CHAPTER XIII.

So it was that General Schuyler was left to rely upon his own resources. Arnold had now joined him and was put in command of one portion of the little army with his head-quarters at Fort Edward, while Schuyler, posted at Moses' Creek, a few miles below, was preparing to resist the advance of Burgoyne, then moving. He kept out vigilant scouts in every direction, from Saratoga Lake far towards Bennington. Colonel Warner was kept on the rear and flank of the invaders, within the domain of the New Hampshire grants, or Vermont, with a slowly accumulating force, which now amounted to about eight hundred men, and General Glover was pressing forward from Albany, with his thin brigade. On the 26th of July Burgoyne made a general forward movement from Skenesborough. He had been considerably reinforced during his stay of three weeks there by many royalists or Tories who had joined his standard, among the most influential of whom was Major Skene, in whose honor that place had been named. Two vessels were sent up Wood Creek to Fort Anne with baggage, and a large detachment pushed on to the same point on that and the following day, while General Riedesel, with a large corps of his Germans, was detached to the left of that line of march to prevent troops from the New Hampshire grants following upon the flank of the British; and, to keep the Tories in that region, in countenance, General Phillips, at the same time, passed

over Lake George with a considerable force, took possession of what was left of Fort George, without opposition, for it had been abandoned and burnt, and began the construction of a military road from that point toward Fort Edward, a distance of about sixteen miles. The same sort of work was begun at Fort Anne, to enable the invaders to move upon Fort Edward, but they found Wood Creek so obstructed, the bridges over the stream so broken up, and the roads so barricaded with trees, that their progress was exceedingly slow. The impetuous Fraser took the lead, and appeared before Fort Edward on the 27th, where Burgoyne established his head-quarters on the 31st. On the following day Riedesel celebrated the birthday of his Brunswick sovereign, with as much display as possible, at Fort Anne.

In the meantime General Schuyler had been maintaining his position at Moses' Creek and Fort Edward, with pertinacity, but with the greatest difficulty. The latter post was only a ruin of what was never a very tenable fortification. "I find by letters from below," Schuyler wrote to Washington on the 26th, "that an idea prevails that Fort Edward is a strong and regular fortification. It was once a regular fortification, but there is nothing but the ruins of it left, and they are so utterly defenceless that I have frequently galloped my horse in on one side and out at the other. But when it was in the best condition possible, with the best troops to garrison it, and provided with every necessary, it would not have stood two days siege after proper batteries had been opened. It is situated in a bottom on the banks of the river, and surrounded with hills from which the parade may be seen within point-blank shot. I doubt not that it will be said that Fort

Miller, Fort Saratoga, and Stillwater, are considerable fortifications, of neither of which is there a *trace left*, although they still retain their names."

It was because of this untenable state and position of Fort Edward that Schuyler withdrew the main body of his army to Moses' Creek, four miles below, at about the time when Burgoyne advanced from Skenesborough; and it was the utter ignorance that prevailed concerning the fortifications of the old French and Indian War, which Schuyler's enemies took advantage of when condemning him for abandoning Fort Edward and retreating down the Hudson, as he did a few days after this letter was written. He had no other alternative if he would save his little army and more effectually retard the advance of Burgoyne. His militia were in an almost continual panic-fear, owing to the known presence of large parties of Indians, who were now and then seen prowling near the camps, and they were continually leaving for their homes. On the 29th of July, when Burgoyne's forces were gathering near Fort Edward, such a panic seized about three hundred of the militia of the extreme front in consequence of a few shots from a small party of Indians—not more than fifty in number—that they fell back pell-mell toward the main army yet at Moses' Creek, breaking through the thin brigade of General de Fermoy and a body of militia, and throwing the whole into disorder. This fear had doubtless been produced by an occurrence at Fort Edward only three days before, when a body of Indians and regular troops suddenly attacked a picket-guard at that post, under Lieutenant Van Vechten, killed and scalped the young commander and others, and took four prisoners. "They also scalped a woman and carried off another," Schuyler

