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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JOURNAL OF DR. ELIAS CORNELIUS,
A REVOLUTIONARY SURGEON ***

JOURNAL
OF
DR. ELIAS CORNELIUS,
A REVOLUTIONARY SURGEON.

GRAPHIC DESCRIPTION
OF HIS SUFFERINGS
WHILE A
PRISONER IN PROVOST JAIL,
NEW YORK, 1777 AND 1778,
WITH BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

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JOURNAL
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A REVOLUTIONARY SURGEON.

AND
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

JOURNAL OF ELIAS CORNELIUS, M. D.,

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Surgeon's Mate in the American Revolutionary Army,

While a Prisoner to the British in the Provost Jail, New York, 1777 and 1778.

AUGT. 22, 1777.—This morning I marched down to East Chester with the main body of our troops in that division Viz. Gen Varnum's Brigade of Continental troops & Gen Ward's of Connecticut Malitia where we went and surprized one of the Enemies Piquets and took two officers and some privates with some Tories & Negroes. After that I went with our two guides and Dr Tunison of the General Hospital, and seized some stores that was within the Enemies Lines and kept for their use. After that (which was about two o'clock P. M.) the Gen thought proper to send out Piquet Guards. Capt Y Alden of Col Samuel B. Webbs Regiment, was detached, with about fifty men to command the advanced Piquet on the left, near West Chester. Capt David Dexter of Israel Angell's Regiment was detached with the same number of men to command the advanced Guards on the right at Miles Square. I, wishing to be where most was to be done, rode down with Capt Dexter. He stopped at Miles Square; but seeing a body of men at a distance on the right towards North River, not knowing who they were I sat out with a determination to find out. I had gone but half way when I met Col Dammond.

After some conversation we concluded to ride to the Enemies advanced Post, and see what discoveries we could make. After riding in sight of Fort Independence, we returned unmolested to Col Dammond's Regiment. While we were riding we heard cannonading and firing of small arms, which we supposed to be the enemy attacking our advanced Guards on the left; here I left Col Dammond and returned to Capt Dexter's Piquet and there tarried some minutes, after which set out for Head Quarters, where I had left the Gen and main bodys of the troops at East Chester. It had become late in the afternoon, but I thought myself safe, as I had been six miles nearer the enemy than I was at that time. I had now four miles to ride before I came to Capt Dexter's Piquet. Before I come to East Chester it took up some time; I however arrived there in an hour and a half. To my great surprise I found that our troops had left the place and retired back and the Enemies scouting parties were in the town. (At this time Capt Alden on the left was killed and his Piquets chiefly killed or taken.) On riding into town, while passing a corner, four of the Enemy started from behind a shed, one of whom seized my horse, another seized me by my coat & legs asked me where I belonged, to which I answered to the Army of the United States of America and to Gen Varnum's Brigade of Continental troops, and then I asked where Gen Varnum was: one of them (John Anderson a noted Tory) said "I am he," I answered, it is false. By this time they had me to the ground during which time, one of them seized one of my pistols, the other I took and presented at the breast of the leader and bid him surrender, he immediately took the one he had taken from me, and presenting it asked me if I would surrender, to which I answered, No, he immediately ordered the others to make ready their peices and advance, then turning to me, he said if I "did not at once surrender he would order his men to blow a Brace of Pistols through me" I immediately surrendered. They at once began robbing me of everything I had. Viz Horse & Harness, Pair of Pistols, Great Coat, pair of Shoe Buckles, pocket book with notes &c. to the amount of 25 or 30E; besides some money, and sundry other articles. I was then put under guard and proceeded to West Chester; we had gone but half a mile when we met one of the Seargents of Capt Alden's party, making his escape from the enemy to our guards. Here the leader of the guard that had taken me seised him and drove him with me to a place 3 miles below West Chester to a Mr Hunt's an old tavern keeper. This man abused me more than any other, while I was a prisoner here I with my companion was kept till the next morning. The officers that our party had taken of the enemy, (the same morning I was taken) were allowed to walk the streets and were not put under guard, and had their Parole immediately. Where, as I and my companion were put in close confinement, with 13 sentinals, who would not allow us to speak.

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AUGUST 23rd—This morning as I and my companion were conveyed to Kings Bridge we met Mr Delaney a Tory Col, who inquired of our leader "where he got those scoundrels?" to which he replied that they where some of Washington's army. We had gone but little farther, when we met a man who told us that he saw Capt Alden dead, the day before and that he helped to bury him. When we arrived at Kings Bridge I was put under the Provost Guard where to, my sorrow, I found a man by the name of Prichard, who was one of Capt Alden's Piquet and belonged to the State Guards of Connecticut. He had his Commission with him which was taken and never returned. Besides myself and the man just mentioned, there were several others who were under guard with us; one Sargent of the State Guards, a Corporal of Col Webbs Regiment, one of the Light-Horse, and 8 Privates, in all 13. We were kept, in this place sometime under the Hessian Guards. I applied for the things of which I was

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robbed, my pocket-book & buckles were returned. I then made application for things, which belonged to other prisoners, (on their behalf.) Some of them had part of their things returned, others nothing. At eleven O'clock a Surgeon of the British Army came to me, and inquired for news papers. I told him I had none, he then gave me a New York paper, and said that I should have my parole as soon as I reached New York. The only provision we had as yet received since we arrived here was some mouldy bread, a pint of rum put into a bucket of water, once in a while the Hessian that Guarded us would bring some sour apples in his hat and throw them down among us as he would among so many pigs. The guards being relieved we were marched for New York. Just before we reached there we were taken to the Quarters of a Hessian General for a show. Here the Hessians flocked around us, mocking us, sometimes drawing their swords across our throats, and saying we were to be hung here. A mate of the Hessian Surgeon seeing me much fatigued gave me a glass of wine which refreshed me much. Here our present guards were relieved by other Hessians; we were marched for Harlem here we were brought before Gen. Piquet, a Brigideer General in the British Service; we staid here a few minutes, we were then put under an English Guard, who treated us better than we had been before; under this guard we went to New York. It being very warm weather, and the Guards changing often, we were marched so fast, that some of us were ready to faint. But we were not allowed to stop even to get a drink of water till we came to within four miles of New York, when a poor woman seeing our condition, came out and entreated our guards to stop that she might give us some water; the guard consented and the good woman (as I may call her, for I beleive she was the means of saving the life of one of our men who was just sinking with the heat) ran into the house and brought us several pails of beer and three or four loaves of bread and two or three pounds of Cheese, and to some of us she gave some money; the name of this woman was Clemons, a native of Boston, and she was about 30 years of age. She kept a small shop at the righthand side of the road near Kings bridge. We marched till we come to the Bowery, within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of New York; being very thirsty I prevailed upon the guard to stop, that we might again refresh ourselves. We asked some negroes if they would give us some water, to which they replied "No Domd you, you rebels, that we cant give you none, we are some of Donmons Men," we were forced to go on without our desired refreshments.

