers, it was more than the Admiral could bear. These people, whom the Admiral regarded as simple and ignorant Puritan fanatics, were leading his son William astray.

A handwritten signature of William Penn in cursive script, appearing to read "W Penn".

Penn was first exposed to the Quakers as a teenager living with his parents in Ireland when he heard one of their leaders, Thomas Loe, speak. William forgot Loe’s message as he pursued his education, first at Christ Church College in Oxford, next in France, and then more study of law back home in London. In 1665 a plague drove him back to his father’s country estate in Ireland. One day he happened to hear Thomas Loe preach at a Quaker meeting. “On this crucial day the old man preached from the text: ‘There is a faith that overcometh the world, and there is faith that is overcome by the world.’ He made the greatest convert of his career, for the young gentleman doubted no longer. On that day William Penn definitely and finally became a Quaker.”<sup>1</sup>

### Penn’s Cross

From the beginning Penn had many crosses to bear. Shortly after his conversion, Penn was at a Friends (the name Quakers called themselves) gathering where a soldier burst into the room to stop the meeting. Unlike most Quakers, Penn was not the passive type, so he grabbed the soldier and started to toss him down the stairs. Other Friends had to stop him and remind him that Quakers did not use violence. Penn reluctantly released the soldier.



The first painting of William Penn was made of him in armor at age 22, which was ironic since he would later become a leader of the Friends (Quakers) who were pacifists.

Everyone was arrested and thrown in jail. Penn did not suffer in silence like hundreds of Quakers who had been jailed before him. He dashed off letters to his father's friend, a leader in the province, reminding him their only "crime" was choosing their own religion. As a result they were released, but Penn's father was notified of his son's actions and associates, and he asked William to return to London.

In England Penn openly and actively identified with the Friends by writing and speaking on their behalf. When William met with his father, the Admiral tried everything to get William to give up his Friends and his new found religion, and to continue on a good career and follow in his father's steps. At one point in their lively discussion, the Admiral said he was going to get down on his knees and pray that William would not be a Quaker. Upon hearing this William ran to the window and threatened to jump out if he prayed such a thing. William's mother was helpless in calming them down. She was thankful that a friend came by to visit at this moment which stopped the hysterical scene.

After William kept speaking at Friends meetings, his father kicked him out of the house and said he would leave his money and large holdings to someone else. Even being disinherited did not change William's mind.

In 1668 Thomas Loe died. On his death bed Loe spoke to William Penn:

Bear thy cross, and stand faithful to God; then He will give thee an everlasting crown of glory, that shall not be taken from thee. There is no other way which shall prosper, than that which the holy men of old have walked in. God hath brought immortality to light, and life immortal is felt. Glory, Glory to Him! for He is worthy of it. His love overcomes my heart, nay, my cup runs over: glory be to His name forever.<sup>2</sup>

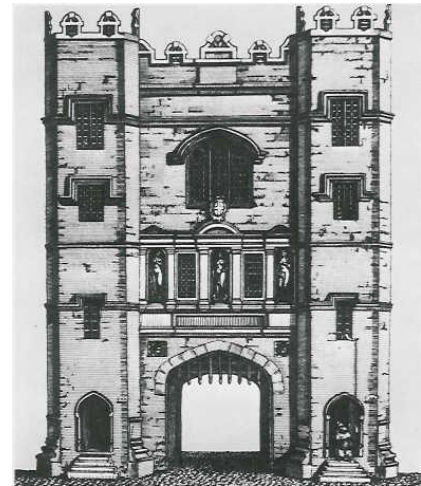
In this same year, Penn published "The Sandy Foundation Shaken," and in December he went to the Tower on account of it. About his imprisonment in the Tower Penn wrote:

I was committed the beginning of December, and was not discharged till the Fall of the Leaf following; wanting about fourteen days of nine months.

