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THE REVOLT

OF THE

British American Colonies,

1764-84.

CHAPTER XIX.

Having sufficiently refreshed his troops General Howe sailed from Halifax for the purpose of invading the United States on 11th June, 1776, the fleet being under the command of his brother, Lord Howe, and reached Sandy Hook, near New York, on the 29th. His force amounted to 9,000 men, and on the 3rd July he landed on Staten Island without opposition. It had been his original intention to land on Long Island but he saw, or thought he saw, reason to alter his resolution, a not uncommon failing of his, and one which cost Great Britain a heavy price—however in this case the excuse for procrastination was awaiting reinforcements. On the same day he was joined by the reinforcements which brought his whole force up to 30,000 men.

Meantime the Congress had quietly perfected those measures which were to separate the Colonies from Great Britain and erect a new nationality on the ruins of the government they had cast off. On the 18th of June Richard Henry Lee moved a declaration of independence, but was opposed by the deputies from Maryland and Pennsylvania, one of the latter, John Dickinson, replied in a speech of great power, for which he was excluded from Congress—that body being determined to force every one else to swallow liberty in accordance with their ideas of it. After a good deal of negotiation the Declaration of Independence was adopted by Congress on the 4th of July, 1776, and signed by every one of its members except the only independent man amongst them, John Dickinson. By this act the people of the Thirteen Colonies, or such of them as Congress represented, cut themselves adrift from Great Britain.

The tardiness displayed by the British administration in sending out the troops necessary to reduce the revolted Colonies to

obedience was the direct cause of this consummation, and the habits of procrastination so notorious a characteristic of General Howe neutralised whatever advantage might be derived from their presence on this occasion. As when the whole forces were concentrated on Long Island Gen. Washington commanded about 9,000 men, which not more than 7,000 were fully armed, to oppose the British troops, and there can be no doubt about the issue, because it is now well known Washington, although a good soldier, was no general.

Admiral Lord Howe, known in the navy as "Black Dick," although not destined to add to his country's laurels during this contest, defeated the French fleet on the 1st June, 1794, being the Admiral and Commander-in-Chief of the Channel fleet. Capt. James Gambier, so well known in after years as the Admiral Gambier of Basque Roads notoriety, a great friend of Hannah More and Wilberforce, commanded the Defence, (74) which suffered severely in the action, having lost all her masts, and while being towed out was hailed by Capt. Pakenham (afterwards Sir Thos. Pakenham) of the Invincible (74), with, "Hullo, Jemmy, whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." Lord Howe was a haughty, kind hearted man, beloved by his men and officers. He brought a commission to America which was sanctioned by Parliament, giving himself and General Howe full powers to treat with the revolted Colonists—to make peace or war—to punish or pardon.

In the hands of British officers this combination of diplomacy and warlike powers has always been most mischievous, and this case was no exception to the general rule. The Howes especially were ever inclined to take matters easily, would always sooner treat than fight, and being amongst people who would fool them to the utmost possible extent for the purpose of gaining time, consequently when they should have been fighting they commenced to treat and that too with the most cunning of Philadelphia lawyers, Dr. Franklin. To this astute philosopher Lord Howe addressed a letter in which he detailed the powers entrusted to

him, his desire to see the object peacefully accomplished; his hopes that the same disposition animated the leading members of Congress and people generally, and hoping that the Doctor would aid him in accomplishing so desirable an end.

In answer Dr. Franklin informed his Lordship that before any proposals for peace could be entertained Great Britain would be required to recognize the independence of the United States, compensate each State for towns burnt therein or damage done, defray the expenses of the war; but this was only his private opinion alone. Lord Howe also opened a correspondence with General Washington, and circulars, letters and declarations to the late Governors of the different Colonies. All those documents were sent to Congress, published in the different newspapers, and were not productive of any beneficial results. And this negotiating delayed the opening of the campaign till the 22nd of August, on which day, as the Admiral and General had made up their minds to fight, hostilities commenced by a division of 4,000 men under General Clinton landing at Long Island without opposition, a feat they might have performed six weeks before with perfect safety to themselves and profit to their country.

Long Island is separated from New York by the channel known as East River, which is about a mile in width. The island is intersected obliquely by a range of heights opposite New York, a road stretched from the point then known as Brookland ferry, now the City of Brooklyn, across the aforesaid heights to Gravesend, at which point the British troops had disembarked. Above Brookland ferry an elbow of the East River formed Wallaback or Wallabout Bay, while below it a cluster of islands formed a bay called Governor's Cove into which a stream known as Mile Creek fell, the head of which approached within half a mile of Wallabout Bay. The United States troops to the number of 15,000 men were encamped on the peninsula between the ferry and head of Mile Creek, with their front covered by a line of intrenchments extending from the creek to a marsh at the head of Wallabout