wrote to Washington on the 27th of July. The "woman" who was "scalped," was the beautiful young girl, Jane McCrea, whose tragical end has been the theme of history, romance, art and song, for almost a hundred years. The sad story has been variously told. I had it more than twenty years ago from the lips of a granddaughter of Mrs. McNeil, at whose house Miss McCrea was staying at the time, and it was in this wise: Jane McCrea was the daughter of a Scotch Presbyterian clergyman of Jersey city, then known as Paulus' Hook. Mrs. McNeil was an intimate acquaintance of Miss McCrea's father, and when he died the latter went to live with her brother at Fort Edward, where Mrs. McNeil then also resided. Near her brother lived a family named Jones, and Miss McCrea and young David Jones became attached to each other, and were betrothed. The Joneses took the royal side when the war broke out, and, in the autumn of 1776, David Jones and his brother Jonathan raised a company of men under pretence of going to swell the garrison at Ticonderoga, but continued on down the lake when they went in that direction, and proceeded to Crown Point, where they joined the British army. When Burgoyne prepared his army for invasion, the Joneses, Jonathan as a captain and David as a lieutenant, were assigned to duty in the corps of General Fraser, and when the army approached Fort Edward they were with him. Mrs. McNeil was a cousin of General Fraser, and a staunch loyalist. Miss McCrea's brother was as staunch a whig, and when the British approached he left Fort Edward and went to Schuyler's army at Moses' Creek. His sister lingered with Mrs. McNeil, with a faint hope that she might see her lover. Her brother sent repeated requests for her to join him,

and on the 25th of July he gave her a peremptory order to that effect. She promised to go down the river in a large batteau which was expected to leave the next day.

Early the next morning a black servant-boy, belonging to Mrs. McNeil, saw some Indians creeping toward the house. He gave the alarm, and fled to the fort. Mrs. McNeil's daughter, the young friend of Miss McCrea, and mother of my informant, was then in Argyle, many miles from Fort Edward, and the family consisted of only the widow and her young guest, two small children, and a black feminine servant. The kitchen stood a few feet from the house. When the alarm was given, the black servant snatched up the children, fled to it, and, through a trap-door, retreated to its cellar. The widow and her guest followed. The former was corpulent; the latter, who was small and agile, reached the trap-door first. Before Mrs. McNeil could descend, the Indians had entered the kitchen, and a powerful savage, seizing her by the hair, dragged her up. Another went into the cellar, and brought out Miss McCrea, but did not discover the black face of the servant, and so she and the children remained unharmed.

With the two women, the Indians started off on the road toward Sandy Hill, where Fraser was encamped, and upon the slope of a hill a short distance on the way, where the road forked, they caught two horses, and attempted to place the two prisoners upon them. They could not lift the heavy Mrs. McNeil, and as she signified by signs that she could not ride, two stout Indians took her by the arms and hurried up the road, over the hill, while others placed Miss McCrea upon one of the horses, and hurried forward by another road.

Meanwhile, the negro boy had given the alarm at the fort, where some of the picket-guard were stationed, and they immediately started in pursuit, to effect a rescue. They fired several volleys at the Indians, but the savages escaped unharmed. The latter, Mrs. McNeil said, seemed to watch the flash of the guns, and several times threw her upon her face, at the same time falling down themselves. When out of reach of the musket-shot, over the hill, they stripped her of all her clothing but her chemise, and, in that plight, carried her to Fraser's head-quarters. There she met and reproached her kinsman for sending his "scoundrel Indians" after her; but he denied all knowledge of her having left New York, and as no woman in camp had a gown large enough for the plundered prisoner, he lent her his camp coat for a garment, and a pocket-handkerchief for her stolen cap.

Two parties of Indians very soon afterward appeared with scalps, when Mrs. McNeil at once recognized among them the long, glossy locks of her young friend, Miss McCrea. Shuddering with horror, she boldly charged them, through an interpreter, with murder, which they stoutly denied. They declared that while they were hurrying her up the hill, on horseback, a bullet from one of the American guns, intended for them, mortally wounded the poor girl, and she fell dead from the horse. Sure of losing a prisoner for which Burgoyne had offered a reward, they took her scalp, as the next best thing they could do, and that they bore to camp in triumph, to obtain the promised reward for such trophies, according to the terms laid down to them at the feast on the Bouquet.*

Mrs. McNeil believed their story, for she had heard

* See page 198.

not only the firing of the guns but the whistle of bullets over her own head. And the fact that the savages were far more solicitous, on account of the gain, to bring in a prisoner, than a scalp, gave plausibility to their story. They had so taken the heavy Mrs. McNeil, with great fatigue and difficulty, while the lighter Miss McCrea might have been carried with ease.

