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### Nathaniel Wilmer (c. 1650-1711),

QUAKER MERCHANT AND SHIPOWNER OF LONDON, AND FRIEND OF WILLIAM PENN; WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF HIS BIBLE.

**N**ATHANIEL WILMER was the second son of Captain Nathaniel Wilmer, of the parish of St. Dionis Backchurch, London (and later of Cashel, Ireland), a "citizen and grocer" of London, also described as a "citizen and armourer."

This Captain Wilmer was the third son of John Wilmer, M.A., born at Sherborne, co. Warwick, circa 1584, and for some forty-three years the Puritan incumbent of Northill, co. Bedford, and formerly curate to the celebrated Puritan divine, William Gouge, M.A. (1575-1653), of St. Anne's, Blackfriars. John Wilmer, whose ancestry will be found in the *History of the Wilmer Family*,<sup>1</sup> was buried in 1655, described as "minister of God's word." By his wife Mary (?) Hoget (or Hoggett), he had a family of twelve children, five of whom were clergymen in the Church of England, and of these, two were ejected for nonconformity in co. Sussex in 1662, viz., Samuel at Clapham-cum-Patching, and Thomas at Pagham. A younger brother, Isaac, was rector of Coombes in the same county, but, as Calamy informs us, died [in 1660] before the Act of Uniformity, but it is probable that he also was silenced.

Another brother was Elisha Wilmer, a "citizen and ironmonger" of London, who resided at Wapping, where

<sup>1</sup> Foster and Green, 1888.

he died in 1661. His only surviving daughter, Mary, the last of his family who survived the Great Plague, became a Friend, and from her the Quaker families of Mackett, Peirie and Willett descended, and the present Wilmer Mackett Willett, a clergyman of the Church of England, is also a descendant.

Of Samuel Wilmer's family, Ann married, in 1700, William Ridgeley, also a Friend, so that it will be found that descendants of three of these brothers at least became Quakers.

But to revert to Captain Nathaniel Wilmer. He was baptized at Northill in 1621, and was apprenticed to Lewis Bicker, a "citizen and grocer" of London; and in 1646, having several Wilmer relatives at Reading, of a family of town-clerks, etc., there, journeyed to Berkshire for a wife, and married Constance Sherwood, of East Hendred, of a county family connected with that of Bulstrode Whitelocke, some of which held the office of High Sheriff for their county.

Upon his marriage, Nathaniel Wilmer was settled at St. Dionis Backchurch, London; and in 1650, immediately after Cromwell's return from his work of "pacification" in Ireland, he held a Captain's commission from the Protector to raise a hundred men for transportation by way of Bristol or Chester to Ireland.

Prior to this, Wilmer's eldest son, John Wilmer, was born in London in 1647; he was later a Friend, a "citizen and merchant-taylor" of London, a silk merchant of Friday Street, and had a country home at Ealing. He died in 1723, having married thrice, into three well-known Quaker families, viz., those of Lamboll of Reading, Knight of Godmersham, and Myers of Aldingham. By his third wife, Mary Myers, he had, with other children, a daughter Grizell Wilmer (1692-1756), wife of Jonathan Gurnell (1684-1753), merchant, of London, and lessee of the Manor of Great Ealing, and friend of, and bill-discounter to, William Penn, from whom descend a great many Quaker and other families.

Captain Nathaniel Wilmer eventually settled at Cashel, in co. Tipperary, Ireland, and died there in 1654, aged thirty-three, in command, under the celebrated Colonel Richard Le Hunte, ancestor to the

present excellent Colonial Governor, Sir George Ruthven Le Hunte, K.C.M.G.

Captain Wilmer's will is dated 19 March, 1654. He refers to his two sons; John as "now in the tuition of his grandmother, Constance Sherwood [*née* Saunders, of Newbury] in the county of Berks"; and Nathaniel as "now in the tuition of his mother and my dearly-loved wife in Cashell." To these his two sons he gives lands in co. Cork, etc., amongst which were "three plow lands more or less as it was sett out and appointed to mee for my service in Ireland . . . they paying thereout the thirde part unto their mother my wife during her naturall life." He also leaves his wife interest in lands and houses at Cashel, and "my cattle, plate, household goods," etc. "To my welbeloved cozen Nathaniell Laurence<sup>2</sup> my guilt and silver rapier and to his child one silver spoone. To my trustie servant Richard Cornelius my white horse [charger, no doubt], and my wearinge clothes. I appoint my affectionate and loving wife executrix."

