

JAMES WADSWORTH*

“**W**HAT’S in a name?” Verily much every way, as the fascinating records of the ancient and honorable town of Durham abundantly prove. What Daughter of the American Revolution can turn their yellow pages and trace the quaint biography—the birth, the baptism, the marriage, the public offices and honors, the private joys and sorrows, the death—without living in imagination in those days of dignity and simplicity and being thrilled with the emotions which pulsed in human hearts a century ago; for these plain, unvarnished records of the past become strangely vocal, not alone with the exultant pæans of patriotism, but also with the “still, sad music of humanity.”

Durham is not among the oldest daughters of Connecticut. While, among the colonists at Hartford, their far-seeing and liberty-loving leader, the Rev. Thomas Hooker, “of majestic presence and noble mien,” was working out that constitution of “unexampled liberality” which has proved a lasting foundation for the liberties of the commonwealth; while Wethersfield and Windsor, Saybrook and New London were involved in Indian treaty or Indian massacre; when Fairfield and Stamford were fighting the Dutch, even while New Haven was breaking the heart of gifted John Davenport by surrendering her individuality to Connecticut; while Mettabessett was changing her name to Middletown and spelling it with one d, Durham was but the swamp of Coginchaug—a happy hunting ground for the brave Mettabessetts.

Battles carnal and spiritual had been fought out to a peaceful issue, dissent and controversy had been somewhat quieted in the primitive Colonies when Durham began her chronicles. Their colonists had been Englishmen; Durham’s founders, two generations later, were Americans.

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The transformation from Coginchaug to Durham is interesting. As early as 1662 land grants were made from its territory, and, for a period following, it was the pleasant custom if a public man merited the gratitude of the colony, by wisdom in council, by bravery in battle, or by preaching a "good election sermon," to reward him with the grant of a farm in Coginchaug. It was doubtless in this way that Abraham Pierson, first president of Yale College; Rev. Joseph Eliot, son of the apostle to the Indians, and other clerical gentlemen, became owners of real estate in Coginchaug swamp. These grantees purchased their rights of the Indians in spite of Governor Andrews's sneer that the "signature of an Indian was no better than the scratch of a bear's paw." One could hardly dispute his remark, from an æsthetic point of view, after a perusal of the marvelous deed given by Chief Tarramuggus and his tribe to the purchasers of Coginchaug.

In 1699 the petition to the General Court for a township was granted, and in 1704 the name was changed, the proprietors having requested that "the plantation shall be called by the name of Durham, and have this figure for a brand for their horsekind, D." According to tradition, the new name was chosen from the city and country seat in England which had been the residence of the Wadsworth family. Among the thirty-four original proprietors to whom, "in the seventh year of our sovereign, Lady Ann of Great Britain," the patent of Durham was issued, we find with quickening interest the name of James Wadsworth, who, with Ruth, his wife, and his only son, James, came from Farmington to the new settlement. He was the son of John Wadsworth, who came from England with his father, William, in 1632. Other descendants of this family are Captain Joseph Wadsworth, who is supposed to be responsible for the mysterious disappearance of the famous charter, having hidden it in the venerable oak and retained it in his possession for many years; and General Daniel Wadsworth, who founded the Hartford Atheneum. Among the colleagues of James Wadsworth, who was the grandfather of our hero, are familiar names—Caleb Seaward and Samuel Camp, Robinson, Coe, Parmelee, Beach, Roberts, Baldwin, Fairchild, and Chauncey. These were joined by the Tibbals and Merwins,

the Newtons and Guernseys, and many others, until the town soon reached its later average of one thousand people.

An enthusiastic historian thus eulogizes the favored town—no longer Cuginchaug swamp: “Beautiful for situation is the town plat of Durham, skirted by a prairie on one side and a cultivated valley on the other; girded by mountains, neither too near nor too remote. Beautiful is the village of Durham and its long, broad streets, studded with neat habitations, the abode of peace and virtue, of contentment and religion. When the town was on the great mail route from Boston to New York and six stages daily passed through it, passengers, as they stopped for breakfast or dinner at the Swathel House, would often declare that they had seen nothing on their way which for beauty of landscape surpassed it. Here George Washington and other distinguished men stopped for rest and refreshment.”

