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### The Story of General Wadsworth

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TIMOTHY DWIGHT

## The Story of General Wadsworth\*

### LETTER XVIII.

Story of General Wadsworth—Attack on his house—His capture.

*Dear Sir,*

Among the most respectable inhabitants of this town, from whom we received an uninterrupted succession of civilities, Major General Wadsworth, for many years a member of the American Congress, deserves to be remembered by us with particular respect. The following part of this gentleman's history will, I think, excite in your mind a lively interest.

After the failure of the expedition against the British garrison at Penobscot, General Wadsworth was sent, in the spring of 1780, by the Legislature of Massachusetts to command in the District of Maine. The principal objects of his mission were to retain the inhabitants in their allegiance, and in their attachment to the American cause, and to obstruct the efforts of the enemy. In these employments he spent the summer of 1780, and the principal part of the following winter. Before the end of February he dismissed his troops; the period of their enlistment being finished; and began to make the necessary preparations for his return to Boston. Mrs. Wadsworth, and a friend of hers, Miss Fenno of Boston, had accompanied him, and continued here till this time.

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\*Reprinted from *Travels in New-England and New York*, by Timothy Dwight. Volume II, pages 174-200. New Haven, Published by Timothy Dwight, 1821.

His preparations for returning could not escape notice. A neighbouring inhabitant, hostile to the American cause, had attentively observed his motions, and announced his design to the commander of the British fort; observing, that, if he seized the present moment, he might make General Wadsworth a prisoner; that he was defenceless, having only six soldiers under his command; that he would speedily leave the country; and that the least delay would frustrate this important object. The British commander listened eagerly to the intelligence; and immediately sent a party of twenty-five soldiers, with their officers, to attack the house, in which he lodged. They embarked in a small schooner, already equipped for a cruise; and proceeded to an inlet, four miles from the General's quarters, called West South River. Here they arrived at the beginning of the evening; and lay concealed in the house of one Snow, a Methodist preacher; professedly a friend to him, but really a traitor; until 11 o'clock. The ground was covered with snow; and the weather severely cold. The surface, in the neighbourhood of the house, was hilly. An enemy could therefore advance within a few rods, without being discovered. For this reason the sentinel at the door was regularly ordered to fire his piece at the appearance of an enemy, and to escape without attempting to enter the house: as any effort of this nature would enable the enemy to enter at the same time.

The party came suddenly upon the sentinel, who gave the alarm by crying, "Who is there?" His comrades instantly opened the door; and as he went in, the enemy fired a volley into the kitchen, which was the soldier's guard room, and entered it together with the sentinel. Another party of them at the same instant fired through the windows of the room, in which the General and his lady slept; and blew the windows in. A third, at the same moment, forced their way through the windows; and took possession of the room, in which Miss Fenno lay. Thus

they were masters of the whole house, except the room, where the General lay, which was strongly barred. The British officers, finding nobody in Miss Fenno's room, beside her and Mrs. Wadsworth, who, hastily dressing herself, had escaped into it, ordered the firing there to cease.

General Wadsworth had a pair of pistols, a blunderbuss, and a fusee. With the pistols, which he had discharged several times, he had defended the windows of his room, and a door, which opened into the kitchen; and prevented the assailants from entering. He now heard their feet advancing through the front entry; and snapped his blunderbuss at them. They retreated. He snapped it again at several of the soldiers, who were forcing their way through the pannel of the kitchen door. These retreated also. He then seized his fusee; and discharged it upon some others, who were breaking through one of the windows. These also fled. The attack was then renewed through the entry. Against this he defended himself with his bayonet. His linen discovering him to the soldiers in the kitchen, they fired at him; and one of their balls went through his left arm, and terminated the contest.

Upon his announcing, that he would surrender, the firing was ordered to cease. The soldiers, however, continued to fire from the kitchen. General Wadsworth, unbarring the door, and opening it, said, "My brave fellows, why do you fire after I have surrendered?" The soldiers rushed into his room; and one of them, who had been badly wounded, exclaiming with an oath, "You have taken my life, and I will take yours," pointed a musket at his breast. The commanding officer, who had entered the room through the other door at that moment, struck the musket with his sword, and saved the General's life. One of the officers now brought a candle from Miss Fenno's room; and exclaimed, "Sir, you have defended yourself too well; you have done too much for one man. You must

excuse haste. Shall we help you on with your clothes? You see, we are in a critical situation." The soldiers were ordered out to parade before the door. The General's clothes were soon put on except his coat; which his wounded arm rendering it impossible for him to wear, it was committed to a soldier. Mrs. Wadsworth, and Miss Fenno, came into the room; and, suppressing their intense emotions with admirable fortitude, proposed to examine the General's wound. This, however, the haste of the party prevented. Mrs. Wadsworth threw a blanket over him: and Miss Fenno tied a handkerchief very closely around his arm, to check the copious effusion of blood. A soldier then took him out of the house. He was much exhausted; and supposing that the ball had cut an artery, told the officer, he would not carry him far. Fortunately, however, the blood, being congealed by the cold, and stayed by the bandage, ceased to flow; and his strength and spirits speedily returned.

