CHAPTER IX.

BRITISH FAILURES PREPARING FOR AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

THE versatile Johnson, turning from military to civil duties, remained in New York during the whole of the month of January, 1756. The men then in control of the British government, with their usual obtuseness, sent another sailor to do the work of a statesman. Sir Charles Hardy, after appointing October 2 as a day of public thanksgiving for the victory at Lake George, celebrated it himself by starting on a visit to Albany. He proposed to effect such a resumption of active military operations as would secure the main object of the great expedition, — the capture of Crown Point. His presence, however, was fruitless, and he returned to New York, November 26. Then, on the 2d of December, he met his little Parliament, and told them all about the victory of General Johnson or Baron Dieskau. The stolid Dutchmen and others were unable, as the Indian orators would say, "to see it in that light." They could not do other than anticipate the verdict of the critical scholarship of this generation, for they looked upon the whole affair as "a failure disguised under an incidental success." Further, instead of hearing that the English flag

waved over Crown Point, and that English cannon guarded the narrows of Lake Champlain, they were asked to pay for Fort William Henry and Fort George, both of which were but an ordinary day's horseback-ride from Albany. At the same time Sir Charles demanded in King George's name a permanent revenue, with which to pay governors, judges, and the general expenses of the government.

To the first proposition, to pay their share of expense for forts in which all the colonies were interested, the Assembly at once responded favourably. To the second they gave a flat refusal, declaring that the idea of a permanent revenue was in direct opposition to the public sentiment of the colony.

On the same day on which the Assembly met, Governor Shirley arrived in New York. Being, by the death of Braddock, the king's chief military representative in America, he summoned a congress of colonial governors to meet in New York December 12. With his usual extraordinary mental activity, he was full of schemes, one of which was a midwinter campaign against Ticonderoga. The congress approved of it; but the hard-headed members of the Assembly, the people generally, and Johnson, did not. With all admiration for the fussy politician, who planned superbly on paper, but somehow failed in the field, they had a sincere respect, which was, however, tempered by excellent common-sense.

As for Shirley and Johnson, they seemed always unable to work harmoniously together, the latter resenting what he believed to be the needless inter-

ference of the other. Shirley found Johnson more than a match for him in the rather acrid correspondence conducted in New York during January. Living but a few rods apart, the liveried coloured servants of these colonial dignitaries kept their soles warm in carrying despatches. In jealousy of each other, the two gentlemen were as incompatible as Siamese twins, their only common ligament being loyalty to the Crown. Johnson was determined to get and hold his commission from the Crown, and not be subject to colonial governors or assemblies. He laid the whole matter before the Lords of Trade, and aided by his friends at Court, secured a flattering verdict in his favour. In July, 1756, there came to him from his Majesty's Secretary, Fox, a commission as Colonel, Agent, and sole Superintendent of all the affairs of the Six Nations, and other Northern Indians, with an annual salary of six hundred pounds. By orders from the same august source, the Northern colonies were prohibited from transacting business with the Indians, so that the whole matter was settled in Johnson's hands.

Being now well intrenched in his office and authority, Johnson, with his usual versatility and vigour, turned from the duties of the desk and council-room to the activities of the field. The frontiers of New Hampshire had been harassed during the winter by prowling bands of savages, but the French now attempted a more ambitious raid. Warned by Indian runners, who had made the first part of their journey on snow-shoes from Fort Bull at the Oneida "carry,"

he at once sent ammunition to the garrison of thirty men. On skates from Montreal to Fort Presentation, and thence on snow-shoes to the Oneida portage, the party of nearly three hundred Frenchmen, after ten days of gliding and stepping, appeared before the wooden fort, March 27. Their demand for surrender was met by a volley, which in return was answered by a charge, a crushing in of the gate, and a massacre of all but five of the garrison. Among the military stores destroyed were two tons of powder. About the same time the ship-carpenters at Oswego became the prey of raiding Indians from Niagara, who returned with three prisoners and twelve scalps. Forays were made by Canadian savages, even into Ulster and Orange Counties, within a day's horse-ride of New York.

