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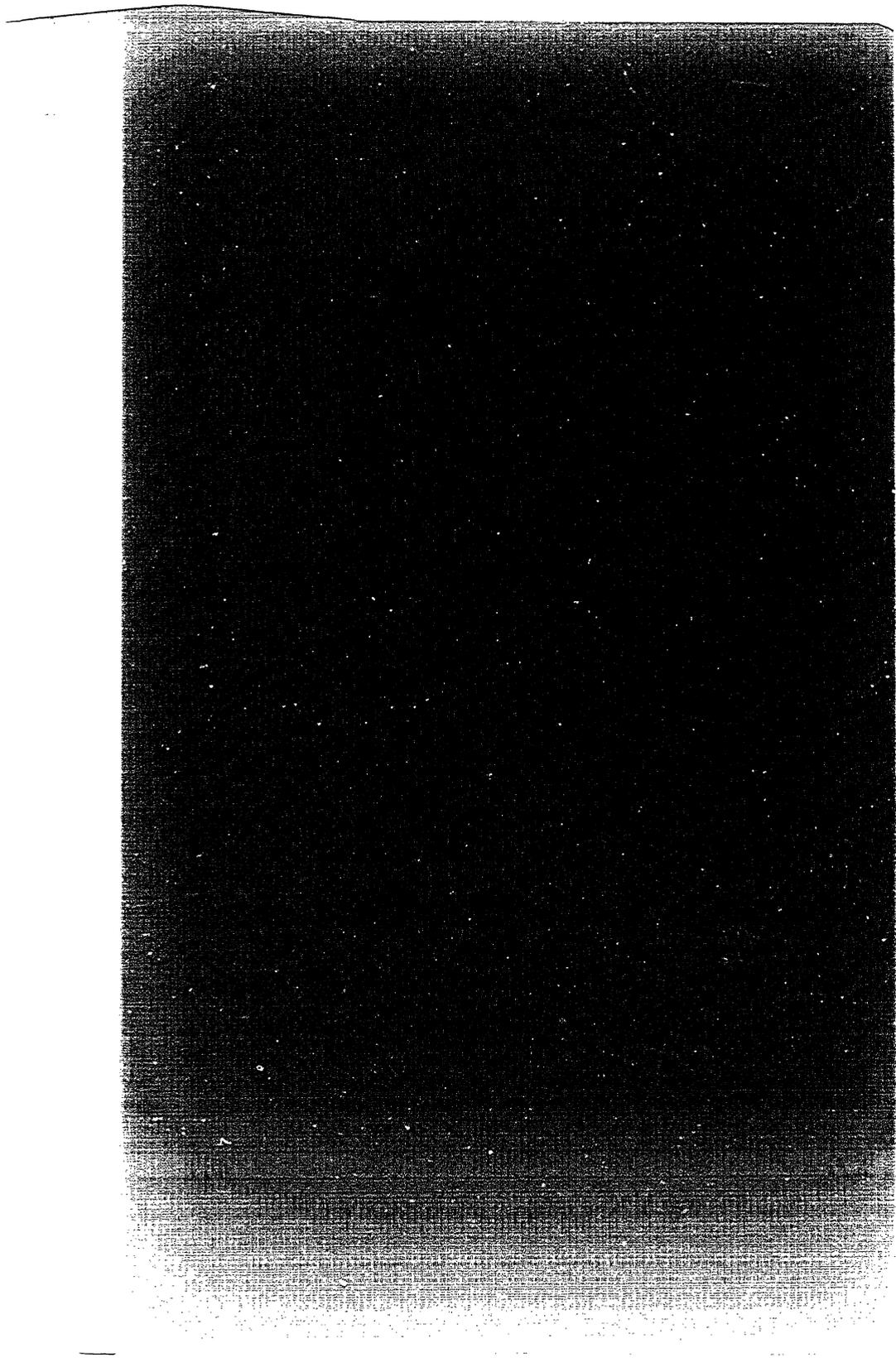
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