The will was proved by the relict Constance Wilmer at Dublin, 30 May, 1655, Colonel Richard Le Hunte and Thomas Barzey, gent. (one of the witnesses), giving a certificate or testimony that the will was that of the late Captain Wilmer.

Shortly after the Captain's death, his widow, Constance Wilmer, joined the early Quaker Church, probably through the preaching of Burrough and Howgill in 1655. In 1661, she, with her countryman, Joseph Coale of Reading, who died in prison there in 1670, aged thirty-four, addressed a quarto pamphlet to Thomas Fuller or Fulwar (1593-1667), Archbishop of Cashel, 1661-1667. It is entitled *Some Religious Affaires Signified in a Letter from one called a Quaker, to Arch-Bishop Fuller, in Ireland. Also some Queries out of Conscientious Scruples propounded to all the Bishops in general in that Nation, for satisfaction to doubtful consciences. As also some reasons shewing why we deny all other kinds of Profession of Religion, and are turned*

<sup>2</sup> He who was Puritan vicar of Keysoe, Beds., had married Wilmer's first cousin, Mary Hoget, of the family of Anthony Hoget, a former incumbent of Northill.

to this way, in which we now are scornfully called Quakers. For the Arch-Bishop of Cashel, these.

“ This is a true Copy [adds Constance Wilmer] of what was delivered to Arch-Bishop Fuller the 30th day of the 8th Month, but he seemed to deny to answer it, and told constant Wilmer and Mary Pearce,<sup>3</sup> by whom it was delivered, that he could not tell how to satisfie them, & that it was not his work to do it, but they might come to Church & conforme themselves &c. And some other discourse they had with him, but no Answer is yet had to these sober Propositions.” The pamphlet treats of “ The true light,” “ New Birth,” “ True Ministers Called of God,” “ Tithes,” “ Persecution,” “ Baptism of Infants,” etc. Copies of this now very scarce pamphlet are in the libraries of Devonshire House, E.C., and Birmingham (Bevan-Naish collection).

We have no further particulars of Constance Wilmer, but that she was living at the time of her elder son's second marriage in 1684 to Phœbe Knight, of Godmersham and Dover ; her age was then about sixty-two.

Nathaniel Wilmer the younger was born apparently at Cashel about 1650. He was “ my young sonn ” in 1654, as we have seen, and by 1686 he had settled in St. Giles's-in-the-Fields, London, as a merchant and ship-owner, and was evidently a prosperous man.

In Whitehead's *Christian Progress*<sup>4</sup> we learn that he was one of the suffering Friends summoned by George Whitehead, together with the Informers, to appear before the two Commissioners appointed by the King (James II.), who were to report to him on the merits of these cases of suffering. Of those who were thus summoned there are four lists, those Friends who appeared in the first and second part of the case, those Friends who were not examined, amongst whom were Nathaniel Wilmer, Francis Stamper, William Crouch, William Bingley, etc., and fourthly the Informers.

It would appear that Wilmer was in partnership with

<sup>3</sup> Mary Pearce was the wife of Richard Pearce, a distinguished Quaker apothecary of Limerick, and one who suffered for his principles. He issued, with his wife Mary, a trade-token, viz.,

*Obverse*—RICHARD. PEARCE. OF.=A MORTAR AND PESTLE.

*Reverse*—LIMERICK, APOTHECARY=R.M.P. 1668.

<sup>4</sup> 1725, p. 595.

a Friend named James Brown, of St. Giles's-in-the-Fields, who, in 1673, for refusing to bear arms, suffered distress of goods with Edmund Caryl to the amount of £5 11s. 6d.<sup>s</sup> and who, in 1686, was under prosecution in the ecclesiastical court, but discharged.

In 1686, August 11th, Nathaniel Wilmer acquired a folio Bible, or at least had this date engraved on the covers, which date may possibly be that of the death of his mother, Constance Wilmer; of this Bible we will speak later.