As I saw very few, so I saw them but seldom, except my own Father and Dr. Stillingfleet, the present Bishop of Worcester. The one came as my relation, the other at the Kings command to endeavour my change of judgment. But as I told him, and he told the King that the Tower was the worst argument in the world to convince me; for whoever was in the wrong, those who used force for Religion could never be in the right.<sup>3</sup>

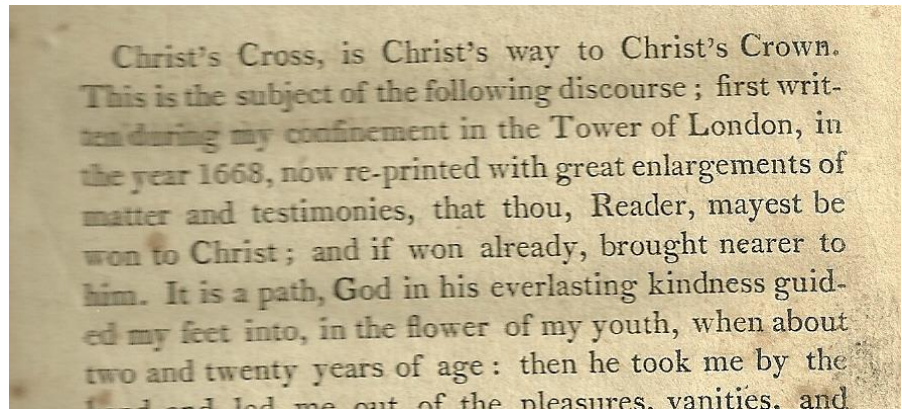
Penn later wrote Lord Arlington that this action might make hypocrites but not converts.<sup>4</sup>

The Bishop told Penn he must take back what he had written or stay in prison. Penn's response was: "My prison shall be my grave before I will budge a jot; for I owe my conscience to no mortal man."<sup>5</sup> It was during this imprisonment that Penn wrote *No Cross, No Crown*, probably his most famous work.



Newgate, the place of Penn's imprisonment during his precedent trial securing the rights of juries.

Penn was released from the Tower in August of 1669. In September he went to Cork, Ireland, to his father's estate. He found the Friends "under...general persecution, and those of the City of Cork almost all in Prison."<sup>6</sup> He immediately took up their cause and labored to get them out of prison, and succeeded in getting an order-in-council on June 4, 1670, for the release of Quaker prisoners in Ireland.



In the preface to his book, *No Cross, No Crown*, William Penn wrote: "Christ's Cross, is Christ's way to Christ's Crown."

His father had become ill, so soon after this Penn returned to England to be with him. On August 14, 1670, Penn and fellow Friend, William Mead, went to a Quaker meeting in Gracechurch Street, London. The meeting house had been padlocked by the authorities, so Penn preached in the street to the group that remained. Penn and Mead were arrested for this, and after two weeks in that "noisome and stinking" prison, they went to trial on September 1<sup>st</sup>. Later, William would publish a complete report on the trial.<sup>7</sup>

### Precedent Trial

Penn and Meade were charged with unlawful assembly by force of arms, disturbing the peace, conspiring to preach, and terrorizing the people. After pleading "not guilty," the prisoners were put aside and forced to wait the rest of the day while other cases were heard. Court was then adjourned until the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Upon entering the court, well-meaning police, wishing to avert problems for the defendants and knowing that Quakers were conscientiously opposed to doing so themselves, took off Penn's and Meade's hats so that they would comply with court policy. Upon approaching the bench, orders were given to have their hats put on, and then a fine of forty marks was laid to each man for contempt of court. William said that since the bench was responsible for their hats being on, the bench should be fined.

During proceedings, William explained to the jury that they were guilty of nothing but worshiping God and asked the bench to let the jury and himself know upon what law he was prosecuted. The bench replied that it was upon the common law. William then asked, "Where is that common law?" The answer being it was too difficult to produce, William responded: "If it be common, it should not be so hard to produce."



Frederick Lamb's painting of William Penn.

In defense of common rights and individual liberties, Penn quoted Lord Coke's *Institutes*, which he had studied in school, even mentioning page numbers. This infuriated the judges, mayor, and recorder, who shouted to a guard to take William away and throw him into the bale-dock, which was a small pen partitioned off in the courtroom.

As he was being hauled away, Penn exclaimed: "I plead for the fundamental laws of England...If the ancient fundamental laws which relate to liberty and property...are not...maintained and observed...our

liberties are openly to be invaded, our wives to be ravished, our children slaved, our families ruined, and our estates led away.”

Meade then began to defend himself with the same insightfulness as Penn, which caused the bench’s rage to increase to the point where one judge bitterly remarked to Meade, “You deserve to have your tongue cut out.”

