

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE army under Schuyler took possession of the Isle aux Noix, twelve miles south of St John's, on the evening of the 4th of September, the day of the arrival of the General at Isle la Motte. On the following day he drew up the declaration already mentioned, and sent Allen and Brown among the Canadians with it, and then prepared to push on to St. John's, notwithstanding his effective force did not exceed one thousand men. With these he embarked early on the morning of the 6th, leaving the baggage and provisions, except a supply for four days, at the Isle aux Noix. They proceeded to within two miles of St. John's without molestation, when the garrison opened a harmless cannonade upon them from the fort. They pushed forward half a mile nearer the post, and landed in a deep, close swamp, which extended very nearly to the fort. There they landed and marched in the best order possible in such a tangled way, with a detachment from Waterbury's Connecticut troops, under Major Hobby, as a flank for the left wing, that moved a little in advance of the main body. Hobby was attacked when crossing a deep, muddy brook, by a party of Indians and some Tories, who delivered a heavy fire ; but the loss on both sides was trifling. The republicans lost only a sergeant, corporal, and three privates killed, and one missing, and eight privates wounded, of whom three died the ensuing night. Hobby

was shot through the thigh, Captain Mead through the shoulder, and Lieutenant Brown in the hand, but all soon recovered of their wounds. This was the first blood shed in the actual invasion of Canada. The assailants were driven back, and the Americans, taught by the event to be more cautious, concentrated their forces on the approach of night, and cast up an intrenchment for their defense, in the event of a sudden attack.

In the evening, a gentleman living in the neighborhood entered General Schuyler's tent very cautiously, and gave him information that caused him to fall back to the Isle aux Noix. He informed Schuyler that there were no regular troops in Canada, except the twenty-sixth regiment, under the command of General Richard Prescott, most of whom were at St. John's and Chamblée, the latter a fort, twelve miles further down the Sorel than the former. He said there were one hundred Indians at St. John's, and quite a large body of savages were with Colonel Guy Johnson at Montreal ; that the works at St. John's were complete and strong, and plentifully furnished with cannon and stores ; that one armed vessel, pierced for sixteen guns, was launched, and nearly ready to sail ; and that he believed not one Canadian would join the republicans, while all would remain strictly neutral. He assured the general that they would be pleased to have a republican army penetrate their province, provided the safety of their persons and property might be insured, and they were paid in gold and silver for all they might furnish the troops ; that he thought it imprudent to attack St. John's at that time, and advised Schuyler to send some parties among the inhabitants, while the remainder of the army should draw back to the Isle aux Noix, from whence he might have intercourse with Laprairie and Montreal.

Much of this information proved to be deceptive, but it so impressed Schuyler as truth that he called a Council of War early on the morning of the 7th, to whom he communicated it.* The result was, that considering the forward state of the armed vessel at St. John's, it was "unanimously agreed to be indispensably necessary to take measures for preventing her entrance into the lake. It was the opinion of the council that this could only be effected at the Isle aux Noix. The weak state of the artillery affording no prospect of silencing the enemy's guns under the protection of which they were rigging her, it was therefore resolved to return, without delay, to the Isle aux Noix, throw a boom across the channel, erect the proper works for its defense, then wait for certain intelligence touching the intentions of the Canadians, and when reinforced, send a strong detachment into the country by land, should the Canadians favor such a design."†

When this course was determined on, Schuyler gave immediate orders for the embarkation of the troops "without hurry and without noise;" and they returned to the Isle aux Noix in the same order as they left it—the New York troops in front, the Connecticut troops next, and the row-galleys in the rear of all.

On arriving at the Isle aux Noix, General Schuyler sent a detailed account of operations in that quarter to the President of Congress, in which he observed :

"I can not estimate the obligations I lie under to General Montgomery for the many important services he has done, and daily does, in which he has had little assistance from me, as I have not enjoyed a moment's health since I left Fort George. I am now so low as not to be able to hold the pen. Should we not be able to do any thing de-

* The council was composed of Generals Schuyler and Montgomery, Colonel Waterbury and Lieutenant-Colonel Whiting of the Fifth Connecticut Regiment, and Lieutenant-Colonel Ritzema of the First New York Regiment.