The winter was unusually mild, which caused the utter abandonment of Shirley's expedition to Crown Point; while the numerous petty successes of the French and Indians turned the faces of the vacillating members of the Iroquois cantons toward Canada as the winning side.

Yet strange as it may seem, the New York Assembly was slow in voting supplies. The ultra-loyalists who supported Hardy, who was backed by the king and his council, now vented their maledictions upon the "foreigners" who made the cosmopolitan population of the province, and their representatives in the Assembly. All this seems strange to the average historiographer, especially to the copyist of loyalist or other writers who rely on such men as Colden, Smith,

Jones, Washington Irving, and the like, for their ideas of Colonial New York and her people. There was good reason for the stubbornness of the legislators. The fact is, that the people of the province of New York were mostly descendants of the sturdy Republicans who had fought under William the Silent. They believed that the encroachments of monarchy — that is, one-man power — were more dangerous than the raids of hostile Indians. The Dutch, Germans, Scots, Irish, Huguenots, were almost a unit in their democratic ideas. This province, unlike others of the original thirteen, was not settled by people of aristocratic England, in which a republic, once begun, had gone to pieces inside of twelve years, but by men long trained in self-government and in a republic. Even their forms of church life were as nurseries for the training of men in democratic principles. To the loyalist historian, Jones, a Presbyterian seems to be a synonym for rebel, of whatever name or strain of blood. Congregationalists, fed on the rhetoric and oratory of Forefathers' Day, find it hard to believe that the democratic idea in Church and State flourished anywhere outside of New England. The New York men were determined at all hazards — even the hazards of savage desolation — to resist any further trenching upon their rights by King George, or his subservient Parliament, or his bullying governor.

England had sent over, after Clinton, another illiterate sailor to enforce a fresh demand, — even the passage of a law for settling a permanent revenue on a solid foundation; said law to be indefinite and with-

out limitation of time. The descendants of the Hollanders who had long ago, even against mighty Spain, settled the principle of no taxation without consent, and had maintained it in a war of eighty years, were resolved to fight again the same battle on American soil. They now set themselves resolutely to resist the demands of the Crown, and this whether Indians were in Orange County or at Niagara. Despite the protests of such incorrigible Tories as Smith, Colden, and others in the Executive Council, the people's representatives persevered.

It is needless to say that the Assembly gained their point, and that the greatest and most lasting victory of the people in the long story of American liberty was won. A few months after, at the autumn session, the joyful news reached New York that the Crown had virtually repealed the instructions to Sir Danvers Osborne, which had made the colonists of New York set themselves in united array of resistance to "their most gracious sovereign."

The war had thus far been carried on without profession or declaration. The diplomatists of London and Versailles had been as polite and full of smooth words as if profound peace reigned. The English were following their old trade of piracy, and had captured hundreds of French vessels, and imprisoned thousands of French sailors. The French, on the other hand, were doing with England as they did with China in 1885, when they bombarded cities, treacherously got behind forts in the Pearl River, and killed thousands of Chinese, while all the time professing to be at

peace. At length the British went through the formality of declaring war, May 17. On the French side, the necessary parchment, red tape, and seals were prepared, and the official ink flowed two years after blood had flowed like water.

Now at last, in Pitt, England had a premier who knew something about the geography of America; and "geography," as Von Moltke teaches, "is half of war." William Pitt thought the time had come for intelligent and active operations looking to the conquest of North America by the English. His first selection of men, however, was not particularly wise or evident of genius. Listening to the word of Johnson, and others in New York, he removed Shirley from the chief command, and sent out, successively, Colonel Webb, General Abercrombie, and Lord Loudon, — all of them, as it proved, failures.

