

LIFE AND TIMES  
OF  
PHILIP SCHUYLER.

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CHAPTER I.

WHEN Montgomery was slain, and Arnold was disabled, the command of the American troops at Quebec devolved on Lieutenant-Colonel Donald Campbell, the senior officer on duty. He immediately sent Edward Antill, one of Montgomery's engineers, to General Wooster at Montreal, with an account of the great disaster, and an urgent request for him to come down immediately and take the chief command. Arnold wrote to Wooster, by the same hand, requesting him to send the news by express to Washington and to Congress, for it was supposed that General Schuyler, the Department Commander, was then in Philadelphia. It was a mistake. He was at his home, in Albany, grievously suffering from gout and asthma, and was also watching the armed Tories in Tryon County. Of this Wooster was informed, and he sent Antill to Schuyler with copies of the letters from Quebec, and one from himself, in which he gave, in few words, a vivid picture of the critical state of affairs in Canada. He said :

"We have but four tons of powder in the country. We have lost one artillery company ; it will therefore be necessary to supply us with another very soon, or we may possibly not only lose the footing we

have got here, but perhaps be all sacrificed in the country. There is little confidence to be placed in the Canadians. They are but a small remove from the savages, and are fond of being of the strongest party. \* \* \* \* We are in the greatest need of cash—hard money. We shall soon be in the greatest distress for the want of it, and doubtless the more so since the check to our arms. Mr. Price has hitherto supplied us. Indeed I do not know how we could have subsisted as an army without him. He has already advanced for us about twenty thousand pounds, and has assisted us in every way possible. General Montgomery, in his last letter to me, begged that Price might be mentioned in the strongest terms to Congress.

“Our enemies in the country are numerous. The clergy almost universally refuse absolution to those who are our friends, and preach to the people that it is not now too late to take arms against us; that the Bostonians are but a handful of men, which is true. Something must be done, and that speedily, or I greatly fear we are ruined. We have but five or six hundred men for the garrisons of this place, Chambly, and St. John’s. Many of the troops insist upon going home, their time of enlistment being out. Some, indeed, have run away without a pass or dismissal, expressly against orders. \* \* \* \* I have given orders to suffer no man to go out of the country, whether he will enlist or not. The necessity of the case, I believe, will justify my conduct. I shall not be able to spare any men to reinforce Colonel Arnold. This place must be secured for a retreat, if necessary. I called a council of officers, who agreed, to a man, that I ought to remain here.”\*

Schuyler approved Wooster’s action. “You may rest assured,” he said, “that a conduct so prudent will meet with the fullest approbation. “By all means,” he continued, “secure a retreat for Arnold, and should Carleton follow him there, as you may certainly expect succors, I do not doubt but you will suffer every hardship before you will give up the town. Our cause, sir, is just, and I trust that Divine Providence will dispel this untoward cloud, and that we shall again receive its smiles.” †

Before the distressing intelligence came from Quebec, Schuyler had urged Congress to send reinforcements into Canada, and had ordered Colonel Warner to gather recruits

\* Autograph Letter, January 5, 1776.

† Schuyler’s MS. Letter Books.

as quickly as possible for the same destination. Now he put forth every effort to increase the little army in Canada, or to at least save it from destruction. He again urged Congress to forward troops with all possible dispatch. He also suggested the propriety of their sending a committee to his Department delegated to act with full power, for the seeming indifference of Congress to the wants of the northern army threatened that army with fatal results. That indifference was keenly felt by the people of the province of New York. "I cannot but be surprised," Robert R. Livingston had written to Schuyler from Clermont, his seat on the Hudson, "at the neglect the Congress manifest in the matter, which I am convinced they think of the last importance; but they have never yet known the difficulties you have had to contend with in the state of the army in Canada. My letters from Philadelphia informs me that all their time and attention have been employed on the affairs of Virginia, who has condescended (after all her gruffing) to ask aid against a pitiful handful of negroes and ragamuffins.\* The troops raised in New Jersey, and part of the Pennsylvania battalion, are sent there, so that we are left to the care of Providence, or to depend upon the forbearance of our enemies." †

