

have nothing to look forward to but wreck or starvation. There is no escape. The sea, therefore, was impassable, and by land there was no road. A trackless forest lay between Beaubassin and the head of Cobequid Bay; another intervened between this point and the upper Shubenacadie, and still a third between that River and the valley which lies between the North and South mountains. The winter had been severe. The snow lay deep in the woods. Mountain ranges, with deep gorges worn in their sides by descending torrents, tidal rivers open at their mouths, and to be crossed only on their upper waters, where bridged by the frost, presented obstacles to an enemy which, thought Noble, surely, man's only would encounter. The shortest land route between Beaubassin and Minas, allowing for the necessity of crossing the streams above the flow of the tide, was well on to 200 miles in length. This was what intervened between Col. Noble at Minas and DeLamessay at Beaubassin. The same causes which, in his mind, rendered it impracticable to proceed to Beaubassin, secured him, he believed, from attack where he was. He had as little to dread from DeLamessay as if his detachment were at Quebec. Still, he was not wholly neglectful of his position in the midst of a disaffected people. In the letter to Mascarene, from which we have already quoted, he says that he kept a body of scouts busy in reconnoitering the neighboring villages, so as to guard against possible danger. And on the very day after he wrote that letter, he, for some reason that does not appear, moved the main guard, which had been till then stationed at the house where he himself was quartered, to the stone house in which the cannon were mounted. Little idea had he, when he took that step, of the frightful disaster which was to fall upon him within the next twenty-four hours.

Let us now shift the scene for a little, and enquire what the French were about while the Provincials were settling themselves down comfortably in their winter quarters at Minas.

DeLamessay had still with him at Beaubassin a part of the force that he had conducted to that place on his retirement from Annapolis. On the 5th January, an Acadian from Minas arrived at Beaubassin. From him DeLamessay learned that a body of 250 soldiers from New England had arrived at Grand Pré, and had quartered themselves there for the winter, with the intention of building block houses, and fortifying themselves in the spring, that the Acadians had moved out of a number of their houses, and handed them over to the soldiers, who were dispersed all over the village. Then occurred to DeLamessay one of the boldest enterprises that history records. He called a council of his officers, laid his plans before them, and obtained their approval. Unfortunately for himself, he was unable to take part personally in the execution of his project. He had, on his retreat from Annapolis, in the previous summer severely injured his knee cap, and he was still unable to march, but his second in command, Captain Coulon DeVilliers, as brave and brilliant a soldier as himself, both fine specimens of French chivalry, readily undertook the task which his superior officer was reluctantly obliged to forego. The plan was to send a detachment of 300 men, 240 of them being Canadians, the rest Indians, on snow shoes, with provisions on their backs, to surprise, and if possible, capture the force, supposed to be 250 men, scattered in the different houses along the high road at Grand Pré. In four days the expedition was ready. They set out on their arduous march on the 12th January. They carried no tents with them. They had no shelter at night from the extreme cold of a Nova Scotian winter, except what they derived from holes in the snow, scooped out with their snow shoes. They began their daily march at early dawn. They kept on all day through the trackless forest, and sometimes, when the character of the ground permitted, they prolonged their march to a late hour of the night. They had little time during the day to warm the frozen food they carried on their backs. At nights they kindled fires, by which they could thaw and cook it; but after a long and weary march all day, they were too tired and sleepy to spend much time in this process. Many a meal they made on food thawed in their mouths. Yet these men never flinched from their task. Over the high mountains and deep gorges of the Cobequids, across rushing torrents descending from the mountain sides, over rocks and windfalls, all the way to the head of Cobequid Bay, then up what is now North River, to a point above the tide, thence over what we call Salmon River, and to the waters of the Shubenacadie above the tide, thence over the lofty hills and across the deep valleys of what is now Eastern Hants, they pursued their toilsome march till at last they emerged on the level country in the neighbourhood of Pisiquid (now Windsor). In all this long journey, except at the head of Cobequid Bay, at what is now Truro, there was not a settler to be found; but when they reached Pisiquid, they were among friends. But they were too wary to trust even friends. They arrived at Pisiquid at half-past nine o'clock on the morning of Friday, the 31st January, and their first act was to place guards on every road leading to Minas, so as to prevent any intelligence of their arrival from reaching the British commander. They rested all day at Pisiquid among their Acadian friends, who treated them kindly. Of these five and twenty volunteered to join the expedition. Coulon now learned to his amazement that the British force, instead of consisting of 250 men, as the habitant from Minas had informed DeLamessay, was really over double that number. A furious snow storm was raging when the expedition arrived at Pisiquid, which lasted all that day, and a great part of the next. During the thirty hours that the storm raged, at least four feet of fresh snow fell, over ground deeply covered by previous storms. The roads at Minas were completely blocked, and there was no communication between the different houses occupied by the British troops.

