

## CHAPTER XX.

THE morning light of the 20th of September revealed to Burgoyne the desperate condition of his army—broken, disappointed, spiritless, and encumbered with a large number of wounded men. So urgent was his necessity for preparations against an expected immediate attack that he buried his dead promiscuously in holes and trenches. He withdrew to the high ground near Freeman's house, within two miles of the American lines, and there cast up intrenchments. Hoping hourly for good news from Howe or Clinton, he harangued his troops, and declared that it was his determination to leave his body on the field or force his way to Albany.

On the following morning Burgoyne received a message from Clinton, at New York, promising a diversion in his favor by an expedition up the Hudson River. With this despatch also came information of Howe's success on the Brandywine, where, on the 11th of September, he routed the army under General Washington and caused its precipitate retreat toward Philadelphia. But Howe had lost the fruits of victory through his chronic indolence, for he did not pursue the flying republicans until they had at least twenty-four hours the start of him. But the prestige of victory was his.

The good news from below reanimated the hopes of Burgoyne, and he wrote to Clinton that he could maintain

his position until the 12th of October. Sir Henry had been waiting for reinforcements which had been slowly traversing the ocean in Dutch bottoms for almost three months. They had now arrived, and war-ships, armed galleys and flat-bottomed boats were speedily filled with between three and four thousand troops, professedly for a southern expedition, but really for a voyage and aggressive warfare up the Hudson River.

General Israel Putnam, of Connecticut, a veteran of the French and Indian war, was then in command of enfeebled garrisons in the Highlands. He had allowed most of the New York militia to go home on furlough, and when, at the close of September, Sir Henry Clinton was ready to move up the Hudson River with a strong force, Putnam had not more than two thousand men at Peekskill and at Forts Clinton, Montgomery and Constitution. British spies had found out this weakness, while, at the same time, the eyes of vigilant patriots had watched Sir Henry's movements, and these had been reported to Putnam. That officer, on the 29th of September, sent word to Governor Clinton, who had the immediate command of the Highland forts, and was then attending a session of the New York legislature at Kingston, that there was every indication of an immediate movement of the enemy up the river, and begged a reinforcement of militia to enable him to maintain his position at Peekskill. "The ships," he wrote, "are drawn up in the river, and I believe nothing prevents them from paying us an immediate visit but a contrary wind."

We have already observed that a strong boom and iron chain had been permanently laid across the Hudson at Fort Montgomery. Across Poplopen's Kill, southward of

this post and within rifle shot of it, was Fort Clinton, which had been erected to occupy ground which commanded the former. Across the Kill was a bridge communicating between the two forts. The head-quarters of the governor were at Fort Montgomery, and the other was commanded by his brother, General James Clinton. These two posts were garrisoned by about six hundred men, chiefly militia, with the veteran Colonel Lamb in command of the artillery. Just above the boom and chain, Continental vessels, built at Poughkeepsie, were stationed for the protection of the obstructions, by order of General Putnam and contrary to the advice of Governor Clinton.

On the 4th of October the armament of Sir Henry Clinton moved up the river, closely followed by watching swift-rowing whale-boatmen, landed troops at Tarrytown and marched a few miles into the country. Putnam believed Peekskill to be their destination, and immediately sent a courier to Governor Clinton with the intelligence, saying: "They are now, as we hear, making for Croton Bridge," just above the Van Cortlandt manor-house. The governor, more sagacious than the general, perceived that the movement was only a feint to draw off attention from the Highland forts, the real objects of attack, and immediately adjourned the legislature and hastened to Fort Montgomery with all the militia that he could gather on the way.

Meanwhile Sir Henry had returned to his shipping, sailed further up the river, and on Sunday, the 5th of October, landed four thousand troops on Verplanck's Point, eight miles below Peekskill. Putnam now felt sure that he was to be attacked, and so he withdrew to the hills in

the rear of Peekskill to await the expected assault, and sent to the governor, at Fort Montgomery, for all the troops he could spare.

