

ington, with the power of crossing the Delaware at pleasure, had the opportunity of which he profited of striking a blow for the cause to which he had devoted himself.

General Lee had been left in command of the United States troops at White Plains, which Gen. Howe injudiciously allowed to remain in possession of the communications with the Eastern Provinces. From the moment Cornwallis had crossed the river Lee had watched the movement with the keen eye of a tactician, determined, if in his power, to take advantage of any false movement which might be made.

Washington wrote to him on the 19th of November from the camp at Hackensack directing the withdrawal of his division from White Plains, and the necessity of reinforcing the disheartened troops in Jersey, but Lee paid no attention to this order,—not as American writers say, because he wished to supplant Washington, but because he foresaw that either Cornwallis would crush him at once or else by a series of blunders allow all his troops to escape. In the first place there was no need to sacrifice more than Washington's army, which had been placed in that position by his want of skill; and in the second, he (Lee) could strike a blow at Cornwallis which would effectually protect Philadelphia. For this purpose he tried to induce Gen. Heath, who was left in command of the militia at Peekskill, to let him have a detachment of one or two thousand men to operate on Cornwallis' rear, but those *revolutionary heroes* appear to have been meanly jealous of the only General in their army, and the request was refused. He therefore crossed the Hudson at Haverstonburg with 3,000 men and some artillery on the 6th of December and continued his march, intending, apparently, to cross the Delaware north of Trenton, but in reality to strike Cornwallis' communications, for this purpose he halted at Morristown on the 13th and proceeded to reconnoitre in the direction of Brunswick; owing to carelessness on the part of his escort he was captured while at breakfast by Col. Harcourt and a party of British light horse. As he maintained a proper degree of reticence as far as his military designs were concerned, Gen. Sullivan, who succeeded to the command, had no alternative but to march his troops to join Washington beyond the Delaware.

The last of those series of blunders for the year 1776, on the part of the British Commander-in-Chief, was the preparation of an expedition against Rhode Island, which was taken possession of on the 26th December by a squadron commanded by Sir Peter Parker and a division of 10,000 men under Sir H. Clinton and Earl Percy. This was not a strategical point, its only use was to keep the fleet and troops idle for three years.

Meantime the disastrous effects of the war were beginning to appear in the rapid dissolution of Washington's army and the known determination of Congress to dis-

perse, and it was only kept together by the almost coercive measures of Gens. Putnam and Mifflin,—under their advice it adjourned on the 12th December to Baltimore, in Maryland, but if Clinton had crossed the Delaware this adjournment would have been *sine die*.

It would be a difficult matter to find in the annals of history a parallel or similar case in any of its details, to what was exhibited by both armies during this contest. Washington had no claims as far as either military education or experience went to make a good or even respectable General, and it must be recollected that knowledge or intelligence, especially in military matters, was far less diffused than at present, and it was more difficult to handle troops then than now as a necessary consequence. Howe had received a military education and had military training and experience, but his capacity to receive the one or profit by the other was infinitely small indeed. He confided the defence of the Trenton forts to the foreign auxiliaries which the mistaken policy of the British Government had substituted as "being cheaper war material" than the native soldier, and those men, in profound ignorance of the language of the people, with semi-barbarous habits, and the trained aptitude for plunder common to the European Continental soldier of that day, were totally unfit for outpost duty, where vigilance, celerity and conciliation were all equally necessary. Howe found the people of New Jersey loyalists or willing to become so; his stupidity and the rapacity of the stolid Germans that fortune sent amongst them left the people rebels to a man.

When the fortunes of Congress and its army were at the lowest ebb Washington, by one of those movements that seem more like sudden inspiration than calculations founded on the known connection of cause and effect, determined to strike a desperate blow to retrieve it. Having correct information of the force and disposition of the Hessian troops at Bordentown and Trenton he collected a corps of militia of about 450 men and sent them to Mount Holly, 14 miles further down the Delaware, with orders to make a demonstration as if it was intended to operate on the line of communication with Brunswick but to retreat on the appearance of a British force. This movement succeeded; Donop at once marched his whole force of 2,000 men, except 80 left at Bordentown, to Mount Holly, thus placing 21 miles between himself and Ralle at Trenton, which to the heavy German troops he commanded, was equal to a three days march. On his approach the militia fell back, yet he loitered two days in the neighborhood of Burlington without a shadow of cause.

On the night of the 25th of December Washington's troops in three columns crossed the Delaware, the centre under his own command at Trenton, consisted of 2,500 men

and a train of 20 field pieces; the right, under Gen. Cadwallader, was to cross at Bordentown, and the left under Ewing, about ten miles above Trenton. At four o'clock on the morning of the 26th December Washington's division landed on the Jersey shore, surprised Trenton, killing 30 men, capturing 886 non-commissioned officers and private and 23 officers; Col. Ralle was mortally wounded. Washington captured six brass field pieces, 1,000 stand of arms, and four stand of colors, with a loss of two men killed and two frozen to death.

The cause of this easy conquest was to be found in the fact that discipline had been greatly relaxed, many of the troops were sent on plundering expeditions and many more were intent on loading and securing their plunder on waggons instead of doing their duty in defence of their post. Owing to the river being partially frozen the other divisions could not effect a landing in time or it is quite possible Donop's force at Bordentown and the adjacent posts would have been captured or dispersed.

Washington retreated across the Delaware the same evening having effected a striking and brilliant *coup de main* for a cause supposed to be irretrievably lost and achieved his only military success. The movement led to Donop's retreat to Princeton, at which post his men and General Leslie's force were much superior in numbers to General Washington.

The frontier posts had been abandoned to an inferior force and the British officers at Princeton offered no resistance to Washington's occupation of Trenton with 4000 men on 30th December, 1776, an event which may be said to have closed the campaign.

All this time Sir William Howe had remained at New York planning expeditions to Albany for the purpose of effecting a junction with General Burgoyne who was to lead an army from Canada by way of Lake Champlain and the Hudson to that point. Sir Guy Carleton was obliged to close the year's campaign with the naval victory at that lake and put his troops in Winter quarters at Isle aux Noix and St. Johns, this was one of those projects continually put forward by a man notoriously incapable of executing anything and it ended in disgraceful and disastrous failure.

Great Britain has had two wars of considerable magnitude with the people of the United States and it does not appear in the testimony of history that during either one or the other anything like a plan of campaign connected throughout all its parts has been so much as thought of by either statesmen or generals.

In the contest now under review the operations are desultory, never well sustained and no matter how successful the whole fruits of victory have been lost by sloth and imbecility a series of isolated expeditions which the objective point is by no means the vital one, comprises the whole system.