In 1688 we hear of Wilmer in connection with the bankruptcy of Richard Watson, an excellent Friend, belonging to Stockton Monthly Meeting, the particulars of whose case are of singular and pathetic interest, and well deserve publication.

Under date "Stockton y<sup>e</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> of y<sup>e</sup> 12<sup>th</sup> month, 1688," we learn from the Monthly Meeting books that "the letter ordered to be sent to Na: Wilmoore [was] as followeth, [viz.] "

Friend Nathaniell Wilmoore, we are informed by Rich: Watson y<sup>t</sup> thou art one of his Credittors & refuses to seeke releif upon y<sup>e</sup> Commission of bankrupt sued out against him & y<sup>t</sup> he supposeth thou art informed y<sup>t</sup> he haith made some considerable resarve & haith not justly giuen up his estate; & at y<sup>e</sup> request of y<sup>e</sup> s<sup>d</sup> Richard Watson, we being his neighbours & some of us his famillier acquaintance doe hereby certifie unto those whome it may Concern y<sup>t</sup> to our knowledge y<sup>e</sup> s<sup>d</sup> Rich: Watson & Jane his wife, though by Law she was not oblided to doe it, haue giuen up all their Lands & tenements in Norton & Stockton; & we neuer heard, neither doe we belieue y<sup>t</sup> they or either of them haue or euer had any land or tenement else where, & to y<sup>e</sup> best of our knowledg we doe certifie y<sup>t</sup> his estate in shipping is discouered & his books were giuen to y<sup>e</sup> Commishoners at their first Comeing, their houshold goods & marchandise was giuen up, & as to money we belieue he had very little, & further more things not mentioned in his bookes some of us doath know he haith made discouery of, soe y<sup>t</sup> soe far as we know or haue any just ground to belieue, they haue made noe Consealment but haue delt ingeanously in discouering & giueing up what was theirs; & therefore we think it hard y<sup>t</sup> any friend should stand out & espetially y<sup>t</sup> Na: Wilmoore should be y<sup>e</sup> man because by diuers letters boath from thyselpe & Ja: Browne we haue sene how seamingly thou didst Condesend to take a proportionall part prouided thou might fare no wors then other Creditors. We doe assure ye some of us are deeply Conserved & our debts as just & mannyfest as thine is & our endeauors to y<sup>e</sup> utmost were used y<sup>t</sup> we might haue releife.

<sup>s</sup> Besse, i. 437.

Y<sup>e</sup> nicety of y<sup>e</sup> Commishoners were such y<sup>t</sup> wee Could not be admitted of, which by y<sup>e</sup> method Richard Watson put ye upon, there was noe hazard in thy case ; all friends here haue found themselves obbleiged for y<sup>e</sup> truth sake as well as for their owne & R : W : sake to accept what y<sup>e</sup> Estate would raise, & giue him discharge y<sup>t</sup> he may be fully at Liberty to use his future indeauours ; he promising & we belieueing y<sup>t</sup> if euer god shall here after enable him he will make further sattisfaction ; & y<sup>t</sup> which did partly induce friends here unto ; was not only what we believed concerning giueing up of his Estate an account as afores<sup>d</sup> but also because friends in y<sup>e</sup> truth aduised him to put some of his Creditors suing out y<sup>e</sup> Commishon of Bankrupt[cy] contrary to y<sup>e</sup> aduice of some of his neer relations soe y<sup>t</sup> friends boath from this monthly meetting & alsoe from our Quarterly meetting haue put to their hands to help indeauours y<sup>t</sup> friends might not be excluded by reason of their testimony against swearing ; y<sup>e</sup> obtaining of which preuili<sup>d</sup>g friends accounted very well of ; & when all this is done y<sup>t</sup> thou should be y<sup>e</sup> only man to exclude thy selfe, we are sorry for it ; therefore our desire & aduice in loue & good will unto ye is y<sup>t</sup> thou maist noe longer omit to act as others haue done ; & we are pswaied Richard Watson's endeauours will not be wantting to promote thy Interest what he can & if any thing Ly in our pour either by aduise or assistance we shall alwayes be redy to serue ye in what we may, & rest thy friends in y<sup>e</sup> truth.

ffriends p<sup>s</sup>ent at this meetting

*For Stockton & Norton :* THO : CHIPCHASE ; ROBT : PATTISON ; JA : WOOD ; JO<sup>N</sup> WOOD ; RO : HARTBURNE ; THO : DODSWORTH ; W<sup>M</sup> DODSWORTH ; NICO COCKFIELD ; W<sup>M</sup> HARRISON.

