CHAPTER IV – THE COMPLETE LETTER WRITER

BURGOYNE'S letter to Lord Rochefort was a general review of the situation and of his impressions since his arrival. Though written after Bunker Hill, he was too John Bullish not to allude to the American forces as a "rabble in arms." "Never despise your enemy" should be one of the first items in the soldier's Book of Do's and Don't's. Despising your enemy generally leads to being surprised by them. In the Royal Military Tournaments in the eighties of the last century the opening scene was almost invariably a camp of British soldiers, and then "Surprise of the British Army," generally by whooping savages, really British rank-and-file blackened and disguised. In those days they whooped as if they enjoyed it. A year or so ago, when a fight between Normans and Saxons was being rehearsed at Aldershot, it was noted that the Saxons fought mum-chance. They were urged to assume Anglo-Saxon attitudes and to shout forth cries of defiance. The rehearsal was renewed, and as the Norman knights advanced, a stentorian shout was heard from the defenders of the White Cliffs of Old England: *Are we down-hearted?* And the rehearsal had to be stopped again.

Down-hearted, or perhaps disgusted, is rather a good word for Burgoyne's letter. It is one long grouse. Gage ought to have seized Adams, Hancock and the other leaders, ought to have trained the troops, got secret intelligence, and raided the surrounding country for supplies. Although he alludes to "the affair of April 19th" (Lexington) as a "paltry skirmish," he adds that had the enemy opened batteries upon Boston it would have induced "circumstances as rapid and as decisive as the Battle of Pharsalia ; and the colours of a fleet and army of Great Britain, not wrested from us, but without a conflict kicked out of America." He grumbles about his rank, "the inferiority of my station as youngest Major-General upon the staff left me almost a useless spectator, for my whole business lay in presiding during part of the action over a command to assist the left." And he adds, "In the general regular course of business in this army, Major-Generals are absolute cyphers." Major-Generals cyphers! One can only comment: O! O! O! "My rank only serves to place me in a motionless, drowsy, irksome medium, or rather vacuum, too low for the honour of command, too high for that of execution." "The defence [at Bunker Hill] was well conceived and obstinately maintained; the retreat was no flight; it was even covered with bravery and military skill, and proceeded no further than to the west hill, where a new post was taken and new intrenchments instantly begun."

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He then, commenting on the very heavy casualties among the British officers, pens a sentence which I think he must subsequently have regretted. “Though my letter passes in security I tremble while I write it; and let it not pass even in a whisper from your Lordship to more than *one* person;[1] the zeal and intrepidity of the officers, which was without exception exemplary, was ill seconded by the private men. Discipline, not to say courage, was wanting. In the critical moment of carrying the redoubt, the officers of some corps were almost alone.” It is difficult to explain this, but it was probably due to the fact that Burgoyne had lost many personal friends among the officers' casualties on Bunker Hill and the bitterness of his heart found expression in his pen. In any case, he changed his mind. When, the following year, Colonel Barré said in the House of Commons that “the troops from an aversion to the service misbehaved at Bunker's Hill,” Burgoyne, home on leave, “rose with warmth and contradicted him in the flattest manner.” He allowed that the troops “gave way a little at one time, because they were flanked by the fire out of the louses, at Charlestown, but they were soon rallied and advanced and no men on earth behaved with more spirit,[2] firmness and perseverance till they forced the enemy out of their entrenchments.” To this one may add the testimony of Sir John Fortescue, the historian of the British Army. “The return of the British infantry to the third attack after two such bloody repulses is one of the very greatest feats ever recorded of them.” King George was fully satisfied. Lord Barrington, Secretary at War, sent Gage a despatch from the War Office, July 28, 1775, expressing His Majesty's approbation of “the firmness of spirit which distinguished the troops in the late action.” In a thoughtful postscript, which, however, reads rather oddly he “recommended to his consideration whether he should not be provided with more shoes, shirts, stockings, etc., which the troops might wish to purchase,” and suggested that a Mr. Coffin (ominous. name!) should be made use of in the matter.

North was more human. He wrote to Burgoyne, “The gallantry and ability of General Howe, and the bravery of the men whom he commanded on the 17th of June, are the admiration of their countrymen, but the number of wounded and killed makes my heart bleed. I would abandon the contest were I not most intimately convinced in my own conscience

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[1] Presumably the King.

[2] They were perhaps, on occasion, rather too spirited. In Howe's Orderly Book there are a good many instances of "lashes" being ordered to be laid on; and it is curious to read that in September, 1775, "Winifried" McCowen actually "stole the Town Bull and caused him to be Killed." For this poor Win, who probably had wearied of salt pork and wanted some roast beef, was, though a woman, ordered to receive “100 lashes on her bare back in the most public parts of the town.”

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that our cause is just and important." (Marquis of Abergavenny's Manuscripts.) Burgoyne, to return to his letter, is very sound on the general situation; the country near Boston is all fortification, the army could only proceed "by the slow step of a siege" and was sadly lacking in wagons, hospital carriages and horses. And above all Gage is not equal to his task, he might make an amiable governor but was incapable of rising to the opportunity; but this is qualified by the statement that even Caesar would find the matter a difficult job. But Caesar would have seen that he was properly supplied with the sinews of war, which is more than Gage had done. There was little money, and consequently no cattle, no forage and, above all, no intelligence: "we are ignorant not only of what passes in congresses, but want spies for the hill half a mile off." Howe, writing to General Harvey, June 12, 1775, (Dartmouth Manuscripts), entirely bears Burgoyne out in this

"In our present state all warlike Preparations are wanting. No Survey of the adjacent country, no proper boats for landing troops—not a sufficient number of Horses for the Artillery, nor for Regimental baggage. No Forage, either Hay or Corn of any Consequence. No Waggons or Harness for Horses, except some prepared by Colonel Cleveland for the Artillery. No Fascines, or Pickets. The Military Chest at the Lowest Ebb, about three or four thousand only Remaining, which Goes fast for the subsistence of the troops. . . . Our Intelligence is So Scanty, that what we get from the Inland Country for the most part is sent to the General by the Rebels. Very few or no Spies. We are therefore Entirely Ignorant of what they are about in the Neighbourhood."