† Schuyler's Orderly Book.

cisively in Canada I shall judge it best to move from this, which is a very wet and unhealthy part of the country, unless I receive your orders to the contrary.”*

This letter, which reached Philadelphia on the 18th, occasioned much uneasiness in Congress, for it was apparent that the success of the expedition into Canada was most to be desired of all the operations of the campaign. All other business was suspended for the purpose of discussing its contents, and after an animated debate, Messrs. Deane, Rutledge, Chase, and Jay, were appointed a committee to draft a letter to General Schuyler on the subject. On the 20th it was addressed to him by the President of Congress, who said :

“I am directed by the Congress to express their approbation of your conduct, as stated in your letter. Your taking possession of the Isle aux Noix, and the proposed measures for preventing the enemy’s vessels from entering the lake, appear to them highly expedient and necessary. The Congress have such a sense of the importance of that post as to wish it may not be abandoned without the most mature consideration, or the most pressing necessity. They view the expedition intrusted to your care as of the greatest consequence to the general cause; and as they clearly foresee that its influence, whether successful or otherwise, will be great and extensive, they are desirous that nothing necessary to give it a fortunate issue, may be omitted. They have ordered all the forces raised in New York immediately to join you; and those under General Wooster to march immediately to Albany; from whence, if you should think such reinforcement necessary, you will be pleased to order them. Should you stand in need of further reinforcements, the Congress desire you will apply to General Washington.

“The Congress repose the highest confidence in the abilities, the zeal, and the alacrity of the officers and forces employed on this expedition. They are determined to spare neither men nor money; and should the Canadians remain neuter, flatter themselves that the enterprise will be crowned with success, notwithstanding the great and various difficulties to which it has been and still is exposed.

“It is with great concern that the Congress hear of your indisposi-

* Schuyler’s MS. Letter Books.

tion. They desire me to assure you of their warmest wishes for your recovery, and to request that, in discharging the duties of your station, you will not omit the attention due to the reëstablishment of your health."

Several members of the Congress wrote to Schuyler privately, urging him to be careful of his health, for they felt assured that the success of the campaign depended chiefly upon him.

"It gives me great concern," wrote Thomas Lynch, of South Carolina, "to find your health so much injured. Don't you know that it is the duty of a general to take the utmost care to bring the army into the field in good health? If so, how much care is to be taken of the head? You must spare your body, and not expect it can possibly keep pace with such a spirit. If you push it too far, it will leave you and us in the lurch; in short, you will kill our general.

"I see the difficulties with which you are surrounded. These can only add glory to the success of your enterprise. The Congress is awake at last, and feel the importance of your expedition—that every thing depends on its success—and I think you may depend on every support that is consistent with the delay that attends popular assemblies."

After returning to the Isle aux Noix, General Schuyler made strenuous efforts to hasten forward reënforcements. He commenced some fortifications there preparatory to the reception of his artillery, then hourly expected, and also the construction of a boom to obstruct the channel. In the course of a few days his little army was swelled to more than seventeen hundred men.

But there was a foe at work in the camp more insidious and more to be dreaded than the enemy in the field. Malaria commenced its destructive ravages. The Isle aux Noix is situated in the midst of a low, marshy country; and before the troops had been there a week more than six hundred of them were on the sick list. And the unwholsomeness of the air so greatly aggravated General

Schuyler's disorders that he was soon brought to the borders of the grave. Bilious fever and severe rheumatism attacked him alternately, and he was confined to his bed most of the time, with great suffering of mind and body. Yet he persevered in duty, and did not yield until menaced with speedy death.