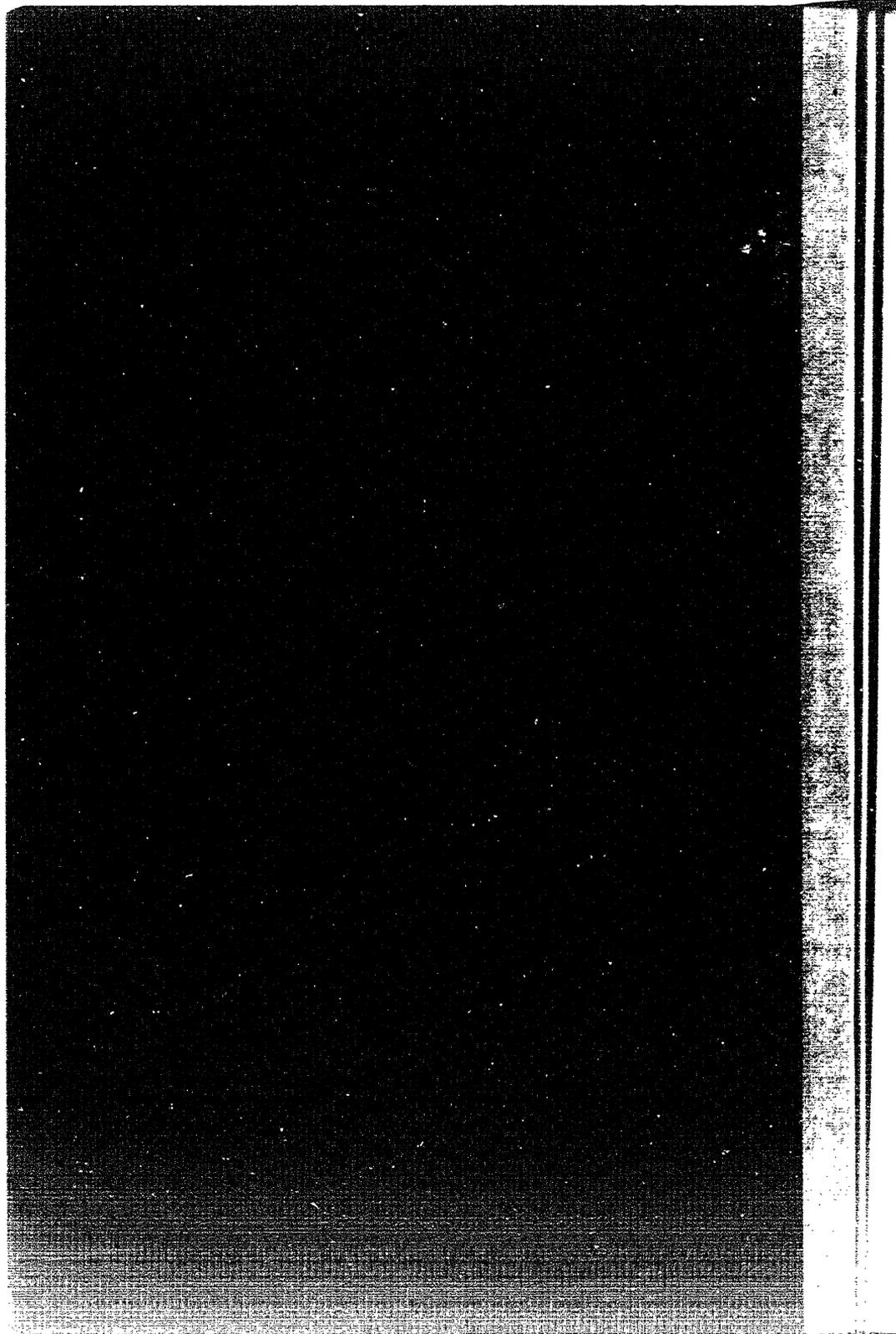
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DEEDS SPEAK.