But the wildest stories soon got abroad. It was known in camp that Lieutenant Jones was Miss McCrea's lover, and it was told, with all the gloss of romance, how he had sent the Indians to bring her to him; how they quarrelled about the division of the reward he had offered them for the service, and how they had, in the intense heat of that quarrel, killed her to settle the dispute. As the story went from lip to lip it continued to increase in romantic and horrid interest, and produced a deep and wide-spread indignation, which was intensified by a published letter of General Gates, in September, written in vivid colors to Burgoyne, in which the American commander charged him with allowing his Indians to butcher with impunity defenceless women and children. "Upwards of one hundred men, women and children," Gates said, "have perished by the hands of the ruffians to whom, it is asserted, you have paid the price of blood."

This terrible charge Burgoyne flatly denied, and probably with truth, for he was a humane man and was really opposed to the employment of the savages. He had issued an order at once, after the sad occurrence, making it a rule thereafter that no party of Indians should be permitted to go on a forage, unless under the conduct of a British officer, or some other person competent to restrain them and to be responsible for their behavior. Gates' letter

was written and published for effect, and wonderful was its power upon the minds of the people, already excited by the horrid tale. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, burning with indignation, flocked to the American standard to oppose Burgoyne, who, perhaps, would have remained quietly at home; and strength was given to many a soldier's arm, and keenness to his blade, in the hour of battle, by the stinging thought of this cruelty.

A sequel to the sad story, as told by my informant, may here be given. Lieutenant Jones was chilled with horror by the awful event. With broken spirit he offered his resignation, but it was not accepted. He bought the scalp of his betrothed, and with the precious memento he and his brother deserted before the army reached Saratoga, and went back to Canada, where he lived to a great age, according to an account given me by a relative of his by marriage, at Glen's Falls. He never recovered from the shock. He had been gay and garrulous: after that he was melancholy and taciturn. He avoided society, and toward the close of every July, when the anniversary of the death of his beloved approached, he would shut himself up in his room, and refuse to see any one.*

* The steady approach of Burgoyne, and the story of the murder of Jane McCrea, spread universal alarm over the country below, and the families of the patriots fled toward Albany for protection. Among those who were thus driven from their homes, was Mrs. Ann Eliza Bleecker, a daughter of Brant Schuyler of the city of New York, who, with her husband, was living among the romantic hills about twenty miles from Albany. She was a poetess of considerable eminence, and a love of nature had drawn her into the then wilderness. She was suddenly startled by a wild cry that the savages were near. Her husband had gone to Albany to provide a residence for his family. She seized her two children and fled with others on foot, carrying one of her little ones in her arms. After a while she obtained a seat in a wagon with other fugitives. She met her husband the next morning,

General Schuyler finding his position at Moses' Creek entirely untenable with his dwindling army, he called a council of his general officers, and following their unanimous advice, he moved his army first to Fort Miller, a few miles down the Hudson, and then to Saratoga, where the whole force arrived on the 31st of July, leaving Burgoyne in possession of the whole country above. General Lincoln had arrived at Schuyler's head-quarters two days before, and on the morning of the retreat departed for Manchester, in Vermont, to take command of the troops gathered there under Colonel Warner, and others that might arrive. He found that Warner's force had dwindled to about five hundred, the militia having deserted; but now, the people being inspirited by the presence of Lincoln, recruits began to come in, and on the 4th of August that officer wrote to Schuyler that he expected, in a few days, to be at the head of at least two thousand men, with whom, according to the plan of Washington and Schuyler, he was to hang upon the flank and rear of the invading army, and to strike them when it might seem to be expedient. Schuyler was not satisfied with his position at Saratoga. "I have been on horseback all day," he wrote to the Council of Safety of the State of New York, on the first of August, "reconnoitring the country for a

who took her to Albany and thence down the Hudson, one of her children dying on the way.

