

CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARIES OF THE
WAR OF 1812.

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VI.—THE SKIRMISH AT LACOLLE—THE THIRD
INVASION.

NOVEMBER 20.—General Dearborn, Commander-in-Chief of the United States forces, had made his headquarters first at Greenbush and later at Plattsburg, on the western shore of Lake Champlain. At the latter place, by the middle of November, he had an army of eight or ten thousand men, with which he hoped to reach Montreal and occupy the Province of Lower Canada. This was called the army of the north, to distinguish it from that at Niagara, the army of the centre. The British forces in Lower Canada, numbering only three thousand, were so disposed as to be ready to meet the enemy by whichever route they came. The frontier posts which would meet the first attack were under command of Major de Salabery, a French Canadian who had already won distinction in the British service, and who was later to become famous in Canadian history. On the sixteenth, Dearborn moved towards the Canadian boundary with three thousand men, and it seemed that he was about to make an invasion in force. On the twentieth, a further advance was made by a party of six hundred under Colonel Zebulon Pike. Before daylight in the morning they had reached Canadian territory, and moved forward in two divisions to the Lacolle mill stream, which lies a little north of the boundary line. Here they took the blockhouse, or the building used for that purpose, the defenders making their escape in the darkness; and then the two parties began firing on each other, each being under the impression that the other was British. When they had discovered their mistake, de Salabery was approaching; and they hastily retired to their own side of the boundary line, leaving their dead and wounded on the field. This remarkable skirmish, in which the British practically had no part, began and ended the campaign of 1812 in that region. The threatened invasion was postponed. Dearborn's troops marched southward and went into winter quarters.

General Dearborn gave in his official report the reason why his army of invasion did not invade. It was because of the rawness of his troops. He was apparently too good a soldier to lead such men into battle. He did not wish to share in his own

person and command the fate which had for like reason befallen the army of the centre and the army of the west.

NOVEMBER 28.—Not counting Colonel Pike's harmless incursion, the third invasion was on the Niagara river, above the falls. Immediately after the battle of Queenston Heights, General Sheaffe agreed to an armistice on the Niagara frontier. The conclusion of this armistice by General Van Rensselaer was his last important work as leader of the defeated army of the centre. He soon resigned his command, blamed by his compatriots in the United States for faults that were not his, and reviled by his successor who had been to some extent the cause of his discomfiture. He was succeeded by Brigadier-General Smyth, who was to prove himself even more worthless in full command than he had been as a subordinate.

The armistice enabled Smyth to complete his preparations for invasion. By the twenty-seventh of November, he had at Black Rock an army of four thousand five hundred men, with boats enough for the embarkation of more than three thousand. Small parties of British regulars and Canadian militia guarded the upper part of the river, where a crossing was to be expected. At two points, not far apart, in the early morning of the twenty-eighth, small parties of the enemy effected a landing. There was heavy fighting before they were dislodged, with great loss on both sides considering the numbers engaged. Several other detachments attempted to cross; but their boats failed to reach the shore, and at daybreak further attempts were abandoned. Not long after daylight came, all had been either driven back or captured; for once again the invasion ended with the surrender of the commanding officer of the invaders and his men, though this time his rank was only that of captain, and he had but thirty men to surrender.

Later in the day, a large part of Smyth's army embarked in their boats. They remained near their own side of the river, ready to cross, while the British officer on the other shore was invited to surrender to save the effusion of blood. The British having declined the invitation, Smyth ordered his men to disembark and dine.

Disputes between Smyth and his officers delayed matters for the next two days. Another attempt to cross was about to be made before daylight on the first of December; but some of the men now refused to embark, and Smyth countermanded the movement. Then discipline ceased in his army.