

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHILE the siege of St. John's was very slowly progressing, because of a want of proper supplies, a defiant, meddling spirit of insubordination, general inefficiency in the service, and the ambition of inferior leaders who had been sent among the Canadians to acquire personal renown by some bold stroke for the common cause, cast serious obstacles in the way, and lost to the republicans not only precious time, but the most cordial, active, and general support of the Canadians.

Colonel Ethan Allen and Major Brown were both obnoxious to this charge. The former, as we have seen, was regarded by Schuyler as a dangerous man, not because of any lack of patriotism, or for evil intentions, but because he could not be kept within subordinate bounds. Events partially justified the opinion. His boldness, zeal, peculiar personal bearing, and extravagant promises, captivated the simple Canadians, and he had been a very successful political preacher among them. Within a week after he left the camp at the Isle aux Noix he was at St. Ours, twelve miles southeast of the Sorel, with two hundred and fifty Canadians under arms, and he wrote to General Montgomery that within three days he should join him in the siege of St. John's. His letter was characteristic—sanguine, boastful, and indicative of the elation of success. "I could raise," he wrote, "one or two thousand in a week's

time ; but I will first visit the army with a less number, and, if necessary, go again recruiting. Those that used to be enemies to our cause come cap in hand to me ; and I swear by the Lord I can raise three times the number of our army in Canada, provided you continue the siege.”*

On the morning of the 24th of September, while Allen was on his way to Montgomery's camp, he fell in with Major Brown, on the road between Longueuil and La-prairie, who was at the head of a party of two hundred Americans and Canadians. Allen had with him a guard of eighty men, chiefly Canadians. He and Brown, and their confidants, held a private interview in a house near by, when the latter told the former, that the garrison at Montreal, where no danger was apprehended, did not exceed thirty men, and the town might easily be taken. He proposed that they should, with their respective forces, cross the St. Lawrence at separate points above and below Montreal, make a simultaneous attack upon it, and secure a joint and very important victory. Allen eagerly approved of the proposition. He doubtless remembered the pleasures of success at Ticonderoga a few months before, and the applause that followed, and also the indignity cast upon him in the Grants, in omitting to choose him the leader of the Green Mountain Boys ; and he saw a fair prospect of enjoying a repetition of the glory and honor achieved on Lake Champlain, and a vindication of his character as a brave and successful leader. His partisan spirit was thoroughly aroused ; and no doubt visions of victory and the plaudits of posterity suddenly assumed the shape of reality in his mind, and made him impatient for action.

The plan was soon arranged between the partisans.

* Autograph letter, Sept. 22, 1775.

Allen was to return to Longueuil, on the southern shore of the St. Lawrence, a little below Montreal, and cross there, while Brown and his two hundred followers were to cross at Laprairie, just above the city. The passage was to be accomplished in the night, and early the next morning the exchange of three huzzas, by the two parties, was to be the signal of attack upon the town. These arrangements were made by the parties without the consent of Montgomery, who was anxiously waiting for the reënforcements expected from these men, to push the siege of St. John's to completion.

Allen hastened back to Longueuil, added about thirty "English-Americans" to his party, collected a few canoes, and crossed the river during the night of the 24th. The night was dark and windy, the current and eddies of St. Mary's rapids strong and dangerous, and the canoes few and frail. The passage was protracted and tedious. Three times the canoes crossed and recrossed before all were landed on the opposite shore; and when the last canoe-load had touched the bank, day had dawned.

Allen placed guards in such a way that intelligence of his presence should not reach Montreal; and then he anxiously awaited the promised huzzas from Brown's party. The sun arose, and yet no signal was heard. It mounted higher and higher toward the meridian, and still all was silent above. The gallant Vermonter, conscious of being alone, and too weak to carry out the enterprise, would have retreated, but it was too late. Already an escaped captive had alarmed the garrison and the city, and all but the first canoe-loads must become prisoners if an attempt should be made to recross the river. Allen would not leave any of his men. "This," he said, "I could not reconcile to my feelings as a man, much less as an officer,

and I therefore concluded to maintain the ground, if possible, and all to fare alike."