Women's Canadian Historical Society

OF TORONTO.

TRANSACTION No. 2.

The Battle of Queenston Heights,

October 13th, 1812.

BY

MRS. S. A. CURZON, First President.

With a Sketch of her Life and Works

BY

LADY EDGAR.

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SKETCH OF MRS. CURZON'S LIFE AND WORK.

BY LADY EDGAR.

Read at the Meeting of the Women's Canadian Historical Society, November 16th, 1886.

I wish to-day, in this closing hour of our year, to speak of one whose earthly work is done, Mrs. Curzon, the first President of our Society, who, as you know, passed away last week.

I think you would all like to have some account of her life and work, and it is fitting that, at this annual meeting, we should speak of one who just three years ago did so much to found this Society, and became, by unanimous vote, its first President.

Sarah Anne Curzon was an English woman by birth. She was born in Birmingham in 1833. Her father, George Phillips Vincent, had a large glass manufactory there, was a man of good education, and particularly interested in chemistry and physics. He devoted himself to his family, read and talked with his children and instructed them in all the public questions of the day, and also allowed them as often as possible to meet the scientific men who gathered at his house.

Dr. Charles Baker, one of the principal physicians of Birmingham, and his brother, a well-known divine and author, were cousins, also Edward W. Benson, Archbishop of Canterbury. In 1858 she married Robert Curzon, and came with him to Canada in 1862. For more than thirty-five years she has lived among us in Toronto, and by her pen and personal influence has done much for our intellectual and national life. Beneath a frail form and gentle bearing dwelt a brave spirit, and with many disadvantages of health and fortune she accomplished much.

With all her strength she fanned and kept alive a true Canadian spirit in our midst, and fostered also an intense love for the motherland, believing that Imperial Federation was the best system of colonial development.

From 1872 she contributed, by essay, fiction and verse, to the *Canadian Monthly*, the *Week*, the *Dominion Illustrated*, *Grip*, the *Evangelical Churchman*, the *Canadian Magazine* and many English and American papers, and for two years she edited a woman's page in the *Canada Citizen*.

In 1887 her most ambitious work was published, "Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812," a drama. This volume is most highly thought of, and has assisted much in stimulating the study of Canadian history, more especially in regard to the war of 1812.

Her excellent knowledge of French led her to translate from Sulte, Le Moine, Le May, and other well-known French-Canadian writers, and among her fugitive pieces of verse are many excellent translations from the French of Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo, Philippe Desportes and others.

Nor was her pen devoted to literature alone. At a time when the doors of the University were closed to women she worked industriously by contributions to the daily press, and by discussions in the Women's Literary Club, in order to obtain for women the right to all college and university privileges in arts, science and medicine. She had the satisfaction of seeing her own daughter become a graduate of the University and assistant analyst in the School of Practical Science, Toronto. With her co-laborer, Dr Emily Stowe, Mrs. Curzon also assisted in founding the Women's Medical College. Another measure claimed her attention also. She was a strong advocate of Woman Suffrage, and with others she worked earnestly and with success in obtaining for married women more control of their own property, and in securing the measure of enfranchisement which women now enjoy in the Province of Ontario.

Those who knew her gentle and retiring nature would hardly have suspected the strength that lay beneath. One of her own sweet verses seems best to describe her life :

" For many a valiant deed is done,
 And great achievement wrought,
 Whose inspiration knows no source
 But pure and holy thought.
 For strung by Duty's steady hand,
 And thrilled by love's warm touch,
 Slight forms and simple names may serve
 At need to avail for much."

The Battle of Queenston Heights, October 13th, 1812.

BY MRS. S. A. CURZON.

A Paper read before the First Meeting of the Season of 1897-98 of the Women's Canadian Historical Society of Toronto.

The War of 1812-15 has taken its place in history. It was not an unimportant struggle between two insignificant combatants, as some have affected to consider it—a mere colonial quarrel in which it did not particularly matter which side won; it was a gauge of defiance thrown down by a people new at the art of governing, but which, having proved its powers against its late governors, had not wholly subsided into gravity after a hysterical interlude of self-gratulation. The declaration of war with England by the United States, in 1812 was, in fact, a fresh outburst of hysteria, and was conducted all through upon lines of excitement, which found vent in foregone conclusions and bombastic proclamations, such as even the protest of a party, the pretence of a faction, the heroism of a Lawrence, and the skill of a Harrison could not mask. But the challenge, unworthy as it was, had to be taken up, and England, already strained for men and means by the long struggle with the disturber of European peace, at once addressed herself also to the defence of her loyal colonies in North America. The protection by a mailed hand which the mother country had given Canada from the moment the Union Jack first floated over the ramparts, was enlarged and strengthened; excellent officers were in command, and these received the necessary Orders-in-Council and stood on the alert.