So far Sir Henry's preconcerted plan for drawing Putnam's attention from the Highland forts by a feigned movement on Peekskill, and so allow the baronet to land troops on the west side of the river and march without impediment upon the forts, was successful. So also was the remainder of his plans. Under cover of a thick fog, at daybreak on the morning of the 6th of October, he crossed the Hudson to Stony Point, with a little more than two thousand men, leaving about one thousand, chiefly loyalists, at Verplanck's Point to keep up the aspect of menace toward Peekskill. At the same time the war-vessels, under the command of Commodore (afterward Admiral) Hotham, were ordered to anchor off Fort Independence, within cannon shot of the Highland forts, and play upon them and the vessels above the chain.

Piloted by a Tory, Sir Henry made a forced circuitous march from Stony Point around the southern and western bases of the Dunderberg, through rugged defiles, for several miles, and, at eight o'clock, in the pass between that height and Bear Mountain, his force was separated into two parties, in each of which were many Hessian hirelings. One division, composed of four hundred loyalists under Colonel Beverly Robinson, and five hundred British regulars and Hessians, were led by Lieutenant-colonel Campbell, and directed to go around Bear Mountain, and fall upon Fort Montgomery; while the other division, destined for Fort Clinton, and full twelve hundred in number, were led by General Vaughan, accompanied by Sir Henry. Ex-Governor Tryon was left in the valley, with a rear-guard.

Meanwhile, Governor Clinton, who, on Sunday evening, was informed of the landing of troops at Verplanck's Point, and who had brought to Fort Montgomery four hundred recruits, had sent out a reconnoitring party at dawn on Monday morning. Three miles south of the fort this party fell in with the British advance-guard. After a brief skirmish, they retreated to the fort, without loss, and reported the approach of the enemy, when Governor Clinton sent a messenger to Putnam for aid. The man turned traitor, and deserted to the British. Putnam, in the meantime, was astonished at hearing nothing from the enemy, who he supposed were about to attack him at Peekskill. He went out to reconnoitre in the afternoon, and did not return until firing was heard in the direction of the forts, and when, at the instance of Colonel Humphreys, reinforcements had been sent (though too late) from the camp at Continental Village, near Peekskill.

While Campbell was making his way around Bear Mountain, Vaughan and Clinton pressed toward their goal, along a way near the river. At a narrow pass, between Lake Sinnipink and the steep bank of the Hudson, they encountered an *abatis*, and there they had a severe fight with the Americans. These were pushed back, and at about four o'clock in the afternoon both posts were invested. At five, a demand for the surrender of Fort Clinton was made, and scornfully refused, when a simultaneous assault upon both fortresses was made by the troops and the vessels of war in the river.\*

The garrisons were composed mostly of untrained militia. They behaved nobly, and kept up the defence vigorously,

\* Sir Henry Clinton's Despatch.

against a greatly superior force of disciplined and veteran soldiers, until twilight, when they were overpowered, and sought safety in a scattered retreat to the neighboring mountains. Many escaped, but a considerable number were slain or made prisoners. The brothers who commanded the forts escaped. The Governor fled across the river in a boat, and at midnight was with General Putnam at Continental Village, concerting measures for stopping the invasion. James, forcing his way to the rear, and receiving a severe bayonet wound in the thigh, found safety in the mountains, and the next day reached his home, at New Windsor, in Orange county. A sloop of ten guns, the frigate *Montgomery*, and two row-galleys, stationed near the boom and chain for their protection, slipped their cables, and attempted to escape. There was no wind to fill their sails, and they were burnt by the Americans to prevent their falling into the hands of the enemy. The frigate *Congress*, which had already gone up the river, shared the same fate on the flats near Fort Constitution, which was abandoned.

By the light of these burning vessels the fugitive garrisons made their way over the rugged mountains, and a large portion of them joined General Clinton, at New Windsor, the next day. They had left many of their brave companions behind, who, to the number of two hundred and fifty, had been slain or made prisoners. The British, too, had parted with many men and brave officers. Among the latter was Lieutenant-colonel Campbell.

Early on the morning of the 7th of October the river obstructions between Fort Montgomery and Anthony's Nose, which cost the Americans a quarter of a million dollars, were destroyed, and a light flying-squadron, com-

manded by Sir James Wallace, and bearing a large number of land troops, under General Vaughan, sailed up the river on a marauding expedition, with instructions from Sir Henry to scatter desolation in their paths. It was hoped that such an expedition would draw troops from the Northern Army for the protection of the country below, and thereby assist Burgoyne.

