

CHAPTER XIV.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL BAUME was too cautious to proceed, when, at the mill on the Walloomscoick, he was informed of a body of troops at Bennington, so he halted there and sent back to Burgoyne for reinforcements. Lieutenant-colonel Breyman was immediately sent with five hundred German troops to aid Baume. The force at Bennington was a part of the New Hampshire brigade, under General Stark, who had arrived at that place on the 9th, the date of Burgoyne's instructions to Baume. There, on the 13th, Stark heard of the attack of Indians upon the party of Americans at Cambridge, already mentioned, when he detached Lieutenant-colonel Gregg, with two hundred men, to oppose their march. Towards night word reached Stark that a large body of the foe, with a train of artillery, was in the rear of the Indians, and in full march for Bennington. He at once rallied his brigade, gathered all the militia at Bennington, and sent out an urgent call to his standard for all the militia in the vicinity. He also sent an order for the officer in command of Colonel Warner's force at Manchester, to march his men to Bennington immediately. That night was a rainy one, but Stark's command was instantly obeyed, and towards morning Warner's troops, thoroughly drenched, reached Bennington.

While these men were drying their clothes and preparing their arms for action, early on the morning of the

14th, Stark moved forward with his whole force to the support of Gregg, accompanied by Colonels Warner, Williams, and Brush. After marching about five miles they met Gregg retreating, and the enemy within a mile of him. Stark immediately disposed his force in battle array, when Baume and his men halted upon an eminence not far from the mill, and began to throw up intrenchments. Stark then fell back about a mile, showing his troops to the greatest advantage, there to wait for reinforcements and arrange a plan of battle. The morning of the 15th was again very rainy, but both parties worked vigorously in preparations for battle. The Germans and a corps of Rangers were intrenched upon a high hill at a bend of the Walloomscoick, and on its north side, and another party of rangers and German grenadiers were posted at a ford of that stream. At the foot of the declivity were some chasseurs; and about a mile distant from the main intrenchments on the height, on the south side of the stream, was posted Peters' Tories, or "American Volunteers," as they called themselves. On the same side of the stream, upon the Bennington road, Stark and the main body of his army were encamped. The Walloomscoick, usually fordable, was now swollen by the storm.

The rain fell copiously all day, and yet small parties of the Americans fell upon detachments of the enemy and so annoyed them that the Indians began to desert Baume, "because," as they said, "the woods were full of Yankees." The Germans continued their works upon the hill, and by dusk that night had mounted two pieces of cannon upon them.

A few hours later Colonel Symonds arrived at Stark's camp with a body of Berkshire militia, accompanied by an

ardent clergyman of Pittsfield, the Rev. Mr. Allen, who, toward the dawn, went to Stark and said: "The people of Berkshire have often been summoned to the field without being allowed to fight, and if you do not now give them a chance they have resolved never to turn out again." "Do you wish to march now, in the darkness and rain?" Stark asked. "No, not just this moment," replied the belligerent minister of peace. "Then," said Stark, "if the Lord shall once more give us sunshine, and I do not give you fighting enough, I'll never ask you to come out again." Sunshine came with the morrow, for at dawn the clouds broke and very soon all nature lay smiling in the sunbeams of a warm August morning. It was propitious for the zeal of the parson and his men, and they had "fighting enough" before the evening twilight.

Early that morning (August 16) both of the little armies prepared for action. Stark's plan of attack had been duly arranged, and after reconnoitring his foe at the distance of a mile, he proceeded to execute it. He sent Colonel Nichols with two hundred men up a little creek to attack the enemy's left and rear; and Colonel Herrick was detached with three hundred men to fall upon the rear of Baume's right, and form a junction with Nichols. Colonels Hubbard and Stickney were ordered to march down the Walloomscoick with two hundred men, to the right of the enemy, and with one hundred men in front, near the Tory camp, in order to divert Baume's attention from the other movements.

