

CHAPTER VII.

SCHUYLER was now anxious to go to Philadelphia, but, in consequence of the absence of Generals Gates and Arnold, no general officer was left in the Northern Department, and according to the regulations of Congress he could not leave it. And a more effectual bar to such movement existed in the condition of military affairs between New York and Philadelphia.

Washington, as we have seen, had been driven to the banks of the Delaware, within thirty miles of Philadelphia, where he used extraordinary and effectual means for recruiting his broken army, then about to dissolve by the expiration of the time for which a large portion of the troops had been enlisted. Increased pay for the officers, offered bounties for soldiers, and the great personal influence of the commander-in-chief, together with the patriotic impulses of the people in the presence of palpable danger to the cause, gave to Washington, on the 24th of December, about five thousand effective troops, many of them fresh and hopeful. He was then on the right bank of the Delaware. On the left side, at Trenton, lay about one thousand five hundred British and Hessian troops, and a smaller number were at Bordentown, below. These Cornwallis (who was so certain of an early march of his army to Philadelphia, that he had returned to New York to embark for England) believed to be sufficient to keep the Americans from recrossing the river. It was a fatal mis-

take. Washington led his troops across the Delaware above Trenton on Christmas night, and early on the following morning fell upon and captured and dispersed the British and Hessians there.

Congress, meanwhile, thoroughly alarmed, had fled to Baltimore, at the middle of December. There they delegated to Washington the powers of a Dictator, for six months, giving into his hands discretionary control of all military matters for that period. "Happy it is for this country," they said, in the letter which conveyed to him such authority, "that the general of their forces can be safely intrusted with unlimited power, and neither personal security, liberty nor property, be in the least degree endangered thereby." To General Schuyler almost equal discretionary power had really, though not in expressed terms, been given in the management of the military affairs of the Northern Department. To no other officers than these two, did Congress ever evince such unlimited confidence in their wisdom and patriotism.

Stirring events followed the battle at Trenton, in the vicinity of the Delaware. Cornwallis was summoned back by the gravity of the situation; and a few days after that battle he marched from Princeton with a considerable force against Washington, whose little army, somewhat strengthened, lay at Trenton. The latter avoided a battle there by adroitly eluding the British commander and withdrawing to Princeton before daylight on the morning of the 3d of January, 1777. Near there he fell upon some British reserves, who were on their march to join Cornwallis. A sanguinary battle ensued. The booming of cannon brought Cornwallis back, when Washington's troops, too much exhausted to fight a fresh army greater

in number than themselves, fled. So precipitous was their retreat, that when Cornwallis entered Princeton, not an American soldier could be found there. Washington continued his flight to Morristown, in East Jersey, and among the hills of that beautiful region he established his head-quarters for the winter. Thither Cornwallis dared not pursue.

Such was the situation of affairs at the beginning of 1777. Congress was a fugitive from its capital, and the management of the affairs of the Northern Department was left to the discretion of Schuyler. His patriotic anxiety for the public good was much stronger than his desire for personal vindication, and he labored with untiring zeal in efforts to place his department in a good defensive state, at least. He was greatly distressed because of the tardiness with which troops ordered to it appeared; and at the close of the year (December 30th, 1776) he wrote the following letter to Congress on the subject of the affairs of his Department:

“ That I have not been honored with the commands of Congress on the various matters mentioned in my former letters, and in a paper which I delivered to Messrs. Stockton and Clymer, on the 11th ultimo, is most probably to be imputed to the necessity it has been under of giving the closest attention to the manœuvres of the enemy in Jersey. This consideration, and that of the winter's being considerably advanced, has induced me to proceed in making such preparations for the next campaign as I deem absolutely necessary, without waiting the determination of Congress, trusting that Congress will readily pardon any *faux pas* I may commit from erring in judgment.