The Congress appear to have forgotten, or, in the face of corroborative action on the part of the enemy, seemed to regard it as a fable, the significant warning concerning the capital plan of the British ministry for crushing the rebellion, which they devised immediately after the failure of their arms at Bunker Hill, and which had been conveyed in a

\* This was in allusion to the operations of Lord Dunmore, who, with a motley force of Tories and refugee negro slaves, made war upon the Virginians over whom he had borne rule as royal governor.

† Autograph Letter, January 12, 1776.

letter from London several months before.\* Said the writer :

“ Their design is to get possession of New York and Albany ; to fill both of these cities with very strong garrisons ; to declare all rebels, who do not join the King’s forces ; to command the Hudson and East Rivers with a number of small men-of-war and cutters stationed in different parts of it, so as to cut off all communication by water between New York and the provinces northward of it, and between New York and Albany, except for the King’s service, and to prevent, also, all communication between the city of New York, the provinces of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and those to the southward of them. By these means the administration and their friends fancy that they shall soon either starve out or retake the garrisons of Crown Point and Ticondarogo, and open and maintain a safe intercourse and correspondence between Quebec, Albany, and New York, and thereby afford the fairest opportunity to their soldiery and Canadians, in conjunction with the Indians to be procured by G. J. [Guy Johnson†] to make continual irruptions into New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Connecticut, and so distract and divide the provincial forces as to render it easy for the British army, at Boston, to defeat them, break the spirits of the Massachusetts people, depopulate their country, and compel an absolute subjection to Great Britain.”

The proceedings of Parliament, the letters of friends to the cause, from England, and the evident intention of the British commanders in America to execute this plan, if possible, proclaimed that this was to be the grand scheme for the subjugation of the insurgents ; and yet Congress, with amazing apathy, even when it was known that Burgoyne was at Quebec with ten thousand men, and Howe was probably on the ocean with an equal or greater number, destined for New York, allowed the possession of Canada and the defence of the northern frontiers, along which hung a dusky cloud of hostile savages, to be a consideration second to the defence of certain points in other colonies, demanded by representatives of those colonies.

While the critical condition of the little army in

\* July 31, 1775. See Journal of the Provincial Congress of New York, page 172.

† See chapter xx. volume i.

Canada demanded Schuyler's immediate and earnest attention, the hostile movements of Sir John Johnson and his retainers in Tryon County, demanded as immediate and earnest attention. The Committee of Safety for that county had informed him that at least seven hundred Tories, most of them Scotch Highlanders, were under arms, and that Johnson Hall was fortified. They implored his assistance. He called for the gathering of seven hundred militia at Albany, to go forward and join the armed Whigs in Tryon County. The response was gratifying, and attested in a most remarkable manner the popularity of Schuyler and the confidence of the people in his military skill as a leader. In a letter to the Continental Congress, he said: "Such was the zeal and alacrity of the people that, although the weather was cold in the extreme, it was impossible to prevent their coming up, which they did, in such numbers that by the time I reached Caughnawaga, I had very near, if not quite, three thousand men, including nine hundred of the Tryon County militia."\*

On the 16th of January (four days after receiving the sad news from Canada) Schuyler left Albany at the head of his hastily gathered little army, and arrived at Schenectady, the first settlement in the Mohawk valley, west of Albany, that evening. There he met a deputation of Mohawk Indians, assured them that he had no hostile designs against them in penetrating their country, explained to them the necessity for his movement, and received assurances from them that they would appear at Johnstown, his destination, as mediators only. At the same time he sent forward a letter to Sir John Johnson in which he

\* Schuyler's MS. Letter Books.