At the same time Mrs. Schuyler went up to Saratoga to superintend the removal of furniture from the country seat at Saratoga. Her carriage was attended by only a single armed man on horseback. She encountered a crowd of the flying people, who urged her to turn back. She refused, and passing on through a dense forest for two miles, she came out into the clearings at Saratoga, and accomplished her errand. When urged to turn back, she said: "The General's wife must not be afraid."

place to encamp on, that will give us a chance of stopping the enemy's career. I have not yet been able to find a spot that has the least prospect of answering the purpose, and I believe you will soon learn that we are retired still farther south." Four days later he wrote to Washington from Stillwater, within about thirty miles of Albany:

"By the unanimous advice of all the general officers, I have moved the army to this place. Here we propose to fortify a camp, in expectation that reinforcements will enable us to keep the ground and prevent the enemy from penetrating further into the country; but if it should be asked from whence I expect reinforcement, I should be at a loss for an answer, not having heard a word from the Massachusetts on my repeated application, nor am I certain that Connecticut will afford us any succor. Our Continental force is daily decreasing by desertion, sickness, and loss in skirmishes with the enemy, and not a man of the militia now with me will remain above one week longer, and while our force is diminishing that of the enemy augments by a constant acquisition of Tories; but if, by any means, we could be put in a situation of attacking the enemy and giving them a repulse, their retreat would be so extremely difficult that, in all probability, they would lose the greater part of their army."

On the same day he addressed General George Clinton as governor of the State, setting forth the weak condition of his force, and concluding with these cordial words: "I sincerely congratulate you on the honor your countrymen have conferred on you, and assure you that I shall embrace every opportunity to make you sit as easy in the chair of government as the times will admit. Your virtue, the love of my country, and that friendship which I have always, and with great truth professed, are all so many inducements to it." And on the same day he wrote to the Council of Safety of the State of New York, asking their attention to his open letter to Congress, which he sent to them, and said: "Perhaps if his Excellency, the Governor, was to put himself at the head of the militia they would turn out in great numbers, and afford us such a

reinforcement as would enable us to keep our ground; and if the Eastern States would also send succors we should then, in all probability, be able to ruin General Burgoyne's army, for if it meets with a repulse, it will be so extremely difficult for him to retreat, that I should hope a very considerable part of his army would be lost."

General Burgoyne was now at Fort Edward. He had reached the Hudson River, which flowed through the country he was to subdue, from the northern wilderness to the sea, and his troops were exultant, as that was the goal toward which they had been pressing. But *his* hopes of conquest were not as promising as they had been. He found himself entangled in a net of complicated difficulties. His means for the transport service were entirely inadequate to supply his wants, and he found that the army could barely be victualled from day to day, for Schuyler had so promptly and completely stripped the country around him of food and forage that supplies could not be obtained even from those who, through timidity or choice, might otherwise have helped him. He was therefore compelled to employ his army in bringing the stores and provisions which General Phillips had forwarded to Lake George, across the rough wooded country to Fort Edward, and also from Skenesborough to the same place. It was a work of immense labor, for neither oxen nor horses could be procured, and the whole country was inundated by almost incessant rains.

Burgoyne had also serious trouble with his new savage recruits at this time, who had lately come to him. His order recently issued in regard to the affair of Miss McCrea, for restraining them, was resented, and when, discovering their evident ill-humor, he called a council of the

chiefs, what was his astonishment to find that the tribe for whom St. Luc, his most trusted partisan, acted as interpreter, declared their intentions to return to Canada, and demanded his acquiescence and assistance. They had been promised the free exercise of their thirst for blood and plunder, and were disappointed. This declaration greatly embarrassed him, for this savage force, gathered by the express orders of the ministry at great expense, and calculated to give him much strength by the terror they would inspire, would be lost if he acquiesced in the demand, and there was no way to reconcile them except to revoke his orders and give free vent to their cruel passions. This he would not do, to his honor be it spoken; and while he refused to revoke his orders for restraining them, he appealed to their honor and plighted faith, and agreed to grant furloughs to parties to return home and gather in their harvests. They seemed to be touched by his speech and kindness, and all appeared agreeable when the sun went down, but the next day those savage allies whose chivalry he had extolled at the Bouquet, went away by scores, carrying with them as much of the plunder which they had collected in their forays as possible. This desertion continued until scarcely a savage who had joined the army at Skenesborough remained.

