

HISTORIC CANADA, IX.



HE struggle for supremacy in North America between France and Britain was ended by the

capitulation of Montreal in 1760, and the transfer of Canada by the Treaty of Paris in 1763. The British

Provinces were delivered from the fear of incursions from Canada; the Pontiac war had been put down by British arms, and everything had the appearance of settled peace. But the outburst in Boston set the country in a flame; the British troops withdrew from that city, driven off by hunger rather than by force of arms. The Revolutionary war was soon in full vigour to end in 1783, when the independence of the United States was acknowledged.

Among the actors who took part in the scenes of that period many are known, some with an honourable record, others with the stigma of failure (not necessarily of disgrace). How many of those who did their duty faithfully and successfully, as brave and capable men, in subordinate positions, have had their memories preserved? I propose to give a sketch of one of those forgotten officers.

Mason Bolton was born in Dublin about 1735, and at the age of sixteen received an ensign's commission in the 9th Regiment, serving for twenty-two years before he obtained the rank of Major in 1773. During that time he had been exposed to every extreme of climate; nearly died of yellow fever in the West Indies; suffered from malaria and scurvy in Florida; had his constitution completely undermined, yet served continuously without relief, beyond that afforded by a few months leave of absence when a subaltern. He rejoined the army in Canada with his regiment in the spring of 1776, and accompanied Burgoyne that summer in his first expedition, when Carleton was commander-in-chief. In November of the same year he was transferred to the 8th, or King's Regiment, as lieutenant-colonel, the headquarters being at Niagara, to which post he went to take command in the spring of 1777.

Niagara was then one of the upper posts, regarded as being on the verge of civilization, at which, as one officer wrote, the discomforts were so great that they might be accepted as an atonement for many sins. It was by no means modern, having been originally built by La Salle in 1678,

as a stockaded fort, and left in command of de Tonti, with a garrison of thirty men. It was used as a magazine or storehouse and filled with goods and provisions for trade with the Indians, a vessel being employed during the two summers of 1678 and 1679 exclusively for that purpose, to avoid the hostility of the Indians, who had seen with jealousy the construction of a fort, but were appeased when they saw it turned into a storehouse from which they could obtain supplies.

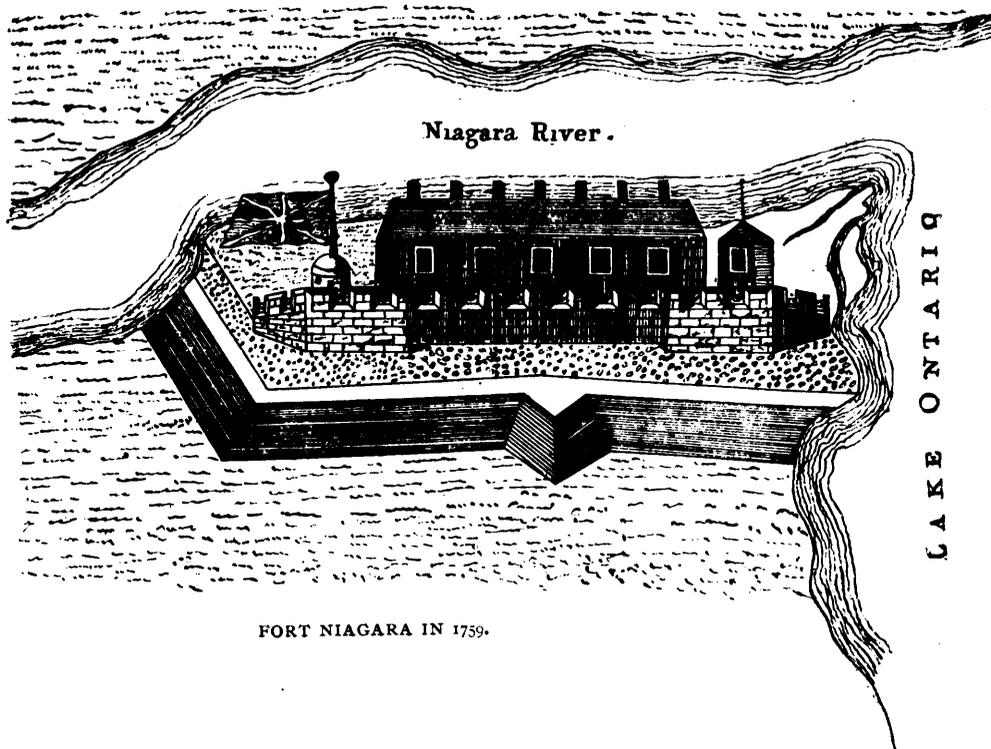
In 1680 it was abandoned by the garrison, who withdrew all the goods that could be carried off, and so La Salle's plan for securing the fur trade was for the time frustrated. It was too suitable a place for trade to be long neglected. In 1686 it was proposed by Denonville to erect a permanent fort, strong enough to resist the attacks of the British and to secure the whole of the western fur trade, the Quebec merchants offering to furnish all sorts of goods necessary for the trade, and to pay, besides, 30,000 livres for the privilege of trading with the Indians. In 1687 the fort was erected and a garrison placed there of 100 men under the Chevalier de Troyes. But a pestilence broke out and the whole garrison died, as alleged by some from the badness of the provisions, or by others from malaria, but, from whatever cause, the fort was again abandoned and the place left uninhabited. Experience in the neighbourhood having shown that the deaths were not caused by the unhealthiness of the situation, another fort was built in 1721, the one taken by Sir William Johnson in 1759, and which was still in existence during the Revolutionary War.