From Livingston, Allen, and Brown, Schuyler received such intelligence concerning affairs in Canada, and the temper of the people, that on the 10th he detached eight hundred men, under General Montgomery, in the direction of St. John's. These consisted of portions of Hinman's, Waterbury's, McDougall's, and Van Schaick's regiments. They landed about three miles from St. John's, at nine o'clock in the evening, near the place where the republicans had thrown up breast-works on the afternoon of the 6th. From that point Montgomery sent Lieutenant-Colonel Ritzema of the New Yorkers, with five hundred men, to take post on the road leading from St. John's to Laprairie, in order to cut off the communication between St. John's and the country, according to General Schuyler's orders to that officer, issued before his departure from the Isle aux Noix. They had not proceeded far when a false alarm created a panic, and the troops fled back in confusion, some of them turning into the woods to avoid the officers at the breast-work, who, they apprehended, would again command them to move forward. When mustered, in order to advance again, Ritzema had only about fifty men. These were soon increased to two hundred, but the day was so far spent that it was determined to delay further attempts until morning.

Early the next morning, at the request of several officers, Montgomery called a Council of War, composed of himself, Colonel Waterbury, Lieutenant-Colonel Ritze-

ma, Majors Elmore, Zedwitz, and Dimon, and Captains Starr, Smith, Bearsley, Reed, Brown, Weissenfeldts, Willett, Mott, Lyon, Yates, McCracken, and Livingston. It was unanimously determined to proceed, and the consent of the troops was obtained by a vote—a mode of proceeding so unmilitary and detrimental to all authority, that Montgomery consented to it only on the compulsion imposed by the exigencies of the case. Just as the detachment was about to march, intelligence came that the enemy's armed vessel was lying only half a mile from them, and it was thought prudent to reëmbark, and return to the Isle aux Noix. While this matter was under consideration, half the detachments from the New England regiments embarked without orders.

On the way back to the Isle aux Noix, the general ordered the boats to stop at a point eight miles from St. John's, to try the temper of the troops by asking them to march from that point against the fort. The proposition was voted down. "When the halt was made at the point," says the narrator from whose notes these facts have been drawn, "the general and captains, with a few guards, disembarked; and on a cry by one of the men that *boats were coming!* the troops were with difficulty restrained from pushing off without their officers!"*

Montgomery was mortified by this bad conduct of the soldiers, and foresaw nothing but disaster before him, if such were the men on whom he was to depend for support in the invasion of Canada. Some persons at the time had strong suspicions that Ritzema was either a coward or a traitor. He deserted to the enemy within a year from that time; and Major Zedwitz was

* MS. Narrative by General Montgomery.

cashiered for an alleged attempt at a treasonable correspondence with Governor Tryon.

Schuyler and Montgomery now arranged a plan for an immediate attack upon St. John's. The troops under Ritzema, who had returned to duty, seemed heartily ashamed of their "unbecoming behavior," and Montgomery considered their sensibility to ridicule as a promise of better conduct in the future. Schuyler accordingly issued orders on the 13th for an embarkation on the following day of the artillery that had arrived, and of the whole army on the 15th. He was then too ill to leave his bed, but on the 14th he felt so much better that he had hopes of moving with the troops. "But by ten o'clock at night," he said, in a letter to Washington, "my disorder re-attacked me with redoubled violence, and every fair prospect of a speedy recovery vanished." Yet he lingered in that unhealthy spot a day or two longer, still hoping to move with the army. At last he was compelled to transfer the general command to Montgomery, and take passage in a covered boat for Ticonderoga, where he arrived at three o'clock in the afternoon of the 18th, feeling somewhat invigorated. "I find myself much better," he wrote to Washington, on the 20th, "as the fever has left me, and hope soon to return where I ought and wish to be, unless a barbarous relapse should dash the cup of hope from my lips."

