

CHAPTER XIX.

THE incompetency of Congress at this time to meet the exigencies of the military service was apparent to thinking men, who deplored its weakness. It was divided by cabals and sectional factions, the fruit of a system of politics then having a vigorous growth in and out of Congress, founded on the paramount sovereignty of the several States, which is now known as State Supremacy. It, in a degree, through the earnest endeavors of Washington to unite all the forces in one Continental army, at one time threatened serious disaster. In the face of his warnings they remodelled, at the middle of the campaign, the commissary department in a manner that defied all unity of action, and great confusion ensued; and in lavishing their favors on Gates that he might be sure of success, Washington was made to feel that he was only the peer of that ambitious general, and not his commander, until Congress, perceiving their own folly, declared that "they never intended to supersede or circumscribe his (the Commander-in-chief's) powers."

Washington tried to destroy State distinctions in the army, while Congress fostered them; and in their attempts to overthrow and ruin General Schuyler, they showed how perniciously that sentiment might work, even to the withholding of troops from service at a most critical time. They commissioned every foreign adventurer, and so they

filled the army with incompetents whom they had not the vigor to expel when they were found to be such. These were generally ambitious men full of the fire of the large European armies, and could not brook the cautious movements of the Americans, forgetful of the fact that the latter had no men to spare. They so impressed upon Congress a sense of the necessity of more vigorous and aggressive movements that John Adams was induced to write: "I wish the Continental army would prove that anything can be done. I am weary with so much insipidity; I am sick of Fabian systems. My toast is, A short and violent war." He could also write that "the army under Washington is more numerous by several thousands than Howe's whole force," when it was several thousands less; for Howe had nearly eighteen thousand men with him, and all thoroughly disciplined.* "Congress never exacted more from Washington, or gave him less support."†

At the time we are considering, the country needed all possible unity of action, for Howe was threatening Philadelphia, and Burgoyne was menacing Albany. Washington made an earnest appeal to the Eastern States, to swell the army of Gates. He was seconded by the New England delegation in Congress. Thousands of men at once began to move toward his camp from Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Overriding Washington's advice, Congress gave to Schuyler's successor unrestricted power to make requisitions for militia, on New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania; and a corps of picked troops, five hun-

* "I was left to fight two battles," Washington wrote to Patrick Henry on the 13th of November, "in order, if possible, to save Philadelphia, with less numbers than composed my antagonist, while the world has given us at least double."

† Bancroft's *History of the United States*, ix. 393.

dred in number, whom Washington had called from the army and formed into a rifle corps, under Colonel Daniel Morgan, as skirmishers, Congress sent to Gates to fight the Indians in Burgoyne's army. In every way the hands of Gates were strengthened, and he speedily bore the laurels of a victor.

Gates opened the campaign against Burgoyne with a foolish and unjust tirade from his pen. That officer wrote a letter to Gates, complaining of harsh treatment experienced by Tory prisoners captured at Bennington. It was couched in gentle terms. "Duty and principle," he said, "made me a public enemy to the Americans who have taken up arms; but I seek to be a generous one; nor have I the shadow of resentment against any individual who does not induce it by acts derogatory to those maxims upon which all men of honor think alike."

To this Gates retorted: "That the savages should, in their warfare, mangle the unhappy prisoners who fall into their hands, is neither new nor extraordinary; but that the famous General Burgoyne, in whom the fine gentleman is united with the scholar, should hire the savages of America to scalp Europeans; nay more, that he should pay a price for each scalp so barbarously taken, is more than will be believed in Europe, until authenticated facts shall in every gazette confirm the horrid tale." Then, in a grandiloquent style, he recited the story of Jane McCrea, alleging that her murderers were employed by Burgoyne, and declaring that more than one hundred men, women and children had perished by the hands of the ruffians "to whom, it is asserted," he said, "you have paid the price of blood."

To these charges Burgoyne made a dignified, and no

doubt truthful, reply, denying Gates' allegations so far as he was personally concerned in Indian atrocities, and said that in the case of Miss McCrea the act was as sincerely lamented by him as it could be by the tenderest of her friends. "I would not be conscious of the acts you presume to impute to me," he said, "for the whole continent of America, though the wealth of worlds was in its bowels and a paradise upon its surface."