It was to this post, as already said, that Bolton was sent in the prime of life, as years go, and full of spirit and courage, but his originally strong constitution so weakened that he was almost a physical wreck. His sufferings were not sharp attacks, coming occasionally, and leaving long intervals of ease. They were steady, continuous, gnawing at his very life strings. Yet, in spite of them, he gained the confidence of his officers and men as a leader under whom they could cheerfully serve. His duties as district commander were many and arduous. He was responsible for the safety of all the posts along the extensive frontier as far north as Michilimakinak; had practically to guard the navigation from Coteau du Lac upwards, so as to secure the safety of the provisions for the posts under his charge, any serious deficiency in that respect involving the retreat of the troops and the defeat of the most skillfully devised military arrangements. He was compelled to keep the Indians in good humour and prevent them from going on independent expeditions, which too often meant indiscriminate slaughter. Apart from general instructions for his guidance, nearly everything was left to his discretion, and for months all com-

munication between him and the rest of the world was cut off, except through such reports as were brought in by the scouts he had constantly in motion to obtain intelligence of the movements of the enemy, as otherwise a hostile force might surprise his post at any moment.

The number of troops in Canada was limited, and only a few could be spared for the upper posts. The troops at Niagara had a hard time of it, some on fatigue duty, others off on scout, so that nothing could be done to strengthen the works, and they stood in great need of repair. On the capitulation of Burgoyne, Bolton expected that the enemy would be emboldened to attack his post, yet he had no supply of artillery stores to resist and no men to repair the fort. The stockades and pickets were rotten, the outworks gone, provisions were running short; but the commander wrote that, in spite of all, the King's Regiment would do its duty.

In the spring of 1778 the Indians became restless; he was compelled to employ and restrain them. All demanded clothing and provisions, which he must give in violation of orders, or withhold and lose their services. His few sailors refused to do duty on account of the reduction of their rations—a reduction of which he disapproved, but which he had been instructed to enforce. In spite of these obstacles, this physical wreck conducted, during the summer of 1778, the most active operations. He had the Indians and rangers constantly out, through whom he kept every settlement in alarm to deter the men from joining the hostile forces; arranged the more regular and important expeditions, which included naval and military operations ordered by the commander-in-chief; he had scouts on foot from Fort Stanwix, on the Mohawk, to Fort Pitt, close to the forks of the Ohio, so that not a movement of the enemy passed undetected or their designs unanticipated. For, in truth, Niagara was not in a position to resist an attack in force. It was lumbered with the goods of the Indian traders, placed there for security, adding difficulties to the defence and temptation to those in search of plunder. The post required 1,000 men for its defence; there were 294, a large proportion of whom were on the sick list. There were scarcely men enough to man the outworks, even if they had been defensible, or to relieve the sentries, but Bolton had made up his mind to defend his post until the death. Congress had determined to attack the Indians with a strong body of troops, so as to clear the way for an advance on Niagara and Detroit. To meet this plan Bolton had, from his small garrison, to send detachments to Walter Butler to help the Indians against the Wyoming men, who had advanced to Tioga; to Hamilton to help him in his ill-conceived expedition against Vincennes.



FORT NIAGARA IN 1759.