At this juncture Burgoyne received intelligence that the detachment under St. Leger, whom he had sent from Lachine to proceed to the Mohawk valley, by way of Oswego, had accomplished their march and were actually besieging Fort Stanwix. This made it imperative for him to make a rapid movement down the Hudson, so as to coöperate with St. Leger on his expected approach to Albany. But how could he move without transportation

and provisions? These must first be obtained, but where? This perplexing question seemed to be solved by Major Skene, then in Burgoyne's camp, who was well acquainted with the whole surrounding country, and who informed him that at Bennington, about twenty-four miles east of the Hudson, the Americans had gathered a large quantity of horses, carriages, and supplies of all kinds, for the use of the Northern Army, and advised an attempt to seize them. He believed this might be easily done by a surprise; and Burgoyne, deceived by the representations of Skene that the inhabitants were loyalists in the proportion of five to one, and would show themselves in the presence of protecting power, and also driven to extremities by his needs, immediately set an expedition on foot for that purpose. Both Phillips and Riedesel were opposed to the measure as extremely hazardous, but Burgoyne, trusting too largely to the supposed loyalist strength in that region, and impelled partly by his vain estimate of his own strength and the weakness of the Americans, partly by what seemed to him to be stern necessity, took the responsibility of detaching Lieutenant-Colonel Baume to Bennington, with five hundred Germans, Canadians, and Tories, and one hundred Indians, on the 9th of August. His instructions to Baume declared his object to be to try the affections of the country; to disconcert the councils of the enemy; to mount Riedesel's dragoons; to complete Peters' corps of Loyalists; and to obtain large supplies of cattle, horses, carriages and stores. He was directed to "scour the country from Rockingham to Otter Creek;" to go down the Connecticut River as far as Brattleborough, and return by the great road to Albany, there to meet General Burgoyne, and to endeavor to make the country believe his

corps was the advanced body of the general's army which was to cross the country and proceed to Boston. He was ordered to make prisoners of "all officers, civil and military, acting under the Congress," and to "tax the towns where they halted, with such articles as they wanted, and to take hostages for the performance, etc.; to bring all horses fit to mount the dragoons, or to serve as battalion horses for the troops, with as many saddles and bridles as could be found." Burgoyne stipulated the number of horses to be brought at one thousand three hundred, at least, and more if they could be obtained, and directed them to be "tied in strings of ten each, in order that one man might lead ten horses."

With these instructions to accomplish impossibilities with six hundred men, Baume left his encampment on the 13th of August, and the next day arrived at the mill on the Walloomscoick Creek, capturing on their way, near Cambridge, some men and horses, by means of some Tories and Indians, when the latter drove away the horses as their own prizes. From the prisoners he obtained not very encouraging information. They said there were one thousand three hundred Americans at Bennington, but they thought they would retire on the approach of Baume.*

So far Baume had found no impediments to his progress. Now they grew thick and fast around him. The presence of Burgoyne at Skenesborough, and the expectation that he might attempt to penetrate New Hampshire and Massachusetts, whose whole frontiers were uncovered, with Boston as his point of destination, had filled the inhabitants of that region with alarm. The Committee of

* Baume's Letter to Burgoyne, 14th August, 1777.

Safety of Vermont (New Hampshire Grants) apprised the New Hampshire Committee of the impending and pressing danger, and implored their assistance. The Provincial Assembly of the latter State had gone home, but a summons from the Committee brought them all back in the course of three days. Deep despondency rested upon those representatives of the people until the patriotic John Langdon, then speaker of the Assembly, whose zeal was always glowing, said in tones that carried conviction of his sincerity to every mind: "I have $3,000 in hard money. I will pledge my plate for $3,000 more. I have seventy hogsheads of Tobaga rum, which shall be sold for the most it will bring. These are at the service of the State. If we succeed in defending our firesides and homes, I may be remunerated; if we do not, the property will be of no value to me. Our old friend Stark, who so nobly sustained the honor of our State at Bunker Hill, may be safely entrusted with the conduct of the enterprise, and we will check the progress of Burgoyne."

The fire of Langdon's spirit was communicated to the Assembly. They planned and put into operation the most energetic measures. The militia of the State were formed into two brigades, and placed under the command of William Whipple (one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence) and John Stark. One-fourth of Stark's brigade and one-fourth of the regiments of Whipple were placed under the command of the former and ordered to march immediately to the western frontiers of the State, with power to disarm all Tories found in their way. This done, a day of fasting and prayer was ordered and observed, for these were men who were in the habit of following the spirit of Cromwell's injunction, "Trust in Providence, but keep your powder dry."