gave reasons for his movement under orders from the civil authority,\* and expressed a desire to comply with their orders "in a manner the most peaceable, that no blood may be shed." To effect that object, he requested Sir John to meet him on the 18th. The baronet complied, and a friendly interview was had at Guy Park, the residence of Guy Johnson, near the present village of Amsterdam, in the Mohawk valley. Johnson was accompanied by several of the leading Scotchmen, and when Schuyler demanded, as terms of peace, the immediate cessation of all hostile demonstrations, the surrender of all arms, ammunition and stores in the possession of Johnson, the delivery to him of all the arms and military accoutrements held by the Tories and Indians, and Sir John's parole of honor not to act inimically to the patriot cause, the baronet assured Schuyler that the Indians would support him, that many were already at Johnson Hall, and that others were on their way down for the purpose. To these words of implied defiance Schuyler answered that although averse to shedding blood, yet if resistance should be made force would be opposed by force, and that the consequences would be of the most serious nature. Johnson asked for a postponement of his reply until the next evening. The favor was granted; and after Sir John had left, Little Abraham, a leading Mohawk chief, called upon Schuyler, and not only denied the truth of the assertion that the Indians were ready to support the baronet, but repeated the assurance given at Schenectady that they would act as mediators only.

Schuyler moved forward, and on the following day, when at Caughnawaga, within four miles of Johnstown, where

\* See Resolution of Congress cited on page 472 of the first volume of this work.

the Tryon County militia had assembled, he was met by Sir John's answer, in which easier terms were proposed. This was followed by a deputation of sachems and warriors who came as professed mediators. They said the baronet had declared that he had fortified Johnson Hall only to guard himself against insult by riotous people; that he had no unfriendly intentions against the country, and begged the general to accept his terms. Schuyler replied, "I have given Sir John until 12 o'clock to-day to consider *my* terms, after which, if he shall not comply, I shall take such measures as will make him, and whoever assists him, feel the power in my hands." The Mohawks then begged, as a special favor to themselves, that if the baronet did not yield, Schuyler would extend the time of grace until four o'clock the next morning, that they might go to Sir John, and "shake his head," as they expressed it, so as to bring him to his senses; also that the baronet should not be driven out of the country. Schuyler extended the time of grace, but Sir John, alarmed, yielded at the appointed time, and on the following day (January 19, 1776) the expedition moved to Johnstown, where the arms and military stores in possession of Johnson, were delivered up. The amount was much smaller than Schuyler expected to find, but seemed to be all that had been collected.

At noon the next day, Schuyler's men were drawn up in a line in the streets at Johnstown, when nearly three hundred of the Scotch Highlanders advanced to the front and laid down their arms. Sir John gave his parole of honor not to take up arms against the colonists, and not to go westward among the Indians beyond the German Flatts and Kingsland district. With these pledges of peace, six chiefs of the Macdonald clan of Highlanders and

more than one hundred Tories as prisoners, and a six and four pound cannon and a number of swivels as trophies, Schuyler returned to Albany on the evening of the 21st of January, where he was received with demonstrations of public joy. He had disarmed between six and seven hundred Tories, conciliated the Mohawks, diluted the loyalty of some of the most prominent of the leaders among the other Six Nations, and received a promise that six more hostages from among the old English, Dutch and German settlers should be sent to him.\* But the work had to be done over again, in May, as we shall hereafter observe, for Sir John Johnson violated his parole as he doubtless intended to do when he gave it, and portions of Tryon County were again swarming with open enemies of the patriot cause.

