

# William Sewel to William Penn 1696

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William Sewel (Sayvell) was born in 1654, son of Jacob Williamson Sewel, surgeon, of Amsterdam, and his wife Judith Zinspenning. Sewel's parents were convinced during a visit from William Ames, and Judith Zinspenning became the author of several Quaker pamphlets. She died in 1664.

Comparatively little is available of the life history of William Sewel. He lost his father when young, and was apprenticed to a stuff manufacturer; he taught himself several languages and compiled several dictionaries in English and Dutch. In 1717 appeared his *History of Friends*, in Dutch, which he translated into English and published in 1722, and which passed through numerous editions down to 1844. For the results of other literary work see Smith, *Cata.* ii. 563. Sewel's death took place about the year 1725. "He left a son of the same name, of whom considerable hopes were entertained in his youth, but going to England with a view of attending the Yearly Meeting, in company with another young man, the vessel in which they embarked was wrecked near the Texel. Sewel being an excellent swimmer tried to save his companion by means of a rope fastened round their bodies. But on reaching the shore and drawing the rope, he found his friend was gone. This melancholy event had such an effect upon his brain that a settled gloom clouded his mental faculties during the remainder of his life." (*Friends' Monthly Magazine*, vol. ii (1831). p. 145.)

The original Latin letter is in the possession of Bristol Friends (Bristol MSS. V. 85, 86, see *Jnl.* ix. 193). It has been copied for the printer by Walter Woolley, of Bristol. The translation in *Friends' Library*, London, has been used, as amended by T. Edmund Harvey, M.A., 1928.

GUILJELMO PENN. S.P.

AMICE PLURIMUM COLENDE.

Literas tuas candidi in me affectus plenas, ac benignissimi tui de me iudicii indices accepi; et per mihi gratas fuisse libens agnosco; nam tuum amorem, quem mirum quantum exseris, longum post intervallum regustare, gratissimum esse oportet ei, qui Te inter amicissimos habet, et semper.

Dum memor ipse mei, dum Spiritus hos artus regit, ut spero, habebit. Ut autem ad ea, quorum facis mentionem, referibam propositum illud, quo erudiendae juventutis munus mihi a Bristoliensibus Amicis offertur, cum animo volvi et revolvi; sed quid dicam? Obveniret mihi, illuc migrando, conditio fortasse aliquanto opulentior, quam quâ

nunc fruor; at hoc nequaquam potis ad relinquendum patriam me impellere, qui sorte mea, quanquam duriuscula, et variis difficultatibus circumsepta, contentus, non tam splendide quam bene vivere studeo.

Subest fateor et alia ratio, nempe me talentum meum literarium, quaecumque tandem sit, melius ibi exercere posse, quam hic terrarum, quo non solum meae familiae, sed et plurimarum familiarum filiis inserviando prodesse liceret. Atqui nec hoc satis validum ad abducendum me hinc argumentum. *Dulcis amor patriae* adeo plerisque inhaeret, ut etiam in proverbium abierit; verum naturalis iste amor non praecipue me afficit; est aliud nescio quid quod me trahit, nec liberum hinc proficisci sinit: nostrorum, ut scis, exiguus hic est numerus, et si mea migratione de eo etiamnum detraherem, quis me maneret exitus, nisi animo undiquaque essem libero, facilis conjectura est.

Constituit me Deus in hac regione pro suo nomine et veritate testem, ac si inter antesignanos censendus haud sim, non omnino tamen inutilem ei operam in mea statione me navare persuasum habeo: et quis scit quid adhuc mihi restat hic peragendum? Hisce ergo rite perpensis, scrupulum haud leve mihi inde exorire, nemini mirum videre debeat, etiamsi non nego conditionem istam oblatam, et tuam aliorumque Amicorum erga me benevolentiam, magni me facere, quare et gratiam vobis habeo quam maximam pro eo quo prosequi me voluissis favore; nec unquam leviter de hoc existimandum, sed grato animo id mihi semper recolendum erit.