Wedderburn at home wrote to North: "In all undertakings carried on by the arms of this country the beginning has been unprosperous.[1] This country is never sufficiently prepared. The misconduct of the General and Admiral is the most obvious cause of the present bad posture of affairs in America." He then enlarges on the modern text, "Sack the lot."

To return to Burgoyne, he adds the rather astonishing statement, "There is hardly a leading man among the rebels, in council or in the field, but at a proper time, and by proper management, might have been bought." This is a hard saying, and I think it is the politician not the soldier who is speaking here.

Captain John Montresor, indeed, went further than Burgoyne.

"Even Israel Putnam, of Connecticut, might have been bought, to

[1] Which is extraordinarily true.

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my certain knowledge, for one dollar per day, or 8 shillings New York Currency. The following Rebel Generals might have been obtained at a still 'melieur marchais' (sic), viz:

Lasher, the Shoemaker of New York
Heard, the Tavern-keeper of Woodbridge
Pomeroy, the Gunsmith
Pribble, the Tavern-keeper of Canterbury, Old England."

(See that work full of curious information, *The Evelyns in America,* edited by G. D. Scull. Printed for private circulation, Oxford, 1881.)

No doubt people were bought during the war, Benedict Arnold for one. Is there not an empty niche in the Saratoga Monument? But it was wounded pride that helped his treachery. There was another individual bought, and in England, no less a personage than the famous Mr. Gibbon. He had been a bitter critic of the Ministry, remarking pleasantly at Brook's that "there was no salvation for England unless six of the heads of the cabinet council were cut off and [like Parliamentary Papers] laid upon the tables of the Houses of Parliament as examples."[1] But when the great historian was made a Commissioner of Trade his sympathy for North America and contempt for ministers declined and fell with a dull thud.[2]

Burgoyne's criticism was not merely destructive. He puts forward for Lord Rochfort's consideration a plan of campaign. When the reinforcements, daily expected, arrive, he suggests that Dorchester Neck should be occupied, three thousand men left in Boston, and two thousand embarked for an unknown-to the Americans-destination. In short, he proposes "diversions." He would "chastise" Rhode Island, occupy Connecticut River, and "encourage" Long Island. And he also hints that if he had been sent with a force to New York, why, the war would have been practically over. (These things are so easy on paper.) He says he has interviewed many of the prisoners, most of them "men of good understandings, but of much prejudice and still more credulity,"

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[1] The nearest approach to this was when the desiccated ear of Master Mariner Jenkins was shown (Exhibit A) to an astonished House of Commons. England went to war with Spain over this.

[2] This inspired some wit to a pleasant epigram:

King George, in a fright
Lest Gibbon should write
The history of England's disgrace,
Thought no way so sure
His pen to secure
As to give the historian a place.

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and that he has urged Gage to send them unconditionally back to their homes with the words, "You have been deluded; return to your homes in peace; it is your duty to God and your country to undeceive your neighbours."

This counsel of perfection was not acted on, but his next suggestions were, later on, and enormous controversy this caused. He proposes that a large army of foreign troops[1] should be hired, also a large levy of Indians,[2] and as many Canadians employed as possible. Poor Burgoyne! He was to know later the value of the Indians and the Canadians, and to discover how ill-suited heavy German troops were for fighting in the forests and swamps of North America. The general idea one gets from this letter is that although poor old Grandmother Gage had better go home and knit stockings, a certain John Burgoyne might work wonders. In short, we find in this letter Burgoyne the politician and, I fear it must be admitted, the intriguer. But in his letter to his nephew by marriage, Lord Stanley, we have Burgoyne the dramatist, to whom the Bloody Battle of Bunker Hill appealed as a scene in a play, beginning with the old stage direction, "Alarms and Excursions Without."

"As to the action of the 17th [Bunker Hill], you will see the general detail of it in public print. To consider it as a statesman, it is truly important, be cause it establishes the ascendency of the King's troops, though opposed by more than treble numbers, assisted by every circumstance that nature and art could supply to make a situation strong. Were an accommodation, by any strange turn of events, to take place without any other action, this would remain a most useful testimony and record in America.

"To consider this action as a soldier, it comprised, though in a small compass, almost every branch of military duty and curiosity. Troops landed in the face of an enemy; a fine disposition; a march sustained by a powerful cannonade from moving field artillery, fixed batteries, floating batteries, and broadsides of ships at anchor, all operating separately and well disposed [i.e., placed]; a deployment from the

[1] Efforts were first made to hire Russian troops, but the Empress Catherine, or "Sister Kitty" as Horace Walpole calls her, would not hear of it.

[2] This question had come up before. On September 4, 1774, Gage wrote from Boston to Carleton: "I am to ask your opinion whether a body of Canadians and Indians might be collected and confided in for the service of this country should matters come to extremities."

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march to form for the attack of the entrenchments and redoubt; a vigorous defence; a storm with bayonets; a large and fine town set on fire by shells. Whole streets of houses, ships upon the stock, a number of churches, all sending up volumes of smoke and flame, or falling together in ruin, were capital objects. A prospect of the neighboring hills, the steeples of Boston, and the masts of such ships as were unemployed in the harbour, all crowded with spectators, friends and foes, alike in anxious suspense, made a background to the piece; and the whole together composed a representation of war that I think the imagination of Le Brun[1] never reached. It was great, it was high-spirited, and while the animated impression remains, let us quit it. I will not engage your sensibility and my own in contemplation of humanity upon the subject, but will close *en militaire,* by lamenting that your brother Thomas was not arrived, because in a long life of service he may not, perhaps, have an opportunity of seeing any professional tragedy like it."

