CHAPTER X – BURGOYNE'S APOLOGIA

DESPATCHES and gazettes, especially those which report disasters and mishaps,* are inevitably very carefully written and as carefully edited before they appear in print. It is always pleasant to read the news contained in them as it struck the man in the street, or rather the soldier in the ranks. Elijah Fisher in his *Journal While in the War for Independence* (Badger and Manley, Augusta, Maine, 1880) handling his pen as bravely as though it were a bayonet, gives the following delightful account of the surrender.

"October the 17th. Gen. Burgoin and his howl army surrendered themselves Prisoners of Ware and Come to Captelate with our army and Gen. Gates (five thousand seven hundred Prisoners besides the seven hundred toreys that Gen. Gates would not take as Prisoners of Ware that the Ingens garded to Canady) surrendered themselves prisoners of war. Then at one of the Clock five Brigades was sent for Albeny (for there come nuse that Gen. Clinton was a comin up the North river to Albeny) and all the stores belonging to the army was there and crossed the river at the New City we Come to Greenbush of agnst (over against) Albeny at Brake of Day in which time we march'd forty miles. Gen. Clinton having nuse that Gen. Birgoyne had capetlated and had surrendered his army prisoners of war he Returned back to New York. By reason of the hardships heat and cold and hard marches broght that Pain on in my side again."

Let us now consider the question, why did Burgoyne fail and 'Come to Captelate" as Mr. Fisher so pleasantly puts it? Well, in the first place, the whole plan of campaign was crazy. A lover in an old play made a modest request of the gods: he asked them to "annihilate but space and time." Could that have been done Burgoyne, Howe and St. Leger might have met at the same date at Albany. But as things are in this world, British ministers were banking on the impossible. The reason for the descent from Canada was that in the old French and Indian Wars that had been the recognized route. But, Britain having command of the sea, it is ridiculous that Burgoyne should have been sent by a long and extraordinarily difficult land route with the ultimate object of reaching New York, when he and his troops could have been transported thither with no difficulty by sea. The scheme adopted gave the Americans the advantage of "interior lines," though the phrase had not then been invented. Insane strategy apart, the reasons for Burgoyne's failure have been indicated in previous chapters. And they come out pretty clearly in his apologia, which he called *A State of the Expedition from Canada as Laid before the House of Commons by Lieutenant-General Burgoyne and*