The party withdrew in great haste; and increased their expedition, in consequence of the report of a musket, fired at no great distance on the other side of the river. The two wounded British soldiers were mounted on a horse, taken from General Wadsworth's barn. The General himself, and a wounded American soldier, were on foot; but were aided in their march by their captors. When they had proceeded about a mile, a number of persons, who had gathered at a small house on the way, and who had seen the party when they went out, hailed them; and asked whether they had taken General Wadsworth. They said no: and added, that they wished to leave a wounded man with them; that, if they took good care of him, they should be well paid; but, if not, that they would come, and burn their house. The wounded man, apparently dying, was then carried into the house; and General Wadsworth, after being warned, that his safety depended upon his silence, was set on the horse behind the other wounded

soldier. A part of their course lay over a frozen mill-pond, about a mile in length. At the head of this pond they were met by some of the party, who had been left behind, to take care of the Methodist preacher's house. These, having learned the success of the enterprise, hurried back to the privateer; to carry the news. When the party reached the privateer, some were overjoyed, and others swore bitterly. The Captain, particularly, was in a rage, on being informed, that he must return with his privateer to the fort; and, instead of sending the prisoner by a small boat, as had been originally proposed, must convey him in his vessel. Seeing some of his men wounded, he demanded, with a furious voice how he, the General, dared fire on the King's troops; damned him for a rebel; and ordered him to go, and help launch the boat: declaring, that, if he did not, he would put his hanger through his body. General Wadsworth coolly answered, that he was a prisoner; was badly wounded; and could not assist in launching the boat; however he might think proper to treat him.

The commanding officer had gone into the house, to take some refreshment; but, hearing of this abusive behaviour of the Captain, returned immediately; and, in a manner very honourable to himself, told the Captain, that the prisoner was a gentleman, had made a brave defence, and was to be treated accordingly. At the same time he informed him, that he must return with his privateer to Bagaduce; (the point on which the British fort stood;) both on account of the prisoner, and of his own wounded men; and must therefore embark his own people, and the party, immediately. He added further, that his conduct should be represented to General Campbell as soon as he arrived. The poor Captain, thunder-struck with this denunciation, lost his importance in a moment. The men were embarked; the stern of the boat was given to the General; and, after they had gone on board, the best cabin, and the

most comfortable things which the vessel could afford.

The General's arm was now benumbed, rather than painful. The vessel was soon under weigh: and a cold Northern wind drove her with such violence, as seriously to incommode General W. and his fellow-sufferers.

I will now return to the ladies, who were left behind in their desolated house. Not a window in this habitation escaped the destruction. The doors were broken down; and two of the rooms were set on fire. The floors were drenched with blood: and on one of them lay a brave old soldier, (through whose arm, near the shoulder joint, had been driven the whole charge of a musket; consisting of a wad, powder, and ball;) begging for death, that he might be released from his misery. To add to the sufferings of these unfortunate ladies, a number of the neighbouring inhabitants, having heard of the disaster, flocked in, and filled the house. Here they did nothing but gaze about with an idle curiosity, or make useless, numerous, and very troublesome, inquiries. Scarcely any thing could be more wearisome, or more provoking. At length the ladies assumed resolution enough to reprove them with some severity; and thus restored them from the stupor, produced by these novel and disastrous events, to thought, feeling, and exertion. As soon as they had fairly recovered themselves, they very cordially, and kindly, united their efforts to render the best offices in their power. The next morning they repaired the doors and windows; cleansed the floors; dressed the wounded man in the best manner in their power; and placed the family in as comfortable circumstances, as the case would admit.

You will easily believe, that the solicitude of both General Wadsworth, and the ladies, particularly of Mrs. Wadsworth was extreme. What an affectionate wife must feel for a husband, situated as he was, nothing but the experience of such a wife, in such circumstances, could enable even the female heart to realize. To all his other

distresses was added, in the mind of the General, the most excruciating anxiety concerning his little son: a boy of five years old. This child, and a sister younger than himself, slept with a maid in the bed-room; directly in the range of the enemy's first discharge into the kitchen. As the General was leaving the door, after he had been made a prisoner, the maid came to it with the younger child: but he could not recollect that he had seen his son, after the onset. This, he thought, could scarcely have happened, unless the child had been killed.

Near the close of the day, the privateer approached the place of her destination. The signal of success was made; the capture of General Wadsworth announced; and the shore thronged with spectators, to see the man, who through the preceding year had disappointed all the designs of the British in this quarter. They were composed of Britons, and American refugees, of every class. David has often deprecated in the most pathetic manner the triumph of his enemies. General Wadsworth was now furnished with an opportunity of realizing the import of the language, and entering deeply into the feeling of the Psalmist.

The General left the privateer amid loud shouts of the rabble, which covered the shore; and was conducted to the house of a very respectable refugee, until a report concerning the success of the expedition should be made to General Campbell; the Commandant of the post; and his orders should be received.

A guard soon came, with orders to bring the prisoner to the guard room, within the fort; which was about half a mile from the landing. A guard, even of an enemy, was to him a very desirable accompaniment at the present time: for among those, who were around him, there were many persons, from whom, in these circumstances, he had nothing to expect, but abuse. When he arrived at the fort, he was conducted into the officers' guard-room; and was



treated with politeness. Soon after, General Campbell sent a messenger to General Wadsworth with his compliments; informing him, that his situation should be made as comfortable, as it could be; and that a surgeon should attend him immediately, to dress his wound. The surgeon soon came; and upon examination found the joint of the elbow uninjured, and pronounced the wound to be free from danger, if the artery was unhurt. This, he said, could not be determined, until a suppuration had taken place. After the wound had been dressed, and supper served, General Wadsworth retired to rest. In the morning the Commandant sent an invitation to him to breakfast with him and at table paid him very handsome compliments on the defence, which he had made, observing however, that he had exposed himself in a degree not perfectly justifiable. His guest replied, that from the manner of the attack, he had no reason to suspect any design of taking him alive; and that he intended, therefore, to sell his life as dearly as possible. "These things," said General Campbell, "are very natural to gentlemen of our profession. But, Sir, I understand that the Captain of the privateer treated you very ill. I shall see that matter set right." He then informed his guest, that a room in the officers' barracks, within the fort, was prepared for him; and that he should send his orderly sergeant daily, to attend him to breakfast, and dinner, at his table; where a seat would always be reserved for him, whenever he chose to accept of it. This polite proffer was followed by other observations, of the same general nature; after which General Wadsworth withdrew to his quarters.