*For Darlington & Yarme :* ROBERT TRUMAN, RA : REEDE ; LAUR : APLEBY ; THO : THORP ; DAN : ROBINSON.

*For Shotton :* JO<sup>N</sup> WILKINSON, JO<sup>N</sup> HALL.

The above letter is valuable as an illustration of the remarkable rectitude of the early Friends, of the care they took to clear the Truth, of their unselfish kindness to a brother in difficulties, and their earnest endeavours to assist him to discharge his liabilities. Richard Watson, whose large shipping business had long caused uneasiness to Friends, was a Friend evidently both beloved and esteemed by them. He was eventually restored to the fullest unity with his friends, settled in London, and in 1706 we find Richard Watson writing to his friend Richard Lindley of Yarm, cordially acknowledging a gift of £4 remitted him by Stockton Monthly Meeting.

Under date 18 July, 1689, we learn from the Burleigh Collection of State Papers<sup>6</sup> that a warrant was issued by the Government "to search for and apprehend

<sup>6</sup> State Papers Domestic, Warrants Book 34, p. 412.

Nathaniel Wilmer for corresponding with the enemy," probably with James II. or his adherents, for which it will be remembered Penn was also in serious difficulty, was imprisoned within the confines of his house, and finally cleared by the government of William and Mary.

In 1691 was printed a now very rare pamphlet (not in D.) entitled, *Some Letters and an Abstract of Letters from Pennsylvania, containing the State and Improvement of that Province*. Published to prevent mis-reports. Printed, and sold by Andrew Sow[l]e, at the Crooked-Billet in Holloway Lane, in Shoreditch, 1691 (Quarto, 1½ sheets). "This," says Joseph Smith in his *Catalogue* (vol. i. p. 849), "is a very interesting tract relative to the early history of Pennsylvania." It contains letters by John Goodson of Philadelphia to Penn, dated 1690; Robert Turner addressed to Nathaniel Wilmer; John Goodson to John and Susanna Dew; and refers to J. Tizack, I. W., Alexander Beardsley, W. Bradford, C. Pickering, R. Hill, William Rodeney, John Holland, Richard Morris and Francis Harrison.

The letter to Nathaniel Wilmer from his friend Robert Turner is as follows :

Nathaniel Wilmer, Friend,

My Love to thee, This comes Cover to the inclosed, for my Friend W[illiam] P[enn]. I know not but by his writing, he may before this comes to hand, be on his Voyage towards us; if so, then I desire, by the first opportunity presenting to send it back to me here, to be delivered to my own Hand. I hope the ship *Tryal* is arrived in England, before this comes to hand; if so, John Fuller, my Love to him, and to my old Friends from Ireland, if thou see any of them, the Lord preserve them and us.

I heard lately a Letter from Abraham Fuller<sup>7</sup> from London, directed to John Fuller, giving some account of Ireland, and of some few Friends, God preserve them and keep them to himself; The Lord is Angry, Vengeance is his and he will repay it.

God prospers his People and their honest Endeavours in the Wilderness; and many have cause to Bless and Praise his holy Arm, who in his Love hath spread a Table large with us, even beyond the expectation or belief of many; yea, to the admiration of our Neighbouring Colonies; let the Murmurers, Repiners and evil Tiding Tellers say as they

<sup>7</sup> A distinguished Irish Friend and Minister, of Lehinsey in King's County and of Moate Meeting. He was convinced about 1660; was a serviceable and hospitable man, and a sufferer for the Truth, and died in 1694, aged about 75 (see *Piety Promoted*).

will, God is amongst his People and the Wilderness is his, and he waters and refreshes it with his moistening Dew, whereby the Barren are become pleasant Fields, and gardens of his delight, blessed be his Name saith my Soul, and Peace and Happiness to all God's people every where. I should be glad to heare of the Faithful, and of their Welfare, especially of my Antient friends in Ireland, who sojourn in a land of great distress, wherein I have been,

Thy Friend in the Truth

ROBERT TURNER.<sup>8</sup>

We next hear of Nathaniel Wilmer from the Devonshire House Monthly Meeting books, where we find "a paper from a meet[ing] the 8-iii-1700 [is described as] being a testimony against Nathaniel Willmott [Wilmer in margin], ff[rancis] Plumsted to record it."

