

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE perfectly clean record of General Schuyler's civil and military character while in command of the Northern Department, which was made by the Committee of investigation appointed by Congress in the spring of 1777, and by the court-martial in the autumn of 1778, seemed to be a sufficient reason why the tongue of slander should cease. It did cease, and honorable men, in and out of the army, who had believed false accusations to be true, hastened to express their convictions to the contrary.* No whisper

*The late Wm. J. Davies wrote to me as follows, under date of August 9, 1859: "A short time since I made some copies for Mr. Bancroft, from General Glover's letter-book, which had been loaned to him for that purpose, among which was one written at Stillwater, giving his opinion of the transactions which resulted in the evacuation of Ticonderoga, and the march of Burgoyne on to Saratoga. He mentions the existence of great clamors raised against Schuyler and St. Clair, in consequence of the fall of that fortress, and the subsequent reverses of the fleeing army, and in which he says he also had sympathized, he being at that time at Peekskill; 'but,' says he, 'on my arrival at the seat of war, I, of course, had better opportunities of observing and judging, and it gives me pleasure to say that I have altered my opinion, and am satisfied that all was done that was possible to prevent that catastrophe, and that General Schuyler was no way blamable.' I conceive this letter," Mr. Davis continues, "of immense importance in connection with Schuyler's military reputation; and completely refutes the charge of a want of capacity in his manner of conducting that campaign."

General Glover was one of the New England officers with Schuyler in the field, who so warmly expressed regret when he left the Northern Department. His letter is a specimen of the testimony given by many of the New England officers, who were well informed respecting Schuyler's military character. They did this in the face of

against him as a brave, skilful and judicious military commander was afterward heard during the remainder of his life, which was prolonged more than a quarter of a century from the time of his trial—a period of political tempests in which he was an active participant. He was regarded with affection and reverence by the people of his State as their saviour from the horrors of an invasion by civilized and savage men, who would have desolated the fairest portions of it but for General Schuyler's timely and continual exertions; and the whole country, so soon as his immense and patriotic labors were revealed, when truth had swept away from them the smoke of jealousy and detraction, honored him as the chief instrument in defeating the capital scheme of the British ministry for enslaving the colonies.

For more than sixty years after the death of General Schuyler the great importance of that patriot's public services in the Northern Department was never questioned. The late Chief Justice Kent, writing of him, said: "In the prejudices of their sectional compatriots, and often suffered in consequence.

Among those who honorably defended General Schuyler was the Rev. Cotton Mather Smith, who was Chaplain of a Connecticut regiment. So soon as he was satisfied that the character of General Schuyler was unjustly attacked, he openly espoused his cause and endeavored to vindicate him, by which course he offended and alienated many of his own friends. Long years afterward, this generous conduct of Mr. Smith became known to General Schuyler, and the latter wrote to the former from New York (1795), saying: "If the legislature had continued its session at Poughkeepsie, I intended myself the pleasure of paying you a visit, personally to have conveyed those sentiments of esteem and affection with which I am deeply impressed for a character who generously interposed in my favor when calumny reigned triumphant. I could only be supported by men like you and an approving conscience."

In further testimony of his gratitude to Mr. Smith, General Schuyler sent him a quarter cask of wine.

acuteness of intellect, profound thought, indefatigable activity, exhaustless energy, pure patriotism, and persevering and intrepid public efforts, we had no superior."* And Daniel Webster said to his grandson upon a social occasion: "When a life of your grandfather is to be published I should like to write a preface. I was brought up with New England prejudices against him, but I consider him as second only to Washington in the services he rendered to the country in the war of the Revolution. His zeal and devotion to the cause, under difficulties which would have paralyzed the efforts of most men, and his fortitude and courage when assailed by malicious attacks upon his public and private character, *every one of which was proved to be false*, have impressed me with a strong desire to express publicly my sense of his great qualities."†

During the stormy period, in the political history of our country, when the elements of conflicting opinion crystallized into the shapes of the Federal and Republican parties, and the warfare (in which Schuyler actively engaged) was carried on with a bitterness of personal feeling now almost inconceivable, not one of the rumors against his reputation started during the war was mentioned. The slanders had all been so amply refuted that they seemed no longer to occupy a place in men's minds. His eminent public services in the campaign of 1777, and his courage and ability were never questioned until a distinguished historian, strangely misreading, it seems to me, the correspondence of the General at that time, and as strangely misconceiving the nature of his efforts, came to

* American Portrait Gallery.

