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James Edward Scanlon

WILLIAM BURNET (1687–September 7, 1729), who governed New York and New Jersey from 1720 until 1728, was born in the Netherlands, at the Hague. His father, Gilbert Burnet, who became the bishop of Salisbury, had been a chaplain to Charles II, but he was one of the first English subjects to transfer his allegiance from James II to William and Mary. Gilbert Burnet had gone to the Netherlands to pay court to William, and, while there, had married his second wife, Mary Scott, a wealthy Dutchwoman of Scottish extraction. Young William Burnet was named for his godfather, the man who became king of England in 1689. After the Glorious Revolution, Gilbert's fortunes waxed and waned with the rise and ebb of the Whigs, but in general the family held a privileged position because of its leading role in the events of 1688–89. William developed into a personable but hotheaded young man. Though he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, at the age of thirteen, he was expelled for laziness and disobedience. He was, however, privileged in having Sir Isaac Newton tutor him for a time.

As an adult he reportedly continued to be personable and hot-tempered, but he also desplayed an active intellectual curiosity. His younger brother, Gilbert, concluded that William's curiosity was undisciplined and essentially frivolous. When informed that William was writing a book, Gilbert told him that he feared the book would make him a subject of derision. Nonetheless, William wrote the book, *An Essay on Scripture Prophecy, Wherein it is Endeavoured to Explain the three periods Contain'd in the Xii Chapter of the Prophet Daniel With some Arguments to make it Probable that the FIRST of the PERIODS did Expire in the Year 1715.* It was published anonymously in New York in 1724, and one of William's brothers-in-law suggested that he might have done better to spend his time at backgammon.

Burnet obtained the dual governorship of New York and New Jersey in 1720 by trading his post as comptroller of the customs with his friend Robert Hunter, who in 1719 had returned to England. Since Hunter and Burnet both had strong Whig connections the trade was easy to arrange. Burnet, whose first wife had died in 1717 and left him with a two-year-old son, willingly accepted the inconvenience of living in the colonies because he hoped the governorship would prove more lucrative than his post at the customs. He needed money because his heavy investment in the South Sea Company was rapidly depreciated after 1720. Through most of his term as governor, until the death of George I in 1727, he had few worries about opposition at home. Whatever problems he encountered originated in the colonies.

In both New York and New Jersey Burnet relied heavily on the advice of Lewis Morris and James Alexander, who had been principal advisors to Governor Hunter. In New Jersey both men were closely allied with the main proprietary interests, and Burnet, throughout his term, tended to favor legislation designed to protect or enhance proprietary claims. This meant that the landholders who

claimed titles which had not originated in patents from proprietors, primarily the so-called Nicolls patentees, were predisposed against Burnet.

These antiproprietary forces dominated Burnet's first assembly in 1721. The assembly had been elected in 1716, and on Hunter's advice Burnet continued it. However, Lewis Morris, while he was acting governor after Hunter's departure, had alienated many of its members with policies favoring the proprietors. After Burnet's arrival the assemblymen's own reluctance restrained them from engaging in open oppostion to the governor. But they criticized Burnet's reliance on Morris, and they tried to use their control of finances, unsuccessfully, to effect a change in Burnet's attitude.

Throughout his early stay in the colonies Burnet reflected his family's history by tending to brand his opponents as Jacobites and high churchmen. In 1721 he harried George Willocks, one of his East Jersey critics, out of the province by calling him a Jacobite and fomenter of opposition. By harassing Willocks, shrewdly electioneering among an electorate as lacking in deference as any in America, and using patronage after the election, Burnet contrived in 1722 to have a second assembly that was more amenable to his wishes. This assembly sat in three sessions before new elections were occasioned in 1727 by the death of George I. In 1722 the assembly passed an act for the financial support of the government for the years 1720–25; it also agreed to a stringent anti-Jacobite law. In 1723 it passed its famous Loan Act. In its last session, in 1725, it renewed the 1722 support act through 1730.

