

The Surprising Adventures of the Brigantine Rebecca

Incidents in the West India Trade of 1762

BY JOSEPH CARSON

THIS is a story of the sea. Like all such stories, it has a hero and a villain, and to complete the trilogy, a man of mystery. Like most sea stories too, no woman spices the scene. Not quite accurate, that—for our hero, a Quaker, introduces the woman and disposes of her briefly in a letter to the villain.

If thou art yet concern'd with Spanton in the Sloop *Ranger* I fear thee will be a sufferer from the bad Account I hear of him, he left Eden Town about the 20 June with a Strumpet on board not bound for Jamaica as he gave out, but bound to Madeira. I heartily wish thee was clear of him.

Perhaps even our young Quaker may have found some humor in the picture of the *Ranger* dropping down on the tide armed with

1 insurance policy of £400
6 carriage guns
6 swivels and
1 strumpet

all leaning over the rail, waving good-bye to the forlorn sisters on shore; all at a 10% premium. But the strumpet sailed away, so no opportunity occurs for a colorful dust jacket enlivened by a golden haired girl clutching a musketoon tightly beneath well rounded lungs.

The hero of our tale is Richard Waln, Jr., a Philadelphia merchant and ship owner, who in 1762 when the story opens is but twenty-five years of age. A merchant is not often a hero—all wrapped as he is in complexities of pistoles, pieces of eight and the livres of Hispaniola, and in perishables like gammons and sturgeon and venison hams. He trades in his osnabruks, his tickleburgs and rattinets, but he himself is not cut from the cloth in which tales are woven. The youthful Waln is no exception. He is a proper merchant, who would never think of himself as a hero. Nor does his youth alone make him one. It was the Quaker in Waln that gave him his character—fixed in him those contradictions of mind and heart that always ruled him. Determined, impetuous, forbearing under repeated provocation, he was a man able to forgive and forgive and forgive again. Waln never had to turn the other cheek. It was already turned.

People could impose on such a man. The goods he shipped, they said, were "excessive ordinary," or damaged through ill packing, or had come to a bad market. Such excuses he heard from his factor in tiresome repetition. Yet in spite of his gentle trust in human kind, in spite too of the perils of the sea, he "acquired considerable wealth." In 1774, in his 38th year, he retired from commerce over the water and bought a farm on Crosswicks Creek near Allentown, New Jersey. Here he erected a splendid mansion, a grist mill, a saw mill, a fulling and carding mill. His estate, well watered and fertile, is still occupied by his descendants.

Now Philadelphia merchants in the war years of the 1760's could remain merchants, sending their wares in bottoms owned by others. Or, if they had sufficient capital, they might prefer the hazards of ownership that sail with all vessels. Throughout his adventures Waln when he could be, was a ship owner. With his silent partner, Jacob Shoe-

maker, an uncle of his wife, he found the money for a vessel. He purchased the *Rebecca*, and in the Spring of 1762 was making her ready for her first voyage. There were other vessels of the name in the Delaware river trade—a sloop, a schooner, a ship, . . . probably a snow. Waln's *Rebecca* was a brigantine, a roomy, efficient and substantial craft—a good investment just so long as she came to port in safety.

In seeking to clear the *Rebecca* from Philadelphia in May of 1762 for his initial voyage, Waln faced numerous perils, among them the war-time measures that sat hard on the colonial merchant. Yet adversity is the merchant's challenge, the test of his judgment. In Waln's case, adversity was opportunity, and he was prompt in seizing it. For in this month of May occurred a sharp rise in the prices of imported goods. Waln followed prices current closely. They were his barometer for action—action positive or negative, but always instant. If he could get the *Rebecca* out and back from the West India Islands with dispatch carrying near full loads, his stature as a merchant would grow and his pocket book swell.

So the *Rebecca* is loading—though not as fully as one is led to expect. The invoice of the goods consigned to Harris and Wallis, merchants of Barbados, lists 44 barrels of flour, 20 kegs of bread, 3176 white oak hogshead staves and 2238 white oak hogshead heading, insured for £168 at 12 per cent. This was indeed a light load for the *Rebecca*, yet on it she was cleared. But in the midst of the loading, Waln received a blow he had not anticipated. "An Embargo was laid here the twelfth Inst," he writes a Barbados' merchant and adds: "it is also laid on all the Northern Colonies, in order to distress the French & Spaniards who are in great want of Provisions at Hispaniola."

But he was loading, and he was young and impetuous and perhaps reckless. What he did is best explained in a few words from a letter to Harris four days later to supplement the invoice he had cleared.

The goods on board is more than are Cleared out by near 300 bbs Flour and 220 bbs Bread, we purposed to make a post Entry but the Embargo prevented it.

And so he loads these saleable articles, doubtless uninsured, but worth upwards of £600. It was risky, for the *Rebecca's* clearance papers did not agree with her cargo. Aside from the fortunes of war, the *Rebecca* now ran a double chance—search by a British frigate, a frigate of her own country, and by the port authorities at Barbados. In his Quaker fashion, Waln communicated his apprehension to Harris, "I would have thee be as cautious as Possible," he wrote.

By May 14, two days after the embargo, everything is ready for the *Rebecca's* sailing. On that day Waln sits down at "his store in Water St., between Arch & Race Sts. adjoining James' and Drinker's store" to pen a letter of instruction to his captain, whom he addresses as "Respected Friend Jonathan Wood." He tells him to sell the bread and flour at Barbados for prices he sets down, but if these cannot be realized, to proceed to Granada. He enjoins him to

speak with no Vessell at Sea nor suffer thyself to be spoke with if to be avoided, thy stay in Barbados or Granada is not to exceed twelve Days unless by staying longer thou can get near a full Freight thee may then remain 20 days.

Because of the embargo, as he wrote Pearson Parvin of Barbados, Waln had hopes that Captain Wood might get such a freight. These hopes were not realized, but it was not however the prompt lifting of the embargo that dashed them.

The *Rebecca* reached Barbados not later than June 27, for William Harris there writes on July 16 that he is much hurried dispatching the *Rebecca* which is to sail back to Philadelphia the next day.

I have Used all diligence to Procure Freight from others, but being a Vessell of no force & to Sail before the fleet which is the 19th Inst. found it impossible. I tho't t'would have been Prudent to have kept the Vessell here two Days longer to sail with the fleet which at least would have made insurance lower & Could have Procured More Freight both of My own & others.

Waln had enjoined Captain Wood not to remain more than twenty days, and these days ran out the 17th. Wood felt he must get away, convoy or not. Harris considered this unwise, even reckless, for he adds,

Your Noble Captain the very next day after I had done Receiving the Cargo (which I would have Received faster than he Delivered it) told me he would Certainly Sail the day next follow'g. You were pleas'd to give him Private Orders Concern'g his Stay here & also abo't Proceed'g to the Granades, but Seeing I did Not think proper to proceed there shall not Mention any further about that affair.

While Harris properly felt he could not interfere, the tempo of his letter accelerates, and he gives Waln some sage advice in conclusion:

However, I beg leave to advise You, if ever you send your Vessell this Way again let her be address'd to some one in whom you can fully Confide & let not your orders be divided between two that are not connected least a wise man & a fool should Meet together which will never agree & you & thereby your Interest should Suffer.

These are the words of the "wise man," a man with an older head than Waln's. That he and Captain Wood exchanged high words is clear, for four days later, he writes Waln again.

Am sorry I was Obliged to dispatch the Brigatine before the sail'g of the fleet which is this day. Next Morn'g after Captain Wood sailed there

have been two Gentlemen here . . . but would not ship . . . by a Vessel of no force unless she had sail'd with the fleet tho' I did not in the least fear Captain Wood's Protest, which he threaten'd to bring ag'st me as I kno it was out of his Power to do it. Nevertheless would not give him the least Reason to say I was the cause of his Breaking your Orders.

Fool or not, Captain Wood kept faith with what he believed his orders were. His twentieth day had come, and he left Barbados unconvoyed two days ahead of the fleet.