Putnam and Clinton had agreed to move northward on opposite sides of the river, endeavor to keep pace with the ships, and so protect the people. Putnam at once abandoned Continental Village, took what stores he could with him, and retreated to a pass of the Highlands, not far from Fishkill. Governor Clinton tried to rally his broken little army at New Windsor, and to induce the militia to turn out; but the people all along the river were panic-stricken when they heard of the approaching foe, and were so busy removing their families back to places of supposed safety, that Clinton could never tell what his force might be. "They would come in the morning, and return at evening," he said.

When Clinton was about to leave New Windsor, with his little force, on the morning of the 9th, two strangers were seen coming from the direction of Fort Montgomery. They were arrested. One of them, who seemed to be much agitated, was seen to hastily swallow something. An emetic was administered, when a silver bullet was thrown up. He swallowed it again, and, under a threat of being immediately hanged and opened, he took a second emetic, with the same result. The bullet was elliptic, hollow, and screwed together at the middle. Within it, written upon tissue-paper, were the words—a despatch from Sir Henry Clinton to Burgoyne, dated at Fort Montgomery, October 8th :

“*Nous y voici* (here we are), and nothing between us and Gates. I sincerely hope this little success of ours will facilitate your operations.”

The unfortunate bearer of this despatch was tried and condemned as a spy, and Clinton took him with him in a forced march toward Kingston, where the State Legislature was about to reassemble.

Meanwhile the marauding fleet had gone up the river, and obeyed instructions to the letter. Every vessel on the Hudson was burned; the houses of known patriots along the river banks were fired into, and parties went on shore here and there and plundered the inhabitants. The torch was kept in fearful activity. Finally, on the 13th of October, they landed above the Rondout Creek, and a large party marched upon Kingston, and laid almost every house in ashes. With all his zeal Governor Clinton could not reach that place with his followers in time to protect the people. He was two hours too late. In the presence of the incendiary flames he hung the spy that bore the silver bullet, upon the limb of an apple-tree. I saw that bullet and its inclosed despatch a few years ago in the possession of the late Charles Clinton, a grandson of General James Clinton.

Having laid Kingston in ashes, a detachment of the marauders passed over the river, marched to Rhinebeck Flats, and there destroyed the residences of conspicuous patriots. They pushed northward as far as Livingston's Manor, burning and plundering, with the expectation of joining victorious Burgoyne at Albany, when alarming news came to them from the Upper Hudson which made them speedily turn southward and rejoin the main forces of Sir Henry Clinton, in the Highlands. And Sir Henry



himself, after destroying the barracks and stores at Continental Village, and demolishing the forts in the Highlands, thought it prudent to decamp; and he returned to New York with his whole force, after an absence of twenty days.

During these stirring operations on the lower Hudson, Gates and Burgoyne had been working diligently in strengthening their respective positions at Bemis' Heights and vicinity. Each cast up strong intrenchments, and each seemed disposed to have the other take the initiative of battle. Gates felt quite sure of catching the apple in his lap if he should wait patiently until it was fully ripe, for he knew that Burgoyne's force was daily diminishing while his own was increasing. Some of Burgoyne's officers became impatient of delay. One of the Hessians wrote: "The enemy, though he can bring four times more soldiers against us than we have, shows no desire to make an attack."

Arnold, though without command, became chafed by the seeming apathy of Gates. He could not restrain his impatience, and wrote to that commander, saying: "I think it my duty (which nothing shall deter me from doing) to acquaint you, the army is becoming clamorous for action. The militia (who compose a quarter part of the army) are already threatening to go home. One fortnight's inaction will, I make no doubt, lessen your army, by sickness and desertion, at least four thousand men, in which time the enemy may be reinforced and make good their retreat. I have reasons to think that, had we improved the 20th of September, it might have ruined the enemy. That is past; let me entreat you to improve the present time."