But not for offence! The mother-heart still yearned over her departed offspring, and *defence only* was "writ large" on all official documents. To this fact alone it is due that the War of 1812 lasted three years. Had Brock been at liberty to follow up his success at Detroit by an attack on Fort Niagara, the course of the struggle would have been changed, and, as far as can be seen, shortened considerably. Confined, however, as he was, to a strict line of defence only, he could do nothing better than see to his weapons, "keep his powder dry," and be ready for what might happen. And much was happening. The surrender of Fort Detroit by General Hull without

even a blow struck, had cut the American war party to the heart, and their clamours had shaken the American Government to the centre. Hull, an aged and able Revolutionary officer, was disgraced, and every post and fort was strengthened, while three armies were put on an active footing under good command, and money was freely voted for the war. Brock knew—for he could see it—that men were being massed all along the Niagara frontier, and was very conscious how weak were his own resources. The four or five regiments of regulars that could alone be spared by England from her bitter fight with Napoleon were divided and sub-divided among the various posts; Kingston, York and Niagara were points on which the enemy would be sure to pounce, and must be well defended. He knew he could count on a loyal, but far from numerous, militia; and he did all in his power to prepare them for the inevitable. He knew his men of all arms would never fail him, and they never did; yet he had ample cause for anxiety. So young a country had seldom been driven to make such a stand as Canada was called upon to make.

Detroit was taken on August 16th, and now October, the forerunner of winter, approached. There were evident signs that the enemy intended some move against the Canadian frontier. Brock thought it would certainly be against Fort George and the little town under the shelter of its few guns. There was nothing worth attacking up the river—a gun or two and a few men at Queenston, and a few more men at Fort Erie with other guns. Only at Fort George were there military stores of much value. Moreover, if that were carried the outposts would be taken almost necessarily. This may not have been Brock's absolute reasoning, but it is well known that up to the last he expected the impending attack would be upon Fort George, and in this view his officers generally agreed with him. How that expectation became modified is explained in a letter of which I hold the copyright as an appendix to my poem, "Laura Secord," a drama, and I refer to it here as an authority, because none but the readers of that volume have had an opportunity of seeing this valuable contribution to the history of the eventful day. The letter was written by Lieut.-Colonel Evans, of the 8th or King's Regiment, who was Acting Brigade-Major to the Forces at that date; and it was most obligingly lent to me by his son, Major R. J. Evans, at the request of the late George M. Evans, M.A., for use in my work. If I may be allowed to do so, I would commend the Notes and Appendices to "Laura Secord," a drama, etc., to the attention of such of our members as would desire to acquaint themselves fully with the personages and events most closely connected with the opening of the War of 1812 in the Niagara Peninsula.

Brigade-Major Evans dates his letter "Government House, Fort George, Oct. 15, 1812," and after narrating the instructions he had received from General Brock at dinner on the evening of the 11th October, part of which required him to cross the river with a message

to General Van Rensselaer, he says: "I reached Queenston early in the morning of the 12th. . . . And when about leaving Hamilton's house (Capt. Dennis' quarters) a scattered fire of musketry from the American shore took place, and on a ball entering the room, passing between us, I enquired, with surprise, the meaning of such unusual insolence. Capt. Dennis stating the practice to have existed more or less for some days, insomuch as to render ingress by the river door hazardous, I deemed it fitting first to cross the river. . . . I now begged Mrs. Dickson kindly to prepare a white handkerchief as a flag of truce, asking Mr. Dickson, who was a Captain of Militia, would he accompany me across the water. . . . I took Dickson by one hand and the flag in the other. We launched our frail canoe amidst an unsparing shower of shot which fell all around us; nor did the firing cease till the canoe became quite unmanageable, tossed about in the waters of the strong eddies; when, as if struck by shame at his dastardly attempt to deter us from our purpose, the enemy gave the signal to cease firing. I was thus relieved, and enabled on approaching the shore to observe more calmly all that was passing. On touching the ground, with water in the leaky canoe ankle deep, I was about, as was my custom, leaping ashore, when a sentinel from a guard brought to the spot, came to the charge with fixed bayonet, authoritatively commanded me not to leave the boat. To my inquiry for Colonel Solomon Van Rensselaer (the Adjutant-General), with whom I usually conferred, I was told he was sick. I then stated having an important message from General Brock for their commander, which, if inconvenient for their General to receive from me personally, I begged an official person might be immediately deputed to convey it to him. After some delay, Mr. Toche, the General's secretary, made his appearance, but his reply to General Brock's request being abrupt, and as I thought somewhat significant—'that nothing could be done till the day after to-morrow'—I ventured to remind him of General Brock's liberality towards their people which the fortune of war had thrown into his hands, entreating that he would again consult his General, and enable me to carry to mine something more satisfactory." (Col. Evan's message to Gen. Van Rensselaer was requesting the immediate exchange of the prisoners taken in the *Detroit* and *Caledonia* for an equal number of Americans Brock had released after the capture of *Detroit*.) "In compliance, as he stated, with my wishes, but more as it appears to be with an intent to consume my time, rendered precious from its being after midday, he detained me in my miserable position for two hours, and then returned, expressing the General's regret 'that the prisoners having been marched for Albany they could not instantler be brought back, but that I might assure General Brock, with his respects, that all should be settled to their mutual satisfaction the day after to-morrow.' I was now too anxious to depart to wish the parley prolonged, my mind being quite made up as to the enemy's intentions,