The admirable performance of the delicate and important task of suppressing the Tory rising in Tryon County, committed to General Schuyler, commanded the admiration of the whole country. "I hope," Washington wrote to him, "General Lee will execute a work of the same kind on Long Island. It is high time to begin with our internal foes, when we are threatened with such severity of chastisement from our kind parent without." On the 5th of February the Continental Congress resolved:

"That General Schuyler has proceeded in disarming such inhabitants of the County of Tryon, in the colony of New York, as were disaffected, and providing for the future tranquillity of those parts, with fidelity, prudence, and dispatch, and at the same time with a proper temper towards that deluded people, and thereby performed a meritorious service:

"That the cheerfulness and ready assistance of those who accompanied General Schuyler in his march to the County of Tryon and their useful services in that expedition, discovered such a patriotic

\* MS. Narrative of the Expedition, dated at Albany, January 23 1776, sent to the Continental Congress by General Schuyler.



spirit, that it is hoped none of them will allow their countrymen to entertain a suspicion that any ignoble motive actuated them, by refusing a pecuniary reward, especially when they were employed in suppressing a mischief in their own neighborhood."

The latter expression was elicited by a statement of General Schuyler that some of the men of the expedition had claimed pay for their services, and which he thought improper under the circumstances.\*

Heavy burdens of care and responsibility were now laid upon General Schuyler by Congress, because, as they said, they had "great confidence in his attention to the public interest." On the 8th of January they had directed him to have the river St. Lawrence well explored above and below Quebec, and "to determine upon proper places for opposing, by armed boats or otherwise, any attempts of the enemy to penetrate that country by the river,"† and he was empowered to have as many of such boats speedily prepared as he might think proper. They also gave orders for shipwrights to be sent to Schuyler, to be employed by him in constructing batteaux on Lake Champlain, not exceeding one hundred in number. On the following day they invested him with new powers, giving him the discretion, in a great degree, of a military dictator in his department. On the 17th a committee, at New York, composed of Francis Lewis and John Alsop, sent to him two master ship-builders for supplies for the construction of two naval vessels at Poughkeepsie, which Congress had ordered; and on the 25th he was directed to have the

\* "Some of the troops," General Schuyler wrote, "refused to move, unless I promised pay for their carriages, and these same people insist upon pay as Minute-men. Many of the people, however, expect no pay for their carriages nor for themselves. Expeditions of this kind would be very expensive at this rate. I cannot think that Congress intended pay for the men on such occasions."—Schuyler's MS Letter Books.

† Journal of Congress, ii. 15.

fortress at Ticonderoga repaired and made defensible. At the same time he was compelled to perform most of the duties of the Indian Commissioners at Albany, of which body he was president. "Necessity," he said, in a letter to Congress, "drives me too often to act alone. Mr. Douw is removed out of town, and the other gentlemen reside at a considerable distance, so that I must not only do the business, but have the burthen of all the Indians that come, and they are troublesome visitors to a man that has something to do."

In addition to these military duties, those pertaining to the political affairs of his district were laid upon General Schuyler in a large degree. The royal governor of the Province dissolved the Colonial Assembly at the close of 1775, and in the most cautious manner he issued writs for the election of new members to meet in New York at the middle of February. Before the publication of such dissolution, the Committee of Safety, of New York, apprised General Schuyler of the fact, and begged him to exercise his influence in bringing together the leading Whigs of the city and county of Albany, that they might choose suitable candidates. The 22d of January was the appointed day for the election, which was a most important one, because it would determine the relative political strength of the Whigs and Tories in the province, and Schuyler entered into the canvass with zeal. Uncertain whether the troops he had led into Tryon County, a large portion of whom were legal voters, might return before the election day, he wrote from Johnstown, on the 20th of January, to the high-sheriff of Albany County, requesting him to adjourn the election from day to day, that the freeholders in the little army in the Mohawk Valley might not be deprived of the privilege of voting for representa-

tives at that "alarming and critical juncture."\* The Sheriff (Henry TenEyck) was in political sympathy with Schuyler, and would have so adjourned the voting had not the troops, as we have seen, returned to Albany on the day before that appointed for the election.

