In Defense of Thomas Digges

History has dealt harshly with Thomas Digges. That Maryland gentleman, who sojourned in England during the American Revolution, has been branded as an embezzler, a rogue, and a British spy. None of these charges was ever proved conclusively. Nineteenth-century scholars, studying the then available correspondence of Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, formed their own opinions, however, and jotted them down.

Franklin had accused the Marylander of pocketing for his own use most of the money sent him in 1780–1781 for support of American seamen in British prisons. The specific allegation was that Digges had drawn upon the American minister plenipotentiary in France for £495 sterling, but had applied only £30 of it to the relief of the prisoners. Hence, Franklin’s letters had bristled with bitter invectives, such as “... he is the greatest villain I ever met with”; “As to Digges, I have no confidence in him, nor in anything he says, or may say...”; “Beware of him, for he is very artful, and has cheated many.”

2 Franklin to Gustavus Conyngham, Feb. 6, 1782, ibid., V, 149.
3 Franklin to David Hartley, Apr. 5, 1782, Jared Sparks, ed., Diplomatic Correspondence of the American Revolution (Boston, 1829–1830), II, 240; Wharton, V, 293–294.
4 Franklin to Robert R. Livingston, June 25, 1782, ibid., 512.
John Adams had written of a visit paid to him in 1782 by Digges, who had Lord North's direction to ask whether Adams, or anyone else, could treat with Great Britain for a truce. The report of this visit had been delivered to Downing Street, but Digges' character was "such that they did not choose to depend upon it." Influenced by these and other pertinent papers, Charles Francis Adams, editing his grandfather's "works," added this footnote beneath one of Digges' letters:

Mr. Digges, the writer of many letters under this and other signatures, was a Maryland gentleman who remained in England during the war, and maintained secret communication with several of the American ministers, and not improbably with the British Government likewise; though apparently he was but little trusted by either side. Dr. Franklin, in many of his letters, inveighs bitterly against him for his embezzlement of money remitted to him for the use of American prisoners.

Perusal of this same material led George Bancroft, the historian, to place a memorandum in one volume of his manuscript collection: "Digges was a rogue, unworthy of trust."

Edward Everett Hale and his son published in 1887 two volumes covering a hasty and none-too-accurate tour through the American Philosophical Society and other repositories. They happened twice upon Thomas Digges. The first time was in a letter from Lord Shelburne in 1782, containing an assurance that while Digges "had been, it seems, employed by the late Administration in an indirect commission to sound Mr. Adams ... having heard by accident a very indifferent account of his character, and particularly that Dr. Franklin had a bad opinion of him, I, from that moment resolved to have nothing to do with him."

6 Adams to Franklin, Apr. 16, 1782, ibid., 570.
7 Footnote by Charles Francis Adams, ibid., 147.
9 Edward Everett Hale and E. E. Hale, Jr., Franklin in France (Boston, 1887), II, 47.
10 Ibid., 46 (note). William Petty, second Earl of Shelburne (1737-1805), was called upon by George III to organize a new ministry to succeed that of Lord North. He refused the premiership, but served as Home Secretary under the Rockingham Ministry in 1782. He had just come into office when Digges returned from his visit to John Adams in Amsterdam.
The second Hale discovery was a letter from Franklin's nephew, Jonathan Williams, Jr. Reporting from Dublin in 1785, Williams had advised his uncle that Digges was in jail, adding, "He has been playing the rogue in this country [Ireland], but like all other cunning rogues has shown himself to be a fool, and is now paying severely for his folly and wickedness."  

All these bits of evidence, direct or hearsay, Francis Wharton assembled in the late eighties of the last century, while compiling his monumental *The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, and proceeded to place another stamp of infamy upon the luckless Digges. In the introduction to the six volumes, whose printing he would not live to see, the ailing editor wrote, "The character of Thomas Digges will be hereafter considered, and it will be seen that he grossly betrayed American trusts which had been placed in his hands." About a hundred pages farther along, under the chapter title "British Spies," he presented his conclusions:

Thomas Digges, whose name appears occasionally in the following correspondence, was said to be a native of Maryland. However this may be, he was for some years before the war resident in London, where he became acquainted with Arthur Lee, who, on December 8, 1777, recommended him to the confidence of Congress, and on April 16, 1778, described him to Samuel Adams as "a very worthy person, and together with his brother, who is yet in London, has done service to the cause." We now know, however, that Digges was at this time, and for some time afterwards, in the employ of the British ministry. . . . Digges sent to Adams English information (no doubt of a decoy nature inspired by the British Government).  

This damnation of Thomas Digges has endured well into the twentieth century, where Wharton's volumes have been accepted as immutable. Already three historians have embraced his dictum and have labeled Digges accordingly. One has called him "a British spy and a defaulter"; another, "one Digges, whom the Doctor [Franklin] had already described as 'the greatest villain I ever met with'" and "Digges (a British agent)"; and the third, "An American merchant

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11 *Ibid.*, 47 (note). Letter of Jonathan Williams, Jr., in the Franklin Papers, XXXVIII, 158, American Philosophical Society, hereafter cited as Franklin, APS. The Hales edited it from the original which reads: "He has been playing the Rogue in this Country, but like all other cunning Rogues shewn himself to be a Fool also, and is now paying severely for his Folly & Wickedness."

12 Wharton, I, 541, 658.
in London, who a few years later, turned out to be a British spy, a defaulter, and an embezzler."\(^{13}\)

Despite the odium heaped upon him, Thomas Digges was not as bad as he has been portrayed. He did embezzle some of the money intended for the prisoners, but not to the amount specified by Franklin. The Doctor's ledger might show that £495 had been advanced, but when he charged that only £30 had been put to proper use, he was merely repeating a guess made by one of his English correspondents, for Digges never submitted a final account.\(^{14}\)

Unhappy circumstances—the cutting off of remittances from home and the failure of escaped prisoners to repay advances he had made to them—had forced Digges to substitute ingenuity for integrity. He had written Franklin in September, 1779, that "any American sailors in distress, hiding from the press gangs, or who had found means to liberate themselves, generally fly to me, and drain me exceedingly of cash: I should not think this a hardship, could I possibly get money from home or borrow it here on easy terms."\(^{15}\) Almost a year later, in July, 1780, he remarked sourly, again to Franklin, "I have never had a bill paid, nor any remittance from any one of my Countrymen pushing home."\(^{16}\) To one accustomed to affluence, the desire to live as a gentleman persisted even if the means did not. When one must needs exist by his wits, transition from respectability to roguery becomes, all too often, an inescapable step. Thus it must have been with Thomas Digges.

At no time, however, did his impoverished state drive him to act as a British agent or spy. Suggestions that he sent Adams and Franklin decoy information supplied by the North Ministry have no basis in fact; nor has the implication that he was in correspondence with the enemy as early as 1778. Had he been guilty of such betrayals, the evidence would have been discovered long ago in British archives. The correspondence and papers of George III, Lord George Germain, Lord Sandwich, and numerous lesser lights who flourished around the


\(^{14}\) William Hodgson to Franklin, Apr. 12, 1781, Franklin, APS, XXI, 141.

\(^{15}\) V. J. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Sept. 20, 1779, Franklin Papers, V, 93, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, hereafter cited as Franklin, HSP.

\(^{16}\) W.S.C. [Digges] to Franklin, July 17, 1780, _ibid._, 138.
Court of St. James during that period, have been printed or calendared, yet the name of Thomas Digges is conspicuous by its absence in letters and indexes.

Lord Shelburne referred to him twice and the King once, each commenting upon the report of his visit to John Adams in 1782. "The Writer of the Paper that accompanies this has not afforded new matter, but a melancholy confirmation of the American dependency on France," George III remarked regretfully. Shelburne advised His Majesty three weeks later "that the greatest part of Mr. Digges's paper was false." Shelburne's second reference has already been quoted. Comparison of the letters Digges wrote to Franklin with other contemporary accounts of the same events, disposes of the contention that he supplied false information. Instead, his news was timely and frequently of service.

This interesting and controversial Maryland gentleman has never been studied in the light of his own letters to Franklin, the Doctor's replies, and the letters exchanged between Franklin and William Hodgson, a London merchant, after the peculations came to light. The major portion of this correspondence, seventy-eight letters from Digges between September 18, 1778, and December 29, 1780, are in the Franklin Papers at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. There are sixteen more of his letters in other repositories. Contemporary copies of letters from Franklin to Digges, nineteen in number, are in the American Legation Letter Books for 1779, 1780, and 1781, at the Library of Congress. The interesting Franklin-Hodgson correspondence during 1781 and 1782 is found in the Franklin Papers at the American Philosophical Society, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the Library of Congress.

Thomas Attwood Digges, third son of William and Ann Attwood Digges, was born in 1742 at Warburton Manor, situated on the Maryland side of the Potomac River hard by the mouth of Piscataway Creek. Nearly opposite on the Virginia shore, Lawrence

17 Sir John Fortesque, ed., *The Correspondence of King George the Third From 1760 to December 1783* (London, 1928), V, 431-433, 486, 487.
18 None of these sources represented new discoveries. They have been available to students for more than half a century.
Washington a few years later would build a spacious house and call it Mount Vernon. The Digges ancestral home was a "handsome seat," rising upon a promontory that commanded a magnificent view of the broad river. The estate comprised some twelve hundred acres of land in Prince George County and had been purchased in 1717 by Charles Digges, Thomas Attwood's grandfather.

Young Thomas Attwood had distinguished forebears, stemming from Sir Dudley Digges, Knight-Baronet and Master of the Rolls in the reign of Charles I of England. There had been Sir Dudley's son Edward, who had emigrated to Virginia in 1650 to found the Digges line in America and to serve for a period as governor of that colony; Edward's son William, who had removed to Maryland in 1680 and had been a member of the Provincial Council; and William's son Charles, who had built Warburton Manor. Charles's son, the second William, seems to have been content to lead the life of a colonial gentleman, father a family of six boys and as many girls, and provide for the education of those who reached maturity. Three of his sons were given the opportunity to continue their studies abroad. Thomas Attwood and his brother George, five years his junior, were sent to Oxford. Joseph, the youngest boy, having embarked upon a medical career, was dispatched in 1766 to complete his education at the University of Edinburgh.

The years Thomas Attwood Digges spent at Oxford are not specified. During that time and later, according to one chronicler, he was no stranger to London, "where he was spoken of as 'the handsome American,' and where his portrait was painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds."

How much time Thomas Attwood spent in America after his education ended is difficult to determine. The Digges family at Warburton Manor had become acquainted with the Washingtons on the Virginia side of the Potomac, and were quite intimate with George Washington.

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22 Ramsburgh. The chart of the Digges family shows that one son, Francis, died at the age of seven, and two daughters, Susannah and Ann, "died young."
24 Wilstach, 327. The portrait is extant and was probably painted between 1761 and 1771. Ramsburgh; Allan Cunningham, *The Life and Discoveries of Sir Joshua Reynolds, First President of the Royal Academy* (Hudson, O., 1853), 22–46.
Washington and his bride, who occupied Mount Vernon in 1759 and thereafter. Washington's diaries not infrequently mention various members of the Digges clan, but from 1760 to 1775, Thomas Attwood's name is not among them. Undoubtedly they were known to each other, but hardly close friends. Thus, the statement that Washington lost no time in securing Digges' services in London at the outbreak of the American Revolution is more than suspect.

Even more lacking in proof is a further contention that Thomas Attwood Digges was the man "whom George Washington backed when the Continental Congress desired to send a confidential representative to the English Capital" and who "received the complimentary but hazardous appointment."

The gentleman in question disposes of these fallacious claims in a letter in September, 1778, offering his services to Franklin and regretting that he had not hitherto given "personal assistance to a cause I have extremly at heart." The only indication of any correspondence with Washington during the war period is Digges' comment, in another letter to Franklin, that Washington had written him in 1777 to forward some books to Dr. William Gordon, who was preparing a history of the American Revolution.

For some years prior to the opening of hostilities, Thomas Digges was abroad. He had dropped the "Attwood," and was employed as London agent for shipping interests which took him frequently to Birmingham and Bristol and occasionally to Lisbon and Bilbao. He professed large knowledge of Portugal and her people, and prided himself upon being widely known and respected in Lisbon. Likewise, he claimed to be well acquainted in Spain, "in the merchantile way."

George Digges joined him in the early summer of 1775, so the brothers were together in London shortly after the gunfire at

26 Ramsburgh.
27 Wilstach, 327.
29 Digges to Franklin, June 11, 1779, ibid., 67.
30 Digges to Franklin, Feb. 7, 1779, Franklin Papers, III, 5, University of Pennsylvania Library, hereafter cited as Franklin, UP.
31 W.S.C. [Digges] to Franklin, Aug. 18, 1782, Franklin, HSP, V, 139.
32 V— J— D——— [Digges] to Franklin, July 6, 1779, ibid., 82.
33 Will[a Ross] [Digges] to Franklin, Nov. 30, 1779, ibid., 108.
Lexington and Concord in April had reverberated in England in May.\textsuperscript{34}

Hostilities brought an end to Thomas Digges' legitimate agency employment, but he did, according to his story, embrace every opportunity to have many "useful articles" forwarded from Bristol to America through Spain, these transactions being "as well for a certain public body as for private individuals."\textsuperscript{35} Also in those early years of the conflict he induced William Burn, one of the principal merchants in Lisbon, to send across the Atlantic "some Cargoes of salt at the period it was most essentially requisite."\textsuperscript{36} The other Lisbon merchants, as he discovered to his discomfiture, had turned against him; "not one (Mr. Burn excepted) . . . have shown the Americans any quarter."\textsuperscript{37}

London contained a number of Americans marooned, in a sense, as were the Digges brothers. With some they were closely associated. Thomas and George Digges, for example, "lived in terms of friendship & intimacy" with Arthur and William Lee of Virginia, and Ralph Izard of South Carolina.\textsuperscript{38} They also boasted of other "confidential Friends," including William Carmichael, Joshua Johnson, and Matthew Ridley, all of Maryland, and two Pennsylvanians, Samuel and Joseph Wharton.\textsuperscript{39} This little group carried on surreptitious correspondence with friends of liberty abroad, and employed various pseudonyms to evade suspicious scrutiny in the British post office. Thus, Thomas Digges assumed the first of numerous nom de plumes under which he could be addressed in England. Any epistle directed to Pierre J. DuVall, Post Office, Bristol, or to Pierre J. Bertrand, Post Office, London, would be sure to reach him.\textsuperscript{40} It was all quite conspiratorial—and harmless as well—during 1776 and well

\textsuperscript{34} The exact date of George Digges' arrival in England cannot be determined. He was fox hunting with Washington at Mount Vernon in mid-February, 1775. Washington Diaries, II, 185. His oath of fidelity, taken at Annapolis, Md., Aug. 12, 1778, states that he had been absent "for about three years last past." William Hand Browne, ed., "Journal and Correspondence of the Council of Maryland, April 1, 1778-October 26, 1779," Archives of Maryland (Baltimore, Md., 1901), XXI, 182.

\textsuperscript{35} Th[omas] D[igges] to Franklin, Apr. 9, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 57; Willm Ross [Digges] to Franklin, Nov. 30, 1779, \textit{ibid.}, 108.

\textsuperscript{36} P. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Mar. 17, 1780, \textit{ibid.}, 124.

