

CHAPTER III.

The Campaign down the Niagara.

Besides the brilliant incidents in the minor operations of the campaign, the splendid victories gained on the Canadian side of the Niagara by the American forces under Major General Brown and Brigadiers Scott and Gaines have gained for these heroes and their emulating companions the most unfading laurels.—*Madison.*

On the second day of July, 1814, General Brown issued an order to his command stating that he was authorized by the government to put it in motion against the enemy; and on the same day, accompanied by Generals Scott and Ripley, he made a careful reconnoissance of Fort Erie to determine upon a plan of attack. Fort Erie will be described later on. It is sufficient to state here that it was a poorly fortified stone fort defended by a small garrison of about one hundred and forty officers and men under command of Major Buck of the British army.

On the third of July, pursuant to the plan agreed upon, Scott, with his brigade and some artillery and Indians, crossed the river from Black Rock, about a mile below the fort, whilst Ripley, with a portion of his brigade, crossed about a mile above. Scott reached the fort first (as Ripley from some cause—a fog, some authorities say—seems to have been delayed), and alone invested the fort at daylight. Scott posted some eighteen-pounders within easy range of the fort, and his Indians scoured the woods. Ripley soon joined Scott, and the fort was given two hours to surrender. Much to the disgust of the British commander in chief, the fort capitulated Sunday afternoon, July third, 1814, and the Americans took possession with a loss of only four men wounded, the garrison marching out and stacking arms. The British appeared to feel its loss keenly. General Drummond, writing to Sir George Prevost July tenth, says:

"I regret exceedingly the loss of this place, which I had the strongest hopes would have made an excellent defence, or, at all events, held the enemy in check for several days."

As the British forces were stationed at Chippewa Creek, only a day's march away, reinforcements could have reached the fort during the night and possibly have outnumbered and routed the Americans. In fact, several companies of the Royal Scots were marching to the assistance of the fort when the news reached them that it had capitulated. In a general order issued by the governor in chief of Canada, that official expresses his surprise and mortification that the fort surrendered "without having made an adequate defence."

General Brown's forces camped about the fort that night; but early the next day, leaving Lieutenant McDonough and a small force to garrison the fort, Brown put his army in motion to attack the British forces who were encamped near Chippewa Creek, eighteen miles away down the Niagara River. By early morning of the fifth the American army had taken up position in front of the enemy, and on that day the severe engagement of Chippewa took place. Both sides claimed a victory in the official reports; but the Americans clearly had the best of the battle in every respect, and our forces were jubilant over the showing they had made against the British regulars.*

General Brown soon set to work cutting a road through the woods to Chippewa Creek, and working parties protected by the riflemen and Indians built a bridge across the creek, as the old bridge was occupied by the British. The building of the bridge enabled Brown to turn the enemy's right flank, which Riall, the British commander, was quick to perceive. He, therefore, on the eighth of July, retreated to Fort George, at the mouth of the Niagara, the American army following and investing the fort. Here the Americans remained until July twenty-fifth, when Brown, failing to secure the cooperation of the fleet on Lake Ontario, and finding his communications threatened, determined to move his army against Burlington, where the enemy had troops and

*"We had never seen those gray jackets before. We supposed it was only a line of militia men, and wondered why you did not run at the first fire. We began to doubt when we found you stood firmly three or four rounds and when at length in the midst of our battery blaze we saw you 'port arms' and advance upon us we were utterly amazed. It was clear enough we had something besides militia men to deal with."—A *British officer to Douglass.*

stores, first falling back to Chippewa in order to deceive the enemy as to his intentions.

While before Fort George no engagements worth mentioning occurred; but, in accordance, apparently, with the well-settled custom at that time, the Americans carried on a predatory warfare against the defenseless noncombatant Canadians. Major MacFarland, of the Twenty-third United States Infantry, in a letter to his wife, written at the time, says:

"The [American] militia and Indians plundered and burnt everything. The whole population is against us; not a foraging party but is fired on, and not infrequently returns with missing numbers. This state was to be anticipated. The militia have burnt several private dwelling houses and on the 19th inst. burnt the village of St. Davids, consisting of 30 or 40 houses. This was done within three miles of our camp, and my battalion was sent to cover the retreat, as they had been sent to scour the country and it was presumed they might be pursued. My God, what a service! I never witnessed such a scene, and had not the commanding officer of the party, Lieut. Colonel Stone been disgraced and sent out of the army I would have resigned." *

In short, no one can examine the history of this period without coming to the conclusion that the well-recognized laws of warfare were ignored by both sides and that each burned and sacked defenseless hamlets almost as often as an opportunity presented itself.

