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LIFE OF TALBOT.

THE LIFE

OF

SILAS TALBOT,

A

COMMODORE

IN THE

NAVY OF THE UNITED STATES.

BY

HENRY T. TUCKERMAN,

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P R E F A C E .

THE following memoir was intended for the series of American Biography edited by President Sparks. Owing to the suspension of that valuable work, and at the suggestion of its accomplished editor, the present sketch appears in a separate volume. In preparing it, I have been actuated by a desire to render justice to a highly efficient and patriotic American officer, and, at the same time, to preserve some of the incidents and correspondence which belong to that period of our country's annals, to which the flight of time only adds new significance and interest. There has been manifest, until within a few

years, a singular indifference to the historical and biographical details of our revolutionary era ; and an absence of that cordial recognition of individual merit in some of the chief actors of that great drama, which confirm, not only the proverbial charge of ingratitude against republics, but justify De Tocqueville's theory with regard to their exclusive devotion to the immediate, and their peculiar insensibility to the lessons of the past. The difficulty experienced in obtaining many of the facts in this brief and imperfect sketch, as well as the original documents requisite to authenticate them, is sufficient evidence of the forgetfulness and neglect to which the records of American public characters are liable.

In view of the sacrifices and inadequate reward which usually attend patriotic ambition, the least we can do, is to render literary

justice to the memories of our departed heroes, to chronicle their deeds for the emulation and gratitude of posterity, and keep bright the escutcheon upon which their names are inscribed. It is gratifying to observe that, through the labors of Historical Societies and individuals, this high duty seems destined to be gradually fulfilled among ourselves. As the great questions which now agitate the world,—the struggle between Power and Right,—practically develop, the history of the men who took an active part in the achievement of our independence, becomes more important and suggestive; and, if this memoir tends to revive one of those noble examples of consistent and devoted heroism, it will not appear in vain.

New-York, August, 1850.

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LIFE OF TALBOT.



CHAPTER I.

ONE great cause of the triumph of our Revolution, was the mutual confidence that prevailed among its friends ; another, still less recognized, was individual disinterestedness. Not in the biographies of a few signal actors, or in the results of two or three battles, can we discover the real means of success ; but in the allied and consistent energy of those who, separated by a vast extent of country, were yet side by side and heart with heart in allegiance to her cause. As the greatest forces of Nature are latent,

and only surmised by their partial development, so moral agencies often work unseen, and accumulate with the silent but intense growth of the oak and the avalanche. If we compare the American with the Continental revolutions of the last two years, we cannot but perceive that the repeated failures of the latter are often traceable to selfishness and the absence of intelligent unanimity. In accordance with that great principle of compensation, now so generally recognized, it would seem that in public affairs not less than in personal achievement, self-sacrifice is essential to eminent results. One reason that the American war furnishes so ineffective a subject for the epic poet, is that its most impressive and significant phases are to be found in its episodes;—in the countless instances of modest valor, cheerful privation, and secret martyrdom. The domestic correspondence, and the household traditions of the people, yield more dramatic hints of that eventful struggle than

the annals of the historian. The "pomp and circumstance" of war were so abridged by the limited resources and simple habits of the colonists, that its glories were almost exclusively revealed by feats of personal daring and quiet endurance.

It is often thought derogatory to the spirit of republicanism, to manifest any faith or interest in genealogy; but this prejudice arises from the evils associated with the idea of fixed rank, and the absurd ostentation displayed in heraldic devices. Natural aristocracy has become recognized as a great fact in human society—a law of race, and an ordination of the Creator. It is, therefore, not only deemed justifiable as a merely curious question, but highly interesting and important as an element in the philosophy of character, to trace mental and physical distinctions to their ancestral origin. Indeed, one of the most inviting aspects of this subject is opened by the social life of this country; for to a philosophic

mind it is a most attractive study to investigate the effect of a pioneer life, a new form of government and development of the religious sentiment, upon the original emigrants from Europe to America ; and then realize the modification of taste, habit and character, thus induced upon succeeding generations. The climate, theology, and occupations of New England, essentially changed the nature of the children of the pilgrims ; yet, here and there, especially during the Revolution, the family instincts of individuals, recorded by the historian of their progenitors, reappears in striking contrast with their wholly diverse condition and habits.

Captain Talbot came honestly by his adventurous impulse and resolved courage. He was a lineal descendant of that Richard de Talbot who witnessed the grant that Walter Gifford, Earl of Buckingham, made to the monks of Cerasie, in the reign of William the Conqueror. His Norman blood asserted itself in a thirst for honorable

activity, in the zeal with which he dedicated himself to the crusade for freedom, and the quickness of thought and deed that signalized his enterprises. Not less obviously was his military aptitude an inherited quality. The Earldom of Shrewsbury was bestowed, in the fifteenth century, upon John Talbot, for his prowess and skill in war. It is remarkable that one of his ancestors was the antagonist of the Maid of Orleans, and another had the custody of Mary Queen of Scots. The line, although illustrious in English history, presents the usual mingled chronicle of shame and glory that belongs to the authentic record of an unbroken and venerable lineage. Thus Geoffrey Talbot was banished by King Stephen for cruelty in his military exploits on behalf of Maud; while Hugh Talbot is renowned as a benefactor to the monks of Beaufort, with whom he eventually took orders. Macaulay, in two of his striking portraits, gives us the most opposite char-

acters in members of this race :—Richard Talbot, lord-lieutenant of Ireland, under James the Second, is described as one of the most infamous public men of his day ; and Charles, lord-lieutenant of Staffordshire, and colonel of one of the regiments of horse raised during the Western Insurrection, is portrayed as a singularly accomplished and winsome gentleman. The inscription on a monument to another of the family, at Sheffield, declares of him, that “ though noble by descent he was more noble and illustrious in his actions ; famous at home and abroad, loyal to his prince, and true to his country ; ” and that he “ resigned his soul in a good old age.”

It is evident that the chivalric element, though sometimes overlaid by cruelty and craft, was innate in the blood ; it came from the Norman knights ; while the less elevated instincts perhaps are of Celtic origin ; at least, such appears to be the inference of a keen and well-informed annalist.

Like his renowned ancestor, Captain Talbot was eminently "true to his country." It was justly recorded of him by a distinguished contemporary, that "America had not a more active friend. Alternately in the army and the navy, as his country called for his services, through the whole war, he devoted himself to her cause."

Large families and early self-dependence were characteristic of colonial life. Education was the great, if not the only duty incumbent on a parent, except that of providing for the material comfort of infancy. So certain and available were the means of subsistence, if either physical strength or mental aptitude existed;—so far removed even from the imagination of the thriving settlers, was the problem of the inadequacy of labor that now agitates civilized society,—that a child with a good constitution and the rudiments of learning, was thought quite prepared for the exigencies of life. To insure this equipment was, however, a

vital interest; and accordingly, when the father of Silas Talbot found himself about to leave his children orphans, he made the elder guardians of the younger, and devoted his small property to the support of the latter. The subject of this sketch was the ninth of fourteen children, and but twelve years of age, when deprived of his only surviving parent, who had lived as an honest, thrifty and contented farmer, for several years, at the town of Dighton, Bristol county, then part of the colony of Massachusetts bay. The spirit of adventure lurked in the orphan's blood; and he had no sooner learned to write, than he began to look about for the readiest means to give it exercise. At that period the southern coasting trade yielded to New England a profit that naturally enlisted her enterprise; and in order to master the profession of a mariner, as well as to gratify his youthful curiosity, and love of action, he entered himself as cabin-boy on board one of the

many craft that plied regularly between the northern and southern states. Hardy from a boyhood passed in rural occupations, amid the bracing winds of Rhode Island,—his native intelligence quickened and enlarged by observation and reading,—with the energetic habits and strength of purpose thus fostered, his advancement was not less certain than rapid: and accordingly we are not surprised to find him at the age of manhood, in the year 1772, married to Miss Richmond, of one of the oldest and most respected colonial families, and the occupant of a dwelling built with his own earnings, in Providence, R. I. This property seems to have been acquired in the versatile manner characteristic of the time and people. While a lad he had learned the trade of a stone-mason—then one of the most lucrative mechanical occupations; this he seems very soon to have abandoned for the sea, and during the early part of his residence in Providence, he engaged occasionally in

mercantile speculations, in which he exhibited more than ordinary boldness and sagacity. An instance is yet remembered of his sailing down the river, when lumber had unexpectedly risen to a high price, and intercepting a vessel thus loaded, purchasing the cargo, and making sales in town at an enormous advance.

But his was not a spirit to rest content with the indolent enjoyment of outward prosperity, nor to stifle its aspirations in the pride of success, or the relish of accumulation. The foothold he had gained in the world only excited him to nobler toils; emancipation from want only made him desirous of glory; and the comfort and respectability of a home served but to deepen his patriotic sympathies. Scarcely had he attained that basis of prosperity and domestic happiness for which the heart of youth so instinctively yearns, than the first shadows of war began to appear in the far horizon. The most calm and hopeful acknowledged

that a resort to arms appeared the only means of safety as well as justice. It was felt by all that the most sacred principles of civil existence were threatened. Indignation was gradually warming into a solemn purpose of defence, and the seeds of the Revolution had begun to germinate.

Accordingly, in every nook of the land men began to initiate themselves in military habitudes. The mechanic, the tradesman, the agriculturist, set apart two or three hours from their daily toil to practise the drill, acquaint themselves with the minor tactics, and become familiar with the formulas of soldiership. To one who, at this distance of time, reflects upon the quiet, systematic, yet earnest manner in which the poor scattered and undisciplined colonists thus entered upon their preparations to resist a powerful invader, there is almost a sublimity in the tranquil confidence and resolute spirit manifested, under circumstances that would have palsied in despair

the efforts of any but a sturdy, enlightened and patriotic race. The humble style of these private exercises, compared with the greatness of the future result, is remarkable. In the instance before us, young Talbot and his companions hired the loft of a sugar-house in Providence, and repaired thither, several evenings in each week, to be drilled by a runaway drum-major, an old Scotchman, well-versed in the technicalities of his profession, and not indisposed to cultivate the martial instinct destined to expend itself on his former allies.

Events soon demonstrated that such preliminaries were not an hour in advance of the exigencies of the time; for no sooner had the news of the battle of Lexington reached Rhode Island, than her legislature voted the establishment of three regiments. It is a striking evidence of the local reputation already gained by the leading spirit of the little band of volunteers, that the State immediately gave him a commission, dated

June 28th, 1775, (with the usual ruse in the filling up—"In his majesty's name," &c.,) as captain in one of these regiments. They marched, without delay, to join the American camp, near Boston, and assisted in carrying on the siege, with as little expenditure of ammunition, however, as possible—one of many economies necessity obliged them to practise. After our army entered the city, and the British had embarked for Halifax, the commander of the American squadron, just arrived at New London, from the Bahama islands, applied to General Washington for two hundred volunteers to assist in carrying them to Rhode Island. With the characteristic promptitude that eminently distinguished him throughout the war, Captain Talbot offered his services, and the fleet was soon anchored in safety in the harbor of Providence. Having performed this incidental duty, he accompanied the army to New-York.

The lovely harbor of this now great me-

tropolis then offered a scene of rare and exciting interest. Riding at anchor in the vicinity of Staten Island, appeared the British fleet, with the army under Lord Howe. Every spar and line of cordage in those swarming battle-ships, was defined to the eye of the distant spectator, against the lucid azure of the sky ; and, on quiet nights, reflected to the gaze of the boatmen that haunted the adjacent shore. Their dark, massive hulls and scowling cannon wore a portentous aspect, and seemed to cast long and prophetic shadows upon the free waters into which they had ruthlessly intruded—significant of the years of bitter trial of which they were ominous harbingers.

Upon the heights of Brooklyn, at York Island, and Paulus Hook, rose the newly-heaped batteries of the Americans. Never smiled that lovely bay more cheerfully than during those clear days of that eventful spring. More solitary than at present, with its constantly plying steamers and

forest of shipping, the position of the belligerents was plainly obvious. The comparative silence that hung over the broad waters, the fast-skimming clouds that, for a moment, darkened their crystal sheen, and the occasional furrows raised by sudden breezes that swept across them, stimulated the imagination of the lonely enthusiast who, from some isolated point, looked forth and mused upon the landscape.