An hour after Schuyler left the Isle aux Noix, he met Colonel Seth Warner, with one hundred and seventy Green Mountain Boys, in boats, on their way to the camp, "being the first," the general said, "that appeared of that boasted corps." Part of the corps had already mutinied and deserted, and some had been left at Crown Point. Captain Allen's company of the same corps, "every

man of which was raised in Connecticut," arrived at Ticonderoga on the 19th ; Colonel Bedell's New Hampshire troops had arrived on the 16th ; Captain Henry B. Livingston's corps had already passed down the lake ; and Captain Lamb, with his artillery, was expected to join Montgomery on the 20th. The last-mentioned corps was of great importance, for there were none in the invading army that knew any thing about the proper management of cannon. Some troops yet remained at Ticonderoga, and others had just arrived. Schuyler at once issued orders for the most of these to embark immediately for Montgomery's army, and by this means a reënforcement of several hundred men was given to it.

Schuyler found the promises of convalescence fallacious. Fever and rheumatism had reduced him to a skeleton, and he found no relief at Ticonderoga. He was also constantly annoyed by the bad conduct of troops, and in his vexation of mind and body, he wrote as follows to the Continental Congress, on the 25th of September :

"The vexation of spirit under which I labor, that a barbarous complication of disorders should prevent me from reaping those laurels for which I have so unweariedly wrought, since I was honored with this command ; the anxiety of mind I have suffered since my arrival here lest the army should starve, occasioned by a scandalous want of subordination and inattention to my orders in some of the officers that I left to command at the different posts ; the vast variety of disagreeable and vexatious incidents that almost every hour arise, in some department or other, not only retard my cure, but have put me considerably back for some days past. If Job had been a general, in my situation, his memory had not been so famous for patience. But the glorious end we have in view, and which I have a confident hope will be attained, will atone for all."*

Two days after writing this letter he received the one from the President of Congress, already given, approving

* Schuyler's MS. Letter Books.

of his conduct, and urging him to take good care of his health. This, and the private letters sent from Philadelphia, soothed his spirit.

“The honorable Congress have my warmest acknowledgments,” he said in reply, “and they may rest assured that nothing on my part shall be wanting to insure that success they so earnestly wish; and I hope soon to congratulate them on it. Whilst I deprecate the untimely misfortune which prevents me from sharing in the immediate glory, it was perhaps inflicted in such a critical hour to serve the common cause, for if I had not arrived here on the very day I did, as sure as God lives the army would have starved.”

It was, indeed, fortunate for the army that Schuyler returned to Ticonderoga at that time. He found every thing connected with the forwarding of provisions in the greatest disorder. Neglect, dishonesty, speculation—every thing calculated to rob the army of necessary stores were rife, and provisions on the way were detained by neglect or indolence, in a most shameful manner. “The letters I have been obliged to write to several officers,” he said to the Congress, “I have been under the necessity of couching in terms that I should be ashamed of, did not necessity apologise for me.” He then gave in detail illustrations of the neglect, and added, “the horrid anxiety I suffered from this dreadful situation of the army is now abated, and I hope for so sufficient a restoration as to enable me to join soon.”

Less cautious than Schuyler, Montgomery left the Isle aux Noix on the day when the invalid commanding general departed for Ticonderoga, and advanced upon St. John's with about one thousand men. Major Brown had been sent with one hundred and fifty continental troops and thirty Canadian recruits to reconnoiter the vicinity of Chamblée and make friends of the inhabitants; Major James Livingston had gone farther down the river and

was collecting the inhabitants under his standard ; and Colonel Ethan Allen was near the St. Lawrence again, "preaching politics" and beating up for recruits. Alarmed by the temper shown by the inhabitants, and the menaces of the invading republicans, Sir Guy Carleton had issued a proclamation in French, setting forth the disloyalty of the king's subjects, and offering pardon to all who should, within a given time, return to their allegiance and join the standard of the crown. But his proclamation, and the efforts of the French clergy and nobility, were of little avail. Hardly one hundred Canadians were induced to join the garrison at St. John's, and few Indians had taken up the hatchet for the king. Carleton, in despair, wrote to General Gage at Boston, "I had hopes of holding out for this year, had the savages remained firm ; but now we are on the eve of being overrun and subdued."

Montgomery arrived at his old encampment near St. John's on the evening of the 17th of September, and made a forward movement early the next morning.