\textsuperscript{37} W.S.C. [Digges] to Franklin, Aug. 18, 1780, \textit{ibid.}, 139.

\textsuperscript{38} Wm Forbes [Digges] to Franklin, Dec. 4, 1779, \textit{ibid.}, 106.

\textsuperscript{39} Th[omas] D[igges] to Franklin, Sept. 18, 1778, \textit{ibid.}, 48.

\textsuperscript{40} J W [Digges] to Franklin, Dec. 19, 1778, \textit{ibid.}, 51.
into 1777. By autumn of the latter year some of the group had slipped secretly across the English Channel. Remaining in London were the two Diggeses, Matthew Ridley, and Samuel Wharton.\textsuperscript{41}

Arthur Lee had joined Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane, his fellow commissioners to the French court. William Lee had followed to become a commercial agent by Congressional appointment and, later, a commissioner to the courts of Vienna and Berlin. Similarly, Ralph Izard had been commissioned to Tuscany.\textsuperscript{42} All of them corresponded with Thomas Digges. Ambiguous overtures reached him from the Lee brothers, implying that a secretaryship might await him in Paris. It was too vague, so he rejected it, reporting later: "It is true, from private, rather secret offers of their own, I might have found bed & board in their habitations; & however irksome such a situation might be to me, I would willingly have submitted, even to the prejudice of my private views or interests, provided I had been properly desired to do so."\textsuperscript{43}

Meanwhile, Digges had become involved in another matter. Great Britain had reopened two prisons to receive captured American seamen, who hitherto had been confined on board ships of the line lying idle in English naval bases. Mill Prison at Plymouth and Forton Prison near Gosport received their initial consignments of prisoners in May and June, 1777, respectively.\textsuperscript{44} By November more than three hundred were confined in the two prisons, poorly clad, inadequately fed, and facing a winter in unheated, comfortless buildings.\textsuperscript{45}

Their plight aroused Digges' sympathy. Inquiries revealed a deplorable situation in Forton Prison which he related to Arthur Lee. By the beginning of December, the latter authorized him to expend £50 sterling for necessaries for these prisoners.\textsuperscript{46} Additional facts

\textsuperscript{41} Ridley was still in London in August, 1778, residing at No. 4, Circus Tower Hill. Memorandum by Thomas Digges, unsigned, Aug. [?], 1778, \textit{ibid.}, 47. Samuel Wharton stayed in England until 1779. Oath of allegiance, Apr. 9, 1779, Franklin, APS, LXXIV, 34.


\textsuperscript{43} A McPherson [Digges] to Franklin, July [August] 13, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 84.

\textsuperscript{44} Richard Livsey, ed., \textit{A Relic of the Revolution} (Boston, 1847), 44; John Thornton's report on Forton Prison, Jan. 9, 1778, Arthur Lee Papers, IV, 11, Harvard University Library, hereafter referred to as Lee Papers.

\textsuperscript{45} Actual count of prisoners at Forton on Dec. 29, 1777, was 119. \textit{Ibid.} In Mill Prison on Dec. 28, 1777, were 289 prisoners. John Waller to David Hartley, \textit{ibid.}, III, 110.

regarding the treatment accorded the unfortunates in both prisons he presented later that month to a Major John Thornton, a gentleman of questionable antecedents, sent by the commissioners in Paris to investigate. With hundreds of American prisoners "in a starving condition from cold and famine," Digges was "more than unusually agitated and unhappy." Many English gentlemen, largely of Whig persuasion, became as agitated as Thomas Digges over the treatment the North Ministry permitted in the two prisons. A call went forth for a meeting to be held the day before Christmas, 1777, at King's Arms Tavern in Cornhill, "for the Purpose of relieving the DISTRESSES of the AMERICAN PRISONERS." More than a hundred attended, launched a subscription with around £1,500 pledged immediately, and appointed a committee of twenty to administer the fund. Upon the committee were four London aldermen, a number of open sympathizers with the American cause, such as Benjamin Vaughan and William Hodgson, and two Marylanders, "Mr. Matthew Ridley and Thomas Digges, Esq." Within fifteen days subscriptions had reached £3,700, and the committee called a halt "for the present."

George Digges crossed over to France and took passage for America in the spring of 1778, but Thomas stayed on. He was busy in the administration of the prisoners' subscriptions, in one or two shipping ventures at Bristol, and in writing letters to the two Lees and Ralph Izard. Insistent and ugly rumors of dissension among the commissioners at Paris had reached London. Digges' knowledge of the quarrels was confined to reports brought by persons coming from France, and "every mouth was full of the difficulties that sub-

47 Thomas Digges to John Thornton, Dec. 21, 1777, Lee Papers, III, 89.
48 "Extract of a letter from —— Digges, Esq., to the Hon Arthur Lee, Esq., dated Bristol, August 30, 1778," ibid., VIII, 258. This letter is in printed form only.
49 The Public Advertiser (London), Jan. 2, 1778. Benjamin Vaughan (1751-1835) migrated to America in 1796. William Hodgson (1745-1851), who lived more than a century, became a warm confidant of Franklin in 1780-1783.
50 Ibid., Jan. 10, 1778.
51 George Digges was in Paris in mid-April en route to Bordeaux. Statement of George Digges, Apr. 14, 1778, Lee Papers, III, 85. He was in Philadelphia the following July. Samuel Chase to Gov. Johnson, July 4, 1778, "Journal and Correspondence of the Council of Maryland, April 1, 1778-October 26, 1779," Archives of Maryland, XXI, 155.
sisted." The story he got was that Deane and Franklin had formed a party against Arthur Lee; that this "vile combination" was to reduce Lee to a cipher and sink him in contempt, and that William Lee had come in for "his share of abuse." Digges' sympathy was enlisted in the cause of the Lee brothers. After all, he had been long and intimately acquainted with them and knew neither Franklin, Deane, nor John Adams, who was to replace Deane. He voiced his partisanship freely to the Lees.53

Such sentiments explain why William Lee in January, 1778, wrote to his brother in Congress that, should there be a commissioner appointed to Portugal, he could recommend "Mr. Thos. Digges in England, a son of Wm. Digges in Maryland, opposite to Gen'l Washington's, who is sensible, spirited, and has been invariably employed in his country's services ever since the commencement of the dispute with G.B."54 Similar endorsements of the Marylander by Arthur Lee at about the same time have previously been related.

While the Lees might recommend Thomas Digges to members of Congress, they neglected to acknowledge his numerous letters. But again, through an intermediary, they hinted that the secretaryship was still open. Just why a definite proffer of the post could not be made puzzled Digges. But he kept on writing and the one-way correspondence continued until, by the end of August, he began to wonder whether his ardent support had perhaps been misplaced. He had not received a line from Arthur Lee, "or his Bro' now for many months," although his late letters to both touched upon some particular business of their own.55 "To speak true," he later remarked, "I was afraid of joining intimately & cordially those who were engaged in disputes & quarrels which I ever disaprov'd & carefully endeavourd to shun."56 The latter statement may be subject to question, but very evidently he was ready to make an about-face.

Digges' suspicions that he might have enlisted in the wrong cause had been aroused by David Hartley, member of Parliament, noted humanitarian, and a warm friend of Benjamin Franklin's. Hartley had become acquainted with Digges "upon the business of the Amer-

53 "Extract of a letter from ——— Digges, Esq. . . . , August 30, 1778," Lee Papers, VIII, 258.
55 Memorandum by Digges, unsigned, Aug. [?], 1778, Franklin, HSP, V, 47.
56 V— J— D [Digges] to Franklin, July 6, 1779, ibid., 82.
ican prisoners.” With the former to assure him that Franklin's character was above reproach, he now was ready to forsake the unresponsive Lees, swallow previously voiced doubts about the aged senior commissioner, and turn to him, hoping to “do good in the little way I had in my Power.”

In September, 1778, Alexander Dick, of Fredericksburg, Virginia, and Thomas Wren, of Portsmouth, England, provided Thomas Digges with a fortuitous opportunity to write to Benjamin Franklin. Dick had been captain of marines on board the Virginia-armed brig *Mosquito*, captured in the West Indies. He and his fellow officers had been carried to England and lodged in Forton Prison. Wren was a humane and benevolent Presbyterian minister, who distributed to the prisoners the necessaries received from the London subscription and who, upon occasion, offered clandestine aid to any who escaped. On the night of September 6, Dick and several companions broke out of Forton and sought temporary refuge with the clergyman. Wren directed them to Digges, then engaged in one of his shipping ventures at Bristol. Digges obligingly honored Dick's bill for £25 sterling, drawn on Franklin, and wrote to the Doctor, explaining his act and asking acceptance of the bill.

I hope you will excuse me Sir for this unnecessary intrusion, but I am prompted from an ardent wish to be servicable to you or your community, to go further, and make an offer of my services to you. I am unavoidably prevented from giving my personal assistance to a cause I have extremely at heart, but I am so situated in this Country, as to have it often in my power to be servicable to those more actively & openly employd; If you can point out any mode wherein I can be useful, or will place confidence enough

57 Hartley to Franklin, Apr. 22, 1779, Correspondence of David Hartley, 1775-1781, Franklin, LC. The letter, without identifying Digges as the bearer, is printed with editorial revisions in Wharton, III, 127-131.
58 [Digges] to Franklin, Jan. 10, 1780, Franklin, HSP, V, 114.
in me to transact or do any thing for you here, I promise you Sir it shall be done with zeal punctuality secrecy & honor. It will not be prudent in me to be further explicit. . . .

Feeling that Franklin might be skeptical, he added some references which, to avoid detection, he identified thus: “M'r I——d, Mess'r L——s, M'r Jos W——n, M'r C——r m——l whom I have reason to expect is return'd to you, or any other confidential Freind who has lately gone from England, M'r R——y, or M'r J. J——n can satisfy you who & what I am; the two first mention'd Gent', & M'r R——y, can give you my name and direction.” Such thin concealment scarcely would have baffled British postal authorities had the letter been intercepted. He concluded with an expression of fear that the condition of American prisoners in England “will soon be again deplorable.”

Franklin replied on October 23, accepting Alexander Dick’s bill, agreeing to honor any reasonable drafts of a similar nature, and encouraging Digges to write whenever there was anything material or useful to impart. The graciousness of the letter exceeded the Marylander’s expectation. While eager to reply, he refrained until he could find a trusted messenger. When suitable opportunity came on December 19—“a Gent'n connected with a freind lately settled at Nantes”—Digges advised Franklin that much time was spent “with our mutual freind D——y, and we are in dayly hopes of something being done for our captive people—their situation is getting worse & worse.” He would not send the Doctor items culled from the press he said, as he knew “the public papers go regularly abroad.”

Unwittingly, Digges had struck a note in this letter which would impress Franklin. That was his refusal to take credit for items already appearing in newspapers. On that subject the Doctor later would write to James Lovell that he could furnish a multitude of dispatches with confidential information taken out of the newspapers he for-

62 These men were, of course, Ralph Izard, Arthur Lee, William Lee, Joseph Wharton, William Carmichael, Matthew Ridley and Joshua Johnson.
64 Franklin’s letter has not come to light, but its contents can be gathered from Digges’ reply of Dec. 19, 1778, ibid., 51.
65 David Hartley (1731–1813).
warded to Congress. "I know the whole Art of it," he continued, "for I have had several volunteer Correspondents in England, who have in their Letters for Years together, communicated to me Secrets of state, extracted from the Newspapers, which sometimes came to hand in those Papers by the same Post, and sometimes by the Post before." Thomas Digges, however, was not one of these.

When Digges returned to London early in the new year, he found his friend David Hartley obsessed with the idea that, but for the French alliance, a peace could be negotiated. The British M.P. had been vitally concerned in reconciliation from the beginning of the struggle and of late had found that Lord North seemed willing to listen to him. Like any sensible man, Digges, too, desired to see an end to the war. But January, 1779, did not seem a propitious time to discuss a cessation of hostilities.

Nonetheless, the influence of Hartley's thinking was apparent in the letter Digges sent to Franklin on January 31. A week later Digges wrote again, reiterating that Hartley would be helped in his efforts toward reconciliation "by the pro and con to a simple question whether or not with the assent of France a Suspension for a time of the treaty with America could be brought about, so as to give an opening for the Ministry to negotiate with your Community."

To Benjamin Franklin's no small surprise, Thomas Digges presented himself at Passy at the end of April. He carried a letter of introduction from David Hartley, and the latter's proposal for a peace parley. The British M.P. was warm in praise of his messenger:

The bearer of this and of some other papers (Mr. D) is a very sensible and worthy Gentleman, with whom I have had the pleasure of contracting an acquaintance since the Commencement of the American troubles. . . . It has been a satisfaction to me at all times to have found him a friend to the restoration of peace between the two Countries. It has likewise been an additional Satisfaction and Confirmation to me in my own thoughts upon that Subject, to find that his Sentiments have, I think upon most or all of the topics upon which we have conversed, coincided with mine. We both seem possessed of the opinion, that some plan of opening a negotiation upon preliminaries with each side might find to be a Sufficient Security to itself

67 Franklin to Lovell, Aug. 10, 1778, Franklin, LC, 606.
68 Hartley to Franklin, Jan. 22, 1779, Correspondence of David Hartley, 1775-1781, Franklin, LC.
might be practicable; and then your Sentiments, wth you gave me in a letter some years ago, might have its free scope & effect; viz. a little time for cooling might have excellent effects.

Hartley had reduced his sentiments to a paper, which opened with the astounding statement that Lord North had consented to the proposal although merely as a mediatorial proposition by a private person. His ideas were five in number: (1) five commissioners to be appointed by George III to treat with the Americans; (2) any of the five to be empowered to agree, as a preliminary, to a five- or seven-year suspension of all hostilities; (3) any one of the five to be empowered also to suspend any acts of Parliament respecting America for the same period; (4) America to be released from any treaties with foreign powers that might defeat the negotiations; and (5) that a general treaty should be agreed to as soon as these preliminaries were settled. 71

Here was Thomas Digges cast in a new role, that of mediator. Franklin accepted him as such, and discussed Hartley’s proposal at length with him. The Doctor did not commit himself immediately, so, while an answer was being formulated, Digges took a room at the Hotel de Yorke and enjoyed several days in Paris. He had one or two meetings with Arthur Lee and Ralph Izard, but did not endear himself to either by his attitude. Neither, he said, “liked the freedom with which I gave my sentiments about the quarrel when they attempted to explain it all to me & which I would not hear.” 72 There was a seeming intent to draw him into it, and he shied away from the pair and communicated with them as little as possible. 73 On the other hand, he was much in the company of Edward Bancroft 74 and Franklin’s grandson and secretary, William Temple Franklin. 75

On May 3, 1779, he took the oath of allegiance to the United States before Franklin, identifying himself in that document as “Thomas Digges of Wharburton in the State of Maryland,” and concluding the pledge with a fervent, “So help me God.” 76 On May 5 he received his pass to return, as well as a number of letters from

71 Hartley to Franklin, Apr. 22, 1779. See Note 57.
72 Wm Forbes [Digges] to Franklin, Dec. 4, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 106.
73 Donald Forbes [Digges] to Franklin, Dec. 3, 1779, Franklin, UP, III, 34.
74 Thomas Digges to Franklin, May 4, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 60.
75 Thomas Digges to William Temple Franklin, Jan. 10, 1780, Franklin, APS, CIV, 4.
76 Digges’ oath of allegiance, May 3, 1779, ibid., LVII, 27.
Franklin to friends in England which were entrusted to him to deliver personally.