On the appearance of this band, the people of Montreal were greatly excited. Allen took a defensive position, and resolved to sell his life dearly. The morning wore away, and it was afternoon before any opponents appeared. At three o'clock, Major Campbell, with a "mixed multitude," composed of forty regular troops, over two hundred Canadians, and some of the Indians then in Montreal, came down upon the invaders. A very sharp conflict ensued, which lasted almost two hours. Allen commanded skillfully and fought bravely, until only thirty or forty of his men remained. Some of them were wounded, and some had been killed. The Canadians, almost to a man, had deserted him at the beginning of the engagement.

"Being almost entirely surrounded with such vast unequal numbers," says Allen, in his *Narrative*, "I ordered a retreat, but found that those of the enemy who were of the country, and their Indians, would run as fast as my men, though the regulars could not. Thus I retreated more than a mile, and some of the enemy, with the savages, kept flanking me, and others crowded hard in the rear. In fine, I expected in a very short time, to try the world of spirits; for I was apprehensive that no quarter would be given to me, and, therefore, had determined to sell my life as dear as I could. One of the enemy's officers, boldly pressing in the rear, discharged his fusee at me; the ball whistled near me as did many others that day. I returned the salute and missed him, as running had put us both out of breath (for I conclude we were not frightened); I then saluted him with my tongue in a harsh manner and told him that inasmuch as his numbers were so far superior to mine, I would surrender, provided I could be treated with honor, and be assured of good quarter for myself and the men who were with me. He answered I should. Another officer coming up directly after, confirmed the treaty, upon which I agreed to surrender with my party, which then consisted of thirty-one effective men, and seven wounded. I ordered them to ground their arms which they did."*

* *A Narrative of Colonel Ethan Allen's captivity, written by himself: Walpole, 1807.*

The prisoners were conducted in triumph into Montreal, and delivered to General Prescott, a narrow-minded, petty tyrant, who, as his subsequent conduct on Rhode Island showed, seldom exercised the common courtesies of life toward the unfortunate who fell into his hands. Toward a man like Allen, he was disposed to be specially cruel; and his anger was made hot by the first sight of his prisoner, who was rough in manner and personal appearance. He exhibited none of the common characteristics of a soldier or a gentleman. His jacket was made of deer-skin; his undervest and breeches of Sagathy; his shoes of cow-skin, the soles well fortified by hob-nails; and on his head was a red woolen cap. Most of his followers were equally rough in appearance; and to the eye of Prescott they seemed more like free-booters than soldiers.

“Who are you? What is your name?” inquired Prescott in a loud and angry tone, when Allen was brought to him in the barrack-yard at Montreal, closely guarded by the regular troops. He was answered by the prisoner, when Prescott roared out, “Are you the scoundrel who took Ticonderoga?” “I am the very man,” Allen replied fiercely. Prescott then stormed, called him hard names, denounced him as a rebel, in bitter terms, and shook his cane over Allen’s head, threatening to beat him. “I told him,” says Allen, “he would do well not to cane me, for I was not accustomed to it; and I shook my fist at him, telling him that was the beetle of mortality for him, if he offered to strike.” A British officer standing by, whispered to Prescott that it would be dishonorable to strike a prisoner, and the brigadier contented himself with bestowing a few curses upon the “rebel,” and assuring him that he should “grace the halter at Tyburn.” He then ordered the prisoners to be taken by a guard on board the *Gaspé*

war-schooner, Captain Ryall, lying at Montreal, placed them in irons, and thrust them into the hold of the vessel. This barbarous order was rigidly executed. A bar of iron eight feet long, was rivited to the shackles of Allen, and his fellow-prisoners were fastened together in pairs, with hand-cuffs.*

Allen's shackles were so tight that he could not lie down except on his back. He obtained permission to write to Prescott, and in his respectful letter reminded that officer that he was receiving treatment undeserving his own humane conduct toward British prisoners who had been in his power. "When I had the command, and took Captain De Laplace and Lieutenant Fulton, with the garrison of Ticonderoga," he said, "I treated them with every mark of friendship and generosity, the evidence of which is notorious even in Canada. I have only to add that I