† See "Correspondence and Remarks upon Bancroft's History of the Northern Campaign of 1777, and the Character of General Schuyler." By GEORGE L. SCHUYLER, page 25.

the conclusion that he was an incapable coward, and wrote as follows in a rapid review of those services :*

“ Meantime, the British were never harried by the troops with Schuyler,† against whom public opinion was rising. Men reasoned rightly, that, if Ticonderoga was untenable, he should have known it, and given timely orders for its evacuation, instead of which he had been heaping up stores there to the last.‡ To screen his popularity, he insisted that the retreat was made without the least hint from himself, and was ‘ ill-judged and not warranted from necessity.’ With manly frankness Saint Clair assumed the sole responsibility of the praiseworthy act which saved to the country many of its bravest defenders.§

“ Schuyler owed his place to his social position, not to military talents. Anxious, and suspected of a want of personal courage, he found everything go ill under his command. To the Continental troops of Saint Clair, who were suffering from the loss of their clothes and tents, he was unable to restore confidence ; nor could he rouse the people.|| The choice for governor of New York fell on George Clin-

* Bancroft’s History of the United States, chapter xxi. volume ix.

† This assertion seems very strange in the light of historical facts and the information in the hands of the historian when he wrote, for he had all of the Letter Books of General Schuyler, and the mass of letters written to him, in his possession when he prepared these disparaging remarks.

The reader who may have perused the records of this campaign in the Northern Department, in the few preceding chapters of this volume, cannot fail to perceive the injustice of the reflections upon the character of General Schuyler, indulged in by Mr. Bancroft, and comments upon them might appear unnecessary. A few notes seem to be called for.

‡ See his vindication in his quoted correspondence and at his trial.

§ General Schuyler, on no occasion (and particularly on this occasion), ever attempted to “ screen his popularity,” or, as he is charged in another place (page 361), felt “ a dread of clamor, shirking the responsibility of giving definite instructions.” On the contrary, he was ever unmindful of popularity, so long as he believed his conduct to be right ; and instead of St. Clair assuming all the responsibility, it was shared with all the general officers who were with him, according to their letter to General Schuyler, mentioned on page 240.

|| I have nowhere found a shadow of a foundation for this assertion. He was never suspected of a want of personal courage excepting by those persons who had been deceived by the falsehoods of his enemies, as the writer ought to have known.

ton. 'His character,' said Washington to the Council of Safety, 'will make him peculiarly useful at the head of your State.' Schuyler wrote: 'His family and connections do not entitle him to so distinguished a preëminence.*' The aid of Vermont was needed; Schuyler would never address its Secretary except in his 'private capacity.'† There could be no hope of a successful campaign, but with the hearty coöperation of New England; yet Schuyler gave leave for one half of its militia to go home at once, and the rest to follow in three weeks,‡ and then called upon Washington to supply their places by troops from the south of the Hudson River, saying to his friends that one Southern soldier was worth two from New England.§

"On the twenty-second, long before Burgoyne was ready to advance, Schuyler retreated to a position four miles below Fort Edward.|| Here again he complained of his 'exposure to immediate ruin.' His friends urged him to silence the growing suspicion of his cowardice;¶

* The historian gives no authority for this statement. The known cordial relations, political and personal, which existed between Schuyler and Clinton at that time, make it seem improbable that he made such an assertion. It might have been made in some letter written to Schuyler.

† The reason for this punctilio is given in a note on page 186 of this volume, and fully justifies General Schuyler. The reason is also given by Mr. Bancroft, on page 360, volume ix.

‡ This, in the light of facts revealed by General Schuyler in his letters, from which quotations have been made on pages 242, 256 and others of this volume, seems to be a most ungenerous reflection.

§ In none of his letters to Washington, asking for reinforcements, have I found Schuyler intimating any such desire. No wish for a substitution of troops "from the south of Hudson's River" is anywhere expressed in his official letters; nor do I find any allusion to the comparative value of soldiers from different sections.

|| According to the Journal of General Riedesel, Burgoyne was *then* "ready to advance," and on that very day ordered General Fraser to move on to Fort Edward. Two days later General Riedesel was ordered forward, and on the 26th, according to Schuyler's letter, Fraser's troops and Indians attacked pickets at Fort Edward. Five days later still, Burgoyne made his head-quarters at Fort Edward.