“ On the 3d instant I addressed myself to General Ward on the subject of cannon and military stores. From the copy of his letter, which is enclosed, Congress will perceive that I am not likely to receive any aid from the Massachusetts Bay. I have, however, since the receipt of his letter, which was written on the 29th inst., written by express to the Honorable Thomas Cushing, entreating that the Legislature of that State would reconsider the matter and furnish what cannon etc. they can, and urged the necessity of their being sent

whilst the earth is covered with snow, as a great expense in the transportation will be saved by these articles being carried to Ticonderoga in winter. I have made similar applications to Governor Trumbull and the president of New Hampshire; and I propose, in a few days, to visit the Convention of this State on the same subject, for indeed, unless a sufficient number of cannon and ammunition can be procured we must inevitably lose Ticonderoga, and what the consequences of such a disaster will be are too evident to dwell upon. I have caused ten blacksmith's shops to be erected in this city, and engaged workmen to be employed in making intrenching tools, axes, nails, etc., and hope, with the assistance of the smiths in the vicinity, to get a sufficient stock of these necessary articles, provided I can anyhow procure a quantity of steel, for which I have applied to the Massachusetts Bay; but lest none should be sent from thence, I must entreat Congress to order three tons from Pennsylvania or Jersey with all the dispatch possible.

“ I have ordered all the provisions that can be procured to be sent to Fort George, Cheshire's, and Ticonderoga. I fear a deficiency of salted meat, of which a sufficient stock should be laid in, as it would be risking too much to depend upon the precarious supply of fresh beef at a time when the fortress may be invested by the enemy.

“ Forage is laying in for the cattle which it will be necessary to employ in the spring both at Ticonderoga and on the communication to it.

“ Directions are given for repairing the batteaux on Lake Champlain and Lake George, and for building one hundred and fifty adapted to the navigation of Hudson's and the Mohawk Rivers and Wood Creek. Should the enemy be able to force us from Ticonderoga it will be possible for them, altho' we have possession of Mount Independence, to get into Lake George by drawing their Batteaux over land from below Ticonderoga; for altho' the task would be arduous, yet it is feasible, and ought to be guarded against. I therefore propose to build five or six flat-bottomed vessels, of considerable force, on Lake George, and shall begin to prepare the necessary articles in the beginning of February, unless Congress should please to direct otherwise; and about the same time I propose to begin the necessary work of obstructing the navigation of Lake Champlain, between Ticonderoga and Mount Independence, which I hope to execute so effectually as not to leave a possibility for any kind of craft to pass whilst we keep possession of the latter place, *and which I think we can do against any force whatever, provided we have a sufficient garrison properly supplied with cannon, ammunition and provisions.*

“ A considerably quantity of cordage and oakum is wanted. If it cannot be supplied in this State, I shall send to the eastern ones; and so, indeed, I must for many articles that will be wanted. I wish,

therefore, a resolution of Congress, directing every State to comply with my applications in whatever they can.

“The Indians have sent me a friendly message, and I have great hopes that they will abide by the neutrality which they have promised to observe. A report prevails that the enemy have requested the Mohawks to remove into the country beyond our settlements, but I have reason to believe it is void of foundation. I soon expect a visit from a considerable number of Chiefs and Warriors. They are in great distress for blankets. Unfortunately we have none here. I have applied for some to the Massachusetts Bay and New Hampshire, and may probably receive some from thence.