It was on May 5 also that Digges learned that his mission had born little fruit. Franklin had dismissed the five points thus: (1) He could see no need for five commissioners, for "a number of talkers lengthens discussions"; (2) suspension of hostilities should be for twenty-one years, not five or seven, and all British forces should be withdrawn from America; (3) suspension of acts of Parliament was needless as America had no concern in what that body did; (4) America had no desire to be free from her engagements with France; and (5) on the basis he proposed, negotiations could begin "as soon as you please." Basically, as he explained in the letter to Hartley, a short truce would be an armed truce, and then was no time for it, because America was determined to continue the war until England was impotent to do further mischief to the peace, liberty, and safety of the world.\footnote{Franklin to Hartley, May 4, 1779, Correspondence of David Hartley, 1775-1781, Franklin, LC. An edited version is in Wharton, III, 154-156.}

In addition to delivering Franklin’s letters, Digges agreed to undertake an additional mission. For almost a year, at the earnest and repeated requests of Richard Peters, secretary of the Continental Board of War, the Doctor had been trying, without success, to locate in England Peters’ aged father, William Peters.\footnote{Richard Peters had written four times to Franklin (Mar. 5, May 31, Aug. 13 and Nov. 4, 1778), asking him to locate his father and furnish him money if he was in want. These letters are in Franklin, APS.} Digges consented to take up the quest, working from the single clue that, when last heard of, the elderly man was living in Nottingham.\footnote{Arthur Hamilton [Digges] to Franklin, May 14, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 62.}

Five days later Digges was back in London. He and Hartley found some element of hope in Franklin’s answer; sufficient, at least, for Hartley to seek an appointment with Lord North. It was granted for nine o’clock on the evening of May 12. All that Hartley later reported about this appointment was that Lord North had been attentive to the reading of Franklin’s reply. On May 14, Digges advised Franklin in vague terms of the progress of the parley, reporting that “The beginning of the Business & the stage it is now in promises well, but I am too apt perhaps to doubt of real sincerity.”\footnote{Ibid.}
Negotiations with Lord North dragged along, and Digges sensed the delaying tactics of the administration. By May 18 he could write to Franklin that Hartley’s most recent attempt for further discussion had been brushed aside by North with “I will speak to you soon. I am not yet ready for you.” 81 Three days later he had to report that Lord North now thought “it was ‘a serious matter deserving contemplation & should be attended to.’” 82 Another four days, and his word to Franklin was that the Prime Minister claimed “‘it required deliberation, and the answer would be given as soon as possible.’” 83

Benjamin Franklin had been skeptical from the very day of Digges’ arrival in Paris as to the sincerity of Lord North. With the Marylander’s letters arriving at frequent intervals, his skepticism turned to certainty. On May 30, he expressed himself forcefully to his optimistic London correspondent: “I never had nor have I now the least Expectation that any Good can come of the Propositions made to certain Persons. Whatever is reasonable and prudent for them to do, seems to be out of their sphere, for hitherto they have constantly rejected the best Measures and chosen the Worst.” 84

Before receiving this emphatic judgment, Digges had concluded that perhaps he had some suggestions which might be acceptable to Franklin. In forwarding them at the end of May, he thought he might be “a little impertinent by wishing so ardently for peace or throwing out any probable terms,” but he wanted to submit “a few propositions.” They differed from Franklin’s original terms only by reducing the period of the truce from twenty-one to ten or twelve years and by including France. “What say you to this?” he concluded. 85 The reply, which came in due time, was typical of Franklin —kindly, but firm: “I am much obliged to you for your kind Letters, and pray you to continue them. I find it Endless and fruitless Business to consider and give Opinions upon Propositions for Peace, drawn up by Persons who have no Authority to treat. I hope You will therefore excuse my Silence on yours I can at present only thank you.” 86

81 V. J. D—d [Digges] to Franklin, May 18, 1779, Franklin, UP, III, 16.
82 [Digges] to Franklin, May 21, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 63.
83 Allen Hamilton [Digges] to Franklin, May 25, 1779, ibid., 133.
84 Franklin to Digges, May 30-31, 1779, Franklin Letter Book (1779), 175-176.
85 V. J. D—d [Digges] to Franklin, May 31–June 1, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 64.
86 Franklin to Digges, July 12, 1779, Franklin Letter Book (1779), 220.
A reluctant Digges wrote finis to the parley. "I wish I knew all the actors as thoroughly as you know them," he had written wistfully to Franklin. "I am sorry our friend [Hartley] got so little by his laudable endeavours to serve both Countries." Thus ended Thomas Digges' first effort at mediation, but it concluded with him high in Benjamin Franklin's esteem.

During the abortive truce negotiations, Digges had not neglected the American prisoners, but there had been few calls for his services. A cartel had been agreed upon whereby about one hundred of the unfortunates from Mill Prison had been sent to Nantes on March 25 in the ship Milford and, upon her return, a similar number from Forton on July 2. These cartels, however, had been arranged for by David Hartley. Digges contributed an interesting comment upon the loading of the second one: "There were 17 officers & 102 Men. . . . They behaved very quietly & properly as they passd to the Ship. . . . The general language of the lower class of People as the American Prisoners past thro Gosport to embark was 'they are fine fellows, God Bless them, & send them safe home.'" Digges contributed an interesting comment upon the loading of the second one: "There were 17 officers & 102 Men. . . . They behaved very quietly & properly as they passd to the Ship. . . . The general language of the lower class of People as the American Prisoners past thro Gosport to embark was 'they are fine fellows, God Bless them, & send them safe home.'"

His other service was to supply £20 to Dr. James Brehon of Cambridge, Maryland, former surgeon of the Continental sloop Hornet, when that gentleman and four companions escaped from Forton and sought him out in London. To repay himself, he drew on Franklin for the money advanced, explaining that "I can assure you I am not at present cursed with a great deal of Cash." By some mistake the Doctor honored the bill twice, but when this was called to Digges' attention, he was distressed but positive "that I had it but once, at least by all my Memdms & accot." Shortly after his return from Paris, Digges had started his search for William Peters, learning that the old gentleman lived in Liverpool and not in Nottingham. "I have done the needful towards your

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87 Thomas Digges to Franklin, June 11, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 67.
88 Hartley to Franklin, Mar. 30, 1779, Franklin, APS, XIII, 233; Hartley to Franklin, July 5, 1779, Correspondence of David Hartley, 1775-1781, Franklin, LC.
89 V. J. D d [Digges] to Franklin, July 6, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 82.
90 James Brehon to Franklin, July [?], 1778, ibid., II, 73.
91 [Digges] to Franklin, May 21, 1779; V. J. D——d [Digges] to Franklin, May 31—June 1, 1779, ibid., V, 63, 64.
request," he wrote Franklin on May 14, "& make no doubt of soon hearing from him for He is in want." Finding Peters turned out to be far more difficult than anticipated. Letters to Liverpool were returned with the notation that Peters could not be located. Digges appealed to Richard Penn, hoping that the Proprietor's grandson could learn something "among his Phil friends." Penn feared that Peters was dead, since four months before, the aged gentleman had written that he was "old & very infirm." But Digges persisted and was at length rewarded. William Peters was living near Nottingham after all, and was much in need of the £100 which Digges had been authorized to give him.

By such actions the assured and well-informed Digges continued to win Franklin's warm regard. There can be no better proof of this than a brief letter from Passy on August 20. Gustavus Conyngham, a Continental naval captain whose deeds in 1777 and 1778 in European waters had made him an anathema to all Britons, had been captured off New York and sent in irons to England to be tried for high treason. Franklin had learned of Conyngham's misfortune and directed Digges, "I desire you would take care to supply him with Necessaries that a brave Man may not suffer for want of assistance in his Distress." Instead of a formal "your obedient and very humble servant," he concluded with, "I am ever Your affectionate B F."

Some weeks before this Digges had discovered Conyngham's plight. His informant was a Mr. Milligan, a fellow Marylander who had been a passenger in the packet which had brought the captive to Falmouth from New York. Milligan had heard that the captain had been removed in irons to Pendennis Castle and "denied pen & ink or to speak to any one but the Goaler." Digges appealed to a friend in Falmouth to give "every necessary help," and enclosed a letter to Conyngham offering his services. The answer came back that access

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94 Richard Penn (1735-1811), who had sailed for England in 1775 bearing the Olive Branch Petition to the King, and the address to the inhabitants of Great Britain from the Continental Congress.
95 V. J. D——d [Digges] to Franklin, May 31–June 1, 1779, ibid., 64.
96 [Digges] to Franklin, June 25, 1779, ibid., 78.
97 Neeser, 159.
98 Franklin Letter Book (1779), 233. Letter printed in Hale, I, 344, and in Neeser, 183, with credit to Hale.
to the prisoner was impossible without bribing the jailer, who was too tricky to be trusted.

"As soon as I was certain of His confinement & situation," Digges said, "I got a friend to solicit the Board of sick & hurt to have his Irons taken off & get him removd to Mill Prison." This friend was David Hartley. Digges heard from Falmouth that Conyngham was "put on board a Sloop of war much in want of Cloaths & refreshment." Whether this vessel had gone on a cruise from Falmouth with the captain impressed as a common seaman, or was carrying him to Plymouth, was a question finally answered by word that he had been committed to Mill Prison. Letters reached Conyngham there, and his replies enabled Digges to report on September 20 to Franklin:

I have had three letters from him & the treatment He speaks of & describes is really shocking. He was broke over all the way in Irons, & put into the first Prison (amidst the scoffs hisses threats & insults of a mob, at which he cried with rage & indignation) with only a common sailors thin jacket, one check shirt trowsers, & pair of shoes. ... I have informed Him of your request to give him help, & he is extremely thankful for it. He writes me that the Cloaths he stands in need of, his common maintainance (for our subscrip fund has now got very low) and a few guineas to serve as occasion may offer, will make the sum he may want forty pounds or upwards, of which He has sufficient to repay in the hands of people in Nantes & Cadiz. I have given orders to a very worthy man of Plymouth to look towards the proper supply to him of Cloaths and a little money, & he is now well off for the present. I shall draw as I last did on you for that sum, & remit his order on me for so doing when he forwards it. ...

That second parenthetical phrase, "for our subscrip fund has now got very low," had more than ordinary significance. Two circumstances militated against its reopening for additional contributions: a renewed threat of invasion, and the sudden seizure on August 29 of Captain Thomas Hutchins, of the British army, on a charge of treasonable correspondence with Franklin, Samuel Wharton at Nantes, and other Americans. The invasion threat, with the Grand Fleet blocked in Portsmouth by a far superior enemy, might set all

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100 Hartley to Franklin, Oct. 26, 1779, Franklin, APS, XVI, 71.
103 V. J. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Sept. 20, 1779, ibid., 93.
104 V. J. Bertrand [Digges] to Franklin, Sept. 4, 1779, Franklin, APS, XV, 16.
England into "consternation & tremor," but the arrest of the New Jersey-born officer of the Sixtieth Regiment of Foot and Engineers sent shivers of fear down the spines of every American sympathizer in London who had engaged in any correspondence which an omnipotent Ministry might consider inimical. These Londoners had been leaders in the subscription raising and, as Digges remarked ominously when the charges against Hutchins were learned, "A little blood may be wanting to stop the popular clamour against our Leaders and turn the publick conversation from the present gloomy state of affairs in this once great & flourishing Country."

Hutchins, committed to New Prison, Clerkenwell, was examined three or four times, and his papers were combed for names. An iron chest left in Hutchins' care by Samuel Wharton was located, broken open, and correspondence discovered. Additional names were bruited about, among them "M' D——s," Thomas Digges himself. From Passy, Dr. Franklin expressed regret, "that any innocent Men should suffer on suspicion of holding a Criminal Correspondence with me. The Truth is that I do not know that Capt. Hutchins, and never had a Correspondence with him of any kind, directly or indirectly."

Eventually excitement died down. Digges was sure the proofs against Hutchins were insufficient to warrant a trial, "for the key to the Cypher in which he wrote, has been destroyed." There was still danger, however, of a court-martial, and American sympathizers continued to be uneasy. Evidently the authorities came to the same conclusion as Digges, who informed Franklin that the captain "might get out by insisting on bail being taken for him, claiming the habeas corpus &c., but we are unwilling to give the least offence for the present." There had been hints that Hutchins might sell his commission for 1,500 guineas, and he was urged not to jeopardize chances by premature legal action. Unfortunately, efforts failed to recover

105 V. J. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Sept. 6, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 92.
106 Hutchins' oath of allegiance, Mar. 6, 1780, Franklin, APS, LXXIV, 21. Hutchins (1730–1789) became the first geographer of the United States.
107 V. J. Bertrand [Digges] to Franklin, Sept. 4, 1779, ibid., XV, 16.
108 V. J. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Sept. 6, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 92.
109 V. J. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Sept. 20, 1779, ibid., 93.
110 Franklin to Digges, Oct. 7, 1779, Franklin Letter Book (1779), 271.
111 V. J. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Sept. 20, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 93.
Samuel Wharton's iron chest and contents "from the Philistines." Also "Cap'n H——-s arrest," as Digges wrote later, "brought on me much trouble," and taught him "to be as cautious as possible." The first step had been to keep "my papers in a safe & distant quarter."

Thomas Digges continued his London activities despite Hutchins' arrest. In January and February he had written to Franklin suggesting a trade—by collusive clearances, if it could not be done legally—between Great Britain and the United States. That he discussed the subject at more length upon his visit to Passy in May is likely, although not disclosed in his correspondence. Now, however, with the Hutchins probe in full cry and a "grand naval combat," which could decide "The Empire of the Sea," hourly expected, he launched his idea anew.

This time he not only had a definite proposal, but someone to carry it out. Cyprian Sterry was a Rhode Islander, who had long been in England. John Smith, Jr., was from Baltimore, and had just arrived for the specific purpose of recovering a debt of £3,000 due his father and of investing the money in necessary woolens and linens to be shipped to America via Holland and St. Eustatia. Sterry and Smith had pooled their resources for the adventure when Digges ran across them in London. He was an old friend of the Baltimorean and his brother, Colonel Samuel Smith, noted as the gallant defender of Fort Mifflin in the Delaware River in 1777. Why run the many chances of the roundabout route they proposed, he asked them? Why not confine it to "one risque" by purchasing a vessel in England, manning it with men of their own collection, clearing for New York, and then slipping into the Delaware or some other port? He, Digges, could assure them a safeguard against American privateers if they would go to France and present the plan to Dr. Franklin. Both men were willing. They purchased the brig Hope, and engaged a Captain Thomas Holland and eight seamen. Smith became ill, so Sterry went off alone to Paris with a letter of introduction and explanation from Digges:

113 V. J. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Nov. 15, 1779, ibid., 105.
115 V. J. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Sept. 20, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 93.
116 V. J. Bertrand [Digges] to Franklin, Sept. 4, 1779, Franklin, APS, XV, 16.
These two Gentlemen have a considerable quantity of Blankets, and Coarse Cloths, and other articles much wanted in a certain Army; and for which Mr. Smith principally came from Maryland to supply. . . . As I know the extreme want our people are in for winter Cloathing, and that these Gentlemen can throw in several thousand pounds worth at a critical season of the year, I have encouraged their trying to get a certificate from you, that the ship was originally meant for some port of the northern colonies, & the cargo meant to be offered to the States at the current price. I have no doubt it will be of great public good should they succeed; and as to the propriety of the measure you are the best judge of.  

