

"THE AVENGER OF WYOMING."

Sketch of the Life and Times of
Major-General John Sullivan.

An Interesting Historical Account
Prepared for "The True Wit-
ness," by Mr. J. Phoenix,
of Montreal.

General Sullivan's next notable exploit was his descent on Staten Island. The British holding this island were in the habit of making raids on the neighboring territory, and carrying off whatever they thought valuable from the suffering civil population. To put a stop to this kind of warfare, Sullivan boldly determined to make a raid on the British posts in turn. His main object was to capture about 1000 American militia-men serving the King. These men, from their knowledge of the surrounding country, were very mischievous foes. The expedition, bold as it was in design, was most prudently concerted, and succeeded in almost every part. Six regiments were put to rout, and a large number of prisoners were taken, great quantities of stores were destroyed, six ships were burned and one was captured; and, when retreating again to the main land, the Americans brought with them arms, blankets, cattle, horses, and so forth, which had been in possession of the enemy. Unfortunately, the rear guard of Sullivan's forces, some 200 in number, allowed itself to be surprised, and after a stubborn resistance, was compelled to surrender to a vastly superior force.

We have said that the Americans could boast of but few successes in their revolutionary war. We might have added that they met with many reverses and disasters. With one of the most prominent of these the name of General Sullivan is largely but not dishonorably connected. The British commander, Howe contrived to out-manoeuvre Washington when, in the summer of 1777, the latter was using all his skill to protect the seat of Congress, Philadelphia. By a deceptive movement, Howe led the American General-in-chief to believe that he meant to cross the river Brandywine at a given point; meanwhile he had sent the major part of his army to a ford several miles higher up, where they got over without molestation. In this juncture Washington hurried Sullivan, who had commanded his right wing, to resist them. The latter suddenly found himself required to dispute the advance of the combined forces of Howe and Cornwallis with but 4,000 men all told, and one half of these were raw levies who had never been under fire before. The position was an unenviable one for a commander. Success would have been miraculous; defeat, under any circumstances, is more or less attended with obloquy in the public mind. But General Sullivan, though unquestionably tender of his military reputation, knew his duty in the matter too well to falter for a moment. He had gone into the quarrel without a personal end to serve; his pay as a general officer was but scarcely a fourth of what he was losing; his property had been dwindling and depreciating rapidly in consequence of the prolonged war; and he had sacrificed without a murmur the large emoluments of a lucrative professional practice. Such a man as he could have but one desire—to make the most of his opportunities, such as they were, for the benefit of the cause he had at heart. "Forward" was the word; but his advance guard had marched but a short distance ere the enemy was struck. Sullivan threw out his troops in line of battle in the best position the time allowed; the British, confident in their numbers and resources, came on rapidly to the attack; the armies clashed in contest and for two long hours, under the broiling August sun, half of Sullivan's wearied and dispirited force stood at bay and shook off again and again the grasp of the foe. Half, we say, for the raw troops could not be prevailed to make a stand of any kind, but broke and fled in spite of every effort made by their officers to rally them. When the sun began to decline the American force fell back sullenly, loading and firing as they retreated, forming on every advantageous spot of ground, and disputing every inch of the way with dogged resolution. As

for General Sullivan's conduct throughout the affair, it compels the highest respect for his skill, and the deepest admiration for his courage. His horse was shot under him as he issued an order. He rode among the troops from hill to hill, encouraging them by his words and example; he rallied them when, too hardly pressed, they broke and got into disorder; in the midst of the excitement of the contest, with bullets whistling about his ears, he exhibited a cool courage which inspired the rank and file with ardor; while he displayed so much capacity in seizing on points of resistance as to merit encomium from his officers. All in vain were his efforts; he could not accomplish a miracle; and when the wig he commanded was driven back, Washington's whole army followed. Philadelphia was left uncovered, with open road for the passage of Howe and Cornwallis. In a little while after the defeat of the Brandywine, Washington determined on attacking the British, who lay at Germantown. Again Sullivan commanded the right wing. He threw himself into the work so earnestly that in a couple of hours he had driven back the British left a couple of miles, and was on the point of entering the town. Unfortunately, Washington's left made no corresponding advance. The morning was foggy, and bodies of the troops in that division more than once mistook each other for enemies, and wasted on one another the bullets which had been destined for the British. The result was that Sullivan, being left totally unsupported, had to fall back from his advanced position, and Germantown was added to the list of disasters to the American arms. Sullivan spent the winter in the camp at Valley Forge, cheerfully enduring the privations which all there had to suffer. Early in 1778 he received an independent command, and took charge of the expedition against Rhode Island. The co-operation of the French fleet was relied on in this expedition, which would not have been undertaken otherwise; the General had got his forces on the island and was pressing the British hard, when the French admiral suddenly weighed anchor and put to sea. A retreat from the island became exigent then, and Sullivan made preparations for it; but the British commander, seeing the Americans deserted by their French allies, sallied out of his fortified camp, and engaged the troops at Butt's Hill. The two armies were pretty equally matched as to numbers. The engagement lasted for seven hours. It was said by Lafayette that it was the best fought battle of the war. At all events his respective losses reveal superior generalship on the part of Sullivan, who was the winner of the day. The Americans lost 215, the British 1,023—nearly one-fifth of their whole force. On the General's staff that day two of his brothers served—Colonel Eben Sullivan and James Sullivan (John's substitute in the Durham encounter) then at the age of thirty-four, Judge of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, and afterwards Governor of the same State. It should be mentioned that but 1,500 of the men under General Sullivan's command had ever before been in action. The next service in which the General was engaged was quite out of the beaten track of civilized warfare. Among the many devices resorted to by the British for suppressing the revolution, the most infamous was the employment of Red Indians for the harassment of the border populations. The Six Nations, as they were called—the most formidable Indian power that ever existed since the white man first trod the American soil—had accepted a British alliance, and made war in their own ferocious fashion, not only on armed combatants, but on the dwellers in peaceful settlements. The romantic valley of Wyoming, lying in lone beauty far away on the Susquehanna's banks, occupied by a simple and industrious population, whose toil kept their fertile slopes in constant bloom, was among other places surprised by a band of Red Indian savages led by a British colonel. A horrible massacre followed. The valley was wholly cleared of its inhabitants, several hundreds in number; their houses were given to the flames and their growing crops to devastation. The waters of the Susquehanna were poisoned with dead bodies for weeks afterwards; the air of the woods around was tainted from a like cause. Indignation seized the mind of Congress when the news of those deeds of horror came to their ears. They resolved at once—pressed as they were for men, provisions