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As we come into the town the Hessians, Negroes, and children insulted, stoned and abused us in every way they could think of. At that time two of our men had become so fatigued that we were obliged to carry them. In this way we were led through half the streets, as a show. At last we were brought before Gen Jones who ordered us to the Sugar House which formerly went by the name of Livingston's Sugar House which was the Prison the private Soldiers were kept in. Here one Walley a Seargent of the 20th Regt. of Irish troops in the British Service, had the charge of the prisoners. This man was the most barbarous, cruel man that ever I saw he drove us into the Sugar house yard like so many hogs, from there he ordered us into the Sugar House which was the dirtiest and most disagreeable place that I ever saw and the water in the pump was not better than that in the Dock. The top of the House was open to the weather, so that when it rained the water ran along and through every floor and on that account it was impossible for us to keep dry. Mr Walley gave us (13 of us) 4 pounds of poor Irish Pork and 4 pounds of mouldy bread for 4 days. After passing one night I asked Mr Walley if I was not to have my parole to which he answered No. I then asked for a pen and ink that I might write a petition to the Gen for it, he answered no, and was very cross and abused me very much. I again asked him the reason why I was not to have my parole, he told me I was not to have it. I then asked him if he would let me have a pen and ink to write a few lines to my father which he might see before I sent them. He then struck me across the face with a staff which I have seen him beat the prisoners; he told me he would find a place for me. The next morning he came and took me out of prison under guard with one Capt Bissel (whom he had taken from the main Guard) and conveyed us to the Provost Guard. Capt Bissel was put in the upper part of the prison. I was then taken down to a Dungeon; when the door was opened "here" says Sergeant Keith (the Provost marshal) "here's a Doctor for you, you Damb rebbel." When I went in I found Capt Chatham formaly Capt of a Privateer, and belonged to Pennsylvania, and was taken prisoner and put in this dungeon, because after he was taken captive, he was ordered to pilot their ship up the Delaware, which he refused. There was also in this place a Capt Travis, of Virginia, & Capt of a Sloop of War, & John McCalsenden a Quarter Master in the Continental Army, and belonged to the first Battallion of New Jersey, and was accused of being a deserter Six or Seven years before the present war begun. He was condemned to be hung, but did not know which; he had been there between five and six months; There were also in this dismal place besides these mentioned, nine thieves murderers &c. While in this place Capt Chatham was taken sick with nervous fever, I solicited Seargent Keith to permit him to go up stairs, But he answered in the negative. I then requested him to suffer me to send for some Medicine or I believe he must die, to which he replied he might die; and if he did he would bury him. All the provision each man had for a week was but, two pounds of Meat and two pounds of bread, always one and sometimes both was not fit to eat, and those who had money were not able to send to purchase any of the necessaries of life. At this time I had not one farthing of money just being robbed of all, and also of my clothing except what I had on. I had no change of linen from the 25th of August till the 12th of September. At this time I solicited Sargent Keith to permit me to send to my father on Long Island and see if he would send me some money and clothing which I was much in need of. (My father was one of their beloved friends and lived among them) But he as before positively answered in the negative, and said that no paper or written message should be sent out of the dungeon. About this time I

