

Centennial Anniversaries of the War of 1812

J. VROOM.

IV.—The Gananoque Raid—The Battle of Queenston Heights.

September 21.—The War of 1812 was remarkable for petty raids, most of them with no better object than plunder; while in some cases the marauders had not even that excuse, but were merely bent upon malicious destruction. Such were the visits of the so-called privateers to the coast waters of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia; and such was the raid upon Gananoque, on the St. Lawrence, in the early morning of the first of September, in which one man was killed on each side and a few others wounded, one woman wounded by a shot fired through the window of her house, and a small quantity of arms and ammunition carried off by the raiders. It is only worth mention as the first of the series.

October 13.—After the capture of Detroit, General Brock hastened to Niagara, there to repeat, if possible, his plan of a sudden attack. But the Governor-General, in accordance with the wishes of the British Government and his own inclinations, had proposed an armistice, looking to negotiations for peace; an armistice which was of short duration, because the United States Government refused to ratify it, and of which the only effect was to give the United States commanders on the frontier time and opportunity to strengthen their forces for another invasion. At Niagara, when hostilities were resumed, General Brock, with twelve hundred white troops, half of them regulars, and with a small number of Indian allies, was opposed by an army of some five or six thousand men, more than half of them regulars. The United States forces were under General Van Rensselaer; who, like General Hull at Detroit, had to contend with disaffection in his own army. Van Rensselaer was an officer of the militia. He was not cordially supported, therefore, by General Smyth, who was in command of the regular forces and did not like being put in a subordinate position.

General Brock's little army was distributed along the Canadian bank of the river, some thirty miles in length, not knowing where the enemy might attempt to cross. The attempt was made on the thirteenth of October, in the darkness of the early morning. General Brock, at Fort George, near Lake Ontario, learned that his foes were

crossing in force at Queenston, about half way between the mouth of the river and the falls. The details of what followed are somewhat uncertain, because of conflicting accounts; but it is known that there were only about three hundred men on the spot to repel the invaders. At daybreak, General Brock arrived and took command. On the heights above the village was a battery of only one gun. This a small party of the invaders captured; having reached the heights by a steep path that was left ungarded because it was considered impassable. Leading his men up the hill to retake the gun, Brock fell, mortally wounded. He died almost immediately, and his body was carried back to Queenston. Colonel Macdonell, second in command, was also mortally wounded; and the invaders, though they had to abandon the gun, were left in possession of the heights.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when the reserve arrived, under General Sheaffe, and the real battle began. By a flank movement, Sheaffe took possession of the high ground in the rear of the invaders; and he soon had eight hundred British and Canadians and two hundred Indians in line and ready for action. The enemy, over a thousand strong, were under the immediate command of General Wadsworth; to whom General Van Rensselaer, on the other shore, was vainly endeavouring to send reinforcements. Thus the forces actually engaged were nearly equal in numbers.

The action was brief. The invaders broke and fled at the first onset; some of them, to escape the sword, throwing themselves over the cliff. Unable to rally his panic stricken troops, or to get them back to their boats, General Wadsworth surrendered with seventy-two officers and nine hundred men, in full view of comrades on the opposite shore who had refused to come to their assistance.

So the second invasion came to an end; and a second United States general and his army were made prisoners of war. But Brock was dead; and, to the Canadians, the loss seemed more than the gain. Men had fallen beside them in defence of their homes—men who had been friends and neighbours as well as companions in arms. Macdonell had fallen. But all other losses were overwhelmed and forgotten in their great sorrow for the death of Brock. Like Wolfe, he fell on the field of battle; but, unlike Wolfe, he died without knowing that the victory was won. He died, too,