The Loan Act was the most significant piece of legislation during Burnet's tenure. In spite of the enthusiasm for copper mines that developed in the 1720s, New Jersey was still almost entirely dependent on agriculture. Its trade was largely in the hands of New York and Philadelphia merchants. Since New Jersey had no medium of exchange, its economy fluctuated with the currencies of New York and Pennsylvania. In 1709 New Jersey had begun to issue bills of credit, but after 1716 it had begun to retire them, producing a deflation that in 1720 caused, or at least aggravated, a depression.

James Alexander, a lawyer, land speculator, and New York merchant, strongly favored a new paper issue. So did most of the assemblymen. They made it clear that they would reward Burnet handsomely for his cooperation. Because Burnet insisted that any new currency had to have proper backing, they created a loan office authorized to lend £40,000. Loans to landowners secured by mortgages on their New Jersey farms put the money into circulation. The act provided an extremely stable medium of exchange. Burnet defended the act against the mounting criticisms of London merchants and officials. He even gathered testimonials to the soundness of New Jersey money from New York City merchants. For his troubles Burnet received sizable "incidental" appropriations in addition to his regular salary from 1723 on.

Burnet governed a rapidly growing New Jersey. At the request of the Board of Trade he took a census in 1726. It indicated that the population, which in 1702 may have totaled 12,500, had more than doubled to 32,442, including 2,581 slaves. The growth brought about increasing problems over land titles as more and more of the disputed areas became populated, but the storm did not break until after Burnet's departure.

Burnet's last Jersey assembly, elected in 1727, was led by a vocal antiprerogative Quaker, John Kinsey, Jr. It proved almost as troublesome as his first. Burnet spent hardly any time in the colony between 1725 and 1727. The assembly that gathered at Perth Amboy in December 1727 knew when it convened that Burnet was due to be replaced. It began by requesting that New Jersey be given a governor of its own. The assembly engaged in a continual struggle with Burnet and his council over a bill that amended the procedures for registering deeds. The council sought to protect pro-

prietors, the assembly to circumvent the council's authority over land. Eventually the assembly gained Burnet's assent for a triennial act which was later disallowed. The assembly also continued a practice of using the interest collected on the loan-office notes to support the government, which met strong disapproval from the Board of Trade. Burnet was more than willing to accede to this practice.

Governor Burnet drew an annual salary of £600 in New Jersey, and he also received fees. In addition, the assembly approved "incidentals," which varied from a first grant of £1,000 in 1723 to the £600 his last assembly voted him early in 1728. In return Burnet presided over a growing colony and approved legislation favorable to its growth, but he spent little time in the colony. Between 1720 and 1728 he was absent twice for more than a year. In 1722 Burnet married Mary Van Horne, the oldest daughter of a prominent New York Dutch merchant; together they enjoyed the social life of Manhattan. The elder Van Horne, who had been a staunch supporter of Hunter's, continued to support Burnet, and Mary's brother Cornelius was added to the New Jersey council in 1727. Burnet's wife bore him three children in New York, but both she and her lastborn died in the autumn of 1727. Soon after, Burnet was notified that John Montgomerie, special favorite of the new monarch, George II, would replace him as governor of New York and New Jersey. Burnet's friends protested the change to no avail. Burnet, however, was not forgotten, and he was transferred to Massachusetts. On April 24, 1728, he turned over the government of New Jersey to Montgomerie and headed for Boston where he encountered a disagreeable assembly and received no salary. As the result of a carriage accident he died there on September 7, 1729.

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John Strassburger

JOHN MONTGOMERIE (d. July 1, 1731) was born in Dumfriesshire, Scotland. Trained as a soldier, Montgomerie served in Parliament and then turned courtier, becoming groom of the bedchamber to the Prince of Wales. In 1716, when the prince quarreled with his father, King George I, Montgomerie chose to give up his office rather than risk his friendship with the heir apparent. This act of loyalty probably led the prince, after his accession as George II, to offer Montgomerie the lucrative governorship of New York and New Jersey.

Historians have described Montgomerie as a man of little natural ability, limited education and intelligence, and no real ambition, who was mainly concerned with leading a life of leisure and material comfort. Reputed also to have considerable wealth, he was noted chiefly, according to historian William Smith, for the number of household possessions he brought to New York. Cadwallader Colden, however, an important New York leader at the time, understood the governor and his situation somewhat dif-