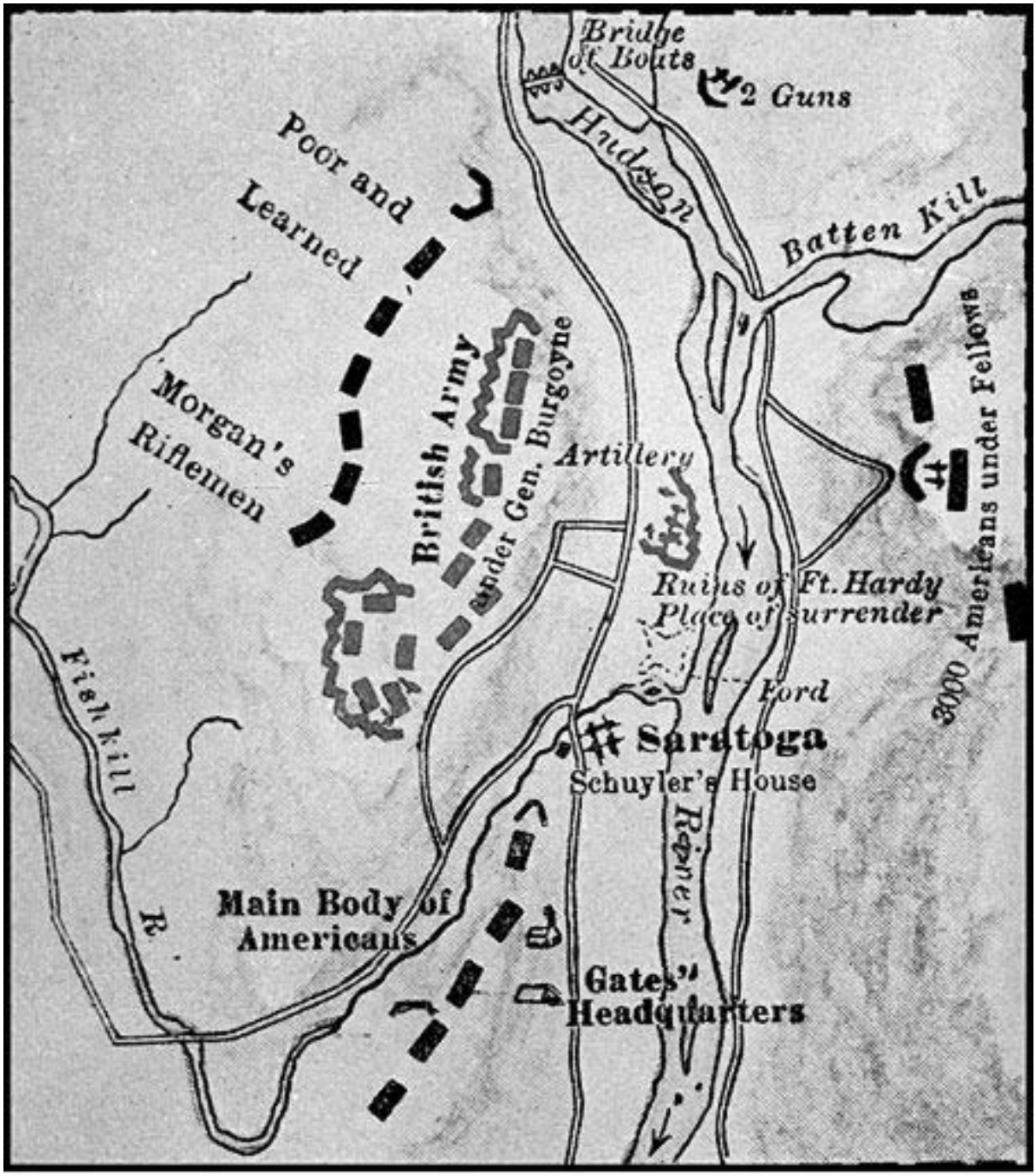
*At the time of the Boer War the official designation of such was "regrettable incidents."

Verified by Evidence. This was published in 1780, and it is typical of Gentleman Johnny that it is a fine quarto and that he chose a publisher whose office was "Opposite Burlington House, Piccadilly"—no Grub Street for him, but the heart of the West End. To this book he prefixed a narrative which he divided into three "periods"; he really meant Acts, for the sense of the drama was always strong in his mind.

Act I covers the period from his appointment to the pursuit immediately after the capture of Ticonderoga; Act II deals with the events from that date to the crossing of the Hudson; and Act III takes the drama up to the signing of the Convention. The tragic hero (with a touch of comedy) is John Burgoyne himself; the villain of the piece, who is indicated early, is the Minister who would not allow him any "latitude." Burgoyne begins by paying a handsome compliment to Sir Guy Carleton, who did everything he could to "expedite his requisitions and desires." Difficulties arose even before he left Montreal. The Canadians did not come up to expectations in numbers, whether as fighting men or as laborers (corvées), and the contractor who had undertaken to supply drivers for the transport proved a broken reed. He gives his effective strength on the day he encamped before Ticonderoga, 3,724 British and 3,016 Germans rank and file, that is 6,740 regulars (exclusive of artillery men, 473 in all), about 250 Canadians and Provincials and about 400 Indians. The estimate for the Canadian troops had been 2,000, so there was a serious deficiency here. He met the charge that he had been "overartilleried" by explaining that many of his guns, particularly the heavy ordnance, were left at Ticonderoga, and some at Fort George. Moreover artillery was particularly necessary for "the attack of block-houses, a species of fortification peculiar to Americans," and also to defend Albany—if he got there.

The chief scene in Act II is Bennington. Burgoyne mentions no names but he says that those who knew the country best were most sanguine of success (which means the incompetent idiot Skene), and he felt himself compelled to add that "my cautions were not observed nor the reinforcement advanced with the. alacrity I had the right to expect," which is, and not unfairly, to the address of Baume and Breymann.