and to the course it was most fitting for me to pursue under the circumstances. It had not escaped me that their saucy numbers had been prodigiously swelled by a horde of half savage troops from Kentucky, Ohio and Tennessee, which evidently made it hazardous for their northern countrymen to show their accustomed respect for a flag of truce from a foe; but my most important discovery was their boats slung in the sides or fissures on the river bank, covered only by the brush, with indeed many decided indications that an attack on our shores could not be prudently delayed for a single day. Under such impression the first thing on reaching our own side was the removal by Mr. Dickson of his family from his own house on the beach, the very site of the prospective struggle, and giving note of preparation to the few Militia which, with the 49th flank companies, were all the immediate disposable force for the defence of Queenston."

It must not be overlooked that in 1812 Queenston was not merely the summer resort it is to-day. It was the head of the portage between Lakes Ontario and Huron, and a horse-railway—traces of which may still be seen at a point on the St. David's Road—facilitated a large traffic, which, beginning early in French occupancy of Canada, became after the Revolutionary War, a very important route of trade from both sides of the line. Mr. Thomas Dickson was the first postmaster on the Canadian side, and had large trade interests and storehouses at Queenston, as also had the Clarkes and Secords.

Lieutenant-Colonel Evans' letter continues: "Having to put the many posts on the line of communication on the *qui vive*, although I rode at full speed, it was 6 p.m. ere I reached Fort George. . . . I narrated to General Brock all that had occurred. . . . The General, evidently doubting at first, hesitated, but seeing my earnestness in rebuking his attendants of charging my being over-sanguine, and chagrin at their proffered bets against my predictions, he became unusually grave, desired I would follow him to the office, where at his request I succinctly recapitulated the days occurrences, adding my solemn conviction that not a moment was to be lost in effectually preparing for defence. The General now thanked me, approved of all that I had done, and, returning to the dining-room, directed officials to be immediately written and despatched by Provincial Dragoons, calling in the militia of the vicinity that same evening, those more distant to follow with all alacrity. I was directed to make all requisite preparations at headquarters. In this work I was busied till near 11 p.m., when, worn by fatigue, I stretched myself on the mattress. After a slumber of a few hours I was aroused by a distant cannonade soon after 2 a.m., October 13th, but without surprise, well-knowing whence the ominous sound came. The General, who, himself, had all in readiness, at once mounted his horse and proceeded for the post attacked. His *aides-de-camp* (Glegg and Macdonell) were awake and soon followed. Major-General Sheaffe, second in command, assumed charge at headquarters, but the impres-

sion on General Brock's mind being that the attempt at Queenston would prove only a feint to disguise his (the enemy's) real object from the creek in front of Fort Niagara, his apparent wish was that whilst all were held in readiness to act in any quarter, no decisive movement of the troops should take place till the enemy's intention were fully developed.

"The Indians and regular artillery were, however, promptly despatched, and the *elite* of the 41st, with an equal number of well-drilled Militia flank companies ready to follow on the first summons. As the day dawned—(This would be between 7 and 8 a.m. of an October morning)—the scouts I had sent out reporting no symptoms of hostile movement in the quarter indicated—(The creek in rear of Fort Niagara, now, I think, the site of Youngstown)—these troops all proceeded at double quick for the succour of Queenston, the debouching of which column on the main road appeared to be the signal for opening a brisk canonade from Fort Niagara on the troops, the town and the fort.

