

THE SCHUYLERS OF ALBANY.

A HOUSE AND ITS MEMORIES.



MAJOR-GENERAL PHILIP SCHUYLER.

ON the banks of the Hudson River, between the cities of Albany and Troy, which are now almost united into one, stands an old house, still doing duty as a substantial and pretty farm villa, yet which has passed through much history. It is the ancient country seat of the Schuylers of Albany, a race whose doings were especially associated with Canada. In 1650, after the rougher work of founding Rensselaerswyck, as Albany was called, under Dutch rule, had been performed by the earlier colonists, there came out to the place a young man of Amsterdam, educated, arms-bearing, and a friend of Van Rensselaer, the Patron Lord of the seignior. In 1672 he purchased the land which, with some additions from Indians and others, made up the estate, called "The Flatts," a possession having about two miles front on the river, and upon which he shortly after built this country house. It was the friendly and far-seeing policy of this man,—Philip Pietersen Van Schuyler, Colonel and Indian Commissioner,—which laid the foundation of the influence of the British over the Iroquois, which was later to play so momentous a part for the colonies against France, and, in fact, perhaps, decided the event. In its time the house was considered, doubtless, a large and elegant one. To day its proportions are comparatively modest.

Schuyler married, soon after his arrival, Margarita Van Slichtenhorst, the daughter of the Director of the Colonie, a man of ancient family, whose daughter inherited, and passed on to her descendants, a prompt spirit of courage. In 1690, when the usurping Governor Leisler sent his son-in-law, a Captain Milborne, to take over the Fort at Albany, in the absence of her son, who was its commander, she drove the Captain out of the Fort and kept control herself till the return of the Colonel. Their sons and daughters, who were numerous, inter-married with the chief families of Dutch seigneurs, such as the Van Cortlandts, Livingstons, Van Rensselaers and others, the possessors of immense manors, established, by the policy of the crown, on the English system, for, as Parkman remarks, New York was aristocratic in both form and spirit. It was a mild and inoppressive régime however. There was little that was harmful about its feudality.

The house next descended to Pieter, Philip's eldest son, following a custom of primogeniture, other property being apportioned to the rest. In 1688, Pieter, at the age of thirty-two, obtained a royal charter for Albany, and was appointed its first Mayor, an office equivalent to Governor, being a Crown appointment and having military and administrative powers over a large district. He was also Indian Commissioner like his father. The Iroquois then formed a powerful confederacy, stretched throughout the northern region of New York, and were in nearly constant war with the French. In the winter of 1689, the latter attacked the English colonies by three expeditions sent without warning, and at midnight committed the massacre and sack of Schenectady, a small freeholders' village, near Albany. It was then that the house of the Schuylers began its public history. The Mayor gathered volunteers and pursued the French, but too late. At the suggestion of the Schuylers, expressed through an embassy to Boston, consisting of the brother-in-law and nephew of Mayor Pieter, the British colonies combined for an invasion of Canada

the following summer,—by sea, under Phips, and by land, by way of Albany and Lake Champlain, under General Winthrop, of Massachusetts. The Schuylers actively arranged the local details. Difficulties proved too great, and the expedition fell through. Abraham, one of the brothers, had, however, in the spring penetrated, with eight Iroquois, into the Canadian settlements. Captain John, aged 22 years, another brother, volunteered to Winthrop to lead a band and strike at least some blow at the enemy. With 29 whites and 120 Iroquois he penetrated to Laprairie, burnt the crops, took prisoners, and only did not attack the Fort because his Indians refused to fight in the open. The house was now fortified so that its palisades could garrison 100 men, and became more than ever a place of Indian councils. Next year (1691) the Mayor started with a small but better expedition, determined to strike a blow. This was particularly necessary, inasmuch as the Iroquois had of late years come to despise the British for their inactivity against the French, and had grown tired of defending alone the common frontier. The story of Pieter's gallant attack on Fort Laprairie in this expedition, is accurately told in



COAT-OF-ARMS ON SCHUYLER WINDOW OF FIRST DUTCH CHURCH IN ALBANY, 1656.