Gates evidently thought he had made a great literary achievement. He called General Lincoln and Colone. Wilkinson into his apartment, and showed them the letter, and when they suggested that it was too personal, he said bluntly: "By God! I don't believe either of you can mend it,"* and sent it away uncorrected.

Let us turn from these mere personal matters to events of greater moment.

Early in September Gates found himself in command of an army stronger in number than Burgoyne's whole force. He left the mouth of the Mohawk and moved up to Stillwater; and upon Bemis' Heights, at a narrow part of the Hudson Valley, he established a fortified camp. He was so confident of success that he sent out no harassing parties, and as a dense forest stood between him and his antagonist at the mouth of the Batten Kill, he had only vague information concerning Burgoyne's movements. These were carried on secretly in preparations for an advance. Across the country from Lake George, a month's provisions for his army was brought, and all his forces from Skenesborough, Fort Anne and Fort George were drawn to the main army. He constructed a floating bridge across the Hudson, at Saratoga, for the passage of

* Wilkinson's Memoirs, i. 231.

his troops. These paraded without the beat of drum, and his evening guns no longer broke the silence of the woods and hills.

On the 11th of September a rumor reached the American camp that Burgoyne was in motion, and it was reported that, in a speech to his soldiers, he had told them that the fleet had returned to Canada, and their only safety was to fight their way to New York. Rumor spoke the truth. He was prepared to move forward, and risk a battle. Lord Germain had censured Carleton because he would "hazard nothing with his troops." Burgoyne found that necessity compelled him to hazard everything. His officers were disposed to retreat; so he did not consult them; and, on the 11th of September, he surprised them with this order: "The army will be ready to move forward to-morrow morning." The next day was consumed in perfecting arrangements for the movement, and on the 13th and 14th the whole army slowly crossed the Hudson River, over a bridge of boats, and encamped near Fish Creek, at Saratoga, with positive orders from the commander that no soldier should pass that stream.

Meanwhile, Lieut.-col. Colburn had been sent out from the American camp to the high hills east of the Hudson, with a small party, to watch the movements of the enemy from the tops of trees, and send word regularly to Gates. This he did most faithfully. At the same time, orders were sent to Lincoln, stationed at Manchester, in Vermont, to make a movement in Burgoyne's rear. He accordingly sent out two thousand men to attack the forts on Lake Champlain. A part of these, under Colonel John Brown, a brave officer from Pittsfield, Massachusetts, who had already done excellent service, surprised the garrison at

the foot of Lake George, captured a vessel carrying provisions for the enemy, seized the post at the falls of the outlet of Lake George, took possession of both Mount Hope and Mount Defiance, with the French lines, and demanded the surrender of Ticonderoga and Mount Independence. He destroyed fifty boats above the falls, and one hundred and fifty below them, including seventeen gun-boats and an armed sloop, and captured two hundred and eighty-nine prisoners and five cannons.* The fortress of Ticonderoga was too strong for him, and he abandoned it, and rejoined Lincoln.

Burgoyne had slowly advanced. On the 15th he moved from Saratoga, but was so detained by the repairing of roads and bridges which Schuyler had broken up, that it was the 18th before he reached a point now known as Wilbur's Basin, within two miles of the American camp. He had with him a great train of field artillery, eighty-five baggage-wagons, and two ponderous twenty-four-pounders. A body of light troops, new levies and Indians, the latter painted and decorated for war, were sent into the deep forest, toward Saratoga Lake; and there was every indication of an intention to bring on a battle speedily. All this Lieut.-colonel Colburn had seen; and when the enemy had marched two miles from Saratoga, he descended from the eastern heights, and hastened to camp with the information.

Burgoyne was now confronted with a line of breastworks cast up under the direction of Colonel Thaddeus Kosciusko, the eminent Polanders, extending from the Hudson River westward, over the ridge known as Bemis'

* Autograph Letter of Colonel Brown to General Lincoln, September 18, 1777.

Heights. These were well manned and armed, for Gates was now liberally supplied with artillery. Burgoyne perceived that he must either stand still, make a disastrous retreat, or fight. He chose the latter alternative.