What a fine war correspondent he would have made! Burgoyne had some correspondence with his old friend and subordinate Charles Lee, who wrote to him from Philadelphia soon after his arrival in Boston. Lee was an odd and prickly character. In England he was called the arch-rebel; of his treachery to America we will read later. He had a violent temper, which resulted in 1778 in his court-martial for insubordination at the Battle of Monmouth. He was always nursing some fancied grievance. As Burgoyne was the handsomest man in the British Army so Lee must have been the ugliest in the American. He was tall and extremely thin, with an aquiline nose of enormous proportions. He was fond of dogs, and in a delightful caricature[2] of him he is shown as accompanied by one of these pets which, however, the artist has depicted more as an ant-eater than a dog. Born in 1731 (he was related to the Bunbury family) he received a commission at the age of eleven, and served in North America 175-60, where he made friends with the Mohawks, who nicknamed him "Boiling Water." After being in Portugal with Burgoyne he served in several continental armies and was made a major-general by the King of Poland. He lost two fingers in a duel in Italy in 1770 and, like so many others, was supposed to be Junius. A caustic wit, a man of the world and a cosmopolitan soldier, he was not of a generous nature. When captured by the British he attributed it to the fortune of war, the activity of Colonel Harcourt, and the rascality of his own troops. When he was taken prisoner he was poorly clad and sent for a tailor to mend his clothes, but "Not a

[1] Charles Lebrun whom Louis XIV took a-campaigning into Flanders in 1667 to tell the world, by his brush, what a fine General was Le Roi Soleil.

[2] By Barham Rushbrooke. The uniform Lee is shown as wearing is that as aide-de-camp to Stanislaus, King of Poland.

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man in the regiment" (which he had once, in Portugal, led into action[1]) "would work for so great a rascal." George III was immensely pleased by Lee's capture and said, "I shall take care of Colonel Harcourt leave his future to me." He did take care of him. Harcourt ended as a field-marshal. The little village of Tring (in Hertfordshire), which was interested in Colonel Harcourt, had a poster put up in the marketplace:

"Feb. 13, 1777.

"This is to give Notis that Thursday next will be held as a day of regoicin in commemoration of the takin of General Lee, when their wil be a sermint preached, and other public demonstrascions of joye, after which will bee an nox roosted whole & everery mark of festivity & bell ringing imaginable, whith a ball & cock fiting at night in the Hassembly room at the black Lyone."[2]

Lee's letter (June seventh) to Burgoyne is very artful. He is chiefly concerned for Burgoyne's reputation. "I sincerely lament the infatuation of the times, when men of such a stamp as Mr. Burgoyne and Mr. Howe can be seduced into so impious and nefarious a service by the artifice of a wicked and insidious court and cabinet." Burgoyne must know what abandoned men the cabinet are, a man of such sense and integrity should not keep such company. Then comes some artful flattery. Burgoyne is a man of capacity, but Gage! Why, he has had his understanding so completely blinded by the society of fools and knaves that "he is no longer capable of discerning facts as manifest as the noonday sun: I assert, Sir, that he is ignorant, that he has from the beginning been consummately ignorant of the principles, temper, disposition, and force of the colonies." He misstates facts and derives "tortured inferences from them." This must have been "jam" to Burgoyne. We have seen what he thought of Gage, and human nature is such that we all simply love to hear that those placed in authority over us are a pack of ignorant fools.

Lee then proceeds to give his old friend what is really most sensible advice. "You cannot possibly succeed. No man is better acquainted with the state of this continent than myself. I have run through almost the whole colonies, from the north to the south, and from the south to the north. I have conversed with all orders of men, from the first estated gentlemen to the lowest planters and farmers, and can assure you that the same spirit animates the whole. Not less than a hundred and fifty thousand gentlemen, yeomen, and farmers, are now in arms, determined

[1] See page 13.

[2] *The Evelyns in* America. Tring is much nearer London than Frome. See page 140.

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to preserve their liberties or perish. As to the idea that the Americans are deficient in courage, it is too ridiculous and glaringly false to deserve a serious refutation. I never could conceive upon what this reputation was founded. I served several campaigns in America last war, and cannot recollect a single instance of ill-behaviour in the provincials." And then he comes to Howe. "Gracious God ! is it possible that Mr. Howe should be prevailed upon to accept of such an office! The brother of him to whose memory the much-injured people of Boston erected a monument,[1] employed as one of the instruments of their destruction." And so, after a few pleasant allusions to George III as an Eastern Despot and North as felonious, the letter ends "with the greatest sincerity and affection, Yours, C. Lee."

Burgoyne's reply, written on July ninth, might have been penned by Sir Charles Grandison and Dr. Johnson, in collaboration. It is painfully polite and even more painfully pompous. He had never anticipated that the "vicissitudes of human affairs" would cause them to meet as foes. It had been his pride to be Lee's friend, but Lee is in the wrong. Burgoyne himself is "no stranger to the doctrines of Mr. Locke" and looks "with reverence almost amounting to idolatry upon those immortal Whigs who adopted and applied such doctrine during part of the reign of Charles the First, and in that of James the Second." The letter is like a speech in Parliament on the American question, in all probability it was based on notes for a speech which he never delivered. It ends by proposing that he and Lee should meet in "the house upon Boston Neck, just within our advanced sentries, called Brown's house." But one paragraph in this letter was destined to flutter the dove-cots. Burgoyne said, "Is it then from a relief of taxes or from the control of Parliament 'in all cases whatsoever' we are in war? If for the former, the quarrel is at an end: there is not a man of sense and information in America, who does not know it is in the power of the Colonies to put an end to the exercise of taxation immediately and for ever. I boldly assert it, because sense and information will also suggest to every man, that it can never be the interest of Great Britain, after her late experience, to make another trial." Charles Stuart, Lord Bute's son, wrote home, "I have seen Burgoyne's letter to Lee, which was sent to Congress, and heard Major Bruce[2] say in a conference when I happened to be on duty, that General Putnam had

[1] In the language o£ the day it represented "the Genius of the Province of Massachusetts Bay in a mournful posture lamenting the fall of the hero."

