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THE REVOLT

OF THE

British American Colonies,

1764-84.

CHAPTER XVI.

While treason, open and rampant, flourished in the North American Colonies, encouraged by disloyal and turbulent opposition at home; the officer to whom the honor of England had been confided proved himself unworthy of the trust.

Sir William Howe succeeded Gen. Gage not only in command of the troops but to more than a full share of that officer's indolence and puzzle headed blundering. He passed at the period for an able and experienced General, but no action of his during the time he commanded the British forces in America bears out the idea that he either understood or cared to perform his duty. It is probable that his mother, being a natural sister of King George III., helped his promotion, but whatever may have been the cause its direct effect was the loss of the American Provinces to the British Empire. No analytical commentary on his actions or character could attach greater infamy to both. With a powerful fleet and an army of at least 16,000 men thoroughly disciplined and amply provided he allowed himself to be closely besieged in his lines before Boston by the armed rabble which awed Gage, and with whom Howe was totally unable to cope, led by a General who had never seen more extensive operations than the bush fighting before Fort Du Quesne, the elite of the English army and its avowedly best General, who had seen "fighting in Flanders," was shut up in a seaport town with the full command of a siege, compelled to send to the West Indies for a supply of provisions, and the operations of his troops thoroughly paralyzed by the stupidity and inefficiency of their leaders.

Washington, commanding the rebel forces, determined, if possible, to compel an evacuation of the town before the arrival of rein-

forcements by the spring fleet from Britain, opened fire on the lines during the 2nd of March, 1775, and after a bombardment of fourteen days had so far silenced the fire of the defenders that no alternative remained but to dislodge the rebels from their position or evacuate the town. And now the most surprising part of Sir William Howe's conduct as a General displays itself. It was found on reconnoitering that "to succeed in the former was impossible, for the British troops must have ascended an almost perpendicular eminence, on the top of which the 'Americans' had prepared hogsheads, chained together in great numbers and filled with stones to roll down upon them as they marched up; a curious provision, by which whole columns would have been swept off at once." Thus writes Stedman, the historian of this war, but the military reader will naturally ask why in the first place were the rebels allowed to occupy such a position; secondly, what were the reasons that prevented the whole matter being long before settled by a pitched battle; and thirdly, why was not the attempt made to turn the flank of the rebel position and thus decide the question? for it is perfectly evident beyond the Guards in the lines on the Neck, and the garrison on Castle Island the whole effective force occupying Boston might have been withdrawn for that purpose because the rebels could not hold the town for an hour in the face of the naval forces in the harbour. But as those measures would have involved more trouble, care, thought, energy and consideration than Sir William Howe or any of his subordinates possessed, the easy, wise and safe conclusion was arrived at to evacuate Boston leisurely and retire somewhere else to carry on the war, in other words, "seek a new base of operations," by a movement to the rear vulgarly known by the less glorious and less euphonious name of a retreat or run away. The garrison being placed on ship board with the sick and wounded and about 2,000 refugees, sailed for Halifax in Nova Scotia about the 6th of April, and as weather was favorable they arrived there in a few days.

In 1757 Lord Loudon proposed to encamp

the British forces on Long Island to protect the Continent from the attacks of French Canadians and savages, whose base of operations were the shores of the Great Lakes; nineteen years later Sir William Howe carried a similar operation into effect, and after abandoning the revolted Colonies, changing the whole character of the contest, virtually acknowledges the independence for which the rebels were seeking, he encamped at Halifax for the purpose of suppressing rebellion and restoring law and order, in the Colonies from Massachusetts southward. To add to his qualifications to restore British rule and supremacy he left no force off the harbour to warn British shipping that the English flag no longer floated over Boston, although he knew a squadron was at sea with reinforcements, and in consequence of this piece of unparalleled management Lt. Colonel Archibald Campbell with 700 men ran right into the harbour and was captured, along with several transports bearing large quantities of military stores on board, amongst others the ship Hope with 1,500 barrels of gunpowder, besides carbines, bayonets, travelling carriages for guns of position, all sorts of artisans' tools, clothing, blankets and bedding, so that Sir William Howe merited the eternal gratitude of the rebels for first assuring their independence, relieving them from all pains and penalties of the consequence of their illegal acts, and then acting as their Quartermaster General.

English parliament and people might henceforth pass what ordinances they pleased, the Colonists were no longer rebels, they had compelled the Royal Commander-in-Chief and his troops to evacuate their territory, and henceforth they were free to set up any form of government they pleased.

It was not Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga nor Cornwallis' at Yorktown which decided the fate of the "War of Independence," improperly so called. Those actions merely repelled the invasion of the United States, and decided the attempt at conquest; but Howe's infamous evacuation of Boston destroyed the last claim England could lay to the soil of the "Thirteen" Colonies.

As a specimen of the manner in which the