It was evident that neither party had, as yet, determined upon its course. The considerate, on both sides, felt the importance of a successful blow, at the existent juncture; yet the actual state of the colonial defences was but partially known to their opponents, and a premature manœuvre might occasion temporary discomfiture, even in that well-appointed squadron. On the other hand, it was of the highest moment that the Americans should be assured of the readiness of our troops to cope with their formidable invaders. It was needful

that the spell of vague alarm should be, in a measure, broken, which had been inspired by the presence of those destructive engines, whose thunders seemed to gather new potency from their long quiescence; whose shrouds and decks bristled with pikes and bayonets, and whose black and heavy sides contrasted vividly with the red hues of the soldiers' uniforms, grouped thickly at the port-holes and on the taffrails, as if impatient to pour forth upon the land so invitingly spread below and around. To one gallant heart, this inaction was especially irksome. Captain Talbot had obtained the command of a fire-ship, and lay directly before the city, awaiting orders. To secure a more efficient position, and the better to disguise his purpose, he took advantage of a light wind, ascended the Hudson fifteen miles, and anchored just above Fort Washington.

For three days, in this romantic spot, he quietly awaited an opportune moment for action. On the one side, the banks of the

noble river sloped gradually upward, half-covered with low cedars, whose dark umbrage already wore the freshening tints of spring; on the other, like natural fortifications, rose the gray and upright rocks of the tufted palisades. Few dwellings were then visible; the ripple of the water on the pebbly shore was audible in the lull of the wind, and the tranquil and sequestered beauty of the scene gave no hint of the deadly preparations then making on board the unwarlike craft that swung so gently at her moorings. The lapse of a few hours after Captain Talbot had chosen his anchorage, evidenced the sagacity of his movements. Three of the enemy's ships, in order to protect the left of their army, in case of need, had shifted their ground from the harbor to a spot about half way between the mouth of the Hudson and the fire-ship. Orders were therefore soon forwarded to the latter to make a night attack. She was filled with combustibles, and besmeared with turpentine.

Several trains of powder were laid ; and one of the crew was easily induced to strip himself, and lie down upon deck, with a lighted match, ready, at a moment's warning, to ignite the vessel.

At two o'clock in the morning they weighed anchor, and dropped slowly down with the tide. The nearest of the three ships was the *Asia* of sixty-four guns, whose tall spars and towering hull no sooner loomed upon the eager gaze of Captain Talbot's hardy band, than they steered directly for her broadside. Unsuspicious of any danger, it was but a moment before her little adversary had flung her grappling irons, that the *Asia* fired ; and then a scene ensued that baffles description. From the depth, as it were, of profound silence, there echoed the reverberation of cannon, the cries of the wounded, and the piercing shouts of alarm and revenge. In an instant the darkness of a cloudy night gave place to a red flashing glare that revealed the fort, the

waters, and the fields, with the distinctness of noonday; and brought into vivid relief the huge vessels of war now alive with their startled crews, who hastened to the relief of the Asia;—some pouring water on the rising flames, others disengaging the fire-ship from her side, and not a few intent at the guns, which hurled an incessant shower of balls at the boat in which the daring originator of this sudden conflagration, was propelled by his brave men towards the nearest shore. Although lighted in their aim by a pyramid of fire, of all the shot from the three vessels, but two struck the crowded bark of fugitives. Captain Talbot, however, in his anxiety to render the experiment certain, had lingered amid the burning timbers of the fire-ship, and was the last to escape, the seaman who applied the match having, according to a previous understanding, immediately jumped overboard and been picked up by his expectant comrades. When, therefore, the boat reached the Jer-

sey shore in safety, the appearance of the gallant leader was frightful and his sufferings intense. His skin was blistered from head to foot, his dress almost entirely consumed, and his eye-sight gone.

Sadly, yet with gentle care, his humble companions in danger bore him through the solitary woods, in the gray, cold twilight of morning, to a thin but hospitable settlement then called the English Neighborhood ; but, on their arrival, his dreadful condition so alarmed the children of the place, that no house would give him shelter. At last a poor and aged widow opened her cabin door, and allowed the weary and scorched bearers to lay him on the floor, and cover his tortured frame with a blanket. Fortunately, in the course of that day, two American officers, General Knox and Dr. Eustis, passed the vicinity on business ; and hearing of the case, hastened to visit their countryman. The seasonable medical aid of the latter gentleman soon essentially relieved

his anguish ; and although for a considerable period deprived of vision, he was soon able to bear a removal to Hackensack, to await his convalescence. Meantime the Asia had been extricated, with great difficulty, from her perilous situation ; and the bold enterprise that so nearly proved her destruction, created such apprehension and loss of confidence in the enemy, that they slipped their cables, fell down the river, and anchored below the city. The hopes of the Americans revived in the same proportion as those of the British were discouraged. So obvious, indeed, was the auspicious influence of this event, that by a resolution of Congress passed on the tenth of the ensuing October, this “spirited attempt,” as it was designated, of Captain Talbot, was made the occasion of a vote of thanks, and a special recommendation of that officer to the commander-in-chief, besides promoting him to the rank of Major.

“ *October 10th, 1777.* Resolved, That Cap-

tain Silas Talbot, of the State of Rhode Island, be promoted to the rank and have the pay of Major in the Army of the United States, in consideration of his merit and services in a spirited attempt to set fire to one of the enemy's ships of war, in the North River, last year; and that he be recommended to General Washington, for employment agreeable to his rank."

The instant he recovered, with the avidity of a man thoroughly pledged to an "idea dearer than self," he looked around for the nearest post of duty. At that time a severe and most unequal conflict was going on, with occasional intermissions, on the Jersey side of the Delaware. The names of the respective localities thus fiercely disputed, were not, indeed, fitted to grace a historical romance or poem of chivalry; but the era and the occasion were of that grave and practical character, in which things assume their just superiority to names, and a great principle throws into the shade conventional

honor. For several days the British having intrenched themselves on Hog Island, assailed with an unremitting fire the American fort erected on Mud Island. The shipping also kept up successive volleys, so that not a spot gave refuge to the harassed and disheartened occupants. Into this "deadly breach," Captain Talbot, yet scarred with the raging element he so narrowly escaped, threw himself with ardor. Hopeless as the task appeared, the besieged, under his and a brother officer's cheering guidance, held out with marvellous fortitude against a cross-fire, to which their indifferent resources afforded neither the means of retaliation or defence. At length the enemy, impatient at such heroic perseverance, taking advantage of a flood tide, brought an armed transport directly against the fort. The broadside discharge of this new ally was more than the weary and crippled, though brave garrison, could withstand; and, after Captain Talbot (disabled from a wound in the hip,

having until that moment fought for hours with his wrist shattered by a musket ball) had been conveyed to the Fort at Red Bank and thence to Princeton hospital, Col. Thayer evacuated the island. Gen. Washington was then at White Plains, and soon became acquainted with the particulars of this gallant defence, to which even the British bore honorable testimony. Accordingly, when Captain Talbot was able to seek an interview, he was received by the Commander-in-chief with the utmost cordiality, his assiduous bravery warmly applauded, and leave of absence readily given the wounded officer to visit his family at Rhode Island, until quite recruited.

CHAPTER II.

ON the 8th of December, 1777, a considerable force of the enemy had taken possession of the Island of Rhode Island ; and from that period, for three years, the colony were kept in a continual state of alarm. With their small armed vessels and tenders, the invaders made frequent incursions, often guided on marauding expeditions in the vicinity by the Tories ; and it had been found requisite to fortify, at intervals, the entire circuit of Narraganset Bay. The inhabitants, with occasional assistance from the continental soldiers, maintained a vigilant guard. The town of Providence wore the aspect of a military rendezvous. The University buildings at first occupied by the artillery

troops, subsequently were converted into a hospital; the college grounds were used as a parade. All business was suspended, and many of the citizens had removed to the interior of the state. Their absence, however, was less apparent, because of the influx of fugitives from Newport, to whom it has been justly remarked, was then repaid the debt of gratitude due their ancestors by the townspeople, for similar protection and refuge afforded them in the Indian war, a century before. The monotonous din of arms and strains of martial music, then so familiar to the once quiet and busy town, gave place to more lively demonstrations on the twenty-second of April, when the news of the treaty with France arrived. But the scene of action was soon changed to Newport, and the island it occupies—a locality so attractive in itself and so intimately associated with the subject of this memoir, that I cannot refrain from a brief sketch of its history.

As one there inhales the salubrious air, and looks forth upon the majestic sea, it is easy to realize how a man of heroic spirit may go forth amid such an inspiring experience, with the calm resolve to execute gallant deeds or perish in the attempt. Indeed, to judge by the reminiscences of the "oldest inhabitant," which is quite a Methuselah problem there—for longevity is peculiar to the region—Newport has never failed, in the hour of need, to yield her brave champions. In the colonial times, there was Roger Williams, a man who seems to have been the incarnation of moral courage, who, unsubdued by the spiritual tyranny of Massachusetts, that drove him forth to wander through the piercing winds and heavy snows of a New England winter, and find in savage hospitality the refuge denied him by countrymen and bigots—without a guide, or food, or lodging. Under a grant from the chief of the Wampanoags, he began a settlement at Seekonk, on the east side of the

Narraganset river; but even here the persecuting spirit of his former neighbors pursued him, and at the suggestion of Winslow, then Governor of Plymouth, he removed beyond their jurisdiction, and established an independent colony at the head of the bay, and named it Providence, in memory, as he declared, "of God's merciful providence to him." The claim, as ably urged by Mr. Hunter, our former Minister at Brazil, in an address delivered in this town two years ago, which I had the pleasure of hearing, that this state henceforth became the only one in New England which truly enjoyed the blessings of religious freedom, is fully confirmed by the evidence of facts. I perceive that Hildreth, in his lately published History of the United States, recognizes this noble distinction as justly belonging to Rhode Island. The purpose of Roger Williams, in his two visits to New England, to secure a charter which should protect his colony "from the spiritual despotism of her

neighbors," appears to have been realized; and on the second of these occasions, Clarke, his companion, still honorably represented by descendants in Newport, although he won the friendship of Clarendon for his mission, was obliged to mortgage his house there, in order to defray the expenses of their visit; a sacrifice subsequently redeemed by the corporation. Massachusetts continued to watch the growing little state with a jealous eye; but Williams had taken care that the terms of the new charter should be explicit—providing emphatically that, "no person within the said Colony shall be molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question, for any difference in matters of religious opinion, who did not actually disturb the civil peace." Indeed, the antagonists of Williams have betrayed in their own attempts at self-vindication, the necessity of these stringent provisions. In an old book of Cotton Mather's, he says, "If any man has lost his religion, he may find it

in this general muster of opinions (referring to the R. I. settlements) in this Gerazim of New England, the receptacle of the convicts of Jerusalem and outcasts of the land." The only instance recorded of intolerance in Williams seems to be his joining his old enemies against the Quakers. although it does not appear that he did this otherwise than by fair controversy. His logical combativeness and zeal may be inferred from the well-authenticated fact that, after the age of seventy, he rowed, in an open boat, from Providence to Newport, a distance of thirty miles, to argue the matter with George Fox; which discussion continued for three days, without any satisfactory issue. A curious illustration of their mutual excitement, and of the spirit of those times, is still preserved in the Redwood Library, in the shape of a worm-eaten, and black-letter volume, entitled "George Fox digged out of his Burrows," and the latter's reply, called "A New England Firebrand Quenched." Notwith-

standing this partial sympathy of opinion, the representatives of Rhode Island (so named from the Isle of Rhodes) found no countenance in their sister colony, for the delegation that visited Boston, soon after, were fined and whipped by the authorities of that town. The old patriots, not content with bearing off the palm of colonial freedom, claim also that the first act of popular resistance to English oppression that occurred in the country, was the destruction of H. B. M. armed sloop Liberty in Newport harbor, in 1769. The Privateers of the town won no small renown; both during the French and the Revolutionary wars; and the names of Read, Babcock, and others, are yet eloquent of traditionary valor. The former escaped from a prison-ship, having been betrayed while in command of a privateer by a treacherous comrade, returned to Newport, fitted out a new craft, pursued and captured the traitor, with a speed and a promptness rarely equalled in naval annals.