A few days out, Harris' fear was justified. The *Rebecca* was captured by a privateer from Cap François, a polacco of which Joseph Raymond was captain. She was a smaller vessel than the *Rebecca* and of a type with two single sticks as masts, built usually to operate in the Mediterranean. She was armed of course, which the *Rebecca*, the vessel of the Quaker, was not. The command to heave to was promptly obeyed. And the *Rebecca*, that vessel "without force" and this privateer lay a few cable lengths' apart gently riding up and down in a Summer sea while the two captains talked. The French could have found a good use for the rum and sugar aboard the *Rebecca*, but doubtless the size of the polacco and the fear of the arrival of a British frigate made rapid action imperative. Hence Raymond seized no ship's gear and none of the cargo. He did, nevertheless, exact a ransom, and took as hostage, Jonathan Montgomery, the first mate of the *Rebecca*, in accordance with the custom of those war days. Thus this hostage became the human pledge for Captain Wood's written promise on behalf of Waln to pay the sum of two thousand dollars in ransom money. The somewhat chastened Wood signed a Ransom Bill for this sum and turned once more towards Philadelphia, to face Waln with a slender cargo and no first mate. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* of August 19, after the *Rebecca's* arrival home, records the fact tersely: "Captain Wood in his passage here from Barbados was taken by a

French Polacco from the Cape, and ransomed for 2,000 Dollars." Such reports were so common in the newspapers that this one merited nothing longer.

The polacco took Montgomery to Bordeaux. Once there, he wasted little time in informing Waln of his plight:

These are to Inform you that I am in Confinement for the Ransom of Your Brigantine Rebecca as I hope that she Arrived Safe I have no Occasion to Acquaint you of any Other Particulars as you are better Inform'd by the Arrival of the Brigantine as soon as I Arrived I wrote to London to Your Correspondent Messrs Neate & Neave & as I Flatter myself long Before this Come to Your hands You will order the Aforsaid Gentlemen to Release me This Comes to London Inclosed in Messrs. Neates & Neaves Letters Who I hope will forward it to You. I Conclude & Remain Gentlemen Your

Most Humble Sarvant to command

Jonathan Montgomery

Bourdeaux
Prison September the 13
1762

On the arrival of the *Rebecca*, Waln had written promptly to his London correspondents, Neate and Pigou, about the matter, for they replied under date of September 10. He had sent them four bills of exchange totalling £502 to meet the ransom bill. Any hope of prompt redemption was dashed however, for on December 4 Neate & Pigou wrote Waln that one note was under notation, one accepted and two "noted for non-acceptance if not paid when due." They stated they would make remittance when the bills were paid. In the meantime they had written Montgomery "to advise him the needful," for they had heard he was "safe arrived" at Bordeaux. Despite Waln's hope that Montgomery was already redeemed, more delays occurred, and finally on February 23, 1763, Neate and Pigou wrote again to Waln that the bills were now in cash, that Montgomery

had not replied and that they had written him again on February 10. They added with caution,

It would not be prudent to send the money for that purpose unless we know Montgomerie was living. If we hear nothing from him in ten days we will get a letter of recommendation from some merchant in Bordeaux to make inquiry what is become of him. If living he shall be immediately ransomed.

Just when Montgomery was ransomed does not appear, but he turned up in Waln's office in Philadelphia some time prior to November 20, 1763. Thus close the events surrounding this capture of the *Rebecca*.

In this year of 1762, England's war against France and Spain was in its last stages. French and Spanish privateers still roamed the western seas, particularly the Caribbean, and some even were reported operating off the coasts of the Middle Colonies. Their prizes enriched many a Bourbon merchant. On their part, Philadelphia privateers won such success that the temptation to sign up for a voyage or two touched even hardy upland men who had never seen blue water. Waln wrote to a friend in Barbados,

the Spirit of Privateering seems to revive a vessell built for that purpose will be launched tomorrow. She is 95 feet keel & has not been Building 3 mo—many others of less size are fitting out.

He was writing of the *Hero* to be commanded by John ap Owen with a crew of two hundred men and an armament of twenty four nine pounders—a formidable opponent of any vessel except a frigate. To man such a craft, Philadelphia owners held out large rewards:

the poorer people in the Country dazeled with an imaginary prospect of Riches, are striving who shall enter first, regardless of their old occupation they leave the lands to be cultivated by bought servants or their Masters, when to complete the scen a Regiment is raising wherein

all Servants & Apprentices are Enlisted, such is our present Situation & such it is like to be until providence shall put an End to this Destructive War or til all our Enemy's settlements are reduced.

In spite of the chances yet to be taken and in spite of his recent ill fortune Waln was still the ship owner and trader. He must keep his vessel sailing. With her cargo discharged, tied up at her wharf near Arch Street, Philadelphia, the *Rebecca* began reloading. She had been in her home port a month. Her invoice of September 16, 1762, lists the following:

256	bbls. Ship Bread	6265	White Oak hhd Staves
101	Kegs Bread	8560	red Do Do
20	bbls. Turpentine	10,000	foot of pine Boards
963½	Bushells Corn	32,000	Shingles
1	M hhd heading		
	insured at a value of £968 at 13 p.ct		

and in addition

- 22 Kegs of Bread
- 1 bbl Gammons
- 2 bbls Onions

The brigantine herself was insured for £400 at thirteen per cent—a valuation that was three fifths of her true worth.

Waln had decided to give up further adventures to Barbados for, he wrote, the markets there were discouraging. He concluded to enter a new field, the greater island of Jamaica, and to establish a business there, for which purpose he was sending a factor to its largest port, Kingston. This factor was to be Robert Wilson, and the goods loaded were consigned "to Robert Wilson, merchant on board."

Wilson was an Irishman by birth, with relatives in Philadelphia. Any information about him must be found solely in his own letters, those of Waln to him, and a few others. These cover a period of less than four years in his

life. Wilson could pen a letter of a sort, but his orthography was atrocious, his spelling phonetic or obscure, his expression of thought on paper muddy. "As thou does not write the best Hand," Waln wrote him once, "I think thou had best get a Clerk to write thy Letters." But he never did. "Thou art so sparing of thy Paper as not to leave room for a seal," Waln wrote again. And indeed as we turn over these illiterate scrawls from Wilson, we share Waln's annoyance that in breaking the seal, several words were always destroyed. It was often a fault with better men than Wilson.

Waln's choice of a factor proved unfortunate, but it took the young Quaker a long time to say bluntly to Wilson "the punctuality which at first Recommended thee, seems to have forsaken thee." Whether he was young or old, stupid or venal or both can only be judged as the relations between the two men develop.

The characterization of Wilson in the invoice as "merchant on board" is significant, for Waln having used the word "merchant" now writes a letter to Wilson under the same date, enclosing this document and the bill of lading and instructs him to dispose of the merchandise to the best advantage and make as large a remittance as possible "by return of this vessell in Coffee and Hides . . . if they can be had reasonable, but if not, send us Bills of Exchange." This letter indicates that Robert Wilson was sailing to Kingston as Waln's agent or factor. Waln uses the word factor often when writing to Wilson. But in his early dealings with Wilson, he at the same time recognizes his factor's status as a merchant in his own right, and acquiesces in his pursuing independent adventures, certainly until an outburst at a later date. Wilson's relations with Solomon Spanton of the *Ranger*, Anthony Golley of the *Fanny* and the *Elizabeth*, and Henry Northwood Greaves of the *Fanny*, present him clearly as a merchant, often in partnership with others.

Often, too, Waln acts with Wilson the merchant and not with Wilson his factor. These two positions were frequently inconsistent, and the friction that arose is to be explained, in part at least, because of Wilson's divided interests. On the other hand, it is clear that Wilson never successfully countered Waln's charges that he was careless and neglectful as factor, and failed to do things he was directed to do. It is these delinquencies of Wilson and Waln's quiet manner in facing them that makes him the hero, Wilson the villain of the story.