“The Legislature of the Massachusetts Bay have ordered one fourth of the militia of the County of Berkshire, and one eighth of that of Hampshire, to Ticonderoga, to continue three months in service. Part of one regiment is marched from the former. What the whole number will be from both I cannot make a guess at. No troops are yet arrived here from Connecticut, nor can I learn that any are got to Ticonderoga from New Hampshire; neither was any part of Colonel Warner’s regiment there on the 26th; and Colonel Warner advises me that he has no hopes of any troops remaining after the term of their enlistment expires, unless it be the Pennsylvanians, who, he believes, will not quit the post until regularly relieved. For three weeks, or perhaps a month to come, we have little to fear from an enemy, but as, after that, Lake Champlain will be passable, it is probable they will make an attempt, as I am well informed that they have two regiments at St. Johns, three at Isle aux Noix, and a small body as an advanced post on Isle la Motte; and I conjecture that they would hardly keep so many troops at those places if they did not meditate a winter’s expedition. It is therefore of importance that the garrison should be strengthened, and I have therefore repeated my former applications, for assistance, to the Eastern States. Those of Van Schaick’s and Gansevoort’s regiments that are raised, are under orders to march to Fort Edward, Fort George, Cheshire’s, and Skenesborough, but I fear the garrisons of those places will have left them before the relief gets there, which is detained thro’ the want of blankets, which I am trying to collect from the inhabitants in this city and county.

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“We are greatly at a loss for iron rods to make nails out of. If I knew where to procure them I should not trouble Congress.

“If any cannon are to come from Pennsylvania, as I believe there must, for I have very little prospect of getting a supply elsewhere, I wish them to be sent whilst the snow continues on the ground.

“The paymaster-general informs me that he has very little cash left. A speedy supply will be necessary, as such a variety of articles are to be purchased and so much transportation to be paid for.

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“Much as I wish to do myself the honor to pay my respects to Congress, yet so much is to be done here, and no other general officer in the department, that it would not be prudent for me to quit it in this conjuncture.

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“January 1st, 1777. Last evening I was informed that amongst the letters lately intercepted by the enemy was one from Colonel Trumbull, the Commissary General,* in which he insinuated that I had secreted his brother Colonel John Trumbull’s commission as Adjutant General. If it be true that he has asserted such a thing, I shall expect from Congress that justice which is due to me. The commission was never sent, at least never received by me, and if it had been, is there the least probability that I would secrete it, after having recommended Colonel John Trumbull to the office as an active, discreet and sensible officer? That gentleman and his brother, the paymaster-general, both know, and I dare say will do me the justice to avow, that I wished to have them employed in a department equally honorable and much more important, and that I would have recommended him to Congress if he had chose it.”

Schuyler’s labors were seldom greater than during the remainder of the winter of 1777. To General George Clinton he wrote on the 5th of January: “I am closely engaged in preparation for next campaign, and shall hope that if we can be furnished with men, cannon, and ammunition, that the enemy will not be able to penetrate by the north; and if the intended obstruction in Hudson River is effectually made, they will have very little prospect of advancing farther into this State by the south.” With the Reverend Samuel Kirkland, the missionary, and Mr. Deane, the intrepeter among the Indians, he was in constant communication, doing all in his power, by generosity and kindness, to keep the savages to the line of their promised neutrality; for in consequence of inadequate sup-

* Joseph Trumbull, son of Governor Trumbull, of Connecticut. It must be remembered that this was the same officer who wrote the letter to Gates, mentioned on page 95, calculated to inflame his jealousy against Schuyler when the question of command had risen between them.

plies for them at Albany, they were disposed to depart from it. Before Congress and General Washington he was continually laying information of the wants and prospects in his department, giving to each wise and comprehensive advice. To the patriotism of the authorities and people of his own and the New England States, he strongly appealed for immediate and effective measures for placing a barrier against a British invasion early in the spring. He informed General Washington, on the 30th of January, that the ensuing campaign would require ten thousand men at Ticonderoga, besides two thousand men more for the several points of communication and for Fort Schuyler (late Fort Stanwix) on the Mohawk. He made liberal arrangements with two judicious persons in Canada, known to be friendly to the cause, to furnish him from time to time with the best intelligence; and directed Colonel Bedel, who had been fully reinstated,* and in whom he expressed the fullest confidence, to use his great influence with the Caughnawaga and St. Francis Indians, to attempt to gain information by their means.