But our interest in these early days now concentrates upon General Wadsworth's noble grandfather, who, without prominent military achievement, was as remarkable as his grandson. James Wadsworth the first was born in 1675 and lived until the general was twenty-six years of age and able to succeed him as proprietor's clerk and town clerk, offices which the former had held for fifty years. A lawyer by profession, he was honored by almost every office at the disposal of the people of Durham, and his name appears in nearly every public document of his times. At the very outset he successfully represented Durham before the General Assembly in the settlement of her boundary lines with Middletown and her other neighbors. “When his abilities and moral worth came to be generally known he was honored by appointments by the Colony. He was the first justice of the peace and he had command of the first military company at its formation. Upon the organization of the militia in 1735 he was constituted colonel of the Tenth Regiment. He was Speaker of the House in the Colonial Legislature, 1717, and assistant from 1718 to 1752. The election to that office was by a general ticket, and such was the confidence of the Colony in his ability and integrity, at a period when ability and integrity were the indispensable qualifications for office, that on the returns for the year 1732 he had the highest vote in the Colony. In May, 1724, he was appointed,

with several other gentlemen, to hear and determine all matters of error and equity brought on petition to the General Assembly, and from 1724 he was one of the judges of the superior court. At the October session of the Assembly, 1726, a grant of three hundred acres of land in Goshen was made to Colonel Wadsworth, Hezekiah Brainerd (father of the missionary David Brainerd, of Haddam), and John Hall, of Wallingford, in return for public services."

In the performance of public duties, his ability and integrity were alike conspicuous, while an exemplary attendance upon the worship and ordinances of the Lord gave a dignity to his character. He exerted a salutary influence upon the town—more so, indeed, than any one except his "personal friend, the minister." As soon as Durham was settled, negotiations were commenced by which the town should call a spiritual guide, and at the ordination of the Rev. Nathaniel Chauncey, Colonel Wadsworth and Caleb Seaward were chosen to call the council and arrange the entertainment thereof. The colonel himself contributed the beef, to the value of sixteen shillings, and secured from others "two piggs," a generous quantity of rum, beer, and cider, and a very substantial collation. The new minister became the strong personal friend of Colonel Wadsworth, and they spent fifty years together in the care of the temporal and spiritual welfare of the town. In their deaths they were not divided, the one dying in January and the other in February, 1756.

The Rev. Mr. Chauncey was a remarkable man, even for those heroic days. He was the first to receive a degree from Yale College, and his influence was always powerfully exerted in favor of learning as well as piety. David Brainerd, the celebrated missionary, dates his "frequent longing" for a liberal education to his one year's residence in Durham, and he commenced his classical studies, as did many another lad of the parish, under Mr. Chauncey's influence. Mr. Chauncey owned one of the largest private libraries in the State, and was always a deep student. One of his admiring hearers writes: "He was not a large man, but a man of great presence. He looked like a man. When he was seen approaching the meeting-house on the Sabbath, we were all careful to be in our seats, and when he entered the house

we all rose to receive him and continued standing until he took his place in the pulpit. His sermons were carefully studied and deeply interested his congregation. On one occasion, in his preaching, Deacon Crane arose after service and said: "Reverend Sir, will you please to explain further on that point of doctrine in your sermon?" "Deacon Crane, if you will go with me to my study, I will explain it to you." Accordingly the minister and the deacon hastened to the parsonage, when lo, the whole congregation followed!"