Franklin read Digges' recommendation, listened to the request of the Rhode Islander, and agreed to issue a passport. He based his decision upon a Congressional resolve permitting importation from the English dominions of the property of the inhabitants of America, or those about to become inhabitants. The passport was drafted on September 24, and upon the copy kept at Passy the Doctor endorsed, "On the 25th of Sept M's Sterry took the Oath of Allegiance to the U. S." Then he advised Digges, "In respect to your Recommendation I comply'd with the request of your friend." The elated Digges assured Franklin that, "Altho I am totally unconnected with this or any similar adventures, I cannot help wishing they were more frequent, for by such means I am certain our friends can be very much relieved, & the unfair monopoly now practising in Am's may be very much broken." It would be his purpose, as we shall see, to have these adventures continued.

When the second prisoner-exchange cartel (that of July 2) returned to Plymouth early in September, it brought conflicting accounts of the number of Britishers yet remaining in France for exchange. "The Captain of this Vessel says there are no more American-Captured Prisoners in France in or near the Ports of the Ocean," Digges reported to Franklin on September 20, "but that there are several in St Maloes, Havre, & Dunkirk. The Agent at Nantes says there are no more in any Ports of France, but that there are considerable numbers in

117 V. J. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Sept. 6, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 92.
119 Sterry's passport, Sept. 24, 1779, Franklin, APS, LXXIV, 30.
120 Franklin to Digges, Oct. 7, 1779, Franklin Letter Book (1779), 271.
121 T[homas] D[igges] to Franklin, Oct. 8, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 94.
Bilboa St Andero [Santander] and Corunna.” As the Board of Sick and Hurt seemed inclined to accept the statement of the agent at Nantes, possibilities of a third cartel appeared remote. Digges was vastly disturbed, as “You can scarcely immagine the distress another winters confinement may bring on these unhappy people.”

There were one hundred and thirty-five Americans in Forton and one hundred and ninety in Mill Prison when Digges next wrote on October 8, but his fears that there could be no exchange for lack of British prisoners had ended. Off Scarborough Head on September 23, John Paul Jones had fought the naval battle which would give him imperishable fame, and Digges exulted that in the two men of war taken (the Serapis and Countess of Scarborough), “Mr Paul Jones has . . . got 350 Seamen besides the Crews of thirty odd vessels which he took & destroyd on his late cruise.” Continuing, he wrote: “Above twenty ships of war was dispatchd after Him; but after throwing the northern parts of England into full as much panick as the combined Fleets did the western, he has apparently got away with much booty & no little credit to himself.”

Hopes were dashed as the days wore on and the British Ministry refused to exchange the five hundred or more Englishmen Jones had carried into Holland. Once again Digges was in despair, “as our Subscrip" is in the last fifty, God knows what will become of those poor fellows when it is gone & the Cartel should be stopt. . . . I wish the Texel scheme may be accepted, but altho humanity to the suffering Prisoners there may point it out, I have little Expectation it will; because the pride of these Gentry may prevent it.”

Pessimism was justified. The Board of Sick and Hurt called in William Hodgson, the Coleman Street merchant, and informed him that there would be no exchange in Holland as the vessels and their crews might well be retaken when Jones would be forced to bring them around from the Texel to Dunkirk. The Board would agree, however, to a third cartel, this time to Morlaix, a port in the north-western corner of Brittany, if Franklin specified the exact number of Britons held in France. Hodgson told this to Digges and upon the

122 V. J. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Sept. 20, 1779, ibid., 93.
123 Digges was overoptimistic. Jones’s squadron took nineteen prizes, including the two frigates.
latter's advice, in David Hartley's absence, communicated the information to Franklin.\footnote{126}

“There seems a strange detention of the [cartel] ship in every voyage,” Digges in turn advised the Doctor, “and Mr. H[artley] being in the Country & not sticking close to the Agents here, I fear helps in this detention.”\footnote{127} Delay made the prisoners more despondent,\footnote{128} and resulted in increasing breakouts. Any American reaching London headed unerringly for Thomas Digges' abode, No. 23 Villars Street, Strand. While there are no hints of his place of residence in Digges' letters to Franklin, the address was known to the two Presbyterian ministers—Robert Heath at Plymouth and Thomas Wren at Portsmouth—who supplied it to those escaping from Mill and Forton prisons.\footnote{129} Demands from these fugitives drained the Marylander of cash. He had spent larger sums on them “than may be strictly prudent,” he explained, yet, “they seem to fly to me as one who was obligd whether it was convenient or not to supply them.”\footnote{130} His dilemma was further emphasized on November 10:

I cannot describe to you the trouble I have with these people; and the expence is so heavy on me at times that even with my curtaild and oeconimic [sic] mode of living I am put to extreem difficulties. It is not trifles that will do for men who come naked by dozens & half dozens, & it is harder still to turn ones back upon them.\footnote{131}

That he did not turn his back was attested to later by Gustavus Conyngham, who, with four companions, knocked on the Villars Street door on the evening of November 8. Conyngham and thirty others had tunneled under a wall at Mill Prison three nights before.\footnote{132} Then they had scattered, but three of them had attached themselves to the captain, “looking up to him,” remarked Digges, “as a Saviour & deliverer.”\footnote{133} And Conyngham, for his part, wrote that “at London

\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{126} Hodgson to Franklin, Nov. 23, 1779, Franklin, APS, LXI, 43, and copy in \textit{ibid.}, XLIV, 39.
  \item \footnote{127} T[homas] D[igges] to Franklin, Oct. 8, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 94.
  \item \footnote{128} T[homas] D[igges] to Franklin, Oct. 12, 1779, \textit{ibid.}, 96.
  \item \footnote{129} Disclosure of Digges' London address came during the examination of John Trumbull before a Bow Street magistrate in November, 1780. \textit{The London Chronicle}, Nov. 21-23, 1780.
  \item \footnote{130} V. J. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Nov. 15, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 105.
  \item \footnote{131} V. J. D——d [Digges] to Franklin, Nov. 10, 1779, \textit{ibid.}, 103.
  \item \footnote{132} \textit{The Public Advertiser}, Nov. 11, 1779.
  \item \footnote{133} V. J. D——d [Digges] to Franklin, Nov. 10, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 103.
\end{itemize}
we meet with our Good friend Mr Digges Who did every thing in his power to serve me and all his Country men that Chance to fall in his Way. happy we have such a man Among that set of tyrants, the[y] have in that Country.”

Digges acted expeditiously. While the fugitives lay concealed, he engaged passage for them in a Dutch ship bound to Rotterdam, supplied them with about twenty-eight guineas, guided them safely on board, and breathed a sigh of relief as the vessel slipped down the Thames on the night tide of November 10. He entrusted Conyngham with two letters to Franklin to be posted at Rotterdam. The first hoped that the captain “will be with you in a day or two after this reaches you.” The second promised an accounting as soon as expenditures were reported “by my friend at Plymout[h].” He knew the total would far exceed the fifty pounds for which he already had drawn.

Robert Heath in due time gave the figure of the Plymouth advances to Conyngham as £51 7s. 6d. To this Digges added the sum he had supplied the captain in London, and said he would draw on Franklin for the “overplus.” The final account he claimed to have forwarded on December 11 in a letter sent by common post which was never received at Passy. By this time nine more escaped Americans had come to him in London, “notwithstanding I use every means to inform them How near they are to an Exchange.” The continued demands, he complained, “do not answer well with my present finances.”

Despite expenses, Thomas Digges continued to pursue his paramount interests—American prisoners and clandestine trade. A new and unexpected development had complicated further the prisoner-of-war situation. Two flags of truce had arrived almost simultaneously in December from Boston, each carrying Britishers sent home on parole to be exchanged for an equal number of Americans in

134 Conyngham to Franklin, Nov. 18, 1779, Franklin, APS, XVI, 116. An edited version of this letter is printed in Hale, I, 346–347.
135 V. J. D——d [Digges] to Franklin, Nov. 10, 1779, Franklin, HSP, V, 103.
136 Alexr Hamilton [Digges] to Franklin, Nov. 9, 1779, ibid., 102.
137 V. J. D——d [Digges] to Franklin, Nov. 10, 1779, ibid., 103.
138 V. J. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Nov. 26, 1779, ibid., 107.
139 Robt Sinclair [Digges] to Franklin, Dec. 17, 1779, ibid., 104.
140 Wm Forbes [Digges] to Franklin, Dec. 4, 1779, ibid., 106.
English prisons. One of these flags, the ship *Bob*, Isaac Cazneau, master, and Edmund Dunkin, owner, had put into Penzance in Cornwall with ninety-five prisoners, embracing captains and crews of two Falmouth packets.\textsuperscript{141} The second flag, the ship *Polly*, Benjamin Carpenter, master, and Henry Mitchell, owner, had arrived at Bristol with thirty-five passengers, "chiefly Gentlemen & Ladys who were Capturd in the Jam[a] June Fleet."\textsuperscript{142}

Time was required to assemble sufficient information about these two flags to make an intelligent report to Franklin. In this, Digges was assisted by John Jackson, "a talking sort of a forward lawyer who came in Mitchell," \textit{i.e.}, the *Polly*.\textsuperscript{143} Jackson produced a copy of the parole he and six other Jamaica gentlemen, including Edward Barry, secretary to Governor Dalling,\textsuperscript{144} had signed before the Commissary of Prisoners in Boston. It specified that they would procure "the Liberation of as many American Prisoners Confined in England of equal Rank with ourselves And cause them to be sent over to France Addressed to the Honble Benjamin Franklin Plenipotentiary for the United States of America." In case of failure each parolee pledged himself to return to America in six months.\textsuperscript{145} Digges forwarded a copy of the parole to Franklin with the comment that Jackson had been twice with Lord North, who "promisd every thing very fairly."\textsuperscript{146}

What Jackson secured was a recommendation to draw up a memorial, "stating their case, & praying that the terms of their agreement should be complied with." The memorial was presented, but "the answer could not be given for some days."\textsuperscript{147} A fortnight later Digges prophesied, "No steps are yet taken or likely to be taken."\textsuperscript{148} There never was an official decision. The best Jackson and his companions could secure was a verbal statement that the terms of the parole could not be complied with, that they should not have made such a compact with rebels, and that "they are not on a footing

\textsuperscript{141} [Digges] to Franklin, Jan. 10, 1780, \textit{ibid.}, 114.

\textsuperscript{142} Wm Ferguson [Digges] to Franklin, Dec. 24, 1779, \textit{ibid.}, 109.

\textsuperscript{143} T[homas] D[igges] to Franklin, Mar. 3, 1780, \textit{ibid.}, 119.

\textsuperscript{144} Sir John Dalling (d. 1798), governor of Jamaica.

\textsuperscript{145} Engagement of British prisoners, Boston, Nov. 20, 1779, Franklin-Bache Collection, APS.

\textsuperscript{146} [Digges] to Franklin, Jan. 10, 1780, Franklin, HSP, V, 114.

\textsuperscript{147} Thomas Digges to Franklin, Jan. 11, 1780, \textit{ibid.}, 113.

\textsuperscript{148} J. V. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Jan. 28, 1780, \textit{ibid.}, 116.
with the Rebel prisoners here who can only be released by a form of act of Pardon, &c." Because an exchange arrangement existed between New York and Boston, the Admiralty granted partial releases to four of the one hundred and thirty who had arrived in the two flags of truce. These four were Jackson, Barry, and the two packet captains, Peter Hill and John Bolderson. The partial release was to consist of a letter to the commanding officer in New York instructing him to liberate one rebel of equal rank for each of them.

Digges was disgusted, but not surprised. At the first rebuff, Jackson and Barry had talked largely of appealing to the House of Commons. A meeting with David Hartley and Edmund Burke had been arranged for in Digges' rooms on February 11. The other passengers had been "rather idle or negligent towards getting the terms of their release complyd with." The exceptions had been the packet captains who had argued futilely before the Board of Sick and Hurt. The meeting with the two Whig members of Parliament never materialized. Jackson and Barry had "made some little stir at first," Digges remarked, "but their mouths seem to have been since shut." Further investigation disclosed that Barry already had been sent back to Jamaica with dispatches for the governor, and that Hill and Bolderson had been appointed to new packets. The rest were "all following their avocations & seem to be quite easy." Also, he could find no evidence that the letter to the commanding officer in New York had ever been written. "This shall be properly enquird into," he promised Franklin, "& you shall know the issue." His report on March 17 was most edifying:

Those Gent" who came over on Parole in the last Cartels seem quite easy under their breach of that parole, & seemingly now give themselves not the least trouble about procuring or abiding by the terms of their agreement. It is singular with what ease & facility an Englishman can break his parole to America, & how lavish they are of the words scoundrels & villains, when there is the least appearance (wch I believe there never has been) of Americans doing the like by them. Surely those lately returnd parole Priso" in numb', should be in some measure calld upon to abide By their parole agreement. . . . Should the Yankies once more take them, I think their chance would be but a shabby one.

149 W. S. C. [Digges] to Franklin, Feb. 10, 1780, ibid., 118.
151 W. S. C. [Digges] to Franklin, Feb. 10, 1780, ibid., 118.
153 P. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Mar. 17, 1780, ibid., 124.
Adding injury to insult, Henry Mitchell’s ship, the *Polly*, had been attached at Bristol as “a Scotch prize,” upon a claim brought by her former owners. Mitchell, whom Digges described as “an Irish man marryd in & belonging to Boston,” had protested to the Admiralty against such seizure of a flag of truce and had received intimation that the worth of her shall be paid to Him.” This, Digges suspected, was “most likely meant to stop his mouth & get him out of the way.” However, by the end of April, the Marylander admitted that “the Cartel to B[ristol] which was seizd is likely to be paid for,” as in fact it later was.

Noncompliance with paroles was doubly provoking, Franklin wrote to Digges, when the full story of the Boston cartels had been laid before him, “not only by the refusal of what is Just, but by so long delaying the Refusal and keeping the matter in suspense.” He had thought, he said, of using public advertisements to require those released upon parole to surrender themselves, as they had engaged to do, upon failure to have Americans freed in their stead. “But I do not flatter myself,” he continued, “that a single Englishman will have Honour enough to comply with the requisition. So corrupt are become the Morals of that once generous and virtuous Nation.”

Departure of the regular prisoner cartel from Plymouth to Morlaix, meanwhile, was repeatedly delayed to the monotonous refrain of “the want of specification of numbers.” As a result, prisoners continued to break out and flee to London, or to give way to despair and enter the King’s service. In two days’ time in early January, Digges had helped six escaped privateer captains to board a Dutch ship bound for Amsterdam, and “as each man must be supplyd with some few Guineas these burdens (so very frequent on me) are almost intolerable.” Within another two weeks twenty more found their way to Villars Street. He would have been beggared completely, but for the receipt of fifty pounds from John Wilkes, the “overplus” of that gentleman’s election campaign. Eighteen guineas of this sum,
he sent off to Robert Heath for the use of John Manley, noted Continental captain, who had just been committed destitute to Mill Prison, after being taken in the privately armed ship Jason. Digges hoped Manley might with this money "bribe some individual to give up his place for Him in the next Cartel." Instead, the valiant captain elected to break prison, was recaptured, and wound up in the Black Hole rather than in a cartel ship.