The traces of British invasion are still manifest in the absence of trees cut down during the war by soldiers. They also mutilated and carried off many of the books in the Redwood Library, desecrated all the churches but the Episcopal, by converting them into stables for their cavalry, destroyed the Beaver-tail lighthouse, and the barracks at Fort Adams. These offences were not wholly unpunished by the inhabitants of Aquidnay, as this part of the island was called by the Hutchensonian party, who, when exiled from Boston and its vicinity, founded Newport. Many of the prizes taken by Admiral Wallace, the commander of the British fleet, were recaptured; and when Prescott succeeded Clinton and Lord Percy in the command of the army quartered here, by a very bold and skilful stratagem he was kidnapped in his own chamber at night, and secretly conveyed within the American lines, through all the guards that watched over the enemy's forces encamped

on Gould and Weaver's Hill. During the whole time a correspondence was kept up between the island and the main by means of the window of Peter Peckham's barn. Up to this time Newport rivalled New York in commercial enterprise. Her West India trade was extensive. Lopez, a Jewish merchant, sent thirty vessels on trading voyages annually. The war struck a fatal blow to the prosperity of the town. Its fine harbor rendered it a most desirable port for the revenue cutters, and no place was more exposed to invasion. It is recorded as a fact honorable to our French allies, long quartered here, that on their departure, one hundred dollars covered all the loss incident to their sojourn. There Lafayette endeavored, though unsuccessfully, to co-operate with Count D'Estaing, whose fleet, for many weeks, manœuvred off the island, and was seriously crippled by a memorable storm that compelled him to put to sea. There Washington had his first interview, in

March, 1781, with Count Rochambeau ; the tombstone of one of the French Admirals is still seen in the old church-yard ; thence Perry went to gain the battle of Lake Erie.

It will naturally be asked what traces are still discoverable of the past history of Newport. In the ancient church is an organ presented by Dean Berkely ; and in that of East Greenwich, the silver cup used at the communion service, is said to have belonged to him. The old stone tower, which, notwithstanding speculations of antiquarians, is thought by many to be only a substantial mill, commemorates—if not antecedent to the foundation of the town—at least, an early period in its annals ; the well-kept but deserted synagogue attests the wealth of the Hebrews who there once prosecuted a flourishing trade, and whose temple is now preserved by strangers through a testamentary provision. Occasionally a pile of bananas in Thames street, indicates the fact that two

small vessels yet keep up the once constant intercourse between Newport and the West Indies. Over her rocky ledges the gallant Duncan trained his artillery to the alertness and precision which gained more than one battle in the Mexican war. A granite obelisk marks the grave of Perry ; and the little Grecian temple, with its small but desirable collection of books, is a graceful evidence of the intelligent taste of the people even in 1730.

Many distinguished names are associated with Newport. It was the favorite residence of Berkeley, Channing, and Allston. Stephen Hopkins, too, whose tremulous signature is on the Declaration of Independence, but whose heart, as one of the patriotic Islanders says, "never trembled," had once his home there. It is the native place of Arthur Brown, afterwards President of Trinity College, Dublin ; of Malbone, the miniature painter, and of Slater, one of the fathers of American manufactures. Gilbert.

Stuart was born in the vicinity; and one of his pictures of Washington adorns the State House.

Newport has the most individual climate in America. It has been thought that the vicinity of the Gulf Stream is one cause of the marked difference between the temperature there and that on our seaboard elsewhere. Its saline humidity is a perfect sedative to the natives, and the fogs are salubrious except in cases of pulmonary disease. Fashion, with her characteristic blindness, keeps her votaries away from the peculiar charms of this region, by immuring them in noisy hotels and amid dusty thoroughfares. They prefer the sound of a gong to the roar of the sea, and a gaudy drawing-room to the heavens and the ocean. They leave there at the advent of the most glorious season, when autumnal skies and a bracing air redouble the attractiveness of the place; when the sky and climate remind one of Italy, as do the capricious flitting of the gay

crowds that profane the venerable cities of the old world as they do the natural sanctities of the new.

When the French fleet, under Count d'Estaing, appeared off Rhode Island, towards the close of July, sanguine hopes were naturally excited that the enemy would be driven from the State. An expedition planned to effect this desirable object the preceding autumn, while General Spencer was in command, after having been partially equipped, was abandoned for reasons that have never been satisfactorily explained. A second attempt was now decided on by General Sullivan, who, on the ninth of August, left Providence and assumed command at Tiverton. The Council of War ordered out the whole military force of the State for twenty days. The French fleet had an encounter with the British, under Lord Howe, off Point Judith, and did not return to the assistance of the Americans until the twentieth of the same

month. A violent storm (yet traditional at Newport, from the circumstances that the windows of the town were incrustated with salt, deposited by the sea-water borne inland by the tempest), separated the fleets, and neither gained any obvious advantage. Meantime, it became necessary for our army to cross over to the island where the enemy were stationed. At this crisis General Sullivan availed himself of the energetic aid of Captain Talbot, to collect and prepare in as brief a time as possible, a sufficient number of boats to insure the safe and rapid debarkation of the troops. Invigorated by the respite from toil and suffering he had enjoyed, and his patriotic sentiments revived by a sojourn with those most near and dear to him, as well as by the daily spectacle of privation and anxiety exhibited by his neighbors and kindred,—we can readily imagine the zest with which he mounted his horse and rode, day and night, besides dispatching expresses over an area of fifty

miles around the country, for ship-builders, smiths, and carpenters, in pursuance of this design. In an incredibly short time, eighty-six flat-bottom boats, each fitted to carry one hundred men, were in readiness. They were calked by candle-light in an open field ; and so weary had the indefatigable overseer of the enterprise become, that he enjoyed a refreshing sleep under one of the boats, notwithstanding the clank of hammers above his head, The debarkation commenced on Sunday the 9th of August. The light corps to which Major Talbot was attached, marched directly down the island towards Newport, until within cannon-shot of the British lines. Colonel Laurens then directed him to proceed alone and reconnoitre. Arrived in sight of the enemy's outposts, he descried three artillery men, in a garden, gathering vegetables. He instantly sprang his horse over the wall, and threatened them with instant death if they stirred. Not doubting that he was a British officer,

they apologized for their absence from the fort, and delivered up their hangers. The Major coolly drove them along the road before him, and sent them to his commanding officer as prisoners of war. The excellent prospect of our army, however, was destined soon to be destroyed, as already hinted, for, on the same day, from the top of Col. Weaver's house, the British fleet was visible in the offing; they stood for Newport, and anchored outside the harbor; but when, on the following day, the French fleet went to attack them, they slipped their cables and hastened to sea. Count D'Estaing gave chase, but the gale ensued, and he eventually returned crippled; and on the twenty-second sailed for Boston, to convoy two of their ships that had been disabled in the encounter. Deprived of his co-operation, and hourly expecting the return of the British fleet with reinforcements, General Sullivan saw no alternative but a seasonable retreat; and although this was at last most

judiciously effected, a severe action preceded, in which the bravery and skill of our troops have scarcely received from the annalist the deserved meed of praise. General Lafayette, on his last visit to this country, declared his opinion that it was the best fought battle during the war. He was an eye-witness, having arrived on the field from Boston, whither he had hastened to induce Count D'Estaing to return to the assistance of Rhode Island. If he had done so, there is every probability that the British would have all been taken prisoners. The testimony of Colonel Trumbull, who had volunteered his services as aid-de-camp to General Sullivan, is to the same effect. His account of the action is graphic and impressive. He was sent at daybreak to Colonel Wigglesworth, of the rear-guard, on Quaker or Windmill Hill, with orders to withdraw his troops. In so doing, Trumbull describes himself as moving up a long, gradual acclivity, in the very line of fire; first

a round shot or two dropped near and bounded on ; then he met Col. Townsend, with his arm off: next Capt. Walker bade him farewell, as he was carried by in a dying state ; and a moment after, a shower of grape fell around him like hail. On reaching the scene of action, the gallant Colonel shouted to the envoy, “ Don’t speak—I know your errand.” “ Do you see those troops crossing to your rear ? ” asked Trumbull in reply. “ Yes, they are Americans.” “ No sir, they are Germans : mark, their dress is blue and yellow, not buff. They are coming to intercept your retreat. Retire instantly : ” and the order was reluctantly obeyed.

The action of this memorable day was commenced by Major Talbot. The British had pursued General Sullivan to Butts’s Hill, at the north of the island. Lieutenant Col. Laurens, with his detachment, took charge of the rear. They halted at Redwood’s house ; and when the British army drew near, Major Talbot, in obedience to

orders, met and checked them. During the retreat, which was conducted with admirable tact, coolness, and daring, the light corps made every possible stand under cover of stone-fences and other incidental barriers, until supported by the main army, when the action became general. The commanding officer, in his dispatches to Congress, emphatically mentions the important services rendered the country, in this instance, by Major Talbot, in his speedy provision of the means of transportation for the troops, and the gallant defence he maintained as an officer of the light corps, in the safe and orderly retreat from the island.

CHAP. III.

ON the first appearance of the French fleet off Newport, the British, then in possession of the town, sunk a frigate called the *Flora*, and burned several other vessels of war, to prevent their being taken by the enemy. In consummating this revengeful policy, however, with the usual short-sightedness of mere calculators, they secured a free entrance to the colonists to both the island passages. Their great expedient now, to dishearten both the continental army and the people, was to interrupt all communication with the main, and thus cut off their supplies. Having deprived themselves of the readiest means to effect this purpose, by the voluntary destruction of so many of

their ships, there remained no alternative but to blockade the two points of egress. In order effectually to close up what is called the East passage, they converted a fine stout vessel of about two hundred tons into a galley, removing her upper deck, and placing on her lower, twelve eight-pounders that belonged to the *Flora*, besides ten swivels. Strong boarding netting was attached: she was manned with a crew of forty-five, under Lieutenant Dunlap, of his Majesty's Navy, and named, in honor of his commander, the *Pigot*. Moored at the mouth of the *Seconset* river, she completely barred its entrance, and for a long period had kept a sullen and undisturbed watch, greatly to the detriment of the island and the army. Deficient as were the Americans in maritime force, at this period and in that region, they suffered the consequences of this grievous interference with their rights and comfort, without the hope of its removal, except through some happy turn in the

general issues of the struggle. The bitter and ineffectual complaints of his unfortunate townsmen daily reached the ears of Major Talbot. We have already seen that he was a man of genuine sympathies and indomitable enterprise. His noble heart secretly bled to witness the suffering of his patriotic countrymen ; his pride was wounded at the insolent success of the enemy, and his just indignation excited at wrongs incurred for no crime but that of ardent loyalty to freedom. Not only did the galley, in her effective position, exclude provisions and reinforcements from that section of the colony, but entirely broke up the local trade. Major Talbot brooded over schemes for her destruction, but they were baffled by the inadequacy of the means at hand ; his projects, too, were coldly received by General Sullivan, who regarded them as impracticable. At length he proposed to that brave though cautious officer, to assume the responsibility and expense of the attempt him-

self, with some indispensable assistance and the needful sanction of his commander. Still viewing the scheme as visionary, but reluctant to wound the feelings of so devoted an officer as his persevering ally, General Sullivan consented and promised a draft of men. With his usual alacrity and self-possession, the now delighted Major instantly began an examination of the shipping at Providence, in order to select a craft adapted to his purpose. He, at length, made choice of a coasting sloop called the Hawk, and, in two days, equipped her with two three pounders, and sixty men from the various regiments then quartered in the town. After setting sail, in consequence of the failure of the wind he was obliged to anchor within eight miles of port, and remain during the night and all the succeeding day. Such is the singular distribution of land and water, as a glance at the map will indicate, that in order to reach the galley, it was indispensable for him not only to double the north