Gates regarded this as impertinent meddling, and paid no attention to it; but at the same time he wrote to Governor Clinton: "Perhaps despair may dictate to Burgoyne to risk all upon one throw; he is an old gamester, and in his time has seen all chances. I will endeavor to be ready to prevent his good fortune, and, if possible, secure my own." He felt secure, for notwithstanding the militia were coming and going, his army was steadily increasing. Lincoln, with two thousand men, had joined him, and so, in ease, he bided his time.

A week had passed since Burgoyne had assured Sir Henry Clinton that he could hold out till the 12th of October, yet he heard nothing from that officer. On the first of October he was compelled to put his army on short allowance. He was hemmed in upon all sides. The armies were so near that not a night passed without firing, caused often by attacks upon the British pickets. For more than a fortnight after the battle, they were kept in a state of continual alarm. "I do not believe," said Burgoyne, "either officer or soldier ever slept in that interval without his clothes; or that any general officer or commander of a regiment passed a single night without being upon his legs occasionally at different hours, and constantly an hour before daylight."\* Not a man or a biscuit were allowed to reach him from any quarter. Perils of every kind were weaving a fearful web around him; and at length, on the very day when Clinton captured the Highland forts, he came to the conclusion that he must either fight or fly. He chose to fight.

On the 4th of October Burgoyne consulted Phillips, Riedesel and Fraser on the situation. He proposed to

\* Burgoyne's "State of the Expedition from Canada," i. page 166.

make an attempt, by a swift circuitous march, to turn the left of the Americans. Riedesel advised a swift retreat to Fort Edward. Fraser was willing to fight, and finally, on the morning of the 7th of October, Burgoyne agreed to try his fortune in a reconnoissance in force, and if there seemed no chance for a successful attack he would consider a retreat. Another object was the covering of a foraging party which necessity compelled him to send out. The Americans had, the day before, attacked his entire line of outposts, and were taking off his men in detail when seeking provisions, and his situation was absolutely untenable.

At ten o'clock on the morning of the 7th, rations and liquor for four days having been previously issued to the troops, Burgoyne started with fifteen hundred picked men, eight brass cannon, and two howitzers, on his reconnoissance, moving toward the American left. He was seconded by Phillips, Riedesel and Fraser. Never were troops better commanded.

Burgoyne left the camp on the high ground in charge of Brigadiers Hamilton and Specht, and that of the redoubts near the river to Brigadier-General Gall. He moved to high ground, three-fourths of a mile to the left of the American line; and, behind a forest screen, he formed a line with his artillery, and offered battle. He sent out a party of five hundred, composed of rangers, loyalists and Indians, to make a circuit stealthily through the woods, and hang on the American rear, to keep them in check while the attack should be made on their front and flank.

Burgoyne's movement was discovered before he was quite ready for an attack. The advance-guard of the

American centre beat to arms. The alarm spread along the line. Gates ordered his officers to their alarm-posts, and sent Wilkinson to inquire the cause of the commotion. He returned with the news that the enemy was on the left, evidently preparing for an immediate attack. "Order out Morgan, to begin the game," said Gates, and that officer was soon on the march, with his riflemen and a body of infantry, to secure a position on heights on the right of the enemy; while General Poor, with his brigade of New York and New Hampshire troops, and a part of Learned's brigade, were directed to advance against the left of Burgoyne's line.

While this movement was in progress, a party of Canadians, Indians and loyalists, who had partly gained the rear of the Americans, attacked their pickets. These were soon joined by grenadiers, who drove the Americans back to their lines. There a hot engagement ensued for half an hour, in which Morgan soon engaged. He finally charged the assailants so vigorously that they retreated in confusion to the British line, which now appeared, in battle order, in a cleared field. The grenadiers, under Major Ackland, with the artillery, under Major Williams, formed the left, upon rising ground; the centre was composed of Brunswickers, under Riedesel, and British, under Phillips; and the light infantry, under Earl Balcarras, formed the extreme left. General Fraser had five hundred picked men a little in advance of the British right, ready to fall upon the flank of the Americans when the action in front should commence.