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and materials of war on every side—to organize an expedition for the chastisement of those Bashi Bazooks. Washington was asked to recommend an officer who could be trusted to carry this expedition through with success; and the Father of his Country named Major-General John Sullivan. The latter, sharing the general indignation, accepted the heavy responsibility, although his health was then very far from good. He made his preparations with all his accustomed care and foresight, saw everything in as perfect order as the limited resources of the government could admit of, and then swept down on the guilty Six Nations. These latter, reinforced by 700 British regulars, sent to their aid from Canada, and guided by a cloud of British officers, selected a strong position on which to confront the Avenger of Wyoming. General Sullivan, turning their flank, made the position useless. The attack was ordered. So hotly was it begun that before half the American troops could get into action the foe was beaten beyond retrieval, and the power of the once formidable Six Nations gone for ever. For nearly a month Sullivan followed the Indians into their own country, even to their very capital, laying waste their towns and fields—meting out to them, with stern retribution, in all save massacre, the pitiless measures they had themselves employed. Then he received their submission, so far as he had power to receive it and promised to use his influence with Congress to have the conditions ratified—a promise which he did not fail to redeem. When his work was thoroughly performed he turned his steps eastward, and led his people safely into the regions of civilization. How truly thoroughly his work was done is plain from the fact that the once dreaded Six Nations were never heard of more. The expedition was one requiring the utmost care, circumspection, foresight and judgment. The wily Indian was the foe; the district to be traversed mainly trackless woods, unknown and interseeded with numerous water courses; the distance to be measured between six and seven hundred miles, and the resources of every kind needed for the expedition, including even provisions, should of necessity be brought along from the first, since none of them could be obtained in the enemy's country. On his return from his Indian campaign, General Sullivan sent in his resignation. Five years of active service of the most harassing nature had told on even his excellent constitution, and the fatigues of the last expedition had been unexceptionably severe. The physicians advised that rest was absolutely necessary for him. Congress of course accepted his resignation with regret. Washington, in a letter full of the most complimentary expressions, says: "I flatter myself it is unnecessary for me to repeat to you how high a place you hold in my esteem. The confidence you have experienced and the manner in which have been employed on several important occasions, testify the value I set upon your military qualifications, and the regret I must feel that circumstances have deprived the army of your services." General Greene, Washington's able second-in-command, wrote in a similar strain; and Sullivan bore with him into his retirement the good will, esteem and affection of nearly every officer of rank and character in the army.

He was not, however, allowed to remain long out of the public service. New Hampshire elected him as one of her delegates to Congress, in the middle of 1781, just six months after his retirement from the army. The cause of the patriots had never before worn so gloomy an air. The armies were melting away; the finances of the country were in a wretched condition; disaster followed disaster in the field; the French fleet was blocked up at Newport; Arnold had turned traitor, and thousands were only anxious to follow in his footsteps if they could have done so with impunity. In a short time after Sullivan's second entrance to Congress a change began. Military and financial re-organization occupied his thoughts to good result. Under the judicious arrangements brought in by him the armies filled up rapidly, and, in like manner, the finances of the country quickly improved under the direction of a committee of five suggested by him, and of which he was the chairman and the leading spirit. These happy changes continued until the close of the war.

General Sullivan resumed the practice of his profession in his own State, of which he became Attorney-General. It is not a little singular that his son George was afterwards appointed to that office, and that George's son, John, in turn held it also. Every honor that New Hampshire could give the General was freely offered. He was elected Governor of the State among other posts. He, on his part, lost no opportunity of conferring benefits on her people. Space forbids me to go through the long catalogue of his eminent services; but it should be noted that, having set his heart on utilizing the splendid water-power of the State, he induced a number of French artisans to emigrate to New Hampshire, for the purpose of teaching their crafts to her people, and so laid the foundation of her present great manufacturing prosperity. His last notable service to the United States was the important aid he gave in procuring the adoption of the Federal Constitution, for which several of his most distinguished contemporaries warmly thanked him. Washington conferred on him the only office the state of his health permitted him to accept—the Federal Judgeship of New Hampshire. This was in September, 1789. For a few years he struggled on through his duties; but at last was visited by utter prostration. A little time of waiting, and then the end came, on the 23d of January, 1795, he being still in his fifty-fifth year.

My sketch, slight as it is, sufficiently establishes that John Sullivan was a very remarkable man. We think that it proves also an assertion previously made—that, having regard both to conception and execution, American independence owes more to no single man than to Major-General John Sullivan, the "Avenger of Wyoming."

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