end of the island, but to pass two of the enemy's forts, one at Bristol ferry, on the west side of the river, and the other at Fogland's ferry, on the east; the width of the stream at these points being three quarters of a mile. Not until the ensuing night did the wind become favorable, when they again started. On approaching the fort at Bristol ferry, they kept as near as possible to the opposite shore; but, notwithstanding every precaution was observed to insure concealment, the Hawk was discovered and fired upon; fortunately, however, she received no injury, ran up Taunton river seven miles, and anchored near the shore, on the west side of Mount Hope bay. Although now within fifteen miles of the galley, it was impossible for her to pass the other fort in safety until the wind again shifted. The next morning, therefore, Major Talbot, leaving the Hawk in charge of Lieutenant Baker, proceeded in his boat to the eastern shore, determined to improve the interval

by a reconnoitering expedition, thus gaining intelligence essential to the judicious conduct of their enterprise, and, at the same time, soothing his impatience at the unanticipated delay. He, therefore, procured a horse, and rode down the shore until directly opposite the galley. We can easily imagine the feelings with which he gazed upon the object of this bold expedition. It was one of those calm, cloudless days in October, so enchanting in that region—now the favorite summer resort of citizens from every part of the land. At that season, the heavens and the atmosphere, the very tint of the water and touch of the breeze, remind one of Venice and Rome. The invigorating air and the lucid hues around, excite either imaginative or chivalric sentiment; and barren as the landscape is of either picturesque or sublime features, the charms to which we allude make it then seem a fit home for poets and heroes. As Major Talbot inspected with his resolved but experi-

enced glance, the equipments of the Pigot, he perceived that he had undertaken to confront a foe "armed at all points." The aspect of the galley was, indeed, that of a complete floating battery. The men were distinctly visible on deck, in the orderly array suggestive of exact discipline. The nettings were not only high, but carried entirely round. The only result of his observations, however, was to confirm his resolve to attack her without delay; but he deemed it advisable to apply to General Cornell for a reinforcement of fifteen men and another officer. Accordingly Lieutenant Helm, of Rhode Island, and the desired additional crew, were on board the Hawk before nine o'clock the same evening. As if to encourage their purpose, at that very hour, the wind became favorable, and they weighed anchor. Major Talbot, like all successful leaders, had that power over others, which is only the instinctive recognition of natural aristocracy. To many of

the men now enlisted, at his instance, to achieve an important but most hazardous exploit, his prowess, reliability, attachment to the American cause, and sufferings in its behalf, were familiar. When, therefore, he summoned them around him, and revealed the object of the expedition, urging the necessity of the utmost coolness and promptitude, and intimating the prospect both of reward and honor, there was an immediate and unanimous response. As the sloop dropped silently down the river, they lashed a kedge-anchor to the jib-boom, to tear and at the same time grapple with the nettings of the Pigot. They drifted by the Fogland fort, under bare poles, without being discovered, although they saw the sentinel each time he passed the barrack light. This was a most auspicious circumstance, for one shot would have given an alarm to the galley. All hands being ready for action, they again hoisted sail ; but, fearing they should run astray of their object in the darkness,

soon cast anchor once more, lowered a boat, and went in search of her with muffled oars. They had proceeded but a few rods, when her sombre form was seen rising in the gloom; they noted how she rode with the wind and tide, returned to the Hawk, and directed her course accordingly. Being soon perceived by the watch on the deck of the galley, they were repeatedly hailed, but made no answer; when nearly alongside, a volley of musketry was discharged at them: but before the Pigot could fire one gun, the jib-boom of the Hawk had torn its way through the nettings, and grappled the foreshrouds; while their salute had been amply returned, and Lieutenant Helm, followed by his detachment, mounted the deck sword in hand. With shouts the crew of the Hawk drove every man into the hold of the galley, except the commander, who fought desperately in his shirt and drawers, until convinced that resistance was useless. When informed, however, that he was van-

quished by a little sloop, he wept over his inevitable disgrace, and Major Talbot in vain offered him the condolence which, as a generous victor, he felt at his mortification. This brilliant *coup-de-main* was effected without the loss of a man on either side. The triumphant party weighed the anchors of the long execrated galley, coiled her cables over the gratings to keep their captives safe, made sail, and arrived the next day at Stonington, Ct., where they landed the prisoners, and marched them in triumph to Providence. In the succeeding November, Captain Talbot received the following letter and resolution from the President of Congress :

PHILADELPHIA, 17th Nov. 1778.

SIR,—I feel a very high degree of pleasure in obeying the orders of Congress by transmitting an Act of the 14th inst., for expressing the sense of the House, of the bravery and good conduct of yourself, and the offi-

cers and men under your command, in taking the armed schooner Pigot, and for granting you a commission of Lieutenant Colonel in the Army of the United States, in acknowledgment of your merit.

You will receive, Sir, within the present inclosure, the commission annexed to the Act, and will be pleased to signify to your officers and men, the applause due to them on this occasion.

I entreat you to accept my best wishes that you may have many future opportunities of distinguishing your character in the annals of your country, and that you will be assured,

I am, with great respect and esteem, Sir,

Your obd't and most humble servant,

HENRY LAURENS,

President of Congress.

SILAS TALBOT, ESQ.,

Lieut. Col. in the Army of the United States
of America, Providence.

“*November 14th, 1778.* Resolved, that Congress have a high sense of the bravery and good conduct of Major Silas Talbot, of the State of Rhode Island, and the officers and men under his command, in boarding and taking the armed schooner *Pigot*, of eight twelve-pounders and forty-five men, in the East Passage, between Rhode Island and the main; and that he, as a reward of his merit, and for the encouragement of a spirit of enterprise, be presented with the Commission of Lieutenant Colonel in the Army of the United States.”

Thus once more an achievement of this gallant American officer raised the drooping spirits of his countrymen. Depressed by the failure of the recent attempt on the English garrison at Newport, their hopes had languished: now they were magically revived. The mere fact that the long suspended intercourse by sea was renewed, carried buoyancy to many hearts and com-

fort to a thousand homes. The enemy relinquished any farther experiments to blockade the island. Congratulations, acknowledgments, and honors, were proffered the bold leader in this enterprise, from all quarters. The Assembly of his native State presented him with a sword ; but perhaps, of all the compliments bestowed on the occasion, the one he received with the greatest relish, was the character awarded him, in the British report of the loss of the Pigot—"one of the greatest arch-rebels in nature !"

CHAPTER IV.

THE career of the hero, in whatever sphere, is one of alternate success and disaster ; and his very eminence principally consists in the spirit with which he encounters disappointment, rendering it only an impulse to new effort. Two enterprises in aid of the great cause so dear to him, and involving the welfare of his native State, Major Talbot was obliged reluctantly to abandon, in consequence of unforeseen and inevitable obstacles. The first was an attack on the *Renown*, a famed vessel of the enemy, carrying fifty guns ; whose cruising ground, for a considerable time, was off the isle of Providence. This expedition was frustrated by the ice ; fortunately, however, its neces-

sity was soon obviated by the departure of the *Renown*, she being ordered to another station, and Rhode Island thus again opened to the sea. The British, notwithstanding, maintained a craft of forty-four guns in the vicinity, which occasionally appeared and threatened mischief. The *Hawk* was re-equipped by her former commander, with a view to surprise this vessel; but on their way to sea, the pilot ran her on a shoal, and much to the chagrin of Major Talbot, this project was also unavoidably relinquished.

A remarkable proof of the self-devotion of the leaders in our revolution, may be found in their willingness to sacrifice official rights to immediate utility. It is an acknowledged fact that professional men, especially those of superior gifts and honorable zeal, are peculiarly sensitive to the recognition both of their rank and character. Indeed a feeling of self-respect is the natural accompaniment of high qualities. There are undoubtedly instances, some quite

notorious, of the repudiation of commissions, and the abandonment of the cause, on the part of those engaged in the American war, because of the tardy promotion or inadequate equipment furnished them by the government; but it is, as a general rule, true that the personal history of many who distinguished themselves in the achievement of our independence, reveals a series of compromises with individual rights and official claims, in order more effectually to promote the public good, and advance the cause of freedom, more creditable to the parties as men, than their most brilliant acts as soldiers. In this manner the very soul of republicanism displayed itself; pride was cheerfully yielded to duty, and technical distinction not allowed to weigh a moment in the balance, with the demands of sincere patriotism. Perhaps, no man of that day affords a nobler example of this little appreciated species of self-devotion, than Silas Talbot. He was, by nature, not less proud

than determined, keenly alive to the least interference with his individuality, and to the full extent, conscious of "that last infirmity of noble minds"—the ambition of justly earned renown. Yet we have seen with what unhesitating ardor he offered his services whenever any exigency occurred; how considerate he proved himself of the impoverished state of the colonies, in seeking the appointments required for each expedition either in person or at his own expense; and how subordinate, in every arrangement, were all motives and purposes to attachment to his country and the success of her arms. In accordance with this disinterested enthusiasm, throughout the war, Colonel Talbot was equally ready to take the field or hazard the dangers of a naval conflict. On land or water he commanded with the same efficient authority, planned with the same valorous daring, and fought with the same intrepidity.

A letter addressed him, about this period,

by Lafayette, is an interesting testimony to the justice of this view of his character :

BRISTOL, Sept. 8, 1778.

SIR,—The reputation you have already acquired by your zeal and skill in the artificial way, leads me to communicate to you a plan whereby I think some success would be obtained. Heavy and strong scows, upon each of which a twenty-four pounder might be fixed, and then sent on a calm night to attack an English frigate that lies at the north end of the island; such a direction could be taken as to avoid a broadside from her before many well-aimed shots had annoyed her exceedingly. At the same time, while she was busy on the defensive, four or five boats filled with bombs and combustibles could be sent to the other side to ignite her. If you believe, sir, such a scheme would succeed, I shall be obliged to you if you will come immediately from Providence with such artificial provisions as will enable

us to try the experiment without loss of time. You might also bring down three, four, or more, large scows or ferry-boats adapted to carrying guns. The affair must be kept very secret. With the greatest and most sincere esteem,

I have the honor to be, dear sir,

Your most obedient servant,

THE MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE.

To Major Talbot.

A seaman in early youth, he entered the army in manhood ; and accordingly, though his exploit with the fire-ship was a maritime service, he was, as we have seen, promoted to a major's rank for that action ; and made a lieutenant-colonel for his bold capture of the Pigot. The phraseology, dates, and even the paper and chirography of these commissions might serve as historic landmarks. The first is entirely written in a stiff hand on a half-sheet of paper, and sets forth, under date of June 28th, 1775, that

“the General Assembly of our English Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England in America” have raised a Company and appointed Silas Talbot, gentleman, Captain thereof, “for the preservation of the rights and liberties of his Majesty’s loyal and faithful subjects in this colony of America.” It is signed by the colonial secretary, Henry Ward. Another, dated the 1st of July of the same year, is of the ordinary printed form issued by Congress, and signed by John Hancock, its president, authorizing Mr. Talbot to act as Captain of a company in the Fourteenth regiment, commanded by Col. Hitchcock. Another, of the 14th of Nov., 1778, appoints him lieutenant-colonel in “the army of the United States, raised for the defence of American liberty;” while one under date of April 14th, 1780, signed by both National and State authorities, gives him full powers as “commander of the sloop Argo.” His commission as Captain in the Navy, under its new organization, is

signed by John Adams, and dated on the 25th of June, 1796; and that instructing him "to visit and occasionally reside in any ports of the West Indies, as agent of the United States, "under the act of Congress for the relief and protection of American seamen," is engrossed on parchment in ample form, and signed by Washington.

If honor thus followed him in the ranks of the land forces, glory spread her harvest for him on the wild element familiar to his boyhood. The year after his famous encounter with the galley at the head of Seconset river, he was transferred to the navy. It was the purpose and the earnest desire of Congress to give him a government vessel worthy of his reputation and a fit agent for his prowess. So restricted was our marine, and so drained the treasury by the current expenses of the war, that this auspicious intention could not be realized; and for awhile the gallant major was obliged to content himself with the anomalous re-

ward of promotion in the army for skill and courage exhibited on the water, until, in 1779, he became a captain in the navy, without a national vessel to command.