As an American, Digges could not appear before the Board of Sick and Hurt to urge dispatch of the cartel. William Hodgson had been pressed into emergency service the previous fall, and Digges now persuaded David Hartley to appoint the Coleman Street merchant a permanent go-between. As Digges explained to Franklin: "I think more might be done thro Him than by D[avid] H[artley], (at least at the Office on Tower Hill), for, with the best intentions & wishes to do good, that Gent is so much out of Town & employd in other Parl[iam]entar[y] matters, that the necessary business for the Prisoners cannot be duly attended to by Him."

Real reason for the cartel's delay, in Digges' opinion, was "the fear of these prisoners getting quickly on board Paul Jones's Squadron." Hodgson's efforts, however, brought results, and the cartel ship sailed from Plymouth on March 5, bearing one hundred Americans for exchange at Morlaix.

Benjamin Franklin had welcomed Hodgson's original interposition in expediting the cartel, and in January had forwarded a pass for Morlaix and the long-sought specifications of Britishers available for exchange. Digges' financial stringency and the imprisonment of John Manley were uppermost in the Doctor's mind when he answered Digges on February 9:

162 John Manley (1733-1793).
163 Isaac J. Greenwood, Captain John Manley, U. S. N. (Boston, 1915), 112-117.
165 Wm S. C. [Digges] to Franklin, Apr. 28, 1780, ibid., 131.
166 J. V. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Jan. 28, 1780, ibid., 116.
167 The Navy Office, housing the Commissioners for Sick and Hurt Seamen, was on Tower Hill, facing the Tower of London.
168 W. S. C. [Digges] to Franklin, Feb. 10, 1780, ibid., 118.
169 J. V. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Jan. 28, 1780, ibid., 116.
170 Alex' M'Kinlock [Digges] to Franklin, Mar. 10, 1780, ibid., 121.
171 Franklin to Hodgson, Jan. 20, 1780, Wharton, III, 462-463.
I am concern'd for Capt. Manley who is a brave and useful officer, and desire you to supply him with Necessaries to the Amount of 25 Guineas. Inclos'd I send you a Bill for 100 £, out of which I request you to pay Messrs Brown Colli[son] and Triton the Sum of £28 1s. 10d. which I owe them, and take their Receipt in full, and keep the Rest in your hands to assist poor Prisoners. I hope they will all be now soon off your hands and at liberty.

But Franklin's hopes were not realized. British prisoners were not available at Morlaix when the cartel arrived. The Americans were landed, and the master of the cartel ship returned to Plymouth carrying only a receipt for the one hundred men he had delivered. Thomas Digges left the unraveling of that fiasco to William Hodgson with the understatement to Franklin on April 14, that Hodgson "is rather anxious to hear from you." Also, wrote Digges, the empty cartel "causes much murmuring at Forton & several have forced their way out since the vessel returnd & continue flying up to L[ondo]n." The £100 from Franklin, with more than half of it already gone to John Manley and to Brown, Collinson, and Triton, would not last long at that rate.

Even while involved with the flag-of-truce ships from Boston and with the escaped captives from Forton and Mill prisons, Digges was not neglecting his project of shipping goods out of Great Britain for American ports. He had learned that a William Johnston, a seafaring man from the north of Ireland, had gone to Passy to ask Franklin for a passport for himself and some friends to emigrate to America. "I think Johnston's scheme & jaunt was hastily taken up & likely to turn out unsuccessful . . . ," he wrote Franklin on November 10 in a letter carried by Conyngham. As Conyngham knew Johnston well and could recommend him highly, perhaps the Doctor would oblige. Franklin did, supplying the desired passport for the brigantine Harrier, William Johnston, owner and commander, bound from London for America with a cargo of linen and other clothing. Thus

172 London bankers who failed in 1783.
173 Franklin to Digges, Feb. 9, 1780, Franklin Letter Book (1780), 21, 22.
174 Hodgson to Franklin, Mar. 28, 1780, Franklin, APS, XVII, 153.
176 V. J. D——d [Digges] to Franklin, Nov. 10, 1779, ibid., 103.
was a second cargo promoted by Digges to break the "unfair monopoly."\textsuperscript{177}

His first adventurer for 1780 was Walter Belt, a fellow Marylander and a native of Digges' own Prince George County. Belt and a half-dozen others owned the British-built brigantine \textit{Brighton}, of one hundred tons burden, in which they proposed taking out "ten thousand pounds worth of useful & necessary articles." That cargo and a desire "for the serving & putting in the right situation six or eight good friends" were the reasons Digges gave in sending Belt to Passy as a "supplicant" for a passport.\textsuperscript{178} Apparently fearful that Franklin might balk at this, the third request, Digges explained that he had received many applications of a similar nature which he encouraged because it meant "getting home the effects & property of some useful citizens," who, he feared, might be lost to America by too long a stay in England. "Whenever there is an appearance of discouraging such adventure from the other side," he continued, "I hope you will give me an item thereof; in order that I may save the expenses of some who may hereafter risque a trip to Paris for such help." In fact, he expected to forward one or two more requests very shortly.\textsuperscript{179}

Belt was granted a passport on February 11, having entered bond in the amount of £300 sterling that his cargo of woolens, linens, and other clothing would be landed "in some Port of the United States, not in Possession of the British Troops, the Dangers of the Seas excepted."\textsuperscript{180} The captain returned to London bearing a letter for Digges from Franklin:

\begin{quote}
I comply'd readily with your late Recommendations placing faith in the Declaration of the Parties, that the Transaction was bona fide intended, for the purpose mentioned, getting home with Property. If this should be extended to cover an illicit Trade, it will when discovered put a stop to such Operations. I see by something in a late paper from that Country, that they begin to suspect them.\textsuperscript{181}
\end{quote}

A prompt explanation went off from Digges, that "in Belt's adventure you may rely there is none but Americans of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{177} Bond of Johnston, Nov. 25, 1779, Franklin, APS, LXXIV, 53.
\item \textsuperscript{178} J. V. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Jan. 28, 1780, Franklin, HSP, V, 116.
\item \textsuperscript{179} W. S. C. [Digges] to Franklin, Feb. 10, 1780, \textit{ibid.}, 118.
\item \textsuperscript{180} Belt's bond, Feb. 11, 1780, Franklin, APS, LXXIV, 54.
\item \textsuperscript{181} Franklin to Digges, Feb. 26, 1780, Franklin Letter Book (1780), 33, 34.
\end{footnotes}
right sort concerned they are chiefly indeed all of them placed in this Country at present by the accidents of war—some prisoners—some left out of Bread by the stoppage of the Fishery &c.” The bearer of this letter was Benjamin Carpenter, who had been master of Henry Mitchell’s cartel ship Polly, and who, like Belt before him, also wanted a passport. Carpenter, in fact, wanted two: one for himself for the brigantine Adventure, and one for Mitchell for the ship James, both vessels to sail from Ireland with rigging, cordage, sail duck and other stores for two ships that Mitchell was building at Boston. Mitchell could not apply in person as he was dancing attendance “at the Admiralty every day with his Lawyer,” hoping for a gratuity for the Polly. Digges recommended Carpenter and Mitchell as “persons every way qualified to be trusted & whom I would wish to serve.”

Franklin issued both passports, informing Digges that it was done “In compliance with your Recommendation, which I very much respect.” Carpenter took the oath of allegiance on March 14, and signed bonds for both vessels. “All these businesses give me trouble for which I charge nothing,” the Doctor wrote the next day. “I hope therefore that the Gentlemen will in return do something on my Recommendation, and that is, to let me see their Names in the list of Subscribers for the Relief of their poor Countrymen Prisoners in England.”

Whether Carpenter and Mitchell contributed to the subscription, which had been reopened at last, is not in the record, but there is Digges’ further protest that he was sure all the transactions he had recommended were bona fide. “I don’t mean by saying this,” he explained, “that some of the partys did not carry more than they had property to purchase.” He, however, repeated his assurance that he “never had, nor ever shall have, . . . the least concern directly or indirectly in these adventures.” In April he sent Isaac Cazneau, the other cartel captain, to Franklin for still another passport. Cazneau’s vessel, the Bob, had been renamed Penelope and sent to Liverpool for a cargo of “useful articles.” Digges could recommend this captain highly, but as Cazneau “is personally known to You,”

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182 Thomas Digges to Franklin, Mar. 3, 1780, Franklin, HSP, V, 119.
183 Carpenter’s oath of allegiance and bond, Mar. 14, 1780, Franklin, APS, LXXIV, 7, 56.
184 Franklin to Digges, Mar. 15, 1780, Franklin Letter Book (1780), 55.
185 P. Drouillard [Digges] to Franklin, Mar. 17, 1780, Franklin, HSP, V, 124.
he told Franklin, "I need not here add anything in his favour."\(^{186}\) In mid-April Franklin issued the desired passport, and Digges had promoted his sixth cargo of clandestine goods for America.\(^{187}\)

Toward the end of June, Benjamin Franklin reread a half-dozen of Digges' more recent letters and replied to such subjects as called for comment. Earlier in the month Digges had written that the Board of Sick and Hurt was still awaiting a letter regarding the empty cartel from Morlaix, and seemed inclined to continue the exchange if explanation proved satisfactory.\(^{188}\) It surprised Franklin that there was still opportunity to renew the exchange of prisoners, for he had given up "all Thoughts or Expectations of continuing the Cartel." Finding that the unfortunate Americans in Forton and Mill prisons were likely to be longer detained, he told Digges: "I desire they may be paid from me the little comfort I can afford them of Six pence per week each. I will answer your Drafts for the Sums necessary." At the bottom of the letter, which went off on June 25 in custody of William Burn, the only Lisbon merchant to support the American cause, it will be recalled, Franklin appended unwelcome news. The British had captured Charleston, South Carolina, a victory which would make David Hartley's hopes for peace "more remote than expected."\(^{189}\)

For a month or more a report had been current that Gustavus Conyngham had been captured again, and Digges had tried to run it down.\(^{190}\) When he discovered the story to be true, he also learned that the capture had been made by a British privateer in which Samuel Hartley had a part interest. The privateer and her now famous prisoner were expected daily at Dartmouth.\(^{191}\) Back in January, upon Digges' solicitation, Franklin had secured release of the captain and mate of a vessel belonging to Hartley and taken by a French frigate.\(^{192}\) Now he reminded Hartley, that "one good turn deserves another." The latter agreed and dispatched letters to the

\(^{186}\) T[homas] D[igges] to Franklin, Apr. 6, 1780, ibid., 125.
\(^{187}\) Cazneau's oath of allegiance and bond, Apr. 16, 1780, Franklin, APS, LXXIV, 9, 60.
\(^{188}\) Alex\(^{\text{c}}\) Brett [Digges] to Franklin, June 10, 1780, Franklin, HSP, V, 135.
\(^{189}\) Franklin to Digges, June 25, 1780, Franklin Letter Book (1780), 162, 163.
\(^{190}\) W Ross [Digges] to Franklin, Apr. 14, 1780; W\(^{\text{w}}\) S. C. [Digges] to Franklin, Apr. 28, 1780, Franklin, HSP, V, 127, 131.
\(^{191}\) John Thompson [Digges] to Franklin, July 12, 1780, ibid., 137.
\(^{192}\) Tho[mas] Digges to Franklin, Jan. 11, 1780, ibid., 113.
other owners in Dartmouth and to the privateer captain urging release of Conyngham upon arrival instead of turning him over to port authorities. In notifying Franklin, Digges feared that Hartley's letters would reach Dartmouth after Conyngham had been committed, in which case, "there will be no hopes of liberating Him his name being so offensive." Fears were justified, and "it was Cap'n Conyngha'ms fate to be recommitted & put in the Black hole before our letters could get to hand." Thus, he joined John Manley in Mill Prison.

August brought the unexpected arrival at Bristol, in a small flag-of-truce brig from Boston, of Robert Temple, who had determined "to move Himself & Family to settle in Ireland He being ill in a Consumption." Robert was the older brother of John Temple, a former friend of Digges' and a man whom Franklin held in high esteem.

Robert Temple reached London at the end of the month. Digges reported him "in very bad health & brings away three handsome Daughters, comely & full grown, & which must be a loss to any young Country." The invalid produced a passport granted him by the Massachusetts Council, authorizing him to charter the brig Temple, of one hundred and twenty tons burden, unarmed, and to proceed to Ireland with his family and effects. He also had been permitted to carry prisoners of war with him for exchange in England upon conditions similar to those for the flags of Mitchell and Dunkin the previous November. The prisoners were four in number, all of the armed ship Jane, which had sailed from Cork in May bound for New York with provisions and dry goods. Off the American coast, after a stout resistance which caused thirteen casualties (five fatal) in her crew of fifty, she had been taken by the Massachusetts privateer ship Tracy, John Burroughs Hopkins, commander, and

103 John Thompson [Digges] to Franklin, July 12, 1780, ibid., 137.
104 W. S. C. [Digges] to Franklin, Aug. 18, 1780, ibid., 139.
105 W. S. C. [Digges] to Franklin, Aug. 25, 1780, ibid., 140.
108 Order of Massachusetts Council, July 3, 1780, ibid., 143.
109 Officers and passengers of the ship Jane to Franklin, Sept. 10, 1780, ibid., 144.
carried into Boston on July 2.\textsuperscript{200} The Massachusetts Council had paroled the four men in time for them to secure passage in the flag.\textsuperscript{201}

Digges was concerned about the fate of the Temple, for he wrote Franklin that the authorities “will not admit her as a Cartel or allow any Exch\textsuperscript{a} of Prisoners, tho the most remarkable civility has been shewn to M'r T——— & the vessel at Bristol, & M'r Stephens of the Adm\textsuperscript{v} has given orders she shall not be seizd but permitt\textsuperscript{d} to return. This return means to Boston empty, but to no other place. M'r T——— obligation is to put the Vessel in a port of France or Spain so that He must stand the risque of running Her to Fr or Spain at any rate. This makes Him uneasy, & I dare say you will hear more of the case as it opens more.”\textsuperscript{202}

Despite Digges’ pessimism, Robert Temple secured “protection for the Cartel to depart for some port of Spain or France.” The vessel was cleared for Oporto, in Portugal, from where she would have to make her way to Bilbao at the owner’s risk of capture by French or Spanish vessels of war.\textsuperscript{203} “Her flag, papers & the vessel being known,” Digges explained, “will secure Her from American Privateers & the English Clearance from all British Cruizers.” However, the British seamen who had brought the Temple from Boston had been “pressed on board men of war.”\textsuperscript{204} William Hodgson reminded the Board of Sick and Hurt that permission to sail was a hollow mockery with no crew to navigate her. He was advised to petition the Admiralty for eight Americans on board the British tender Nightingale, lying in the Thames at the Tower of London. These eight, recently brought in, had not yet been committed for high treason and could properly be released. Digges drew the petition which Temple presented.\textsuperscript{205}