[2] Major Samuel B. Webb, writing to Silas Deane (July 11, 1775), has an interesting note on this officer: "Major Bruce, who served two years in Portugal with Genl. Lee, told my brother Joe at the lines that it [Bunker Hill] was the hottest engagement he ever knew; even, says he, the Battle of Minden did not equal it"

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assured him if General Burgoyne had authority from His Majesty to write the Letter, he was certain Congress would be happy to receive the terms he hinted at. I fear the General has said too much, and I think replied to Lee very improperly." Major Webb, writing to Silas Deane, says, "General Burgoyne commands on the Neck, at Roxbury. He has wrote a long letter to General Lee in which he proposes a meeting, whether this will be complied with or not, I cannot say. A certain something runs through the whole of his letter, which shews they are sick at the stomach. He says, 'if the right of taxation is all we are contending for, he is empowered[1] to say Great Britain will give that up.' Why did they not say that six months ago? They must now remember that we have an undoubted right to ask for the expense we have incurred in raising an army and for the loss of the beautiful town of Charlestown, which is now a heap of rubbish. We doubt not Burgoyne writes thus so as hereafter to say that he made us generous offers, with a view to compromise matters. He is as cunning and subtle as the Devil himself, and writes as if he were on the right of the question, like a man of abilities, but his wickedness is to be seen in every sentence of his letter."

The *New York Gazette* gave a better summing-up of the letter.

"July 8, 1775. This forenoon a trumpeter came from the Regulars army with a letter from General Burgoyne to General Lee, and was conducted blindfolded by the guards to the headquarters in Cambridge. The contents of this letter has occasioned much speculation and is variously reported, but we hear the substance of it is nothing more than this: That General Burgoyne laments being obliged to act in opposition to a gentleman for whom he formerly entertained a great veneration; but that his conduct proceeds from principles, and doubts not that General Lee is actuated by the same motive; he wishes affairs may be accommodated, and desires to have a conference with General Lee."

Lee submits this proposal to the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts.

"Head Quarters, July 10th, 1775.

"General Lee presents his respects to the President and gentlemen of the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts, and submits to their perusal a letter which he yesterday received from General Burgoyne, in answer to one which was read and approved by the Delegates of this Province, and other members of the Continental Congress. He begs leave to receive

[1] It will be noted Burgoyne did not use this actual word.

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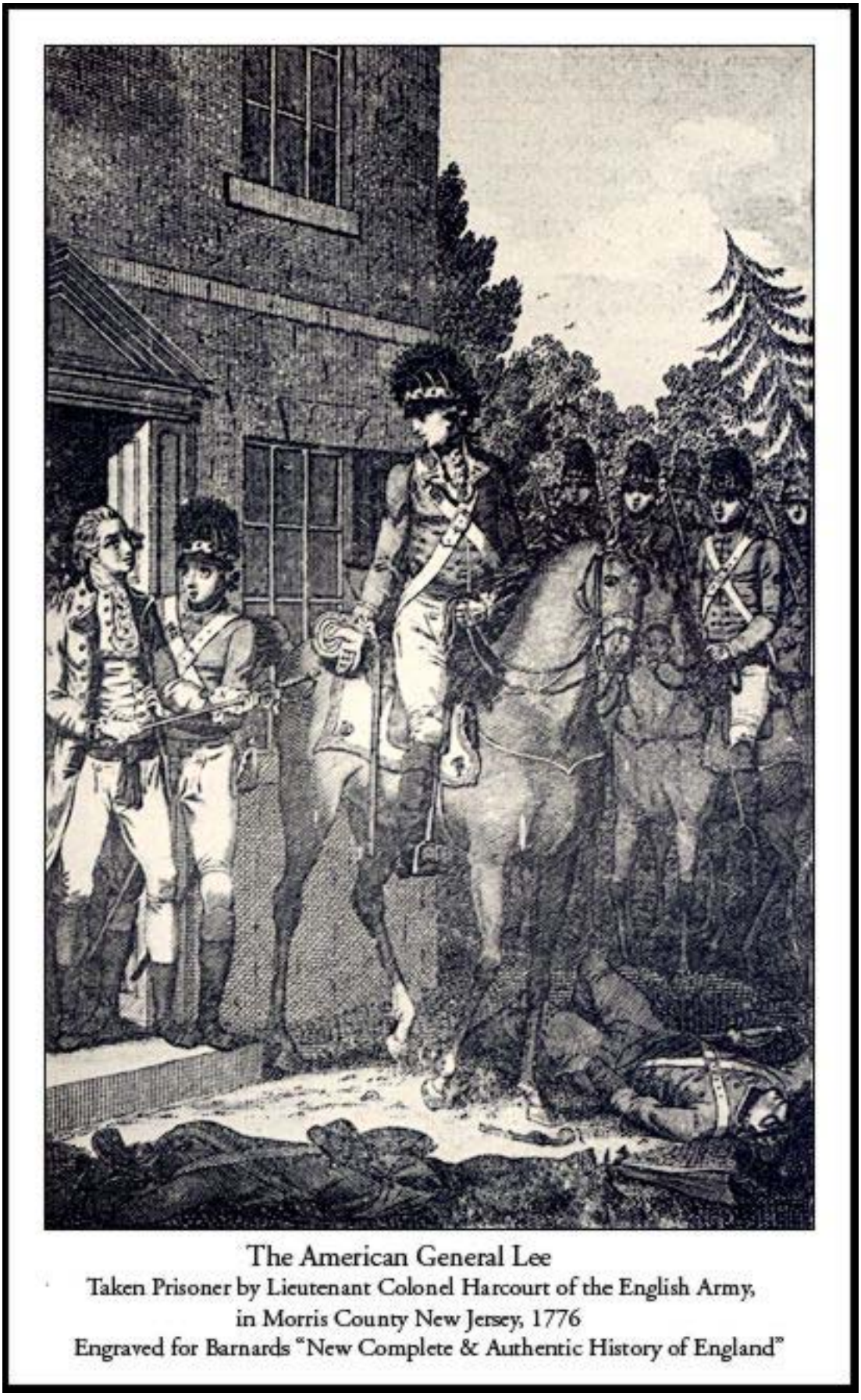