The *Rebecca* is ready to sail, so once again Waln sits down to write a letter of instruction to her captain, now John Warner, who had replaced Wood. He directs Warner to use the quickest dispatch and not to stay in Jamaica over "14 days without a Convoy and then not more than twenty days." These were dangerous words. After his experience with the equivocal nature of similar instructions to Captain Wood and the unfortunate outcome, Waln might have worded his instructions so as to allow his captain to exercise discretion upon facts as they arose. But he desired the "quickest dispatch" from all those concerned, and took this way to insure it. It was not the course of a careful and prudent man that William Harris of Barbados had so vigorously urged. Waln's misfortune off Barbados had taught him no lesson.

The *Pennsylvania Gazette* for September 22 notes the *Rebecca's* clearance. Out into the river on the tide she puts and down Delaware Bay and past the Capes. She makes good progress southward through the Windward Passage. There, eight leagues off Jamaica, and near her haven, Kingston, the *Rebecca* was captured again by a French privateer. A month later Robert Wilson sent Waln this bald and colorless account. It was one of Wilson's more painful efforts in composition:

I Take this opportunity to acquaint you that on the tenth of October we was taken about eight Legs from the East End of this Island by a french Schoner of Eight swevels & one Carag Gun belonging to Porto prince & after that they had take Sundrey things both belonging to the Brigantine & Cargow they Ransomed for five thousand pices of Eght wee araved at Port Royal october 26th & next day Gott up to town I had the Brig & Cargow Valoued & I thinke the Loss will Come to forte five ore fifty pr Ct . . . the Brig's sails wass verey much tore So that I was obliged to Gett a boldt of Canviess for to mend them with Shee is now Ready to Saile but waits for the fleet which is to Sail the 18th.

That there was an effort to escape, a pursuit, an overhauling, a challenge and gun fire is apparent. Wilson is silent on all this, silent on the hostage taken off and silent on the sundry things taken.

The Ransom Bill exacted at this second capture furnishes the only additional facts to piece out the story. It is in French, in the hand of the French captain. Much later it found its way to Kingston for payment, where it was translated into English for use in connection with Waln's long overdue insurance claims. It reads in full:

We the Subscribers Bernard Laforse Commander of the Privateer the Cricket belonging to Mr. L'Hermite of Port au Prince, I John Warner, Master of the Brigantine Rebecca & I Robert Wilson Supercargo of the Same Vessel that I Bernard Laforse Captain of the aforesaid Privateer the Cricket do acknowledge that I have ransomed jointly with the aforesaid Messieurs Warner & Wilson the Brigantine Rebecca belonging to Mr. Richard Walls of Philadelphia loaden with flour, Bread & other Provisions bound for Jamaica for the sum of five thousand Pieces of Eight, which is thirty thousand Livres of the current Money of Port au Prince the Place she was fitted to & we oblige ourselves to remitt the said sum to the Order of Messrs L'Hermite & Brothers & We John Warner & Wilson as well for Richard Wall, as we in our own names, do promise to pay the said sum of five thousand pieces [of Eight to the Order of Mr. L'Hermite or to him, I Bernard Laforse do acknowledge I have recd on board my vessel Mr. Marcom Huggins as Hostage, who shall for the space of two months be Maintained and treated at the Expense of the Owners of the Brigantine & We Promise to fulfill the above men-

tioned agreements & we have signed double & in true faith On Board the Brigantine Rebecca North and South of St Iago de Cuba this 15th October 1762.

B. Laforse

John Warner, Robt. Wilson

Marcom Huggins

I Pray all Captains of French, Spanish & Allies Privateers to lett the said Brigantine Rebecca pass being bound to Jamaica with Nine Men.

Kingston April 13th 1764 Receiv'd the within Contents in full. Hermitte freres & Menadier.

While this document is not drawn with the legal precision of the specimen Ransom Bill given in Beawes' *Lex Mercatoria Rediviva*, it served its purpose. The only way Waln could redeem his seaman, Marcom Huggins, was to pay the money. L'Hermitte's receipt at the foot of the Bill shows that this did not happen for 18 months.

Once again the *Rebecca* gets under way to her port Kingston, once again after a hostage is taken off—this time to be carried to Hispaniola. Now out of this capture crept strange doings, with stranger motives. But before they could emerge, for that process took months, the unfortunate *Rebecca* disposed of herself. This she did outbound from Jamaica to Philadelphia on her return trip. She reloaded at Kingston and set her course toward Philadelphia, this time in convoy with the fleet bound for England. Days pass and she does not reach home. Two months after her sailing, on February 20, 1763, Waln writes that she is now missing, and six days later at the foot of a letter to Wilson he says:

N.B. We have Just had an account that Capt Warner died the 5th & that the Brigantine Rebecah was lost 11 December her standing & runing Riging Sails & Cables were put on board, the Schooner was taken the same day by a French Privateer & retaken 4 hours after by Capt Miller in a Sloop, if he should carry her to Jamaica, claim the goods we have a right to.

Waln's clarity of expression seems to have deserted him. Later he speaks of the *Rebecca* as a "castaway."

But John Cummings, a merchant, writing to Waln from New Providence in the Bahamas, March 1, 1763, has a different and clearer version:

Long before this you have no doubt heard of the loss of your Brigantine & the manner how better than it is in my Power to Relate but as some of the People have come down here that was taken up by a privateer of this Port I shall now tell you what they say. That is that they sailed from Jamaica in company with the fleet for England and a few days after Capt Warner Died. Mr Way the then mate was sick and one Mr. Hutchens of your Place was Passenger on board and he took Charge of the Vessel and unfortunately run her on shore on Heniaugh & he and all hands got on shore and a few Days after a Bermudian Wrecker came and took the Brigantines sails & rigin and Mr. Hutchens off for Bermuda tho for better information I referr you to Mr. Way & some of the Hands that are coming home in this Sloop.

The picture of Mr. Hutchens, a passenger of Philadelphia, trying to sail a large vessel in such a dangerous sea-way affords a somewhat comic relief in the wake and at the funeral and burial of the *Rebecca*. One can sympathize with this amateur navigator-in-spite-of-himself. At least he tried. For six days, he tried. Whether, keeping Heniaugh to port in making for the Caicos Passage, he was blown by the easterly gale onto a lee shore, or whether, trying to pass west of Heniaugh to take the Mariguana Passage, he piled her up on the reef, cannot be known. Perhaps he was even heading for some other passage into the open sea.

Waln's comment on this second capture is reserved. "The Brig. *Rebecah*, Capt. Warner is again taken . . . I am a little unfortunate in that vessel," he writes. Well might he say so. The two captures had drained his cash resources, and he was obliged to write Edward Cathrell of Burlington on February 1, 1763:

As I have lately met with several heavy losses at Sea, it will Streighten me very much to pay the money due to thee for the House I live in, If it will suit thee to let it remain on Interest I shall esteeme it a Favor.

But while the *Rebecca* was gone, her affairs lived on four years more, years of distress and misunderstanding on the part of Waln. Never did he grasp why certain things were done or left undone, and in truth, Wilson's efforts to clarify matters and often to evade them did not help at all, for his actions were almost as obscure as his motives.

For several months after Wilson reached Kingston and settled down there as Waln's factor and as merchant, the relations between the two men remained pleasant. Trade was brisk, but Waln often complained—of the inferiority of the coffee shipped or the wormy quality of the hides. Wilson sends little presents for Mrs. Waln—a keg of limes or sweet oranges or yams. In turn, Waln thanked him and gave him bits of intimate family news, told him of the inoculation of his son against smallpox. The ending of Waln's letters, while formal in language was almost affectionate. He wrote often that if Wilson would continue his correspondence, Waln could get him "a good many consignments." But he warned him: "he who makes haste to be rich will certainly be poor."

During this period after the loss of the *Rebecca*, Waln employed many vessels in his Kingston trade. Some he may have owned like the *Sally*, a brigantine, or tried to own, like the *Francis*, a snow. In some he chartered tonnage, like the ship *Europa*, the brigantines *Tryal* and *Blessing* and the ship *Hanover*. But his first love, the *Rebecca* was gone, and he missed her.