When Coulon, at Pisiquid, discovered the numbers of the enemy he

had to encounter, he might have been excused if he had felt a little disconcerted at the increased difficulty of the task that lay before him; but he seems never to have quailed.

From his Acadian friends he learned how the British soldiers were distributed. His force he considered too small to permit of an attack on all the twenty-four houses at the same time. He, therefore, selected ten of the number which were either occupied by officers, or in which officers lodged. He divided his followers into ten detachments, with a captain at the head of each, and, to each detachment, he allotted one or more of his Pisiquid recruits to guide it to the house it was to attack. In ten divisions, therefore, the party set out from Pisiquid about midnight, in a blinding snow storm. They reached the Gaspereau about 2 o'clock in the morning. They were now within a mile of Grand Pré: it was still snowing as hard as ever. This was a most lucky thing for them. Even at that early hour, if the sky had been clear, the movement of a large body of men could hardly have escaped notice, but in the storm the French approached Grand Pré without being seen by anybody. Not the slightest suspicion had the British troops of any enemy being within a hundred miles of them.

Coulon had reserved for attack by the party he headed, the house occupied by Col. Noble, and some four or five subordinate officers. He was guided to the spot by one of his Pisiquid Acadians. The sentry was at his post, but the falling snow prevented him from seeing the party approaching the house he was guarding. The first notice of the attack was a shot which killed the sentinel. Then came a series of discharges of firearms on this and the other houses selected for attack. Noble and his officers, who were in bed and asleep when the first shot was fired, jumped up at once and seized their arms. In a moment the door was smashed open and the struggle began. The officers fought in their shirts, as they had sprung from their beds. Presently, Noble received two severe flesh wounds. The blood spurted from his wounds, and he began to feel faint. The assailants observing that he was disabled, called to him by name to come out, promising to give him quarter. He refused to do so, and had already returned the fire three times, when a bullet entered his forehead. He fell to the floor, and died instantly. His brother was killed at the same time. Meanwhile, Coulon, who led the attack, had been shot through the arm, and fainting from loss of blood, had been carried to the Gaspereau, where the French surgeon attended him. M. de la Corne succeeded to the command. The struggle for the possession of the house continued. At last De la Corne and his troops forced their way in, and made prisoners of all the inmates that still survived. One young lieutenant, a nephew of Lord Lechmere, who was confined to his bed by a fever, was shot where he lay. Another lieutenant, attempting to escape from the house, had a bayonet thrust through his heart. Capt. Howe, who had been sent up from Annapolis to carry out the arrangements made for provisioning the troops, and who lodged in the house with Col. Noble, was severely wounded by a shot through the arm.

Meanwhile, the other houses that had been marked for destruction, had been taken, all except one, in which there was a cannon. A number of Indians were engaged in the attack on this house, but four of them were killed by the first discharge of the cannon: the rest immediately abandoned the attack, and the house escaped.

In the meantime the alarm spread to the houses not selected for attack. The soldiers who were lodged in them rushed to the assistance of their comrades. But what could men do with four feet of snow to impede their movements? Noble had brought snow shoes with his men from Annapolis, but by an unlucky mischance, had left them in the vessels, and he could not get at them, except by cutting through the ranks of the enemy. The English then made an attack on the house now occupied by La Corne, where their dead Colonel lay, in hopes to recapture it. But in the meantime La Corne had received a strong reinforcement, and was able to repel the attack. The Provincials then made for the stone house, which contained the cannon, resolved on a stand there; but the house was too small for so large a number, which still amounted to over 350. A detachment of some 200 of them shortly afterwards sallied out of the house, and charged a body of French. They fought bravely, though up to their armpits in snow. From half-past three in the morning till half-past three in the afternoon the battle raged. For twelve long hours these poor people, many of them only half clad, all without food since the night before, fought their foe.

Meanwhile, poor Howe, who was a prisoner in Coulon's hands, was like to die from loss of blood. The French surgeon was attending Coulon and other wounded men at Gaspereau. La Corne pitying Howe, who was really a non-combatant, consented, at his request, to send a flag to the stone house to ask leave for the British surgeon to come over to dress his wound, and suggesting a suspension of arms till the surgeon should return. This was about half-past three. The request was granted, and the surgeon sent. He was soon ready to return. But in the meantime the British in the stone house took stock of their situation. Of their ammunition they had left only eight rounds of powder, and as many of balls. Their stores of provisions, and all the other munitions of war, were in the ships. They themselves were penned up in a house too small to hold them, and had neither food nor ammunition. The enemy were between them and the Gaspereau. If they attempted to wallow through a mile and a-half of deep snow, the French and Indians, mounted on snow shoes, would shoot them down like pheasants in a battue. Capt. Goldthwaite had succeeded to the command on the death of Col. Noble. He collected his officers around him in his narrow precincts. In the circumstances, he had no room to consult them apart from the soldiers. It was a council of war, in which officers and men alike