

The Battle of Quebec.

S. D. Scott in the *Standard*, September 13, 1909.

A century and a half ago this morning, the French garrison at Quebec and the army defending that capital awoke to find four thousand British soldiers drawn up on the plain above the city. Before night the battle which determined the destiny of America had been fought. General Wolfe had won the soldier's death which he desired in preference to the end which disease would soon have brought, and gained a conqueror's fame. The chivalrous General Montcalm was dying within the walls of the city for which he had fought so long and well. Five days later Quebec was surrendered to the British.

The consequences of the Battle of Quebec are great, out of all proportion to the magnitude of the engagement itself. Some four thousand men on each side were on the Plains, of whom perhaps three thousand were in the fighting line. The British loss in killed, wounded and missing was about seven hundred, the French perhaps a little more. The loss on both sides was larger at the Battle of Sainte-Foy, fought partly on the same ground in April of the next year, when the French, under Levis, were victorious, and in turn laid siege to Quebec. For though it is taught that the fate of Canada was settled at the first battle, it was not until the middle of May, 1760, when a British squadron arrived before the French ships, that the British were confirmed in the possession of Quebec and the Lower St. Lawrence. Even then, Montreal was to be taken, and it required not only the Quebec force, but two others converging from Lake Champlain and Niagara to make this certain.

But the victory won by Wolfe was absolutely essential to British success. With this victory the result was still for a time uncertain. Without it, failure was inevitable. General Wolfe, who was making a losing fight with a disease that he knew to be incurable, had at best but a few months to accomplish his destiny. He was in bed when the attack was planned. It was not his design. In his opinion there was no better way than a front attack on the main body of the enemy at the position below Quebec between the Beauport and Montmorency Falls, or a flank movement from a landing place still farther down and thence through the woods to fall upon the rear of the enemy. The plan of front attack had been tried and had signally failed, and any such movement against forces so strongly placed and so superior in numbers was doomed to disaster. That was the opinion of Murray, Townshend and Monkton, and Wolfe accepted their view in favour of a landing above Quebec.

The very audacity of this programme appealed to the commander, who selected the spot and fought off his disease so far that he was able to take part in it. In this case fortune showered favours on the brave. It is pointed out by historians that if Bougainville had not planned to send down provision boats that night, and had not failed to send them, or having changed his plan had sent word to the sentinels that he had done so, Wolfe's boats would have been arrested before they reached the landing; that if Vergor, who had been sent with a sufficient force to guard the spot at the top of the cliff where Wolfe's men

came up, had not allowed most of his men to go home and the rest to go to sleep, it would have been impossible for a man to reach the height and live; that if the troops, a few miles away at St. Charles had come up and joined in the fight, and those at Cap Rouge, two or three miles up the river, had moved down to attack Wolfe in the rear, the little army would have been annihilated before noon. But it was not to be. Wolfe was permitted to marshal on the plain his whole available force of four thousand men, and then to fight not much more than one-third of the force available to meet him. France had two splendid commanders on the St. Lawrence at that time in Montcalm and Levis. But Levis was at Montreal, and Montcalm as embarrassed and hampered by a governor and military superior who was worse than inefficient, and by other authorities whom history has branded as incorrigible grafters, and who were afterwards convicted of gross corruption. The very officer who failed to protect the headland where Wolfe ascended had been tried for surrendering Fort Cumberland when he might have defended it.

These circumstances made possible a desperate undertaking. But with them was the personality of one of the world's greatest captains, and a small army of men, who before and after this event proved themselves to be some of the best soldiers whom a British officer ever led into the field.

Had Wolfe failed, the war would have been greatly prolonged, and no one can tell what would have been the issue. Had Canada remained French, it is probable that the United States would have remained British, for the colonists would never have cast off the protection of Britain against the traditional enemy. Nowhere was there such rejoicing over the capture of Quebec as in New England, which indeed had some right to celebrate, as these and more southern colonists contributed a large portion of the forces which assisted to make the conquest complete.

There will be no great celebration of this anniversary in Quebec or any part of Canada. Last year's ter-centenary was liberally construed to include the two battles on the Plains of Abraham; and the adjacent slope of Sainte-Foy, where the heaviest of the April battle was fought, is included in the ground set apart as a national park. As Wolfe was the victor of September, Levis was the successful commander in April, and thus the festival was arranged to appeal to the national pride of both races. The battle-fields have been dedicated to the celebration of peace between the two nations, and harmony between the descendants of the races who met in arms one hundred and fifty years ago.

A well-to-do Pennsylvania farmer who had sent his son to Philadelphia to begin life as a clerk, wrote to the merchant in whose employ he was, asking how the boy was getting along and where he slept nights. The merchant replied: "He sleeps in the store in day time. I don't know where he sleeps nights."—*Chicago News*.