The American General Lee
Taken Prisoner by Lieutenant Colonel Harcourt of the English Army,
in Morris County New Jersey, 1776
Engraved for Barnards "New Complete & Authentic History of England"

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their commands with respect to the proposed interview. If they approve of it, he shall be glad to accept of it; if they disapprove, he shall reject it. But if they approve of it, he must request that they will depute some one gentleman of their body to accompany General Lee, and be witness of the conversation. He desires their answer immediately, as he has engaged to inform Genl. Burgoyne by four o'clock this afternoon, whether the interview is to take place. He shall likewise be much obliged to the gentlemen if they will return the letter; but if they choose to take a copy of it, he can have no objection."

The Provincial Congress replied, diplomatically and wisely

[Watertown, July 10, 1775]

"Sir:

"The Congress have perused the letter from Genl. Burgoyne, which you was kind enough to submit to their inspection. They can have no objection to the proposed interview, from a want of the highest confidence in the wisdom, discretion, and integrity of Gen. Lee; but beg leave to suggest that as the confidence of the people in their General is so essentially necessary to the well-conducting of the enterprise in which we are engaged, and as a people contending for their liberties are naturally disposed to jealousy, and not inclined to make the most favorable construction of the motives of conduct which they are not fully acquainted with, whether such an interview might not have a tendency to lessen the influence which the Congress would wish to extend to the utmost of their power to facilitate and succeed the operations of war.

"The Congress, agreeable to your request, have, to prevent as far as we are able, any disagreeable consequences which may arise from the jealousy of the people on such an occasion, appointed Mr. Elbridge Gerry to attend you at the proposed interview, if you shall think proper to proceed in it; and as they do not think themselves authorized to counteract the General's inclination, they would submit it to his opinion, whether the advice of the Council of War might not be taken in a matter of such apparent delicacy.

"To the Honourable Genl. Lee."

Lee took the hint and wrote to Burgoyne:

"Headquarters, Cambridge, July 11, 1775.

"General Lee's compliments to General Burgoyne. Would be extremely happy in the interview he so kindly proposed; but as he perceives that General Burgoyne has already made up his mind on this great subject, and as it is impossible that he (General Lee) should ever

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alter his opinion, he is apprehensive that the interview might create those jealousies and suspicions so natural to a people struggling in the dearest of all causes, that of their liberty, property, wives, children, and their future generation. He must, therefore, defer the happiness of embracing a man whom he most sincerely loves, until the subversion of the present tyrannical Ministry and system, which he is persuaded must be in a few months, as he knows Great Britain cannot stand the contest. He begs General Burgoyne will send the letters which his Aid-de-Camp has for him____ If Gardiner is his Aid-de-Camp, he desires his love to him."

The last sentence strikes a delightfully human note.

It was as well the conference did not take place. It could only have led to a long speech in Gentleman Johnny's best parliamentary manner, besprinkled with "Good God, Sirs," with an exordium and a peroration calculated to make old Brown, had he been present with his ear applied to the keyhole, yawn his head off and call loudly for rum as a restorative.

We now come to Burgoyne the diplomatist. Nothing is too dirty for diplomacy; it will steam open despatches and regard solemn engagements as scraps of paper. But it is rather disconcerting to find Burgoyne writing to Lord North that it might be possible to bribe Lee. He begins by alluding to him as "late half-pay Major and incendiary in the King's service, at present, by a very strange progression for a man of his temper, Major-General and demagogue in the rebel army which forms the blockade of Boston." He then explains what he would have done had the proposed interview taken place. He would have cut him short in his "paltry jargon of invective"; he would have pointed out "the phrenzy of British Colonies offering themselves to France or Spain"; and he would have proved to him that were it possible to come to an accommodation, the negotiator (Lee) "would deserve the united thanks of the whole Empire, and America herself, when her senses returned, would raise statues to his memory." He says that Lee's ruling passion was avarice, and "though he would have started at a direct bribe he might have caught at an overture of changing his party to gratify his interest." And Burgoyne, always ready with an historical precedent, thinks that the example of General Monk might have occurred to Lee. He apologizes for the mild and friendly terms in which he had written to the "incendiary," his excuse being "were he secretly bought over, the services he might do are great; and very great I confess they ought to be to atone for his offences."

Burgoyne quotes another letter from Lee from which he deduced that "the rebels are more alarmed at the report of engaging the Indians

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than at any other measure, and I humbly think this letter alone shows the expediency of diligently preparing and employing that engine." They proved, as we shall see, about as efficient an "engine" as the Russian "steamroller" which, so many armchair strategists argued in the fall of 1914, would, before Christmas, be steaming and rolling along the *Unter den Linden* in Berlin.

There is another interesting point made by Lee and quoted by Burgoyne. This is that "France and Spain are ready to accept the Colonies," that is to say, to recognize them. Burgoyne adds, and rightly, that if North communicated this to the Ministers of those Courts, "I take it for granted, though it should be true, they will flatly deny it." He had not been a member of the House of Commons for nothing. He ends by saying that probably the "leaders of the revolt" would be "as much averse to trust their cause to fair discussion as to the fair field: distant skirmish, ambush, entrenchment, concealment are what they depend upon in debate as in arms." The shameful Donkin took much the same view: he complained of the American "cowardliness in delighting more in murdering from woods, walls and houses than in skewing any genius or science in the art military." Burgoyne, of course, meant to be nasty, but as a matter of fact he is paying a great compliment to the American troops and their leaders. It is always very unpleasant when your enemy will not fight according to the strategical rules laid down in the works by the great writers on war. I remember once reading in an American military magazine a delightfully cynical remark on this point: "Strategy when practised by savages is treachery." "The principles of strategy are eternal" those unprincipled warriors who monkey about with them and fight according to the light of nature are iconoclasts and, even if they win, deserve the heaviest censure for not conducting warfare *à la Cocker Militaire, i.e.,* some old Prussian General von and zu Schmellfungus.

