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THE REVOLT OF THE

British American Colonies, 1764-84.

CHAPTER XLI.

Previous to the declaration of war against Holland a squadron of one ship of 74 guns, one of 64, three of 50, and three frigates of 32 guns each, two sloops of war, two cutters, a bomb-ketch and fire ship, two ordnance store ships, eleven transports, five victuallers and thirteen Indiamen, under the command of Commodore Johnston, having on board General Meadows with 3000 troops and a detachment of artillery—destined to act against the Dutch settlements at the Cape of Good Hope—put into Porto Praya Bay, in the island of St. Jago, one of the Cape de Verd islands, on the 10th of April, for the purpose of obtaining supplies of wood, water and fresh provisions. As those islands belonging to the Portuguese, a neutral nation, were of course neutral, the British Commodore took no precautions against an attack and so far was almost utterly defenceless, but the seventy-four, sixty-four and two fifty gun ships were compelled to anchor outside the Bay and were therefore prepared to offer resistance; when at 9h. 30m. a.m. a French squadron of two 74 and three 64 gun ships with several frigates and smaller vessels, in all eleven sail, appeared in the offing under all sail with a fine breeze of wind rounded the east point at 10h. 45m. and stood in line of battle towards the British squadron. At this time there was upwards of 1500 persons on shore engaged in the different operations of wooding and watering, but were recalled by signal and the squadron prepared to unmoor, but little time was given for that operation, within an hour and an half from being first signalled as in sight Mons. Suffrien, in the Heros 74 guns, led the way firing on the British vessels at the mouth of the Bay as he passed, kept on his way till within a cable's length of the two largest ships of the British squadron and there dropped anchor, he was followed by two other French vessels, one

anchoring ahead and the other astern of Mons. Suffrien; having passed springs on their cables before entering the bay, the two other French ships of his squadron did not anchor but ranged about the Bay firing at every ship as they passed and endeavoring to board the merchantmen, but in this they were not successful owing to the number of troops on board. After a furious engagement of three quarters of an hour one of the French ships drifted out to sea carrying with her the Hinchinbroke East Indiaman which she had carried by boarding—the French Commodore cut his cable and stood out to sea leaving his remaining ship, the Annibal, thoroughly disabled without a stick standing her masts all shot away thoroughly disabled—how she managed to get clear is one of those mysteries which occur in such a disorderly action—it is evident that Commodore Johnstone was more anxious to preserve his convoy than to cripple his enemy, but some of the British ships that had not participated in the action should have prevented the escape of the disabled Annibal. A pursuit was commenced but not carried on with sufficient spirit, it however ended in the recapture of the Hinchinbroke next day, so that the French Commodore had nothing in the shape of a trophy to console him for breaking the neutrality of the Port, outraging the laws of warfare, and the only results of a hard fought action was a dismasted ship which should have been a prize to his opponents—he had poked his nose into a wasps nest and was badly stung for his pains—the loss of the British squadron was 43 killed and 134 wounded. After repairing all damages they sailed from Porto Praya on the 2nd of May.

As the objects of the English armament had been betrayed to the French Court and Monsieur Suffrien sent out specially to intercept and prevent the success of the expedition, his ships and convoy carried out a reinforcement of troops and munitions of war for the Cape of Good Hope; it now became an object of anxiety with the British Commodore to learn whether the French squadron had reached the Cape; he detached four of his smaller vessels on the 12th of June to proceed ahead and obtain intelli-

gence with orders to rejoin him in a certain latitude. On the 1st of July they fell in with and captured a Dutch vessel bound for Ceylon laden with stores and provisions and £40,000 in bullion, which had left Saldanha bay a few days before; from her they learned that Mons. Suffrien had arrived at the Cape on the 21st June, where he had landed 500 men to reinforce the garrison of which eighty or ninety were artillerymen; it was also stated that five Dutch East India ships richly laden were lying in Saldanha bay about 40 miles north of the Cape—with this intelligence and their prize the detached squadron rejoined the Commodore on the 9th July—a Council of War was now held as to future proceedings, the attack on the Cape had become impracticable, but it was urged that on the Spanish settlements in South America it would be successful, and that they could proceed to India by the Pacific; but the Commodore determined to take or destroy the Dutch ships in Saldanha Bay—off which he arrived in the night and entered it next morning—succeeded in capturing without loss the whole squadron, although they were ran ashore and set on fire by their crews as soon as the British squadron appeared, but the fire was extinguished and all got afloat except one which blew up.

Both the English and French Commodores had secondary objects in view to which they were directed by their instructions; the English were to send a squadron to reinforce their fleet in the West Indies, and the French were to proceed there, after providing for the security of the Cape. Intelligence received by the Dutch prize determined Commodore Johnston to send the whole of the land forces to reinforce the British troops in India, a part being originally destined to proceed to the Leeward islands.

In the first year of the contest to which the French had committed themselves their power in India was nearly annihilated. After the fall of Pondicherry the Islands of Bourbon and Mauritias, with the port of Mahio on the continent of Asia, was all that remained to them. Nevertheless, with that adaptability which is so marked a trait in