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THE REVOLT OF THE British American Colonies, 1764-34.

CHAPTER LII.

The siege of Gibraltar formed the central point on which the whole interest of this contest turned, and the efforts put forth by the combined forces for its capture were enormous. It was well for Great Britain that Spain's national pride and desire was centered on the re-conquest of the celebrated Rock, and actually directed against the fortress which covered it as it is abundantly evident that if the exertions to acquire it were directed against any other portion of the external possessions of Britain the acquisition of Gibraltar would be much more certain than the event of any siege or other direct effort for its acquisition. The history of the memorable siege it underwent for three years and a-half is graphically told by Captain Drinkwater, himself an actor in the scenes described. Every appliance that mechanical and engineering science could devise were brought into play on the side of the besiegers, which was met on the part of the besieged by a daring which knew no danger, nor counted any odds, and a bravery that never wavered, as well as inventive resources of no ordinary kind. The labor of six months in batteries and approaches would be assailed by a force of volunteers composed of seamen and marines, and in a couple of hours entirely ruined; the loss in men and material to the besiegers being fearful, while the storming party looked on the whole affair as a good piece of fun, and could hardly be restrained from attacking the Spanish lines covering their camp. This check effectually prevented future annoyance to the garrison, as it appeared impossible for the Spaniards to construct works of so formidable a description in any reasonable time, or within moderate expense. In this dilemma a French Engineer, the Chevalier d'Arcon, proposed to construct shot and shell proof floating batteries, which by their

mobility, the short distance at which they might be placed from the works on the sea face of the rock and the command they would have of the whole town could not fail of success. They were not only to be shot and shell proof but constructed of materials calculated to resist the action of fire, and from the vertical fire of shells they were protected by a stooping roof, which might be raised or lowered at pleasure. Whether all those qualities were fairly tested does not appear, but the germ of all shot and shell proof floating batteries, whether as monitors or turret ships, is to be found in their design. During the time taken in constructing these engines of offence the Duke de Crillon, fresh from his victory at Minorca, was appointed to the command of the Spanish troops, while that army was reinforced by 12,000 auxiliary French soldiers with two princes of the blood, the Comte d'Artois and the Duke de Bourbon, with a number of the first nobility of France and Spain.

About the beginning of September the combined fleets of France and Spain arrived in the bay, which with the vessels already at Algiers numbered forty-nine sail of the line. The floating batteries, ten in number, were commanded by Admiral Don B. Moreno, they were mounted with 164 pieces of heavy brass cannon, and had on board upwards of 6000 men, a great proportion of whom were artillerymen, thirty-six being allowed to each gun. There were also on board a number of spare guns to replace any damaged in action.

The plan of attack was well devised; it provided that when the battering ships had taken their stations the Spanish gun and mortar boats, of which they had a great number, should place themselves so as to flank the British batteries, and if possible drive the artillerymen from their guns. The combined fleet was to cover and assist the battering ships, while a furious cannonade was to commence from all the batteries on the Isthmus. An immense number of large boats that had been collected from all the Spanish ports were to be in readiness to embark and carry over the bay and land troops for the assault of the fortress as soon as the

battering ships should produce a visible effect on the works.

On the 13th of September, between nine and ten o'clock in the morning, the battering ships anchored in a regular line between the Old and New Moles at moderate distances from each other and about 900 yards from the British works, and at once opened fire which was sustained by the works on the Isthmus, the gunboats, and the combined fleet. This was at once vigorously replied to by the garrison with shot and shell, which did not produce any visible impression on the floating batteries, which were planked with green wood and had their sides and tops further protected with green hides. But about noon the garrison began to fire on them with red hot shot, and at two o'clock, p.m., smoke was seen to issue from the Admiral's battery, the people on board being busily engaged in using fire engines and pouring water into the shot holes. Immediately afterwards the Prince of Nassau's ship, next in size, was observed to be on fire, and before evening the fire of the garrison had gained a visible superiority. The Spanish gunboats had been beaten off, the fire from the batteries on the Isthmus all but silenced, while the combined fleet were obliged to sheer off out of range. The fire of the garrison increased and was kept up with unremitting fury during the night. About one o'clock, a.m., flames burst out of the floating batteries first set on fire, and all the rest of the line was evidently on fire with the exception of one. Signals of distress were now made, and boats were sent off to their assistance, but the British gunboats flanked the line of battering ships and effectually prevented assistance from reaching them, and raked them so effectually that they could not work a gun. In this situation they remained all the rest of the night exposed to a terrific fire from the garrison and gunboats, and entirely helpless. At daylight the fire from the fortress ceased and the British seamen used every exertion to save the miserable wretches who yet remained on board the floating batteries, numbers having escaped in their own boats. About four hundred were taken off by the British sailors at the