* Allen in his *Narrative* says his "handcuffs were of the ordinary size, but his leg irons, which were very tight, would weigh, he imagined, thirty pounds; the bar was eight feet long and very substantial." When, a few weeks later, General Wooster was in command at Montreal, he instituted inquiries concerning the harsh treatment of Colonel Allen, by order of General Schuyler. From a number of depositions, in manuscript before me, I copy only one, the others being substantially the same:

"I, the subscriber, being of lawful age, do testify and say, that a gentleman known as Colonel Allen, was brought on board the *Gaspé* man-of-war, then lying before the town of Montreal, some time in the month of September, 1775, and pursuant to the orders of Captain Ryall, who then commanded said ship, I put a pair of irons on said Allen's legs, which he wore for seven or eight days, during which he was kept by the boatswain's cabin. Afterwards the irons were taken off his legs and handcuffs were put on his hands, which was the practice for some considerable time; then only one leg was ironed in the night, and handcuffs in the day." Further saith not

WM. BRADLEY, midshipman on board the *Gaspé*.

This deposition is given, because the statements of Colonel Allen that he was put in irons, or otherwise treated than as a prisoner of war, have been denied. Of the midshipman who made this deposition, Allen in his *Narrative* says: "One of the officers, by the name of Bradley, was very generous to me; he would often send me victuals from his own table; nor did a day fall but he sent me a good drink of grog."

expect an honorable and humane treatment, as an officer of my rank and merit should have." The brutal Prescott gave the prisoner no response. He remained in irons on board the *Gaspé* between five and six weeks, when he was sent to Quebec, and from thence to England to be tried for treason.

The treatment which Colonel Allen received during a captivity of two years and six months, at different times, was disgraceful to the British authorities, and it was only because of the fear of unpleasant consequences to the British officers in the hands of the Americans, that he was released from confinement in Pendennis Castle, and sent to America as a prisoner of war. He was exchanged for Colonel Campbell, in May, 1778.

Allen's raid increased Montgomery's difficulties, prolonged the seige, and produced a disastrous effect upon the campaign. It discouraged the Canadians, and caused for the moment a great change in their feelings toward the republican cause. Brooke Watson, an English merchant, who was in Montreal two or three weeks after the affair, and who went to England in the same ship with Allen, writing to Benjamin Faneuil, of Boston, said :

"Surely the kingdom of Great Britain can not much longer be governed by such weak councils and feeble efforts. She has scarcely got a secure province in America. As to this, it has long been on the brink of falling into the hands of the most despicable wretches. Had not the inhabitants of this town gone out to meet *Colonel* Allen on Monday, the 25th ultimo, the town and the principal part of the province, would now have been in their hands, and that fellow would probably have been governor of Montreal. Thank God, that day's action turned the minds of the Canadians, and I have reason to hope the province out of danger, at least, for this year."*

To John Butler he wrote three days later :

"*Colonel* Allen, who commanded this despicable party of plun-

* Autograph letter, October 16, 1775.

derers (they were promised the plunder of the town) was, with most of his wretches, taken. He is now in irons on board the *Gaspé*. This action gave a sudden turn to the Canadians, who before, were nine-tenths for the Bostonians. There are great numbers now in arms for the King, but the enemy have possession of the South side of the river as low as Verchere, except the garrison of St. John's, which they still invest with little hopes on their side, and little fear on ours of its being taken."*

Montgomery was much annoyed by Allen's affair, yet it appears from his letters that he was not wholly ignorant of the project of the partisans before its attempted execution. On the morning of the 28th of September, he wrote to Schuyler, saying :

"Allen, Warner, and Brown, are at Laprairie and Longueuil, with a party of our troops and some Canadians—how many I can't tell. They all speak well of the good disposition of the Canadians. They have a project of making an attempt on Montreal; I fear the troops are not fit for it."†

In the afternoon of the same day he wrote :

"Since mine of this morning, I have received a letter from Mr. Livingston,‡ and another from Colonel Warner, who is at Laprairie, acquainting me that Colonel Allen had passed the river at Montreal, or below it rather, with thirty of ours and fifty Canadians; that he had been attacked by a superior party from the garrison; that he was taken prisoner, two or three killed and as many more wounded, and that the rest took to their heels. I have to lament Mr. Allen's imprudence and ambition, which urged him to this affair single-handed, when he might have had a considerable reinforcement."