Act III begins with the crossing of the Hudson. Why did he cross it? Well, Why not? "My army was conscious of having the superiority and was eager to advance; I expected co-operation; no letters from Sir William Howe removed that expectation. . . . I read again my orders—I believe for an hundredth time—and I was decided." And further, had he retreated he would, he says, have been universally blamed. He also says definitely that it was not true, as asserted by some, that Fraser and Phillips were opposed to the crossing



Map of Surrender of Burgoyne, October 17, 1777
From Avery's "History of the United States"

of the Hudson. The action of September nineteenth he claims as a victory without "any immediate advantages," due, he admits, to the valor of the army of the enemy. Why did he not retreat? Because he expected at any moment the cooperation of Sir Henry Clinton, because his sick and wounded were recovering fast and "the more I delayed the stronger I grew,"[1] and also because he hoped that Colonel St. Leger and his troops would come by way of

[1] A very weak argument.

Ticonderoga to his assistance. His defeat on the seventh of October was entirely due to Arnold, not to Gates. If Arnold had not been there he, Burgoyne, was confident that he would have defeated the unenterprising Gates, in spite of the vigor and the obstinacy of the American troops.

The witnesses were then called, the first of them being Sir Guy Carleton. Sir Guy is extraordinarily cautious. Like the Italian witness in the Enquiry into the Conduct of Queen Caroline [1] he often falls back on "*non mi ricordo* —"I don't precisely recollect." He is always begging the Committee to judge for themselves from the printed papers before them; indeed, he said in so many words, "I have an objection to give an opinion on almost all points." It is, as a minor point, interesting that he continually uses the picturesque word "fall" where most English would say "autumn." When asked what he would have done in Burgoyne's position, he replies: "Every man must decide for himself. What I would have done I really don't know." When questioned about Howe he drew even further into his shell: the most he would say was: "I took it for granted that Sir William Howe knew what he was about and would do what he thought best for the public service." On the whole it may be said that Carleton's evidence was for Burgoyne about as helpful as Sam Weller's was for Mrs. Bardell.

The evidence of the Earl of Balcarres is chiefly interesting for his opinion of the fighting quality of "the rebels"; at Hubbardton they behaved with great gallantry; on the nineteenth of September, and indeed whenever he fought them, he was much struck with their obstinacy and courage, and he pays a fine tribute to Burgoyne, who "at all times shared the dangers and afflictions of the army in common with every soldier; as such they looked on him as their friend." Questioned as to Sir William Howe's proceedings, he declined to commit himself, saying that he was a soldier and not a politician.

Captain Money, the Deputy Quartermaster-General, testified chiefly as to transport difficulties, and the shortcomings of the Canadian contractors, but he gave very damning evidence about the Brunswickers on October seventh. They quitted their position[2] as soon as the firing began, and did not leave a man behind them. After some difficulty they were "brought to make a stand in the rear of the artillery, but in no order." Two German officers, with drawn swords, "kept them up." He also spoke highly of Burgoyne and of the trust the army had in him; had he retreated when it was reported that Sir Henry Clinton was coming up the river, "the army would never have forgiven him nor would he

[1] George IV's consort, charged, I think unjustly, with being a Royal Vamp.

[2] Anburey also says definitely that they bolted and that Breymann was killed while trying to rally them. See also page 196.

ever have forgiven himself." The Earl of Harrington's evidence relates chiefly to the misconduct of the Indians, but he also said that there never was an army "more deservedly pleased with the conduct of their general" than Burgoyne's.

The most interesting point in the evidence of Major Forbes of the 9th Regiment is that the whole army expected that Sir William Howe was going to cooperate up the North River (the Hudson) and, had he done so instead of going to Philadelphia, Burgoyne's army would never have been taken prisoners; this was in fact the opinion of the army generally. Captain Bloomfield of the Artillery was called and examined by Burgoyne to prove that the expedition was not "over-artilleried." He had "lived in the family" (*i.e.*, been on the staff) of General Phillips and his opinions might be taken as representing those of his chief. He gave full details as to the number and caliber of the guns and as to the number left at Ticonderoga, Fort George and St. John's.

