

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BATTLE OF LAKE GEORGE.

By the movements in Western Pennsylvania, the war had already broken out, though the diplomatists on the transatlantic side had not yet said so. By the first week in May, the raids on the northern border began by the destruction of Hoosic, within ten miles of Fort Massachusetts. The half-naked or starving refugees reaching Albany furnished a vivid object-lesson of reality. Under Johnson's vigilance and activity, the people in the forts, block-houses, and palisaded villages were kept on guard night and day. In this work he was ably seconded by Governor De Lancey. Politics make strange bed-fellows; and the late critic and opponent, now that he occupied the seat of the person whom he had, largely out of party spirit, opposed, became a warm friend of his friend Johnson, the untiring frontiersman.

When in New York, Feb. 28, 1755, Johnson learned of the official declaration of war, and the sailing from Cork, Ireland, of General Braddock with one thousand regulars, bound for Alexandria, Va.; and to this place Johnson with Governor De Lancey made a journey. At the council held by the five royal governors, expeditions against Nova Scotia, Crown Point, Niagara,

and Fort Du Quesne were planned. Johnson was again made Superintendent of Indian Affairs, and appointed as major-general to command the forces for the reduction of Crown Point.

The story of the success of one of these expeditions and the failure of two of them under Braddock and Shirley, is known to all. We may now glance at that under Johnson. After a great council held in June, attended by eleven hundred of all ages and sexes, to the devastation of Johnson's larder, King Hendrick and many hundred fighting men promised to be ready for war. After various delays, the motley army gathered from the colonies left Albany August 8, 1755, and on the 28th Johnson reached the Lake of the Holy Sacrament. A true courtier, he changed the name given by Isaac Jogues, which had superseded the Indian term, *Andiatarocte*; and in honour of his sovereign George, and "to ascertain his undoubted right there," called the beautiful water by the name it still bears. The modern fanciful name "*Horicon*" seems to be nothing more than a printer's mistake, glorified by a romancer.

Parkman's magic pen has drawn the picture of the movements of Dieskau, the German, and his French and Indian forces opposed to the provincial army, and has brilliantly described the camp and forces at Lake George, when, on the morning of Sept. 8, 1755, the Canadians, Indians, and French, numbering fifteen hundred, being, unknown to the English, only an hour's march distant, one thousand men sallied out from the camp to capture Dieskau and his forces.

The spirit of Braddock seemed to be still in the air; and the men — New England and New York militia — sallied out jauntily, expecting easy victory, but in reality to what proved “the bloody morning scout.” They were led by Col. Ephraim Williams — whose will, creating what is now Williams College, had been made a few days before at Albany — and by Lieutenant-Colonel Whiting. In three divisions the little army marched out and soon disappeared from view in the forest, just before nine o'clock A. M. The two columns, French and English, were thus approaching each other in a narrow road, like trains on a single track in a tunnel.

Not knowing what the issue might be, Johnson made preparation for all risks. He at once ordered trees felled and laid lengthwise. With these and the wagons, bateaux, and camp equipage, he constructed a rough line of defence, which faced all along the one side of the camp which an assaulting party might be reasonably expected to attack, — that is, on that side of the rough quadrangle which was parallel to the lake. At that portion fronting the road, he planted three of his heaviest pieces of cannon, one thirty-two and two eighteen-pounders. Another was posted a little way round to the left, while five howitzers of smaller calibre, with the mortars, one of thirteen-inch, and four of smaller calibre, were stationed to throw shell in the morasses and woods on the flanks. The superb artilleryman, Major William Eyre, with a company of British sailors, served the guns.

The situation then was as follows: Colonel Williams's

party was marching southward along the stump-embossed road cut by Johnson's axemen a few days before. After advancing two miles he halted for the other divisions to come up, and then moved in a solid body. With what seems incredible carelessness, neglecting to send out scouts, they moved on, Braddock-like, unsuspecting of danger, imagining that the French were miles away.

On the contrary, Dieskau's scouts had watched their departure from the camp, and quickly reported the news to the German baron. He at once ordered his regulars to halt, and sent the Canadians and Indians into the forest, three hundred paces ahead, with orders to lie flat on the ground behind trees, rocks, and bushes, and make no noise or sign until the regulars had fired, when all were to rise and surround the English.