The three men appointed were alike in their supercilious contempt for American militia and officers, and were all destined, through their ignorant pride, to disgust Americans with English ways, and steadily to determine them toward independence. Abercrombie, on his arrival, at once began to cast firebrands of discontent among the colonial troops by nullifying the intelligent and well-laid plans of Shirley, and promulgating the exasperating order that all regular officers were to be over those in the colonial service of the same rank. General Winslow fortunately succeeded in dissuading the Britisher from his madness, before desertions and threatened resignations became too numerous; but with the compromise that the imported

soldiers should garrison the forts while the Americans went to the front. In other words, the provincials were to see and do the severest service. Abercrombie further showed his obstinacy and ignorance of affairs by billeting ten thousand soldiers on the citizens of Albany, instead of at once advancing to Oswego. He thus unwittingly helped to create that sentiment against the outraging of American homes by the forced presence of soldiers which, later, found expression for all time in the amendment to the Constitution of the United States. Abercrombie wasted the whole summer at Schenectady, which now became the headquarters of the armies. It was determined to build forts at all the portages between this town and Oswego, as well as at South Bay, to protect Fort Edward. While the boat-yards along the Mohawk River were in full activity, and stores were being collected, he employed his men part of the time in teaching the people of Albany and Schenectady how to build earthworks in European style, in digging ditches, and in putting up heavier stockades around the two towns.

One of the good things done by Parliament at this time was the formation of the Royal American Regiment of four battalions, each a thousand strong. Of the fifty officers commissioned, nearly one third were Germans and Swiss. Most of the rank and file were Palatine and Swiss-Germans in America, who enlisted for three years. None of the officers could rise above the rank of lieutenant-colonel, and the Earl of Loudon was appointed first colonel-in-chief. Loudon was succeeded in 1757 by Abercrombie, and in 1758 by Lord

Amherst. Until the Revolutionary War, this cosmopolitan regiment did noble service under Stanwix, Bouquet, Forbes, Prideaux, Wolfe, and Johnson. From 1757 to 1760 we find one or more battalions of the regiment in active service in the various parts of New York. The famous Rev. Michael Schlatter, the organizer of the German Reformed Church in Pennsylvania, was the regimental chaplain. On the 15th of June, 1756, the forty German officers who were to raise the recruits arrived, one of the ablest being Colonel Bouquet. This Swiss officer, with the Germans, at Bushy Run in Pennsylvania largely retrieved the disasters caused by Braddock's defeat, and restored the frontiers of Pennsylvania to comparative safety and comfort.

While Abercrombie, who was one of those military men whose reliance is less upon the sword than the spade, was digging ditches in Albany, Johnson was arranging for a great Indian council at his house on the Mohawk. He had in view the double purpose of winning the Delawares and other Pennsylvania tribes from war against the English colonists, and of inducing all the Northern Indians to join in the expedition against the French posts on Lake Ontario. Braddock's defeat had been the signal for the Delawares, under the direct influence of the French, to break the peace of more than seventy years, and to scatter fire and blood in Pennsylvania, from the Monongahela to the Delaware. The solemn treaty of Penn — which Voltaire, with more wit than truth, declared was "never sworn to and never broken" — was now a thing

of the past. The wampum was unravelled, and the men with hats and the men with scalp-locks were in deadly conflict. While the Friends remained at their Philadelphia firesides, the German and Scotch settlers on the frontier bore the brunt of savage fury. When public action was taken, it was in the double and contradictory form of peace-belts of wampum sent by the Friends, and a declaration of war by Governor Morris. In this mixed state of things it was hard for Johnson to know what to do. Through his influence the Iroquois, uncles and masters, had summoned by wampum belts their nephews and vassals to the great conference which was opened at his house in February, 1756. To prepare for this, Johnson had made a journey to the council-fire of the Confederacy at Onondaga, arriving June 15. There he succeeded in neutralizing in part the work done by the French, and obtained an important concession. The Iroquois voted to allow a road to be opened through the very heart of their empire to Oswego, and a fort to be built at Oswego Falls.