¶ "From the nature of your department and other unavoidable causes," William Duer wrote to Schuyler on the 29th of July, "you have not, during the course of this war, had an opportunity of evincing that spirit which I and your more intimate friends know you to possess. Of this circumstance prejudice takes a cruel advantage, and malice lends an easy ear to her dictates. You will not, I am sure, see

he answered: "If there is a battle I shall certainly expose myself more than is prudent."* To the New York Council of Safety he wrote on the twenty-fourth: "I mean to dispute every inch of ground with Burgoyne, and retard his descent as long as possible;" and in less than a week, without disputing anything, he retreated to Saratoga, having his heart set on a position at the juncture of the Mohawk and Hudson. The courage of the commander being gone, his officers and his army became spiritless; and, as his only resource, he solicited aid from Washington with unreasoning importunity.†

this place till your conduct gives the lie to this insinuation, as it has done before to every other which your enemies have so industriously circulated." This was written on the day when Congress ordered an investigation concerning the evacuation of Ticonderoga, and the faction opposed to Schuyler were filling the ears of the members of that body with insinuations of his cowardice and treason, and threatening what was done four days later, namely, an order for him to repair to Philadelphia. This is the foundation of the historian's remark.

* This was not said in reply to any such letter from his friends. In a letter to John Jay, Schuyler, after mentioning that the enemy had appeared near Fort Edward; that a battle seemed imminent, and that, in consequence of the feebleness of his own force, he should avoid one, if necessary, he said: "It is not impossible but it may take place, and as the fate of every person engaged in it is uncertain, as I shall certainly be there, and in order to inspire my troops shall expose myself more than it is prudent for a commanding officer to do, I may possibly get rid of the cares of life, or fall into their hands." It will be seen that the historian, in quoting only a part of the sentence, has given it an aspect entirely different from what it bears with its context.

† This sentence, like that quoted in the last note before this, the historian has wrested from its context, and thereby it is made to assume an aspect entirely different from what it wears in the original. The whole sentence reads as follows, and is the summing up after a statement of the forlorn condition of his army: "Should it be asked what line of conduct I mean to hold amidst this variety of difficulties and distress, I would answer, to dispute every inch of ground with General Burgoyne and retard his descent into the country as long as possible, *without the least hopes of being able to prevent it ultimately, unless I am reinforced from General Washington, or by a respectable body of militia.*" This letter is quoted entire on page 242 of this volume. The unfairness of the historian in omitting that part of the sentence which I have put in italics, is very apparent; and the insinuation that General Schuyler was a boaster and a coward seems cruel in the extreme. By such a suppression of a part of a sentence it may

After alluding to the few reinforcements which Washington had sent to the Northern Department, and the anxiety of the Commander-in-chief, Mr. Bancroft writes: "Alarmed by Schuyler's want of fortitude, he ordered to the north Arnold, who was fearless, and Lincoln, who was acceptable to the militia of the Eastern States. At the same time, he bade Schuyler 'never despair.'"* Commenting upon Washington's hopefulness, he says: "All this while Schuyler continued to despond;"† and then, quoting a part of a sentence of a letter in which that general alluded to the possibility of Burgoyne's reaching Albany, he says: "The next day, flying from a shadow cast before him, he moved his army to the first island in the mouth of the Mohawk river. He pitied the man who should succeed him, and accepted the applause of his admirers at Albany for the wisdom of his safe retreat."‡

be easily proven that Washington was a traitor to his country. The reader who may peruse the whole of Schuyler's letter from which this part of a sentence has been wrested in support of cruel insinuations will perceive, too, that the General's urgent calls for reinforcements were not made with "unreasoning importunity." His army was in a most critical situation.

* Schuyler asked Washington to send him an efficient and spirited brigadier, to help him mould raw militia into soldiers; and, instead of being alarmed by the general "want of fortitude," he simply complied with his request. See pages 232 and 233 of this volume.

† For remarks upon this point, see page 242 of this volume.