The various public duties imposed upon General Schuyler at that time by Congress, the provisional government of New York and his fellow-citizens, within the space of a few weeks, vividly portray, not only the embarrassments and distresses of the times when there were few men to whom in that dark hour the performance of such varied and high duties might be safely intrusted, but also testify to the high esteem in which he was held by the representatives of the whole country, and the unbounded confidence reposed in him. That esteem and confidence he publicly acknowledged as his highest reward; and they formed the most potential answer to the detractions which had already fallen from the lips of jealous men in and out of Congress. Officers of New England troops, especially some of those of Connecticut, were ever watchful for causes of complaint against him; and the friendly tone generally apparent in his official correspondence with Wooster was not a correct interpretation of his feelings. His earlier experience with that officer made him extremely sensitive to every expression on the part of the veteran that might be construed as censure or disrespect. And so it was that when, in a courteously written letter, Wooster mentioned the bad conduct of some prisoners whom Schuyler, as an act of humanity, had allowed to return to Canada, the remarks were regarded by the latter as a reflection upon his character and policy. And he wrote to the Continenta.

\* Schuyler's MS. Letter Books.

Congress in no pleasant humor, complaining that Wooster had before written to him "with unbecoming subacidity." With his usual frankness, he sent a copy of the letter to Wooster. That was the beginning of an open rupture. Schuyler's orders thereafter had so strong a flavor of "subacidity," and were so imperious, that the old Connecticut general could not endure them with patience, and his letters in reply bore a delicate tone of retort. The volcano of Schuyler's indignation was finally uncapped when Wooster wrote to him that the commanding officer in Canada "is the only competent judge of what is proper, and what not, for the internal regulations of the army and for the immediate safety of the country."\*

Schuyler instantly sent a copy of this letter to Philadelphia, with one from himself written in forcible terms. He said:

"Congress will perceive by General Wooster's letter of the 11th instant to them, and that of the same date to me, that matters are got to such a height between us, that either he or I must immediately quit this department, for I cannot consistently with my honor or my feelings serve with an officer who early in this campaign witnessed a contempt for my orders, and proceeded so far as to offer insults of the grossest kind. \* \* \* A respect for my country obliged me to suppress that just resentment which I felt rising in me. But wounded in my honor, although willing to be spent in the glorious cause in which my country is engaged, and to continue to serve her under all the disagreeable incidents attendant on a ruined constitution, yet she cannot expect in addition a sacrifice of my reputation by calmly bearing indignities. \* \* \* It is almost needless to observe to Congress that no altercation which I may have with any officer which I command will ever draw off my attention from my duty. I trust my conduct in public life, both before and since I have had a command, have sufficiently evinced my principles on the present unhappy contest. I shall never court the favor of officers or men, unless they are deserving. Such as are not, I shall always freely and indiscriminately censure. If this gives umbrage, it can never be remedied while I am in command, because I cannot hesitate a moment between giving

\* Autograph Letter, February 11, 1776.

offence and doing my duty. Had I consulted my own inclinations, I should not have ventured on the storms of public life, well knowing that my want of abilities would expose me to a thousand difficulties, and deprive me of the inestimable comforts of domestic life, and that I should be envied by those weak minds who are dazzled with power, but have not elevation of sentiment enough to conceive that to some men it has no charms."

In this case, as in subsequent ones, Schuyler's nobility of soul and generous nature made his actions rise above the petty considerations of personal grievances, and he not only continued his efforts in behalf of his country with increased zeal, but expressed words of sympathy for Wooster, in his letters to Congress and to the General himself, because of the great embarrassments with which that officer was compelled to contend in Canada. In a letter to Wooster written only a week after the one in which he so bitterly complained of the General's conduct, he said: "I was well aware of the difficulties you must labor under for want of hard money, and that unless you are speedily supplied our cause will suffer; but unfortunately, I have not got a single sixpence. I have employed proper persons to try if any can be procured on my private account in this part of the country; whatever may be got shall be immediately sent you." Two days later he wrote—"Whatever my sentiments are with regard to our private disputes, I assure you that I very sincerely pity your situation."\*