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was feeling resigned to suffer all the punishment that they were desirous of inflicting upon me. Remembering that many of my dear country men had previously suffered greater punishment than mine; and that many of them died and bled in their countrys cause, and defence. Previously contemplating and Meditating that the cause we were contending for, was a just cause, and a cause that all mankind ought to be interested in. Having meditated on all these things, I thought myself in duty bound, to suffer with patience & fortitude, with my fellow prisoners in my country's cause. In this hidious place I was kept till the twentieth of September following; when Seargent Keith (the Provost Martial) came to the dungeon and took Capt Chatham, and Travis, and myself, and led us to the upper part of the prison, where I found my friends that were also prisoners, Viz, Ethan Allen, Major Williams, Paine & Wells and others. Allen was made prisoner near Montreal, in the beginning of the war. He was put on board a man of war, and kept chained flat on his back in the hole six months. He also told me he had twice been carried on shore in England to be hung, but was reprieved. He was likewise taken on shore in Ireland and at Halifax for the same purpose. After this he was brought to New York, where for a short time he had his parole, it was taken from him, and he put in the provost jail, as there was an antipathy against him. I left him in this goal on Jan 7, 1778. Major Williams, belonged at Maryland and was taken prisoner at Fort Washington. Major Paine belonged at Connecticut. While I was in this place, we were not allowed to speak to any friend, not even out of the window, I have frequently seen women beaten with canes and ramrods who have come to the Prison windows to speak to their Husbands, Sons or Brothers, and officers taken and put in the dungeon just for asking for cold water. Our provision was the same as in the dungeon with the exception of dried Peas, we however had no fire to cook them. Soon Fort Montgomery was taken by Gen Clinton (British) and all the officers were brought and put in two small rooms on the lower floor of the prison. Several of them were badly wounded but no Surgeon was allowed to dress them. I asked Sargent Keith for the privilege, he first told me I should, but on asking him the second time, I was refused, and assured if I said any more about it he would put me with them and there keep me. All of us in the upper prison were sometimes allowed to go on top of the house, I took this opportunity of throwing some ointment and Lint down the chimney to the wounded in the lower rooms, with directions how to use it, I knew only one of them Lt. Col Livingston. About this time there was a report about town that Burgoyne and his army were made prisoners, by the army under command of the Hon Major Gen Gates; it was however soon contradicted in their newspapers, it was set forth in the following manner "Last Thursday the rebels came to Elizabeth-town Point, to enlist recruits for the rebel service, and in order to deceive raised a false report, fired cannon, made fires, and gave away rum without measure, and said that Gen Burgoyne and his whole army were taken prisoners. But notwithstanding all their efforts they could not get a single man. And the account of Gen Burgoyne being taken prisoner is to ridiculous to be beleived." This passed in some of the papers and there was nothing said for ten or fourteen days, but the women that passed by made motions assuring us that we might depend upon it that he was surely taken prisoner. About this time Col Livingston had a letter sent into him from his father By a British Officer who was coming into New York on Parole, and was brought to the Commander of the city, who being in haste ordered his Secretary to write his permission to the letter and direct it to Mr Livingston a Rebel Col, in the Provost jail, therefore it was brought to him. Soon we heard holloeing, and other expressions of joy by him and others in the same room, but could not tell what was the matter. After he had read the letter over and over again he put it up to us through the crack in the floor, and we at once knew the cause of their joy, and the whole prison was filled with joy inexpressible! The truth of what we heard was at this time confirmed. The next thing we saw was (in the papers) Gen Burgoyne's capitulation with Gen Gates. From this time till I left the prison we were better treated, although the provision was bad. But drew rather larger quantities of it. Some Butter, and about a gill of rice a week, and some cole which we never drew before. About this time my father came from Long Island to the prison to see me. I was called down to the grates. My heart at first was troubled within me, I burst into tears and did not speak for some minutes. I put my hand through the grates and took my fathers, and held it fast. The poor old gentleman shed many tears and seemed quite troubled to see me in so woeful a place. He asked me how I did I told him poorly but as well as could be expected in such a hidious place, I then asked after the health of Mother Brother & Sisters, he told me they were well. I was filled with joy at hearing this as it was the first time I had heard from them since I entered the service. He asked me "what I thought of myself now and why I could not have been ruled by him, he said he had forewarned me of the cost, and that I had been led away by a bad man (Dr Latham) and that Washington's whole crew would soon be in the same situation" and says he, "did not you never see his excellency's proclamation, whare in was set forth a free grace and pardon to all who would come in voluntarely" (Meaning Sir Wm Hows Proclamation) I told him I had seen it, says he "why then did you not come in then, voluntarely, and quit the rebels. I thought you would come in voluntarely without being brought in by force of arms" Says I, Father what made you think so, did not I tell you my mind before I left your house, and did not you know my disposition? Have not I been faithful in all the duties of a child, to a parent? But, Father you, and every other man must know that it was a very trying thing to me, to leave all my dear friends and turn myself out into the world naked, Does this seem to you, to show a rebellious disposition of temper and mind? When at that time I had not a relative or acquaintance in the Army, not a relative in the world but what were enemies to this once happy country. Believe me dear Father, I was not led away by any man as you supposed. But on the contrary I weighed the matter seriously before I came into the service, the more I meditated the more I was led to believe that the

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cause in which my countrymen were engaged was a just one, and loudly called for the assistance of every well wisher of his bleeding country. Such were the feelings when I left my tender father's family. Soon the provost Martial came and said he could not allow my father to stay longer, I therefore bade him farewell. Towards the latter part of December we had Continental bread and beef sent us and as much wood as we wished to burn, (a friend gave me some money which was very useful.)

JANUARY 9th 1778.—This day Mr Walley come and took from the prison myself and six others under guard and took us to the Sugar House where I was first imprisoned. At this time my health was bad, being troubled with the Scurvey, and my prospects for the winter were dark. This prison was much worse than when I left it before, from the fact that there were nearly thirty soldiers, who went around to the other prisoners and stole from them, the few comforts they had, and take the sick from their beds and take their bed clothing, and beat and kick them almost to death. The articles which they took from us they would carry to Mr Walley and sell them for rum.

JANUARY 13th.—This morning I being unwell went to the hospital, which was the brick Meeting House, here I staid until the 16th here I was not much better than I was in the Sugar House no medicine was given me, though I had a cough and fever, the Surgeon wished me as soon as I became better to take the care of the sick, provided he could get my parole.

JANUARY 16th.—On coming the next morning he said he could get it. I was now determined to make my escape, although hardly able to undertake it. Just at the dusk of the evening, before the lamps were lighted (having made the Sentinal intoxicated) I with others went out into the back yard to endeavor to make our escape over the fence, the others being backward about going first, I climed upon a tomb stone and gave a spring and went over safely, and then gave orders for the others to do likewise. A little Irish lad undertook to leap over, and caught his clothes in the spikes in the wall, and made something of a noise. The sentinal being aroused called out (Rouse) which is the same as to command the Guards to turn out. They were soon out and surrounded the prison, in the meantime I had made my way to St. Paul's Church, which was the wrong way to get out of town. The guards expecting, I had gone towards North River, went in that direction. On arriving at the Church I turned into the street to go by the College and thus go out of town by the side of the river. Soon after I was out of town I heard the 8 o'clock gun; which was found on board the Commodors ship, and was a signal for the Sentinals to hail every man that came by. I wished much to cross the river but could not find any boat suitable. While going up the side of the river at 9 O'clock (P M) I was challenged by a Sentinal with the usual word (Burdon) upon which I answered nothing, on being challenged the second time I answered Friend. He bade me advance and give the counter sign, upon which I fancied I was drunk and advancing in a staggering manner, and after falling to the ground, he asked me where I was going, home I told him, but had got lost, and having been to New York, had taken rather too much liquor, and become somewhat intoxicated. He then asked my name which I told him was Marther Hopper (Mr Hopper lived not far distant) And solicited him to put me in the right road, but told me that I must not go till the Sargent of the Guards dismissed me from him, unless I could give him the counter sign. I still entreated him to let me go knowing the situation I was in. Soon, however, he consented and directed my course which I thanked him for. Soon the moon arose and made it very light, and there being snow on the ground, crusted over, and no wind, therefore a person walking, could be heard a great distance. At this time the tumor in my lungs broke, and being afraid to cough for fear of being heard, prevented me from releiving myself of the puss that was lodged there. I had now to cross lots that were cleared and covered with snow, the houses being thick on the road, which I was to cross, and for fear of being heard, I lay myself flat on my stomach and crept along on the frozen snow. When I come to the fence, I climed over, and walked down the road, near a house where there were music and dancing. At this time one of the guards came out. I immediately fell down upon my face. Soon the man went into the house, I rose again and crossed the fence into the field and proceeded toward the river, there being no trees or rocks in the field to hinder my being seen, and not being able to walk without being heard as the snow crust was hard enough to permit my walking on it, and the dogs beginning to bark, I lay myself flat again and crept across the field, which took me half an hour. I at length reached the river and walked by the side of it some distance and saw a small creek which ran up into the island and by the side of it a small house, and two Sentinals one each side of it, not knowing what to do I crept into a hole in the bank which led in between two rocks, here I heard them talk. I concluded to endeavor to go around the head of the creek which was about half a mile, but on getting out of the hole I took hold of a limb of a tree which gave way, and made a great noise, the sentinal on hearing it said "did you not hear a person on the cr," I waited some minutes and then went around the head of the creek and came down to the river on the other side of the house to see if I could not find a boat, to cross to Long Island. But on finding sentinals near by I returned back a short distance, and went up the river. I had not gone more than 30 rods, when I saw another sentinal posted on the bank of the river where I must pass or go round a half a mile and then come down to the river again. I stood some minutes thinking what course to pursue, but on looking at the man found he did not move and was leaning on his gun, I advanced toward him and succeeding in passing by without waking him up. After this I found a Sentinal every 15 or 20 rods till I came within 2 miles of Hell Gate. Here I stayed till my feet began to freese, and having nothing to eat, I went a mile farther up the river. It now being late I crept up into the bushes and lay down to think what