PHILADELPHIA, 18th Sept., 1779.

SIR,—The bravery and spirit of enterprise you have on frequent occasions displayed in the service of your country, justly entitle you to the honor done you by the inclosed Act of Congress of the 17th inst. I am persuaded you will consider it as an additional motive to continue those exertions, from which you have derived reputation, and your country received benefit.

With great esteem, I am, Sir, your most obedient and humble servant.

JOHN JAY,
President.

Lieut. Col. Talbot.

“*September 17th, 1779.* Resolved, that, in consideration of the distinguished merit

of Lieutenant Col. Talbot, a commission of Captain in the Navy of the United States be given him, but that his pay and rations as Lieutenant Colonel cease while actually employed in the Navy; and that the marine committee be directed to provide a proper vessel for him as soon as possible."

Soon, however, the critical state of affairs induced Congress to issue specific orders, by which Captain Talbot was directed to arm a naval force sufficient to protect the coast then harassed by the British from Long Island to Nantucket, so that the supplies of the American army, under General Gates, were cut off. It therefore became the duty of the newly-appointed Captain, to avail himself of the best resources at hand. He was not only baffled in this endeavor by the poverty of Congress, but by the scarcity of vessels. He, however, armed at Providence his former prize, the *Pigot*, and a sloop called the *Argo*. Of the latter, unworthy as she was of the distinction, and

ill-adapted to the objects for which she was destined, he cheerfully took command. Humble as this merchant sloop would now appear in the eyes of a naval officer, under the skilful and brave guidance of a genuine patriot and heroic man, she soon became renowned. Her very inferiority made her triumphs more signal; and her career added to the many immortal proofs, yielded by that unequal war, that not in the material agencies, but in the ruling spirit of a nation, exist the most reliable sources of her glory. The *Argo* was built in New-York, and belonged to a mercantile house there. She was of only one hundred tons burthen, had a wide stern, a high bulk-head, and no wheel; she was steered by means of a long tiller. The only part of her that possessed the least grace was the model of her lower frame. Her aspect was clumsy, and greatly resembled that of an old-fashioned Albany sloop. At first she carried ten, and afterwards twelve guns, two of which were

mounted in the cabin. Thus narrowly provided, with a crew of sixty, Captain Talbot sailed from Providence, under orders from General Gates, in May, 1779. Among his men were very few seamen; many of them, indeed, had never heard cannon except when fired as distant salutes. Their Captain, however, had availed himself of an extensive and intimate acquaintance with the people of his native State and its vicinity, to select men of character, active habits, and patriotic integrity. He knew, from his own consciousness, that the enlistment of the heart was the best inspiration to deeds of valor; that a clear resolve was more efficient than a knowledge of tactics, and that true fidelity would soon nurse instinctive bravery into systematic power. On the appearance of the *Argo*, many of the British cruisers ran into Newport harbor; but a series of chases and skirmishes ensued, which enabled Captain Talbot to drill his men, manœuvre his vessel, and

establish that alacrity of obedience, unity of purpose, and thorough discipline, which afterwards gave such efficiency to his little craft. After clearing from her annoying visitors the coast of Rhode Island, in accordance with his orders, Captain Talbot extended his cruise ; and soon captured the *Lively*, of twelve guns, and two letter-of-marque brigs from the West Indies, bound to New York, which he carried to Boston. At this period success like this had a more than apparent significance. The prizes were acquisitions greatly needed ; the fears that prevailed along the coast, on account of the British incursions, were much allayed, and the confidence of his men both in him and themselves, essentially deepened. The arrival of the *Argo* was therefore gratefully welcomed, and her departure eagerly watched, sometimes with tearful, but often with hopeful and exultant eyes.

One fervent desire, however, animated every patriotic spectator, whenever she

hoisted sail at a Rhode Island port, and her well-known form was seen to hover in the distance and approach the coast, or gallantly depart seaward. Of all the maritime enemies of the State, celebrated as she was for loyalty to freedom, one infested her shores peculiarly obnoxious to the people. This was a Tory privateer of fourteen guns, called the King George. She was commanded by Captain Hazard, and manned with a crew of eighty. From his familiarity with the region and people, this detested individual had succeeded in inflicting severe trials upon his countrymen and neighbors. Many of his captures were made under circumstances of great aggravation; and the fact of his vessel being employed so constantly against former intimate associates and friends, and of his being a native of the State against whose liberties and prosperity he was arrayed, naturally excited towards him the most bitter indignation. The inhabitants of Providence, Stonington, and

New London, ardently hoped that the *Argo* would encounter the *King George*. She seemed to be her legitimate adversary, and Captain Talbot and his men, acquainted as they were with the plunder of townsmen committed by this traitorous adventurer, no less earnestly anticipated being the instruments of his punishment. For a long period, however, their hopes were unrealized; either from the accidental distance which separated their courses, or because the tory captain, fearing to encounter his justly incensed countrymen, kept out of the way, they did not seem destined to meet. But fortune, ever so favorable to brave aspiration, at length smiled upon the republican flag. One fine clear day, about the hour of noon, when the sea was partially smooth, Captain Talbot, who was cruising about forty leagues from Long Island, descried the *King George*. His crew needed no appeal to concentrate their energies upon this execrated foe. The *Argo* bore down upon her

like an eagle on its prey ; and no sooner had one well-directed broadside made her reel to the shock of battle, than the eager crew sprang impetuously on her decks, and she instantly surrendered. It was the work of a moment, and, as in a former memorable instance, Captain Talbot gained possession of his long-sought prize without the loss of a man on either side. It is impossible not to recognize, in both cases, the influence of moral energy. The stern purpose of the leader and his devoted followers was rendered intense by the consciousness of the wrongs they avenged, of the nobleness of their motives, and the justice of their cause. They accordingly acted with a zealous unanimity that insured a triumph. They smote their enemy with one simultaneous onset, one united cry of defiance, and, as it were, with one crushing blow. It is far more easy to imagine than to describe the exultation that welcomed the victors when they carried the King George into the harbor of New Lon-

don ; the entire range of the northern seaboard cordially participated in this feeling, and the *Argo's* fame was now established by the activity and success of her arms. As yet, however, she had captured five vessels without any thing that might be called a battle. But this experience had given a rare discipline and efficiency to her crew ; and had demonstrated that superior valor and skill enables a small vessel to cope with one of much greater size and muniment, less ably and courageously managed. Ere long an opportunity was afforded to test by experiment the truth of this conviction. Early in August, a sail was discovered from the mast-head of the *Argo*. It proved to be a large armed ship. They approached each other, hailed, and a desperate fight immediately began. During four hours and a half the battle raged fiercely, and during this time the two vessels were within pistol shot of each other. Captain Talbot's speaking trumpet was pierced in two places, the

skirts of his coat shot off, and nearly every man on the quarter-deck killed or wounded. Still neither vessel gave indications of a wish to bring the exterminating contest to an end. With unflinching perseverance each continued the deadly fray, until, at length, the ship's mainmast fell and she surrendered. At the same instant an alarm was given that the *Argo* was sinking; her commander, undismayed, ordered her hull to be plugged, and, by this means, she was kept afloat.

His new and hardly won acquisition proved to be the ship *Dragon*. Upon the news of this victory, that seemed to confirm the naval aptitudes of Captain Talbot, Congress ordered that his pay as Colonel in the army should cease, and that an appropriate national vessel should be placed under his command—a thing, as we have already seen, more easily said than done. The next instance of daring recorded of him is his having chased, by mistake, a sixty-

four British man-of-war, several miles. He did not discover his error until her broadside, with its terrible array, was suddenly presented to his view, as she rounded towards the now apparently doomed Argo. Nothing daunted by this unlooked-for peril, Captain Talbot ordered the sweeps to be manned. It was almost a perfect calm, and his light craft was thus enabled to gain upon her bulky antagonist, and, though her hull was repeatedly pierced, she at last escaped, as it were, by a miracle; and carried home one of the shot that lodged on her deck, and weighed thirty-two pounds, as a trophy of the imminent risk she thus survived. That he continued actively employed with the Argo, through the autumn, is evident from the annexed letter.

BRISTOL, 21st October, 1779,
4 o'clock, P. M.

Sir,—Upon the receipt of this letter, you will proceed with the Argo, the galley and

the Ordnance sloop, under your command, to Norwich neck;—as the regiment are wanted at Bristol, I have ordered them to proceed directly thither. You will do well to advise them to keep the eastern shore. Upon your arrival at Norwich neck, you will receive my further orders.

I am, Sir,

Your humble servant,

HORATIO GATES.

To Lt. Col. Silas Talbot, or officer commanding the vessels at Pawtucket.

The fame of the *Argo* had now reached her owners in New-York, and they reclaimed her. The services rendered by Captain Talbot while in command of her, to the Federal army of the Eastern States by prize-money, were formally acknowledged by General Gates, according to whose certificate, three hundred prisoners and five valuable merchantmen were the fruit of her brief career. By this means essential

relief was afforded the troops. Of the six British privateers taken by the *Argo*, the smallest carried twelve guns. Captain Talbot's reputation as a naval hero, was thus firmly established and warmly recognized; the fame of his achievements was greatly enhanced by the apparent inadequacy of the means employed, and the great immediate importance of the services he rendered, both as a means of physical relief and moral encouragement to the army and the people of his native State. It was a time of singular privation and great vicissitude to the adherents of the national cause on land; and the occasional advantages gained, along the coast, by our spirited marine, were the more auspicious and cheering to the hearts of the people.

The following is the certificate of General Gates before alluded to:—

“In the spring of the year 1779, when I had the honor of commanding a part of the Federal forces of the United States of

America, in the Eastern Department, a great number of small British cruisers infested our coast. They were so closely stationed from Long Island to Nantucket, that our trade and supplies were totally interrupted, and the forces under my command greatly distressed by the enemy's captures, whereupon Congress directed me to arm vessels for the protection of our coast. To that effect, I armed a large galley and a sloop named the *Argo*, mounting twelve six-pounders, to the command of which I appointed Silas Talbot, Esquire, of the State of Rhode Island. That intrepid and enterprising officer was eminently useful, and greatly assisted in driving the enemy from our coast, and relieving our wants, by opening a safer passage to our supplies by water. In the course of his first cruise, he took six British privateers, the smallest of which mounted twelve guns; and our troops were partly subsisted by the prizes he sent us. On the first of August of the same year, the French fleet being ex-

pected on our coast, I ordered him to cruise in quest of it, to deliver some dispatches to its admiral; and I gave Capt. Talbot a discretionary power to make prizes of all British vessels he might think proper to attack. In that cruise, he captured five valuable merchantmen bound to New-York, and chiefly loaded with provisions. The United States having received one-half of the captures, were greatly benefited by his success, which, besides the pecuniary advantages it procured them, and the immediate relief it gave our troops, put upwards of three hundred British prisoners into our hands. In testimony whereof, I deliver this certificate to Captain Silas Talbot. Given under my hand at Philadelphia, this seventeenth day of July, in the year 1783.

HORATIO GATES,
Maj. Gen.

CHAPTER V.

