

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HARDSHIPS OF WAR.

We will now go back to the place we left, and see where Wash-ington was at the close of the year 1777. He had been forced to leave New Jer-sey in the hands of the King's troops. His own troops were worn down by long and hard toil, and had need of rest. They were in want of clothes too, and could not keep warm in the tents, so he sought out a place where they could build huts and screen them-selves from the cold winds and storms.

He chose Val-ley Forge, which was on the west bank of the Schuyl (school)-kill Riv-er, and a score of miles from Phil-a-del-phi-a.

Sad was the march of the troops to Val-ley Forge. Food was scant, their clothes were worn out, and a track of blood marked the way they trod. They had fought hard, but not to win, and this made their hearts low.

On De-cem-ber 17, they reached Val-ley Forge, and had to freeze in their tents till they could cut down the trees and build the huts they were to live in.

The walls were six feet and a half high, and were made of logs filled in with clay. The roofs were made of logs split in half.

No pen can paint the hard lot of those poor men shut in at Val-ley Forge. For some days they had no meat. For three days they had no bread. Some of the men had to sit up all night by the fires, as there were no clothes for their beds, and they could not sleep for the cold. Some of the men were so scant of clothes that they could not leave their huts.

Wash-ing-ton was kept short of funds and of troops, though he plead hard for both, and was sore pressed on all sides. He scarce knew what to do. There was but one thing he could do, and that was to wait.

While his troops were in this sad plight--some of them sick un-to death--the red-coats, who held Phil-a-del-phi-a in siege, led a gay sort of life, and were much at their ease.

Near the first of March a Ger-man came to Wash-ing-ton's camp to lend him his aid.

His name was Bar-on Steu-ben. He had fought for long years in the wars that had been waged in Eu-rop-e, had been aide-de-camp to Fred-er-ick the Great, and had won much fame by his brave deeds. The French, who were friends to our cause, knew that we had need of such a man as Bar-on Steu-ben, and urged him to come to A-mer-i-ca, and he was at once sent to join the troops at Val-ley Forge.

Our troops had had no chance to drill, there was no one to teach them, and they had fought with a rush and a dash, and in a pell-mell sort of

way. Steu-ben went to work to drill these men, the best of whom had much to learn, and he found it a hard task at first as he could not speak our tongue. At last a man was found who spoke French, and him Steu-ben made his aide-de-camp and kept him close at hand.

The men were slow to learn, for the drills were new to them, and Steu-ben would get wroth with them and call them "block-heads," and all sorts of hard names. But though he had a sharp tongue, and was quick to get in a rage, he had a kind, true heart, and soon won the love of the men.

For eight months the red-coats had held Phil-a-del-phi-a. In the spring Gen-er-al Howe went home, and left his troops in charge of Sir Hen-ry Clin-ton, who made up his mind to lead the troops back to New York. But he did not wish his plans to be known.

In the mean-time, Wash-ing-ton knew that a scheme of some sort was on foot--so he sent troops out to check the King's troops should they move by land. The red-coats left Phil-a-del-phi-a on June 18, and as there was but one road for them to take, their train stretched out for twelve miles. They made a halt at Al-len-town, and Clin-ton had not quite made up his mind which way to go from that place. He at first thought he would go as far as the Rar-i-tan Riv-er, and then ship his troops to New York; but when he found that our troops were not far off, he turned to the right and took the road to Mon-mouth.

His march was a slow one; the heat was great; the rains made the roads

bad, and they had to stop to bridge the streams, and to build cause-ways so that they could cross the swamps.

Wash-ing-ton in the mean-time had gone on to Kings-ton; but as soon as he learned Clin-ton's course, he moved his troops so as to get in the rear of the red-coats.

On the night of June 27, the foe went in camp on the high ground near Mon-mouth Court House. The van-guard of our troops was five miles off, and in charge of Gen-er-al Lee.

At day-break the van-guard of the red-coats set forth down the hill, while Clin-ton with his choice troops staid in camp on the heights of Free-hold, to give the long train of carts and pack mules a chance to get well on the way. At eight o'clock all were in line of march to Mid-dle-town.

As soon as Lee heard that the foe were on the move, he set out to meet them, and was joined by the troops in charge of La-fay-ette. As Lee stood on one of the hills he caught sight of a band of red-coats hid some-what by the woods, which he thought was a part of the main force. So he sent some of his troops to draw their fire and check them in the rear, while he with the rest of his force would take a short cut, through the woods, get in front of the corps, and cut it off from the main force.

Wash-ing-ton was on his way with his main force, when the boom of big

guns rang out on the air. The sound caused him to change his pace to a quick step, and when he drew near Free-hold church, where the road forked, he sent Greene with part of his force to the right, while he with the rest of the troops took the left hand road.

