THE COLLAPSE OF CORNWALLIS.

A Review of the Great Revolutionary Events of One Hundred Years Ago.

The Death Blow to British Tyranny Struck by the Allied Armies.

Memories Freshened by the Anniversary.

The siege of Yorktown and the surrender of Lord Cornwallis and his army was the real culminating event of the great revolution which severed the American colonies from the British empire. One hundred years have floated down the stream of time since that event, and from a weak confederation of thirteen colonies has come, in that brief time, a great nation, respected by all the world for its enlightenment, and for the wonderful progress it has made in wealth and power. The century which has passed has been a great one. Time, thought and experience had not wrought in vain, when a century ago, the statesmen of that period undertook the work of founding a nation. The declaration of independence which they made sounded through the world, and awakened everywhere a spirit of liberty that has been growing in volume ever since. The institutions then founded on this continent were based on principles so just and humane, that when administered with due wisdom and skill, they will never embarrass or restrain the proper activities of men at any point. Our government stands a model, which other nations will carefully copy in due time, as they can adapt themselves and change their institutions. It may not be a literal copy, but the spirit breathed into the great declaration penned by Thomas Jefferson is rapidly becoming a potential influence in the structure of all civilized governments.

In the great revolutionary struggle of a hundred years ago, France, then ruled by a crowned head, was our faithful ally. She is now a republic, modeled to a great extent after our own, and no country in the old world is so prosperous, nor is any people more contented. It is a significant fact that these two allies in a great struggle have remained friendly ever since, in spite of all the complications which the clashing interests of commerce have developed, and to-day the representatives of that government and the descendants of the noble Frenchmen who participated at the siege of Yorktown, are on our soil as honored guests of the country which their ancestors helped establish among the powers of the world.

The British government, against which we then warred, has now with us most friendly relations, and is proud of the honor of having been our mother country. Slight jealousy of her aspiring offspring, it is true, she has occasionally exhibited in the course of the century which has elapsed since her forces laid down their arms to ours, but that spirit appears to have been eliminated from the English statesmen and people of the present day, and it is not likely that the friendshlp of the two countries will ever again be disturbed by the clash of arms.

Possessing, then, the highest friendship and regard for the nation which was our enemy in the revolutionary struggle, it is not improper that we should celebrate the centennial anniversary of the surrender which closed the war, and] it is not inappropriate that the incidents of the Yorktown campaign and the leaders who figured in it prominently should be briefly noticed.

Lord Cornwallis surrendered the British army of Virginia and the south to Gen. Washington at Yorktown on the 18th day of October, 1781; and, though it was not until March, 1783, that the preliminaries of a peace treaty were signed between the colonies and England, this surrender decided the struggle and the British military power offered no further effective resistence. Gen Phillips, the English commander under Cornwallis, and the traitor Benedict Arnold had been harassing that part of Virginia all through the spring and summer of 1781. Baron Steuben, the noble old Prussian officer, had done magnificent service in upholding the cause of the colonists. His little army of militia was kept on and about the peninsula, while all the regulars that could be spared were sent south into the Carolinas to reinforce Gen. Green against Cornwallis. The months of May and June brought Lafayette with 2,000 Frenchmen and Destouche with a French fleet. In a naval fight in the Chesapeake between the French and a British fleet, the former was driven north. Cornwallis later in the summer was forced to leave the Carolinas and marched his army north, intrenching himself at Yorktown. Meanwhile Baron Steuben had increased his Virginia troops in numbers and converted them from militia into soldiers, and Gen. Lafayette had also strengthened his command. Gen. Washington then conceived the plan to pen Cornwallis up in Yorktown and capture the entire British army south of the Chesapeake. It was a complete success, and the strongest of the British armies in America, with the best generals, capitulated on the 18th of October following. While Baron Steuben and Gen. Lafayette were, next to Washington, most conspicuous on the American side, Gen. Knox contributed in no small degree to the glorious result. He has been called the hero of the Yorktown campaign because of the great artillery fire that had so much to do with the defeat of the enemy. Gen. Knox commanded our artillery, and was the American artillerist. His services were of the first order; and it is believed that his effective artillery fire compelled the enemy to surrender before the arrival of Sir Henry Clinton with a fleet and army to attempt the deliverance of Lord Cornwallis.