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to do next. I concluded as I could not get a boat to cross the river to Long Island to remain where I was during the night and early in the morning to go down to New York and endeavor to find some house to conceal myself in. In the morning as soon as the Revelry Beating commenced I went on my way to New York which was 8 miles from this place, after proceeding awhile I heard the morning guns fired at New York though 4 miles from it. I passed the sentinals unmolested, down the middle road, and arrived there before many were up. I met many of the British and Hessian Soldiers whom I knew very well, but they did not know me. I went to a house and found them friends of America, and was kindly received of them, and promised to keep me a few days. I had not been here, but $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour when I was obliged to call for a bed. After being in bed two or three hours, I was taken with a stoppage in my breast, and made my respiration difficult, and still being afraid to cough loud for fear of being heard. The good lady of the house gave me some medicine of my own prescribing, which soon gave me relief. Soon a rumor spread about town among the friends of America, of my confinement and expectation soon to be retaken, they took measures to have me conveyed to Long Island, which was accordingly done.

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FEB. 18, 1778.—The same day I was landed I walked nine miles, and put up at a friends house during my walk I passed my Grandfather's house, and dare not go in to see him for fear he would deliver me up to the British. The next morning I started on my journey again and reached the place I intended at 12 O'clock (noon) and put up with two friends. The next morning I and my companions (two of them) started from our friends with four days provisions and Shovels and axes to build us a hut in the woods. We each of us had a musket powder and balls. After going two miles in the woods, we dug away the snow and made us a fire. After warming ourselves we set to work to build us a hut and got one side of it done the first day, and the next day we finished it. It was tolerably comfortable, we kept large fires and cooked our meat on the coals. In eight or ten days we had some provisions brought us by our friends. At this time we heard that Capt Rodgers was cast away on Long Island, and concealed by some of his friends. We went to see him, and found him, we attempted to stay in the house in a back room. At about 10 O'clock A. M. there came in a tory, he knowing some of us seemed much troubled. We made him promise that he would not make known our escape. The next day my two comrades went back to their old quarters and Capt Rodgers and myself, and a friend went into the woods and built us a hut, about ten miles from my former companions, with whom we kept up a constant corespondence. Soon a man was brought to us by our friends whom we found to be John Rolston, a man that was confined with us in the Provost Jail. And was carried to the Hospital about 3 weeks after I was, and made his escape the same way, and by friends was brought to Long Island.

MARCH 19th 1778.—About five O'clock a friend came to us and said we had an opportunity to go over to New England in a boat that had just landed, with 4 torys that had stolen the boat at Fairfield Connecticut. We immediately sent word to our two friends with whom I first helped to build a hut, that we could now go across the sound, but they could not be found. At sunset those that came over in the boat went off, and some of our friends guided us through the woods to the boat, taken two oars with us which we had made for fear we should not find any in the boat. On arriving at the place our kind friends helped us off. We rowed very fast till we were a great distance from land. The moon rose soon, and the wind being fair, we arrived, we knew not where, about half an hour before day. We went on shore and soon found it was Norwalk Ct. We had bade farewell to Long Island for the present upon which I composed the following lines,

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O fair you well once happy land,
Where peace and plenty dwelt
But now op'pressed by tyrants hands,
Where naught but fury's felt.

Behold I leave you for awhile
To mourn for all your Sons;
Who daily bleed that you may smile,
When we've your freedom won.

After being rested just as the day began to dawn we walked a short distance to a place called the "Old Mill" where we found a guard who hailed us at a distance, and on coming up to him kindly received us, and invited us to his house to warm us (for he lived in Norwalk) here we went to bed at sunrise and stayed till 10 O'clock. After dinner we took our leave of Capt Rodgers, and started for head quarters in Pennsylvania, where the grand Army was at that time. In seven days we arrived at Valley Forge.

NOTE.—The above narrative is a true copy of the "Journal" written by my grandfather (Dr. Elias Cornelius), giving an account of his sufferings and treatment while in the hands of the British in New York, in 1777 and 1778.

CHARLES M. TOMPKINS.

June 4th, 1894.

On our second page will be found a sketch of a Revolutionary soldier and patriot, Dr. Elias Cornelius, who was for many years a resident of Baldwin Place. This is the first complete sketch of Dr. Cornelius' career that has been presented to the public, although he passed away over seventy years ago. We are indebted to our old friend, Judge Charles M. Tompkins, of Washington, D. C., for a copy of Dr. Cornelius' Journal, and also for other information which has aided us in compiling the sketch.—EDITOR.

DR. ELIAS CORNELIUS.

The following sketch of one whose career dates back to the beginning of the Revolutionary War, who suffered imprisonment, endured great privations and persecutions, and even banishment from home and estrangement of family ties for the cause of freedom, but who came out of the ordeal unscathed and purified—like gold tried by fire—with character strengthened and patriotism intensified, and, after the clouds of war had rolled by and his beloved country no longer required his services, became the most noted physician of his time in this section of the State, and a strong and honored pillar in the Presbyterian Church, is written with a desire to revive and perpetuate the memory and deeds of a good man, and a noble patriot, who was an honor to his country, to his profession, and to Christianity, and whose life was an inspiration and a blessing to his fellow men.