These orders were strictly obeyed. The battle commenced at three o'clock in the afternoon, by Colonel Nichols, on the enemy's left, who fell with great vigor upon the German intrenchments. At the same moment

Stark, who was with the main body of his troops, sprang into his saddle and shouted "Forward;" and the remainder of the little army moved to the attack. They pressed onward to the hill above Peters' encampment, where they had the whole field of action in view. It was general. The heights were wreathed in the smoke of cannon and small arms; and along the slopes and the little plain the enemy were moving rapidly to repel the assault. They were harassed on every side. The Americans drove the Tories, pell-mell, across the stream, and following after them brought the whole of both forces into action. "It lasted," said Stark in his official account, "two hours, and was the hottest I ever saw. It was like one continued clap of thunder."

The Tories were driven in confusion upon the Germans, who were forced from their breastworks on the height, while the cowardly Indians, alarmed at the aspect of affairs, fled at the very beginning of the fight through the gap between Nichols and Herrick, with horrid yells and the jingling of cow-bells which formed a part of their plunder. The weight of the conflict was then thrown chiefly upon the brave corps of Riedesel's dragoons, led by the gallant Baume in person. They kept an unbroken column until compelled, by the failure of their ammunition, to give way after they had made a furious sword-charge, leaving their artillery and baggage on the field. Against five hundred veterans, well armed and highly disciplined troops, the unskilled handful of Americans, with their brown firelocks, scarcely a bayonet, very little discipline, and not a single piece of cannon, fought with indomitable courage. They were fighting in defence of their homes, and with a prospect of promised plunder.

Their eagerness for securing the latter nearly proved fatal to them.

So soon as Baume was driven from the field, the Americans dispersed in the eager collection of plunder. Just then Colonel Breyman arrived with reinforcements for Baume. They had been kept back by the heavy rain the day before. They marched more lively when they heard the sounds of battle. Could they have arrived a little sooner, they might have turned the tide against the Americans. As it was, they rallied Baume's flying party, and the whole pushed back to the intrenchments on the height. Stark comprehended the danger and tried to rally his militia. They were too much scattered to be quickly arrayed in battle-order, and for a little while it was doubtful to which party the night would give the palm of victory. Happily for Stark, the corps of Warner, which had been left at Bennington, a few miles distant, in the morning, arrived at this juncture fresh and well armed, and fell vigorously upon the foe. Stark, with what men he could gather, pushed forward to the assistance of Warner. A running fight of considerable severity ensued, and was kept up until sunset with great obstinacy. The enemy made their last stand near the mill, and then fled in confusion toward the Hoosick, pursued by the Americans until dark, when Stark recalled his men. He had as trophies of his victory seven hundred prisoners, including Colonel Baume, who was wounded and died soon afterward; four brass cannons, two hundred and fifty dragoon swords, several hundred stand of arms, eight brass drums, and four ammunition-wagons. Two hundred and seven of the enemy were killed. The loss of the Americans was about one hundred killed and as many wounded. Stark

had a horse killed under him, but himself was not hurt. The total loss of the enemy, in killed, wounded and prisoners, was nine hundred and thirty-four, including one hundred and fifty-seven of Peters' Tories.

This conflict is known in history as the Battle of Bennington, though it was fought some miles from that village nestled among the hills of the Green Mountains, whose church spires may be seen from the height on which the Germans were intrenched. The victory was hailed with great joy throughout the country, not only as an omen of further disasters awaiting the invading army, but as an evidence of the conquering spirit of the militia when once aroused and led by a good commander. The Congress, which had lately commented severely upon Stark's insubordination, were compelled to listen to the voice of the people loudly chanting his praises everywhere, and on the 14th of October following, with tardy justice they resolved "That the thanks of Congress be presented to General Stark of the New Hampshire Militia, and the officers and troops under his command, for their brave and successful attack upon, and signal victory over, the enemy in their lines at Bennington; and that Brigadier Stark be appointed a brigadier-general in the armies of the United States."

While these important events were occurring eastward of Schuyler's camp at Stillwater, equally important events were happening westward of him. The long-expected invasion of the Mohawk Valley, by way of Oswego, had begun. Let us first take a brief view of immediately antecedent and connecting events on the remote borders of civilization in Central New York.