He was now alone. He was a prisoner. The ardour of enterprise was over. He had no object to engage his attention; no plan to pursue; no motive to excite an effort, or even to rouse a vigorous thought. The calm, sluggish course, became absolutely dead, when contrasted by his mind with the storm of war, which had just passed over.

General Campbell, probably foreseeing that such must be his prisoner's situation, sent him in the course of the forenoon several books of amusement; and then calling upon him in person, endeavoured by cheerful conversation to make the time pass agreeably.

Not long after, the officers of the party came in to inquire concerning his situation; and, while they were present, appeared the redoubtable Captain of the privateer. He told General Wadsworth, that he called to ask pardon for what had fallen from him, when in a passion, that it was not in his nature to treat a gentleman prisoner ill; that the unexpected disappointment of his cruise had thrown him off his guard; and that he hoped, that this would be deemed a sufficient apology. General Wadsworth accepted it; and his visitors withdrew. Neither books, nor company, however, could prevent the forenoon from being tedious and long. "Remembrance," in spite of amusement, would "wake with all her busy train." Anticipation, sometimes her very restless and intrusive companion, would present melancholy pictures; and whisper prophecies of suffering and sorrow. About four o'clock P. M. the orderly sergeant, presenting the compliments of the Commandant, summoned General Wadsworth to dinner. He accepted the invitation, notwithstanding his sufferings; and particularly, as he had a wish to see the guests. They were numerous; and consisted of all the principal officers of the garrison. Their conversation was evidently guarded, but delicate; and particularly polite to the stranger. His arm, however, began to be painful: and having satisfied his curiosity, he respectfully withdrew.

The first object, which now seriously engaged his attention, was to obtain some knowledge concerning the situation of his wife and family, and to communicate his own to them. For this purpose he wrote, the next morning, a billet to the Commandant; requesting, that a flag of truce

might be sent to a militia officer in Camden; a town on the South-Western skirt of Penobscot bay, not far distant from Bagaduce; with a letter to the Governor of Massachusetts, and another to Mrs. Wadsworth. The request was immediately granted, on the condition, that the letter to the Governor should be inspected. To this General Wadsworth made no objection. The letter contained nothing, but an account of his own situation, a request, that an exchange might be speedily effected in his favour; and an exhibition of the obliging manner, in which he had been treated, since he had been made a prisoner. The letter was perfectly acceptable to the British Commander.

The flag was given to Lieutenant Stockton; the officer by whom General Wadsworth had been taken prisoner. As soon as the weather permitted, he set out for Camden in a boat; and within a fortnight from the disastrous night, mentioned above, returned with a letter from Mrs. Wadsworth. This letter to his great joy informed him, that his wife and family were in more comfortable circumstances, than he had been prepared to imagine, and particularly, that his son was alive. The child had slept through the whole of that dreadful night; and knew nothing of the family sufferings, until the next morning.

This fortnight had been a painful one to General Wadsworth. The increasing inflammation of his wound had confined him entirely to his room: and the sudden transition from domestic happiness to a gloomy solitude, and from liberty to a prison, admitted of few consolations. General Campbell, continued his attention to him for some time. About half of the officers in the garrison called upon him as often, as propriety permitted. Their conversation, in which political discussions were carefully avoided, was intentionally made as agreeable to him, as might be. They also sent him in succession a variety of entertaining books. Upon the whole, the connection

formed between him and them became not only pleasant, but interesting.

At the end of five weeks, his wound was so far healed, that he was able to go abroad. He then sent to General Campbell a note, requesting the customary privilege of a parole. The request was not granted. The reasons assigned were, that it would be unsafe for General Wadsworth to expose himself to the hostility of the refugees, some of whom were his bitter enemies; that the garrison might be endangered by the inspection of a military man; and particularly, that General Campbell had reported his situation to the Commanding officer at New-York, and must therefore receive his directions, before he made any alterations in the circumstances of the prisoner. These reasons had weight: and General Wadsworth acquiesced. At the same time he was permitted to take the air in pleasant weather, by walking some time, every convenient day, on the parade within the fort, under the care of the officer of the guard. In these walks he was attended by two sentinels; and accompanied by some of the officers of the garrison. These little excursions were very favourable, both to his health, and spirits. Upon the whole, to use his own language, his confinement became tolerable.

In about two months, when the mild season was approaching, and began to relax the chains of winter, Mrs. Wadsworth, and Miss Fenno, under the protection of a passport from Gen. Campbell, arrived at Bagaduce; and were conducted with much civility to his quarters. General Campbell, and many of his officers, cheerfully contributed their efforts to render the visit agreeable to all concerned. It continued ten days. In the mean time an answer, or rather orders, had arrived from the Commanding General at New-York. This General Wadsworth augured from the change of countenance in some of the officers. The import of the orders was intentionally concealed from Mrs. W.

and Miss F. But, Miss F. had accidentally learned their nature by a hint, which fell from an officer, occasionally at the General's quarters, and indicated that he was not to be exchanged, but to be sent either to New-York, or Halifax, or some other place in the British dominions. This information she carefully concealed, until the moment of her departure; when, to prevent Mrs. W. from suspecting her design, she barely said with a significant air, "General Wadsworth, take care of yourself." The weather being fine, the ladies re-embarked; and without any serious misfortune landed, the second day, at Camden.