Such was Dr. Elias Cornelius, who for over forty years (1781-1823) filled a prominent place in the active life of Putnam County and Northern Westchester, and whose name in those olden days was a household word in the communities through which he moved and practised his profession.

Elias Cornelius was born on Long Island in the year 1758. Besides Elias, his father's family consisted of another son and several daughters. His paternal ancestors came from Holland, and a coat of arms once in the possession of Dr. Cornelius, of which we have seen a copy, indicates that they were people of rank and distinguished for military achievements and religious zeal which had won for them this honorable heraldic emblem. Beyond this we know nothing of the family history, nor of Elias' boyhood or educational advantages, except that he had not received the benefit of a collegiate education.

At the commencement of the Revolutionary War, we find him studying medicine under the direction of Dr. Samuel Latham, a physician of repute, in New York City, who not only initiated his pupil into the mysteries of the healing art and sought to convert him into a worthy disciple of Esculapius, but also instilled into his youthful mind the principles of patriotism and implanted in his heart the love of freedom to such an extent, that, in spite of the persuasions and remonstrances of his parents and other relatives, all of whom were devoted Loyalists, he resolved to cast his lot with the Patriots.

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The outgrowth of this was that he enlisted in the American Army, Jan. 1, 1777, being then only twenty years of age. On April 15, 1777, he was appointed Surgeon's Mate in the Second Regiment of Rhode Island troops under the command of Col. Israel Angell. His appointment was signed by John Cochran, Surgeon General; James Craik,^[1] Chief Physician and Surgeon to the Army; Col. Israel Angell and others. Four months after this, Aug. 22, 1777, while on a reconnoitering trip, Dr. Cornelius was surprised and taken prisoner by the British, at East Chester. He was robbed of all his belongings, and then marched to New York under charge of Hessian Guards by whom he was treated in an insulting and cruel manner. On his arrival there he was lodged in the Old Sugar House prison, in which the private soldiers were kept. Soon after he was removed from that prison and thrown into a dungeon in the Provost Jail.

Concerning this Jail, Mary L. Booth, in her *History of New York City*, quotes from a published document of John Pintard, one of the founders of the New York Historical Society, as follows: "The Provost was destined for the more notorious rebels, civil, naval and military. An admission to this modern Bastille was enough to appall the stoutest heart."

The Jail was under the superintendence of the notorious Provost Marshal Cunningham, and no greater brute, or demon in human form, ever had charge of captives of war. The barbarities practiced on the defenceless prisoners by this man stand unparalleled in the history of war. It is stated that he treated them with the utmost cruelty, heaped every possible indignity on them, and while his victims were dying off from cold and starvation, like cattle, he actually mingled an arsenical preparation with their poor food in order to kill them off quicker. It is also recorded that he openly boasted that "he had killed more of the rebels with his own hand than had been slain by all the king's forces in America." Such was the Provost Jail and its keeper.

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Among Dr. Cornelius's friends and fellow prisoners in the jail, he mentions Ethan Allen, the hero of Ticonderoga, and Majors Williams, Paine and Wells.

Here he languished until Sept. 20, 1777, suffering for the necessities of life and receiving like all confined there, most cruel and inhuman treatment from the jailers and guards. He was then transferred to the upper rooms of the prison where he was confined until Jan. 9, 1778. About this time Dr. Cornelius received a visit from his father, who, as we have stated, was a Loyalist and a most faithful adherent of King George. In the journal which he kept during his imprisonment (which we shall publish later) he makes mention of this visit and records the views which his father then expressed of his conduct. He writes that he reproached him for his treasonable action and wept over the trouble it had brought him into, ascribing the whole as a result of the influence which Dr. Latham, whom he styled "a bad man," had exerted over his son. He then urged Elias to avail himself of a free pardon which had been offered in a proclamation by the Governor, Sir William Howe, to all who would come in voluntarily and "quit the rebels." The young man, however, turned a deaf ear to his father's entreaties, who left him uttering dire predictions of the results that would follow. England, according to his views, must surely conquer the rebellious Colonies, and his erring son would then, when it was too late, realize the folly of his course, and without doubt meet the fate due a traitor to his king and country.

Soon after his father's visit, he was again consigned to the dungeon, but a few days later, on account of sickness, was removed to the hospital which he states was "in the brick meeting house." Watching his opportunity, he made his escape from there, Jan. 16, 1778, three days after his arrival. He then wandered about for a number of days and endured much exposure and suffering, but finally found, to use his own language, "the house of some friends to America," who took him in, and afterwards aided him to reach Long Island.

When he arrived on Long Island, he writes in his Journal that he walked nine miles and passed his grandfather's house but did not dare go in to ask relief for fear that the old gentleman, who was a strong Tory, would deliver him up to the British. Shortly after, in his wanderings, he again found friends to the American cause, and also met two men who had been prisoners of the British, and like himself, had been fortunate enough to make their escape without detection.

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Cornelius, in company with these men, then went into the woods where they built a hut in which they passed the remainder of the Winter, living in constant fear, however, lest they should be discovered by the Tories in the vicinity, and information given which would lead to their recapture by the British soldiers. By hunting, and with occasional supplies stealthily furnished them by a few faithful friends they managed to eke out an existence until March 19, 1778, when not deeming it safe to remain longer in that location, the party separated.

After this Dr. Cornelius took refuge in the house of one of his friends, where he met two other men who had been his fellow prisoners in the Provost Jail. As all three men were desirous of leaving Long Island, in a few days, with the aid of friends, a boat was secured in which Cornelius and his two companions rowed across the sound to Norwalk, Conn., where they found shelter in the house of Capt. Rogers, one of the party. Dr. Cornelius remained at Captain Rogers's residence only long enough to take needed rest and refreshment, then proceeded on his way, and after a journey of seven days, rejoined the American Army which was then in those memorable headquarters at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. He continued in the service until Jan. 1, 1781, and received an honorable discharge.