Quod de obitu optimi tui filii Springeti, ac de contracto denuo matrimonio scribis, sicut hoc Tibi ex animo gratulor, ita illud non sine sensibili dolore ante septimanas aliquot intellexaram: permagnum autem tibi in moerore solatium sit necesse est, quod mors ejus, quamquam praematura videri posset, salutari tamen ac praeclaro exitu fuit concomitata; talem tibi mihi que, quando terrenum hoc domicilium relinquendum erit, exopto et precor.

Vale, vir dilectissime, cum tua quam saluto, ut et Amicos Bristolienses fratremque tuum Peningtonum et me tui observantissimum redamare persevera.

GUILJELMUS SEVELIUS.

Amstelodami, 2. Sextilis,

(11)CXCVI

TRANSLATION

TO WILLIAM PENN—VERY MUCH HEALTH

MOST ESTIMABLE FRIEND,

I have received thy Letter full of kind Affection to me & a Proof of thy very kindly Judgement concerning me. And with Pleasure I acknowledge it was very welcome to me. For again to taste thy Love, which thou shewest in so wonderful a degree—after so long an Interval must be very grateful to him who holds Thee among his best Friends.

And, as I hope, while mindful of myself  
While Spirit rules these Limbs shall always hold

But that I may answer those things which Thou mentionest. That Proposal in which the Bristol Friends offer me the Post of educating youth, I have turned and turned again in my Mind. But what shall I say? Perhaps by removing there my Condition might become somewhat more opulent than what I now enjoy. But this can in no wise induce me to leave my own Country. For I am content with my lot, though a little hard and hedged round with various difficulties. I desire to live rather well than splendidly. I own there is also another Reason; to wit that I could exercise my literary Talent, such as it is, better there than here, by which I might profitably serve not only my own Family but also the Children of many Families. But yet not even this Argument is strong enough to draw me hence. "The sweet Love of one's Country" so cleaves to most Men that it is even passed into a Proverb. But it is not that natural Love that chiefly affects me. There is a something else—I know not what—that draws me & does not let me go free from here. The number of our people here as Thou knowest is scanty, and if by my Removal I should decrease it ever so little, what end would await me—unless my Mind were free in every respect—may be easily conjectured. God has put me in this Country a Witness for His Name and Truth. And if I be not to be reckoned among the first, I am persuaded that the service I am accomplishing for Him in my station is not altogether in vain. And who knows what yet remains for me to do here? Therefore when these things have been rightly weighed none should wonder that no light scruple rises thence in my mind. Though I do not deny that

I much account of that Offer & Thy Kindness & that of the other Friends toward me. Wherefore I am as much as possible obliged to You for the Favor you would have done me. Nor will it ever be with me a Matter to be lightly esteemed but always recollected with a grateful Mind.

As to what Thou writest of the Death of thy very good Son Springet<sup>1</sup> & of thy second Marriage—As I heartily congratulate Thee on the latter so not without sensible Grief I learned the former some Weeks ago. But it needs must be a very great Comfort to Thee in thy sorrow that though his Death might seem premature it was accompanied with a safe & glorious departure. For such an end I long & pray for thee & me when we have to leave behind this earthly house.

Fare well dearly loved friend, with thy Wife, whom I salute, as also the Bristol Friends & thy Brother Pennington. Continue to love in return thy very respectful

WILLIAM SEWEL.

Amsterdam 2nd 6 mon. 1696

<sup>1</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1785, printed a letter from Sewel to Springett Penn, but without date (*Jnl.* xv. 65).

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## Anecdotes of William Penn

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A process-server walked briskly to the door of William Penn, one day, and asked : " Is Mr. Penn at home ? " The janitor, the faithful Obadiah, inquired his business. " Oh ! I have called to see Mr. Penn." " My master hath seen thee and does not like thee," added Obadiah, and the man walked away, surprised.

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A humble Friend journeyed with the Governor, and when he found that the small room had only one bed, he was prepared to sleep in a chair before the fire. Penn, who was in bed, invited his humble companion to join him, but he would not share the bed with the Governor of Pennsylvania, saying : " I am a great snorer, and would disturb thee." Penn replied : " Just thee give me ten minutes' start, and no snoring will wake me." He had a start, and the story goes that the other remained awake all night.