Wilson wondered how the money to redeem the hostage was to be found. If the markets did not rise, he wrote, Waln would not realize enough out of the cargo of the *Rebecca* to pay the ransom. While their commercial trans-

actions, prices current, market demands and the condition of the goods as they arrive at both ports occupy much of their correspondence, what really shaped, or perhaps warped their relations in the background of all this lively commerce was the tangled affair of the disaster of the *Rebecca* and the ransom of Marcom Huggins.

The matter of the insurance begins to bother Waln. He takes exception to Wilson's first figures on the average loss and comments on Wilson's failure to include the articles that were taken by Captain Laforse of the *Cricket*. Wilson should have known, for he was supercargo. It was his business to know. Instead, he replies:

Captain Warner never told me how many things he was awanting when I asked him he told me they had taken every thing that belonged to the vessel I disared him & he meant to make out an account of Everything that was awanting & Lett it be mentioned in the Protest with account of what they had taken of the Cargow but he told me he was told there wass no necessity for it as he was Going to Philadelphia himself. I am sorey to hear of his Death & of the Brigantine being Lost I have not heard of Captain Milllear nor of the Schonner that the Rebecca's Sails wass on board I suppose he Sent her to Providance.

Waln must have viewed this statement as a stupid confession of incompetence on the part of Wilson. A breach between the two men was coming. Suggestions of it occur in a letter of Waln to Wilson after the latter had been in Kingston for five months: "Captain Dee informs me that thee had sold all our Goods . . ." To which Wilson replies, if it be a reply, "I am surpraised how Captain Dee or other Person Could Say that I had sold all your bread."

Six months after the cargo of the *Rebecca* was discharged at Kingston, Wilson sends Waln an account of the sales he had made. It must have been pleasing to Waln, for it nearly equalled the ransom money of £1250. Upon goods that Waln had insured in Philadelphia for £968 Pennsylvania currency,

the account shows the net sum of £1115-19-7½ after deducting wharfage charges, storage, cooorage, portorage and Wilson's commissions at 5%, and as this whole sum was in Jamaica currency, it was better yet, for that currency was then at a premium up to 17% over Pennsylvania. Wilson accompanies this account with the expression of an idea—simple enough in itself, but one later to unlock a Pandora box of irritation for Waln and even for its author, Wilson:

I heard from the Hostage About three weeks ago. I have agreed with a Gentleman to Carry up the money for which I am to give him forty Pistoles and as soon as the Hostage is Relived and know his particular Expences your account Current shall Immediately be Transmitted, with the Ballance in Coffee if any in my hands. . . .

N.B. I have wrote the Hostage Sundry times but had no Answer but only one.

If Waln did not already know the name of this "Gentleman," his doubt was put at rest. For Wilson also enclosed a statement of the average loss on the *Rebecca* as valued by the Kingston appraisers, Beveridge & Bard, on the back of which Wilson sets down figures relative to Huggins' redemption. This introduces into the affair the name of a man of mystery—mystery now, and later in American history, a name of wonder and doubt to all who encounter it.

Brigantine Rebecca	Dr. to Robt. Wilson Jamaica Currency
Amount of said Brigantines Ransom Bill	£1250.
Amt of the Hostage's Wages for 6 mo @ £7 <i>p</i>	42.
do of his Expences @ 6/3 <i>p</i> . day	56.5
Cash paid Button Gwinnet for Carring the money to relieve the Hostage	47.10
	<hr/>
	1395.15
To my commission at 5 p. cent	69.15-9
	<hr/>
	£1465.10.9

Of course, this name Button Gwinnett meant no more to Waln than the name of any man who was ready to carry money from Jamaica to Hispaniola for a commission. But here in this document of April 10, 1763, appears for the first time on this side of the Atlantic that man who thirteen years later signed the Declaration of Independence as one of three delegates from Georgia, by whom but one holographic letter is known today, and but less than fifty signatures. Button Gwinnett is the despair of the collector of the "Signers." His fame almost rests there, but Charles Francis Jenkins, his biographer would not want it so, for he says that Gwinnett "looms far larger in National and State affairs than his earlier biographers have drawn him."

Gwinnett enters our story abruptly in April, 1763, and fades out of it in September, his mission unaccomplished. But his presence here serves to fill part of an unrecorded gap in his career, for Mr. Jenkins is unable to find a trace of him from the time he left Bristol, England, in 1762, until he turned up in Savannah in 1765. The affairs of the *Rebecca* bring him to light.

Waln was beginning to push Wilson hard in the redemption of Marcom Huggins, the hostage. Six months had passed since he had been taken to Hispaniola, and to Waln nothing seemed to have been done beyond an ineffectual exchange of letters. Waln says he has heard from the hostage as late as March 11 and charges Wilson with neglecting many opportunities to release him. He "most urgently requests" Wilson to remit the money to Hispaniola immediately, or else return it to Philadelphia. His patience was running thin:

Thou must be sensible no advantage can be made by Trading on the money equal to what thy Character will suffer as a Factor, besides it is unjust. If I request any of my Friends to ship to thee may I not expect to be upbraided with thy Conduct with regard to this Hostage.

But before Wilson received this, he wrote Waln on April 26 an extraordinary suggestion:

Yesterday morning Mr. Button Gwinnett in the Brigantine Recovery Sailed from Port Royal for Port au prince. He has signed bills of Lading for therten hundred Pounds Jamaica Curr'y to be Paid in Port au prince in Reless of our hostage that is there in Consideration of which I have Drawn on you Payable as follows. one bill of four hundred Pounds at twenty day one do of Six hun'd at thertey & one of six hnd at forty days Sight Philadelphia Curr'y, but he would not Engeage to Pay the money for the hostage unless he is alowed to Lodd with malacess & if he Dont the bills is to be void. If Mr. Gwinnett is alloued to tread I think it will be twoe months if nott more before he araives at Philadelphia with the bills. . . .

If Mr. Gwinnett is not admited to tread at Port au prince it will be a great disapointment as he will Come away without Reliving the hostage & then I will be obledged to get a flag a trouces. Then there is not one that will Go up when they know they will not be admited to tread under a hundred Pistoles & then I will be Disapointed in Shiping the Goods I intended, for there is none that will take bills on Philadelphia if they Can Gett any on London.

Waln, on reading this amazing notion of procedure, was highly incensed. In peremptory language, and once again, he directed Wilson to ship the money he had for the purpose to Philadelphia, whether Gwinnett succeeded in releasing the hostage or not, for, said he, there were many opportunities to ship money to Port au Prince at little or no expense. He adds:

If B.G. should get the Hostage Discharged the money will then be here ready to pay thy Draughts, please to ship it immediately in good green Coffee & the best Mo. Sugar."

These letters crossed and another equally extraordinary came from Wilson dated June 11. He wrote that he would have made a large shipment to Waln,

butt for a Letter that I have just Recivd from Port au Prince which Informes me that Mr. Gwinnett went out from that Port the 3 of May

at night & Did not Pay the mony for the Hostage although he Signed bills of Loading for the money to be Payd there to Monshier Lahermite & an obligation to me to Send the Hostage Down heare by the first oportienity but I Hope I Shall be abel to make him Pay to aney expences the Hostage is at from that Day if he Should be Rouge anuff to Call on you for the acceptance of any bills, by no means acct of any but Please to Remitt whatever money Belonging to me in Corn—

I Shall nott loss So much as Mr. Gwinnet may emagin for Monsr. LaHarmite has Gott a Permission for me to tread there which I entend to make euss of. I entend to send a vessal up there to Load with Malasses.

Thus the confusion becomes more confounded. Waln rightly charges Wilson with having such "an unhappy knack of obscuring the meaning that I could not come to what thou intended to do," for Wilson had written "I have not heard from B.G. since he sailed from here with the cash." This confuses Waln the more, for Wilson had first written him that he had given Gwinnett drafts on Waln. Cash was not mentioned by Wilson. What is Waln to think? He replies, "whether he has these Bills or the Cash it is not possible for me to determine as thou contradicts thyself and I can hardly think he has both." In his exasperation, Waln's thoughts turn again to Marcum Huggins. "This Hostage has suffered much on our account, has caused me the most painful Anxiety & I had much rather the vessel had not been ransomed." For the third time, he directs Wilson to ship the money to Philadelphia.

