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THE REVOLT OF THE British American Colonies 1764-84.

CHAPTER XL.

Having thus got rid of a pretended friend, but in reality a dangerous foe, Great Britain had now, in addition to her rebellious subjects, all Europe openly or covertly in arms against her.

The French opened the campaign of 1781 by a renewed attempt on the Island of Jersey; on the night of the 6th January, some 2000 men, under the Baron de Rullicourt, landed at the Baie de Violet and marched against St. Heliers, the capital of the Island, seizing all the principal avenues of the town before the inhabitants were aware of their landing. The Lieut. Governor Major Corbet was made a prisoner, but not before he had time to send expresses to the stations occupied by the troops assigned for defense of the Island. Meantime the alarm had spread and the militia of the Island, which have long been famous for their efficiency and *esprit de corps*, began to assemble rapidly. The French commander compelled Major Corbet to sign a capitulation for the surrender of the Island, although it was represented to him that no act done by a prisoner could be binding; Elizabeth Castle, the principal fort, was then summoned to surrender under terms of the enforced capitulation, but the officer in command peremptorily refused, although the French (placing the Lieutenant Governor in front of the column) advanced to the gate, but were fired upon and compelled to retire.

After the capture of the Lieut. Governor the command devolved on Major Pierson, who assembled the troops and militia and advanced on the town seizing the heights above it and driving in the French piquets. A summons was sent to him by Baron de Rullicourt demanding his surrender according to capitulation, but was answered unless the French troops laid down their arms they would be attacked in twenty minutes—at

the end of that period a furious attack on all the approaches was made simultaneously, and the French driven at once into the market place—the French General, with a refinement of cruelty very unusual in modern warfare, kept the Lieut. Governor by his side during the whole action, but the Baron de Bullicourt being mortally wounded the second in command surrendered—the gallant Major Pierson was killed in the moment of victory.

The garrison at Gibraltar was greatly straitened for provisions and fuel, but great difficulty was found in relieving it. A Spanish fleet of 30 ships of the line under Don Louis de Cordova was cruising off the coast of Portugal, a French fleet of not much inferior force was nearly in readiness to put to sea at Brest, and all the force which the British Ministry could spare consisted of only 28 ships of the line under the command of Admirals Darby, Digby and Ross; this fleet with a heavy convoy bound for the East and West Indies sailed from Portsmouth on the 13th March, and having waited at Cork to receive the transports with provisions and reinforcements steered for the bay of Cadiz, into which the Spanish fleet thought fit to retire without risking an engagement and was blockaded by Admiral Darby, while the provisions and stores were conveyed to Gibraltar by the division of the British fleet under Sir John Lockhart Ross; and this important fortress was a second time relieved in the face of an overwhelming force.

While the British fleet was absent on this service the French fleet of 21 sail of the line, under the command of the Comte de Grasse, sailed from Brest for the West India station, where a very inferior squadron left by the Comte de Guichen when he sailed for France at the end of the preceding summer had been most unaccountably suffered to exist by the British Admiral. It is just possible that the complications brought about by Clinton's intrigues with Arnold at New York may have had the effect of detaining Sir Geo. Rodney there at a distance from the scene of his legitimate duties, and that his subordinates were unable or unequal to the task of finishing the war at a blow. Sir George

however had returned to his station before the declaration of war with Holland, and the vessel which brought advice of the rupture, also brought instructions to commence hostilities against the Dutch West India possessions.

The Island of St. Eustatia claimed the first attention, not from its actual value but as being the depot of merchandise from whence the rebellious colonies and the French islands received their supplies—of small extent and rocky soil with no natural productions of utility the island was of no value except for its situation as a commercial depot—it was particularly inaccessible having only one landing place, but it was not garrisoned or armed when Sir Geo. Rodney and General Vaughan appeared before it on the 3rd February. It was surrendered on the first summons with a Dutch frigate of 36 guns, five sail of armed vessels, and 150 sail of merchantmen with merchandise to the value of £1,600,000 sterling, and a fleet of 30 ships richly laden which had sailed two days before for Holland with their convoy, a ship of sixty guns commanded by an Admiral was also captured. The surrender of St. Eustatia was followed by that of the Islands of St. Martin, and Saba and the Dutch colors having been kept flying on the forts for some time after the surrender a large number of Dutch, French and American vessels were destroyed and taken.

The Dutch had formed settlements on the Rivers Demarara and Issequibo on the Spanish Main, a squadron of British privateers belonging to Bristol attacked and cut out all the Dutch shipping in both Rivers, while the colony surrendered to the Governor of Barbadoes.

Intelligence of the sailing of the Brest fleet having reached Sir G. Rodney he despatched from St. Eustatia Sir Samuel Hood and Rear Admiral Drake to windward with 18 ships of the line to endeavor to intercept the Comte de Grasse and bring him to action before a junction could be effected with the squadron already at Martinique. On the 28th April, being off Fort Royal Bay, the French fleet was discovered and a general chase to windward commenced. It appears that both