The last witness was Lieutenant-Colonel Kingston, and his evidence is important. He elucidates the baggage question. On May thirtieth Burgoyne had issued an order that officers were not to take more baggage[2] than was absolutely necessary: small notice was taken of this, so another order was issued on July twelfth and it was pointed out that in the last war in America "the officers took up with soldiers' tents and often confined their baggage to a knapsack for months together." The Germans seem to have been special offenders and Burgoyne wrote personally to Riedesel upon the matter. Questioned about another kind of baggage, the number of women[3] with the army, Colonel Kingston made the pleasant reply: "I had really so much to do that I had not much leisure to pay much attention to the ladies, and I know very little of their beauty or their numbers." And when asked if the women were "more of impediment or of comfort to the King's troops," he made the gallant reply that he had never heard anybody describe them as an impediment. He throws a light on the medical arrangements; the biers and hand-barrows were so primitive that many wounded preferred to lie where they fell rather than be carried on them. It also appears from his evidence that Fraser had been opposed to the Germans being sent on the Bennington business, as "they are not a very active people," but he had not expressed this objection to Burgoyne. Kingston also put in a return, a copy of Gates's, showing the strength of the American troops at Saratoga. Asked definitely what, in his opinion, were the causes of the failure of the expedition, he said in so many words: "I looked upon

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[2]Ewald, a Brunswick officer, wrote that the British officers took with them "portmanteaux full of bags of hair-powder, pomatum, cards, novels and plays." Including, one may safely say, one or two by their General.

[3]It was said at the time that they came to about two thousand.

our force not to be equal to the forcing our way to Albany without some cooperation," and, further questioned, replied that he expected such cooperation from New York up the Hudson River. Congress made a fuss about the cartouch-boxes and the last question put to Kingston and his reply throw light upon this matter.

"Q. Was it by consent of General Gates that the soldiers after the convention retained their cartouch-boxes?

"A. They retained their belts, and I really don't recollect whether their cartouch-boxes were in general retained or not: but talking with Mr. Gates when the King's troops marched by with the accoutrements on, Mr. Gates asked me (we had been old acquaintances formerly) whether it was not customary on field days for arms and accoutrements to go together? I told him, there was nothing said in the convention that I had agreed to with him relating to the accoutrements, and that he could have no right to anything but what was stipulated in that treaty. He replied, 'You are perfectly right,' and turned to some of the officers on their service by, and said, 'If we meant to have had them, we ought to have inserted them in the convention.' "

Burgoyne in reviewing the evidence expressed his regret that Sir Guy Carleton had not said more than he did, but he quoted, with the latter's consent, his letter from Quebec of November 12, 1777, in reply to Burgoyne's, announcing his failure. This letter of Sir Guy's contains a very significant passage which is as true now as when it was written: "This unfortunate event, it is to be hoped, will in future prevent ministers from pretending to direct operations of war in a country at three thousand miles distance, of which they have so little knowledge as not to be able to distinguish between good, bad, or interested advices, or to give positive orders in matters which, from their nature, are ever upon the change, so that the expedience or propriety of a measure at one moment, may be totally inexpedient or improper in the next."

Burgoyne then points out what we have already seen, that the Indians were of very little use indeed, and he very properly castigates St. Luc,[1] who had described him (Burgoyne) to Germain in a phrase which the latter quoted in the House, as being "brave, *mais lourd comme un Allemand."* St. Luc is dismissed as a. "wily partisan" who had sought to curry favor with Germain by depreciating the General under whom he had served. He pays Riedesel a high compliment as being a "frank, spirited and honourable character," but of the troops Riedesel commanded he says: "The mode of war in which they were engaged was entirely new to them; temptations to desert were in themselves

[1] Called by a contemporary "that arch devil incarnate."

great and had been enhanced and circulated among them by emissaries of the enemy with much art and industry." The Canadians were not to be depended upon; they were all the time longing to go home, and as rangers (*i.e.*, skirmishers) they compared very poorly with the enemy; perhaps there are few better Rangers in the world than the corps of Virginia Riflemen which acted under Colonel Morgan." The Provincials, consisting of professed Loyalists, had gone on the expedition, some for what they could get out of it, others for revenge against their personal enemies, and all were totally undisciplined or, as our dear old Pomposity must put it, "repugnant even to an idea of subordination."