In the course of the Spring of 1777, Joseph Brant, an

educated Mohawk Chief, with whom General Schuyler was well acquainted, came from Canada and appeared among the Mohawks at Oghquaga, on the Susquehannah, below Unadilla, with a large body of warriors. His presence emboldened the Tories and gave uneasiness to the Whigs. In June of that year he ascended the Susquehannah to Unadilla, with about eighty warriors, and commenced depredations upon the inhabitants of that frontier settlement, who fled to Cherry Valley and other places as far away as the Hudson River.

When General Schuyler was apprised of this movement he directed Brigadier-General Herkimer to repair to Unadilla, with some of the Tryon County militia, to seek an interview with Brant and, if possible, ascertain his intentions. Herkimer took with him three hundred men, and at the same time Colonel Van Schaick marched with one hundred and fifty men to Cherry Valley, while Schuyler held himself in readiness to repair to Unadilla if his presence should be needed. These precautions were taken because they were ignorant of Brant's intentions. They were not aware that he had said to the Rev. Mr. Johnston at Unadilla: "I have made a covenant with the king, and am not inclined to break it."

Herkimer was compelled to wait a week at Unadilla before Brant appeared, in compliance with the General's invitation. They had long been neighbors and friends. Brant dispatched a runner to Herkimer to inquire the object of his visit, and then appeared at the head of five hundred warriors. The two parties were encamped within two miles of each other, and at the interview that followed, each left their arms in their respective encampments. They met in an open field; Brant with about

forty warriors. When pressed by Herkimer to truly reveal his intentions, Brant told him in few words that he and his men were loyal to the king whom they had always served; that Herkimer and his followers had joined the rebellious Bostonians, and that the king would humble them; that General Schuyler was very smart on the Indians at the treaty at the German Flatts a year before, but was not able to fulfil his agreement with them; and finally that the Indians had formally made war on the white people when they were all united, and, as they were now divided, the Indians were not frightened. He also told Herkimer that a war-path had been opened across the country to Esopus (Kingston near the Hudson) for the Tories of Ulster and Orange Counties to join them. The conference ended with an agreement to hold another the next morning.

Again they met; Brant, conscious of his superior strength, was haughty in his deportment, and said to Herkimer: "I have five hundred warriors with me, armed and ready for battle. You are in my power, but, as we have been friends and neighbors, I will not take advantage of you." At a signal his braves, painted in hideous colors as if prepared for battle, burst from the surrounding woods, gave the terrible war-whoop and discharged their rifles in the air. They injured no one. It was well for the chief that they did not, for Herkimer had chosen men ready to kill Brant and his higher officers should the least hostile demonstration be made. Brant advised Herkimer to go back, expressed a hope that he might one day return the compliment, turned on his heel and disappeared in the forest.

The conference satisfied Schuyler that the neutrality

of the Mohawks was at an end. A few days after the conference, Brant and his warriors joined the Johnsons and Colonel Butler at Oswego, where Guy Johnson and other British Indian Commissioners had secured a grand council of the Six Nations. They were flattered, cajoled, deceived; but the larger portion of the sachems adhered to the treaty made with General Schuyler at the German Flatts, until the appeals of the Commissioners to their avarice overcame their sense of honor. They told the savages that the armies of the king would soon subdue the rebels; that the friends of the king were as a thousand to one of the colonists; that the rum of the king should always be abundant among them, and that they should never want food or clothing, goods or money, so long as they should be allies of the king. Fancy articles, such as scarlet clothes, beads and trinkets, which appeal powerfully to the savage fancy, were then exhibited, and the Indians, bewildered and bewitched by these things, made a treaty of alliance with the British agents, and agreed to take up the hatchet against the colonists and never bury it until they were subdued. To each Indian was then given a brass kettle, suit of clothes, tomahawk, scalping-knife, gun, a piece of gold, ammunition, and a promise of a bounty for every scalp he should bring in. Thenceforth Brant was the acknowledged Grand Sachem of the Six Nations, and soon after spread terror over all the borders.*

Preparations were now made for attacking Fort Schuyler (late Fort Stanwix) on the site of the present village of Rome. Colonel Peter Gansevoort had been placed in command of that post in the spring of 1777, by General Schuyler, and was yet in charge of the garrison. He had

* See Stone's *Life of Brant*, i. 187, 188.

so early as June obtained information of an intended invasion, and early in July, a half-breed Oneida sachem, who had been sent to Canada to obtain information, reported that he was at a council whereat Colonel Daniel Claus, a brother-in-law of Sir John Johnson, presided, at which the plan of the campaign was revealed. He also reported that Johnson and Claus were then at Oswego, with their families, in command of seven hundred Indians and four hundred regular troops; that there were six hundred Tories at Oswegatchie (now Ogdensburg) ready to join them, and that Colonel John Butler was to arrive at Oswego on the 14th of July, from Niagara, with Tories and Indians.