Wilson's reply that the redemption money was in cash as well as in bills must have hit Waln straight between the eyes, for this is what Wilson writes on September 22—he too is getting annoyed:

I think you Should not have Reflected So much as you have Don for in what I Did it was for your Interest—. Since that time in Regeard to what I wrott to you Conserning B.G. is very right he had Cash on board for to Relive the hostage Part of which he had of me. But he Left Goods & Accounts in my hands to the amount of what Cash I

advanced to him for to enabel him to Relive the hostage & give him bills payable in Philadelphia on account I might have cash to Remit to you in Coffee which wass Pleanty at that time.

In the midst of this surprising and bewildering explanation that he had handed Gwinnett cash as well as bills, Wilson writes that if Waln will look into the Accounts of Sales he will see that it was not in Wilson's power to relieve the hostage. Further, Waln will find that by the retailing of the goods, he has gained upwards of £150. Wilson means by this that Waln had drained him of cash, so that he could not redeem the hostage at Jamaica; but in the next breath confesses he had used hostage money in adventures profitable to Waln. He evidently hoped the latter would please Waln, or at the least placate him. Not content with this surprise Wilson goes off on yet another unlooked for tack, or a series of them:

Likewise I Ransomed the Brigantine without your orders and signed the Ransom Bill myself & Capt Warner & I Signed an obligation to the Hostage to releive him if Brigantine should be lost going to Jamaica or any other Accident happening so I stand bound to Releive the Hostage and none Else.

Mr. Button Gwinnett signed Bills of Lading the 23 April for the money & Sailed the 25. The Hostage is not yet Come down but it is at my own Expense if he Stays any Longer. Inclosed you'll find accounts Current by which you'll find the Ballance in my favor one Hundred & Fifty Pounds Eight Shillings & Nine Pence half penny which I hope you'll Please to Remitt in Goods or anything you think will answer best.

Since Wilson had ransomed the *Rebecca* as Waln's agent, this piles madness on confusion. Taken altogether it is devoid of any meaning upon which Waln might act or even think. It did nothing to redeem the hostage and everything to embarrass Waln.

In the meantime, rumors had come to Waln, through a relative of Wilson, that Wilson was coming to Philadelphia.

He made no such trip—scarcely cause for wonder for he would hardly care to face the indignant Waln in person. Instead Gwinnett came. Wilson enclosed a letter to Waln under date of July 6 asking that it be delivered to Gwinnett, but “if he was not in town to put it under a cover & direct it to the care of Franceys Lewes Merchant in New York.” Here curiously enough is introduced Francis Lewis, another “Signer” to be. The reasons for Gwinnett’s trip are not given and nobody knows whom he came to see in Philadelphia. Certainly he was not pursuing the matter of the hostage. That mission had failed. And he was not seeking Waln, for to Wilson, Waln writes on July 23:

B. Gwinnett is now here without the Hostage, he has shun’d me ever since his arrival, what thee means by “thee will not lose so much as he may imagine” I do not apprehend.

I could never even flatter myself with an Opinion of his doing otherwise than he has, from the first I knew of the Person thee had agreed with as the Conditions seemed romantick, for surely if he had been allowed to Trade there would have been less occasion for his money, why then should the release of the Hostage depend upon that. As thou hast already been wrote to several Times to send the money here which thou hath in thy hands to release the Hostage, I hope thee has done it before now.

The key word in this letter is “romantick,” which in that day meant quixotic or fantastic or going beyond the practical. It was just that. Jacob Shoemaker, Waln’s partner, who up to now had not concerned himself in the West India end of the business, was upset, and he too writes to Wilson about the hostage. Again nothing comes of it.

Gwinnett appears but once more in the picture, when in a letter to Wilson of September 26, Waln writes “B Gwinnett is gone to Newfoundland from whence he goes up the streights.” The *Pennsylvania Gazette* records the sailing on September 22 from Philadelphia of a “ship” (by an odd

coincidence, she was named *Rebecca*) for Newfoundland, and Gwinnett may well have sailed on her. Whether his adventure was for cod-fish along the outer coast, and to the "streights,"—the Straits of Belle Isle doubtless—for furs, cannot be established, any more than can his relations with L'Hermitte in Hispaniola be defined, or the reasons given for his coming to Philadelphia and possibly New York. He remains the man of mystery.

As far as anyone knows, Gwinnett did not reappear in Philadelphia for over a decade, when for a short and somewhat uncertain period, he sat as a member of the Second Continental Congress.

While Gwinnett was heavily involved in debt in Bristol, England, in 1762, and while debt dogged him constantly in his life as merchant, planter, and land speculator on St. Catharine's Island in Georgia, Mr. Jenkins says that but one person ever criticized his business ethics. That one was Stephen Drayton of South Carolina, who characterized Gwinnett's conduct in a land sale as "full of chicanery." Some months later, Drayton was obliged to pay Gwinnett £500 to settle the matter, so perhaps Drayton's invective was that of a disappointed investor.

Yet here Gwinnett's "romantick" mission to L'Hermitte had failed—failed because he would not deliver the money unless he was permitted to trade in Hispaniola. He was not permitted, and so the extraordinary compact ended just there. Gwinnett's device to push his way in by ruffling somebody else's bills and by clinking somebody else's coins went to pieces. Wilson either did not see or refused to see that both he and Waln were being used by Gwinnett to further his own fortunes. But Wilson ignoring his contractual relations with Waln certainly did see advantages for himself and was quick to grasp them. Through the good offices of L'Hermitte he secured the personal right to trade in

Hispaniola. Later he went there on the brigantine *Fanny* for molasses with Henry Northwood Greaves as his partner—an adventure that even Wilson admitted to Waln was subject to censure.

Somehow L'Hermitte, Gwinnett, and Wilson possessed for a time a common interest. Whether it was shady or legitimate, Waln never knew. To him it remained obscure, and Wilson took no trouble to enlighten him. L'Hermitte continued to hold the ransom bill, and its liquidation still lay in the future. Gwinnett had disappeared from the scene, but he still remained a man of mystery. Wilson's stature as the villain continued to grow through his own unaided efforts.

The hostage had now been at Hispaniola for eleven months. His release was still wrapped in a mass of confusing words and confused ideas. Waln regarded Wilson's statements as to the ransom money, the hostage's wages, and his daily subsistence, as wholly inexact. He did not believe that 30,000 livres was equivalent to £1,250. He did not think the hostage lived well enough to justify a subsistence charge of 6/3 a day. Wilson had used a larger figure for the hostage's wages than the sum at which he had been shipped on the *Rebecca*, and Waln objected strenuously to the charge for Button Gwinnett's taking the money to Hispaniola when he had never actually earned it. Until these things were corrected and the documents dealing with the claims arising from the loss of the *Rebecca* and her cargo put in shape, the underwriters could not be expected to pay their losses. But Captain Warner was dead, and Wilson was the only person in Kingston who knew anything of the facts and figures, the outcome of the second capture and her wreck on the reef. All this detail became Wilson's to handle on behalf of Waln, his principal. Until his redemption

occurred, the figures surrounding Marcom Huggins could not be determined. Then the value of the *Rebecca* and her cargo must be fixed by appraisers in figures satisfactory to both the underwriters and Waln. All this was far beyond Wilson's experience, and his ineptitude was tainted by his eerie self-interest in dealing with L'Hermitte. Perhaps Wilson had borrowed his pattern from Gwinnett.

In the meantime Waln's cash resources were heavily strained, for he had money both in Philadelphia and in Kingston to meet the ransom—or believed he had. But he needed another vessel, and he needed more cash at home to buy goods for export. Still Marcom Huggins remained uppermost in his mind. In his letter to Wilson of July 26, he said:

Was he released on the money here to do it I Should be in more Spirits to Trade to Jamaica as well as have more money, it is a poor satisfaction that we are to bear his Expenses from the Time B. Gwinnett left Port au Prince. . . .