We gather from the Richard Watson bankruptcy case that Wilmer was evidently of an over-reaching character in commercial pursuits, and this may have been the reason for his disownment, or some other contributory cause.

Finally we find amongst the administrations in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury at Somerset House (anno 1711 fol. 89) that "Nathaniel Wilmer, late of St. Giles's-in-the-Fields, Co. Middlesex, bachelor; but deceased in the Merchant Ship *The Reward*, upon the High Seas [dying intestate], administration [was granted] 18 May, 1711, to William Arnold, the principal creditor; John Wilmer [of Friday Street], the brother and next of Kin, having first renounced."

<sup>8</sup> It is evident by this letter that Robert Turner had been well acquainted with Constance Wilmer and her two sons, when they were all resident in Ireland.

"About the year 1657," say Wight and Ruddy (1751), "Robert Turner, having been instrumental to the convincement of a few who lived at Grange, near Charlemont in the Province of Ulster, this year [1660] their numbers being considerably encreased through the labours of other travelling Friends, a Meeting was settled there."

In 1658 Robert Turner issued a large quarto pamphlet entitled *Truth's Defence*. This has a preface by E. B., supposed Edward Burrough. It refers amongst other things to Robert Child, Priest of Bandon Bridge, co. Cork, and to one Humphrey Whittingh, Priest, etc. Robert Turner suffered persecution in Dublin in 1660 and 1661; by 1683 we find him owning lot 31, a plot of a thousand acres or more, on Delaware front, Philadelphia, his neighbours being Joseph Fisher and Thomas Holme; and these Friends owned similar lots in the High Street, numbers 22 and 24. There is "A Letter of Robert Turner's" in William Penn's *Further Account of Pennsylvania*, printed in 1685, which is stated by Joseph Smith to be "a very interesting letter from Robert Turner to Governor Penn, dated, Philadelphia, 3rd of the 6th month (August), 1685, giving an account of the original settlements and improvements."

We must now refer to Nathaniel Wilmer's Bible, which has recently and most unexpectedly come into our possession. It was purchased in London in 1912, by P. Mordaunt Barnard, M.A., B.D., an erudite bookseller of Tunbridge Wells, and by him sold to the present writer. It is a massive folio, 18½ by 12 by 5¼ inches, weighing over twenty-six pounds, and is handsomely bound in contemporary black morocco and silver, with leaves richly gilt, and was printed at the Theatre, Oxford, in 1685. The Old Testament title is wanting, and the only inscription now remaining gives the name of a former owner in 1804, viz., Alexander Croke, of Studley, Oxon. The Bible is printed in large Roman type, contains the Apocrypha, and the handsomely engraved New Testament title is an allegorical picture of the angel of inspiration dictating the gospel to the evangelist John. This Bible is well described in the old couplet of our childhood :

All bound in silver and edged with gold,  
Its weight was more than the child could hold.

The covers of the Bible are richly ornamented with massive engraved silver corner-pieces, silver fillets, and plates for clasps, the latter of which, with other defects, having been carefully restored through the kindness and under the superintendence of our late friend, David Richardson, of Newcastle, who was greatly interested in this really splendid specimen of old binding. In the centre of each cover is a triangular silver plate upon which is engraved with other ornamentation, "Nathaniel Wilmer, His Bible, August XI<sup>th</sup>, 1686."

It is instructive to notice that at a time when Bibles were expensive and comparatively scarce, often no expense was spared in the binding of this greatest of earthly treasures.

To conclude, it is remarkable that this handsome folio should, after over two hundred years' alien possession, once more be owned by a kinsman of Nathaniel Wilmer, and a lineal descendant of his brother, John Wilmer, of Friday Street, London, who died in 1723.

JOSEPH J. GREEN.

*Hastings.*