Meanwhile Schuyler had returned to Albany. He found Gates disposed to slight his offers of aid, but he there engaged, with hearty zeal, in measures for promoting the success of the campaign. He was chiefly employed in keeping the Six Nations to their promised neutrality, and in winning some of the Tuscaroras and Onondagas to the side of the Americans. He held "talks" and feasts with them, and engaged some of the Oneidas to go to Gates' camp, and act as scouts, in which service they were very useful.

A former aide-de-camp of General Schuyler, Colonel Henry B. Livingston, and his secretary, Colonel Varick, were in camp, and kept him continually informed of every important movement there. The former was then the aide-de-camp of General Arnold, who, since his return from the relief of Fort Schuyler, had been placed in command of the left wing of the army. Varick was also much of the time with Arnold; and these young men, the known warm friends of Schuyler, excited the jealousy of Gates and a suspicion that they were prejudicing the mind of Arnold against him. They loved Schuyler, but were above such mean intrigues. Colonel Varick could write to his friend, when it was rumored that Burgoyne was about to advance: "I should bless my stars, and think myself completely happy, were you at the head of this army;"* and Colonel Livingston could write: "Burgoyne is in such a situation that he can neither advance nor retire without

* Autograph Letter, September 12, 1777.

fighting. A capital battle must soon be fought. I am chagrined to the soul when I think that another person will reap the fruit of your labors."* But these expressions of affection were not incompatible with the strictest requirements of honor, yet Gates allowed his suspicions to cause him to treat Arnold with a coolness which, as we shall observe, resulted in open rupture.

The American intrenchments extended along a line about three-fourths of a mile in extent, and had redoubts and batteries which commanded the narrow valley of the Hudson, and the hills beyond, on the eastern side. From the foot of the abrupt height an intrenchment extended across the narrow flat to the river, ending with a battery at the edge of the water, which commanded a floating bridge.

The right wing of the army was under the immediate command of Gates, and occupied the brow of the hill, overlooking the river. It was composed of the brigades of Glover, Nixon and Patterson. These were New England and New Jersey troops. The left wing was commanded by Arnold, and occupied the western portion of the line. It was distant from the river about three-fourths of a mile. It was composed of the New Hampshire brigade of General Enoch Poor, consisting of the regiments of Cilley, Scammel and Hale; the New York militia regiments of Pierre Van Cortlandt and Henry Livingston; two Connecticut militia regiments, under Latimer and Cook; and Massachusetts infantry, commanded by Major Henry Dearborn. The centre was composed of Massachusetts and New York Continental troops, and consisted of Learned's brigade, with Bailey's, Wesson's and Jackson's

* Autograph Letter, September 18, 1777.

regiments, of the former State, and James Livingston's, of New York.

Burgoyne formed his army into three columns, early on the morning of the 19th of September, preparatory to an immediate advance. The first or centre column consisted of the 9th, 20th, 21st and 62d regiments, with six six-pounders, led by Brigadier-general Hamilton; the second or right column, composed of the English grenadiers and light infantry, the 24th Brunswick grenadiers, and the light battalion, with eight six-pounders, under Lieutenant-colonel Breyman, was led by General Fraser; and the third or left column consisted of the German troops and the artillery of the left wing, and was commanded by General the Baron de Riedesel, assisted by Major-general Phillips, who was Burgoyne's second in command. The heavy artillery and baggage were with this column, whose route lay along the road through the meadows on the margin of the river, while the rest of the army had to make their way through the forest. The front and flanks of the British army were covered by Indians, Canadians, and a small corps of loyalists.

Burgoyne's troops had slept on their arms several nights in expectation of a general attack from the Americans, for Arnold, with fifteen hundred men, annoyed them continually by boldly attacking their superior numbers engaged in repairing roads and bridges. With these he skirmished successfully and made several prisoners. At the same time Gates' army was threatened with depletion by the determination of the New Hampshire militia to return home. He was not so personally popular with them as was Schuyler, and he was compelled to try to hold them until the arrival of General Stark, their commander—

who had been left behind on the way on account of illness—by offering each man a bounty of ten dollars to stay till “Burgoyne was beaten or had run away.” They refused to accept the offer, but the influence of Stark, who arrived on the evening of the 15th, “induced them to do what a sense of honor and duty could not.”*

Both armies were ready for battle on Friday morning, the 19th of September. Gates had resolved to act on the defensive, within his lines. He could trust neither himself nor his best commanders, in taking the initiative. He “had no fitness for command, and wanted personal courage,”† says Bancroft. He had offended Arnold by his coldness and indifference because he was Schuyler’s friend; and Arnold was passionate, quarrelsome and insubordinate. But the patriotism of the army was untouched and unmoved by these personalities, and they were ready to meet the foe, who at the same time had resolved to attack the American lines.