Later that week he added, "Since I wrote thee last we have had a meeting with the underwriters . . . it was concluded to release the Hostage from here, & they have agreed to pay their proportion." Again he directs Wilson to send the money in Kingston to Philadelphia by the first opportunity in coffee, sugar or bills of exchange. "Let no consideration induce thee to Delay this matter, but use the utmost despatch." Again he objects to the proposed charge of 6/3 a day for the hostage's subsistence, writing Wilson:

We have the most indubitable proof that he has Lived in the most Wretched misery, scarcely allowed sufficient to keep him from perishing, upon the whole I hope he does not intend to make a Job of this unfortunate Affair and wish it may not become a serious matter.

A few days later he writes that the hostage is ever uppermost in his thoughts, but:

if thee has his free Consent to be detained I am satisfied, but not otherwise for I apprehend it is very unjust & Cruel to deprive him of his Liberty on any pretence whatever . . . I can hardly Think he would be willing to stay there.

Before this reaches Waln, Wilson writes him on November 7, quite the longest letter he ever wrote:

I am sorey that you should think that I disobay orders. There was none of your letter till that Deated July 27th Specified Posatively to send the money to you . . . I having Signified to Monr. Le a Hearmit that the money wass to be Remitted from Philadelphia to Relive the hostage he has Sent Down heare to Insist on my Paying the money as he say he Knows nothing of you & that he has none to Look to but me. I am at loss what to do in this afear. . . .

Wilson's disobeyal of orders is by this time patent, for he had not sent the money to Philadelphia although directed to do so on several occasions. He had used it in trading adventures which at the least was a technical embezzelment. And now it is clear that he proposed to hold the money to meet L'Hermitte's demand for payment through himself not Waln. It is difficult to see why L'Hermitte cared who paid him, so long as he was paid. Wilson's excuse may well be of his own invention, and for his own strange purposes.

He proceeds in his letter with confession, avoidance, repetition, sophistry—finally, inconsistency and hypocrisy.

I know the hostage was not shipped at £7 Sterling per month but the Law will allow him that if he Insists on it as to his expences it will not be Known 'till he is relised but by his own Letters to me he allway had Plenty of vituals & Drink & Liberty to walk about so your Information must be wrong . . . if you send & relis the hostage you can settel with him for his wages and any other thing but if you do not Relis him befor that Le a hermit Insists on my Paying of the money I hope you'l Return the money to me that I Shiped you . . . Please to lett me know by the first oprtunity if you have Sent the money for the hostage for Le a hermit Say he will not Look to any but me for the Payment of his money. I expect to Shipe you by first oprtunity all the money that is in my hands

for that Purpose. I wish that afeare was Settled for it Gives me a Great Deal of uneasiness by Day & Night.

Had Waln received this letter sooner, he might not have sent some carefully drawn articles of agreement which he proposed that he and Wilson now enter into. But this letter of Wilson's crossed Waln's sending of the agreement. There is no evidence that Waln on his part ever withdrew his offer (legally it was just that), or that Wilson ever accepted it.

It was now Waln's turn to write Wilson a long letter. It is worthy of careful reading for in its Quaker way, it constitutes a savage attack upon Wilson.

If thee expects to do any Business from this place thee must get clear of Warner's Hostage & send the Ransom Bill with a full discharge here, it is inconceivable how much this affair has hurt thee, thee has been extremely imprudent in it, & I can just now get any Person in the Island a Consignm't sooner than I could get one to thee.

It is strange indeed that Waln still tolerates a factor who can do such injury to his own and to his principal's business. Waln's indictment of Wilson is not finished, for he continues:

Some person have been with the Owners of the Snow Francis & given thee such a Character as no Honest man would wish for! part of which is that thee has kept a poor Fellow who went Hostage Languishing in Gaol, while thee traded on the money, and made it a practice to do so, & never render'd any Account to the persons who employ'd thee, that thee bore a very indifferent Character at Kingston & that it was not safe to trust thee in any shape whatever who has been so much thy Enemy I cannot learn, but with this Acc't part false and part true the Owners of the Snow came to me & insisted upon my being their Security for what Goods they ship thee, & since we have gone so far I must come to some agreement with them.

In his gentle manner he gropes blindly for a way out, eager almost to give Wilson the benefit of the doubt—eager to defend him if he merits a defense:

I have used what arguments I could to set thee in a fair Light, but without thee does fully settle this Affair & get the Hostage discharged, it will be in vain to try to get thee any Consignments, besides the Underwriters are uneasy & this is the very Thing that broke of my agreeing with Mifflins in the Spring—they wanted Security.

I am sure no advantage can be made by Keeping Things in this situation. Let me intreat thee & I expect it, that thee will give me a full & fair account of this troublesome affair. It has given me more uneasiness than any Thing I have been concerned in.

Why Waln did not end his letter by discharging Wilson—discharging him for just cause—is not easily understood. He does the opposite. He proposes to continue their relations to punish anyone who falsely maligns Wilson and, in addition, to get him new business.

If this affair is settled to Satisfaction, the Hostage discharged, & a regular account sent here with the Ransom Bill, I am in hopes thy Character would in time be Establish'd and then I would make an example of any Person who should give themselves such Liberties, and I make no doubt I would be able to get thee as much Business as any Person with you has from here, if thee did it well, which would be more for thy interest than even the keeping of the whole Hostage money.

This is not the decision of the wise man and perhaps it is not even the decision of the fool. It is the Quaker speaking in Waln—the forgiving Quaker who, while he sees duplicity in Wilson and woeful injury to his business, forgives and forgives and forgives again. No other explanation seems to square with the known facts.

And now L'Hermitte himself becomes restless, even insistent, for Wilson writes Waln November 26:

Mons. LeHarmitte on hearing that the money was to be Sent from Philadelphia Sent down here and Insisted on my giving my Bond that if the money was not at Port au prince in three months that I should pay it on Demand to his Correspondant here.

How L'Hermitte could demand this, and why Wilson was led to give it, is not made clear and never would or could be. If it was true it further complicated matters, for in addition to the ransom bill that obligated Waln to L'Hermitte, both Wilson and Captain Warner had previously obligated themselves personally to the hostage, and now Wilson says he has obligated himself personally to L'Hermitte. This was indeed a Gordian Knot. Thoroughly exasperated, Waln writes Wilson November 29:

Inasmuch as thee did inform us that the Hostage money was paid & that thee detained the Hostage on Account of Trade, but that we were to bear no part of his Expences or Wages from the Time Button Gwinnett left port au Prince, we came to a final settlement with the underwriters & over and over told them the Hostage money was paid, we therefore can have nothing at all to do with it, but expect that thee will immediately get the Hostage Discharged.

And this letter Waln ends in that curious way he has—by severe censure of Wilson, and forgiveness. It cannot be called vacillation. It must be gentleness of spirit:

We note how often the Contradicts thyself in thy Letters & the Weak excuse thou makes for Trading upon this money. Tho' thy proceeding has laid thee open to Censure, & may reflect on Thy Conduct, we rather choose to pass it over, but observe that a person in thy Situation to Act in this manner, is what we are very much surprised at.

Waln lost the opportunity to acquire a vessel in Maryland, because, as he writes Wilson:

some person informed the Owner that thee had turned Scheemer upon other people's money & when I waited upon a second Time, he asked me if I wanted him to loose his money.

I am vexed & disappointed that thee should by thy foolish Conduct spoil the best prospect of making money that I believe thee ever had.

Waln declares Wilson has sunk his character by his wild schemes, by contradicting himself and writing what is not true. He warns, that unless Wilson agrees to work on com-

mission, "without being concerned in any Vessells at all," and agrees to release the hostage immediately, "I must renounce all Connections with thee, for it will be in Vain to try to get thee Consignments."

Now this looked as if Waln were through with Wilson. It was not a break, however; it was but another crack. Two weeks later, Waln's letter on commercial matters is quite friendly, and ends: "Thee may rely upon my Consulting thy Interest in all things, & I expect thee will do the same with thy real friend to Command." Shortly afterwards he swings about once again, and writes Wilson that he is extremely dissatisfied and proposes to send someone else to Jamaica. His criticism of Wilson's conduct is severe:

To send Goods without orders is by no means Commendable, but to not execute Orders when in thy Power is worse . . . I cannot be so hearty in thy Interest while I am used so ill. If thee regards thy Connections thou'l alter thy Conduct if thee does not I must alter mine.