Not fully comprehending the circumstances, nor aware of the greater blame that attached to Major Brown, General

* Autograph Letter, Oct. 19, 1775.

† Autograph Letter.

‡ Mr. James Livingston, who had for some time resided near Chamblée, was a favorite among the Canadians in that parish. He was then encamped with quite a large number of them, at Point Olina, not far from Fort Chamblée. In his letter he said: "Mr. Allen should never have attempted to attack the town, without my knowledge, or acquainting me of his design, as I had it in my power to furnish him a number of men."

Schuyler, who clearly foresaw the evil effects of Allen's expedition, upon the Canadians, wrote to the Continental Congress, saying—"I am apprehensive of disagreeable consequences arising from Mr. Allen's imprudence. I always dreaded his impatience of subordination, and it was not until after a solemn promise made me, in the presence of several officers, that he would demean himself properly, that I would permit him to attend the army. Nor would I have consented then, had not his solicitations been backed by several officers."

Three weeks afterward, Washington said in a letter to Schuyler: "Colonel Allen's misfortune will, I hope, teach a lesson of prudence and subordination to others, who may be too ambitious to outshine their general officers, and regardless of order and duty, rush into enterprises which have unfavorable effects upon the public, and are destructive to themselves." But the lesson was not heeded.

October was wearing away, and the inclement season was fast approaching, and yet the successful termination of the siege of St. John's appeared as remote as when first begun. Very little had been accomplished. Montgomery was surrounded by a host of difficulties. He had no officers of military experience and proper military spirit, to whom he might turn in his perplexity for sound advice; and while he was thus left to rely wholly upon his own judgment, he was continually annoyed and his plans thwarted by the interference of those whose ability and position gave them no right to counsel or decide.

The garrison appeared to be too well supplied with provisions to allow a hope on the part of Montgomery that they might be conquered by starvation. The ground on which he was encamped was low and very wet, for the autumn rains had begun, and the troops were suffering

severely from sickness. General discontent prevailed, and the Canadians who had joined the Americans, or received them as friends, became very uneasy at the prospect of failure, notwithstanding the general assured them that if his army should be compelled to retire without a victory, he would take care of all those who dared not remain in the country.

The discontent in the army culminated in open opposition to the general, when he proposed to change the position of the camp to higher and dryer ground, and to plant a battery within four hundred yards of the north side of the fort. He was preparing for this movement, when Major Brown informed him that unless attention was immediately directed to the east side of the river, from which the troops thought they could more effectually damage the enemy, and sooner win a victory, and give them the privilege of returning home, a meeting would be called to devise measures in accordance with their views. Notwithstanding he was used to insubordination, Montgomery was astonished at this information. "I did not consider," he said, in a letter to Schuyler, "I was at the head of troops, who carry the spirit of freedom into the field, and think for themselves. . . . I can not help observing to how little purpose I am here. Were I not afraid the example would be too generally followed, and that the public service might suffer, I would not stay an hour at the head of troops whose operations I can not direct."*

Notwithstanding his patience was tried to the utmost, Montgomery's sense of obligation to his adopted country, at that critical moment, overcame his disgust. He yielded so far as to call a council of war. "Upon considering the fatal consequences which might flow from the want of sub-

* Autograph Letter, Oct. 13, 1775.

ordination and discipline should this ill-humor continue," he wrote to Schuyler; "my unstable authority over troops of different colonies, the insufficiency of the military law and my own want of powers to enforce it, weak as it is, I thought it expedient to call the field officers together." The council was held, they decided against Montgomery's plan, and he was compelled to acquiesce, not, however, without unburdening his mind freely to Schuyler, who was suffering annoyances of every kind at Ticonderoga, arising from similar causes.