It is obvious that Burgoyne was aware that Bennington required some explaining away, for in this review of the evidence he devotes nearly six pages to it. Here he is, naturally, a very special pleader. He had been assured by persons of long experience and residence in America who had been present there when the rebellion broke out (again he means Skene) that the friends of the British cause were as five to one. The original suggestion was Riedesel's, who wanted to get horses for his dragoons, and the idea was approved by Phillips; if Fraser had been opposed to Germans being sent (see Colonel Kingston's evidence), it was because he "grudged a danger or care in other hands than his own." Riedesel spoke the English language well;[1] Baume did not follow his instructions; Breymann was slower than would have been thought possible; the arrival of General Starks (sic) and Colonel Warner was purely accidental, and was admitted by the Americans themselves to be "a providential circumstance."

To the argument that he (Burgoyne) might have made a forced march, the men carrying their rations, he replies: "He must be a patient veteran and of much experience in scarcity who is not tempted to throw the whole contents of his haversack into the mire: he feels the present incumbrance grievous, want is a day remote: let the General find a supply: it is the King's cause and the General's interest, he will never let the soldier be starved.' " It is curious that Anburey uses almost the same words: the men would throw away their rations, exclaiming, "Damn the provisions; we shall get more at the next encampment, the General won't let his soldiers starve."[2]

Burgoyne had admitted that he had acted on his own judgment, and not consulted any officer, in the matter of crossing the Hudson, and Germain had

[1] This may be, but he could not write it. He called Skenesborough "Skinsbury."

[2] Anburey also wrote, and wisely, "For one hour General Burgoyne can devote in contemplating how to fight his army, he must allot twenty to contrive how to feed it." Throughout the expedition the men baked their own bread. The meat until it ran out was salted pork, hot or cold.

publicly blamed him for this; his reply to Germain proves that he was a more formidable opponent on paper than in the field: it is worth quoting in full:

"That a man, chief in authority, should take entirely upon himself a measure of doubtful consequence, and upon mere principle preclude himself from any future means of shifting or dividing the blame that might ensue, appeared incredible at Whitehall: the greater part of that political school concluded the profession of such candour must be a finesse, and that, in fact, the General had not communicated with his officers, because he knew opinions would have been against him. When little minds think they have got a clue of littleness, with what zeal and dexterity they pursue and improve it. Correspondence and intelligence were not wanting; disappointed jobbers, discarded servants, dissatisfied fugitives of every sort, spies, tale-bearers, and sycophants, whom it is the honour of a General to have his enemies, and a disgrace to Office to encourage, abounded in town."

This is plain speaking, and one hopes that Germain felt uncomfortable; that brazen face was long past blushing.

Burgoyne pays a high tribute to the courage of the Americans and also to their tactics, particularly to their use of "great numbers of marksmen armed with rifle barrel pieces" who from the tops of trees picked off the British officers. In one instance Captain Green, aide-decamp to Phillips, "happening to have a laced furniture to his saddle," was shot as he was giving a message to Burgoyne; the rifleman had thought that it was Burgoyne himself at whom he had aimed and it was believed for some time in the American camp that the British general had been killed. Another of his difficulties was that he could get no information: "the deserters were often suspicious, the prisoners very few," and they would give nothing away. Finally he pleaded that the terms he obtained were better than could have been expected in view of the desperate state of the army.

In his "Conclusion" Burgoyne brings a damning charge against Germain which, as we have already seen, is entirely justified, and that is that Howe had been given no instructions to cooperate with the expedition from Canada, until "it was physically impossible that it should have any effect," that is to say Germain's letter of May eighteenth wherein he casually expressed the hope that "whatever Sir William Howe may meditate it will be executed in time to co-operate with the army ordered to proceed from Canada" was not received by Howe until August sixteenth, when he was so far south from the Hudson River, that any cooperation was impossible. This of course is the crux of the whole matter: the detailed instructions to Howe were never sent. Germain got his

week-end in the country, his horses were not kept waiting in the cold, and the American Colonies were lost. For Saratoga was the beginning of the end.