THERE are two great phases of heroic life very unequally exhibited even by courageous men—action and endurance, achievement and fortitude, the impassioned energy of a Murat and the unswerving confidence of a Cæsar. Hitherto the public life of Captain Talbot had been one of absorbing excitement. Indeed, we can imagine few situations better adapted to keep alive the spirit of daring and the zest of adventure, than that of the commander of a successful and well-manned cruiser in time of war, especially when the solemn interest of the question at issue, and the desperate character of the struggle, naturally enlist the most

ardent personal feelings, as was the case in the war for American Independence. A series of triumphs had tested the active bravery of the *Argo's* chief and the disciplined valor of her crew ; and now a different species of courage was to be tried, a new order of heroism developed. To fight valiantly for his country is the patriot's instinct ; to suffer in her behalf demands a martyr's patience. Deprived of his fortunate and now famous craft, and informed by a letter from the committee of Congress on naval affairs, that " the government had every desire to give him a respectable command, but absolutely wanted the means to do it ;" Captain Talbot accepted a private ship, called the *George Washington*, thus again yielding personal gratification to the earnest desire of being useful to the cause for which he had so long and faithfully contended. The sacrifice, however, was not destined to result as brilliantly as on the former occasions. He had captured but a single prize with his

new vessel, when, at daybreak one morning, he found himself in the midst of a large fleet of English men-of-war, two of which instantly gave him chase. A gale soon arose, and one of his pursuers, a seventy-four, dropped astern; the other, the *Culloiden*, continued to follow, and before night captured her diminutive enemy. Captain Talbot, worn out with the solicitude and exertions of this bitter day, was at first carried on board the *Robuste*, and then transferred to a tender, whose commander—a Scotch lord—put his gallant captive into the hold. The only excuse for this dastardly behavior is to be found in the craven fears of his lordship. By a remarkable coincidence, the pilot he employed was the same formerly on board the *Pigot*, and this man so frightened his superior with the story of his prisoner's reckless daring, that he—notwithstanding a written remonstrance which Captain Talbot forwarded to the British Admiral—was kept thus confined below,

until they reached New-York ; and the arm-chest was removed to the cabin.

It is proverbial that cowardice and tyranny are joint attributes of character, and perhaps for this reason, during the revolution, the American prisoners were almost invariably consigned to brutal officers. No brave man would, indeed, covet an occupation so passive and degrading as that of a military jailer ; and the gross inhumanity on the part of those to whom this revolting office was assigned by the English, can only be explained by the vulgar despotism natural to their characters. For many years after the termination of the war, a melancholy token of this barbarous tyranny remained on the shores of Long Island, near where the infamous Jersey prison-ship was moored. When the tide ebbed, the bones of those who had perished on board, amid the horrors of famine, contagion, and darkness, were exposed to view. Freneau accounts for the circumstance in a pathetic line of his

verses commemorative of those poor sufferers, who were buried by their dying comrades — “By feeble hands their shallow graves were made.” Although now decently interred, with a monument erected over them, near the site of their living sepulchre, the memory of that vile outrage upon civilization is too deeply engraven by the pen of the annalist on the national heart, ever to be forgotten. To the Jersey prisonship Captain Talbot was now conveyed. Let us realize, in fancy, the change from victory to captivity, from the free winds and broad expanse of the sea, to the dark hold of that receptacle of woe, amid half-naked wretches, dying of thirst; no bench or berth upon which to rest; the air loathsome, the water corrupted, every sense tortured, and every function deranged. The ravings of the delirious, the moans of the famishing, expostulations, prayers, and horrid oaths, resounded on all sides. When allowed, as a necessary means of prolonging

existence, to ascend to the deck, through the open port-holes, the captives turned their fevered eyes to the umbrageous hills of the opposite shore, and beheld signs of plenty and comfort around, while their frames were poisoned with unwholesome food, and their tongues parched for a draught of pure water. To the noble spirit, even these occasional escapes from the contagious atmosphere of the hold, were embittered by the brutality of the keepers—a “base-born Hessian,” or “servile Scot,” who, with taunts, blows, and even kicks, vented their cowardly rage upon the helpless victims.

From the prison-ship Captain Talbot was removed to the jail in New-York, a scene of misery on the one side, and despotic cruelty on the other, scarcely less renowned in local tradition. Here, under the infamous Cunningham, he endured three weeks of galling captivity. Few buildings in this country possessed a more tragic and histo-

rical interest than the "Old Sugar House," as it was called, to which Captain Talbot was now transferred. It is but a few years since this edifice was removed, to give place to the range of stores which now occupy its site in Liberty-street. It was a gloomy stone building, five stories in height, each divided into two apartments, with low ceilings and windows that admitted insufficient light. Indeed its aspect was remarkably like a prison, to which it was converted in 1776 by Lord Howe. Here the American captives were incarcerated; and the details of privation, disease and mortality there experienced, are only equalled by those inflicted on board of the enemy's ships. A New-York gentleman, fond of revolutionary memorials, yet keeps as a precious relic the window-shutter which his unfortunate countrymen were accustomed daily to unhinge, and use as a checker-board to while away the tedious hours of durance; and when the old walls were taken down, countless

initials and dates were found cut with nails and penknives upon the bricks and stones. Around this dark abode of misery the British and Hessian patrols moved constantly. Here fever, in its worst type, raged; the dead-cart bore thence its nightly burdens; and the emaciated invalids approached the windows by turns, six at a time, to inhale a breath of fresh air.

In November, 1780, on a cold morning and in the midst of a hail storm, Captain Talbot was marched with seventy-one other prisoners, including officers of the first grade and seamen of the lowest order, from this receptacle of misery to the water's edge, and put on board the *Yarmouth*. Notwithstanding the extreme severity of the weather, they were kept huddled together on the poop-deck, without the slightest refreshment until night; when they were driven into the hold, already nearly filled with casks of provisions, upon which loose planks were laid, the intervening space not allowing an

upright posture. No light or air entered but what found their way through a scuttle only large enough to admit one prisoner at a time. Obligated to sit, kneel or crawl in this dismal abode, and deprived of the adequate means of respiration, they soon renewed the worst experience of the prisonship. Before morning there rose among them a desperate cry for water: a bottle was lowered, and such was the fierce struggle that ensued among the bewildered wretches, that scarcely one moistened his lips; and this miserable scene was again and again enacted. The air, at length, became so vitiated that a contagious fever broke out among the prisoners, and soon communicated to the sailors. Fear gained for the victims what pity had failed to yield. They were drawn up in squads, and placed in hammocks swung over the hog-pens. By this process, continued through a winter voyage of seven weeks, these unfortunate men were alternately exposed to a putrid

and suffocating heat and intense cold, so that when landed and sent to the hospital, their appearance was frightful. The maltreatment now resorted to, under the name of a curative discipline, soon yet more reduced their number. The elasticity of a naturally vigorous constitution, and the strength of an indomitable will, enabled Captain Talbot to survive all these trials; and he was no sooner convalescent and removed to the guard-ship, and thence to Dartmoor prison, than he made a bold attempt to recover his liberty; discovered in the act, he was confined for forty days on half-allowance, in a dungeon; three times he thus incurred the same penalty for similar and equally unsuccessful experiments. This characteristic hardihood indicates a spirit unbroken, and a firmness of purpose unsubdued by months of the most exhausting physical deprivation and baffled moral energy. At length the hour of his release, so long sighed for, and so bravely

sought, arrived ; but it found him destitute in a foreign land. In reply to an application for pecuniary assistance in the straits to which he was reduced, he received the following letter from John Jay, our Minister at the Court of Spain :

MADRID, 14 July, 1781.

SIR,—Although I have not had the pleasure of your acquaintance, I am not a stranger to your merit.

On receiving your favor of the 11th ult., I sent a copy of it to his excellency Dr. Franklin, and warmly recommended your case to his attention. I am persuaded he will do all in his power for your relief, and that the distinguished manner in which you have served your country will always be considered as giving you a title to her care and protection.

Not being authorized by Congress to provide for American prisoners *in England*, I could not justify undertaking it ; and there-

fore referred your application to Dr. Franklin, within whose department that business appears to me to fall.

I shall always be ready, as an individual, to contribute to the relief of my distressed countrymen, and should now give you proofs of it, but as your case and that of your fellow-prisoners ought to be, and probably are, provided for by the public, I think assistance should there be asked and denied, before it becomes the duty of private benevolence to supply public omissions.

If the application to Dr. Franklin should be fruitless, I shall then consider myself bound, as a good American, to contribute towards the relief of a fellow-citizen, who has nobly fought in the cause of our country; and I shall, in that case, desire Mr. Williams at Nantes, who forwarded your letter to me, to advance you fifty dollars on my private account, which sum you will repay to me whenever you may be in circumstances to do it; for should misfortunes

delay or prevent your being in that situation, it would be more agreeable to me to advance you a further sum, than to demand the repayment of this. I am, sir, with real esteem,

Your most ob't and very humble servant,

JOHN JAY.

Capt. Silas Talbot,

Late of the Washington ship of war.

He was exchanged for a British officer in France, and landed at Cherbourg in December, 1781, after a captivity of fifteen months, perhaps unequalled in the history of the Revolution for continuous and unmitigated suffering. At Paris, Captain Talbot obtained what pecuniary aid he required, from Dr. Franklin, and then hastened to Nantes, where he met a large number of enfranchised American prisoners. He immediately engaged passage for home in a brig about to sail; but, fifteen days only after leaving port, she was captured by the

Jupiter, a British privateer of thirty-two guns. Her captain, however, whose name was Craig, appears to have exceeded in genuine humanity the cruel tyranny of his prisoner's former captors. He not only treated him with all possible kindness and consideration, but transferred him to an English brig they encountered, on her way from Lisbon to New York.

It was early in the spring of 1782 that a wayfarer might have been seen on the road between Stony Brook—since well known to New Yorkers as the home of the rustic painter Mount—and the beautifully located town of Huntington, on Long Island. Although an isolated pedestrian, he moved onward with obvious alacrity, looked around upon the somewhat rugged landscape with complacency, and his erect and thoughtful air suggested that he was, at all events, a voluntary pilgrim. It requires no great effort of imagination to picture the reveries that beguiled his solitary march. Doubtless

memory and hope blended their hues, and softened the rude outline of suffering traced by the deep furrow of experience ; doubtless he mused of a happy boyhood, so calmly passed in a rural homestead—of an active youth, during which he learned how to grapple with the elements both of nature and life,—and of a manhood earnestly devoted to his country's freedom, crowned with many thrilling triumphs, and sweetened by the amenities of honored citizenship and domestic affections. And then came a dreary interlude of misfortune ; the reminiscence, too fresh not to rankle still in his manly bosom, of captivity on sea and shore, embittered by disease, privation and insult. And now he once again stands on his native soil—a freeman, with the proud consciousness of having been true to himself and the noble cause he had espoused ; and proved by endurance as well as valor his claim to the title of patriot. He was slowly approaching the home of his childhood and the

bosom of his family ; no longer an exile or a prisoner, the traces of his recent stern experience, badges of honor as they were, already began to melt in the warmth of genial anticipations and exultant purpose. On the arrival of the brig that so opportunely crossed his ocean path, at New York, Captain Talbot obtained passage on board a wood-boat then starting for Stony Brook, and thence walked to a public house fifteen miles distant, known to travellers in that then thinly-populated district, as Munroe's. Here he tarried a week to recruit his exhausted strength, and obtain needful information ; crossed the Sound at night, and landed at Fairfield in Connecticut. He then proceeded by water to New London, and thence overland to Providence, R. I., where he arrived in safety after an eventful absence of nearly two years.

The conflicting rights and duties incident to the versatile employment of official talent and bravery in the war of the Revolution,

is one of its more striking peculiarities. In attempting to settle his claims with the government, Captain Talbot experienced the usual difficulty. The letter addressed him on this occasion, by the Commander-in-chief, is too characteristic to be omitted :

HEAD-QUARTERS, 13th August, 1782.

SIR,—Your letter of the 8th ult. only reached me a few days ago. You may very well suppose that it is impossible for me, amidst the great variety of business which comes before me, to remember with any tolerable degree of accuracy, what passed only verbally so long ago as the times to which you refer. It is more than probable that I did, upon your expressing a wish to be employed in the marine if you could not in the land service, signify my approbation so far as it depended upon me. But I am confident I could never have given you that liberty, positively, because I had ever made it a rule to refer the applications of those

officers in the land service, who wanted to take a voyage on account of their health, to Congress,—not looking upon myself authorized to grant a permission to any officer under my command, to go without the limits of the United States. Indeed your proceeding to Philadelphia, after you saw me at Morristown, in February, 1780, and then making application for employ in the marine, to the only persons who could with propriety grant it, seems to me a proof of what I have above mentioned, that you had my approbation conditionally only.

I know not what difficulties you find in obtaining your pay up to the time of your discharge from the service, but I do suppose they arise from your having taken the command of the private ship of war, the *Washington*. If such an objection is made, I can give no certificate that will invalidate it. It would probably operate against you, because it must set forth that you had only a conditional license from me for taking such a

step, and it would then be incumbent on you to produce the authority by which you took such command.