At eleven o’clock the booming of a heavy gun at the centre of the British lines awoke solemn echoes from the hills. It was the signal for the advance-guard of the three columns to move forward. The glitter of bayonets, the gleam of sabres, and the flashing of scarlet uniforms had been seen through the vistas of the woods at an early hour, as the British troops marched and countermarched in forming their lines; and these movements were regularly reported to Gates, yet he gave no orders and evinced no

* Autograph Letter of Colonel H. B. Livingston to General Schuyler, September 16, 1777. On the same day Livingston got into a quarrel with Major Chester, of Arnold’s staff, and at evening they fought a duel with pistols without any serious result.—Autograph Letter of Colonel Morgan Lewis, September 17, 1777.

† History of the United States, ix. 407.

disposition to fight. Even when informed that the enemy were advancing in great force, right, left and centre, he seemed almost indifferent. His officers grew impatient. Arnold, who was apprised of all the movements of the enemy, was as restive as a hound in the leash. His opinion, earnestly and repeatedly expressed to his commander during the morning, that a detachment should be sent out to make an attack, was at length heeded, and at about noon, when Burgoyne had well advanced and gained advantages, Arnold was permitted to send out Morgan with his riflemen and Dearborn with his infantry to assail the Canadians and Indians, who had been sent in advance of Burgoyne's right, and were swarming upon the hills. The detachment fell upon these most vigorously and drove them back. Morgan's men pursued them so eagerly that the riflemen became scattered and weakened, and a reinforcement of loyalists, under Major Forbes, in turn drove the pursuers. For a moment Morgan thought his corps was ruined; but his loud and familiar signal-whistle soon drew his men around him, and, seconded by Dearborn and some New Hampshire troops under Cilley and Scammel, they repeated the charge. After a short fight both parties quietly withdrew to their respective lines. The Americans had lost twenty-two men made prisoners.

At about the same time a party of Canadians, savages and Tories, were detached through the woods along the margin of the flats near the river, where they were met by American pickets, beaten and dispersed, with nearly fifty men killed or made prisoners. Meanwhile Burgoyne was making rapid movements for the purpose of falling heavily upon the Americans' left and centre. Fraser, on his commander's extreme right, with his English grenadiers, made

a quick movement for the purpose of turning the American left flank. The vigilant and impetuous Arnold was making an equally rapid movement to turn the British right, and might have done so had Gates not denied him reinforcements, and done everything in his power to restrain him.

Each party was moving blindly, for the forest was so dense that neither had much knowledge of the other's movements, and they suddenly and unexpectedly met in a ravine west of Freeman's farm-house, near which Burgoyne had then halted. It was on the borders of Mill Creek. For a while they fought desperately. Arnold encouraged his troops by voice and action, but he was forced back, when Fraser, by a quick movement, attacked the right wing of the American line and called up from the British centre the 24th regiment of Brunswick grenadiers, some light infantry and Breyman's riflemen to his aid.

In the meantime Arnold had rallied his men, and had been reinforced by troops under Brooks, Scammel, Cilley and Majors Dearborn and Hull. With these he smote the British so lustily that their line began to waver and fall into confusion, when General Phillips, hearing the din of battle from his position below the heights, hurried over the hills through the thick woods with fresh troops and some artillery, followed by a portion of the Germans under Riedesel, and appeared upon the ground at the moment when victory seemed about to be awarded to the Americans. But even these reinforcements could not make the Republicans yield, and they were fearfully thinning the British regiments, when Riedesel made a furious attack upon the flank of the Americans with cannon and musketry, and so compelled them to give way.

The Germans, by this timely movement, saved the British army from ruin.

The conflict now ceased for a little while, but the quiet was only a lull before a more furious outburst of the tempest of battle. Each army took breath and gathered up its energies for a more desperate conflict. Each rested upon a gentle hill, the Americans sheltered by an intervening wood, and the British resting in an open pine forest.