These severe exertions cost Johnson a fit of sickness; but on the 7th of July he met the Iroquois, Delawares, and Shawanese at his house. After the usual consumption, on both sides, of wampum, verbosity, and rum, all the Indians were won over to the English cause. The covenant chain of peace was renewed, the war-belts were accepted by the sachems, and medals hung around their necks by Johnson himself. The Delawares had "their petticoats taken off," — or, in other words, they were no longer squaws

in the eyes of the Iroquois, but allies, friends, and men. Without detracting from Johnson's reputation, it is probable that the possession by many of the Delawares of the rifles made by the Pennsylvania Swiss and Germans, which gave them such an advantage over Dutch and English smooth-bores, had much to do with winning the respect of the Iroquois.

Through Johnson's influence two councils were held in Pennsylvania, at Easton, when the Delawares under their great chief, Teedyuscung, met delegations of the Iroquois and Governor Denny. Teedyuscung had for his secretary "the Man of Truth," Charles Thompson, master of the Friends' Free School in Philadelphia. The proceedings lasted nine days; Denny by his tact being able "to put his hand in Teedyuscung's bosom and draw out the secret" of his uneasiness. The council was adjourned to Lancaster in the spring of 1757, when, however, the Delaware chief failed to appear. Nevertheless peace was obtained on the Pennsylvania borders, the credit for which was claimed by the Senecas.

To turn now to the field of war, we find that Governor Shirley had organized a corps of armed boatmen, and had sent them under Colonel Bradstreet to Oswego. Bradstreet was successful in thus provisioning the forts with a six months' store for five thousand men. After his brilliant exploit he was attacked on his way back, three leagues from the fort, by De Villiers with eleven hundred men. Despite the sudden fury of the attack, Bradstreet beat off the enemy with loss, only a heavy rain preventing his gaining a greater

victory. Reaching Albany, he urged General Abercrombie to march at once to the forts. A large expedition under Montcalm was already on its way to remove these, the chief obstacles to their plans of empire. Johnson in person seconded Bradstreet's appeal, urging that if Oswego fell, the Iroquois would be sure to join the French. Abercrombie stupidly refused to move until Lord Loudon's arrival, and the golden opportunity was lost.

This slow-minded personage, Lord Loudon, the Scotsman, reached Albany on the 29th of July; but correct ideas as to the situation percolated into his brain with difficulty. Indeed, as with Sydney Smith's proverbial joke about the Scotchman's skull, it seemed necessary to perform a surgical operation in order to show him how needful it was to march at once to Oswego, notwithstanding that Montcalm with his host was daily approaching.

While Loudon was fooling away his time in jealousy of the provincial militia, and sending a force in the wrong direction at Crown Point, Montcalm with three thousand troops and plenty of cannon, part of which had been captured from Braddock, settled himself before Oswego. Of the three forts garrisoned by Shirley's and Pepperell's regiments of New England men, only one was able to stand a protracted siege. All assembled in this fort, Ontario, and fought gallantly until Colonel Mercer was cut in half by a cannon-shot. Then a panic ensued. The one hundred women in the fort begged that the place should be surrendered, and the white flag was shortly after-

council to meet, June 10, 1757. Meanwhile he sent the Mohawks out upon the war-path, and had the satisfaction of hearing of the repulse of the French and the safe defence of the Fort William Henry which he had built two years before at Lake George. Major William Eyre, the ordnance officer who had served the guns so efficiently at the battle of Lake George against Dieskau's regulars, was in command of the fort, with four hundred men. The commander of the American rangers, with Eyre, was John Stark. The long and dreary winter was nearly over, and Saint Patrick's Day was at hand. The French knew as well that the Irish soldiers would be drunk on the 18th of March, as Washington knew that the Hessians would be unfit for clear-headed fighting the day after Christmas. Fortunately, through the thoughtfulness of the future hero of Bennington, his own rangers were kept sober by enforced total abstinence, and the Irish had the rum and drunkenness all to themselves. The French force of fifteen hundred regulars, wood-rangers, and savages came down the lakes on the ice, dragging, each man, his sledge containing provisions, arms, and various equipments, among which were three hundred scaling-ladders. They began a furious attack at sunrise on the 18th, expecting easy victory; but Eyre used his artillery with such deadly effect that despite four separate attacks within twenty-four hours, the expedition ended in total failure. Seized with a panic, the besiegers fled, leaving their sledges and much valuable property behind, besides their dead.