If you found your claims to this indulgence upon your merits and services, they are too well known and recorded, to need any recommendation from me.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

G. WASHINGTON.

Colonel Talbot.

CHAPTER VI.

It is highly probable that the enterprise of Captain Talbot, like that of so many New Englanders, would have found scope in commerce, after the war, had not circumstances occurred which gave rise to an entire change in his plans. The high consideration he enjoyed, and the eminent success which, as a young man, he had already realized, gave birth to the usual envy and misrepresentation that attend prosperity and merit. One of his prizes had been lawlessly taken by a Philadelphia privateer, carried into the Delaware, and claimed as an original capture. Some disaffected individuals, at Providence, pretended to doubt the facts of the case, and to believe that

Captain Talbot had possessed himself in some manner of the fruits of this enterprise ; at their instigation, a prosecution was commenced against him in behalf of a portion of the prize-crew. The gross injustice of the suspicion is not only evident from the high and perfectly well-known integrity of the individual, against whom only local jealousy could have even imagined such a charge,—but also from the fact that, at this very time, Captain Talbot was seeking legal remuneration from the privateer, in the admiralty court of Philadelphia. To this city he now indignantly repaired, to avoid a prosecution at home, and carry on his own suit there ; and although he numbered ardent and loyal friends among his townsmen, the narrow spirit of which he had been made the innocent victim, induced a resolution to change his place of abode. The previous loss of his wife doubtless increased his desire to remove ; and accordingly, having gained his cause and received ample

damages, paid off the malcontents in Providence, thus triumphantly refuting their accusations, he sold his property there, and with a grand-daughter of Governor Mifflin, Miss Morris, of Philadelphia, then contracted a second marriage; and, soon after, established himself in the western part of the State of New York, where, with his usual energy, he was soon quite absorbed in agricultural pursuits. He purchased the forfeited estate of Sir William Johnson, in the township which bears his name, about forty-six miles north-west of Albany, and the capital of Fulton county. This district he soon after represented in Congress. His feelings and manner of life, at this period, may be inferred from a letter which he addressed to his friend Theodore Foster, of Rhode Island, in reply to an application for some details of his career, to be embodied in a proposed history of the war. The original is among the collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society. This letter, the

narrative portion of which I omit, its essential points having been already given, is dated at Johnstown, May 26th, 1788; he says:—"I am settled on a good farm, and accompanied by an affectionate wife and daughter, and my young son. I am exceedingly fond of a country life; in fact, no one can be more domestic than myself. The only difficulty is that I cannot refrain from working so hard, as to render my retirement slavish. When I am borne down by hard labor, I often resolve not to work so hard again, but it is all to no purpose; there is such a demand for service to put the farm in good repair. I had letters from my two oldest sons two days since, dated in December last. They were to sail very soon for St. Domingo, where they are to be stationed for awhile. They write me, they are much pleased with their situation. I must now apologize for not being more accurate, as I had much company last night, and it was near one before they retired. This moment

my swallows begin to chirp. I shall close by saying that no officer in the service of the United States served his country more with all his heart, with all his mind and strength; and notwithstanding I am graced in the annals of Congress, in more special instances than any other officer in the American army, and my body remains loaded with lead received in action,—yet since the peace has taken place, not a single compliment has been paid me, nor any appointment under Congress received. How soon mortals forget their friends! Boys, triflers, and even tories have been received into favor, while the poor soldier is forgotten in his decrepid state. The French nation, ever mindful of those that render them service, have not neglected to compliment me. In the year 1787, the Marquis de Cartous, Minister of Marine, wrote to the Charge D’Affaires, that in consequence of my particular merit in the service of the United States, and in consequence of the particular

service rendered by me to his most Christian Majesty's fleet, my two oldest sons may have the honor and advantage of an education in the Marine of France, and as soon as they are transported to any harbor in France, they shall be employed as volunteers of the second class."

In 1794, when Congress enacted a law to enlarge the naval force, in order to check the Algerine depredations, among the six experienced officers selected to command the principal ships, was Captain Talbot. To his experience and zeal the country is, in no small degree, indebted for the excellent sailing qualities of more than one ship in our navy. He interested himself in the building of the frigate *Constitution*, with whose name the reputation of our present marine is so honorably identified. The admirable skill with which the *Constitution* was managed during the memorable three days' chase at the opening of the war of 1812, when she escaped the vigilant pursuit of the

British squadron ; her remarkable speed and easy management then exhibited, and her subsequent capture of the *Guerriere*, *Java*, and other prizes, as well as her efficiency in the Tripoli war, associated her name with the most brilliant episodes of our naval history, and more than justify the eloquent protest of a native bard, against the design of breaking her up when unfit for service ; —a design afterwards happily abandoned in obedience to public sentiment :

O better that her shattered hulk
Should sink beneath the wave ;
Her thunders shook the mighty deep,
And there should be her grave ;
Nail to the mast her holy flag,
Set every threadbare sail,
And give her to the God of storms,
The lightning and the gale !

The *Constitution* was launched at Boston on the 20th of September, 1797 ; and it was while engaged in overseeing her construction or that of the *Washington*, that Captain

Talbot received the following letter from Mr. Monroe, recognizing his judicious zeal for the naval interests of his country :

PARIS, Aug. 5th, 1796.

SIR,—I was favored some time since with yours, requesting me to procure for you an accurate statement of the length and proportion of the masts, spars, &c., of a ship, of a given size, in the French navy, according to the modern improved model of this country ;—which I undertook to do with pleasure, making application to the suitable authority for that purpose, the result of which was favorable to your views. As, however, this acquisition may be of general utility to our country, I have thought it my duty to make this communication through the department of war ; and with that view, the propriety whereof on my part, I presume you will readily perceive. Permit me further to assure you that, as I highly applaud the zeal which you show upon the present

occasion, as well to promote the interest of your country as to advance your own, I shall, at all times, when in my power, be equally happy to second your views. With great respect and esteem,

I am, Sir,

Your very humble servant,

JAS. MONROE.

After hostilities with France had commenced, one of the squadron in the West Indies was placed under his command; and at the close of the year 1799, we find his broad pennant flying, on board the Constitution, at the St. Domingo station. The officers at this time associated with him, bear eloquent testimony to his dignified yet attractive manners in society, to his thorough discipline and great popularity. The late Commodore Hull was his first lieutenant on this cruise, and the late Commodore Jones, renowned for his capture of the Frolic, before prostrated by the infirmities

of age, was wont to allude with enthusiasm to the noble qualities of his gallant commander. The most striking incident of this cruise is thus recorded by Cooper in his *Naval History* :

“ Captain Talbot had been cruising for some months on the St. Domingo station, and about this time he planned an expedition that was quite in character with his own personal enterprises during the war of the Revolution. It was ascertained that a valuable French letter-of-marque was lying in Port Platte, a small harbor on the Spanish side of the island of St. Domingo, and as she was a dangerous ship on account of her sailing, Commodore Talbot determined to attempt cutting her out. This vessel had been the British packet, the *Sandwich*, and she only waited to complete a cargo of coffee, to make a run for France. The legality of the enterprise was more than questionable, but the French picaroons received so much favor in the Spanish colonies, that

the American officers were less scrupulous than they might otherwise have been.

“As soon as it was determined to make the effort, Mr. Hull, the first lieutenant of the Constitution, went in at night, in one of the frigate’s cutters, and reconnoitred. Commodore Talbot was compelled to defer the expedition for want of a proper craft to avoid suspicion, when, fortunately, she was found by accident. An American sloop, called the Sally, had been employed on the coast of the island, under circumstances that rendered her liable to detention, and she was brought out of one of the small French ports, by a boat of the frigate. This sloop had recently left Port Platte, with an intention of soon returning there ; and she at once afforded all the facilities that could be desired.

“Commodore Talbot accordingly threw a party of seamen and marines into the Sally, and giving the command to Mr. Hull, that officer was directed to proceed on

the duty without further delay. The sloop was manned at sea, to escape detection, and she sailed at an hour that would enable her to reach Port Platte, about noon of the succeeding day. In the course of the night, while running down for her port, under easy sail, a shot suddenly flew over the Sally, and soon after an English frigate ranged up alongside. Mr. Hull hove to, and when the boarding lieutenant got on the sloop's deck, where he found so large a party of men, he was both startled and surprised. He was told the object of the expedition, however, and expressed his disappointment, as his own ship was only waiting to let the Sandwich complete her cargo, in order to cut her out also.

“The Sally's movements were so well-timed, as to permit her to arrive off the harbor's mouth at the proper hour. The Sandwich was lying with her broadside bearing on the approach, and there was a battery at no great distance to protect her.

As soon as near enough to be seen, Mr. Hull sent most of his people below, and getting an anchor ready over the stern, to bring the sloop up with, he stood directly for the enemy's bows. So admirably was every thing arranged, that no suspicion was excited, the Sally ran the Sandwich aboard, the Constitution's people went into her, and carried her without the loss of a man. At the same moment Captain Cormick landed with the marines, and spiked the guns.

“Notwithstanding a great commotion on shore, the Americans now went to work to secure their prize. The Sandwich was stripped to a girtline, and every thing was below. Before sunset she had royal yards across, her guns scaled, her new crew quartered, and soon after she weighed, beat out of the harbor, and joined the frigate. No enterprise of the sort was ever executed with greater steadiness or discipline. Mr. Hull gained great credit for the neatness with which he fulfilled his orders, and it

was not possible for an officer to have been better sustained; the absence of loss, in all cases of surprise, in which the assailed have the means of resistance, being one of the strongest proofs, not only of the gallantry and spirit, but of the coolness of the assailants.

“In the end, however, this capture, which was clearly illegal, cost the Constitution dear. Not only was the Sandwich given up, but all the prize money of the cruise went to pay damages.”

Besides a spirited correspondence with the English Admiral Parker, on this station, Captain Talbot interchanged frequent letters with the renowned black chieftain, Touissant L'Ouverture—the governor of St. Domingo, whose excellent qualities he seems to have thoroughly appreciated. The union in this man, born a slave, of gratitude and affection towards his former master, and loyalty to the cause of his brethren; his humane feelings, courage, and truthfulness,

as well as his prudence and intelligence, render him the most noble specimen of his race, and fill every generous heart with indignation at the base deception to which he at last fell a victim in a foreign prison. His letters to Commodore Talbot are highly characteristic in the trust they display, the grateful acknowledgment of his amity, and a certain quaint simplicity of expression, which is apparent even in the following literal translation of one of them, from the original French:

Liberty.

Equality.

Eighth year of the French Republic, one
and indivisible.

Toussaint L'Ouverture,
General in chief of the Army of St. Domingo,
to Silas Talbot, Esq., Commander of the
United States Frigate Constitution.

SIR,—I have the honor to acknowledge
the receipt of two letters, which you have

been so good as to write me, one under date of the first, and the other of the seventh of April inst. I shall, in the first instance, answer the first. What I have said of the services rendered to me by the frigate General Greene, during the siege of Jaquemel, is very sincere, and it is again agreeable to me to repeat it. I pay with thankfulness as well you, sir, as Captain Perry. Your good intentions for the prosperity of this colony and that of your government, loads me with satisfaction. I beg of you to continue them, and to be convinced of my zeal in keeping the harmony which so happily exists between the two nations. I should have been desirous that the Adjutant-general D'Hebecourt should not have come away so soon, and that he might have seen you, and conversed a moment with you; but having seen the Consul-general, Stevens, the object of his mission was in the same way fulfilled. I should have seen you with pleasure cruising with the Constitution on the

station of the south ; since you have reasons of such a nature as to prevent you coming that way, I depend upon your promise that you will consult the Consul-general, Stevens, in order that means may be taken to get succor to our army. On my part, I will communicate to him my plan on the subject, and point him out my want. Your prudence and loyalty will crown the undertaking.

You write me, sir, that you will render me all the service in your power. I feel all the value of your generous offers, on which I have founded all my hopes. At this moment the army of Jaquemel is in motion, and surely it is in want. I am going to write to Mr. Stevens, who no doubt will communicate to you my letter and what I want. I can but invite to continue your good offers.