‡ The historian omits to mention the important fact that this movement to the Mohawk was in accordance with the unanimous vote of his general officers, in a council of war. See page 256 of this volume. See, also, page 309 for the context of the letter in which he expressed his pity for the man who should succeed him. Instead of the addressors of General Schuyler, here alluded to, being his "admirers at Albany," a large number of them were refugees from their estates and homes on the upper Hudson, then occupied by Burgoyne, and were not likely to be the "admirers" of any man whom they (the best judges) had reasons for believing was an imbecile or a coward.

A little further on he accuses Schuyler of bringing upon Stark "the censure of Congress" for disobedience,* and then says that "on the first of August, it [Congress] relieved Schuyler from the command by an almost unanimous vote, and, on the fourth, eleven States elected Gates his successor.† Before he assumed command, Fort Stanwix [Schuyler] was safe, and the victory of Bennington achieved; yet it hastened to vote him [Gates] all the power and all the aid which Schuyler, in his moods of despondency, had entreated."‡

Commenting upon this portion of our national history, an unprejudiced, acute and thoroughly-informed biographer and historian, after speaking of the unfounded prejudice against Schuyler, and his own bluntness of expression sometimes in his correspondence, says :

"As a gentleman of strong and cultivated mind, integrity, honor, and public spirit, none stood higher in his own State, or possessed more entirely the confidence of his co-patriots. * * * Now and then, he incautiously disturbed the nerves of Congress by the tenor of his letters. A friend writes to him from that body : ' You know Congress, like a hysteric woman, wants cordials. Write truths, without making any reflections of your own.' Some of his letters to the Legislature of Massachusetts assumed a tone but little calculated to allay jealousies or gain friends.§ This was impolitic, but it would in no

* Instead of bringing the censures of Congress upon Stark, General Schuyler (see letter to Lincoln, on page 263 of this volume) sympathized with him, and laid his case favorably before Congress.

† This was done on the receipt of Washington's letter, declining to make any appointment. See page 307 of this volume.

‡ This is true. Schuyler, by his wisdom and energy, had so disputed Burgoyne's advance, at every inch, with a handful of Continentals and militia, that he rendered the victories at Fort Stanwix [Schuyler] and at Bennington possible; and, had Congress been as prodigal of its help for Schuyler as it was now for Gates, the battle with Burgoyne would have been fought much earlier, and far above Saratoga. If the faction in Congress who formed Gates' friends in that body had not induced a withholding of aid from Schuyler, Burgoyne would never have visited Ticonderoga.

degree justify the ill-treatment he received as a public man, and especially so abrupt a dismissal from a command which he had, up to that moment, conducted with all the energy, address and ability that it was possible for any officer to exercise under the same circumstances. His plans were well laid, and the crown of victory was clearly within his reach, when another stepped into his place, who, to secure the prize, had only to stand still and wait the onward tide of events. General Gates was successful where it would have been impossible for any man, with a particle of prudence, to fail. Fortune was his friend, and to her caprices, more than to all other causes combined, he was indebted for the glory he acquired in gathering the laurels of Saratoga."*

I have devoted much space to the vindication of General Schuyler's character, because Mr. Bancroft's "History of the United States" is regarded by the great public as a standard authority, and his opinions may be adopted as correct by a large number of our countrymen. At the risk of a disturbance of our pleasant personal relations, extending over many years, I must, in loyalty to the duty of a faithful biographer and historian, pronounce his use of parts of sentences, without their contexts, in support of his views, unfair, and his estimate of the military character of General Schuyler unwarranted by any facts known to me in that gentleman's career. With a judgment formed by the clear and ample testimony before me, I do not hesitate to say that in the course of my reading I have never seen, in the same number of pages, so many positive errors as appear in Mr. Bancroft's brief review of the career of General Schuyler in the campaign of 1777, up to the time when he was superseded by General Gates. If any weight is to be given to the decisions of tribunals and the opinions expressed by State or National legislatures and the public in the form of favorable resolutions, and votes for offices of trust and responsibility, as well as to the settled convic-

* JARED SPARKS, LL. D., in his "Life of Gouverneur Morris," i. 148.

tions of the people for almost three-fourths of a century, we must believe that the historian has, in this case, misinterpreted the acts of the patriot and statesman, for it cannot be supposed that an officer upon whom rested the shadow of a suspicion of cowardice would be requested by six general officers to remain with them after being deprived of his command, or that he would not have been allowed to retire from the army with the consent of Congress full eighteen months after he was dismissed from that command; or that General Washington would express a strong desire that he should resume that command.