It was in Mr. Chauncey's arms that the little grandson of his friend, Colonel Wadsworth, was placed, when on a July Sabbath, in 1730, he was brought to the meeting-house to be baptized and to receive the already honored name, James Wadsworth. We wonder if, as the years went on and the venerable pastor's tones of solemn earnestness began to show the feebleness of age, the little lad, James Wadsworth, Third, sitting with the other boys on the pulpit stairs, did not sometimes, during the long, cold hour of the winter Sabbath, cherish wandering thoughts about the noonings and the delights of the blazing fire and the substantial lunch awaiting him in the Sabbath-Day House near at hand. As he later reached the dignity of young manhood and a seat in the gallery, his thoughts were doubtless sometimes diverted from Mr. Chauncey's doctrinal discourse as he caught a glimpse of fair Katherine Guernsey among her sisters in the singing seats.

The father of our hero came, as we have seen, when a lad, with his father, the colonel, to settle in Durham, and there his life of eighty-seven years was spent. He seems to have been less prominent in colonial life than his father or his son, but eminently useful in the affairs of the town. For instance, he was one of the committee to "review" the woodpile of the Rev. Nathaniel Chauncey, and he later assisted in the ordination of Mr. Chauncey's successor.

But we may now leave the noble ancestry of our hero and trace in the ancient chronicles of Durham the events of his own long life. Turning first the pages of the church register, we find in Mr. Chauncey's own handwriting the baptismal record, "July 12, 1730, James Wadsworth, son of James and Abigail Wadsworth." Fortunate, indeed, it was for the future glory of the Wadsworth

name that the infant of six days survived the outing, and that it was July and not January in which he was carried to the meeting-house. Two years later his brother, John Noyes Wadsworth, was baptized at home, and when James was thirteen his little sister Ruth was also christened and became the namesake of her grandmother, the colonel's wife, who lived until her grandson James was forty-four years old.

Education went always hand in hand with religion, and the school-house had long stood upon the village green when little James Wadsworth, Third, began his preparation for Yale by studying the "primer and the Psalter and the spelling book." In this modest hall of learning, twenty-six feet long and eighteen feet broad, we can imagine the future general with his playmates—on the girls' side, Tamar Coe, Mercy Johnson, Mindwell Beach, Experience Strong, Submit Seaward, Zipporah Fairchild, Concurrency Smith, and many another quaint little maiden, while among the boys were Sharon Rose, Gideon Leete, Israel Squire, Abiathar Camp, and Zimri Hills.

A very important influence must have been exerted upon these young seekers for truth by the establishment of the Book Company, 1733, which founded the first library in the Colony of Connecticut, of which an enthusiastic historian writes: "For nearly a century the books were circulated extensively through the town, and, being read in the families, nourished for two or three generations strong men, who understood important subjects in the various elevated branches of human knowledge. It was this library which helped to make the voice of Durham potent in the Legislature for sixty or eighty years. It was this library which helped to refine the manners of the people and gave a high character to the schools and which created a taste for a liberal education which for a long time characterized the town. There was no light literature in this collection. The great principles of the civil and ecclesiastical government, the great doctrines of the Gospel, the great duties of morality, the cardinal virtues—the chief end of man—became in their elements so familiar to the leading minds of the town that superficial views of truth or of duty would not satisfy them."

In his later life, when the cruel war was over, General Wadsworth was for many years librarian of the Book Company, and

the volumes were kept at his own house. One of the lads who used to frequent the library says of James Wadsworth: "He was very dignified, but very courteous in his manners, as I well remember. He sometimes had a word of encouragement in regard to reading certain books."