Burgoyne wrote about the same time to Lord Rochfort, lamenting the inertness and procrastination at Boston and blaming for them not so much Gage as the Admiral (Admiral Graves[1]) as largely responsible for "our inactivity, our disgrace and our distress." He discusses the question of evacuating Boston for New York and savagely attacks the departments at home. "At present the sick and wounded are without broth for want of fresh provisions and the poor ensign cannot draw his pay for less than 15 per cent. discount." Finance of any kind is a mystery to most of us, but

[1] Graves was quite incompetent. He undertook nothing which did not miscarry, and did not get on well with the soldiers.

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I have no doubt this state of affairs was all to the benefit of Mr. Rigby, the paymaster General.

We now come to a correspondence between the greatest man on the American side, George Washington, and the handsomest—I can not also say the greatest, for I fear there were no great Englishmen then in America—man on the British side, Gentleman Johnny. Washington wrote, early in August, 1775, complaining of the treatment of American officers who were prisoners of war and who had been "indiscriminately thrown into a common gaol appropriated for felons." The letter was, of course, addressed to Gage, and equally of course Burgoyne, the Polite Letter-Writer of Gage's family[1] was called in to answer it. I do not know if the expressive word "Shucks" had then come into existence, and if it had I do not for one moment suppose Washington would have used it; but it is difficult to refrain from doing so: Burgoyne's letter is so painfully grandiloquent. "Britons ever prominent in mercy have overlooked the criminal in the captive." "Your prisoners [i.e., your officers who are our prisoners] whose lives by the law of the land are destined to the cord have hitherto been treated with care and kindness." He then proceeds to give Washington a little good advice. "Be temperate in political disquisition; give free operation to truth; and punish those who deceive and misrepresent; and not only the effects but the causes of this unhappy conflict will be removed." One has heard of people who were not born to be drowned, but "destined to the cord" is painfully pedantic.

But Burgoyne could, on occasion, unbend. Boston, although practically blockaded and, thanks to the inefficiency of the Admiral, on short commons, had its little amenities. One of them was amateur theatricals. Burgoyne wrote a farce called *The Blockade of Boston:* the Americans retaliated with another, *The Blockheads.* Washington was a character in *The Blockade,* in an unmilitary dress and with a huge wig and long sword. In January, 1776, the farce had a rude interruption. The Americans who knew exactly when the performance began, attacked the mill at Charlestown at that very moment. The alarm was given and a sergeant outside the playhouse door rushed in upon the stage, crying, "Turn out! turn out! They're hard at it hammer and tongs." He was vigorously applauded, being taken as a character in the play, until it was realized that he was in earnest—and the farce came to an abrupt end. In September 1775, the officers gave a performance of *Zara,* Burgoyne writing the prologue. Puritans have often been a target for dramatists, and

[1] In the eighteenth century a general's "family" meant his staff.

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perhaps the best lines in this prologue are those to their address. Thanks to them, says Burgoyne:

Then fell the stage, quell'd by the bigots roar,
Truth fell with sense, and Shakespeare charmed no more.

He also urges the "Boston prudes—if prudes there are"—to come and see the show and be cheered up by it. It is not a very lively prologue. Prologues and Epilogues rarely are, always excepting that in which Nell Gwyn ("His late Majesty's Miss," to give her the title by which she was known after the death of the Merriest Monarch), lying upon the stage a corpse, suddenly arose and said to a scene-shifter who had offered to shift her:

Hold! Let me be, you damned confounded dog,
I am to rise and speak the Epilogue.

Prologues and Epilogues were recitations and therefore bound to be dull. If we must have a recitation, let us have, "It was Christmas Day in the Harem" (though this is not calculated to please Prudes) or the more modern "Casey at the Bat." I do not suppose there are any prudes nowadays in Boston, and if there are, I do not think Zara would give them anything except a headache. Burgoyne's prologue was spoken by Lord Rawdon, known in his day as "the ugliest man in Europe," and, judging from his portrait in the War Office, his day was entirely right. Later on he became Lord Moira and an intimate friend of the Prince Regent. In 1817 he was made Marquis of Hastings, and no doubt then appeared less ugly.

About this time Burgoyne wrote a long letter to Lord George Germain. He talks of "fatal procrastination" and says that we have crossed the Rubicon (good old Rubicon! How many times has it been crossed?) and "plunged into a most serious war, without a single requisite, gunpowder excepted, for carrying it on." Bunker Hill (he calls it Charlestown*) he speaks of as a victory which had re-established the reputation of trained troops as against untrained, which had been rather blown upon by the affair at Lexington against "the undisciplined rabble." He is obviously a little sore about the fight put up by the colonists on Bunker Hill. They are not "one jot above the level of all men expert in the use of firearms, Corsicans, Miquelets, Croats, Tartars, mountaineers and borderers." He is equally severe on their leaders. Some of them, he admits, are very able,

*And so did Washington in a letter to Congress of July 21, 1775. Battles get various names. The Prussians call Waterloo La Belle Alliance and the French, Mont St. Jean.

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but are at the same time “the most profligate hypocrites,” while Adams is “as great a conspirator as ever subverted a state.” He quotes an intercepted letter in which Adams refers to “one of his tools, I conclude he means Handcock (sic), as a piddling genius.” Adams himself although “a profligate character,” has by the exercise of his parts, availing himself of the temper and prejudice of the times, cajoled the opulent, drawn in the wary, deluded the vulgar, till all parties in America, and some in Great Britain, are puppets in his string." He is, in short, Catiline and Cromwell rolled into one. Burgoyne is more to the point and more sensible when he says the British troops have "neither bread-waggons, bat horses, sufficient artillery horses, nor other articles of attirail necessary for an army to move at a distance, nor numbers to keep up posts of communication and convoys, had we even magazines to be conveyed.” He says that his “favourite plan” is a descent at Rhode Island. But he must not be thought to be blaming General Gage, who has “a character replete with virtue and with talents,” but who is also—the censure is pleasantly wrapped up____quite unequal to the situation. Next he fires a regular broadside at the Admiral (Graves), who was, as a matter of fact, quite as incompetent as Gage, not more; that would not be possible.