Such was the experience of General Schuyler. On the 27th of December, 1778, he wrote to Congress, expressing a wish to resign. A motion was made, on the 4th of January following, that his resignation be accepted, when it was amended by a resolution that prevailed, "That the further consideration thereof be postponed." Meanwhile, he had received the following letter from General Washington, dated Philadelphia, 31st December, 1778:

"DEAR SIR:—In a letter which I had the pleasure of writing you on the 18th inst., I requested you to take the direction of the magazines that were to be prepared toward a certain expedition. I should have extended the idea to your taking the full command in the Northern Department, but I was restrained by a doubt how far the measure might be agreeable to your own views and intentions. The same doubt still remains; but as it is very much my desire you should resume that command, I take occasion to signify it to you. At the same time, if you have any material objections against it, I would not wish to preclude their operation. If you have not, you will be pleased to consider this as an order for the purpose. As you are fully acquainted with all the objects of the command, it is unnecessary to enter into a detail of particular instructions."

General Schuyler declined the honor, and, on the 5th of March following, again asked Congress to accept his resignation. His letter containing this request was not

acted upon until the 18th, when a motion was made by Mr. Gerry, of Massachusetts,* seconded by Mr. Dyer, of Connecticut, that the resignation of General Schuyler be accepted. Mr. Burke, of South Carolina, offered the following, as an amendment :

“ *Resolved*, That the President be directed to inform General Schuyler that Congress are very desirous of retaining him in the service, especially in the present situation of affairs; but if the state of his health is such as that he judges it absolutely necessary to retire, Congress, though reluctantly, will acquiesce, and admit his resignation.”

This amendment was rejected by eleven of the twelve States represented, to give place to the following resolution, offered by Mr. Smith, of Virginia :

“ *Resolved*, That the President be directed to acquaint Major-General Schuyler that the situation of the army renders it inconvenient to accept his resignation, and, therefore, Congress cannot comply with his request.”

This was carried, against the votes of New England and Pennsylvania, and South Carolina divided. But General Schuyler persisted in his request to resign, and on the 19th of April, 1779, it was, on motion of Samuel Adams, seconded by Mr. Witherspoon, of New Jersey, “ *Resolved*, That his request be complied with.”

So ended the military career of General Schuyler. We have anticipated some of the events in that career, for an obvious purpose. In reviewing it in the presence of minute evidence, it presents many remarkable points; none brilliant with the coruscations of exciting scenes, such as the details of a great battle, but all of them important in the formation of a rounded whole which challenges our profound admiration. If the reader shall have carefully studied those events as they have been herein narrated, observed their relations to the history of that trying

* See page 99. of this volume.

period in the war, and considered the lack of resources of every kind which continually tended to frustrate the efforts of General Schuyler, and then compared his career with that of any commander in that or any other war in which the Americans have been engaged, it must have been perceived that for persistence in effort, marvellous industry, skill in management, watchfulness, wise forethought, clear foresight, heroic endurance of bodily pain and assaults upon reputation, unswerving personal courage under the most trying exigencies, unselfish patriotism, fortitude under the most depressing circumstances, and the accomplishment of great ends, he stands unrivalled, and may justly claim a place among the great military commanders of his time. The greatness of such commanders does not wholly consist in the skilful movements of vast armies in person, the conduct of great battles and the achievement of great victories by brute force, for in these he may have assistants as able as himself. It consists chiefly in the accomplishment of the great end by forethought which provides means, by the right distribution of force, by the careful husbanding of resources, in the wise direction of movements, small and great, at the proper time, in a courage to take responsibilities and power to achieve thereby; in a word, to be the centre and controller of forces employed in the successful management of every operation of a campaign, in spite of great obstacles.

Such, it seems to me, was General Schuyler in his incessant warfare, for almost two years, with British regulars, Canadian partisans, German hirelings, a cloud of savages on the near frontier, and a host of loyalists and personal enemies, open and secret, all about him; with an army money-chest and commissariat usually empty; the

credit of his government below his own ; an insubordinate army ; and jealous men, in and out of power, assailing his character and casting impediments in his way. He was a hero and patriot, in the highest sense of these words.