At that time the veteran soldier, John Stark, was a private citizen. He was then about fifty years of age; had been one of Rogers' Rangers in the French and Indian wars, and was raised to Captain in 1756; fought bravely as a colonel of a regiment on Bunker's Hill, in June, 1775; went into Canada under Sullivan in 1776, and left that army at Ticonderoga when his commander did.* He joined the army, with him, under Washington, and commanded the van of the right wing in the attack on Trenton, late in the year; and he was with Washington when he went into winter-quarters at Morristown soon afterward. Then he returned to New Hampshire on recruiting service, where, having filled his regiment, he learned that several junior officers had been promoted by Congress, while he was left out. Indignant and aggrieved, he resigned his commission in the Continental Army, but accepted that of brigadier from the authorities of his adopted State, resolved, like General Schuyler, to serve his country faithfully whatever might be his private griefs. He was active while divested of all military authority; now he took the field with the understanding that he was not to be attached to the Continental army, but be amenable only to the authorities of New Hampshire.

Stark was a great favorite with the militia of his State, and when it was known that he was to be their leader, they cheerfully flocked to his standard, which was raised first at Charlestown, and then at Manchester, twenty miles north of Bennington, where Colonel Warner was posted, as we have observed, with the remnant of his regiment of Green Mountain Boys. There Stark met Lincoln, whom Schuyler, as we have seen, sent thither to take the chief

* See page 92.

command, and who ordered him to prepare to march to join the Northern Army on the Hudson. Stark positively refused to go, and showed Lincoln the written terms upon which he had assumed the command of the brigade, or even consented to appear in the field at all. Lincoln immediately wrote to General Schuyler on the subject, on the 8th of August:

"Yesterday, General Stark, from New Hampshire, came into camp at Manchester. By his instructions from that State it is at his option to act in conjunction with the Continental Army or not. He seems to be exceedingly soured, and thinks he hath been neglected, and hath not had justice done him by Congress. He is determined not to join the Continental Army until the Congress give him his rank therein. His claim is to command all the officers whom he commanded the last year, as also all those who joined the army after him. Whether he will march his troops to Stillwater, or not, I am quite at a loss to know. But if he doth, it is a fixed point with him to act there as a separate corps, and take no orders from any officer in the Northern Department, saving your honor, for he saith they all were *either commanded by him the last year or joined the army after him.* It is very unhappy that this matter by him is carried to so great a length, especially at a time when every exertion for our common safety is so absolutely necessary. I have good reason to believe, if the State of New Hampshire were informed of the matter, they would give new and very different instructions to General Stark."*

To this letter Schuyler replied the next day:

"Your favor of yesterday's date was delivered me last night.

"You will please to assure General Stark that I have acquainted Congress of his situation, and that I trust and entreat he will, on the present alarming crisis, waive his right, as the greater the sacrifice he makes to his feelings, the greater will be the honor due to him, for not having suffered any consideration to come in competition with the weal of his country, and I entreat him to march immediately to this army."†

Congress was not so wise or considerate as General Schuyler. That body, when Stark's refusal was communicated to it by General Lincoln on the 19th of August, resolved that the Assembly of New Hampshire should be

* Autograph Letter. † Schuyler's MS. Letter Book.

informed that the instructions which they had given to General Stark were "destructive of military subordination, and highly prejudicial to the common cause," and the Assembly was desired to "instruct General Stark to conform himself to the same rules which other general officers of the militia were subject to whenever they were called out at the expense of the United States."

This was sound military logic, but was not adapted to the particular exigencies of the occasion. Stark had already, while Lincoln's letter, forwarded by Schuyler, was on its way to Philadelphia, performed great services for his country in an independent command, and his apparent insubordination, which seemed so highly "prejudicial to the common cause," was productive of great benefit to his country. The resolution of Congress inflamed his wrath, while Schuyler's sympathizing and patriotic letter inspired him with fresh zeal and a determination to make any personal sacrifice for the good of that country. He well knew the value of Schuyler's services and the patriotic zeal which animated him, and he was ready to serve under him anywhere and obey his commands.