Johnson first heard of this event in a letter from Colonel Gage, — him who married an American wife, and afterward occupied Boston with the redcoats, only to be compelled to leave it at the request of Washington, his old comrade-in-arms on Braddock's Field. It is a curious coincidence that Colonel Gage has unwittingly furnished Yankee Boston with a public holiday in honour of Ireland's patron, Saint Patrick, — which the Irish majority in the Boston City Council first inaugurated in 1890, under the disguise of "Evacuation Day." The date which the Frenchmen chose for their approach to Fort William Henry was the date also on which Gage, in 1775, sailed away to the land whence the Canadians had come in 1757.

Johnson's tremendous energies now shone forth. He at once summoned the Mohawk Valley militia, and sent his trusty interpreter, Arent Stevens, to rouse the Mohawks. The meeting-place was at his house. The news came on Sunday the 24th; and on Monday, at daylight, the column of twelve hundred militia and the Indians were on the march which in less than four days brought them to Fort William Henry.

Finding the enemy gone, Johnson allowed his men two days' rest, and was about to start homeward, when hearing that the French meditated a blow on the frontier village of German Flats, he kept in the saddle all night, reaching home at four A. M. Fortunately the news was not confirmed; but he nevertheless ordered the militia to Burnet's Field, and made

his headquarters there. This energetic action had a good effect upon the Iroquois who had been invited to the grand council at Fort Johnson, as his house was now called, and on the 10th of June the proceedings were duly opened. The result of the ten days' conference was that the neutrality of the Senecas, Cayugas, and Onondagas was secured; while the three other tribes — the Oneidas, Tuscaroras, and Mohawks — were heartily enlisted to fight for the English against the French.

Summer passed away in Johnson's despatching Indian parties to Canada; in Governor Hardy's returning to the more congenial quarter-deck, exchanging civil for naval life; in Loudon's making a grand failure at Louisburg, as usual blaming the colonial officers and troops for his own blunders; and in the shameful loss of Fort William Henry through the cowardice of General Webb.

Johnson had warned Webb of the coming of Montcalm with nearly eight thousand men, including a body of Indians said to be gathered from forty-one tribes. On the 1st of August, while holding a council with the Cherokees at his house, he received news from General Webb that Montcalm was moving down upon Colonel Monro, who with two thousand men occupied the fort and adjoining camp. Johnson at once adjourned the council, and summoning the militia and Mohawks, quickly reached Fort Edward, and begged to be sent to reinforce Monro. The double-minded Webb at first consented, and then ordered him back. Within sound of the cannon, Webb held back his

whole force, and sent Monro a note advising him to surrender. Only when his ammunition was nearly exhausted, his heavy cannon burst, three hundred of his men killed or wounded, many others helpless with small-pox, and the outlook hopeless, did Monro surrender. As usual, the Indians, many of them from tribes utterly unused to any control, got at the rum-barrels, and were converted into devils, whom Montcalm in vain endeavoured to control, until after they had butchered scores of Monro's unarmed people, including women and children. The fort and barracks were burned, and on great heaps of the fuel thus obtained the bodies of the slain were given cremation.