But we must return to the days of his youth. From the school on Meeting-house Green he was soon promoted to the



HOUSE OF GENERAL JAMES WADSWORTH ON THE LEFT.
HOME OF THE LATE WM. WADSWORTH (TOWN CLERK AND JUSTICE) IN THE
FOREGROUND.

pastor's study to begin his classical education with his grandfather's friend, Mr. Chauncey. In 1748, at the age of eighteen, he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from Yale College. In this year occurred the death of his mother. After having studied law, James Wadsworth settled in Durham and was soon advanced to office in both civil and military life. On the death of his grandfather, the colonel, in 1756, he was elected town clerk, and continued in that position for thirty years. In this period he was described as "a man of dignified manners, of sound understand-

ing, and of the strictest morals." He was a member of the General Assembly for many years, and in a letter written from Middletown in November, 1775, to Silas Deane, then at Philadelphia, he is mentioned as one of the "principal palavermen in the House." Before passing to his military career, we may read between the lines of the town records the story of his private life. One of the first services performed by Rev. Mr. Goodrich, the successor of Mr. Chauncey, was the marriage ceremony of Captain James Wadsworth, as he was then called, and Katherine, daughter of Ebenezer Guernsey, on January 13, 1757. His fair young bride must have been his playmate in earliest childhood, and remained his companion in joy and sorrow until four years before his death.

What chapters of pathos these simple records of the church reveal! "Admitted to full communion October 30, 1757, Katherine, wife of Captain James Wadsworth." "Baptized December 25, 1757, Abigail, daughter of Captain James and Katherine Wadsworth."

Facing that mysterious door of motherhood which swings both ways, her mind full of sweet and solemn thoughts, Katherine Wadsworth consecrated hopes and fears alike upon the simple altar of the little village church. We turn the yellow leaf and find the record: "Died February 2, 1759, Abigail, daughter of Captain James and Katherine Wadsworth," for the little namesake of the general's mother lived hardly more than a year. Another daughter, Katherine, came to comfort the saddened home, but in 1763, in her third year, her name is entered in General Wadsworth's own writing among the deaths.

We greatly regret that the military achievements of our hero are so inadequately recorded. It would have been an inspiration to the Daughters of the American Revolution to dwell upon the details of the life of the general as fully as we have upon those of the man; but at present we can only enumerate his offices and let the imagination complete the picture of his military greatness.

In 1775, being colonel of the militia, he was appointed with others a committee to provide for the officers and soldiers who were prisoners of war.

In consequence of a pressing request from General Washington in January, 1776, the Council of Safety voted that four regiments

be raised, each to consist of seven hundred and twenty-eight men, including officers, to serve at the camp near Boston until the 1st of April. The first regiment thus raised was placed under the command of Colonel James Wadsworth, Lieutenant-Colonel Comfort Sage, and Major Dyer Throop. The General Assembly of Connecticut, at the December session, 1776, formed the militia of the State into six brigades under two major generals and six brigadier generals. James Wadsworth was at once chosen one of the six brigadier generals, and later he was appointed second major general.

In May, 1777, James Wadsworth was appointed a member of the Council of Safety; for three successive years he served his state in this very responsible body which had become a kind of State Board of War and included in its membership several of Connecticut's ablest generals, Spencer, Wolcott, Huntington, Davenport, Wadsworth.

In 1777 he was one of an important committee appointed to revise the militia laws of the State for the more effectual defense of the country. In March, 1777, General Wadsworth was ordered to march one-fourth of his brigade to New Haven to defend the coast. In April, 1778, the Council of Safety directed him to inquire into the state of the guards at New Haven and to dismiss the militia there, in whole or in part, at his discretion. For several years he was justice of the quorum, and then judge of the court of common pleas in New Haven County. In 1776-77 he was controller of public accounts in the State, and from 1785 to 1789 he was member of the Council.

Colonel Elihu Chauncey, the eldest son of the minister, though twenty years James Wadsworth's senior, was a congenial associate, and between them there existed a strong and generous friendship. They were both men of the highest moral principle, which no office could bribe them to surrender. Both were, to some extent, martyrs to their convictions. When the Revolutionary War was impending Colonel Chauncey refused to violate his oath of allegiance to Great Britain. He therefore gave up public office, but he continued to enjoy the confidence of his fellow-men because they considered him true to his principles of honor and moral obligations.