Toward the middle of January, Schuyler visited the Convention of the State of New York, then in session at Fishkill, a few miles east of the Hudson, where he was informed that Abraham Livingston, who had established a mercantile house in Boston, was the agent for Congress in the purchase of clothing. To him he immediately wrote, asking him to send on clothing and blankets for troops whom he had been compelled to detain at Albany for the want of them. He also ordered him to purchase and send to him by express, Indian goods, for distribution among the Mohawks, who were becoming disaffected, and had

* See page 75.

asked permission to go to Niagara for blankets. But he would not grant such permission, for he regarded their proposed journey as a pretext for joining the enemy. At the same time he allayed a part of their discontents by preventing, as far as possible, the officers and soldiers stationed in the Mohawk Valley from purchasing furs from the Indians at prices far below what they were worth, and buying them for the government at a satisfactory price through an authorized agent. By judicious management he held them to their neutrality. Their breaking from it would have been particularly disastrous at the time. During that whole winter Schuyler's anxiety about the Six Nations was as intense as that concerning the inadequacy of the northern defences.

It was at about that time that Mr. Kirkland brought to the notice of General Schuyler the salt springs near Onondaga Lake, from which the Indians were making salt. In a letter to Congress, on the 25th of January, Schuyler called the attention of that body to the fact, and expressed his conviction that the springs might be "improved to advantage," if some one acquainted with the process of salt-boiling could be sent thither, for salt was a very scarce article,* in consequence of the interruption of

* James Duane, writing to General Schuyler from Livingston's Manor, on the 15th of February, 1777, said: "Our friend R. Yates and myself are appointed to attempt the making of salt in the western country, and have contracted with one Sam, who understands, or *pretends* to understand the processes, to make experiments. We wish to confer with you on this important subject. It is an article which is essential, and we cannot depend on foreign supplies. Is it not probable that the salt springs issue from, or rather pass thro', beds of salt? If such a discovery should be made a supply would be easy. If five gallons of water, on evaporation, would produce, as it is said, two quarts of salt, it will answer the expense and relieve the fears of the people, who are not a little distressed on this account. We have very

navigation by the war—so scarce that Congress were compelled to adopt measures for procuring it. On the 3d of June they appointed a committee to devise ways and means for supplying it. On the 14th, by a series of resolutions, they requested the several States to do what they might to alleviate the distresses of the inhabitants of the State of New York, brought upon them by a want of salt, which the early closing of their seaport had produced, and directed the Secret Committee to sell to the Council of Safety, or the delegates of that State, a cargo of about two thousand bushels of salt, imported by Congress and then in store at Plymouth, Massachusetts. At the middle of July salt had become so scarce that Congress directed the Committee on Commerce to take the most “effectual and speedy measures for importing into different parts of this continent large quantities of that article.” The dearth appears to have continued into the autumn, for we find Congress, on the 22d of October, directing the Commissary-general of purchases to procure salt for the Middle Department, which then included the State of New York. The great salt springs in central New York, which now supply so large a proportion of our thirty-eight million inhabitants, were then, as we have seen, just brought to the notice of the government, and there were no experts to make use of them.

Schuyler was much annoyed by the unpatriotic conduct of some of the citizens who were endeavoring to profit by the public wants. To the Convention of the State of New York, he wrote on the 25th of January, slender information to proceed upon. I know that Sir William Johnson set a high value on the salt lake and springs which he claimed under an Indian deed. He conceived this claim worthy of particular notice in his will.”

complaining of "a set of monopolizers" in Albany County, who were purchasing such great quantities of wheat, peas, corn, boards, etc., that a supply for public use could not be obtained. He recommended the passage of a law authorizing the seizure of such articles for the public use, to be paid for at fair prices. He also, in the same letter, and another dated the 1st of February, called the attention of the convention to the unguarded state of Ticonderoga, and expressing his fears that unless reinforcements should be sent thither before Lake Champlain should be passable on the ice, that fortress would be lost, for he had assurances that the enemy intended to attack it the very moment they might be able to so cross the lake. Only a few Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New England troops, under Colonel Anthony Wayne, then garrisoned the fortress, and these had been waiting to be relieved by others, for their terms of service had expired. Early in February, the Pennsylvanians could be detained no longer, and marched off for home, leaving the New Jersey troops discontented. These too were anxious to depart, and some left, so that the garrison dwindled down to a few hundred men, chiefly New England recruits.