I am, Sir, yours, &c.

#### LETTER XIX.

Story of General Wadsworth concluded—Major Burton.

*Dear Sir,*

Soon after the departure of the ladies, General Wadsworth was informed, that a parole could not be given to him, because some of the refugees had communicated unfavourable information concerning him to the Commander in Chief at New-York. From this time, General Campbell withheld his civilities. Other officers in the garrison however visited him daily; treated him with polite attention; and beguiled by various amusements the tedious hours of his captivity. He learned from the servants who attended him, that he was not to be exchanged, but sent to England, as a rebel of too much consequence to be safely trusted with his liberty.

Not long afterwards, about the middle of April, *Major Benjamin Burton*, an agreeable, brave, and worthy man, who had served under General Wadsworth the preceding summer, was taken, on his passage from Boston to St. George's river, the place of his residence; brought to the

fort at Bagaduce; and lodged in the same room with General Wadsworth. Burton confirmed the report of the servants. He had learned from a source which he justly regarded as authentic, that both himself and the General were to be sent, immediately after the return of a privateer, now out upon a cruise, either to New-York or to Halifax; and thence to England. There they were to remain prisoners until the close of the war; and were to be treated afterwards, as circumstances should direct. This intelligence, thus confirmed, explained at once the monitory caution of Miss Fenno; and perfectly exhibited to General Wadsworth the importance of *taking care of himself*.

The gentlemen were not long in determining, that they would not cross the Atlantic as prisoners. They resolved, that they would effect their escape, or perish in the attempt. When an enterprize, bordering on desperation, is resolutely undertaken, the means of accomplishing it are rarely wanted.

It must, however, be admitted, that scarcely any circumstances could promise less than theirs. They were confined in a grated room, in the officers' barracks, within the fort. The walls of this fortress, exclusively of the depth of the ditch surrounding it, were twenty feet high; with fraising on the top, and Chevaux-de-frise at the bottom. Two sentinels were always in the entry; and their door, the upper part of which was a windowsash, might be opened by these watchmen, whenever they thought proper; and was actually opened at seasons of peculiar darkness and silence. At the exterior doors of the entries sentinels were also stationed: as were others in the body of the fort, and at the quarters of Gen. Campbell. At the guard-house a strong guard was daily mounted. Several sentinels were daily stationed on the walls of the fort: and a complete line occupied them by night. Without the ditch, glacis, and abattis, another complete set of soldiers patrolled through

the night also. The gate of the fort was shut at sunset: and a piquet guard was placed on, or near, the isthmus, leading from the fort to the main land.

Bagaduce, on the middle of which the fort stands, is a peninsula, about a mile and a half in length, and a mile in breadth; washed by Penobscot bay on the South, Bagaduce river on the East, on the North-West by a broad cove, and throughout the remainder of the circle by the bay and river of Penobscot. A sandy beach, however, connects it with the main land on the Western side. From these facts the difficulties of making an escape may be imperfectly imagined. Indeed, nothing but the melancholy prospect of a deplorable captivity in the hands of an enemy, exasperated by a long and tedious war, carried on against those who were deemed rebels, could have induced the prisoners to take this resolution.

Not long after a cartel arrived from Boston, bringing letters from the Governor and Council to General Wadsworth, with a proposal for his exchange, and a sum of money, &c. for his use. These were carefully delivered to him: but the exchange being, as General Campbell said, not authorised, he refused to liberate the prisoners. This determination they had expected.

Several plans were proposed by the gentlemen for their escape; and successively rejected. At length they resolved on the following. The room, in which they were confined was ceiled with boards. One of these they determined to cut off, so as to make a hole, sufficiently large for a man to go through. After having passed through this hole, they proposed to creep along one of the joists, under which these boards were nailed, and thus to pass over the officers' rooms, bordering on it, until they should come to the next, or middle, entry; and then to lower themselves down into this entry by a blanket which they proposed to carry with them. If they should be discovered, they proposed to act the character of officers, belonging to the

garrison, intoxicated. These being objects to which the sentinels were familiarised, they hoped in this disguise to escape detection. If they should not be discovered, the passage to the walls of the fort was easy. Thence they intended to leap into the ditch; and, if they escaped without serious injury from the fall, to make the best of their way to the cove; on the surface of whose water they meant to leave their hats floating, (if they should be closely pursued,) to attract the fire of the enemy; while they were softly, and silently, making their escape.

Such was their original plan. Accordingly, after the prisoners had been seen by the sentinel, looking through the glass of the door, to have gone to bed, Gen. W. got up, the room being dark; and, standing in a chair, attempted to cut with his knife the intended opening; but he found the attempt useless, and hazardous. It was useless, because the labour was too great to be accomplished with the necessary expedition. It was hazardous, because the noise, made by the strokes of the knife, could not fail, amid the profound silence, of being heard by the sentinel; and because the next morning must bring on an unpleasant detection. This part of the design was, therefore, given up.

The next day, a soldier, who was their barber, was requested to procure a large gimblet, and bring it with him, when he came the next time to dress General Wadsworth. This he promised, and performed, without a suspicion, that it was intended for any thing more than amusement. He received a dollar for this piece of civility; and was sufficiently careful not to disclose a secret, which might create trouble for himself.