"The New England troops," he wrote, "are the worst stuff imaginable, for soldiers. They are home-sick; their regiments have melted away, and yet not a man dead of any distemper. There is such an equality among them, that the officers have no authority, and there are very few among them in whose spirit I have confidence. The privates are all generals but not soldiers; and so jealous, that it is impossible, though a man risk his person, to escape the imputation of jealousy."*

Such feelings and such imputations, as we shall have occasion to observe, were afterwards freely bestowed upon Schuyler.

Of the first regiment of New Yorkers (McDougall's) Montgomery gave a still worse account, and laid before Schuyler instances of great unworthiness both in the officers and men. Of the latter he particularly complained, and regretted much that McDougall had not yet joined the army.

"I think it will be much aid to the service to give Ritzema a regiment," he wrote to Schuyler. "He has the talent for making a regiment as much as any man I have known. Out of the sweepings of New York streets, he has made something more like regular troops, than I have seen in the Continental service. Should not McDougall resign? We can't afford sinecures. Much have I missed him, as you will easily judge, when you consider our talents in this part of the world."†

* Autograph letter, October 31, 1775. In the same letter speaking of appointments and changes that he had made in the army, he said—"Dimon's brigade-majorship I bestowed on Weisenfels, a man of exceeding good character, and more acquainted with the service than most of us." † Ibid.

To his father-in-law, Robert Livingston, Montgomery wrote :

“The difficulties I have labored under from want of discipline in the troops (being all generals and few soldiers), want of provisions, ammunition, and men, have made me most heartily sick of this business; and I do think that no consideration can ever induce me again to step out of the path of private life. As a volunteer, I shall ever be ready when necessity requires, to take my part of the burden.”* In deep bitterness of spirit he again wrote—“The Master of Hindostan could not recompense me for this summer’s work. I have envied every wounded man who has had so good an apology for retiring from a scene where no credit can be obtained. O fortunate husbandmen; would I were at my plow again!”

As, from time to time, Montgomery unbosomed himself to Schuyler, that officer responded with sympathetic feeling, caused by his daily experience of the effects of wrong-doing. “Such scenes of rascality,” he wrote, “are daily opening to me, as will surprise you to learn. But you must not be troubled by any from hence, having doubtless enough where you are to try your temper. The difficulties you labor under are extremely distressing to me, but patience and perseverance, my friend, I hope will carry you through.”

It is an unpleasant duty to report these complaints concerning the troops who were engaged in the important campaign against Canada, in the autumn of 1775. That they were just, impartial history, enlightened by facts, fully concedes. Washington suffered more severely from similar causes, while in command of the army engaged in the siege of Boston at that time. His letters to the Continental Congress and to others, are full of complaints of a similar character to those uttered by Schuyler and Montgomery. Those we have already recorded, and shall hereafter record, are not given in a caviling or narrow spirit,

* Autograph letter, October 20, 1775.

with a view to disparage any man or body of men, but as unquestioned facts, necessary to be used as rebutting testimony in vindication of General Schuyler's character from foul aspersions at that time, and the ungenerous attacks of partisan writers at the present day.

Surely no American can ask for better evidence in the case, than the word of that early martyr to Liberty in America, Richard Montgomery. He and Schuyler—a noble pair of brothers—at the sacrifice of every comfort to be derived from exalted social position, wealth, and happy domestic relations (and one of them suffering from most distressing illness), devoted their talents, energies, influence, fortune and health, to the cause of their country in a most critical hour, with beautiful disinterestedness; honored then and now by the wise and good; loved by all who could appreciate genius, genuine patriotism, and the value of generous sacrifices; and regarded by the infant nation, then in its first struggles for independent existence, as the conservators of their most precious interests at that moment. “The more I reflect on your expedition,” Washington wrote to Schuyler, “the greater is my concern lest it should sink under insuperable difficulties. I look upon the interests and salvation of our bleeding country, in a great degree, as depending upon your success.”