In the debate in the House of Commons in May, 1779, the scoundrelly thief Rigby, one of Germain's creatures, whose acquaintance we have already made, denounced Burgoyne as having no *locus standi:* he (Burgoyne) "sat in that house under the authority of a rebel Congress"; he was, in fact, there on sufferance, and had no rights. "Mr. Fox now rose" and tore Mr. Rigby to bits. He quoted a precedent, very much to the point. A noble Lord, Lord Frederick Cavendish, had been (like Gentleman Johnny) at the Misfortune of St. Cas. Less fortunate than Burgoyne, he had been taken prisoner and appealed to the Court of France to know what exactly, being a prisoner on parole, his position was as regarded his duty in Parliament. Fox went on: "The answer he received was that sitting and voting in Parliament would be no more a breach of his parole than getting his wife with child." Charles James Fox also argued that "no blame was imputable to the honourable General and that the miscarriage of the expedition from Canada was owing to the ignorance and incapacity of the Ministers who planned it and not to the General intrusted with its execution." Governor Johnstone took much the same line the failure of the expedition was due to lack of cooperation on the part of Howe, a cooperation which Burgoyne had been led to expect. The propriety of Sir William Howe going to the southward, instead of going up the North River must be demonstrated. This, of course, Howe was most reluctant to demonstrate: he could not be brought to confess that he had been misled by the advice of the traitor Charles Lee.

It is a great point in Burgoyne's favor that Major. General Robertson, Germain's only witness, that is to say, the only witness for the prosecution against Burgoyne, when asked what was the opinion of the army in general as to Howe's movement south, replied: "I conversed with many officers on the subject; many of them feared that General Burgoyne's army would be lost, if not supported. I wrote myself, on being informed of the situation of the different armies, to a gentleman in this House, telling him that if General Burgoyne extricated himself from the difficulties he was surrounded with, that I thought future ages would have little occasion to talk of Hannibal and his escape." And he stuck to his guns. Howe tried to pin him down by asking whether, after the capture of Ticonderoga, when there did not appear to be any considerable army likely to oppose Burgoyne's advance to Albany, he (Howe) should have gone up the Hudson, Robertson replied: "That depends on Sir William Howe's intelligence, and if that led him to believe that General Burgoyne was not to be opposed by a considerable army, I am sorry his intelligence was not verified." By intelligence he, of course, means information. Of real intelligence, that is to say, common sense, there was very little on the British side during this war.

In apportioning the personal blame for the failure of the expedition from Canada Germain is, *facile princeps,* the real offender; next, although a minor character, comes Skene, with his ridiculous optimism and foolish advice; third is Gentleman Johnny himself. And his share of the blame is, in my opinion, entirely due to his obstinacy and in a minor degree to his love of the dramatic. He saw the whole affair as a stage play to end with a triumphant third act in which he would take the center of the stage, with George III and North in the background, bowing their acknowledgments to the general who had suppressed the rebellion and brought the colonists to their knees and their senses.

Minor causes undoubtedly were the totally wrong view taken as to the possible value of the Canadians, the Indians and the Brunswick troops. The Canadians and the Indians were, as we have seen, of no use whatever the Germans, no doubt, did their best, but the best of hirelings is never very good.*

I once saw a bumblebee, a gorgeous reddish-brown fellow, indignantly struggling in a spider's web. Burgoyne, in his fine uniform, plunging through the woods of North America, reminds me very much of him. Gates may stand for the spider. But the web was woven, not by Gates, but by Germain, Schuyler and Arnold. And perhaps if Gentleman Johnny had been less of a bulldog, less of a fine man about town with a passion for gambling and taking chances, and a keen sense of the dramatic, he would have made his way back to Canada. It requires great moral courage for a general to retreat. Wellington said that it was the mark of a great general to know when to retreat and, knowing this, to have the courage to do so. No general in military history had greater physical courage than Burgoyne. He enjoyed fighting and, therefore, naturally he would not go back. And of course, had he done so, "that Man" would have let him have the court-martial which was, most unjustly, denied him. Indeed Germain, an authority on courts-martial, would have insisted upon it.

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*Haldimand wrote home from Canada in May, 1778, that the German troops then with him were quite unfitted for an American war and deserted in shoals.