Webb, almost scared out of his wits, would have moved southward to West Point, but that Lord Howe, who had arrived with reinforcements, calmed him. Almost as a matter of course, the blame was laid by the British officers and regulars on the provincial troops. This military bigotry, and the inveterate prejudice of the regulars against volunteers had a tremendous effect in making the native-born militia suspect that they could some day do without the supercilious and conceited king's servants. They saw that most of the hard fighting had been done by militiamen at the front, who, notwithstanding the immense resources of Great Britain, were not properly supported at the right time. They were tired of being led to the slaughter by fussy, incompetent, and often cowardly commanders. They noted, also, that the regulars were mostly kept in garrison, while the militia were sent to the front, where, usually in battle with the

Indians, the Americans stood their ground, fighting behind trees, while the handsomely uniformed regulars were flying to the rear. Further yet, the regulars stationed in the forts in the Mohawk Valley were so arrogant and conceited as to look — as the average Englishman is so apt to do — upon the Dutchmen and Germans as a sort of inferior cattle. The consequence was that they were practically useless as defenders.

Johnson was so heartily disgusted with the state of affairs that it is probable that his sickness in October and November was a direct result of exposure in camp, and distraction of mind. He knew that the French would now at the first opportunity strike the western frontier. He therefore wrote to Abercrombie in September, to reinforce the Valley forts and send scouts and rangers to German Flats. All such warnings, however, were like "an east wind in an ass's ears." Abercrombie and his men drilled, drank, swore, gambled, dug ditches, and caricatured the Dutch people in church, and otherwise amused themselves in Albany. At German Flats the long strain of duty in watch and ward resulted in the inevitable reaction; and when the danger was greatest and nearest, the nerves relaxed, the midnight lantern went out, and the sentinel and people alike slept. The friendly Oneidas informed the Germans, fifteen days in advance, of the enemy's movements. A week later, a chief came in person to warn them; but the people took it as a joke, laughed in his face, and sent no word to Johnson. Tired of hearing the cry of "wolf," they neglected to provide for their

sheep. Despite the fort, the block-houses, and the militia company of one hundred men, the blow fell. Fortunately the minister and some of his people heeded the friendly warning of the Oneidas, and the day before the attack, crossed the river to a place of safety. Those left were infatuated until the last moment.

It was on the morning of Nov. 13, 1757, that the Canadian, Belletre, and his three hundred white and red savages surrounded the doomed village, raised the yell, and began the attack. The people were dazed. After some fitful musketry-firing, the Indians succeeded in setting the houses on fire, and in tomahawking and scalping the people as they rushed out of the flames. One of the block-houses was surrendered by the head man of the village, who asked for quarter. Numbers of the people were killed as they ran out to the fording-place of the river to escape to the opposite side, or were shot while in the water. The settlement was totally destroyed. Of the three hundred people, a sixth were killed and one half taken prisoners; the remainder escaped, or had already fled to Fort Herkimer. The abundant live-stock was destroyed or driven off, and the place left in ashes. All this was done almost under the eyes of the commander of Fort Herkimer, but a short distance off, across the Mohawk River. Having a small garrison, he, though fully warned by Oneida Indians of the coming blow, was unable to send assistance, and perhaps anticipated an attack on his own post.

The people of Stone Arabia and Cherry Valley were excited, and prepared to leave these places when the

escaped refugees brought the news. Lord Howe, with his reinforcements, though too late for action, prevented the depopulation of the settlements.

The sage Lord Loudon heard of this latest disaster while in Albany, and his conduct was characteristic. Eager to find a victim on whom to vent his rage and to bear his own and his officers' shortcomings, he blamed the Iroquois, and even proposed to make war against them. It was, probably, only by the active persuasion of Johnson that he was turned from his madness.

Imagination vainly seeks to picture the results had Loudon, the grand master of Great Britain's resources, even begun his folly, and broken the peace league which Van Curler had made, Schuyler extended, and Johnson perfected. Had he practically betrayed his country by turning the whole Indian power of the continent over to the French, the history of this country would have been vastly different from that we know. Had Johnson done nothing else than prevent this, he would deserve a high place among the Makers of America.