Agreement was made for the surrender on the 18th, and on the morning of the 19th Washington sent the articles of capitulation to Lord Cornwallis, accompanied by a note in which he requested that they be signed by 11 o'clock, and that the troops surrender their arms by 2 o'clock in the afternoon. According to historical description the surrender of the arms and standards was one of the most imposing and affecting spectacles ever witnessed in warfare. It was high noon when the allies took possession of Yorktown, detachments from each army occupying a redoubt on the left of the works. The field chosen for the formal surrender of arms and standards is about a mile from Yorktown on the Hampton turnpike. It is a wide plain, descending in long, sweeping undulations toward the York river. The way thither was lined by the allied troops, the French on the left and the Americans on the right. The former were gallantly arrayed, their white uniforms, plumed hats and gilded standards gleaming famously in the ardent sun. The Americans presented a sombre, though soldierly, appearance. Their dress was not uniform, and was much worn. Their heads were proudly erect and every eye beamed with gladness. The French and American colors were unfurled near the front of the columns—the one the golden fleur de lys on a white silk ground, and the other the simple but beautiful stars and stripes. At the head of each army was its commander-in-chief, mounted upon a magnificent charger. Surrounding each were his staff and his general officers. As the positions were being taken the French band discoursed its most inspiriting strains of martial melody. Washington was magnanimously solicitous that his fallen foes should not be insulted, and requested his soldiers to refrain from cheering. Posterity would give them sufficient applause.

"A vast concourse of people," says a historian, "almost equaling in number the military, was assembled from the surrounding country to participate in the joy of the event. Universal silence prevailed as the vanquished troops slowly marched out of their intrenchments and passed between the combined armies." They had on the previous day been given uniforms, and their long files appeared in all their scarlet splendor; but, as the Abbe Robin observes, "all their finery served only to humble them the more, in contrast with the miserable appearance of the Americans." The eye witnesses of the scene dwell upon the lively expectation which was felt by all the allies of seeing Lord Cornwallis, whose name and qualities had inspired them with respect and admiration. They were keenly disappointed, however, for he did not come, being opportunely indisposed. Gen. O'Hara led his army and bore his sword. He sought out Gen. Rochambeau, at the head of the French line, and tendered him the humbled sword. The French commander simply designated to him Gen. Washington, who sat upon his white steed immediately opposite, telling him that the French army was only auxiliary to the American, and the formal honors of the surrender belonged to the latter. Gen. O'Hara approached Washington and was about to draw the sword from its scabbard to present to him. The latter made a negative sign, and exclaimed: "Never from so brave a hand." The soldiers exhibited great vexation in laying down their arms, and one officer was seen to bite his sword in silent rage. The prisoners numbered 7,198. One thousand of these, being sailors, were, together with the shipping in the harbor, surrendered to the French admiral. Two hundred and seventy-four cannon, 7,320 muskets and 457 horses were taken. The colors of twenty-eight regiments were delivered. By death, wounds and desertion the enemy had lost previous to the surrender 552 men; the French 50 killed and 125 wounded; the Americans 27 killed and 73 wounded.

Immediately after the surrender three aides-de-camp, in the name of Washington, of Rochambeau and of Lafayette, presented themselves at Cornwallis' quarters to express a polite solicitude regarding his health. On the evening of the 22d he was invited to dine with the Comte de Rochambeau, but all the delicate efforts of his hosts could not dispel his melancholy. Similar attentions were shown the other captive officers. The French particularly were untiring in their courtesies, and won the esteem and gratitude of those who but lately had execrated them.

Thatcher describes the appearance of Yorktown three days after the signing of the capitulation. "I have this day," he says, "visited the town of York to witness the destructive effects of the siege. It contains about sixty houses, some of which are elegant. Many of them are greatly damaged and some totally ruined, being shot through in a thousand places and honeyed-combed, ready to fall to pieces. Rich furniture and books were scattered over the ground, and the carcasses of men and horses, half covered with earth, exhibited a scene of ruin and horror beyond description. The earth in many places is thrown up in mounds by the force of our shells, and it is difficult to point to a spot where a man could have resorted for safety."