Waln had tried, and tried hard, to educate Wilson in the ways of a good factor. On one occasion he wrote him, "I think if thee would purchase Beau's Law of Merchants & Study it at Leisure it would be of great service to thee." Beawes' fine compendium Waln had probably purchased; it was advertised for sale by David Hall the bookseller (Franklin's partner in the printing business) in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* shortly before he wrote Wilson of it. That Waln had read it is certain, for in numerous letters he reveals a grasp of it. If Wilson studied it, which is doubtful, one thing is sure—he did not follow its precepts. His conduct did not alter.

Aside from all this mishandling of commercial matters, the hostage is still unredeemed. And what is of more moment, he is growing restless. Marcom Huggins had then been in Hispaniola for fifteen months, and he had suffered

smallpox. Whether ill treated or well treated, in his captivity, he does not reveal. Evidently he is a most patient man. He writes Waln on January 10, 1764:

Sir—

This is to let you know that I am in Confinement yet for your Vessel which I Little thought that you would let me stay so long as you have when I Came hostage for your vessel but I hope that you will be so good as to Send the Ransom or have it Sent as soon as possible. I received a letter from Mr. Wilson not long ago that he Expected the Ransom Every day.

Your humble servant
Marcom Huggins

Port au prince

Just before Waln received this, he had asked Wilson whether he had really entered into an obligation to pay the ransom in Jamaica, and if so, to whom. Wilson, replying, made the astounding statement that he had *not* been ordered to release the hostage, but to ship merchandise or drafts to Waln. He followed this later with further evasion:

I am under no obligation to pay the Ransom Bond the next month therefore I shall expect per First Oppy you will Remitt me the Ballance of said goods I shipped as also what Ballance that appar in that Account that was Sent you when B.G. sailed.

It was true Waln had directed Wilson to ship merchandise or drafts to him, and it was also true many opportunities occurred to send money from Philadelphia to Hispaniola. Money Waln never sent, probably because Wilson had said that L'Hermitte would deal only with him. While perhaps Waln disbelieved this, he did believe that if let alone Wilson might complete the matter. Waln was on weak ground here, as his reply to his factor indicates. Waln, faced with the possibility of creating further delay himself if he argued the

matter out, chose to overlook Wilson's lame evasion and his own failure to send the money—the product of his exasperation. His direction was now peremptory:

Take as much money of mine which thee has in Thy hands and release the Hostage immediately . . . my Solicitude to get the Hostage Discharged Transcends all other Considerations. And let me recommend this most Seriously to thee as a thing of the last Importance upon which thy own being as a Merchant depends. I have been a long time Silent relating to this Poor unfortunate man—and so hast thou, but I cannot consistent with my Honour or Common Justice suffer this matter to continue longer in this situation. . . .

There was nothing new in the letter, for he had told Wilson many times to use the money for the redemption of Huggins. But it enabled Wilson to wriggle out through rather a narrow, rather a slimy hole—and Waln did not deem it wise to block that hole up.

Perhaps Wilson sensed a crisis in his affairs at this point for he took two steps, both satisfactory to Waln. The first was a resolution on his part expressed to Waln that he would no longer be concerned in any trade except to Philadelphia. He regretted, too, his Hispaniola adventure for molasses with Henry Northwood Greaves, writing that it was the only one Waln “could exclaim against.” He added that Waln was under no obligation to continue him as his correspondent. Here was Waln's chance to rid himself of Wilson, but the hostage was still unredeemed, and this was no time for a change.

The second step Wilson took was the all-important one—the one that Waln had been urging and begging and pleading so long in vain. Eighteen months after the capture, Wilson finally paid the money for the redemption of Marcom Huggins. His letter of April 19, 1764, to Waln tells how it happened:

I have also enclosed you the Ransom bill with Mosrs. La hermit's Receipt on the Back of it he Came down when the Bond Came Due And Received the money him Self the Hostage is not come Down yett but as I have Gott up all the Papers & Security for his being Seet a Leaberty without any further Charges I expect him heare every Day therefor I hope that Mr. Shoemaker & you will Shipe me the Ballance that is Due on your account Current & then that affaire will be entairly Settled.

Whether Waln had finally stung Wilson to action, or whether Wilson's intrigues had run their course, or whether he feared the consequences of further delay, or whether the matter was simply concluded as all things are at last, will never be known. But Wilson has the last word in writing to Waln, "As the affair of the Hostage is intirly Settled I flatter myself that my friends will not let that be any Scrouples."

With this bit of complacency on the part of Wilson, the story of the redemption of Marcom Huggins ends.

Now that the hostage had been redeemed, the money involved was reduced to a measurable sum—that is, provided Waln and Wilson could agree on their figures. In turn, however, these had to be acceptable to the adjusters, and lastly to the underwriters. Waln needed the money that was tied up, and he needed it badly. He had not yet bought a vessel to replace the *Rebecca*. Had not Wilson spoiled the sale, he might have purchased the snow *Francis* from her Maryland owners, but that fell through. The whole matter between Waln and Wilson still lay in a tangled contradiction of fact and fancy. Merchant and factor pulled further and further apart. Wilson's accounts with Waln were interwoven with the cost of the hostage's redemption, and these in turn were interwoven with the insurance claims. No theory of settlement crystallized into action, and Waln's impatience with the delay rose higher. He did not recall Wilson to Philadelphia—as many a man in similar circum-

stances would have done, and done long before—and he did not go to Kingston himself.

He had in January, 1764, purchased the *Elizabeth*, a brigantine that Anthony Golley, her master, once was interested in. He refitted her for his own needs. Then he acted as he had intimated to Wilson he might act. He sent to Kingston a sea captain, James Child, armed with Waln's power of attorney dated July 21, 1764, authorizing him specifically to settle the mutual accounts with Wilson. Child sailed on the *Elizabeth*. On her first trip in April, the merchandise on board was consigned to Wilson, but on this July trip, it was consigned to Child who was on board. Thereafter there were no further consignments to Wilson. Wilson in a letter to Waln, dated August 22, recorded the arrival of the *Elizabeth* two days earlier. Apparently he was anxious to get rid of the matter the easiest way, for he observed complacently, "Please to settel with the underwriters to the Best advantag you Can if you can't Recover nothing mor gett them to Return the Primene if they will not Pay the Loss."

Wilson was tiring under Waln's continued pressure on him—tiring, too, of the whole matter. But it was Waln's money that was at stake. He was not one to give up easily. On August 14, he wrote Wilson that nothing could justify a factor in deviating from orders except impossibility of compliance. In the matter of the hostage, Waln said he would pay no more than what was actually paid—not what was allowed by the appraisers, Meyler & Hall. He had reason to think, too, that the poor hostage had never dined at any table, as Wilson asserted, much less L'Hermitte's, but had lived miserably.

And yet, critical as he had been of Wilson's conduct in all its facets, he still sought to let bygones be bygones. He wrote Wilson on December 6, but a short time later, "If thou settles all old affairs to satisfaction, notwithstanding

what has happened I purpose being further concerned with thee." He followed these words by suggesting that the errors in Wilson's account were attributable to his clerk—when he must have known it was not so. A few weeks later, he objected to another of Wilson's charges in the old ransom matter, saying, "We have got a Friend to read the Ransom Bill, who informs us the Hostage was to be two months at the expense of the Captors."

It is difficult to follow the reasoning in this, for the language of the ransom bill seems quite to the contrary. But based upon the many statements and indeed misstatements in the accounts Wilson had rendered Waln, commencing on November 17, 1762, when he wrote that £144-1-11½ were allowed for the expense of the hostage and remitting the money, Waln finally on December 15, 1764, produces for the information of the underwriters two accounts. One details the expense attending the capture and ransom of the *Rebecca* and releasing the hostage—£1319-5-5. This does not include the last twelve months of the detention of Huggins which Wilson once acknowledged to Waln was his own obligation (amounting now to £182). The other shows the value of the vessel, cargo and freight—£2272-19-3. Aided by Joseph Richardson and Robert Morris as referees to settle the loss, the adjustments with the underwriters were closed at last. Here appears momentarily in the story Robert Morris, a third "Signer" to be.