"It may be asked in England, `What is the Admiral doing?' I wish I were able to answer that question satisfactorily; but I can only say what he is not doing.

"That he is not supplying us with sheep and oxen, the dinners of the best of us bear meagre testimony; the state of our hospitals bears a more melancholy one.

"He is not defending his own flocks and herds, for the enemy have repeatedly plundered his own islands.

"He is not defending the other islands in the harbour, for the enemy in force landed from a great number of boats, and burned the lighthouse at noonday (having first killed and taken the party of marines which was posted there) almost under the guns of two or three men-of-war.

"He is not employing his ships to keep up communication and intelligence with the King's servants and friends at the different parts of the continent, for I do not believe General Gage has received a letter from any correspondent out of Boston these six weeks.

“He is intent upon greater objects you will think, supporting in the great points the dignity of the British flag, and where a number of boats have been built for the enemy, privateers fitted out, prizes carried in, the King's armed vessels sunk, the crews made prisoners, the officers killed—he is doubtless enforcing instant restitution and reparation by the

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voice of his cannon and laying the towns in ashes that refuse his terms? Alas! he is not. British thunder is diverted or controlled by pitiful attentions and mere Quaker-like scruples; and, under such influences, insult and impunity, like righteousness and peace, have kissed each other."

The Quartermaster-General, the Adjutant-General, the Secretaries and Commissaries (but not their wives) are just as bad, and the general situation is summed up as being "a mass of inefficiencies." And then he comes to the really important part, his personal grievances. "It is hard to conceive so absolute a cypher in a military light as the youngest Major-General in this army." He is fond of this word, he has used it before, and he uses it again in a letter to Mr. Thurlow, afterward the well known Lord Chancellor. "In regard to myself (forgive me for detaining you a moment with the mention of such a cypher) I am placed in a situation that leaves me little more than contemplation for employment, except when I am sometimes called upon to draw a pen instead of a sword." He again calls the American leaders "profligate hypocrites" and says of Adams, "he has certainly taken Cromwell for his model, and perhaps guides secret counsels with more address, and soars too high in personal ambition to incline to accommodation." But he pays a high compliment to his style and says he "appears to me to write with the conciseness of Tacitus." Which is more than Gentleman Johnny himself did. More grousing in another letter. "I seek to blame nobody. General Gage is entitled to my respect and esteem upon every principle that can commend a private character. He is amiable for his virtues, but he is not equal to his situation." The- Quartermaster-General means well and is always busy, "but I am afraid his *ideas* only go to supply the army from hand to mouth." "The department of the Adjutant General is also all peace, parade, and St. James's Park." This is an excellent phrase, and might have come out of one of Burgoyne's comedies. And again he exposes the corruption at home: "General Gage told me, within this week, he had not more money in his treasurer's hands than would supply the next month's subsistence; none can possibly be got for bills, not even at 10 per cent. discount, which has been the rate at which the officers of the army have been compelled to draw for their private pay for some time past. He expected £40,000 by the *Cerberus,* being the `balance of £50,000 which he was officially informed *was* issued, and of which he received ten. Not a guinea more is come. In what contractor or clerk's hands is the interest of that sum?" Meanwhile Mr. Rigby was busy at home drinking brandy and, like the poet's bird, painting his face in his agreeable way "a brighter purple." And once more Burgoyne points out that Gage was not only lacking in intelligence but also in getting it beyond what "can be obtained

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by a spying-glass or from common report often calculated to deceive him."

Intelligence, or information, was a weak point in many British campaigns in the eighteenth century and, perhaps, in other centuries. In Canada in 1760 the only way in which General James Murray could get it was "by giving brandy for it." I believe the same system is followed nowadays by reporters in Fleet Street, sent upon a "story." Money so expended is delicately accounted for as "Inquiry Expenses," which certainly sounds better than "10 doubles and splashes at 1/6." But the classic intelligence story of that day relates to the Carthagena Expedition. On March 5, 1740, a Council of War was held on the Admiral's ship consisting of the four principal officers of the Army and the four principal officers of the Navy, to draw up a plan of attack. The General was asked his opinion, but politely replied that "he was a Stranger in those Seas" and left it, as they say at cards, to the Admiral. But the Admiral also had "no proper intelligence."* So then, having first probably "spliced the mainbrace," they all put their heads together and with much thought and weighing of pros and cons, "drew up a scheme for-settling the shares of Plunder." After all, if you have a committee meeting or a council of war, you must settle something.

General Gage returned to England in October, 1775, ostensibly to "explain the various wants for carrying on the next campaign," but really to be gently put upon some military shelf. In the Boer War this was called being "Stellenbosched," in the European War, in the French army, the phrase was to be "Limoged." In December Burgoyne followed Gage home on leave in the *Boyne.* Captain Evelyn wrote home on his departure, "He appears from the line he has taken here to have been intended rather as a negotiator than to be active in the field. He is a man of great abilities and power of language."

Lee wrote Burgoyne a final letter, which is worth quoting in full.

"Camp on Prospect Hill, Dec. 1st, 1775.

"Dear Sir,

"As I am just informed you are ready to embark for England, I cannot refrain from once more trespassing on your patience. An opportunity is now presented of immortalising yourself as the saviour of your country. The whole British Empire stands tottering on the brink of ruin, and you have it in your power to prevent the fatal catastrophe; but it

*A cynic might say they rarely have.