The prisoners waited with anxiety for the arrival of the succeeding night. To their surprise, the noise made by the gimblet was such, as to alarm their apprehensions, and induce them again to desist. They were, however, not discouraged; but determined to make the experiment again during the day, when they hoped the noise would



either not be heard at all, or would attract no notice. The *eyes* of the sentinels were now to be eluded; for the operation must in this case be performed at times, when they might very naturally be employed in inspecting the room. It was necessary, also, to escape the observation of their servants; who often came in without any warning; and that of the officers; who were accustomed to visit them at almost all times of the day. But on these difficulties their persevering minds dwelt, only for the purpose of overcoming them. The two sentinels, who guarded the prisoners, commonly walked through the entry, one after the other, from the front of the building to the rear. This distance was exactly the breadth of two rooms. After they had begun their walk, the prisoners watched them with attention, until they acquired a complete comprehension of the length of the intervals between the moments, at which the sentinels successively passed their door. The prisoners then began to walk within their room, at the same pace with that of their watchmen: the sound of their feet being mutually heard; and all passing by the glass door the same way, at the same time. The prisoners in this manner took two turns across the room, while a sentinel took one through the entry. This difference of time gave them all the opportunities, which they enjoyed, for using their gimblet.

General Wadsworth, being of the middle stature, could, while standing on the floor, only reach the ceiling with the ends of his fingers. But Major Burton was very tall, and could reach it conveniently; so as to use the gimblet without the aid of a chair. This was a very fortunate circumstance; as it saved appearances, and not improbably prevented the discovery, to which they were exposed from so many sources. Accordingly, whilst the garrison was under arms on the parade, and their servants were purposely sent away on errands, the gentlemen began their walk, and passed by the glass door with the sentinels.

General Wadsworth then walked on; but Major Burton, stopping short in the proper spot, perforated the ceiling with his gimblet, in sufficient season to join General Wadsworth on his return. Again they passed the door, and returned, as if by mere accident: when the ceiling was in the same manner perforated again. This process was repeated until a sufficient number of holes were bored. The interstices in the mean time were cut through with a pen-knife; the wounds in the ceiling, which were small, being carefully covered with a paste of chewed bread, almost of the same colour with that of the board. The dust, made by the gimblet, was also carefully swept from the floor. In this manner they completely avoided suspicion, either from the sentinels, the servants, or the gentlemen by whom they were visited. In the course of three weeks a board was entirely cut asunder, except a small part at each corner, which was left for the purpose of holding the severed piece in its proper place, lest some accident should open the passage prematurely.

During all this time the prisoners had watched every thing, which related to the return of the privateer, in which they were to be embarked. They had, also, made every unsuspecting inquiry in their power, while occasionally conversing with their visitors, and with the servants, concerning the situation of the exterior part of the fort; the ditch, the position of the Chevaux-de-frise, the fraising, the posting of the outer sentinels, and piquet-guard. The scraps of information, which were obtained in this cautious manner, General Wadsworth, who was tolerably well acquainted with the place, was able to put together in such a manner, as to form a complete view of the whole ground; to fix with precision the place, where they should attempt to cross the wall; where, if separated by accident, they should meet again; and to determine on several other objects, of the same general nature. Major Burton, whose first acquaintance with

Bagaduce commenced when he was landed as a prisoner, was less able to form correct views concerning these subjects; and laboured, therefore, under disadvantages, which might prove serious.

The privateer was now daily expected. It is hardly necessary to observe, that the prisoners regarded the moment of her approach with extreme anxiety. They wished for a dark, and boisterous night, to conceal their attempt, and to escape from the observation of their guard; but determined, that, if such an opportunity should not be furnished before the return of the privateer, to seize the best time, which should occur. A part of the meat, supplied for their daily meals, they laid up, and dried, and preserved the crust of their bread, to sustain them on their projected excursion. They also made, each a large skewer of strong wood; with which they intended to fasten the corner of a large bed-blanket to one of the stakes in the fraising, on the top of the wall; in order to let themselves down more easily into the ditch.

When their preparations were finished, a whole week elapsed without a single favourable night. Their anxiety became intense. The weather became warm; and the butter, which had been accidentally attached to some of the bread, employed as paste to cover the holes in the ceiling, spread along the neighbouring parts of the board, and discoloured them to a considerable extent. This fact alarmed them not a little; particularly when, their visitors were now and then gazing around the room, in which they were confined. Nor were their apprehensions at all lessened by several incidental expressions of some British officers, which to the jealous minds of the prisoners seemed to indicate, that their design was discovered.

On the afternoon of June 18th the sky was overcast. At the close of evening, thick clouds from the South brought on an unusual darkness. The lightning began to blaze with intense splendour, and speedily became almost incessant.

About eleven o'clock, the flashes ceased. The prisoners sat up till this time; apparently playing at cards, but really waiting for the return of absolute darkness. Suddenly rain began to descend in torrents. The darkness was profound. The propitious moment, for which they had so long waited with extreme solicitude, had, as they believed, finally come, and more advantageously than could have been reasonably expected. They, therefore, went immediately to bed; while the sentinel was looking through the glass door; and extinguished their candles.