It was now half-past two o'clock. Just as Burgoyne was about to advance, he was astounded by the thunder of heavy artillery on his left, and the crack and rattle of rifles

and muskets on his right. Poor had advanced steadily up the slope on which the commands of Ackland and Williams rested, and pressed on, in perfect silence, toward the batteries of the enemy. Suddenly a terrible volley of musket-balls and grape-shot made havoc among the branches of the trees over their heads, but scarcely one took effect upon the men. This was the signal for the Americans to break silence. With a shout, they sprang forward, delivered their fire in rapid volleys, and then opened, right and left, to avail themselves of the shelter of trees on the margin of the ridge on which the British artillery was planted.

A deadly conflict now ensued. The Americans rushed up to the very mouths of the cannon, and among the carriages of field-pieces they struggled for victory. Equal valor appeared on both sides. For a time, the scale was equipoised. Five times one of the cannons was taken and retaken, when at last it remained with the patriots, as the British fell back. Colonel Cilley, who, during the whole contest, had fought at the head of his troops, leaped upon the captured gun, waved his sword high in air, dedicated the piece to "the American cause," wheeled its muzzle toward the enemy, and, with their own ammunition, opened its destructive thunders upon them.

The effect of this act was electrical, and served to give fresh courage to his troops, who yet had much to do, for the contest was long and obstinate. At length, Major Ackland, who was foremost in the conflict, was severely wounded, and Major Williams was taken prisoner. Deprived of their superior officers, the grenadiers and artillery-men, panic-struck, fled in confusion and left the field in possession of the republicans.

Almost simultaneously with the attack on the British left, Morgan, with his corps, rushed down the hill that skirted the flanking party of Fraser, in advance of the enemy's right, and opened upon them such a destructive storm of well-aimed bullets that they were driven hastily back to their lines. Then, with almost the speed of the gale, Morgan wheeled, and fell upon the British right flank with such appalling force and impetuosity that their ranks were at once thrown into confusion. The mode and force of the attack were both unexpected to the enemy, and they were greatly alarmed. While in this confusion, Major Dearborn, with some fresh troops, came up and attacked them in front. Thus assailed, they broke and fled in terror, but were rallied by Earl Balcarras, and again led into action. The shock on the right and left convulsed the British centre, which was composed chiefly of Germans and Hessians, yet it stood firm.

General Arnold had watched with eager eye and excited spirit the course of the battle thus far. Deprived of all command, he had no authority even to *fight*, much less to *order*. Smarting under the indignities heaped upon him by his commander, thirsting for that glory which beckoned him to the field, burning with a patriotic desire to serve his country, then bleeding at every pore, and stirred by the din of battle around him, the brave soldier became fairly maddened by his emotions, and, leaping upon his large brown horse, he started off, on a full gallop, for the field of conflict. Gates immediately sent Major Armstrong after him, to order him back. Arnold saw the subaltern in chase, and, anticipating his errand, spurred his charger, and left his pursuer far behind, while he placed himself at the head of three regiments of Learned's brigade, who

received their old commander with hearty cheers. He immediately led them against the British centre, and, with the desperation of a madman, he rushed into the thickest of the fight, or rode along the lines in rapid and erratic movements, brandishing his sword above his head, and delivering his orders everywhere in person. Armstrong had followed him for half an hour, but Arnold's course was so varied and perilous that he gave up the chase.

Arnold's assault upon the British centre was received by the Hessians with brave resistance, but when he made an equally impetuous charge and dashed furiously in among them, at the head of his men, they broke and fled in dismay. At this juncture the battle became general along the whole lines, and Arnold and Morgan were the ruling spirits in that of the Americans, while the gallant Fraser was the soul that directed the movements of the British, and by his conduct gave tone and energy to the men. Like Arnold, his voice and example were potential in directing attacks and in bringing order out of confusion. He soon fell, mortally wounded by a rifle ball from one of Morgan's men. Then a panic ran along the British lines. Burgoyne took command in person, but he could not keep up the sinking courage of his men, for at that moment three thousand fresh New York troops, under General Tenbroeck, appeared upon the field. The whole line of the enemy gave way, and the troops fled precipitately to their intrenchments, covered by Phillips and Riedesel. They left their artillery behind, for all the horses, and most of the men who had gallantly defended the field-pieces, were slain. Up to those intrenchments, in the face of a furious storm of grape-shot and bullets, the Americans, with Arnold at their head, eagerly pressed,

and, without the aid of artillery, vigorously assaulted the works. They were bravely defended by Earl Balcarras, and at that point of conflict was the hottest of the fight.

