

to furnish their contingent of men or levy the war taxes, and New York was quite prepared at a moment's notice to take the same stand. This was the period chosen by Sir George Prevost to conclude an armistice with General Dearborn. It is difficult to imagine a more unfortunate step. True the news had just reached him that the obnoxious orders in council, the apparent cause of war, had been revoked, and it was perhaps not unnatural to suppose that with the cessation of the grievance American hostility itself would die out. Sir George Prevost, however, ought better to have known his countrymen. The war reasons assigned were a mere excuse; its real motive was the desire of the Madison and Clay party to hold power. Under the circumstances peace was impossible. Had they gone back to the country worsted and humiliated, their tenure of power was at an end. The American Government refused to ratify the armistice concluded by their general, and the time thus gained was busily occupied hurrying men and munitions to the front. The great authority of the Duke of Wellington was afterwards sought to justify the line of conduct adopted by the Governor. The case, however, could scarcely have been very accurately stated to that eminent general. The Duke is said to have strongly dissuaded a war of aggression with so small a number of troops; and there was wisdom in the advice. The British, a mere handful, could not hope to work their way into the enemy's lines and there maintain their foothold; but between that and the burning of a couple of border fortresses, and destruction of stores accumulated for hostile purposes, there is a wide difference. There is one fact patent, had Brock been free to destroy Sackett's Harbor when he wished to, the enemy would not the following year have been able to obtain the mastery of the lakes; and so much was that the case, that the attempt was made later on by Sir George

Prevost himself, but failed, like all expeditions having the misfortune of being under his personal control.

The time granted the Americans by Sir George Prevost's armistice was put by them to the best advantage, and when Congress refused to sanction General Dearborn's agreement there had assembled on the Niagara frontier, under command of Major-General Van Rensselaer, an army of over five thousand men, two-thirds of which were regulars, well armed and in possession of plenty of ammunition and provisions. To oppose them General Brock had, under his command in all about fifteen hundred men, of whom about half were regulars. Constant skirmishing marked the cessation of the armistice, the sentries amusing themselves by exchanging shots across the river, and the Americans making one or two successful cutting-out expeditions, in one of which they captured and destroyed the brig "Detroit," formerly the United States brig "Adams," which had been surrendered at the taking of Detroit and had been re-christened with the name of that fortress. It soon became evident that the enemy meditated an attack in force, and Brock, with his usual energy and foresight, took every precaution which the small means at his disposal permitted, to secure them a hot reception. On the 11th of October, General Van Rensselaer assembled his force opposite Queenstown, and two days after, early in the morning, crossed the river. General Brock, at that moment, was at Fort George, the point he thought most likely to be attacked; but hearing the firing he made all speed to reach the scene of action, and came up just as the Americans had succeeded in obtaining a footing on the top of the heights. General Brock put himself at the head of twelve men in charge of a small redoubt, armed with an eighteen-pound gun, but was forced to beat a precipitate retreat. The Americans got possession of the fort, and Captain