Here, then, was a horseshoe ambuscade in a swampy spot. It was another case of "the fatal defile." The regulars were, to the party approaching them, invisible, for they lay behind a swell of ground. All was as silent as the grave when the head of Colonel Williams's line entered the trap. Had it not been for the treachery of the Indians, or the warning signal of the French Iroquois to their kindred, given by the discharge of a gun, — though it may be possible that this unexpected shot was an accident, — the English would have been nearly annihilated. But before the party had passed the calks of the horseshoe at the ends of the ambuscade, the war-whoop and the countless puffs of smoke and whistling bullets told the whole story. The silent wilderness at once became hell.

Colonel Williams at once took in the situation, and mounting a rock to direct his men, ordered them to spread out on the hill to the right. He was soon shot through the head. Hendrick had fallen at the first fire. The Americans were rallied by Nathan Whiting, and retreated stubbornly, contesting the ground rod by rod, and firing from behind trees and rocks at the Canadians and Indians, who followed the same tactics. Where they met reinforcements sent out by Johnson, their firing was more steady and destructive.

It was near Bloody Pond that Lieutenant Cole and the three hundred men sent out from camp by Johnson met them, and ably covered their retreat, so that the wounded were brought in, and the main body reached the camp in good order about ten o'clock. La Gardeur, the officer to whom Washington had surrendered a few months before, commanded the Canadian Indians in this battle, and was slain. The savages, seeing the English out of the way for the present, at once fell back to scalp and plunder the slain Americans. Dieskau ordered them off, refusing to let them stop and thus lose time. Though obeying, they were angry and insubordinate, and later in the day sneaked out of the fight, to return like dogs to their vomit of war. Dieskau ordered the bugles to sound the assembly, and re-formed his forces, hoping by a rush on Johnson's camp to capture it at once. Unfortunately for him, he had to reckon with Indians and bushrangers instead of with trained soldiers.

Once inside the camp, the Massachusetts men were

ranged on the right, the Connecticut men on the left, with the New York and New Hampshire men between. Five hundred troops were posted on the flanks in reserve. Lying down flat on their stomachs behind the hastily thrown up barricade, they lay awaiting the enemy, whom they expected at a double-quick pace.

Everything now depended on the steadiness of the militia. The officers threatened death to all who flinched from the foe. All eyes were bent on the woods in front, and especially down the road whence they expected to see the regulars rush on them with levelled bayonets. Could raw provincials, commanded by a fur-trader and a lawyer, face the veterans of Europe?

Three long, cold iron noses poked out at them were too much for Dieskau's Indians. The black-mouthed cannon, intercepting with their round circles a charming view of the blue lake ahead, took away the courage of the bush-rangers, and both reds and whites scattered and took to the woods. To the exasperation of Dieskau, all his life used to regular military formations, his great host melted away from his sight in the undergrowth and behind trees; where, now creeping forward, now squatting or lying, they began a dropping fire in the front and on the flanks of the Americans. In traditional European style, the French regulars, in white uniforms and with glittering bayonets, marched up and delivered their volleys from double ranks.

Platoon-firing was then the orthodox method of

war. The long, thin lines of battle which now obtain in the field, and which the Americans taught to Europe, were not then known to men accustomed to the cleared land and level fields of the Low Countries, and of Europe generally. Soon moving forward into the clearing, and deploying to double width, the regulars fired by platoons of three lines, — the first file of men kneeling down, and the rear, or third file, delivering their volleys over the shoulders of those of the second line in front. Aiming too high and being too far off for the effective range of flint-lock smooth-bores, the result of their general miss was to arouse the spirits of the Americans, even to gayety. After the first hour their nerves became more steady, and they aimed with deadly effect, while the irritated and excited veterans fired too high to do much execution. When the cannon served by the sailors under Major Eyre began to tear their ranks with round shot and canister, the great gaps made among the white coats cheered the provincials still more. Gallantly dressing up, they endeavoured for many minutes to present an orderly front; but, finally, Dieskau had to break from the road, and moving to the right in the face of a murderous fire, began the attack on the three regiments of Colonels Williams, Ruggles, and Whitcomb. Here for another hour they stood their ground manfully, in the face of a fire whose rapidity and accuracy were the astonishment of Dieskau, who bravely led his troops until struck down.