They then immediately rose, and dressed themselves. General Wadsworth, standing in a chair, attempted to cut the corner of the board, which had been left, to prevent the severed piece from falling; but found that he made a slow progress. Major Burton then took the knife; and within somewhat less than an hour completed the intended opening. The noise, attending this operation, was considerable; but was drowned by the rain upon the roof. Burton ascended first; and, being a large man, forced his way through the hole with difficulty. By agreement he was to proceed along the joists, till he reached the middle entry; where he was to wait for his companion. The fowls, which roosted above these rooms, gave notice of his passage by their cackling; but it was unheeded, and perhaps unheard, by the sentinels. As soon as this noise ceased, General Wadsworth put his blanket through the hole; fastened it with a skewer; and attempted with this aid to make his way through the passage, standing in a chair below. But he found his arm weaker, and of less service, than he had expected. He did not accomplish his design without extreme difficulty. But the urgency of the case reanimated his mind, invigorated his limbs; and enabled him, at length, to overcome every obstacle. The auspicious rain, in the mean time, roaring incessantly on the roof of the building, entirely concealed the noise, which he made during this part of his

enterprize, and which in a common season must certainly have betrayed him.

When the General had reached the middle entry, he could not find his companion. After searching for him several minutes in vain, he perceived the air, blowing in through the door of the entry; and concluded, that Major Burton had already gone out, and left the door open. He, therefore, gave over the search; and proceeded to take care of himself. After passing through the door he felt his way along the Eastern side, the Northern end, and a part of the Western side of the building; walking directly under the sheet of water, which poured from the roof, that he might avoid impinging against any person accidentally in his way; a misfortune, to which he was entirely exposed by the extreme darkness of the night.

After he had reached the Western side of the building, he made his way toward the neighbouring wall of the fort; and attempted to climb the bank: but the ascent being steep, and the sand giving way, he found it impossible to reach the top. He then felt out an oblique path; and ascended to the top; as from his window he had observed the soldiers do, when they went out to man the wall. After he had gained the top, he proceeded to the spot on the North Bastion, where Burton and himself had agreed to cross the wall, if no accident should intervene. When he had arrived at this place, and was endeavouring to discover the sentry boxes, that he might creep between them, across the top of the wall; the guardhouse door on the opposite side of the fort was thrown open; and the sergeant of the guard called "Relief; turn out." Instantly there was a scrambling on the gorge of the bastion, opposite to that, where he now was. This scrambling he knew must be made by Burton. The rain, in the mean time, kept the sentinels within their boxes; and made such a noise on *them*, that they could not hear that which was made by the prisoners. In this critical moment no time was

to be lost. The relief guard was approaching. General Wadsworth made all haste, therefore, to get himself with his heavy blanket, across the parapet, upon the fraising, which was on the exterior margin of the wall: a measure indispensable, to prevent the relief from treading on him; as they came round on the top of the wall; and he barely effected it during the time, in which the relief was shifting the sentinels. At the same time he fastened, with the skewer, the corner of his blanket round a picket of the fraising; so that it might hang at the greatest length beneath him. After the relief had passed on, the General with great difficulty, arising particularly from the lameness of his arm, slid with his feet foremost off the ends of the pickets of the fraising; clinging with his arms and hands to the ends; thus bringing himself underneath the pickets, so as to get hold of the blanket, hanging below. Then he let himself down by the blanket, until he reached the corner, nearest to the ground. From this he dropped, without injury, on the berme; and within the Chevaux-de-frise, which lay on the berme. Leaving his blanket suspended from the fraising, he crept into the Chevaux-de-frise, nearest to the spot, where he had descended; and moved softly along to the next angle. Here he remained without noise, or motion, until the relief, having gone round the walls, and out of the gate, to relieve the sentinels without the abattis, should have passed by. As soon as he had heard them pass, and before the sentinels had become accustomed to noises around them, he crept softly down into the ditch; went out at the water course, between the sentry boxes; and descended the declivity of the hill, on which the fort stood, into the open field. Finding himself fairly without the fort, and without the line of sentries, and perceiving no evidence that he had been discovered, he could scarcely persuade himself, that the whole adventure was not a dream; from which he might soon awake, and find himself still in his prison.

Both the rain, and the darkness, continued. He groped his way, therefore, among rocks, stumps, and brush, very leisurely, to an old guard-house on the shore of the back cove. This building had been agreed upon between the prisoners as their place of rendezvous, if any accident should separate them. After searching, and waiting, for his companion half an hour in vain, he proceeded onward to the cove. The time was happily that of low water. Here he drew off his shoes and stockings; took his hat from the skirt of his coat, to which hitherto it had been pinned; girded up his clothes; and began to cross the water, which was about a mile in breadth. Fortunately he found it no where more than three feet in depth. Having safely arrived at the opposite shore, and put on his stockings, and shoes, he found the rain beginning to abate, and the sky becoming less dark. Still he saw nothing of his companion.

It was now about two o'clock in the morning. General Wadsworth had left the fort a mile and a half behind him; and had perceived no noise, which indicated, that the enemy had discovered his escape. His own proper course now lay, for about a mile, up a very gently sloping acclivity; on the summit of which was a road, formerly cut, under his direction, for the purpose of moving heavy cannon. The whole ascent was overspread with trees, blown down by the wind: and to gain the summit cost him the labour of at least an hour. At length he reached the road; but, after keeping it about half a mile, determined to betake himself to the woods, and make his way through them to the river. Here the day dawned; and the rain abated. Here, also, he heard the reveillé beat at the fort. He reached the Eastern shore of the Penobscot, just below the lower Narrows, at sun rise; and found a small canoe at the very spot, where he first came to the river. But he was afraid to cross it in this place, lest the inhabitants on the opposite shore, through fear of the enemy, or hostility to *him*, should carry

him back to the fort; or lest their kindness, if they should be disposed to befriend him, should prove their ruin. He, therefore, made the best of his way up the river, at the foot of the bank; and kept as near, as he could, to the water's edge; that the flood tide, which was now running, might cover his steps, and prevent his course from being pursued by blood-hounds, kept at the fort. In this manner, also, he escaped the notice of the inhabitants, living on the Eastern bank of the river.