I will pass over, sir, to your letter of the 7th of April. . You inform me, and I learn it with joy, that you have given orders to the ship Herald, of twenty guns, to join the

brig *Augusta* and the schooner *Experiment*. I am infinitely obliged for so much honorable proceeding from you, and I shall never forget it.

Lieutenant Russell may be assured, although I may not be present, he will obtain from the general and commandant what he may ask, either coasting pilots or any thing else. I have already given orders in consequence of it. You flatter me with the hope that you are going shortly to send the Boston frigate of thirty-two guns; may you soon be able to realize it: God grant, likewise, to favor my expectation. It remains, sir, to beg of you to recommend to the captains of vessels of your nation, that are going to cruise on the south side, to let pass freely the French vessels that have a passport signed by the Consul-general, Stevens, or by me; and that until we have taken such new measures with the President of the United States, on my part I have already given the most strict orders, that the

most perfect understanding and intelligence may exist amongst all the cruising vessels, both schooners and barges. Good harmony is necessary, and I flatter myself that our efforts shall be mutual in the maintenance of it. I am penetrated, sir, with the affection and esteem that your good and generous conduct has inspired me towards you, and beg you to believe me, with the utmost consideration,

Your very obd't servant,

TOUISSAINT L'OUVERTURE.

CHAPTER VII.

IN his retirement after the revolutionary war, we have seen that Commodore Talbot sensibly felt the comparative neglect which so quickly succeeded his renown. A similar experience has been the lot of many illustrious Americans ; and is often adduced as a new evidence of the proverbial ingratitude of republics. Indeed, it is only within a few years that any zeal has been manifested to render, at least, historical justice to the benefactors of our country. It is true that a pension of three or four hundred dollars per annum was awarded Captain Talbot by Congress, and that he is said to have received the gift of a sword from

the French government: but it was not so much empty honor as cordial recognition, and the opportunity still farther to devote his yet unimpaired energies to high public service, that he so earnestly and naturally desired. A new cause of displeasure was now added to this general ground of complaint, by a very distasteful proceeding on the part of the Secretary of the Navy, to which we must recur.

A question arose as to the comparative rank of Commodores Talbot and Truxton, in which the Secretary of the Navy gave precedence to the latter, much to the former's dissatisfaction. How readily he sacrificed personal views and interest to his country we have already seen; but his pride was no less intense than his patriotism, and while he cheerfully adapted himself to duty as an American officer, he was inflexible, on all occasions, in the maintenance of his rights as a man. It is not, therefore, surprising, that the injustice of the decision

referred to, should have confirmed his resolution to retire from a service to which his best years had been devoted, and enjoy the fairly-earned repose of honorable age. The following correspondence illustrates both the question at issue, and the spirit in which it was argued.

QUINCY, July 8, 1799.

SIR,—I have this moment received your favor of this day's date, by Mr. Tarbell, and had before received your notè.

I can give no answer to any of your propositions, nor determine any thing concerning officers or men, until I know who is to command the Constitution. Your refusal to accept the commission has ruined all my designs. It was altogether unexpected to me. I know not the facts at present, with precision enough to decide between your pretensions and those of Captain Truxton. If I must appoint Captain Little, I must ap-

point all his officers, or at least consult him which of them to take with him, and which to remove from the Constitution. If I should appoint Lever, I must do the same. I know of no other captains at hand. In short, I see no possibility of getting the Constitution to sea, unless you go in her, under a fortnight or three weeks, if so soon. If she must remain in harbor so long, it will be better to send the Boston to sea, and complete her crew out of the Constitution. But in this case I cannot appoint Little to the command of the Constitution. It will be impossible for me to arrange any thing without a personal conference with you. If you would accept the commission, altered so as to leave the question of rank undecided, to be determined hereafter by a council of officers, this shall be done. Assurances have been given you, as I understand, by Mr. Stoddart, that you should not be ordered to serve with Truxton, without

absolute necessity. These assurances I am willing to confirm.

I am, however, fully of opinion that I must see you before I can do any thing. If you cannot come here, I will meet you any where; but it will take time and trouble to concert time and place; so that I believe you had better come here, if you can, to-morrow morning, as early as possible, or next day, or leave it till Thursday.

I have this day forwarded to Captain Little his sailing orders, received only this morning from the Secretary of the Navy. If he is completely ready in all other respects, I am willing to fill up his complement for the Constitution. But the service on which the Constitution is ordered is at least as pressing, and perhaps more so, than the other. I have the honor to be with great esteem,

Your humble servant,

JOHN ADAMS.

Captain Talbot.

ON BOARD THE FRIGATE CONSTITUTION,
9th July, 1799.

SIR,—The foregoing sheets contain exact copies, as I believe, of my commission in the navy of the last war, an official notice of my appointment under the present form of government, the letter announcing the suspension of my pay as Captain, and some correspondence between the honorable the Secretary of the Navy and myself on that subject, in which I gave him to understand that neither my honor nor reputation would permit me to be commanded by Captain Truxton, because he was, in fact, a junior officer. I, at the same time, told him that I had no desire to give him, or the President, or any Captain in the Navy, the least uneasiness; and that he had my consent to strike my name from the list of appointments, if it should be found necessary or convenient. I must now observe to your Excellency, that, notwithstanding I have the command of so fine a ship as the Consti-

tion, I will freely relinquish my present station, and retire to private life. If there is a desire, from political or any other motives whatever, to place Captain Truxton over me, I shall be silent on the occasion; but, at the same time, I cannot sacrifice the little reputation I have in the world as an officer, by accepting a commission that would inevitably compel me to yield that grade or relative rank, which no officer can do, and preserve his honor in or out of service. I am free to grant that Captain Truxton has much merit, and trust I have some small share also; he has bravely engaged and captured an enemy's frigate of nearly his own force, and this was certainly a brilliant action, for which he justly deserves and has received great praise. I have done some things that were, perhaps, thought at the time equally clever, and if the rules of delicacy would allow a detail of them, they might be easily brought to view, and I

should glory in the comparison. I have the honor to be,

Your obedient servant,

SILAS TALBOT.

To the President of the United States.

The unpleasant feelings growing out of this question were increased on the reduction of the navy by Congress, in 1801, which, in his case, as in that of so many gallant men, alienated sympathy from a service before so endeared. Even those friendly to this proceeding, acknowledged that the President's task was most painful and delicate, in discharging unceremoniously so many able officers, and disposing, by sale, of the best means of our maritime defence. The actual expense of the treaty with France, it is asserted, would not have been exceeded by that attending the equipment and maintenance of the marine force, necessary to have obliged that nation to make the desired concessions. A false economy and

narrow views doubtless induced much of the opposition then engendered against the naval interests of the country. They should have been considered irrespective of political opinions, and with reference to the great laws of national welfare and honor. Commodore Talbot, who, through life, had cherished the most intelligent attachment to this branch of public service, not only resigned his own commission, but withdrew his sons from a career for which they had been admirably educated. He purchased lands for them in Kentucky; and one of the chief pleasures of his latter years was an annual visit to that growing State, to enjoy their society. The date of his own resignation is Sept. 23d, 1801. The close of his adventurous life was passed in the city of New York, where he built a commodious residence, and married, for his third wife, Mrs. Pintard, from whom, however, he was separated before his death.

In person, Commodore Talbot was tall and

graceful, in features determined, but attractive. His conversation was spirited and genial. A few of the "troops of friends" that enjoyed his intimacy, yet recall the mingled hardihood and fascination of his appearance; and their remembrance is confirmed by the portrait belonging to his descendants in Kentucky, and painted by Benjamin West, in liquidation of a debt incurred in the artist's days of privation; and, therefore, an interesting as well as an authentic memorial. His wheat-fields at Johnstown were celebrated for their richness and extent; and the same energy displayed in battle and agriculture, he seems to have carried into social life, which was the chief resource of his declining years.

The natural heroism of Commodore Talbot is sufficiently illustrated by his revolutionary career, while attached to the army and navy. His social character was distinguished by a remarkable candor, a high and quick sense of honor, and a rare union of

clear judgment with strong feeling. Although impulsive by temperament, his will was firm and consistent. With very restricted early advantages, he educated himself through the judicious culture and noble direction of the gifts he had received from nature, and the habit of improving every occasion that presented itself to enlarge his knowledge. He was an accomplished gentleman, with a dignity of manners that stamped him for a leader; and yet with a frank urbanity of spirit that endeared him as a companion. He was thirteen times wounded, and carried five bullets in his body. In private life, the elegant hospitality he exercised, the ardor of his personal attachments, the winning grace and self-respect of his manners, his acquaintance with life in all its phases, and a certain generous nobility of feeling, rendered him, in his prime, one of the best specimens of a self-made American officer the country has produced. He died in the city of New-

York, on the 30th of June, 1813, and was buried under Trinity Church. No monument has been erected to his memory ; but his gallant deeds are inscribed on the immortal record of the war of Independence ; and his name enrolled among the patriot-heroes of America.

THE END.

J. C. RIKER

has recently published a new Edition of

THE ITALIAN SKETCH BOOK,

BY H. T. TUCKERMAN.

Opinions of the Press.

TUCKERMAN'S ITALIAN SKETCH BOOK has been published in a third edition, revised and enlarged, by J. C. Riker, of this city. It is a pleasant book, giving the reminiscences of a two years' residence in the beautiful peninsula, which, to its other many ancient and modern titles to historical pre-eminence, has now added that of being the spot where the torch of liberty has been lately kindled, which, passed from hand to hand, is lighting up all Europe.—*N. Y. Evening Post.*

The ITALIAN SKETCH BOOK, by TUCKERMAN, of which a new and considerably enlarged edition has just been issued by Riker, at 129 Fulton street, has a timely interest and value which cannot fail to give it a very wide circulation. Apart from the interest which scholars and cultivated men must always feel in every thing relating to Italy, recent events in that part of Europe have greatly increased the public desire to become acquainted with the character of society, and of the civil, social, and political institutions in that country.

We commend the book to universal favor, as one certain richly to repay perusal.—*N. Y. Courier & Enquirer.*

This is a new edition of a beautiful and popular work, written with all the author's grace and richness of style and clearness of thought and description. Among the additions are an "Essay on Modern Italy," "The Canta-

frice," "A Reminiscence of Shelley," two or three translations, and a couple of humorous sketches, entitled "Kitty Mayo" and "Speculation." The interest, at present, in all which relates to Italy, will probably give an impetus to the success of the book, apart from its merits of composition and reflection. The author has resided in Italy, is familiar with her people and literature, and understands both the obstacles and the aids to her prosperity and progress. Too many of the books on the subject are flimsy and superficial, embodying the mere guesses and impertinences of hasty tourists, and in their dogmatic tone of judgment evincing the very "effrontery of incapacity." Mr. Tuckerman gives calm, well-considered opinions, based on positive knowledge. His work, in its present form, will tend to dissipate many erroneous impressions regarding the Italian character.—*Boston Courier*.

Mr. Tuckerman has attained a high reputation as an essayist, by his "Thoughts on the Poets," and "Artist Life;" and those who have been delighted with his vivid and graceful style in those works, will welcome the publication of a new edition of the Italian Sketch Book, which is one of his earliest and most popular efforts. We have here the fruits of a residence in Italy, given in carefully-finished sketches of art, scenery, and society, and which, without following the beaten track of a connected narrative, offer quite as much variety and interest to the general reader. The chapters devoted to recollections of distinguished persons are especially readable. The "Reminiscence of Shelley" gives one a better idea of the man as well as the poet, than any other description we have ever read, and his account of an interview with Silvio Pellico, cannot fail to enlist the strongest sympathies of those who have read his noble and touching narrative of suffering. Among the other sketches which have much interested us, are those on "Florence Revisited," "Rome," "Italian Journeying," and "American Sculptors." The accuracy and vividness of Mr. Tuckerman's word-paintings are best appreciated by those who have looked upon the scenes he describes, but their poetic beauty commends them equally to the perusal of all.—*N. Y. Tribune*





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