The Congress had observed with anxiety the gathering of this cloud so full of portents of mischief, and had already taken measures to disperse it by appointing Major-General Charles Lee to the command of the troops in Canada, and directing General Schuyler to repair to New York to take command of the forces, and conduct the

\* Schuyler's MS. Letter Books.

military operations there; at the same time requesting the President of Congress to inform Schuyler of the new arrangement and the reasons that led to it. This was done three days before Schuyler wrote the above letter.\*

“I must beg leave,” wrote the President, “to inform you that Congress hear, with great regret, the precarious state of your health, and the return of your disorder. They are fully apprised and sensible of your services and abilities; the influence and weight you have among the Indian tribes; the service you are capable of doing to the common cause even in the present infirm state of your health, and at the same time being apprehensive, should you be sent on so fatiguing service as that of Canada must be, especially at this inclement season, your country might be deprived of the advantage of your services which are so much wanted at this critical conjuncture, they have thought it best to send General Lee to Canada, reserving to you the command of the forces and the conduct of the military operations in the colony of New York.

“Your known zeal and warm attachment to the cause of liberty assure me that you will concert with General Lee the best means of securing the communication of the lakes, and of facilitating the transportation of necessaries for the use of the army in Canada, and give him all the aid and assistance in your power for accomplishing the great ends we all have in view.”†

Circumstances soon caused the plans of Congress to be changed. There was reason to apprehend active operations against the middle and southern colonies, and in order to prepare for their defence they were divided into two military Departments, each commanded by a Major-General. Congress revoked the order directing General Lee to repair to Canada, and sent him to take command of the Southern Department, and at the same time promoted Brigadier-General John Thomas to the rank of major-general, and ordered him to take the command of the troops in Canada. The order directing General Schuyler to proceed to New York was also revoked, and

\* Journals of Congress, ii. 65.

† Autograph Letter of John Hancock, President of Congress, February 20, 1776.

he was directed to remain in Albany where his services would be of the greatest importance. Congress and the whole country were deeply impressed with the value of those services at that time, for there was no man who could adequately fill his place. His ill health was the cause of much public anxiety, and private and public prayers were offered for the preservation of his life. The President of Congress, in a letter to him, conveying intelligence of the change in plans, wrote :

I am extremely sorry to find you recover health so slowly. I hope that your attention to public affairs will not make you neglect the care necessary for perfecting your recovery. The Congress have the most anxious concern for you, knowing the important service you can render to your country at this critical conjuncture."

After mentioning the appointment of General Thomas to the command in Canada, President Hancock continued: "Still they rely greatly on your efforts for perfecting the work so conspicuously begun and so well conducted under your orders last campaign. The supplies of provisions, military stores, etc., for the army in Canada must be procured in these colonies and sent across the lakes. On these supplies being regularly sent will depend not only the success but the existence of the army in Canada. For this reason I am directed to inform you, it is the desire of Congress you should, for the present, or until you receive further orders, fix your headquarters at Albany. There, without being exposed to the fatigues of the camp until your health is perfectly restored, you will be in a situation to direct the proper arrangements for supplying the army in Canada, and to superintend the operations necessary for the defence of New York and Hudson's River (the security of which is of the last importance), and also the affairs of the whole middle Department. The generals under you will receive and execute your orders, and in case of necessity you will be ready to bring down to your aid the whole force of the colony."\*

\* Autograph Letter, March 7, 1776. It is proper here to correct a mistake or a grave misapprehension into which Mr. Bancroft has been led. In his account of "The Retreat from Canada," in the eighth volume of his *History of the United States*, he says, on page 423, when speaking of the appointment of General Lee to the command in Canada, that Schuyler had "refused the service." Again, speaking of the appointment of General Gates to that command, Mr. Bancroft says (viii. 432): "The appointment could give Schuyler no umbrage, for, he himself had uniformly refused to go into Canada." I have not dis-