

SIR ROGER H. SHEAFFE AND THE
DEFENCE OF YORK.

FAIR play has always been, and is our motto,—we therefore most readily give insertion to the following letter, regretting that it did not arrive in time to introduce it among our notes in the present number of the war. We however, wish it to be distinctly understood, that we do not indorse one line of it, nor do we see any proof brought forward which would induce us to alter one tittle of what we have written, respecting the battle of York and Sir R. H. Sheaffe. In the letters of Veritas, (page 50,) and in Christie's history, (page 75,) precisely similar opinions are expressed as those which we adopted and gave publicity to in our notice of the affair—opinions which were based on the testimony of men who could with "Truth" say, "we also saw those things."

We should be glad if "Truth" would explain for us the reasons why Sir Roger Sheaffe was, almost immediately after the battle of York, superseded.—In conclusion, we would remark, that our observations were, in some degree, influenced by the opinions which we have had an opportunity of forming of Sir Roger Sheaffe personally; we shall, however, be most ready, if convinced that we have penned aught that is harsh or unfair, to make promptly the "*amende honorable*."

[To the writer of "the War of 1812."]

SIR,—In your October number, giving an account of the battle of York, you have adopted some idle reports detracting from the military character of Sir R. H. Sheaffe: permit me to set you right. It was but too prevailing an opinion in those times, that because Sir Isaac Brock had frightened Gen. Hull out of his propriety, every other commander must do the same, and that in all cases, and under any and every disadvantage, our troops *must be victorious*. Even at this day unthinking people forget that in the *bush* the American ought to be more than a match for the British soldier. The former from his childhood has been accustomed to the woods, he is at home, he was born in them; his dress is not conspicuous, he can change his position almost without being seen; he is accustomed to act independently without separating from his comrades, and having the *Anglo-Saxon* stamp on him—his courage is undoubted. The latter from the impossibility of concealing his scarlet uniform, becomes a

sure mark for the quick and unerring aim of his enemy's rifle; and being taught to depend on his officer and act in conjunction with the rest of his company, he is at fault and confused the moment he loses sight of them in the forest. His officer is quite as *green* as himself as he is equally unaccustomed to act in the bush. In truth, the only way during the whole war in which I have known the British troops to be entirely successful in a bush fight was where they pushed forward and dislodged the enemy, trusting to the bayonet alone. Premising thus much, I now come to grapple with your charges.—Until the fleet came to anchor it could not be known at what point the Americans intended to land; as soon as *that* was ascertained, no time was lost in marching to oppose them, and the very circumstance mentioned by you of "the wind driving the boats farther to the west," prevented the 8th from meeting them at the shore. The men in the first brigade of boats had therefore effected a landing and taken cover under the bank which effectually protected them from our fire, while the underbrush on the top of it completely concealed them from our view. A body of riflemen was thrown out in advance,—these we quickly destroyed, and our fire was directed against the second brigade of boats approaching the shore, two of which were sunk from the effects of it; but the moment the grenadiers approached the bank they were cut down like grass before the scythe. Repeated charges were made to get possession of the bank, in the first of these the gallant Capt. McNeil was shot thro' the head. Still the brave fellows rushed forward only to be shot down by an unseen foe. "Show us our enemy" was their constant cry and tho' falling by dozens, no persuasion could induce them to take the cover of a tree. This was their first action in the country, and perhaps many of them had never been in a wood before. Their strength was 110 in the morning, and I believe they mustered about 40 in the evening. I have witnessed many acts of individual gallantry, but never such unyielding determination in a body of men. They never thought of retreating until called off by their officers who found that the increasing numbers of the enemy had out-flanked them, and nearly gained their rear. It has been stated, with what truth I am not aware, that three days after the battle one of them was found with both legs broken; he had fallen in a pool of water and sustained life by drinking of it. He never complained, and died the day he was found. All the other troops, regulars, and militia, conducted themselves with great bravery, but from the position they occupied did not suffer so severely.—