On retiring from the service in 1781, Dr. Cornelius settled at Yorktown, Westchester County, and entered on the practice of his profession. Amid the hardships and dangers of his life in the army he received vivid religious impressions and came to be known as the "beloved physcian," which led him after settling there to unite with the Congregational Church, and in 1787 he was honored with the office of deacon.

Some years later he removed from Yorktown to the northwest part of the town of Somers, which is now known as Baldwin Place, and located on the farm at present owned by Samuel M. Lounsbury, where he resided to the time of his death.

Here he devoted himself with renewed energy to his profession and acquired a large practice extending over the towns of Carmel, Somers, Yorktown, Philipstown, and Fredericksburg. He was a close student, and by patient study and industry accumulated a large fund of general and professional information. Many young men studied medicine under his superintendence and became able and successful practitioners.

Though Dr. Cornelius was an energetic man and possessed great firmness of character, he was also very kind hearted and generous—the poor received gratuitous medical attendance from him to a great extent, and while he ministered to the physical ailments of his patients, like his Master, the "Great Physician," he was ever ready to offer spiritual comfort to those who stood in need, and kind words and advice were freely bestowed on rich and poor alike, in such measure as the case required.

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His generosity was not alone confined to individuals but the church as well found him a faithful servant, a cheerful giver and an industrious worker. The Presbyterian Church Society, of Mahopac Falls (formerly known as Red Mills), to-day stands in part as a monument to his zeal and devotion to the cause of Christ, for in 1790, he in conjunction with a few other faithful ones effected its organization, and to the day of his death his contributions to its support were most liberal and his interest in its welfare unabated. He was a prime mover, too, in securing for the society its first house of worship, taking a very

active part in raising funds for the erection of a suitable edifice, and its completion was to him a source of pride and satisfaction. When the church was incorporated, April 7, 1806, he was chosen one of the Trustees.

In his Will he bequeathed legacies to the following religious and charitable societies: The American Bible Society; The United Foreign Mission Society; The American Education Society, and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

His creed was loyalty to his country and to his God, and all through his eventful and useful life his words and deeds alike attested his sincerity. His view of life was evidently embodied in the following lines of verse which were found pasted in the inside covers of all his books.

“SOON will this glass of mortal life be run
And all its fleeting vanities be gone.
Then may I feel no more sins cruel fire,
But to the grave in faith and peace retire;
And weep no more for the licentious wrongs
Of judgments rash or scourge of slanderous tongues.”

Dr. Cornelius married for his first wife the daughter of a brother physician, Dr. Brewer, who bore him several children, all of whom died in childhood, and his wife also passed away in early life. Some years after her decease, he married Miss Rachel Stocker, who is described as possessing many excellent traits of character, and as being a woman of enlarged Christian experience. She died about the year 1833. By this marriage, five children were born to him, one son, Elias Cornelius, and four daughters: “Sally,” who married Tallman Perry, Sept. 13, 1824; Betsey, who married Ira Tompkins, March 8, 1820; Polly, who became the wife of Rev. William Lewis, and Nancy, who died unmarried at the early age of nineteen years.

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The son, Elias Cornelius, who was graduated from Yale College, Sept., 1813, studied theology under Dr. Dwight, and became an eloquent and influential minister of the Congregational Church, being licensed to preach the Gospel, June 16, 1816, at Litchfield, Conn. For five years (1826-1831) he filled the office of Secretary to the American Educational Society, and through his influence and earnest labors the work of preparing young men for the ministry received a notable impetus. In January, 1832, he was chosen one of the Secretaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, to succeed Jeremiah Evarts.

But it had been foreordained that his life work, so earnest and successful, should be accomplished quickly, even before he had reached his prime, for he died at Hartford, Conn., Feb. 12th, 1832, one month after his appointment, at the age of thirty-eight years. The talented poetess, Mrs. Sigourney, wrote some touching lines on his death. One son, Jeremiah Evarts Cornelius, of Boston, Mass., and two daughters, Mary Cornelius and Mrs. Sarah E. Little, of Newton Centre, Mass., are now the only living members of his family.

The daughters, reared in this Christian home, were also noted for piety, and like their father and brother, their walk in life abounded in good deeds. Their highest aim seems to have been to aid and comfort those less fortunate than themselves. They were women highly respected in the communities where their lives were spent, and valued and devoted members of the churches with which they were connected.

Of these, Betsey, who died Sept. 28, 1852, wife of Ira Tompkins, left three sons and four daughters: Eli C. Tompkins, of Fond du Lac, Wis.; Judge Charles M. Tompkins, of Washington, D. C.; Augustus Tompkins, Burlington, Kansas; Mrs. Amelia Travis, Burlington, Kansas; Mrs. Julia Moore, Baldwin Place, N. Y.; Mrs. Elizabeth Hyatt, Jefferson Valley, N. Y.; and Mrs. Sarah F. Hyatt, New York City, all of whom are now living.

Mrs. Sally Perry lived and died in Bridgeport, Conn., the last member of Dr. Cornelius' family to pass away. She left an only son, Rev. Tallman C. Perry, now living at La Prairie, Canada.

Mrs. Polly Lewis, wife of Rev. William Lewis, died at Rising Sun, Ind., many years ago, leaving one son, William, who when last heard from, was living near Auburn, N. Y.

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Nancy, the youngest child, died March 23rd, 1822, aged 19 years.

Dr. Cornelius was a member of the order of Cincinnati, and his certificate of membership bears the signatures of Washington and Knox, who were his personal friends. This, with the “Journal” to which we have alluded, is now in the office of the R. I. Society, of Cincinnati.

Gen. La Fayette was also an intimate friend of Dr. Cornelius, and presented him with a sword as a token of his esteem, which is now in the possession of his grandson, Rev. Tallman C. Perry, of La Prairie, Canada. Dr. Cornelius died in 1823, and lies buried in the Presbyterian Cemetery at Mahopac Falls. His tombstone bears the following inscription:

DR. ELIAS CORNELIUS,

Died June 13, 1823, Aged 65 years.

“A Revolutionary Officer and Patriot, one of the principal founders of the

Church and Society in this place, and for forty years a laborious, and eminently useful Physician. Embracing religion in the Camp, he was early distinguished for his zeal and activity in the cause of Christ, and having spent much of his life in its service, died in the possession of its hopes."

IDA M. BLAKE.

[From *The Spirit of '76*, New York, February, 1898.]