"I take the opportunity of Fulmer's return with the Oneidas," Montgomery wrote to Schuyler, "to acquaint you of our arrival here on the 17th, in the evening. Yesterday morning I marched, with five hundred men, to the north side of St. John's, where we found a party of the king's troops, with field-pieces. This party had beaten off Major Brown a few hours before, who had imprudently thrown himself in their way, depending on our more early arrival, which, through the dilatoriness of our young troops, could not be sooner effected. The enemy, after an ill-directed fire for some minutes, retired with precipitation, and lucky for them they did, for had we known their situation (which the thickness of the woods prevented our finding out till it was too late) there would not a man of them have returned. The old story of *treachery* spread among the men as soon as we saw the enemy. We were trepanned—drawn under the guns of the fort, and what not. The *Woodsmen** were not so expert at firing as I expected, and too many

* The Green Mountain Boys and New Hampshire troops.

of them hung back. Had we kept silence at first, before we were discovered, we should have gotten a field-piece or two."*

The insubordination which had annoyed Schuyler and Montgomery so continually had performed its disastrous work, and prevented a small but very important victory. Caution, secrecy, and concert of action were out of the question; and the leader, utterly powerless to command them, yielded with as much patience as his fiery spirit could maintain. He pushed on a little further to the northwest, and at the junction of the roads leading respectively from St. John's to Longeuil and Chamblée, he formed an entrenched camp of three hundred men to cut off the supplies for the enemy sent from the interior. Having accomplished this important work, he hastened back to the camp to bring his artillery up to bear upon the walls of the fort. These were too light to perform very essential service. Captain Lamb, with the heavier cannon had not yet arrived.

Montgomery now commenced the investment of Fort St. John. His preparations were meager, for his artillery was light, his mortars defective, his ammunition scarce, and his gunners unpracticed in their duties. Yet he worked on cheerfully. Schuyler, tireless in his efforts, was sending on additions to his forces and supplies of food, as full and as fast as circumstances would allow; and Montgomery was soon constrained, in gratitude, to exclaim, in a letter to his chief, "What does not this army owe to your patriotism and indefatigable labors!"

A battery was completed on the 21st, on a point of land that commanded the fort and the vessels in the river, and another was cast up on the east side of the stream, some distance below the fort. For a week the seige went

* Autograph Letter, Sept. 19, 1775.

slowly on. Disease, frightful in its effects, broke out among the soldiers. The ground was low and swampy, and the trees, small and thickly planted, completely shut out the sun. Deadly malaria arose from the dank soil, and Montgomery perceived that the decimation of his army would speedily take place, if he should remain there.

At this juncture Captain Lamb arrived with his heavy ordnance, and on the 26th of September, he bedded a thirteen inch mortar near the battery, on the east side of the river, and hurled many shot and shell against the enemy. But the distance from the fort was too great to allow much execution from the bombardment, and Montgomery resolved to abandon the batteries and take a new position nearer the fort, where the ground was firm and the water wholesome. But the troops, thoroughly imbued with the spirit of independence, and judging for themselves that an attack would be unsuccessful, refused to acquiesce in the plan of their leader. Insubordination was at once rampant, and the general was informed that most of the troops would leave him should he attempt coercion by virtue of his authority.

Unable either to punish them for their mutiny, or to convince them of their error, Montgomery yielded so far as to call a Council of War. It resulted, as was expected, in a decision against his plan. This triumph of insubordination made the recusants more bold. They set all law at defiance, and alarming disorder pervaded the American camp. At length a better spirit prevailed. Montgomery controlled his feelings, and kept his impulses under the restraints of his judgment. He was eloquent in speech and possessed most winning ways. The mutinous knew him to be brave and firm; and these faculties and attributes, working in harmony, accomplished what official

power had failed to achieve. His plans were finally adopted; and on the 7th of October the camp was moved to higher ground, northwest of the fort, where intrenchments were thrown up, and the investment was made complete. But for want of siege guns the republicans were unable to breach the walls of the fort, or do much damage to the out-works of the enemy.*

* Autograph letter, Sept. 24, 1775.