Burgoyne again opened the battle by a heavy cannonade, to which the Americans made no reply. The British commander then ordered a bayonet charge, when instantly column after column of infantry was seen moving across the cleared ground toward the American lines. The latter kept silent until their enemies fired a volley and rushed forward to the charge, when they sprang upon their assailants with such fury that the British were driven back far across the clearing. Arnold was then at headquarters begging in vain for reinforcements, when an officer came with the intelligence that the battle was raging without any decisive results. Arnold's impatience could brook no further delay. "I will soon put an end to it," he exclaimed, and set off at full gallop, followed by an officer sent by Gates to order him back. That subaltern could not overtake the general, who soon gave fresh courage to his troops by example. Backward and forward, over the open field, now advancing and now retreating—ebbing and flowing like the restless tide—the combatants struggled for full three hours, until darkness fell upon the scene, and Colonel Breyman had defeated an almost successful attempt to turn the British right. Then the great conflict ceased. There was occasional skirmish-

ing during the evening, and it was almost midnight when all became still, the Americans quietly slumbering within their lines, and the British sleeping upon their arms on the battle-field, the possessors, if not the masters, of it.

The Americans lost in killed, wounded and missing, three hundred and nineteen men. Among them was the brave Lieutenant-colonel Andrew Colburn, of New Hampshire, already mentioned. The British loss exceeded six hundred men, with the prestige of past successes. Their army was seriously crippled. One regiment which left Canada five hundred strong was reduced to sixty men and four or five officers. The sharpshooters of Morgan's rifle corps dismayed the Indians, and they had no stomach for more fight.

Twice during that eventful day the Germans had saved the British army, and for their deeds the generous Fraser gave them unstinted praise. But Burgoyne withheld the honor; and one of the earliest and most reliable of the British historians of the war (Stedman) makes no mention of Riedesel and his timely flank movement.*

Bnt. for Arnold, on that eventful day, Burgoyne would doubtless have marched into Albany at the autumnal equinox, a victor. The battle was fought wholly by detachments from Arnold's division, excepting one regiment from another brigade;† and to his skill and daring,

* "General Burgoyne and a few other English commanders regarded the German general with secret envy. Indeed they would gladly have passed over his merits had such a thing been possible. British pride did not desire the acknowledgment of bravery other than their own."—Memoirs of Major-general Riedesel, i. 151.

† This was the Tenth Massachusetts, a very feeble regiment, led by Lieutenant-colonel Marshall, who was sent out just at dusk, and had a brief encounter. This was all that was detached from the right wing during the engagement.

which animated his troops, was chiefly due the credit of successfully resisting the invaders at Bemis' Heights. Had he been seconded by his commander, and strengthened by reinforcements, instead of merely making resistance and checking the further progress of Burgoyne toward Albany, he would doubtless have secured a complete victory. Colonel Varick, in a letter to General Schuyler, written from the camp three days after the battle, said: "Gates seemed to be piqued that Arnold's division had the honor of beating the enemy on the 19th. This I am certain of, that Arnold has all the credit of the action. And this I further know, that Gates asked where the troops were going, when Scammell's battalion marched out, and, upon being told, he declared no more troops should go; he would not suffer the camp to be exposed. Had Gates complied with Arnold's repeated desires, he would have obtained a general and complete victory over the enemy. But it is evident to me he never intended to fight Burgoyne till Arnold urged, begged, and entreated him to do it." The concurrent testimony of contemporaries plainly shows that Gates scarcely left his tent during the day of battle, and that therein he freely indulged in strong drink and in unbecoming remarks concerning officers of whom he was jealous.

The praises bestowed upon Arnold highly inflamed the jealousy of Gates, and he made it so apparent that he disgusted the general officers and others who perceived it. His coolness toward Arnold before the battle now changed to insulting and vexatious action. When, on the morning after the battle, Arnold urged him to renew it while the enemy was evidently disconcerted, he refused, with ill-natured words, not deigning to give a reason; and, in his de-

spatches to Congress, he did not even mention the names of Arnold and Morgan, but spoke of the battle having been fought "by detachments from the army."* He caused a part of Arnold's division to be withdrawn without his knowledge, so putting that officer in the ridiculous light of presuming to give orders which were immediately contravened by the general orders of the commander-in-chief of the department. Wilkinson, the adjutant-general, who was a supple sycophant in the hands of Gates, and who afterward actually tried to make it appear that Arnold was not in the action at all, insisted upon the returns of Morgan's corps being made to him, and in this he was sustained by Gates, in a general order, in which it was stated that Morgan's and Dearborn's corps belonged to his division.