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A NEW YORK PATRIOT IN PRISON.

BY A. OAKEY HALL.

How the English in 1777 Made Dungeons in the Livingston Sugar House and Hall of Records.

Judge Charles M. Tompkins, who has been in the Department of the Interior at Washington since Lincoln first appointed him, as well as his Westchester County relatives, never tire of recounting the sufferings as a Revolutionary patriot of their grandfather, Elias Cornelius, who as a young M. D. in the early years of the war against King George, served as surgeon's mate in the brigade of General Varnum, whose descendants yet illustrate the political, loyal and social circles of New York City. When the Britons of to-day wonder why there exists so bitter a feeling in the United States against the English government the answer would be that such stories as grandfather Cornelius had to relate to his posterity (which was only a sample story of tales narrated by a thousand other Continental prisoners) emphasized the naturally bullying propensity of all John Bulls and their inclination toward oppression and cruelty. So long as American children receive common school education, so long will their own native logic teach them to hate a government guilty of oppressions toward their ancestry such as characterized the era of George III., or countenanced the felonious raid of British troops on the National Capitol during the naval war in President Madison's time; or learn about the selfishness of the English cabinet during our civil war time in aiding and abetting secession. London newspapers have but to remember that Americans thereby have a three-fold reason for disliking English governments; and a dislike intensified by reflection upon the three hundred years of their oppressions and cruelties toward Irishmen. This spirit of hatred and dislike is probably more rampant in New York than elsewhere, because its local revolutionary history especially teems with narratives of Tory oppression in our Colonial city and of Tory cruelties in city prisons and prison ships and at the Wallabout on the Brooklyn side, fostered by vindictive provost marshals. The vindictive English spirit of our Revolutionary era has subsequently existed for the Sepoys of India. In 1777 General Howe did not blow prisoners into fragments at the cannon's mouth as was done in 1855 in Hindostan; but the story of Dr. Cornelius' imprisonment in New York City that now passes into history for the first time proves how English vindictiveness could intensify. When Dr. Elias Cornelius surrendered his medical future in this city in order to respect his patriotic instincts by volunteering in the army of Washington, it occupied posts in the area which is now known as the annexed district of this city. In the summer of 1777 the hospital stores of General Varnum's brigade stationed in the city suburbs were sadly deficient; and the city being held by red coats it was difficult for such stores to be procured. Wherefore it occurred to Dr. Cornelius to suggest a raid for hospital stores upon those within the enemy's lines that were as near to the Continental lines as in 1862 were the two hostile armies along the Potomac. The raid was undertaken by Surgeon General Tunison of Washington's General Hospital and Captain Alden's company of fifty. It proved successful as to capturing medicines, bandages, lint and surgical instruments; but in returning one section with which was Dr. Cornelius fell into an ambush at East Chester, where after a brief engagement it had to yield to overwhelming numbers. The horse of Dr. Cornelius was seized and also his pistol holsters by Hessian privates, who acted, says Cornelius, more like brigands than soldiers. They took off his military cloak and even wrenched the buckles from his shoes and obtained thirty pounds in money and his handkerchief, and actually showed some symptoms of grabbing his shirt and stockings. Now, Doctor Cornelius was a non-combatant as a surgeon and to be respected as such by the rules of war—rules that the generals of George III. by the aid of Aboriginal Indian allies hunting for scalps and of Hessian allies bent upon plunder seldom respected throughout the whole Revolutionary and naval wars. The ambush had been planned for the red coats by a Tory civilian—for, sad to relate, the city and its suburbs abounded with Tories and traitors, and new converts are generally the most zealous. The captors stopped at the tavern of a Tory named Hunt who taunted Cornelius, whom he well knew, while at the same time he was dealing out to them liquor bought as he knew with the stolen money. There the hapless surgeon was detained all night in close confinement with a few fellow comrades, and watched by sentinels who threatened to blow out the brains of the first one of the party who spoke to another.

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All this, and much more which now follows of narrative appears from an original journal of his grandfather, a copy of which Judge Tompkins piously preserves. On the following

morning the doctor and companions were escorted under Hessian guard to Kingsbridge, and delivered over to the custody of the Provost Guard. During the day the prisoners suffered with hunger and thirst, being given only mouldy bread and drink from a bucket of water into which a pint of rum was poured, and some green apples which "were thrown at me," says the journal, "as if I were a pig in a pen." Soon they were marched under guard toward New York, and on the way, on a point overlooking the Hudson that would seem to have been situated about where now is Grant's tomb, they were brought into the headquarters of a Hessian general for triumphant exhibition. It would seem to have occasioned great sport to the red coat officers to find captured rebels brought before them to be baited with rough jests and coarse aspersions upon their disloyalty; and for an hour Dr. Cornelius and his comrades afforded the fat old beer-drinking Hessian general great delight; and such as Spaniards feel at a bull fight. Baiting and wounding with the tongue is often to a man of fine feeling as exquisite pain as to the bull is baiting with swords. After the Hessian general had enjoyed his fill of rebel sport, Dr. Cornelius was marched entirely across the island until Bowery was reached, which, said his journal, "is three-quarters of a mile from the City of New York." Continues Dr. Cornelius' account: "As we marched into town Hessians, negroes and children insulted, abused and stoned us in every way they could think of. Two of our men had become so fatigued that we were obliged to carry them. And in this way we were paraded as a show, to be brought before General Jones, who ordered us as prisoners into Livingston's sugar house." Dr. Cornelius arrived there under charge of Sergeant Walley (now of historic infamy) of the 20th regiment (Irish,) who began with apparent delight a course of barbarous treatment. This generation should remember that young New York (N. B.—It is a mistake to speak of "old New York" as belonging to a century ago, for only in 1897 exists an old New York) was then intensely tory. The city was really then "English-quite English, you know;" and the early "sons of liberty," headed by Alexander Hamilton, the Columbia College student, had enlisted under Washington. The sugar house in question was full of holes in its roof, and the prisoners kept in the upper stories were after every rain intentionally exposed to chills and rheumatism.

