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CHAPTER XX.

Having succeeded thoroughly in wasting much valuable time and allowing General Washington sufficient leisure to recover the drooping spirits of his troops as well as to fortify such positions as he choose in the neighborhood of New York, and to establish his authority throughout the country so as to make its conquest a barren acquisition to the British troops, the Royal Commissioners were at length persuaded that the arbitration of the sword was alone to decide the issue of this quarrel.

The victory of Brooklyn was achieved on the 27th of August, and an enterprising soldier would have been in New York next day, but between imbecility and negotiations, which is only another name for that quality, it was the 15th of September following before a movement was made on an untenable position by troops who had been for twenty days within thirteen hundred yards of its wharves. A great deal of ammunition was expended in a useless cannonade. The artillery practice and range at that period and distance was by no means as certain as the practice of the present day with a three mile range.

The Island of New York is about 15 miles in length and not more than two miles in width; it is formed by an arm of the Hudson River, known as the Harlem River, which falls into Long Island Sound at Randall's Island, and by the East River, which separates it from Long Island, connecting it with Long Island Sound. Furnishing admirable defensive positions it possessed the disadvantage of being assailable by a naval force, and even having its communications cut off with the continent, the rivers on all sides being accessible to fleets or a flotilla of gunboats.

With all the confidence of an inexperienced general, Washington had concentrated

his whole force of about 23,000 men in this *cul de sac* during the leisure Howe's blundering negotiations had afforded. He endeavored to cover the town with a line of intrenchments, constructed a strong fort within three miles of the head of the Island on the main shore of the Hudson, just above the point called Jeffrey's Hook, constructed an intrenched line from Col. Morris' house across the island about a quarter of a mile further down, and another line with forts and redoubts half a mile below the last mentioned, and a third along the crest of a series of heights which reached from Harlem River to the Hudson, while another series of lines and batteries extended quite down to Harlem village.

There can be no doubt but those lines, batteries and redoubts were very formidable obstacles to the advance of any force from New York along the road leading to King's Bridge, the point at which the Harlem River is crossed to the main land on the east or left bank of the Hudson; but liable to the serious disadvantage of having all their flanks turned by a naval force, while a land army marching through Westchester could take them all in reverse.

Washington had also fortified and intrenched the heights about King's Bridge to secure a retreat for his troops if necessary. In 1776 many parts of the Island of New York were covered with wood, the ground rough and broken, affording sites for good defensive positions. The population of the town of New York was 22,000 souls.

Howe's dispositions for the capture of New York were neither well devised nor well executed. The garrison of the town was 4,500 men under Gen. Putnam, they were badly commanded, had lost all confidence, and were persuaded that their position exposed them to the danger of being cut off, in fact it was a fate which would have befallen Washington's troops, echelloned as they were between New York and King's Bridge, if the operations had been conducted with anything like intelligence. By pushing a part of the fleet up the Hudson to the bifurcation of the Harlem River their retreat by King's Bridge could have been prevented; a similar

movement by the East and Harlem Rivers with the co-operation of a division of the army through Westchester would have prevented any possibility of escape or resistance; a capitulation would have been the only resource of Gen. Washington. But Howe, whose fondness for display was notorious, after a distant cannonade pushed four men-of-war up the East River and landed a division of 4,000 men under Cornwallis in Kipp's bay, who occupied a height there known as the Suclenberg, about three miles from the town, which was at once precipitately abandoned. A detachment of Hessians advanced to the town and fell in with the rear-guard of the United States troops at Bloomingdale where they were defeated with considerable loss. The whole retreating to Morris' heights; no attempt was made to press their retreat. the English Commander-in-chief and his principal officers repaired to the house of Mrs. Murray, whose conversation must have possessed a strange fascination, for it enabled Gen. Putnam to retreat to the main body of the United States troops without loss; Gen. Howe considerably leaving a retreat by way of King's Bridge, or across the Hudson to Jersey open to them. A division of the English troops under Lord Percy occupied the heights at Bloomingdale to cover the town of New York. The intrenched camp of the United States troops was within half a mile of the position, and on the 16th of September the left flank of the British line was attacked in force but after an action of some hours' duration the assault was repulsed with a loss of over 300 killed and wounded. The flanks of the Royal army were covered by the ships of the fleet, and various attempts were made to destroy them by fire rafts and other contrivances, but without success. Preparations had been made to burn New York before it was evacuated by the United States troops, but they had been obliged to retire so precipitately that this design could not be carried into effect.

Unsuspecting of treachery and willing to treat their late Colonists with all reasonable forbearance the English officers did not take measures to expel the notoriously disloyal