The fate of the Temple is obscure. The owner’s agent, Henry Bromfield, departed for France on September 26, bearing a letter of introduction from Digges, stating that “my freind M'r Bromfield can best explain to You the business He is going upon.”\textsuperscript{206} Apparently,
the intention was to load the brig at Bristol and send her, not to Oporto, but to America. Franklin granted a passport in the name of the master, John Fletcher, and took Bromfield's bond. At an unspecified later date, the master advised: "It not being thought eligible to prosecute the Voyage & some Circumstances rendering the Possession of the Paper hazardous I was induced to destroy it . . . of which I give this Assurance at the Request of Mr Bromfield to cancel the Bonds."[207]

The persistent attempts of the four gentlemen who came in the Temple to fulfill the requirements of their parole, afforded a refreshing contrast to the inaction of those who had arrived in the previous flags from Boston. All four had been assiduous in their efforts, Digges informed Franklin, "but meet with flat refusals at the Sec'y's Office, the admiralty, & the board of sick & hurt."[208] William Stewart, one of the four, wrote Franklin a detailed account of their futile endeavors, which he and his three companions signed. They turned to him, Stewart explained, "as we know not how to relieve Ourselves Out of our present disagreeable circumstances, Otherwise thin by Applying to Yr Excellency for Yr Advice & Assistance." They desired certificates stating that each had exerted every means in his power to obtain the release of an American in his stead. The certificates, Stewart hoped, would be so expressed "as to save us in Case of being taken Again, from the treatment which those Desearve that are Supposd to Breake their Parole of honnour."[210]

To Stewart's appeal, Digges appended a note, saying, "I have frequently been with three of the within signd Gentlemen, all natives of Ireland & seemingly very honourable Men, and to my certain knowledge & observation they have (aided by Mr Robert Temple) done every thing in their power here to comply with the terms of their parole agreement."[211] Franklin's advice was to apply anew at the Board of Sick and Hurt and ask that they be received in part payment for "a Debt I owe them of English in Exchange for Americans they have already delivered here," and ask the Board to supply

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207 Passport to John Fletcher with undated endorsement, and bond of Henry Bromfield, Jr., Oct. 23, 1780, Franklin, APS, LXXIV, 63.
208 Lord George Germain, Secretary of State for American Affairs.
209 W. S. C. [Digges] to Franklin, Sept. 8, 1780, Franklin, HSP, V, 143.
210 Officers and passengers of the ship Jane to Franklin, Sept. 10, 1780, ibid., 144.
211 T[homas] D[igges] to Franklin, Sept. 12, 1780, ibid., 144.
each of them with a receipt, stating he had fulfilled the obligations of his parole. The advice was followed and the suggestion rejected. Connolly McCausland, one of the paroled prisoners, writing for himself and his companions, appealed again to Franklin’s humane disposition, “as we are determined to abide by our Agreement.”

While the record ends there, it can be surmised that the appeal was not in vain.

Meanwhile, Reverend Thomas Wren had come up from Portsmouth and had met with Digges to “put your welcome donation to the Pris 78 on a good footing.” Payment of the six pence per man per week had begun on July 18 at Forton Prison to forty-three officers and one hundred and fifty-two men. The exact number of prisoners at Mill Prison had not been ascertained in late August. When details were worked out, Digges remarked, he would “draw a bill on You as heretofore for the amo to that day.” On September 18 he was still in doubt as to the total sum involved, but he finally “drew a Bill on Mons’ G[ran]d ye 16th [October] 10 days sight for 48 £ payable to the person you write to frequently about the Prisoners.” This bill covered the “Charity at F[orton]” only. Apparently the Mill Prison distribution had not yet begun, perhaps because, as Digges had earlier pointed out, “We are not quite so well off in point of assiduity & cleverness in our Plym freind as we are in that of Ports but intentions are equally good.”

Causing him more trouble than either Robert Temple or the prisoners, Digges informed Franklin on September 8, was the settlement of Henry Mitchell’s claim against the government for the cartel ship Polly.

He [Mitchell] obtained a gratuity for his loss of time & the price of his ship wth was seized, 2900 £ this was paid Him by acceptances of his own

212 Franklin to officers and passengers of ship Jane, Oct. 9, 1780, Franklin Letter Book (1780), 281, 282; Connolly McCausland to Franklin, Nov. 9, 1780, Franklin, APS, XX, 66.
217 W. S. C. [Digges] to Franklin, Aug. 18, 1780, ibid., 139.
218 Alexr Brett [Digges] to Franklin, June 10, 1780, ibid., 135. Digges had written that he felt this “an ample sum for the vessel & loss of time to the concerd.”
bills on Mr. J. Jackson, a Sec'y of Lord Sandwich at the Bank of Eng'd 3 mo after date. I was obliged to indorse two of 500 £ each to help him away. When these bills became due ye 29th Aug't they were noted for non Payment & are still unpaid tho the acceptor is amply able & must discharge them. I guess the money being just at this period useful to his Electioneering Schemes at Huntingdon is the cause of delay, but they are fairly promised for pay't the 14th.220

The promise was not kept, leaving Digges in mid-September "in a calamitous situation," but still hopeful of recovery.221

On October 3, Digges was able to give Franklin first word of a serious misfortune: Henry Laurens, former president of the Continental Congress, had been taken at sea in a packet bound from Philadelphia to Holland, and shortly would be brought to town.222 As rapidly as he learned what was happening to the distinguished South Carolinian, Digges communicated the facts to Passy. Laurens was for some time held incommunicado and when finally on October 14 he was permitted to see his son, Henry Laurens, Jr., and his London correspondent, William Manning, they found him "very ill of a lax, much emaciated, not low spirited, & bitterly invective against the people here for his harsh treatment."223

In a guarded letter on October 24, and with complete disregard for rules of syntax, Digges observed that "The Person whom I have lately wrote to you about the Confinement of, is in much better health, tho rigorously confind as usual." He had been able to communicate with Laurens, a fact he mentioned to the Doctor "for your government in case you have a word to say to Him."224 In Laurens' narrative of his confinement in the Tower, there is substantiation for Digges' claim. The prisoner reported that a faithful friend, a woman, in mid-October had offered to convey letters, and "thenceforth I corresponded with my friends . . . as freely as I could have done if I had been at full liberty."225

219 George Jackson, Second Secretary of the Admiralty and Judge Advocate, who served from 1766 to 1782.
220 W. S. C. [Digges] to Franklin, Sept. 8, 1780, ibid., 143.
221 T[homas] D[igges] to Franklin, Sept. 18, 1780, ibid., 145.
222 Wm S. C. [Digges] to Franklin, Oct. 3, 1780, ibid., 149.
October ended with Laurens' treatment continuing rigorous "to an extreem." "He is getting better," Digges wrote, "& I hear from Him & he from me now & then." At the bottom of this letter he copied a note, which, he implied, came from the prisoner in the Tower. It read:

"Tho not personally known, I am well acquainted with yr Character & attatchments & with his connexions yonder, & had letters to Him from —— and ———. I am happy to be informd the bills are taken up—there will be no more appear—had reprobated the premature & dangerous step of drawing—should be glad were it possible to see you & the person concernd in taking up the Bills (L-D° N———le)227—The present confinement is cruel, the mode & terms aggravate, but there is no abatement on this or any other consideration of Spirits—these are calm & composd—had these faile, the flesh under the late malady would have sunk totally—continue to keep those friends F[ranklin] and A[dams] informd, & communicate intelligence from them as soon as possible—Should not friends interpose for obtaining some Enlargement or parole, by bail or Exchange?—have no hint to communicate at this moment, except that those papers said to be taken, which were intended to be sunk, are of no importance—A million of thanks to W S. C—but a snatchd moment to write all this.”228

Reference to the bills being taken up by De Neufville is rather clear indication of the genuineness of the letter. Digges, of course, inserted the two parenthetical identifications for Franklin's information. The latter had refused to accept the bills when they came to him from Holland because they were not endorsed. He suspected they had been pilfered from the prisoner's papers and sent to Sir Joseph York, British ambassador to Holland, to be passed through a Dutch banker for acceptance.229 It was discovered, however, that Laurens had slipped the bills, unendorsed, into Manning's hand during the "first & watchd interview." Manning, in turn, had passed them to young De Neufville, who forwarded them to his father in Amsterdam.230

Captain Benjamin Joy, acting as a messenger for Digges at this time, became the eighth suppliant Digges had sent to Franklin for a passport to ship goods out of Great Britain for America. Joy was a
Boston mariner, but his venture was intended for Virginia, which was "very much in want of Blue & Colourd Army Cloths, Blanketts, Coarse Woolens, Tent Linin, Sail-Duck, &c." "James Barron Esq. of the Board of War, Duncan Ross Esq' of the board of Trade, and General [George] Weedon," three distinguished Virginians, were named as recommending Joy. The captain had a brigantine called the Swallow, of one hundred and fifty tons burden, "a Copper sheath'd Vessel of the Bermudean mould having a square tuck." "... His attachment & active services for the Cause of His Country are so well known to me," wrote Digges, "that I cannot but back his solicitation to Your Excellency with my strongest wishes that You gratify Him." 231

Prisoners of war remained an ever-present concern to Digges, who was disturbed by the conduct of American cruisers in European seas. Franklin would never secure sufficient Britishers for future exchange, he pointed out, if a stop was not put to "the abominable & impolitic practice of not holding their Prisoners, but suffering them to go at large whenever they have oppertunity." He cited a glaring example, that of Captain Joseph Robinson, of the Salem privateer Pilgrim, 232 who had landed six or seven captains and fifty-three seamen near Cape Clear in Ireland.

The "exemplary exertions of a very worthy little agent [Thomas Wren]" at Forton Prison, however, had resulted in a number of Americans finding their way over "to a certain House in Amsterdam," thus reducing the total held in that prison considerably. Numbers in Mill Prison had been reduced, too, but from a different cause, he commented. Fifteen or sixteen "in a fit of despair of getting Exchangd, lately enterd into the British service." 233

In November, 1780, an abrupt change occurred in the activities of Thomas Digges. John Trumbull, former colonel in the Continental army and son of Jonathan Trumbull, rebel governor of Connecticut,

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had arrived in London the previous summer to study art under the famous painter, Benjamin West. The foolhardy step had been taken upon a suggestion John Temple had made to the former colonel in Boston the winter before.\textsuperscript{234} Quite naturally, Temple’s friends became Trumbull’s, and among them, of course, was Thomas Digges. All had been serene. The Ministry had offered no objections to the young American’s presence as long as he was simply striving to improve his technique as a painter. Trumbull, however, had not been content to sit at the feet of the master and learn to wield a better brush. He, along with William Brailsford, a Massachusetts merchant, and Digges, had decided to embark upon a shipping adventure, similar, no doubt, to those the latter had promoted with Franklin.\textsuperscript{235} This project might well have succeeded had not all England learned in mid-November of the hanging of Major John André as a spy at Tappan, New Jersey, on October 2. A badly shaken Digges, too frightened even to use one of his numerous aliases, wrote an unsigned letter to Franklin on November 21, reporting what had happened:

\begin{quote}
\textit{an Am\textsuperscript{a} Gent\textsuperscript{1} whom I never heard of before of the name of Trumbull is taken up for Treason on the oaths of two N. England men who knew him He was seizd on Sund\textsuperscript{y} night \& is in close confinem\textsuperscript{t} \& Irons. I understand every person who occasionally visited him the next day, viz. Mr Stewart a painter,\textsuperscript{236} M. Diggs, Mr D Neufville a Dutch merch\textsuperscript{t}, Mr Laurens Jr \&c were all taken to a Magistrate to declare what they knew of Him \& a Mr Tylor (who I understand has been many days gone from England)\textsuperscript{237} but that nothing was got out of the Witness’s. The oaths of His informans \& his own papers, every body says is sufficient to convict Him \& the reason assigned for His now apprehension is that means are using to retaliate for Major Andre’s death. Mr Trumbull being formerly they say, an Adj\textsuperscript{t} General in the Am\textsuperscript{a} Army is exactly of Andre’s rank, and is therefore thought a proper person to retaliate upon. Good God what a degree of wickedness folly \& weakness are we Englishmen reduced to.\textsuperscript{238}}
\end{quote}

Digges left untold what caused his own consternation. Trumbull had been hauled off to the Brown Bear Tavern in Drury Lane, while Bow Street officers ransacked his rooms in George Street. One letter

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{234} Autobiography of John Trumbull (Boston, 1871), 66.
\item \textsuperscript{235} L. de Neufville to Franklin, Feb. 8, 1781, Franklin, APS, XXI, 54.
\item \textsuperscript{236} Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828).
\item \textsuperscript{237} Maj. John Steel Tyler, who resigned from Jackson’s Continental regiment on Mar. 1, 1779. Tyler fled England the night of Trumbull’s arrest, having been warned by a friend of the warrant issued against him.
\item \textsuperscript{238} [Digges] to Franklin, Nov. 21, 1780, Franklin, UP, IV, 64.
\end{itemize}
had been found in his pocket, recommending John Temple to his father, the Connecticut governor, as a friend to the American cause. Two more were discovered in his desk drawer. One was from William Temple Franklin, acknowledging Trumbull’s inquiry about mail from home and sending his grandfather’s compliments. The other was seized upon as damning evidence. It was written by a William White from Lyme in Dorset, and was addressed to Trumbull in the care of Mr. Waters, No. 23 Villars Street, Strand. It spoke in guarded terms of some expedition the means for which would be gotten “in the kingdom of our dear and great ally.” It was not difficult for the authorities to read treason into this and the following lines of the letter: “I shall rejoice to join you in any plan that you and Waters may adopt, and hope in God, that your expectations may not be disappointed.”

Who was White? Who was Waters? The examining magistrate thundered these questions at Trumbull when he was arraigned in the police station across the street from the Brown Bear on the following morning. The American prisoner was unafraid and frank. “As to Mr. White I know nothing further of him than a common-place acquaintance whom I accidentally met at Vauxhall,” Trumbull replied, “and I know not either his profession or connexions.” Then he answered the second question: “The man’s name to whom his letter was addressed was not Waters as appeared on the superscription, but Digges.”

When the officers arrived to conduct Thomas Digges before a magistrate, they found no incriminating letters in his rooms. He had profited by what had happened a year before to Thomas Hutchins and had continued the practice of keeping his papers elsewhere. Neither could the letter from White to Trumbull, while mentioning him as a participant in some sort of a suspicious adventure, provide the police with sufficient evidence to hold him. He was permitted to return to Villars Street, where young De Neufville, who also had undergone magisterial catechizing, found him in a “disagreeable Situation from the circumstance of Mr. Trumbull being taken up.”

De Neufville lost no time in hieing himself home to Amsterdam. Before departure, however, he learned that William Brailsford had

239 The London Chronicle, Nov. 21–23, 1780.
240 L. de Neufville to Franklin, Dec. 21, 1780, Franklin, APS, XX, 133.
been apprehended and was suspected of being the author of the William White letter. Also, while the Trumbull case had made Digges an "object of Ministry's attention," real danger to the Marylander lay in the disclosure that he had been aiding escaped prisoners to get out of England. Some Americans who owed their freedom to his care had behaved imprudently by telling their story to the master of the vessel that had landed them in Holland. With arrest seemingly imminent, Thomas Digges thought it wise to vanish for the time being, to silence his pen and keep himself out of the way "for fear the same insolence might extend to himself" which had placed Trumbull and Brailsford in jail.241

Digges' letters through November had been accumulating unanswered on Benjamin Franklin's desk. "I have been long ill of the Gout," the Doctor apologized when he took up his quill on December 5, "or should have written sooner." He tried to atone for unintentional neglect by answering all questions. Benjamin Joy had received his passport for the brigantine Swallow, "but having never had the Satisfaction to hear of the arrival of one of these undertakings except Mitchel at Boston, I begin to suspect unfair Dealing." He feared he had no authority over American captains landing prisoners in Great Britain, explaining, "The Privateers from Dunkirk, tho' call'd American are the Property of French Merchants and follow their Orders in ransoming, which I cannot prevent." The privateer Pilgrim, however, certainly should have delivered her prisoners in France.