"Soon after," continues Lieutenant-Colonel Evans, "the news of the gallant Brock's unhappy fall reached us." . . . Thus showing, on incontrovertible evidence, how early in the morning, probably not nine o'clock, Brock was killed. The note which carried the mournful news to Fort George was from Captain Derinzy, commanding the 41st companies that had gone to the support of Queenston, and is quoted by Lieutenant-Colonel Evans thus: "He found on arriving at Queenston the enemy in possession of the opposite heights (that is, the heights upon which Brock's monument now stands and which overlook the town), and one heavy one-gun battery there; that the enfilading (of the river and landing place) on one side, too distant to be quite effective—then protected by his division—had been powerfully aided by Captain Holcroft, of the Royal Artillery, who, unmindful of consequences, boldly dashed his gun through the valley into Hamilton's courtyard within point blank range, thus succeeding in sinking some of the enemy's crowded boats, and damping the ardour of his troops for crossing. Seeing his critical position Captain Derinzy had sustained him by a party of the 41st regiment. He briefly mentioned that the spirited Brock, finding on his arrival the 41st Grenadiers and Militia, though resolutely defending the landing-place, hard pressed, had called to their aid the 49th light company from the Heights' summit, the key of the position. The enemy, profiting by this step, moved unperceived about a hundred and fifty men—and over a precipitous steep it was deemed impracticable for a human being to ascend—who suddenly appeared to the astonished General first on the mountain summit, and the next instant in possession of the redoubt, putting its defenders to the sword. The gallant spirit of Brock, ill-brooking to be thus foiled, with a courage deserving a better fate, hastily collected the weak 49th company and a few Militia, debouching from a stone building at the mountain's

brow ; with these little bands he spiritedly strove to regain his lost position, but in which daring attempt he was killed by a rifle ball entering under the left breast, passing out by the right shoulder. Captain Williams, by taking a wider range, made a second effort, but as the result proved, with a too inadequate force, the A.D.C. being mortally wounded and Captain Williams' head being partially scalped by a rifle ball."

A plain unvarnished tale, truly ; yet what a tragedy ! Side by side they lie now under one stone—the able General who had seen many fields, and the accomplished *aide-de-camp*, already Attorney-General of his Province, whose early fall on his first engagement, at the age of twenty-eight, is scarcely less touching than that of his beloved commander, who had accomplished his forty-third year only a few days previously.

Let us look at the field in that early morning light. A thriving village in a valley ; above it steep heights, and before it a rapid river which alone separates it from a fierce enemy at that moment crossing its force in boats, some of which land their men safely, others hit by the one gun on the heights, or the others, a little down the river, are sunk or overturned. Yet the enemy's force on Canadian ground increases, and Captain Dennis, with his two flank companies of the 49th and the Militia at hand—some of whom, as Robinson and Jarvis, belonged to the now classic York Volunteers—do their best to keep the invader in check until help shall come from Fort George. To them arrive the General, followed by his *aides*. He takes a rapid glance at the field, orders a piece to be trained a little lower, sees that Dennis with his few men defending the landing is hard pressed, and orders down to his support the light company on the hill. Instantly almost a hundred and fifty Americans appear on the summit (almost where his monument now stands), and begin to descend. The moment is critical—the enemy must be driven back. Gathering the few men of the 49th and militia at hand, under the shelter of a little stone building on the brow of the hill, they emerge upon the foe, the General crying in ringing tones, "Follow me, boys !" With a cheer the rush up the hill is made, and with effect, when from behind one of the trees that then clothed the heights thickly, a Kentucky bullet finds its billet in the General's heart, and all is confusion. "Push on, never mind me !" the hero cries as he falls. "Our gallant General fell on his left side within a few feet of where I stood," says the late Judge Jarvis, of Cornwall, who was a cadet of eighteen in 1812, in Auchinleck's history of the war of 1812. "Running up to him, I enquired, 'Are you much hurt, sir ?' He placed his hand on his breast but made no reply, and sunk slowly down." Gently they carried him out of the way of the fight still raging, and he breathed his last under a thorn tree near where his cenotaph now stands. And then the beloved corpse was still more gently carried to a house near—some say the house of Captain James Secord, where the body,

it was said, was covered with a heap of old army blankets to protect it from insult, for the gallant struggle went against us, notwithstanding the arrival of such small reinforcements as we know of from Fort George, itself in sore straits during a large part of that eventful day; and among the victorious assailants were some of those half-savage troops from Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee that Lieut.-Colonel Evans speaks of as unwilling even to respect a flag of truce. Why, then, should they respect a dead General? For two or three hours at least the Americans were in possession of Queenston, and the outrages they committed were disgraceful to the last degree. In the search for money and valuables no privacy was respected, and feather beds were ripped open with their swords and bayonets for concealed plunder.

