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THE REVOLT OF THE

British American Colonies, 1764-84.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The military, naval and political transactions in Europe during the year 1780, were of a momentous character. Admiral Geo. B. Rodney was appointed to command the British fleet in the West Indies at a time when the prestige of his name had been seriously tarnished. On his voyage out he was ordered to relieve Gibraltar, then besieged by the French and Spanish forces combined, and as that operation involved the convoying of a large fleet of transports and store ships, it was found necessary to detach a portion of the Channel fleet on that service; accordingly his fleet consisted of twenty-one sail of the line and nine frigates. On the 1st of January, 1780, he fell in with and captured a Spanish squadron belonging to the Caracas company commanded by Don Juan Augustin de Yardi, consisting of his flag ship the Guipuscoano 64 guns, six ships of war, and sixteen transports laden with provisions, naval stores and bale goods.

On his arrival off Cadiz Rodney received information that a Spanish fleet of fourteen sail of the line commanded by Admiral Don Juan Langara, was cruising off Cape Vincent, and without a moment's hesitation he made preparations for its capture or destruction. On the 16th January being off Cape St. Vincent the Spanish fleet was discovered to windward crowding all sail to escape. A lee shore had no terrors for Rodney, nor did he trouble himself to manœuvre for the weather gauge, the signal for a general chase was made, and at 5 p.m. the Bienfaisant 64 gun ship having brought the 70 gun Spanish ship San Domingo to action, and at the second broadside the latter blew up with a tremendous explosion every soul on board perishing. The long winter's night did not close the action which was continued to 2 o'clock in the morning when the wind having increased to a gale, Rodney made the signal for the

fleet to heave to. At daylight on the 17th it was found that one 80 gun ship and five 70 gun ships had surrendered, one of 70 guns had blown up, five ships of 70 guns and two frigates of 28 guns each had escaped. It was with great difficulty that the British fleet was extricated from the shoals of San Lucar.

This action was the occasion of one of those episodes which distinguishes modern civilization from the usages of earlier ages.

The Phoenix of 80 guns, the flag ship of Admiral Langara, had struck to the Bienfaisant, Captain MacBride, the conqueror of the San Domingo. The small pox was raging virulently on board the Bienfaisant, and Captain MacBride was anxious to avert that scourge from the Spaniards—for this purpose he addressed a letter to Admiral Langara stating under the circumstances he would not remove the men from the ship but should expect the Spanish officers to consider themselves prisoners of war on their parole of honor—the terms were rigidly adhered to, the Spaniards navigated their own vessel to Gibraltar and then surrendered her to the authorities.

The army and navy safely arrived at Gibraltar, and the provisions and stores being landed, the portion of the Channel fleet with the Spanish prizes and homeward bound transports under Admiral Digby sailed for England on the 15th February on the homeward passage. This fleet got sight of a French convoy but only succeeded in capturing a French ship of 64 guns named the Frithce and a few merchantmen.

From the beginning of the disturbance in America the Dutch merchants had endeavored to profit by the difficulties, by which it had surrounded British commerce, and in addition to the regular trade with the revolted Colonies, added that of supplying them with contraband of war, Holland being one of those countries from which John Hancock and his compatriots had carried on the smuggling trade before they had foresworn allegiance to George III. This conduct of the Dutch people became more marked after the interference of France, as they became carriers of naval stores to that nation also. All remonstrances to the Government having

failed to prevent this traffic, the British cruisers were ordered to seize all contraband of war on board Dutch ships, have the articles landed in a British port, pay the freight and allow the vessels to depart; but this equitable proceeding did not suit the people of Holland as it seriously crippled their trade, and rendered the supplies obtained by the French navy precarious, it was determined to put a convoy of Dutch ships laden with contraband of war under the protection of a Dutch squadron destined for the Mediterranean under the command of Count Byland. Information of this attempt to furnish the French ports with naval stores and munitions having reached the British Government, Commodore Fielding was despatched with a sufficient force to cruise in the Channel, examine the Dutch convoy, and seize such of the ships as had the prohibited freight on board. Both fleets met in the Channel on the 3rd January, permission to examine the convoy being refused and the boats of the British fleet being fired upon, Commodore Fielding fired a shot across the Dutch Admiral which was answered by a broadside and that was returned by another from the British fleet, when the Dutch Admiral struck his colors. The convoy had borne away for the French coast and the greater part succeeded in making their escape. Those that could be overtaken were carried into Spithead, whither Count Byland chose to accompany them to await orders from the States General of Holland, although he was told that he was at liberty to proceed on his voyage.

About this period at the suggestion of the King of Sweden the Empress of Russia willing to seize any opportunity for aggrandizing her own dominions promulgated the doctrine that free ships make free goods, a doctrine intended for the benefit of the Northern powers and especially directed against the interests of Great Britain, as it involved free trade at her expense in naval stores as her local situation enabled her to intercept any supplies from the North of Europe reaching France or Spain during the war. Denmark and Sweden joined with Russia in this movement, and all the other neutral powers of Europe were invited to assent to the princi-