The commanders on either side in this battle were wounded, and had to retire in favour of others. John-

son, shortly after the first volley of the French regulars, was struck by a ball in the thigh which made a painful flesh wound. The ball broke no bones, but was never extracted, and the lacerated nerves troubled him more or less all his life thereafter. He retired to his tent, and Gen. Phineas Lyman took command, cheering his men, and exposing himself with reckless bravery both behind and outside the barricade. In fact, this battle of Lake George was Lyman's battle, and was largely Lyman's victory.

Dieskau had bravely led his men during several hours, but while giving an order to his Indians to move farther to the left, he approached so near the intrenchments that he received, from an American standing behind a tree, his first wound. Ordering the Chevalier de Montreuil to take command, and to order retreat if necessary, then to do his best, and to send men to remove him, Dieskau crawled near a tree and sat with his back against it. One Canadian sent to remove him was picked off by an American, and fell across the baron's wounded knee. The other went off for assistance; but soon after his disappearance the retreat was sounded. A renegade Frenchman, on the American side, then approached within twelve paces of the German baron, and deliberately shot him, the bullet traversing his hips. Dieskau had received, in all, five wounds.

Blodget, a sutler in Johnson's army, stood like a war-correspondent on the hill near by, watching the fighting. He was thus enabled to make a sketch of the battle, which he published as a cheap print, "with a

full though short history," some weeks afterward, in Boston. Even the wagoners, in the intervals between carrying to Surgeon Williams the wounded who lay on the ground behind the log house, took their part in fighting; each probably doing as much execution as the average farmer's boy. For, despite the hot fire so long maintained, the number of killed and wounded on the enemy's side, except among the French regulars whose white uniform made them easy targets, was not very great. It was not easy to hit men ensconced behind trees or stumps, or occasionally rising in the smoke above the underbrush, while the enemy could, during most of the time, see only here and there a head. The Mohawks in the camp were mostly useless, except to keep up yelling while their white brothers fought beyond the breastworks; and they enjoyed seeing how the pale faces fought. Nevertheless, about forty of their number lost their lives during the day in ambuscade and battle.

While this attack of the regulars on the right was progressing, the French Canadians and the Abenaki Indians boldly attempted to flank the left of the camp, many of them even going away round toward the lake, and clustering in a morass where the musketry fire could not well reach them. Fortunately, however, Johnson had posted a field-piece advantageously on the extreme left of his front, which now harassed the squatting Indians, while on those in the marsh the mortars and howitzers were trained. Although the howitzers split and became useless, the mortars did well; and some shells skilfully dropped

drove the lurking enemy away, and completely relieved this flank of danger.

Brave as were the Americans behind the rude barricade, they did not excel the French regulars, who fought until they were nearly annihilated. It was well into the afternoon when they were deserted by hundreds of French forest-rangers and Canadian Indians, who, seeing no hope of winning the day, skulked away to the scene of the morning's ambush, — the one set to plunder, and the other to scalp the slain. About four o'clock so many of the white-coated regulars were prone on the ground and so few in action, all their officers being disabled, while the fire of the others had slackened, that the Americans began to get out of their breastworks, and to fight in the woods. This made the French give way so visibly that the whole of Lyman's force rushed out on the enemy with their hatchets and clubbed muskets, pushing them out of ambush into full retreat. This onset took place between four and five o'clock P. M., and resulted in completely driving the enemy off the field.

The fighting was not yet over, for the third battle on this eventful day was yet to take place. Hearing the distant firing, Colonel Blanchard, of Fort Lyman, sent out a party of two hundred and fifty men under command of the brave Captain McGinnis, who, with his Schenectady men, led the van. Warily approaching the place of the morning's ambush, with scouts ahead, they succeeded in getting between the piled-up baggage of the French army and a vidette of five or six men who were keeping a lookout on a hill.

Moving farther up the road, they found a party of three hundred French and Indians, consisting of those who had plundered the slain, and of other remnants of the beaten army, who were eating cold rations out of their packs. They sat along Rocky Brook and the marshy pond. McGinnis and his men approached stealthily until within firing distance, and then, after a volley, charged like tigers upon their prey.

In the fight which ensued the Americans contested against heavy odds; but although their brave captain was mortally wounded, he directed their movements till the firing ceased, and the third battle of this eventful day resulted in victory. Not till the next evening did the scattered band of Dieskau's army meet, exhausted and famished, at the place where they had left their canoes.