This information seemed to paralyze with alarm the Whigs of the Mohawk Valley, and instead of putting forth energetic action for staying the threatened invasion, they folded their hands and, as we have seen, called piteously upon General Schuyler for aid at a time when he needed more-troops than he had to roll back the tide of a more formidable invasion under Burgoyne. Fort Schuyler was yet unfinished, and feebly guarded, and it seemed as if the whole country must speedily become a prey to the enemy. But Gansevoort was brave, active and hopeful. He wrote spirited letters to General Schuyler, asking for aid, and the latter laid before the Convention of the State of New York, in most vivid colors, the true condition of Tryon County. The General Congress was also fully informed by Schuyler of the situation of that region, but no help could be given in time to meet the dreadful emergency.

On the first of August the motley invading force of British, Canadians, a few Germans, Tories, and Indians of

the Six Nations (excepting the Oneidas, who were faithful to their treaty obligations), the latter led by Brant, one thousand seven hundred strong, came over Oneida Lake and prepared to invest Fort Schuyler. The main body was led through the forest by the Indians following Brant, and the rear was composed of British regulars. The advanced-guard was composed of sixty sharpshooters, selected from the corps known as Johnson's Royal Greens, and led by Captain Watts, a brother-in-law of the Baronet. On the 2d of August, Brant and Lieutenant Bird began the investment of the fort, which was then garrisoned by only seven hundred and fifty men, under Gansevoort. In July, Colonel Marinus Willet, an active and judicious officer from the city of New York, had joined the garrison with his regiment, and on the very day when Bird commenced the investiture of the fort, Lieutenant-colonel Melton, of Colonel Wesson's regiment, had arrived with two hundred men and two batteaux laden with provisions and military stores. This was a most important reinforcement. The garrison now had a plentiful supply of provisions for six weeks, and an abundance of ammunition for small arms. But they had only about four hundred rounds of cannon ammunition. The garrison was also without a flag. This was made, after the pattern prescribed by Congress a few weeks before, of white shirts and bits of scarlet cloth cut into strips and joined, and the blue field for the stars made of an overcoat belonging to Captain Abraham Swartwout, of Dutchess County. Before sunset of the day when the van of the invaders appeared, the strangely fabricated flag was floating over one of the bastions of the fort.

Colonel St. Leger appeared with his whole force in front of Fort Schuyler on the 3d of August. He imme-

diately sent a flag to the commander of the garrison with a copy of a pompous proclamation after the pattern of Burgoyne's, which he had distributed among the people, and in which he magnified the power, justice, and clemency of the king, and charged the various authorities among the patriots with cruelty in the form of "arbitrary imprisonment, confiscation of property, persecutions and torture unprecedented in the inquisition of the Romish church." He exhorted the people who were disposed to do right to remember that he was "at the head of troops in the full power of health, discipline and valor, determined to strike when necessary, and anxious to spare when possible;" and he tempted them with offers of employment if they would join his standard, security to the infirm and industrious, and payment in coin for all supplies for his army that might be brought into his camp. He said, in conclusion: "If, notwithstanding these endeavors and sincere intention to effect them, the frenzy of hostility shall remain, I shall stand acquitted in the eyes of God and man, in denouncing and executing the vengeance of the State against the wilful outcasts. The messengers of justice and wrath await them in the field; and devastation, famine, and every concomitant horror that a reluctant, but indispensable prosecution of military duty must occasion, will bar the way to their return."

The patriot population of that region appear to have been imbued with new courage by the immediate presence of danger, and they treated this manifesto with derision, while the little garrison, who had already counted the cost of a siege, and determined upon a desperate defence of the fort, laughed at its threats and regarded its offers of bribes with scorn.