Wash-ing-ton stood on the ground with his arm thrown up on the neck of his horse, when a man rode up and said the blue-coats were in flight. Wash-ing-ton was vexed, for he was quite sure it was not true. Then up came one with fife in hand, quite out of breath, and in great fright. He was seized at once so that he would not scare the troops then on their way, and told that he would be flogged if he dared to spread the tale he had brought.

Wash-ing-ton sprang on his horse, and sent men out to learn the truth, while he spurred past the Free-hold church. The news seemed too strange to be true. He had heard but a few guns, and did not think there had been much of a fight. Was Lee to blame for this wrong move? He feared so. As he reached the high ground he saw Lee and his men in full flight, and by this time he was in a fine rage.

"What do you mean by this?" he asked in a fierce stern tone as Lee rode up to him.

At sight of Wash-ing-ton's face Lee was struck dumb for a-while, but when he could speak he tried to tell why he had thought it best to fall back. There was not much time for a talk, as the foe were not far off. The sight of their Com-mand-er-in-chief put a stop to the flight,

and plans were at once made to turn the luck. The place where they were was good for a stand, as it was on high ground which the foe could not reach but by a cause-way.

Lee knew that Wash-ing-ton had lost faith in him, so he held back, and would give no aid to his chief. Wash-ing-ton rode back to Lee in a calm mood, and said to him; "Will you keep the com-mand on this height, or not? If you will, I will go back to the main force and have it formed on the next height."

Lee said it was all the same to him where he was placed, that he would do just as Wash-ing-ton said, and "not be the first to leave the ground."

Soon guns were heard on both sides. Lee and his men, who were in the fore-ground made a brave stand, but were at length forced to fall back. Lee brought off his troops in good style by the cause-way that crossed the swamps, in front of our troops in charge of Lord Stir-ling, and was the last to leave the ground. When he had formed his men in line back of the swamp, he rode up to Wash-ing-ton, and said, "Here, sir, are my troops, what do you wish me to do with them?"

Wash-ing-ton saw that the men were worn out with long tramps, hard fights, and the great heat, so he told Lee to take them to the rear, and call in all those he might meet with who had fled from his ranks.

The foe sought to turn both our flanks, but were checked by a sharp

fire, and at length they gave way and fell back to the ground where Lee had been that morn. Here the woods and swamps were on their flanks, and their front could not be reached but by the cause-way. Great as was the risk, Wash-ing-ton made up his mind to charge on the foe, and this was his plan: Gen-er-al Poor was to move round on their right, Gen-er-al Wood-ford on the left, while the big field guns should gall them in front. But night set in ere they could act on this plan. Some of the troops had sunk on the ground, and all were in need of rest. Wash-ing-ton told them to lie on their arms just where they chanced to be when it grew dark, as he meant to go on with the fight at dawn of the next day. He lay on his cloak at the foot of a tree, and La-fay-ette lay near him.

At day-break the beat of drums roused them from their sleep, but the foe had fled, and had been so long on the way that Wash-ing-ton could not hope to check them.

Our loss in the fight at Mon-mouth was 69, while 250 of the King's troops were left dead on the field. Some of the troops on both sides had died in the swamp, and some were found on the edge of a stream that ran through it, where, worn out with their toils, and weak from heat and thirst they had crawled to drink and die.

Lee's pride had been so hurt that he wrote to Wash-ing-ton in a way that he should not have done to his Com-mand-er-in-chief, and he was brought to court by the Board of War and tried for his wrong deeds. His guilt was proved, and he was told that he could not serve for the

next twelve months. He went to his home in Vir-gin-i-a where he led a queer kind of a life. His house was a mere shell, and had but one room, but lines were chalked on the floor and each space was used as if it was a room by it-self. Here was his bed, there were his books; in this space he kept all his horse gear, and in that one he cooked and ate his meals.

With pen and with tongue he strove to harm Wash-ing-ton, whom his shafts failed to hurt, and who spoke not an ill word of Lee. He liked him as a friend but did not think he was fit to lead troops to war. Lee died in the course of four years, and on his death-bed he thought he was on the field of war, and his last words were a call to his men to stand by him.

For a year or two more the strife was kept up on the coast from Maine to Flor-i-da, and both red-coats and red-skins took part in scenes that chill the blood to read of. Houses were burnt and land laid waste, forts were stormed and seized from our troops whose force was too small to hold them. Now and then there was a gain for our side, but in spite of his ill luck Wash-ing-ton held on with a brave heart, and would die at his post but would not yield.

In the first part of the year 1780 we find Wash-ing-ton in camp at Mor-ris-town, with a lot of half-fed and half-clad troops.

No such cold had been known in this zone. The Bay of New York froze so hard that the ships-of-war that lay in it were ice-bound. Food was

scant, and there was a lack of fire-wood.