Washington's general order, issued on the occasion, contained the following just tribute to the allied troops:

The general congratulates the army upon the glorious events of yesterday. The generous proofs which his most Christian majesty has given of his attachment to the cause of America must force conviction on the minds of the most deceived among the enemy relative to the good consequences of the alliance, and inspire every citizen of these states with sentiments of the most unalterable gratitude. His fleet—the most numerous and powerful that ever appeared in these seas, commanded by an admiral whose fortune and talents insure great events—an army of the most admirable composition, both in officers and men, are the pledges of his friendship to the United States, and their co-operation has secured us the present signal success. The general on this occasion entreats his excellency, the Count de Rochambeau, to accept his most grateful acknowledgements for his counsels at all times; he presented his warmest thanks to the Gens. Baron de Viomenil, Chevalier Chastellux, Marquis de Saint-Simon and Count de Viomenil, and to Brig.-Gen. de Choisy, who had a separate command, for the illustrious manner in which they have advanced the interests of the common cause. He requests that Count de Rochambeau will be pleased to communicate to the army under his command the high sense he entertains of their distinguished merits of the officers and soldiers of every corps, and that he will present in his name to the regiments of Agenois and Deux-Ponts the two pieces of brass ordnance captured by them as a testimony of their gallantry in storming the enemy's redoubt on the night of the 14th inst., when officers and men so universally vied with each other in the exercise of every virtue. The general's thanks to each individual merit would comprehend the whole army, but he thinks himself bound by affection, duty and gratitude to express his obligations to Maj. Gens. Lincoln, Lafayette and Steuben for dispositions in the trenches, to Gen. Deprtail and Col. Carney or the vigor and knowledge which were conspicuous in the conduct of the attacks, and to Gen. Knox and Col. d'Abeville for their great care, attention and fatigue in bringing forward the artillery and stores and for their judicious and spirited arrangement of them in the parallels. He requested the gentlemen above mentioned to communicate his thanks to the officers and soldiers of their respective commands. Ingratitude which the general hopes never to be guilty of, would be conspicuous in him should he omit thanking in the warmest terms his excellency, Gov. Nelson, for the aid he has received from him and from the militia under his command, to whose activity, emulation and courage much applause is due. The greatness of the acquisition will be an ample compensation for the hardships and hazards which they encountered with so much patriotism and firmness. In order to diffuse the general joy through every breast the general orders that these men belonging to the army who may be in confinement shall be pardoned, released and join their respective commands. Divine service is to be performed to-morrow in the several brigades and divisions. The commander-in-chief recommends that the troops not on duty should universally attend with seriousness of deportment and gratitude of heart which the recognition of such reiterated and astonishing interpositions of Providence demand of us.

It was not until the 24th of October that congress then in session in Philadelphia, heard of the surrender. An aide-de-camp of Washington rode as fast as horse could carry him from Yorktown, and entered the city at full gallop in the night halting before the house of Thomas McKean, then the president of congress; he dismounted and knocked long and loud at the door, meanwhile shouting at the top of his voice the magic words: "Cornwallis is taken! Cornwallis is taken!" The watchman caught up the cry, and continuing his round shouted at every step, "It's 1 o'clock, and Cornwallis is taken!" Windows flew open; heads came out, and neighbors exchanged conjectures, and every one dressed in haste. Soon the streets were thronged by thousands of excited people, and joyous shouts resounded everywhere, torches blazed, and the old man who was keeper of Independence hall, who had rung the birth of independence, was aroused from his bed and set the bell going as the cannon began to belch forth their thunder in honor of the glorious event. Patriots saw through gloom which had so long prevailed, the dawn of peace.

It was a famous victory, and will be splendidly celebrated. It was the intention of President Garfield to have been present on the occasion, and how grandly he would have spoken there had he been permitted to live. The nation has no man whom the remembrances of the revolution could have stirred to more eloquent utterances. His absence will be the great regret.

President Arthur and all the cabinet will participate, and all who are so fortunate as to be present are to be envied, for it will be a time to stir the heart of every patriot.

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