What the feelings of the British must have been under these circumstances of defeat may be imagined, but there was no retreat; sullenly, but stubbornly, they kept their ground, waiting for further reinforcements from Fort George. One noble and brave woman, Mrs. Maria Hill, a soldier's wife, brought out food and lighed fires to carry tea to the starving men who had been called out before day-break on a cold October morning, and had not yet broken their fast; her babe crowing and cheering under the shelter of a wood-pile. Oh, beautiful sight!

There was great excitement as the news of the death of Brock spread over the peninsula; the Militia flocked in from every point; men long past service took up their weapons, and retired officers who had fought for England throughout the Revolutionary struggle hastened to offer their services to General Sheaffe; the moment was recognized as critical, and every hand was put forth to avert the danger. Old Captain Clench, a man approaching eighty, came in full of ardour, and turned away in despair when assured that he could be of no use on the field. Fort George itself was in straits; every available man had been sent to the relief of Queenston; hot shot was being fired from Fort Niagara setting buildings on fire, and rendering the security of three hundred American prisoners a matter of supreme difficulty. But there was no faltering, the Battle of Queenston Heights had still to be fought. Sheaffe, now in command, came upon the field by circuitous route. With him were Lieutenant McIntyre, of the 41st, with 140 men of his regiment, and some militia; another officer, William Martin, with every regular that could be spared, and some active Militia, and every active man from the posts on the line of communication were added. It was afternoon when Sheaffe reached the field, and the enemy were in full possession, both above and below. They had entrenched themselves strongly on the height, and fresh men were from time to time arriving from over the river. Captain Wool, an able young officer of the United States army, was in command at the summit, and his action throughout the fight that followed was brilliant and courageous to

the last. But it was of no avail. Sheaffe's plan was to enclose the enemy and drive him back the way he had come. Inspired by Sheaffe's arrival, and burning with vengeance for the loss of their beloved General in the morning, the troops that had held their ground against such odds for so many hours addressed themselves to the fight with fury. The village was cleared, the Americans threw themselves into their boats with terrific precipitancy, for the "Green Tigers" fought as though mad. On the heights the tide had turned; the lost redoubt was retaken, and the enemy began to flee. Some one ran up a flag of truce, but the brave Wool tore it down with his own hands, and looked for the reinforcements that should save him. But they did not come. Sheaffe was pressing on him steadily, yet help came not, for the forces assembled on the other side refused to cross, so great was the terror inspired among them by the accounts given by the fugitives already arrived. Their officers rode among them, by turns threatening and entreating; all to no purpose, they would not budge. At last the intrepid Wool saw that the game was up. Closer and closer pressed the little British force, and at length his men broke into a run, not an orderly retreat—it was impossible—but a veritable panic, and in the *mêlée* men threw themselves down the steep precipices on the river bank to perish miserably by ~~fall~~ or flood. *The Battle of Queenston Heights was won.*

I cannot close this paper without one word further. So completely is the Battle of Queenston Heights enshrined in the halo that must forever encircle the name of Brock, the brilliant commander and able administrator, that few persons recognize or remember that it was Sheaffe who won it. Not a great officer, and somewhat of a martinet, Sheaffe, nevertheless, was a valuable man, and did credit to the service, and he was deservedly honored by promotion. *Th*

The Battle of Queenston Heights was a terrible struggle marked by nothing less than a tragedy; the death of Brock touched the national heart to the quick, and the 13th of October, 1812, must ever remain a sacred day in the annals of Canada and Britain.



"Deeds Speak"

**WOMENS'
CANADIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
of TORONTO**

**Recollections of
Mary Warren Breckenridge**

.... BY

Catherine F. Lefroy

TRANSACTION NO. 3

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