"You are a rebel doctor, eh?" cried Jailer Walley to Cornelius; "then you can dose yourself;" and he confiscated the doctor's commission, which was signed by Surgeon General John Cochrane (grandfather of that namesake who is known to this generation as Alderman, Police Justice, Congressman, Union General and President of the Society of the Cincinnati.) The commission was also signed by Washington's staff physician, Doctor Craig, who it will be recalled medically ministered to the dying ex-President. Dr. Cornelius' father was a tory living on the Sound shore of Long Island and had resented the rebel proclivities of his son—at this time not yet of age—and blamed his medical preceptor, the famous Doctor Samuel Latham Mitchell, afterwards the first Federal Senator from New York, for instilling rebel sentiments. Being without funds and clothing the captured Cornelius begged for pen, ink and paper, so as to write to his father; but Jailer Walley not only refused but struck him in the face with his cane and reduced his allowance of mouldy bread and water. The father, however, learned of his son's capture and imprisonment through the tory "Rivington Gazette," and came to see him; but only to urge him to obey Lord Howe's proclamation, which gave pardon to all rebels who should return to their allegiance unto King George. Dr. Cornelius indignantly declined, and the old tory father left his son to his fate; but after the war ended that son was enabled to save his father's property from confiscation. New York rebels were then situated toward Captain General Lord Howe much as Havana rebels are by the forgiving proclamation of Captain General Weyler.

From the sugar house prison Dr. Cornelius was removed to the Provost Marshal's prison on the site of the present Hall of Records, in which still stands portions of the old prison wall. The doctor, because he had refused the clemency of Lord Howe, was clapped into a basement dungeon where he encountered a fellow prisoner—a ship captain of Philadelphia named Chatham, who had as captive refused to pilot a British troop ship up the Delaware. Provost Marshal Cunningham—probably the most cruel and inhuman jailer known to history, and because of his devilish proclivities kept in office to enforce the early repressive measures that the British adopted towards conquering the spirit of rebels—inflicted new indignities upon Cornelius and the others, and not only refused the latter the offices of the provost physician, but punished Dr. Cornelius for attempting to medically succor them. "But they will die," remonstrated the doctor. "They are sent here for that purpose," rejoined Cunningham; "and His Gracious Majesty will forgivingly bury them in Potters Field." That pauper cemetery was then the area now Washington Square. Here Dr. Cornelius was kept from Aug. 25 to Sep. 12 without change of linen or clothing or water for ablutions. Among the prisoners Dr. Cornelius found brave Ethan Allen, who three years previously had become the hero of Ticonderoga, but had been taken prisoner in the General Montgomery expedition against Montreal. Ethan Allen narrated to the doctor, who copied the narrative into his diary, how he had been put on board a man-of-war in the St. Lawrence, chained flat on his back during six months in a corner of the hold, and twice carried on shore in England to be hanged, once also on the coast of Ireland, and a third time at Halifax. Allen's bravery was not then fully known to the doctor, who quaintly writes in his diary, "there seemed to have been much antipathy to Allen." He was not aware either that all those cruelties and these of Cunningham were brought up in Parliament by friends therein of the colonists and expressly by vote approved by Lord North's bloodthirsty administration. And yet the London *Times* continues to wonder why so many Americans dislike the country of Queen Victoria's grandfather, who countenanced the cruelties and oppressions of McKinley's ancestral

people. Adds the Cornelius journal: "I frequently saw beaten with canes and ramrods women who came to the prison windows to speak to their husbands, sons or brothers; some of whom would be put on bread and water diet in dungeons merely for asking that cold water be passed to them through the bars." When General Clinton and a British force captured Fort Montgomery its officers were brought to Cunningham's care, some of them wounded, whom Dr. Cornelius begged to attend surgically only to receive refusals with curses. The London *Times* criticizes Weyler for his treatment of prisoners, and yet he is only in Havana adopting the English precedents set by Lord Howe and Provost Marshal Cunningham in Colonial New York City. Soon, however, news came that General Burgoyne had capitulated to General Gates at Saratoga, when the Cunningham imprisonment modified somewhat. "We are now even given each a little butter, and a gill of rice to each, and our dried peas are allowed to be boiled," quaintly and pathetically writes the doctor; and in January, 1778, he adds, "good bread and beef and wood to burn." But soon Cornelius was taken back to the sugar house, where he found "the Hessian guards stealing our clothes and bed blankets and kicking and beating us." He became so ill, but had made himself so useful, medically, to the British surgeon that when "the rebel physician" became ill the former sent him "to the brick church hospital in the street called Wall." From this hospital the doctor one night escaped, and in a blizzard traversed the island up as high as opposite Hell Gate with almost incredible exposure, suffering and romantic incidents; whence he crossed by boat to Long Island and was cared for by secretive patriots. There is a pathetic entry in the diary—"passed at night by the house in which I was born and dared not go in lest my grandfather, a devoted loyalist should return me to prison." He eventually escaped by boat into Norwalk, Connecticut, and was enabled to rejoin the army, which was now at Valley Forge in Pennsylvania. There he shared the terrors of that patient and suffering waiting of Washington and his patriot soldiers that history has made memorable, and in his surgical capacity Dr. Cornelius was of great service to the Continental camps. Two years more he continued in surgical army duty, but through illness was obliged to seek his honorable discharge in the very year of Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown. It was in a village by that name in the north of Westchester County that he settled as physician, but passed most of his declining years in the town of Somers, dying there in 1823. And many now old men residing in it recall hearing, when they were young, from the lips of old Dr. Cornelius the stories of his sufferings in New York City English prisons. He had a clerical son, who succeeded the father of William M. Evarts as Secretary of the American Board of Missions, and who in his turn had a son whom he named after the elder Evarts. The old army surgeon's grandchildren reside in many parts of the United States, and one of them, Mrs. Hyatt, in this city. His sword, a gift from Lafayette, whom he attended in an illness, abides on British soil in the keeping of a clerical grandson, the Rev. Tallman C. Perry, of LaPrairie, Canada. And summer residents at Mahopac Falls can in its cemetery read the tombstone of the great patriotic sufferer in the British prisons of this city, whose war journal in the possession of the Rhode Island branch of the Cincinnati Society is the basis of the foregoing narrative.

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Footnote:

[1] It will be remembered that Dr. Craik was the physician who attended Gen. Washington in his last and fatal illness, December, 1799. Dr. Craik was then residing at Alexandria, Va.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JOURNAL OF DR. ELIAS CORNELIUS, A
REVOLUTIONARY SURGEON ***

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