Amidst the gloom that gathered around the northern expedition as the season advanced, there were occasional gleams of hope. At one time there seemed a prospect of a speedy closing of the campaign by peaceful arrangements, propositions for which were made to Montgomery through the Caughnawagas, by “the formidable Le Corne St. Luc” and other principal inhabitants of Montreal. A conference at Laprairie was proposed and held, the republicans being represented by Majors Livingston, Brown, and

Macpherson, the latter Schuyler's accomplished aid-de-camp, and now the favorite in Montgomery's military family. The general doubted Le Corne's sincerity, and was cautious. He committed to him a letter to Sir Guy Carleton, and bade his commissioners to be exceedingly circumspect in their negotiations. The conference, as Montgomery feared it would be, was a failure. "It has ended in smoke," he wrote to Schuyler. "St. Luke made the Indian deliver my letter to Mr. Carleton, who had it burned without reading it. The Indian told the Governor very honestly that he was sent to me by St. Luke and others. The Indians at Caughnawaga attended at Laprairie, according to appointment, and are much displeased at the tricks put upon them by these gentlemen. They seemed to think St. Luke was discovered in his plan, and dared not venture to carry it through. I hope we shall have more powder!" He had just written, "Your diligence and foresight have saved us from the difficulty that threatened us. We are no longer afraid of starving;" and now he added, "Your residence at Ticonderoga has probably enabled us to keep our ground. How much do the public owe you for your attention and authority."*

A victory now cheered the commanders and their troops. After Allen's raid, Carleton felt a great anxiety to relieve St. John's, and succeeded in assembling about nine hundred Canadians at Montreal. But mutual distrust was such a strong element of dissolution, that it was difficult to keep them together.

It was well-known that the inhabitants south of the St. Lawrence, generally favored the Americans; and the Canadians who joined Carleton, timid and dispirited, deserted him by scores, until few were left. He could not depend

* Autograph letter, October 9, 1775.

upon the Indians. Indeed, he probably did not wish to, for his nature revolted at the idea of letting such bloody savages loose upon the colonists.

With a foolish confidence that the fort at Chamblée could not be reached by the invaders, while St. John's held out, Carleton had neglected to arm it. Only a feeble garrison was there, and they had been kept in a state of alarm by Livingston. These facts were communicated to Montgomery, and he directed Livingston, with the assistance of Major Brown and Colonel Bedel, to make a night attack upon the fort. The inhabitants of the parish of Chamblée, three hundred strong, cheerfully ranged themselves under the banner of Major Livingston for the purpose, and these were joined by about fifty from Montgomery's camp, under Brown and Bedel. The plan of attack was arranged by the Canadians, who were acquainted with the place. Under the cover of an intensely dark night, some cannon were conveyed by them from the camp, on batteaux, past the fort at St. John's to the head of the Chamblée rapids, where they were landed, mounted on carriages, and dragged to the place of attack. The garrison, under Major Stopford, a well-educated and polished gentleman, surprised and overpowered, made a feeble and brief resistance, and surrendered.*

This victory occurred on the 18th of October, and was a most important event to the besiegers of St. John's, whose ammunition was almost exhausted. Among the articles that fell into the hands of the republicans were six tons of gunpowder, between five and six thousand musket cartridges, five hundred hand-grenades, three hundred swivel shot, and a large quantity of provisions and

* The inhabitants of the garrison, surrendered by the capitulation, were ten officers, seventy-eight private soldiers, thirty women, and fifty-one children. The prisoners were sent to Connecticut.

stores. As a trophy, the Americans secured the colors of the 7th regiment of British regulars, which Montgomery sent to General Schuyler, at Ticonderoga. This, the first military trophy of the kind captured by the republicans, was sent by Schuyler to the Continental Congress at Philadelphia, and for a while, graced the walls of the residence of John Hancock, the president of that body.*

* Christopher Marshall, of Philadelphia, in his Diary, made the following record:

Nov. 3, 1775. Account just brought by express, of the surrender of Fort Chamblée to Major Brown, on the 14th [18th], of October, in which was a great quantity of amunition, provisions, and warlike stores, with the colors of the Seventh Regiment, or Royal Scotch Fusileers, which were brought to the Congress. . . .

Nov. 6. Near five, son Benjamin accompanied me to Colonel Hancock's lodgings, in order to see the ensigns or colors taken at Fort Chamblée, &c.