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OF THE

British American Colonies, 1764-84.

CHAPTER IX.

The great mistake made in the administration of Colonial affairs at this period appears to have been that of placing quantities of artillery and arms within the reach of the disaffected. As General Gage's duty should have led him to take all necessary precautionary measures, it certainly argues no sense of responsibility on his part to leave the numerous forts in the New England Colonies armed and without sufficient garrisons. After the disposition displayed by the people of Rhode Island it was certainly strange to find the batteries for the protection of the harbours armed, and as a consequence as soon as the news of the proclamation reached the locality the mob seized the forty pieces of different calibre, which were mounted, and removed them into the country, stating that this was done to prevent them falling into the hands of the Royal troops and with the intention of using them against any power that should offer to molest them. This action was approved by the Legislative Assembly of the Province, who passed resolutions for procuring arms and military stores at the public expense and for training the militia.

In New Hampshire the mob, led away by this example, surprised a small fort called William and Mary, garrisoned by only one officer and five men, took possession of the ordnance, gunpowder and military stores which they removed.

The actual social and political condition of the British American Colonies are graphically sketched by Winthrop Sargent, M. A., the talented author of "Braddock's Expedition," in his valuable life of "Major Andre." In describing his voyage out to join his regiment in Canada which singularly enough was by the round about way of Philadelphia, and endeavoring to find a reason for this eccentricity, says: "It may well be asked why Andre should have taken this

route to Canada, the travel from the Delaware to the St. Lawrence was full as tedious as that from England to America, and the voyage between the two countries could have as readily been performed to one river as the other. On Sunday, the 17th of the very month (September, 1774) in which he reached Philadelphia, the ship Canadian arrived at Quebec in sixty days from Cowes, bringing over Carleton and his family. * * * From our knowledge of Andre's character it seems unlikely that without some cause he should have missed the opportunity which taking passage in this vessel would have afforded of coming in contact through several weeks with his commander. * * * Is it not probable that the selection of Philadelphia was governed by the circumstances that the meeting of the 'first Continental Congress' was called at that place, and that there was a good deal for an intelligent eye witness to possess himself of between Pennsylvania and Canada. His own inclination may have suggested this idea, but if it really had an existence it was in all likelihood carried into effect by direction of Carleton himself—a leader whom Heath, one of the chiefs of our revolutionary army, characterises as the greatest General the British had in this country during the war, and whose retention in Canada he pronounced an especial piece of good fortune to America. This is the only manner in which Andre's presence in the South can be accounted for at a time when he should serve his Sovereign in the North. He was a prodigious keen observer; he doubtless noted all he saw and the state of things in the Colonies was beyond question of a nature to excite the anxious attention of every considering man in authority.

"Domestic troubles were more than apprehended by the Ministry, and the intervention of the military arm was provided for. The temper of the people and the signs of the times in America would therefore be points to which so far sighted a person as Carleton could not be indifferent.

"At this very moment, however, it is probable that our Revolution could have been turned aside by a change of British policy. The bulk of the patriotic party here were in

opposition as Englishmen less than Americans. They applauded the words of Chatham and Rockingham, and regarded North as their political enemy and the misleader of the King. They did not know that it was the King who guided his ministers and who really is chiefly responsible for the production of measures of questionable constitutionality and as impolitic as impracticable. The general tone of Whig feeling in Philadelphia had from the first been cautious but fair. The public sympathy was, it is true, warmly enlisted for the Bostonians, but the public mind was not as yet fixed to that hostility to England which prevailed in Massachusetts. The first Continental Congress, however, was now met and as it was in session at Philadelphia from 5th September to 26th October, 1774, we may reasonably conclude that its doings were not disregarded by Andre. The secrecy in which the conduct of this body was wrapt prevents us to-day from knowing much more than what appears on its published record, but by contemporaries many things must at least have been surmised which are lost to us forever. It sufficiently appears that the boasted unanimity of the assembly had no foundation in fact. At an early stage it seems to have been agreed, by way of lending weight to every conclusion, that the decision of a majority should be acquiesced in by all, and that no one should reveal anything that transpired without the express permission of Congress. After this arrangement had been settled upon we are told by a well informed Tory pamphleteer of the day that when some strong measures were introduced and carried the effect on the minority was like 'the springing of a mine or the bursting of a bomb in Carpenter's hall. So far as can now be gathered we may infer that to this Congress came several delegates who had resolved in their secret hearts upon secession from Britain and whose aim was to produce war rather than reconciliation.*

*I had not, Sir, been in Congress a fortnight before I discovered parties were forming and that some members had come to that Assembly with views altogether different from what America professed to have and what, bating a designing Junta, she really had. Of these men her independency upon Great Britain, at all events, was the most favorite project. By these the pulse of