Except for the claim against one underwriter the amounts due were promptly paid. But through a misunderstanding of Waln's own making, he was obliged to sue Greg, Conyng-ham & Co. on the balance of their contribution. This he did in the Philadelphia courts in the September Term of 1765. Waln's attorney was his younger brother Nicholas, who had studied law at the Middle Temple, London, during the years 1763-64.

But during all this period following the redemption of Marcom Huggins, letters still passed between Waln and Wilson, although Captain Child was endeavoring to settle their accounts as he was authorized to do. After he had been in Kingston a short time Child wrote Waln a letter. While it does not clearly disclose his motives, it does reveal a timidity on his part, and a desire to turn the matter back on Waln. Child says, that because Wilson was then shipping goods to Waln, "I thought it most prudent not to push him to a Settlement, as You and he may Settle it between Yourselves." Thus Child was anxious to avoid coming to grips with Wilson on the very thing he was sent to Kingston to accomplish. Notwithstanding this display of weakness by Child, an investigation into the mutual accounts of Wilson and Waln by Nathaniel Grant, selected by Child, and John Chalmers, selected by Wilson, as referees, took place. This resulted on May 7, 1765, in a finding that Waln owed Wilson £51-8-5 after Wilson had assigned to Waln certain bills of lading for merchandise worth £115-17-9. To the amount found due to Wilson, Child added £3-3 on an item that Wilson coaxed Child into believing Waln owed him. On May 10, 1765, Wilson executed a release to Waln and his partner Jacob Shoemaker for all matters between them, ending with the timeworn words, "from the beginning of the World to the Day of the Date of these presents." It was a singularly ineffectual release, for five days before its execution Wilson jumped into court, in a matter that Child might well have disposed of in the settlement.

Wilson had out-maneuvered Child. His annoyance could now be translated into action, for he saw an opportunity to strike back at Waln. Sometime before, Wilson had shipped to Philadelphia by mistake two unmarked hogsheads of rum on the *Elizabeth*. When he learned of his

error he instructed Waln to sell the rum for his account. This Waln probably never did for he did not credit Wilson with the proceeds. At the proper moment this gave Wilson his chance. And nine months after his instruction to sell, Wilson seized that chance. On May 5, 1765, when the *Elizabeth* was about to sail from Lucea (an outpost in Jamaica far removed from Kingston), he started a suit in foreign attachment for £152-15-9, which held the *Elizabeth* in port for sixteen days.

Waln received word of Wilson's execution of his release in a letter from Child. A thread of self-satisfaction runs through it—Child felt he had done very well indeed in a difficult situation and in handling an obstinate man. Wilson said, he wrote,

That unless I would agree to pay him for that Rum he would now detain the Brigg, with a good deal of Idle nonsense on which I agreed that if he would make proof by Captain Golly's Oath . . . I would pay him for it. With much Difficulty I got him at last to give a release . . . on my promising to pay the charges of the attachment. . . .

These charges cost Waln £27-2-7½ which included mileage to Lucea and the deputy's wages and subsistence on board the *Elizabeth* during the detention. Rum was not the only thing that flowed from those two hogsheads.

Child ends his letter on a smug note, unintentionally calculated to annoy Waln:

I don't doubt but this Account has given you much anxiety and it has really given me much trouble. I wish you to fall in a better hand in prosecuting your future busyness as I think this man was not fit for the Undertaking.

Waln is far from satisfied. In his reply on June 29, he turns his strangely controlled ire on Child. He notes the omission of £121-13-8¼ never received from Wilson, and tells Child that knowing that Golley had moneys of Wilson's in his

hands, he had attached them in a court action and received £88-16-10 on account.

This method of collection was easy, for Golley was then back in Philadelphia. Thus Waln in turn catches Wilson when his guard is down. But Waln was not yet through with Child: ". . . this is by many not the only charge we are dissatisfied with, £47-10 for carrying the Hostage money to Hispaniola we expected would have been struck off on so clear proof that it was never paid. . . ." Child seemed no better than Wilson in the tangled affairs of the *Rebecca*. "We cannot help Thinking thee has not sufficiently attended to this affair," Waln complained. And as for the two hogsheads of rum, Captain Golley bluntly refused to swear they belonged to Wilson. "I think it will be much for Thy Interest to return home," Waln concludes to Child. This was pretty close to discharging his second Jamaica agent. In writing thus he went very much farther than he had ever gone with Wilson.

So Waln now, at outs with Child, once again turns to Wilson. On August 22 he writes, "Thou now seems disirous of settling our Accounts tho no regard has been paid to my many Letters. . . ." He points out to Wilson how full of errors his accounts have been, and begs him to send a reckoning in full that all between them may be settled. He hardly expects Wilson to do anything as he thinks back on the years of neglect, duplicity, and confidence abused; but he once again at the very end finds himself ready to forgive. "I do not incline to Recapitulate," he observes, "if Thy own heart acquits thee I am content and have been thy friend." The Quaker in Waln had spoken, and spoken for the last time.

Apparently he had not heard from Wilson since the previous September, but in a few months a letter comes from Kingston, and in the Spring Waln again proposes that their

accounts be settled amicably. They probably were not. The record is not clear. In the Summer of 1766 news came to Philadelphia that Robert Wilson had died. Walm was finally rid of his neglectful factor. To a friend in Jamaica he wrote that all Wilson's accounts with Shoemaker and Walm were in the hands of a merchant, Thomas Harper. "Please call on him," he added. Nothing came of it.

And so Robert Wilson was dead. Unwittingly, James Child wrote his obituary when he observed to Walm, "In the course of all my Bussiness I remember not to have met a more obstinate Ignorant man."

Much later, Richard Walm, Jr., stood before the high desk where lay his books of account. He thumbed his index, then pulled down his calf-bound "Ledger A." Turning to folio 115, he read "Dr Brigantine *Rebecah*, my account proper." His clerk had ruled it off sometime before. As Walm pondered the figures, perhaps he remembered his words written so long ago—"I am a little unfortunate in that vessel." He dipped his quill in the ink, and, beneath the clerk's neat entries scrawled some memoranda. At the very end he added the words,

"so that my exact loss is £740."

This recital of the *Rebecca's* adventures was dissected out of a large and conglomerate mass of family papers, initially those of Richard Walm, Jr., the Philadelphia Quaker merchant. Their span reaches from 1759 to the Civil War. In the Colonial period they cover all the incidents of trade from Philadelphia, not only to the West India Islands, but to the British Isles and western Europe as well. The paper deals with some of the incidents in the West India trade, but not all of them.

The material, never before used, is embraced in Walm's files for the period of 1762 to 1765. It includes his letter copy book, the letters and statements of account and prices current from Barbados, Jamaica and elsewhere to him; his day book, his ledger, invoice book, the insurance policies, and sundry other pertinent documents. It is singularly complete.

The writer is indebted to a friend of many, many years—the owner of this collection, Mrs. Benjamin Rush, formerly Mrs. Richard Waln Meirs of Philadelphia and Walnford, New Jersey, for permission to use them. Mrs. Rush is a well known collector and connoisseur of things Colonial—the beautiful, the unusual, the interesting. Having removed the Waln papers from the old mill in which they were tucked away, she has been their custodian and owner, a de facto trustee as it were, for over three decades. Family papers are often burned, while trumpery jewelry is preserved. Mrs. Rush's mind is not given to such unthinking action.

As far as possible the words used in the article are the words and phrases of the actors themselves. These men tell their own stories without present-day interpretation or present-day similies and without editorial interference.

The writer charges himself with an unliquidated debt due Dr. John H. Powell of Philadelphia for his uncounted suggestions during the preparation of this paper. Often these suggestions were savage—always they were vital. His interest from the time the story was outlined to him until it was in final type-script never once faded.

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