Of this treatment Arnold justly complained, when Gates called his remonstrances presumptuous.

"In short," Colonel Livingston wrote to Schuyler, "he has pocketed many insults for the sake of his country, which a man of less pride would have resented. The repeated indignities which he has received at length roused his spirit, and determined him again to remonstrate. He waited on Mr. Gates, in person, last evening. Matters were altercationed in a very high strain. Both were warm—the latter rather passionate, and very assuming. Toward the end of the debate, Mr. G. told Arnold he 'did not know of his being a major-general—he had sent his resignation to Congress. He had never given him the command of any division of the army. General Lincoln would be here in a day or two, and that then he should have no occasion for him, and would give him a pass to go to Philadelphia, whenever he chose.' Arnold's spirit would not brook the usage. He returned to his quarters, represented

* Gates had good reasons for not wishing to renew the battle that morning. His ammunition was exhausted, but he, alone, was aware of the deficiency. Had Burgoyne been aware of this, he might easily have won a victory on the 20th. The soldiers of the left wing, who had fought the day before, had each only a single cartridge left. There was not in the magazine forty rounds to each man in the service. But, on the 20th, a supply of powder, and window-leads for bullets, gathered by General Schuyler, came up from Albany.

what had passed, in a letter to Mr. G., and requested his permission to go to Philadelphia. The reason for the present disagreement between two old cronies is simply this—*Arnold is your friend.*”*

Gates very readily gave Arnold permission to go to Philadelphia. When the general officers and soldiers heard of it, they were greatly alarmed because of threatened consequences. They had lost confidence in Gates, and had the highest opinion of Arnold. “To induce him to stay,” Colonel Livingston wrote, “General Poor proposed an address from the general officers and colonels of his division, returning him thanks for his past services, and particularly for his conduct during the late action, and requesting him to stay. The address was framed and consented to by Poor’s officers. Those of General Learned refused. They acquiesced in the propriety of the measure, but were afraid of giving umbrage to General Gates.”†

Finally, a letter was written to Arnold, signed by all the general officers, excepting Lincoln, urging him to remain, for another battle seemed imminent. This, too, seems to have been withheld for prudential reasons, but Arnold was apprised of the feelings of the army. His ire had somewhat cooled, and, upon reflection, he concluded to remain. But he and Gates were not upon speaking terms, for the former treated Arnold as a cipher, never calling him in consultation.‡ He took from him all command, and gave that of the left wing to General Lincoln.

Arnold was a passionate man, and blustered and fumed about the camp in an undignified manner, making threats, without having power to execute them. He finally wrote

* Autograph Letter, September 23, 1777.

† Autograph Letter, September 24, 1777.

‡ Autograph Letter from Colonel Varick, September 24, 1777.

an indignant letter to Gates (September 30), in which he said :

“ Notwithstanding I have reason to think your treatment proceeds from a spirit of jealousy, and that I have everything to fear from the malice of my enemies, conscious of my innocence and integrity, I am determined to sacrifice my feelings, present peace and quiet, to the public good, and continue in the army at this critical juncture, when my country needs every support. I hope you will not impute this hint to a wish to command the army, or to outshine you, when I assure you it proceeds from a zeal for the cause of my country, in which I expect to rise or fall.”

To this, Gates paid no attention.

General Schuyler was cautious in his correspondence with his friends in camp at this time. He wrote to Colonel Varick :

“ I am pleased to hear that our gallant friend, General Arnold, has determined to remain until a battle shall have happened, or General Burgoyne retreats. Everybody that I have yet conversed with on the subject of the dispute between Gates and him, thinks Arnold has been extremely ill-treated. I wonder at Gates' policy. He will probably be indebted to him for the glory he may acquire by a victory ; but perhaps he is so very sure of success that he does not wish the other to come in for a share of it.”*

This conjecture of Schuyler concerning Arnold's future service to Gates, soon assumed the shape of a fulfilled prophecy.

* Autograph Letter, September 25, 1777.