On the afternoon of the twenty-fifth of July the movement to Chippewa began, General Scott, with the First Brigade and the artillery, having the advance. When Scott reached the vicinity of Niagara Falls he received intelligence that the enemy was posted at Lundy's Lane, one half mile west of the falls, and, although it was nearly sunset, he resolved to attack at once, which he did with great vigor, first sending word back to Brown, who

* Poor MacFarland fell a few days afterwards at Lundy's Lane.

was with the main body. Scott maintained the contest alone with great skill for almost an hour, but after a time Ripley and Porter came up with their brigades and the battle became general.

The story of the fight has been well told by Colonel Cruikshank. As the battle was fought partly in the dark (from six o'clock to eleven) many curious mistakes occurred. General Riell, accompanied by his staff and preceded by an aide, was riding over the field when he came upon a regiment. The aide shouted, "Make room there, men, for General Riell." The ranks gave way, and the general and his staff started to ride through the regiment, when, much to his surprise, he was suddenly seized and pulled off his horse. Astonished beyond measure he shouted, "What does all this mean?" "You are prisoners, sir," was the answer. "But I am General Riell." "There is no doubt of that," responded his captor, "and I am Captain Ketchum, of the United States army." Seeing that resistance was useless, the general was heard to remark *sotto voce*, "Captain Ketchum—Ketchum. Well, you have caught us, sure enough."

Both sides claimed a victory—the British because the Americans retreated from the field of battle, leaving their killed and wounded, all the captured guns but one, and many small arms; the Americans because they drove the British from their position and held it until it seemed advisable to fall back to their camp, two miles away, for supplies and water. Porter, speaking of this fight in writing Governor Tompkins, says:

"Our victory was complete, but, alas, this victory, gained by exhibitions of bravery never surpassed in this country, was converted into a defeat by a precipitate retreat, leaving the dead, the wounded, and captured artillery and our hard-earned honor to the enemy. I entered my remonstrance against this measure, and I confess at the time I almost wished that fate had swept another General from the combat.* But it is certain that no Militia General is to gain any military fame while united to a

Porter would then have succeeded to the command.

regular force and commanded by their officers. * * * In short, I have been brigadiered until I am quite satisfied."

Colonel Hercules Scott, of the One-hundred-and-third Regiment, writing to his sister, says:

"On the 5th of this month a severe action [Chippewa] was fought within about five miles of this place, wherein our troops were defeated with heavy loss. In the first action I was not engaged, but we had another severe one on the 25th, when we had *rather* the advantage."

A table of the losses at Chippewa and Lundy's Lane will be found at the end of this chapter, which will show how desperate was the fighting. As Generals Brown and Scott were both severely wounded, the command devolved upon Ripley, who, acting under Brown's directions, withdrew the army to Fort Erie, which he reached at eleven o'clock on the night of July twenty-sixth. He immediately took up the strongest position possible, and awaited the attack he knew was inevitable.

As an illustration of how severe the losses were at Lundy's Lane: Colonel Miller's regiment lost one hundred and twenty-six killed, wounded, and missing out of about three hundred men. Colonel Miller was the man who, being asked during the battle if his regiment (the Twenty-first infantry) could take a certain battery made the historic response, " I will try, sir." Listen to Miller's report:

"It was then evening, but moonlight. General Brown turned to me, and said: ` Col. Miller, take your regiment and storm that work and take it.' I had short of three hundred men with me, as my regiment had been much weakened by the numerous details made from it during the day. I, however, immediately obeyed the order."

Of the First Brigade, the commander (Scott), his aide, a staff major, and every commander of battalion were either killed or

wounded. In fact, Scott's brigade was all cut to pieces, and its remnants were collected and served during the siege of Fort Erie under a lieutenant colonel.

The following table of losses is interesting:

CHIPPEWA.				
	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Total.
American,	60	249	19	328
British,	148	221	46	415

LUNDY'S LANE.				
	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Total.
American,	171	570	117	858
British,	84	554	235	873*

*Colonel Scott stated the English loss at 939 killed, wounded, and missing.