The bill for £48 for the expense of the prisoners had been received and accepted. "To add a little to the relief of the unfortunate Americans still in Prison," he directed Digges, "I request you wou'd from the time you receive this, & during the Months of Jan'y Feb'y March and April, give them double the Allowance I formerly directed pr Week: but manage it prudently, and order it so as to do them in your Opinion the most Good." All of this reminded Franklin that "Having mislaid some of your Letters I find myself at a Loss, in some Parts of the Accounts between us, & some of the Things you have sent being for other People, I wish you would be so good as to send me out of your Books, a Compleat Copy of your Account from the beginning which will much oblige me."242

241 L. de Neufville to Franklin, Feb. 8, 1781, ibid., XXI, 54.
242 Franklin to Digges, Dec. 5, 1780, Franklin Letter Book (1780), 318, 319.
December days flowed along at Passy, but no more word came from Digges. As his letters for two years had been arriving on almost a weekly schedule, this unusual silence gave Franklin some concern. Perhaps his instructions to increase the allowance for the prisoners had miscarried. On December 18, unwilling to wait longer, he addressed William Hodgson. “I wrote some time since to a Friend that I wish’d the allowance per Week to be doubled,” he explained. “I pray that during the Months of January, February and March the sum to each man may be equivalent to 18 pence a Week in money, Provisions or Cloaths as the Necessities of each may require and at your Discretion or that of our good Christian Friends who are on the spot.”

Around the beginning of January, 1781, the Doctor received a letter from young De Neufville with only a casual reference to Digges’ troubles, as he did not doubt that Franklin was “perfectly ackwainted with every circumstance relating to it.” Franklin replied, “You mention Mr Digges being in a disagreeable Situation; please to tell me what it was, for I have not been well inform’d of particulars as you imagine.” Nor was he better informed a few days later when Digges’ long silence was broken by a letter dated December 29, signed “W R,” but giving no indication from what part of England it came. The writer implied that he had been out of the line of communication since November 25, but offered no reasons. He protested that there had been no “foul play” in granting passports, and reiterated that he “never was or ever will be concernd in any pecuniary manner in them negotiations, unless I ask one for my sole use & purpose.” He then referred to the increased allowance for the prisoners, and Franklin’s desire for an accounting:

Your order for additional advance of pay to your Servants have been complyd with & the acco’t will be renderd thereof very soon—a great addition of numbers lately will make it come heavy. My own private acco’t cannot be got at for some days without very great inconvenience, I being generally distant from all papers books &c. but it shall be very soon forwarded.

244 L. de Neufville to Franklin, Dec. 21, 1780, Franklin, APS, XX, 133.
245 Franklin to L. de Neufville, Jan. 20, 1781, Franklin, LC, 658.
William Hodgson acknowledged Franklin’s order to increase the prisoners’ allotment, but protested that such liberality would require more than £150 a month. In agreement with the agents at Portsmouth and Plymouth, he therefore proposed “not allowing quite so much.” Franklin left disposition of the money entirely to Hodgson’s discretion, pointing out on January 30, “As I had formerly written to Mr. Digges on the same subject, & on the Stoppage of our Correspondence wrote to you, I wish it may be convenient to you to see him so you may not be both doing the same thing unknown to each other.”

In January Digges reported that he had drawn three bills on Ferdinand Grand, in favor of an H. Johnson, in the amounts of £55, £65, and £110. Franklin already had sent £150 to Hodgson and for the first time, apparently, his suspicions were aroused. Something was wrong. Maybe Hodgson had failed to communicate with Digges and they were duplicating each other’s payments. This uncertainty, added to a rumor that came to his ears (he never disclosed what it was) led Franklin to write Ferdinand Grand on February 23:

Mr. Digges has not sent me any Account of his Disbursements, on which his Drafts ought to be founded, tho I long since desired it of him; and I have this Day heard some thing that makes me doubtful. I therefore desire, that if you have not already paid the Bills mentioned in these his inclosed Letters, that you stop Payment till farther Order.

The bills, of course, were the three drawn in favor of H. Johnson. The stop-payment order arrived too late; Grand had remitted for all three. Making the best of an unfortunate situation, Franklin wrote to Digges on March 8, stating that he had ordered the bills honored. To make sure that the letter reached its proper destination, he enclosed it open to Hodgson to be forwarded. At the end of the month he received a staggering disclosure. The Coleman Street

247 Hodgson to Franklin, Jan. 9, 1781, Franklin, APS, XXI, 14.
248 Franklin to Hodgson, Jan. 30, 1781, Franklin, LC, 665.
249 A letter of Jan. 3, 1781, which noted the bill for £55, has not been found. Its partial contents has been obtained from two letters from Franklin, one of Jan. 12, 1781, to Francis Bowens, and the other, of Feb. 23, 1781, to Ferdinand Grand. Ibid., 654, 687. Digges reported the bill for £65 in a letter of Jan. 20, and the bill for £110 in a letter of Jan. 30.
250 Franklin to Ferdinand Grand, Feb. 23, 1781, ibid., 687.
251 Franklin to Thomas Digges, Mar. 8, 1781, incomplete, Franklin Letter Book (1781-1782), 32.
merchant advised that Digges had not advanced a single shilling to the agents at Forton and Mill prisons, although advising each to increase the allowance to the prisoners to one shilling per week; that he had failed to reimburse either agent for payments amounting to £45 that they had made at his direction in the late fall; and that he was at Bristol purchasing goods, apparently planning to leave for Lisbon. Digges has, Hodgson asserted, "deceived you most egregiously."\(^{252}\)

To this point Franklin had balanced suspicions and fears against the willing and useful services Digges had performed over the past two years, against the valuable information he had supplied so copiously, and, above all, against the affection he had felt for the personable Marylander ever since the visit to Passy in the spring of 1779. He really wanted to hear explanations that would clear away his doubts. The revulsion upon learning that this man whom he had trusted and regarded so highly had deliberately deceived and defrauded him, literally overwhelmed the Doctor. His trenchant pen, which now brooked no excuses, wrote Digges' infamy in words of fire:

> He who robs the Rich even of a single Guinea is a Villain; but what is he who can break his sacred Trust by robbing a poor Man and a Prisoner of eighteen Pence given charitably for his Relief, and repeat that Crime as often as there are Weeks in a Winter, and multiply it by robbing as many poor Men every Week as make up the Number of near 600? We have no name in our Language for such atrocious Wickedness. If such a Fellow is not damn'd it is not worth while to keep a Devil.\(^{253}\)

Thomas Digges, harried, harassed, penniless and at his wit's end, had, indeed, turned rogue. The long struggle to live like a gentleman without a gentleman's income had terminated in disaster. With no desire "to Apologize for his Crimes," William Hodgson suggested an explanation: "I apprehend that having lived rather in a genteel Stile & having no fixed Revenue his necessities must have been great & he must have been put to many Shifts." Actually, until John Trumbull's arrest and his own involvement, Digges had managed well with such funds as he could lay his hands on. True, he had borrowed extensively from friends to keep up the appearance of a man-

\(^{252}\) Hodgson to Franklin, Mar. 20, 1781, Franklin, APS, XXI, 117.

From all evidence, however, he had paid out large sums to escaped Americans, just as he claimed, and he had administered honestly the money Franklin had furnished him for Gustavus Conyngham and John Manley. Conyngham’s tribute is already in the record, and Manley, writing from Mill Prison on June 4, 1781, stated, “My good Friend Mr Diggs has been my only Support.”

Upon Digges’ own assertion, more than one hundred and sixty fugitives from British prisons “had thrown themselves on me,” a number of them presenting bills for him to cash in varying amounts, even as high as fifteen guineas. And his bitter remark will be recalled that none save one bill had ever been honored by the recipients of his charity. Hence, a statement by Hodgson that Digges’ advance to escaped prisoners “must in its Nature be a mere trifle” is subject to question.

When first forced into hiding, Digges had remained in a London suburb, and there had received from Ferdinand Grand the draft for £48 accepted by Franklin on December 5. He could not negotiate it without exposing himself to the danger of arrest, so he had called surreptitiously upon Hodgson for that service, had left no instructions how the money was to be applied, and never returned. From his place of concealment he had written shortly before Christmas to the agents at Portsmouth and Plymouth to supply the prisoners one shilling per week beginning January 1, but had not stated how they would be reimbursed. Thomas Wren at Forton, already £25 in advance upon Digges’ previous order, wrote questioningly to Hodgson. There seemed too much secrecy, and he was puzzled why “the conveyance & correspondence abt' it be thro' a person where the mode would imply that it was not allow’d.”

Whatever plans Digges may have had to utilize the £48 left for negotiation with Hodgson went by the board when to his previous tribulations was added a report that he had been trading with the enemy. The story was out, even though garbled, about Walter Belt and the brigantine Brighten, and Digges was suspected of conniving with that captain, shipping goods insured for New York, and con-

254 Hodgson to Franklin, May 8, 1781, Franklin, APS, XXII, 12.
255 Manley to Franklin, June 4, 1781, ibid., XXII, 35.
256 T[homas] D[jigges] to John Green, June 11, 1782, Thibault Collection, in private hands.
257 Hodgson to Franklin, Apr. 12, 1781, Franklin, APS, XXI, 41.
258 Wren to Hodgson, Jan. 8, 1781, ibid., XLVII, 189.
tributing to "a most notorious Breach of Faith & Barratry" when the "Brighton" had left her convoy and put into Boston.\textsuperscript{259} With this tale circulating on 'change, Thomas Digges decamped to Bristol, writing Franklin on December 29 with assurance that orders were being carried out, and on January 3 issuing the first of the series of bills upon the unsuspecting Doctor. Oddly enough, with Digges vanished, Hodgson put the £48 to the exact purpose for which it had been intended, paying the agents at Portsmouth and Plymouth the amounts owed them for the distribution they had made in the final months of the previous year.\textsuperscript{260}

From the beginning of his troubles Digges maintained a brazen, albeit stupid, effrontery in his letters. Unfortunately, those written in the first three months of 1781 have not been located. Their contents can be gleaned, therefore, only from comments by the recipients. Even through early March, wrote Franklin, Digges had insisted that "he only draws as he is drawn upon by his Friends, who hand the Money to the Prisoners, and that those Friends are almost tired of the charitable Employment, but he encourages them."\textsuperscript{261} Later, according to the Doctor, Digges had had the impudence to pretend being injured by a protested bill, had claimed he had sent an accounting of all monies received in the previous year, and had hinted that disbursements to March first were on the way. "But no such Accounts or Hints are received," Franklin remarked, "and I believe were never sent."\textsuperscript{262} In still a third letter Digges spoke of "untoward Circumstances" that had happened to him. "That I suppose," Hodgson commented caustically when he read a copy supplied from Passy, "must allude to his having been arrested at Bath, which I am informed was the Case very lately." In that same letter Digges had spoken of a remittance from Maryland to the French banking house of Bouffle et fils upon which he expected to draw to repay the money received from Franklin.\textsuperscript{263} The latter branded the story as "probably a Lie," and even if true, it meant nothing, since Bouffle et fils had long since been bankrupt.\textsuperscript{264}

\textsuperscript{259} Hodgson to Franklin, Mar. 20, 1781, \textit{ibid.}, XXI, 117.
\textsuperscript{260} Hodgson to Franklin, Apr. 12, 1781, \textit{ibid.}, XXI, 41.
\textsuperscript{261} Franklin to Hodgson, Apr. 1, 1781, Franklin, LC, 717.
\textsuperscript{262} Franklin to Hodgson, Apr. 25, 1781, \textit{ibid.}, 745.
\textsuperscript{263} Hodgson to Franklin, May 8, 1781, Franklin, APS, XXII, 12.
\textsuperscript{264} Franklin to Hodgson, July 17, 1781, Franklin, LC, 837.
Franklin had sent Hodgson a power of attorney to recover the sums advanced and had wondered if a sense of shame could be invoked. "Perhaps on acquainting him privately with the Detection of his Crime," he had written hopefully, "he may chuse to pay immediately rather than be exposed to a Prosecution." The Coleman Street merchant dispelled all possibility of such an approach:

I wish there was any prospect of my being able to do anything with this Man, but I fear all is forlorn hope as to what can be done here. . . . If he had been in Credit & his Character not blasted the way you propose of acquainting him privately with the detection of his Crime might have promised success, as things are now Circumstanced that mode cannot be persued, for as I did not imagine it to be your wish that this Man's Villainy shou'd be concealed, I made no scruple of acquainting several persons therewith particularly Mr Temple & some others with whom D used to be on a friendly footing. My opinion is that he will not appear again in London.

The reported arrest at Bath to the contrary, Digges remained at large. Using the money he had gotten from Franklin and, no doubt, intending some day to repay it, he sojourned at Bristol and Birmingham and was in Bath, a free man, on March 24, when he wrote the Mill Prison agent that he planned to go to Exeter and might even visit Plymouth. Also, he sent to Thomas Wren at Forton the sum of £30, but forbade any further advances upon his account. That was the last heard from him until late in June when he wrote Hodgson that "he intends to go to Passy to justify himself." Franklin received this information with a snort of disbelief: "I have not as much Faith in Digges coming here as I have in his going to Hell.

There can be no question as to Digges' peculation, but a considerable one as to its extent. When some months later Franklin told Gustavus Conyngham about "the greatest villain I ever met with," he declared that Digges had "last winter drawn upon me for 495 £ for the support of prisoners, and applied but 30 £ to their use."
Still later he informed Congress that he had been defrauded of "between three and four hundred pounds." Thus, we have a difference between "several hundred pounds," "three or four hundred pounds," and the figure quoted to Conyngham.

Existing records show that after January 1, 1781, Franklin honored three drafts from Digges totaling £220, and possibly a fourth for £75. To arrive at a total of £495 would indicate that the Doctor had included four drafts of previous years: £50 and £33 for Conyngham, £71 for Manley and other prisoners, and the £48 of December 5, 1780. As these four, while not accounted for, undoubtedly had been spent properly, and £30 additional had been paid to Thomas Wren early in 1781, the sum Digges used to support himself while in hiding was, perhaps, under two hundred pounds. Regardless of the amount, however, Franklin must have gritted his teeth in sheer frustration to be told by Hodgson toward the close of 1781, that "the last I heard of Digges was from Bristol where he gave out that you were perfectly well satisfy'd with his Conduct." 

Contrary to predictions, Thomas Digges returned to London, but not until the beginning of 1782. John Trumbull had been released in August, 1781, and had departed for Amsterdam, the charge of treason dropped. Accounts from America had cleared up the matter of the brigantine Brighton to the satisfaction of the authorities. She had been taken by the Virginia letter-of-marque ship General Washington, Captain George Jameson, bound from Amsterdam for America, had been carried into Boston as a prize and libeled against in admiralty court. Certainly, under such circumstances there could have been no illegal trading with the enemy. Likewise, suspicions of aiding escaped prisoners, based only upon the word of a shipmaster, seem to have been long forgotten. There remained, therefore, only the stigma of embezzling from the American minister plenipotentiary in France, and Digges had no fears that a British court would indict him for such an offense.