General Schuyler slightly hoped the enemy might be detained by the news of Washington's success in New Jersey, of which he sent glowing accounts to the Six Nations, and to the Caughnawagas in Canada. He complained to Washington of the tardiness not only of his own State but that of the New England States in furnishing reinforcements, and especially of the hesitation of the inhabitants of the exposed northern states to enlist as volunteers. There was some show of reason for those of the seaboard New England States in being backward, for the British,

estimated to be four thousand strong, were at Newport, in Rhode Island, and might, in the absence of the militia, make a destructive raid. So late as the 7th of February, General Arnold wrote to Schuyler, from Providence, that there were five thousand raw militia there, to be used by General Spencer against the British at Newport.* But at about that time many of those troops were called away to New York to reinforce General Howe, and relieved the New Englanders from their apprehensions.†

Under the new arrangements for recruiting the armies with soldiers raised to serve during the war, the quota of Massachusetts was fifteen regiments. Washington had already authorized General Arnold to raise four or five battalions;‡ now he sent General Heath there to raise the whole number, and forward them to Ticonderoga as fast as they could be mustered into service. General Knox, the commander of the artillery, who had also been sent to Boston to forward artillerymen and ordnance to the same post, ordered Major Ebenezer Stevens, on the 6th of February, to proceed thither with three companies of artillery. A little later General Washington recommended General Schuyler to have the army in his department inoculated for the small-pox.

Other troops from other parts of New England and New York now began to move toward Lake Champlain, while the British troops at New York were actively building boats and galleys, which Washington believed were to be used on the Delaware, in a contemplated attack on Philadelphia.§ Encouraged by these promises of strength

* Autograph Letter.

† Autograph Letter of Pierre Van Cortlandt.

‡ Autograph Letter of Arnold to Schuyler, February 8, 1777.

§ Autograph Letter of John Taylor, dated at Morristown, 11th of March, 1777.

and of relief from apprehensions of an immediate attack, Schuyler wrote to Congress, on the 24th of February, saying he proposed to wait upon that body as soon as a competent garrison should arrive at Ticonderoga, when he should take that opportunity to justify every part of his conduct since he had been in command of the Northern Department.

Three days after this letter was written, Congress, still in session at Baltimore, adjourned, and reassembled at Philadelphia on the 4th of March. Gates, as we have seen, had repaired to the vicinity of Congress at the close of the campaign of 1776. He was now in Philadelphia, and he and his friends lost no time in impressing upon Congress the idea that Schuyler had assumed the power of a dictator without authority; that he was so offensive to the New Englanders that they would not serve under him; that the tone of his communications to the supreme Legislature was haughty and disrespectful, and that to retain him longer in the command of the Northern Department would be perilous to the country. The fact of Gates's own haughtiness and disrespect toward Congress appears to have been overlooked. He had treated the earnestly expressed desires of that body that he should resume the office of Adjutant-general in the newly organized army with absolute scorn. "I had last year," he wrote to President Hancock, "the honor to command in the second post in America; and had the good fortune to prevent the enemy from making their so much wished for junction with General Howe. After this, to be expected to dwindle again to the adjutant-general requires more philosophy on my part and something more than words on yours." To Washington he wrote to the same effect,

but declared that should it be his Excellency's wish he would resume the office with cheerfulness. Washington expressed his gratification at this seeming self-sacrifice, and desired Gates to send him a line mentioning the time when he would leave Philadelphia for Morristown.

Gates evidently never intended to resume the office. He made no reply to Washington's last request. He had a higher object in view, and in this he was sustained by his partisans in Congress. He was kept well informed by them of every secret of that body that might be of interest to him. No word of censure for his flippant letter to Hancock was uttered; on the contrary, on the very next day (March 13) a committee was appointed to confer with him upon the general state of affairs, and he felt confident that a majority of the delegates would be in favor of his appointment to the command of the Northern Department.