Parkman's "Frontenac and Canada under Louis XIV." It was, said Frontenac himself, "the strongest and most vigorous doing which has taken place since the establishment of the colony." John Nelson, an English gentleman, who had been taken prisoner, with three ships of his, by the French on the coast of Maine, arrived at Quebec about the time the news was received there. In his memorial to the English Government on the state of the colonies, he says: "In an action performed by one Skyler, of Albanie, whilst I arrived at Quebec, in the year 1621, when he made one of the most vigorous and glorious attempts that had been made known in those parts, with great slaughter on the enemies part and losses on his own, in which, if he not been discovered by an accident, it is very probable he would have become master of Monreall. I have heard the thing so much reported in his honour by the French that, had the like been done by any of their nation, he could never have missed of an acknowledgment and reward from the court." This Nelson himself, by the by, though a prisoner, was lodged and entertained by Frontenac in his own house, "because," says Baron La Hontain, in his letters, "he was a very gallant man."

From that time forward no man's influence could weigh with the Iroquois against that of Pieter Schuyler. At times they would refuse to proceed with their councils till the Governor had sent for him, and long after his death they regretfully recalled "our brother 'Quidor' (Peter)—who

always told the truth and never spoke without thinking." Throughout the long period of his life he never ceased to plan and act for the protection of the whole of the colonies against the French. The historian Garneau on this account calls him "the bloodthirsty enemy of the French Canadians." Such a term, however, is unjust to a sincere and humane man. He did only his duty as an officer and active statesman, and no such accusation was levelled at him at the time. Indeed he did his best to arrange with the French Governors for an agreement to cease the use of Indian auxiliaries in their wars, on account of the horrors and cruelties incident to the custom. His proposal was refused, and the wars continued under their traditional conditions. In 1710 he found the Iroquois so disheartened and so nearly on the verge of making a treaty of alliance with the French,—who told them their own king was a great monarch, but that the English were a nation of shopkeepers, governed by a mere woman—that he urged the colonies to send a deputation of the chiefs to England. Five went across accompanied by himself, and the tribes were charmed beyond expectations with their report. The chiefs themselves created a great sensation in London. They were styled "Indian Kings," and references to them are found in the *Spectator*.

Schuyler became while there a favourite with Queen Anne. She urgently desired to knight him, and presented him with his portrait (life-size), and with plate and diamonds for his wife, which remain among his descendants. Handed down by primogeniture the portrait still exists upon the estate, and forms one of the heirlooms of the family. His reasons for refusing knighthood were quaint. At first he said he had brothers not so well off as himself who might feel humbled; afterwards, he added that he feared it might make some of his ladies vain. In 1711 he organized another invasion of Canada with Captain Vetch, Governor of Louisbourg, an able officer, who had married his niece, "a Livingston of the Manor," and, with General Nicholson, who had been Governor of the Province, and also was Vetch's uncle. They were to co-operate by land from Albany with the fleet of Sir Hovenden Walker which proceeded up the gulf, against Quebec. As the fleet was destroyed by storm, the army disbanded. Pieter was twice Lieutenant-Governor of the Province. He died in 1724. Kingsford says of him and his brother John that "except the Schuylers and perhaps Vetch," the British colonies produced no statesmen above mediocrity.

For the same reasons a well-known American historian styles him "the Washington of his times."

John has been eclipsed by his brother. He was equally brave. He, too, was Mayor of Albany. In 1697 he was an envoy to Count Frontenac, with the clergyman Dellius. The letter they bore from Earl Bellomont, the Governor of New York, stated that as a mark of special esteem to the Count he sent these two, who were "men of consideration and merit."

Still another brother, Col. Arent, distinguished himself as an officer on the frontier. He then retired to an estate obtained by him near Newark, New Jersey, where he became very rich through a copper mine discovered upon his property. His sons and grandsons were noted as citizens or officers. His daughter married an Earl of Cassilis.

To return to Albany, the next generation saw the manor house in the possession of Col. Philip, jr., the Honourable Pieter's eldest son. He continued the influence over the Indians and, as his tombstone has it, was "a Gentleman improved in severall publick employments," but ill health made him cease these and suggest to Government the appointment of a friend and connection of the family, the afterwards celebrated (Sir) Wm. Johnson, as Superintendent of Indian Affairs.

The Colonel's wife, who was also a Schuyler, being a daughter of John, continued their reputation for extraordinary energy. She is well-known in colonial history by the cognomen of "The American Lady." Under her régime the house became yet more the centre of military movements against Canada. There she constantly entertained the army officers, and informed them on the conditions of the country and the necessities of forest warfare, how to treat the Indian allies, fight and march successfully in the woods, and deal with the difficulties of transportation in the wild region to the north. The unfortunate Lord Howe became in particular her favourite pupil, and introduced her reforms of dress, equipment and tactics into the army, in place of the ridiculous costumes and unsuitable movements