The next day the marshy pool, in places reddened with the blood of the slain, thrown into it to save burial, was given the name — which it ever afterward kept — of “Bloody Pond.” When the writer saw it, in 1877, the sunbeams danced merrily on its dimpled face, as the snow-white and golden pond-lilies were swayed by the morning's breeze, rippling the water's surface, while yet held at anchor beneath. In this threefold battle the Americans lost most heavily in the “bloody morning scout” at the ambushade, — their total being two hundred and twenty killed, and ninety wounded. The well-plied tomahawks, after the surprise in the woods, and the poisoned bullets of the French Canadians accounted for the disproportionate number of the dead over the wounded. Among the



officers were Colonel Williams, Major Ashley, Captains Keys, Porter, Ingersoll, and twelve others. Captain McGinnis died in the camp two days afterward. Of the Indians, beside Hendrick, thirty-eight were slain. On the French side the loss must have been fully four hundred, or probably one third of those actually engaged.

In this battle farmers and traders prevailed over European troops, trained woodcraftsmen, and fierce savages. The honours of the command belong equally to three men. The credit of the defences, and the excellent disposition of marksmen, artillery, and reserves, belongs to Johnson, who, unfortunately, was wounded in the hips in the first part of the battle, and had to leave the field for shelter. The command then devolved upon Gen. Phineas Lyman, who deserves equal honour with Johnson. The Connecticut general, cool and alert, displayed the greatest courage, and was largely influential in securing the final result. To McGinnis belongs the credit of winning a victory, — the second of the day, in what may be called the third battle of this eventful 8th of September. Nevertheless, such are the peculiarities of the military mind, that Johnson never mentioned Lyman's name in his official despatch. For this reason, and because they unjustly suspected cowardice in Johnson during the battle, and because they saw comparatively little of him before and after it, withal being sectional and clannish in their opinions, Johnson was extremely unpopular with the New England soldiers. Their judgments have mightily influenced the accounts of the

threefold battle of Lake George as found in the writings of New England annalists and historians.

Johnson was at once rewarded by being made a baronet, with the gift of five thousand pounds, while Lyman received the ordinary stipend of his rank, — another ingredient in Johnson's unpopularity in the Eastern colonies.

Three days after, the Iroquois allies waited on Johnson and informed him that, according to custom, after losing comrades in battle, they must return home to cheer their people, and protect their castles against the Abenaki Indians, from whom they feared an attack. It was in vain that Johnson tried to show them that the campaign had hardly begun, and to persuade them to alter their purpose. They insisted on going away, promising, however, to come again soon with fresh zeal.

Dissensions and jealousies between the troops of the various colonies now broke out. Both the generals commanding, and the new governor, Hardy, thought that a strong fort should be built to command the water-way to Canada, by way of Lake George. Though as important for the defence of New England as of New York, the Eastern officers and men could not see the need of a fort here, and the work dragged. When finished, it was called by the courtier, Johnson, Fort William Henry, after the king's grandson, and had a notable history. Meanwhile, owing to remissness of contractors, the petty jealousies of the officers and militia of five or more colonies, and the overcautiousness of Johnson, nothing aggressive was done.

Late in November, the fort being finished, the unpopular duty of garrisoning it devolved upon a medley of six hundred men from the various colonies. The army was disbanded, and the levies marched home. Johnson resigned his commission, and returned to Mount Johnson about the middle of December. About ten days later he was in New York, enjoying, as well as his wound would allow, the parade and illumination of the city in his honour; while Dieskau languished in the Schuyler mansion in Albany, waiting for some of his many wounds to heal; and Lyman received modest honours at home. The patent of Johnson's baronetcy was dated Nov. 27, 1755. He invested the four thousand nine hundred and forty-five pounds eighteen shillings and sixpence which came into his hands, in three per cent bank annuities.

His coat-of-arms consisted of a heart-shaped shield held and flanked on either side by an Indian equipped with feathers, medal, quiver, and bow. On the shield are three fleurs-de-lis; and on the convex band across the shield, two shells, and between them a smaller heart, on which lies an open hand supine. Above the shield a hand grasps a dart. The motto is *Deo Regique Debeo*. The full inscription of the blazon in the language of heraldry is given in the standard books which treat of the British peerage.