General Wadsworth, during one session, was a member of the Continental Congress, but when in 1788 the new Federal Constitution was brought before the State convention at Hartford for adoption or rejection General Wadsworth made the great speech against it. The special town meeting which had appointed General Wadsworth a delegate to this convention had rejected the Federal Constitution, four voting in favor and sixty-seven against it. In taking the vote, those on either side of the question were arranged in lines running south on the green from the south door of the meeting-house. In one line were four, in the other sixty-seven. The vote was given in the negative from the apprehension of the people of the town that the Federal Government to be created by the Constitution would take advantage of the powers delegated to it, and assume other powers not delegated by the Constitution. This fear remained with General Wadsworth that, although the convention which formulated it supposed that they had guarded the rights of the States, advantage would be taken of the Federal Constitution by the national government, in times of popular excitement, to encroach on the rights of the States. However, the vote at the Hartford State convention stood one hundred and twenty-eight in favor of, to forty against, the new Constitution. On high moral grounds General Wadsworth always refused to take an oath to support the Federal Constitution. His oath of fidelity to Connecticut, in his judgment, would be violated by taking that oath. He was offered office—even, it is said, that of Governor of the State, but he declined to accept the honor.

In the year 1794, notwithstanding his refusal to take the oath to support the Federal Constitution, the General Assembly of Connecticut appointed him to “settle accounts between the State of New York and the State of Connecticut, and to receive the balance which may be due this State on such a settlement.”

A letter is in existence, in copy at least, written by Jonathan Trumbull in 1777 to Major General Wadsworth, concerning the exchange of prisoners, in which, in the stately fashion of olden days, he signs himself, “I am, sir, your most obedient, humble servant, Jonathan Trumbull.”

Of the later life of General Wadsworth, there remains but little to record. One of the historians of Durham writes: “I remember

that the boys of the Center School often, when they saw General Wadsworth coming on his Narragansett pacer, with his large, erect, military figure, with his broad-brimmed hat and his Olympian locks, would run across the green to the road to take off their hats and make a low bow. This courtesy he returned to each one of



BURIAL PLACE AND TOMBSTONE OF GENERAL JAMES WADSWORTH.

us, taking his hat quite off and bowing to each one. Thus he encouraged good manners, of which he was a model." By invitation of his nephews, James and William, who had attained great wealth and honor in Geneseo, New York, he spent a year or more with them ; but, though surrounded with every comfort that he could desire, his heart yearned for Durham, and, after this brief absence, he remained in Durham, honored and beloved, until on the 22d of September, 1817, his life of eighty-seven years came to its close.

The inscription on his monument is as follows: "James Wadsworth of Durham was born July 6, 1730, and died Sept. 22, 1817. His wife Katherine Guernsey died 1813, aged 81. Their children died in infancy." "Remember that you must die."

On account of the high offices in civil and military life which General Wadsworth honorably filled and the intrinsic excellence of his character, both intellectual and moral, the Daughters of the American Revolution in Middletown may well be proud to bear his name.

Louise McCoy North.

(MRS. FRANK MASON NORTH.)

The first chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution in the State of Connecticut was the Wadsworth Chapter of Middletown. It was the second in the New England States, Gaspee Chapter of Providence, R. I., having been formed a few weeks earlier. Soon after the formation of the National Society, in October 1890, one* of its officers, a former resident of Middletown, wrote urging her friends in Middletown to form a local chapter, and she herself became the first charter member of the Middletown chapter. The membership was soon increased to the requisite number of twelve, and the chapter organized, its Regent having been appointed by the National Society, there being then no State Regent.

One of the first questions to be considered was a name for the new chapter. Several names were suggested, among others that of "Return Jonathan Meigs" who was formerly a resident of Middletown. The name of "Gen. James Wadsworth," of Middlesex County, was also urged, the naming of chapters for heroines having not then been suggested. The honored name of Wadsworth, which was finally adopted, has been a continual source of pride and pleasure, and the chapter has among its relics, the old Wadsworth family Bible, a picture suitably framed of the Wadsworth home in Durham, and other mementoes.

Kate L. Elmer.

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