Wash-ing-ton saw what a chance there was for a bold stroke, but he had no funds with which to fit out his troops, or to move them to the coast. The cost of war was great, and gold was scarce. He could not strike a big blow for New York to wrest it from the hands of the foe, as he might have done at this time had his troops been well-fed and well-clad but he would do what he could in a small way.

A bridge of ice had formed 'twixt New Jer-sey and Stat-en Isl-and, so Wash-ing-ton sent Lord Stir-ling with 2,500 men to start up and seize a force of 1,200 red-coats. His lord-ship crossed in the night, but was seen and had to fall back to E-liz-a-beth-town. Some of his men fell in-to the hands of the King's troops, and some in-to the hands of Jack Frost.

This raid gave a start to the foe and they set out to tease and vex our out-posts, which they thought could be done at small risk, as there was snow on the ground, and the troops could be borne on sleighs.

Not far from White Plains--and a score of miles from the out-posts of the red-coats--300 of our men had a post in a stone house known as Young's house, as that was the name of the man who owned it. It faced a road which ran north and south down through a rich plain, and so on to New York. Our men kept a close watch on this road, to stop the red-coats who might seek to pass with food or live-stock. The

red-coats made up their mind to break up this nest of blue-birds, and the night of Feb-ru-a-ry 2, was set for the task.

The King's troops set out from King's Bridge, some in sleighs and some on horse-back. The snow was deep, and it was hard for the sleighs to break their way through. The troops at length left them, and marched on foot. They could not bring their field guns with them. Now and then they would come to a place where the snow was more than two feet deep, and they had to take by-ways and cross roads so as not to get near our out-guards.

The sun rose while they were yet six miles or more from Young's house. This spoiled their plan, but still they kept on. Ere they could reach the house, the news flew like wild-fire that the red-coats were near, and men left their farms and homes to aid those in Young's house. But though they fought well, they had not strength to hold the fort. Not a few were killed. The house was sacked and set on fire, and the red-coats made haste to get back to their lines with those of our men whom they had seized, and who were sent to New York and put in the vile jails there.

In the year 1780, France sent ships-of-war and troops to aid our cause, and to drive the red-coats from New York. The French troops were in charge of Count de Ro-cham-beau, who was told to do just as Wash-ing-ton said; for he was Com-mand-er-in-chief.

Wash-ing-ton's heart gave a throb of joy at this proof of good-will,

and his grief was that he had not more troops of his own to join with these that he might push for New York at once. He must wait till the rest of the French troops, then on their way, came to port.

In the mean-time his thoughts were turned to the South, where the red-coats, led by Corn-wal-lis, waged a fierce war. Our troops there were in charge of Gen-er-al Greene, who was full of cheer, and did his best to keep the foe at bay, but with poor luck as his force was small.

But Wash-ing-ton had faith in him; yet such a large force of the King's troops had been sent by sea to aid Corn-wal-lis that Wash-ing-ton feared that Greene would not be safe. So he wrote to La-fay-ette, who was on his way to meet the French fleet that had been sent to Ches-a-peake Bay, to push on and join the troops at the South.

At this time Wash-ing-ton was at a place near West Point, and his whole force on the Hud-son, in May 1781, was not more than 7,000; half of whom were not fit to take the field.

Here word came to him of feuds at the North, and that the foe were in force on the north side of Cro-ton Riv-er.

Col-o-nel De-lan-cey, who led this raid, held the place that An-dré had filled, and bore the same rank, and De-lan-cey's horse-men were the dread of all those who dwelt in that part of the land. Our troops had an out-post not far from Pine's Bridge, in charge of Col-o-nel

Greene of Rhode Isl-and, who had served all through the war.

De-lan-cey set out at night at the head of 100 men on horse-back and 200 on foot. They crossed the Cro-ton at day-break, just as the night-guard had been called off, and bore down on the out-post.

They first went to the farm-house where Col-o-nel Greene and Ma-jor Flagg slept, and put a strong guard round it. Ma-jor Flagg sprang from his bed, threw up the sash, and fired at the foe, but was shot through the head and then hacked with sword cuts and thrusts.

They then burst through the door of Greene's room. He was a man of great strength, and for some time kept the foes at bay with his sword, but at last he fell, for what could one man do in such a fight?

By the time the troops sent out by Wash-ing-ton reached the post, De-lan-cey's men had flown. They tried to take Greene with them, but he died on the way, and they left him at the edge of the woods.

Wash-ing-ton felt sad at heart when he heard of the death of his brave and true friend, Col-o-nel Greene, and the next day he had his corpse brought to the west bank of the Hud-son. Guns were fired to tell that one who had fought well had gone to his rest, and strong men shed tears as he was laid in his grave, for his loss was a source of great grief to all.