Meade was also ordered to the bale-dock. Then the recorder began giving the charge to the jury, pointing out how the defendants were surely guilty. As this was occurring, Penn climbed to the top of the bale-dock wall and shouted to the court and jury that the proceedings of the court were “void of all law, on offering to give the jury their charge in the absence of the prisoners. I say it is directly opposite to and destructive of the undoubted right of every English prisoner,” and he quoted Coke’s *Institutes*.

The Recorder screamed, “Pull that fellow down! Pull him down!”

He then ordered them to be thrown into “the Hole,” a stinking place of confinement in Newgate Prison.

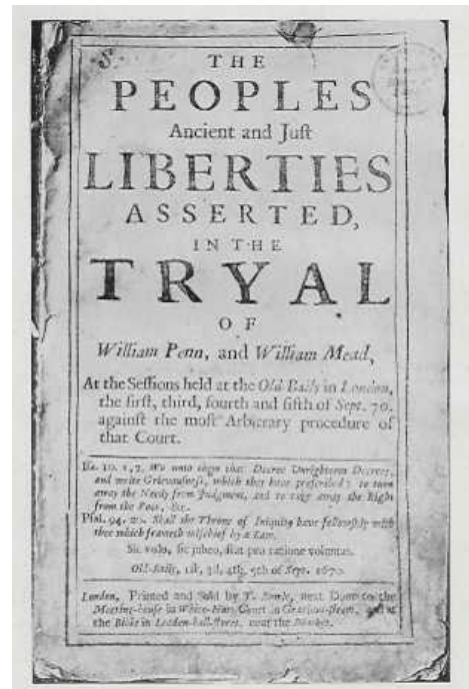
After some hours of deliberations, the jury reached a verdict. The only thing the defendants were guilty of was speaking in Gracechurch Street. This unexpected verdict infuriated the judges who began to menace the jury. One observer said the mayor and recorder “exceeded the bounds of all reason and civility.” The bench ordered the jury to be “locked up without meat, drink, fire, and tobacco” until “we have a verdict that the court will accept.”

As the jury was being removed to their chambers, William cried out to them: “You are Englishmen, mind your privilege, give not away your right.”

After spending the night without food or drink or proper accommodation, the jury brought back the same defiant verdict. The bench would not accept it and began threatening the jury. William declared: “It is intolerable that my jury should be menaced. What hope is there of ever having justice done, when juries are threatened and their verdicts rejected?”

The Mayor roared, “Stop his mouth! Jailer, bring fetters and stake him to the ground.”

The jury was forced to spend another night without food, fire, or other accommodations until they brought back the *right* verdict. The next morning, their resolve had not weakened, but had grown stronger. Their verdict: not guilty of anything. The approval of the spectators in the courtroom was matched by the disapproval of the judges, who fined the jury forty marks each, and ordered their imprisonment until it was paid.



Title page of Penn’s *The People’s ... Liberties Asserted*, recounting his famous trial of 1670.

William Penn bore the cross in many other ways as he determined to stand for truth and follow the leading of God. He went on many missionary trips, often preached at Quaker meetings, and worked



unceasingly to get Quakers and religious dissenters out of jail. He faced more imprisonments, persecution, and ostracism, but gladly endured them all. Since he gladly bore the cross, he also received a crown.

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To learn of Penn's Crown – how he contributed to civil and religious liberty, to the establishment of Pennsylvania, and to the advancement of Biblical governmental principles – order a copy of No Cross, No Crown.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Haines Price and Stanley R. Yarnall, *William Penn: A Short Life with Selections from His Writings*, published for the Book Committee of the Religious Society of Friends, 302 Arch Street, Philadelphia, 1932, quoted in *Remember William Penn*, compiled by the William Penn Tercentenary Committee, Harrisburg, PA: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1945, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> William Sewel, *The History of the Rise, Increase and Progress of the Christian People Called Quakers: With Several Remarkable Occurrences, Intermixed*, Written originally in Low-Dutch, and also translated into English, the Third Edition Corrected, Isaac Collins, New Jersey, 1774, quoted in *Remember William Penn*, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania [Memoirs, HSP]*, Philadelphia, 1826, quoted in *Remember William Penn*, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Janet Gray, *Penn*, New York: The Viking Press, 1967, p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> John W. Graham, *William Penn, Founder of Pennsylvania*, New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1916, p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> *Memoirs HSP*, in *Remember William Penn*, p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> The quotes related to this trial are from Penn's account in Samuel M. Janney, *The Life of William Penn: With Selections from His Correspondence and Autobiography*, Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1852, pp. 67-81.