About seven o'clock in the morning the sun began to shine; and the sky became clear. At this time he had reached a place, just below the Upper-narrows; seven miles from the fort. Here it was necessary for him to cross the river. At a small distance he perceived a salmon net stretched from a point, thickly covered with bushes, and a canoe lying on the shore. He therefore determined, after having cut a stout club, to lie by in the thicket, in order to rest himself, dry his clothes, and discover the persons who should come to take fish from the net; that he might decide on the safety, or danger, of making himself known. In this situation, he had spent near an hour, and made considerable progress in drying his clothes; not, however, without frequently looking down the river to see whether his enemies were pursuing him; when to his unspeakable joy he saw his friend *Burton* advancing towards him in the track, which he had himself taken. The meeting was mutually rapturous; and the more so, as each believed the other to have been lost.

Major *Burton*, after having passed through the hole in the ceiling, made his way directly into the second entry without interruption. As he had been able to escape from the ceiling, only by the assistance of General *Wadsworth*, he concluded, early, that his friend would be unable to make his way through the same passage, and, rationally determining it to be better, that one should regain his liberty than that both should be confined in a British jail,



made no stop, to learn what had become of his companion. Passing out of the Eastern door, (the same which General Wadsworth had selected,) he entered the area of the fort, taking the most watchful care to avoid the sentry-boxes. The night was so intensely dark, that this was a matter of no small difficulty. Fortunately, however, he avoided them all; and steered his course, providentially, to the North-Eastern curtain. At the moment of his arrival the door of the guard-house was thrown open, and the relief ordered to turn out. Burton heard the orders indistinctly; and supposed, that himself, or General Wadsworth, (if he had been able to make his way out of the barrack,) was discovered. He leaped therefore from the wall; and fell into the arms of a Chevaux-de-frise, containing only *four* sets of pickets. Had there been *six*, as is sometimes the case, he must have fallen upon the points of some of them, and been killed outright. Perceiving that he was not injured by the fall, he flung himself into the ditch; and, passing through the abattis, escaped into the open ground. As he had no doubt, that either himself or General Wadsworth was discovered, and knew that, in either case, he should be closely pursued, he used the utmost expedition.

It had been agreed by the prisoners, that, if they should get out of the fort, and in this enterprise should be separated from each other, they should direct their course by the wind. Unfortunately, the gale, which in the afternoon and early part of the evening, had blown from the South, shifted, without being observed by Burton, to the East. Of the region round about him, except so far as General Wadsworth had described it to him, he was absolutely ignorant. In these unfortunate circumstances, instead of taking the direction, which he had intended, he pointed his course towards a piquet guard, kept near the isthmus; and came almost upon a sentinel, before he discovered his danger. Happily, however, he perceived a

man at a small distance in motion; and dropped softly upon the ground. Major Burton dropped a glove in this spot; which, being found in the morning, discovered, thus far, the course which he had pursued in making his escape. The movements of the man soon convinced Burton, that he was a sentinel, *and that he belonged to the piquet*. By various means the two friends had made themselves acquainted with the whole routine of the duty, performed by the garrison. Burton, therefore, from these circumstances discerned in a moment where he was, and determined to avail himself of the discovery. Accordingly, whenever the sentinel moved from him, he softly withdrew; and at length got clear of his disagreeable neighbour. He then entered the water on the side of the isthmus next to the river, with the hope of being able to advance in it so far above the picket, as to land again undiscovered. The undertaking proved very hazardous, as well as very difficult. It was the time of low water. The rocks were numerous in his course; and the river between them was deep. A great quantity of sea-weed also encumbered his progress. He swam, and climbed, and waded, alternately, for the space of an hour; and having made in this manner a circuit, which, though small, he thought would be sufficient to avoid the guard, betook himself to the shore. Here, chilled with this long continued cold bathing, and excessively wearied by exertion, he began his course through the forest; directing himself, as well as he could, towards the path, which had been taken by General Wadsworth. After walking several miles through the same obstructions, which had so much embarrassed his friend, he reached it, and without any further trouble rejoined the General.

After their mutual congratulations, the two friends, as they saw no persons appear, went down to the canoe; and, finding in it a suit of oars, pushed it into the water. Burton informed General Wadsworth, that a party of the enemy

was in pursuit of them, and that their barge would soon come round the point below; and therefore proposed, that, instead of crossing the river directly, they should take an oblique course, by which they might avoid being discovered. Not long after the barge came in sight, moving moderately up the river, and distant from them about a mile. At this time the canoe was near half a mile from the Eastern shore; but, being hidden by some bushes on another point, escaped the eyes of their pursuers. Just at the moment the crew of the barge, having rested for a minute on their oars, tacked, and rowed to the Eastern shore: when one of the men went up to a house, standing on the bank. The two friends, seeing this, plied their oars to the utmost; and, when the barge put off again, had it in their power to reach the Western shore without any possible obstruction.

As they approached a landing place, they saw a number of people. To avoid an interview with these strangers, they changed their course; and landed on the North side of a creek, where they were entirely out of their reach, and safe from their suspicion..