Above the din of arms the voice of Arnold was heard, and in the sulphurous smoke his form was seen, as he dashed from point to point, encouraging his troops. With a part of the brigades of Paterson and Glover he drove the troops of Balcarras from an *abatis* at the point of the bayonet, and attempted to force his way into the British camp. Failing in this, he placed himself at the head of Learned's brigade and made a furious assault upon the enemy's right, which was defended by Canadians and loyalists, who were flanked by a stockade redoubt on each side. For a while the result was doubtful. At length the English gave way, leaving Specht and his Germans entirely exposed. Arnold then galloped to the left and ordered the regiments of Wesson and Livingston, and Morgan's riflemen, to advance and make a general assault, while he, at the head of Brooks' regiment attacked the German works defended by Breyman. He rushed into the sally-port on his powerful horse, and spread terror among the Germans. They had seen him in the thickest of the fight for more than two hours, perfectly unharmed, and they regarded him with superstitious awe as one possessed of a charmed life. So they fled, giving a parting volley in their retreat which killed Arnold's horse under him, and severely lacerated the same leg which had been badly wounded at Quebec. There, at the moment of victory, and at the head of his victorious troops, wounded and disabled, he was overtaken by Major Armstrong, and received from him the order from Gates for Arnold's return to camp, for fear he might "do some rash thing."



He had, indeed, done a rash thing in achieving a victory without the order or even permission of his commander.

While Arnold was wielding the fierce sickle of war without, and reaping golden sheaves for Gates' garner, as Schuyler had intimated that he was likely to do, the commander (according to Wilkinson) was within his camp, more intent upon discussing the merits of the struggle with Sir Francis Clark (Burgoyne's aide-de-camp, who had been wounded and taken a prisoner, and was lying upon Gates' bed at head-quarters), than upon winning a battle which was all-important to the ultimate triumph of those principles for which he professed so warm an attachment. When Wilkinson came to him from the battle-field for orders, he found Gates very angry because Sir Francis would not allow the force of his argument. He left the room, and calling his aid after him, asked, as they went out: "Did you ever hear so impudent a son of a b—h?" Poor Sir Francis died that night upon the bed of his coarse and vulgar antagonist.

It was twilight when the wounded Arnold was conveyed, by Armstrong and a sergeant, from the field. The rout of the Germans was complete. They threw down their arms and fled in terror to their camp, leaving Breyman shot dead on the field. Specht tried in vain to rally them, and in the general confusion he was made a prisoner with several others.

Night speedily drew its curtains around the battle-field, where all was silent, excepting the groans of wounded men and an occasional word of command. At about midnight the division of General Lincoln, which had remained in camp, marched out to the relief of those upon the field, and before dawn, Burgoyne, who had resolved to retreat,

moved his whole force, with all his artillery and stores, a mile north of his first position, at Wilbur's Basin. Early on the morning of the 8th the American troops took possession of the evacuated British lines.

The loss of the Americans, in killed, wounded and missing, in the battle of the 7th of October, did not exceed one hundred and fifty. Arnold was the only commissioned officer who was injured. The British army suffered more severely. Their loss was about seven hundred. General Fraser was conveyed to the house of John Taylor, near Wilbur's Basin, where he died on the morning of the 8th. Colonel Breyman and Lieutenant Reynell died on the field. Major Ackland was severely wounded, and was taken a prisoner to the quarters of General Poor, within the American lines, where he was tenderly cared for by his wife, Lady Harriet Ackland, who, like the spouse of General Riedesel, had followed her husband to the war and shared with him the privations of camp life.

During the battle neither Gates nor Lincoln, his second in command, appeared on the field. The conflict was chiefly directed by Arnold; and under his leadership, with the able assistance of Morgan, the victory was won, and yet Gates, in his report, barely mentioned Arnold and Morgan, with Dearborn.

"It is a curious fact," says Sparks, in his *Life of Benedict Arnold*, "that an officer who had really no command in the army was the leader of one of the most spirited and important battles of the Revolution."