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will admit of no delay. For heaven's sake avail yourself of the precious moment: put an end to the delusion: exert the voice of a brave, virtuous citizen; and tell the people at home, that they must immediately rescind all their impolitic, iniquitous, tyrannical, murderous acts; that they must overturn the whole frantic system, or that they are undone. You ask me in your letter, if it is independence at which the Americans aim? I answer, No; the idea never entered a single American's head, until the most intolerable oppression forced it upon them. All they required was, to remain masters of their own property, and be governed by the same equitable laws which they had enjoyed from the first formation of the Colonies. The ties of connection which bound them to their parent country were so dear to them, that he who would have ventured to touch them would have been considered as the most impious of mortals; but these sacred ties, the same men, who have violated or baffled the most precious laws and rights of the people at home, dissipated, or refused to account for their treasures, tarnished the glory, and annihilated the importance of the nation these sacred ties, I say, so dear to every American, Bute and his tory administration are now rending asunder.

"You ask whether it is the weight of taxes of which they complain? I answer, No: it is the principle they combat, and they would be guilty in the eyes of God and men, of the present world, and all posterity, did they not reject it; for if it were admitted, they would have nothing they could call their own; they would be in a worse condition than the wretched slaves in the West India's Islands, whose little peculium has ever been esteemed inviolate. But wherefore should I dwell on this? Is not the case with Ireland the same as theirs? They are subordinate to the British empire; they are subordinate to the Parliament of Great Britain, but they tax themselves. Why, as the case is similar, do you begin with them? But you know, Mr. Burgoyne, audacious as the ministry are, they dare not attempt it. There is one part of your letter which, I confess, I do not understand.* If I recollect right (for I unfortunately have not the letter by me), you say that if the privilege of taxing themselves is what the Americans claim, the contest is at an end. You surely cannot allude to the propositions of North. It is impossible that you should not think, with me and all mankind, that these propositions are no more or less than adding to a most abominable oppression, a more abominable insult. But to recur to the question of Americans aiming at independence: Do any instructions of any one of the provinces, furnish the least ground for this suspicion? On the contrary, do they not all breathe the strongest attachment and filial piety to their parent country? But if she discards all the natural tenderness

*This is the paragraph which caused the stir. It certainly is difficult to understand exactly what Burgoyne meant.

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of a mother, and acts the part of a cruel step-dame, it must naturally be expected that their affection will cease; the ministry leave them no alternative, *aut serviri, aut alienari jubent;* it is in human nature; it is a moral obligation to adopt the latter. But the fatal separation has not yet taken place, and yourself, your single self, my friend, may perhaps prevent it. Upon the ministry, I am afraid, you can make no impression; for, to repeat a hackneyed quotation,

" 'They are in blood
Stepped in so far, that, should they wade no more,
To return would be as tedious as go o'er.'

"But if you will at once break off all connections with these pernicious men; if you will wave all consideration, but the salvation of your country, Great Britain may stand as indebted to General Burgoyne, as Rome was to her Camillus. Do not, I entreat you, my dear Sir, think this the mad rhapsody of an enthusiast, nor the cant of a factious designing man; for, in these colours, I am told, I am frequently painted. I swear by all that's sacred, as I hope for comfort and honour in this world and to avoid misery in the next, that I most earnestly and devoutly love my native country; that I wish the same happy relation to subsist for ages betwixt her and her children, which has raised the wide arch of her empire to so stupendous and enviable a height; but at the same time I avow, that if the parliament and people should be depraved enough to support any longer the present ministry in their infernal scheme, my zeal and reverence for the rights of humanity are so much greater than my fondness for any particular spot, even the place of my nativity, that, had I any influence in the councils of America, I would advise not to hesitate a single instant, but decisively to cut the Gordian knot, now besmeared with civil blood.

"This, I know, is strong emphatic language, and might pass, with men who are strangers to the flame which the love of liberty is capable of lighting up in the human breast, for a proof of my insanity; but you, sir, unless I have mistaken you from the beginning, will conceive, that a man, in his sober sense, may possess such feelings. In my sober senses, therefore, permit me once more most earnestly to entreat and conjure you to exert your whole force, energy, and talents to stop the ministry in this their headlong career. If you labour in vain (as, I must repeat, I think will be the case), address yourself to the people at large. By adopting this method, I am so sanguine, as to assure myself of your success; and your public character will be as illustrious as your personal qualities are

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amiable to all who intimately know you. By your means the Colonies will long continue the farmers, planters and shipwrights of Great Britain; but if the present course is persisted in, an eternal divorce must inevitably take place. As to the idea of subduing them into servitude, and indemnifying yourselves for the expense, you must be convinced long before this of its absurdity.

"I should not, perhaps, be extravagant, if I advanced, that all the ships of the world would be too few to transport force sufficient to conquer three millions of people, unanimously determined to sacrifice everything to liberty; but if it were possible, the victory would not be less ruinous than the defeat. You would only destroy your own strength. No revenue can possibly be extracted out of this country. The army of place-men might be increased, but her circuitous commerce, founded on perfect freedom, which alone can furnish riches to the metropolis, would fall to the ground. But the dignity of Great Britain, it seems, is at stake. Would you, sir, if in the heat of passion you had struck a single drummer of your regiment, and afterwards discovered you had done it unjustly, think it any forfeiture of your dignity to acknowledge the wrong? No; I am well acquainted with your disposition, you would ask him pardon at the head of your regiment.

"I shall now conclude (if you will excuse the pedantry) with a sentence of Latin: *Justum est bellum quibus necessarium et pia arma quibus nulla, nisi in armis, relinquitur spes. I* most sincerely wish you a quick and prosperous voyage, and that your happiness and glory may be equal to the idea I have of your merits as,

"I am, with greatest truth and affection,

"Yours,

"CHARLES LEE*

"Major-Gen. Burgoyne."

It is interesting to note that just as Burgoyne thought Lee might like to pose as the savior of his country à la General Monk, so Lee thought Burgoyne might assume the rôle of a Camillus. These two old friends never wrote to each other again. A convention finished Burgoyne's military career, a court-martial Lee's.

*Vol. I of the Lee Papers, published as Vol. 4 of the New York Historical Society Collections, 1871.

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