After they had made fast the canoe, they steered their course directly into the wilderness; leaving the barge advancing up the river, but appearing to have made no discovery. The prospect of a final escape was now very hopeful: but, as there could be no safety in keeping the rout along the shore, since they undoubtedly would be way-laid in many places, they determined to take a direct course through the forests, to avoid inhabitants, and prevent a pursuit. Accordingly, they steered towards the head of St. George's river. This they were enabled to do by the aid of a pocket compass, which Burton had fortunately retained in his possession. Their pockets supplied them with provisions; homely enough indeed, but such as satisfied hunger, and such as success rendered delightful. Two showers fell upon them in the course of the day: and

the heat of the sun was at times intense. Their passage, also, was often incommoded by the usual obstructions of an American forest; fallen trees, marshy grounds, and other inconveniences of the like nature. But, with all these difficulties, they travelled twenty-five miles by sunset.

At the approach of night, they made a fire with the aid of a flint, which Major Burton had in his pocket, and some punk; a substance, formed by a partial decomposition of the heart of the maple tree; which easily catches, and long retains, even the slightest spark. But, as they had no axe, and as they did not commence this business sufficiently early, the wood, of which their fire was made, being of a bad quality, burnt ill; and was extinguished long before the morning arrived. The night was cold, notwithstanding the heat of the preceding day. Both extremes were equally injurious to the travellers; and increased not a little the lameness, and soreness, of their limbs. General Wadsworth suffered severely. He had been a long time in confinement; and had of course been prevented from taking any vigorous exercise. He was also possessed of a constitution, much less firm than that of his companion; and was much less accustomed to the hardships of travelling in a forest. For these reasons they made a slow progress, during the morning of the second day. By degrees, however, the General began to recover strength: and before evening they advanced, though not without much difficulty, twelve or fifteen miles. The sufferings of the preceding night effectually warned them to begin the employment of collecting fuel in better season. They had, therefore, a comfortable fire. Still, the latter part of the night was very cold and distressing.

On the third day General Wadsworth was so lame, and had suffered so much from this uncomfortable pilgrimage, that he was able to make very little progress. After many efforts, he proposed to stop in the wilderness, and wait for such relief, as his friend proceeding onward

to the nearest settlements, might be able to bring him. Major Burton cut the matter short by an absolute refusal to leave him behind, in circumstances so hazardous. At length they determined to refresh themselves with a little sleep, and then to recommence their progress. This determination was a happy one; for they found their sleep, in the genial warmth of the day, in a high degree restorative, and invigorating. They were able to travel with more and more ease; and were not a little animated with the consciousness, that their pilgrimage was drawing towards a close. About six, P.M. they discovered from an eminence the ascent of a smoke, and other signs of human habitations; and soon, to their unspeakable joy, arrived at the place, to which they had originally directed their course: the Upper Settlement on the river St. George.

The inhabitants flocked about them with a joy, scarcely inferior to theirs; and not only hailed them as friends long lost, but as men dropped from the clouds. Their surprise, and their affection, were equally intense: and their minds laboured for modes, in which they might exhibit sufficient kindness to their guests.

At this friendly place they took horses; and, accompanied by all the inhabitants, who were able to bear arms, proceeded down the river, within three miles of the house, in which General Wadsworth had been taken prisoner. Here they crossed the river; and took up their lodging on the other side in a very comfortable inn. Their company had by this time increased to thirty men. Half of this force General Wadsworth gave to his faithful friend; who was then distant only three miles from his own house; a stone fort, anciently erected as a defence against the savages. It was naturally suspected by both gentlemen, that concealed parties of the enemy would lie in wait for them; and, if possible, carry them back again to their prison. Nor was the suspicion unfounded. Such a party actually waylaid Major Burton upon his return to his family: and,

had he not been accompanied by this body of armed men, he would again have been taken. Finding themselves frustrated, the lurking party seized a trading vessel, lying in St. George's river; and returning to Bagaduce, carried the first information to the fort concerning the prisoners.

As to General Wadsworth, he was now in a settlement, where he could not be attacked with any hope of success, unless by a strong detachment of the enemy. He therefore continued at this hospitable inn, until the next day but one. Then, having recovered one of his horses, and renewed his strength and spirits, he set out for Falmouth, (Portland;) where he hoped to find Mrs. Wadsworth. During the first day's journey he was accompanied by a small guard. From this time he was safe from the lurking parties of the enemy; and proceeded to Falmouth as his own convenience permitted.

Mrs. Wadsworth and Miss Fenno had, however, sailed for Boston before his arrival. On their passage they were overtaken by a violent storm; and barely escaped shipwreck. The vessel put into Portsmouth in distress; and neither of the ladies was acquainted with a single inhabitant. They took lodgings, therefore, at an inn. When they had in some measure recovered themselves from the anxiety and distress, produced by the perilous situation, from which they had just escaped, they found themselves in a new scene of trouble. Mrs. Wadsworth had left all the specie in her possession with the General, when she visited him at Penobscot: and, during her residence in the District of Maine, the Continental bills of credit had lost their currency. She was, therefore, without money, and without any known friends. After meditating for some time on various expedients to extricate herself, and her friend, from this embarrassment, not a little perplexing to a female mind, she recollected, that she had seen at New-Haven in the year 1770 Mr. Buckminster, then a

tutor in Yale College, and now one of the ministers of Portsmouth.

From this gentleman the ladies, after having made him acquainted with their circumstances, received every assistance, which they could wish. When they were ready to proceed on their journey, he furnished a carriage, to convey them to Newburyport. Here they met with the same friendly offices, and were supplied with the means of proceeding pleasantly to Boston; where the distresses of both Mrs. Wadsworth, and the General, were speedily terminated by his arrival.

I shall only add, that I received an account of all these facts from the persons principally concerned; and am, Sir,

Yours, &c.