272 Franklin to Livingston, June 25, 1782, ibid., 512.
273 Franklin to Ferdinand Grand, Feb. 23, 1781, Franklin, LC, 687.
274 Franklin to Hodgson, Apr. 1, 1781, ibid., 717.
275 Hodgson to Franklin, Dec. 21, 1781, Franklin, APS, XXIII, 135.
276 Hodgson to Franklin, Sept. 4, 1781, ibid., XXII, 133.
277 Continental Journal (Boston), Nov. 2, 1780; Independent Chronicle, Jan. 4, 1781.
Of course, he shunned William Hodgson and all those from whom he had borrowed in the past, but his interest in the unfortunate Americans, whether in Forton or Mill prisons, or fleeing to him to aid them out of England, was renewed. One of them later wrote to George Digges in appreciation of the services his older brother had rendered in 1782: "His part I am sure was always good but the good man had not always the mains [sic] to Supply our Distress." 278

Not all of his former acquaintances and associates avoided him. David Hartley, immersed as always in hopes and plans for reconciliation, was still friendly. So were a number of other Whigs, in and out of Parliament, including Richard Penn. The latter was the means of introducing Digges to the mission which brought about the nineteenth-century charge that he had been employed as a British agent or spy. 279

The North Ministry was tottering, but even in its death throes it clung to hope that it could inveigle America into a truce and a separate peace. Reports had reached England that the original commission to John Adams to negotiate had been expanded to include Franklin and three others, but "there was not one person in Great Britain who could affirm or prove that there was such a commission, although it had been announced in the gazettes." 280

To determine this and other matters, Lord North, through Lord Beauchamp, 281 turned to Richard Penn. The Proprietor's grandson, with many American friends and no Tory taint, seemed a logical person to ascertain if there were persons in Europe commissioned by Congress to treat for peace. If so, were they now willing to avail themselves of that commission? Since the Ministry was sincere, would they receive a commissioner to speak for a truce, and would they mention a place for such a meeting? Penn would not essay the task, referring Beauchamp to Digges as one "knowing the nature of Mr. Adams' former commission." 282

When the proposal was outlined by Beauchamp, along with a suggestion that Adams be called upon at Amsterdam for the answers,

281 William Lygon (1747-1816), 1st Earl Beauchamp.
Digges begged for time to consider and hastened to David Hartley for advice. The latter believed the consultation was "from motives of caution, that he might know what ground he had to stand upon." Hartley, who never omitted an opportunity to press his favorite cause, could see no harm in Digges' undertaking the journey. Moreover, upon making further inquiries, the British M.P. was satisfied that the request through Beauchamp came "from the highest authority." 

With memories of the abortive peace effort in April, 1779, lingering in his memory, Digges was still dubious of the sincerity behind the proposal. He did not consent until after several meetings with Penn and Beauchamp. His agreement came only when the latter gave "pledge of his personal honor" that it was "a serious and sincere requisition from the ministry," which Hartley verified. Even then, according to Digges' story, he exacted a promise from Beauchamp to be fulfilled when the mission was completed—"to obtain a restoration of my papers from Lord Hillsborough's office, which were in a most illegal and unjustifiable manner seized from me near a twelve-month ago."

Here was something new! Among all the excuses offered for not producing his accounts, confiscation of his papers by the government had never been mentioned. Digges' claim, ever since Thomas Hutchins' arrest, had been that his correspondence was not available, being, as he once had emphasized, "purposely secured many miles from here." The seizure that he now described as occurring around April, 1781, would have been made while he was absent from London, which was very unlikely. The tale appears to have been invented as another alibi for his delay in accounting to Franklin.

Before Digges departed he assured Hartley that he intended to go from Amsterdam to Paris, and Hartley entrusted him with several letters. One, to Adams, contained a postscript: "Mr. Digges who will deliver this to you, will explain many things of great importance on the subject of peace." One letter to Franklin was devoted to Digges

283 Hartley to Franklin, Mar. 11, 1782, ibid., 236.
284 Hartley to Adams, Mar. 11, 1782, Adams, VII, 551.
286 Thomas Digges to Franklin, Jan. 9, 1780, Franklin, APS, LXI, 109.
and his mission\textsuperscript{289}; a second letter told of Hartley's own peace efforts and, in reference to the approach to John Adams, commented that "In whatever way a fair treaty may be opened, by whomsoever or with whomsoever, I shall heartily wish good success to it for the common good and peace of mankind."\textsuperscript{290}

Reaching Amsterdam by way of Ostend on the night of March 20, Digges put up at the First Bible Hostelry and sent a mysterious message to Adams. He desired an audience on a matter of public moment, as well as on "a private affair of consequence to myself, which will, I think, lead me in a few days to Dr. F., at Paris." As Digges had not registered at the hotel, Adams should direct a line "to the gentleman who arrived this night, and lodges in the room number ten."\textsuperscript{291} John Adams acknowledged the letter as requested. He would see the gentleman from "room number ten," but only in the presence of his secretary, not wishing to converse with anyone from England without a witness. He advised the said gentleman that he would do better "to proceed forthwith to Paris and communicate whatever he has to say to Dr. Franklin and the Comte de Vergennes."\textsuperscript{292}

Such a suggestion was not at all to Digges' liking, so at ten o'clock on the morning of March 21, he called upon the reluctant minister. He told what Adams later termed "a long story" of the reason for his visit, and finally inquired of that gentleman if he or any others had authority to treat with Great Britain for a truce. First explaining Congress's action in naming a new commission with full power to make peace, thus superseding the original authority given to him alone, Adams informed Digges "... that if the King of England were my father, and I the heir apparent to his throne, I would not advise him ever to think of a truce, because it would be but a real war under a simulated appearance of tranquillity, and would end in another open and bloody war, without doing any real good to any of the parties."\textsuperscript{293}

\textsuperscript{289} Hartley to Franklin, Mar. 11, 1782, Wharton, V, 236–237.
\textsuperscript{290} Hartley to Franklin, Mar. 12, 1782, \textit{ibid.}, 237.
\textsuperscript{291} T[homas] D[igges] to Adams, "Wednesday night 10 o'clock" [Mar. 20, 1782], Adams, VII, 549.
\textsuperscript{292} Adams to Digges, Mar. 21, 1782, \textit{ibid.}, 351. Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes (1717–1787), French Foreign Minister.
\textsuperscript{293} Adams to Franklin, Mar. 26, 1782, \textit{ibid.}, 554.
The other topics discussed were later set down by Digges in his report, perhaps none too accurately. Before leaving Amsterdam on March 22, Digges began a letter to Franklin, telling his reasons for undertaking the journey, its results, and his original intention to visit Paris. "I feel the disadvantages under which I labor," he said, "when writing to you on a matter which cannot be explained or cleared up but by personal conversation." Supposing, however, that upon the subject of peace or a truce Franklin's reply would be similar to that of Adams, he had reconsidered and had determined to return to London, obtain his papers through Lord Beauchamp's promised assistance, and then come to Passy.

If there was any truth in the tale of the seizure of his papers, Digges met bitter disappointment when he arrived in London on March 27. The Ministry which had prompted his trip to Amsterdam was no more. Lord North had resigned on March 22, and with him had gone his cabinet—Hillsborough, Beauchamp, and all the rest. So Digges made the best of the bad bargain and presented his report to Lord Shelburne, "the man whose province it now is to act in any negotiations with America." How George III received that report, and what Shelburne thought of its accuracy, has already been told. Meanwhile, Franklin wrote to David Hartley, expressing anew his opinion of Thomas Digges:

I have no confidence in him, nor in anything he says, or may say, of his being sent by ministers. Nor will I have any communication with him, except in receiving and considering the justification of himself which he pretends he shall be able and intends to make of his excessive drafts on me, on account of the relief I have ordered to the prisoners, and his embezzlement of the money.

Vastly at variance, this, to the "great Esteem" the Doctor had expressed shortly after the visit in the spring of 1779. Yet both visits had been approved by Lord North and had the blessing of David Hartley. They were identical in purpose—to seek a truce and a separate peace—but the difference lay in what had happened in the intervening years. Affection for Thomas Digges had turned to loath-

294 "Mr Digges's Account of what passed between him and Mr Adams" [Mar. 30, 1782], Fortescue, V, 431-433.
295 Thomas Digges to Franklin, Mar. 22, 1782, Wharton, V, 269-270.
296 Thomas Digges to Adams, Apr. 2, 1782, Adams, VII, 562.
297 Franklin to Hartley, Apr. 5, 1782, Wharton, V, 293-294.
ing, but at no time did Franklin state, or imply, that his erstwhile confidant was in the employ of the British government. Even when informing Congress of Digges' defalcation and telling of a rumor that the Marylander was headed homeward, he warned simply, "Beware of him, for he is very artful, and has cheated many." 298

Only fragmentary glimpses can be had of Thomas Digges and his activities after his return from Amsterdam. "The Fellow appears with all possible Effrontery," William Hodgson wrote to Franklin in July, "especially since he was sent or pretended to be sent, by ye old Ministry to M' Adams at ye Hague." Hodgson believed it possible to proceed against Digges "without any risque," and urged the Doctor to forward all bills and letters needed for criminal prosecution. 299 In August, Hodgson paid a visit to Passy, but apparently all Franklin was willing to do was to send the culprit a letter, threatening action. "I wrote to Digges pursuant to what we settled," the merchant advised after his return to London late that month, "but he has not given any Answer, nor do I expect he will." 300

Digges for his part laid claim, evidently with some truth, to continued efforts to help the prisoners. He exerted himself particularly with the new Admiralty Board, he said, in behalf of two interesting Irishmen, Luke Ryan and Edward Macatter, who lay in Newgate awaiting execution for piracy. This pair, in 1779 and 1780, had commanded vessels owned by a Dunkirk merchant, but commissioned by Franklin as American privateers. In 1781, while cruising in other commands under French colors, they had been captured and had claimed American citizenship. Tried in Old Bailey on March 30, 1782, their pretensions, despite an array of witnesses brought from the prisons to bolster them, were riddled, and conviction followed. 301

He had obtained a promise from the Admiralty, Digges stated, that the prisoners who had testified for Macatter would not be remanded to Mill Prison, but would be left on parole. 302 Whether other steps he took were instrumental in the respites and subsequent par-

298 Franklin to Livingston, June 25, 1782, ibid., 512.
299 Hodgson to Franklin, July 13, 1782, Franklin, HSP, III, 30.
300 Hodgson to Franklin, Aug. 26, 1782, ibid., 41.
301 The Public Advertiser, Apr. 2, 1782; Franklin to John Torris, Feb. 4, 1780, Franklin Letter Book (1780), 15.
302 Thomas Digges to Adams, Apr. 2, 1782, Adams, VII, 564.
dons of the condemned men is hard to say. A Mill Prison captive, however, substantiated Digges' efforts for the two captains with the comment, "the[y] ought Ever be obliged to you for your Sundrey Applications for thim of which I have been Long Sense Informed from a Friend in London."\(^{303}\)

This same prisoner, Captain John Green of the Continental navy,\(^{304}\) expressed gratitude to Digges for advancing him £20 on a note, and consoled with him upon the low state of his finances. Green hoped "Ear long, that Something will be dun for you to Reemburse you for your losses."\(^{305}\) When cartels with prisoners for a wholesale exchange sailed from Plymouth for America in June, \(1782\), Digges sent a farewell letter to Green:

I was asked at the Admiralty if the Prisoners did not mean to take the Cartels into France; I answ\(\text{d}\) I had no reason to believe so.—I hope it will not enter the heads of anyone, for it would be very unfair after the handsome manner the new Ministry have permitted the Prisoners to get home. You cannot think the pleasure I feel that they are going away. . . . adieu

God bless You & success to you all and if ever you go to Maryland call at Warburton & see my home & friends.\(^{306}\)

After that, there is a long silence from and about Thomas Digges. It was broken in July, \(1785\), when Franklin was embarking for home after eight and a half years in France. The news came from Jonathan Williams, Jr., who wrote from Dublin, as has already been told, that Digges was in jail, "paying severely for his Folly & Wickedness."\(^{307}\) Arrest in Ireland, however, seemed no more to restrain the gentleman from Maryland in \(1785\), than it had in Bath four years earlier. When the war ended and communications with home were re-established, it is likely that Digges was once more able to replenish his funds with money from Warburton. This is a safe inference, because in \(1793\) Thomas Digges, well established in London, was applied to by the American consul general to run down the Yorkshire heirs of an Englishman, who had died in Virginia unmarried and wealthy.\(^{308}\)

\(^{303}\) Green to Digges, May 21, \(1782\), John Green Letter Book, Thibault Collection.

\(^{304}\) John Green (1736–1796).

\(^{305}\) Green to Digges, Apr. 20, \(1782\), John Green Letter Book, Thibault Collection.

\(^{306}\) Thomas D[igges] to Green, June 11, \(1782\), ibid.

\(^{307}\) Jonathan Williams, Jr., to Franklin, June 17, \(1785\), Franklin, APS, XXXVIII, 158.

\(^{308}\) Richmond Enquirer (October, 1808), quoted in "Notes and Queries," The Virginia Magazine of History & Biography, XXXVI (1928), 263.
Benjamin Franklin had breathed his last on April 17, 1790, and there were none apparently in America interested in carrying on the Doctor's righteous indignation over Thomas Digges' reprehensible conduct, nor in seeking an accounting for the embezzled money. George Digges had died in November, 1792, leaving Thomas as the male survivor of that branch of the family. Nothing prevented his return home, but it was not until 1799 that he arrived at Warburton Manor and discovered three acres of the estate, along the river at the mouth of Piscataway Creek, being rapidly converted into a water battery. It was to bear the name of Fort Warburton, and later, Fort Washington.

On February 8, 1799, Thomas Digges was rowed across the Potomac to dine with George and Martha Washington, renewing the pleasant family custom which, perforce, had lapsed during the war and the first eight years of the republic. Three months later, on May 10, he dined again at Mount Vernon, and on June 11, he was one of a larger company to enjoy the gracious Washington hospitality. On August 15, about four months before his death, Washington wrote in his diary the last entry regarding his Warburton Manor guests—"Mr. Thos Digges dined here."

Two more dates and the story of this controversial, somewhat maligned, yet none-too-guiltless person is told. The first date is 1808, when Digges and two others advertised for the whereabouts in Virginia of a gentleman, whose name might be "Farly or Farsly." The subscribers were seeking further information about the estate of the man with the Yorkshire heirs whom Digges had sought in London in 1793. The second date is 1821, for in that year, at the age of seventy-nine, Thomas Digges died.

Brevard, N. C.

William Bell Clark

309 Ramsburgh.
311 Washington Diaries, IV, 297, 304.
312 Ibid., 306. Accompanying Digges were his sister Elizabeth, wife of Daniel Carroll of Rock Creek; John Carroll, first American bishop of the Roman Catholic Church; Dr. James Craik, physician general of the U. S. Army and Washington's physician and friend; and a Mr. Pye.
313 Ibid., 311.
314 Richmond Enquirer, October, 1808.
315 Ramsburgh.