But how to get rid of General Schuyler? was a perplexing question. The mere allegations which had been made against him could not be sustained by proofs sufficiently positive to warrant his dismissal. There remained no other way than to so increase his discontent as to cause him to resign. Accordingly a letter of his to Congress, written on the 4th of February, was brought before that body on the 15th of March. In it he had said, in relation to their dismissal of the medical director of his department: "As Dr. Stringer had my recommendation to the office he has sustained, perhaps it was a compliment due to me that I should have been advised of the reasons for his dismissal." In the same letter (including the intercepted one from Commissary Trumbull) he said that he "confidently expected that Congress would have done

him that justice which it was within their power to give, and which he humbly conceived they ought to have done." These expressions, far more courteous in words and intent than Gates', and which Congress had not hitherto been offended at, were now construed into insults to that body, and the following resolutions, calculated to sting Schuyler to the quick, and evidently intended to cause him to resign, were adopted:

Resolved, That as Congress proceeded to the dismissal of Doctor Stringer, upon reasons satisfactory to themselves, General Schuyler ought to have known it to be his duty to have acquiesced therein;

"That the suggestion in General Schuyler's letter to Congress, that it was a compliment due to him to have advised him of the reasons of Doctor Stringer's dismissal, is highly derogatory to the honor of Congress; and that the President be desired to acquaint General Schuyler that it is expected his letters, for the future, be written in a style more suitable to the dignity of the representative body of these free and independent States, and to his own character as their officer.

Resolved, That it is altogether improper and inconsistent with the dignity of this Congress to interfere in disputes subsisting among the officers of the army; which ought to be settled, unless they can be otherwise accommodated, in a court-martial, agreeably to the rules of the army; and that the expression in General Schuyler's letter of the 4th of February, 'that he confidently expected Congress would have done him that justice, which it was in their power to give, and which he humbly conceives they ought to have done,' were, to say the least, ill-advised and highly indecent."

President Hancock, who appreciated Schuyler's character, in his official letter transmitting the resolutions, said:

"The sense of Congress, relative to some expressions in your letter of the 4th of February is so clearly conveyed in the inclosed resolves that I shall only add, it is their expectation you will be more guarded for the future; and that you write in a style better adapted to their rank and dignity, as well as to your own character. I have the honor to be with every sentiment of esteem and respect."

Schuyler was not a man to be moved from his purpose by any provocation. He knew better than all Congress how important were his services to the country at that time, and no indignity could induce him to leave the post

of duty while he saw such perils ahead. He keenly felt the utter injustice of these resolutions, and determined to bring the matter to an issue at once. He went immediately to Kingston, in Ulster County, where the Convention of the State of New York were in session, laid the matter before them, and on the 30th of March set out for Philadelphia.

At Kingston, Schuyler was informed, by rumor, that he had been superseded by General Gates, in the command of the Northern Department. On his arrival at Philadelphia he found that to be virtually the case, for Gates, by resolutions of Congress passed on the 25th and 31st of March, had been ordered to repair immediately to Ticonderoga and take the command there, and was empowered and directed to take with him and employ under him in the Northern Department, Brigadier-general Roche de Fermoy, and such other of the French officers in the service of the United States as he should think proper. Also, Major-general St. Clair was ordered to repair to Ticonderoga and "serve under General Gates."

The rumor that Schuyler heard at Kingston about his being superseded, he communicated to his family at Albany, and Colonel Varick, who was still his confidential secretary and an inmate of his house, wrote on the 2d of April that all were well and in good spirits, and that nothing seemed wanting "except his presence as *Philip Schuyler, Esq.*, to make them happy." His family had long wished to see him relieved of the burdens and annoyances of office, yet they patriotically acquiesced in whatever seemed best for the promotion of the public good.