

No. XXVIII.

Scraps of Local History.

Winter Quarters at Niagara.

(Continued.)

By E. Cruikshank.

Among the letters brought in by this Indian messenger from the Mohawk was one addressed to Captain Butler, by General James Clinton, who had succeeded Gen. Schuyler in command of the continental forces at Albany. Replying to Butler's letter of the 12th November, left with the prisoners released at Cherry Valley, Clinton stated that the proposal for an exchange of prisoners had been referred to his brother, the Governor of New York, who had given his consent. He then proceeded to accuse Butler and other officers employed with the Indians of a lack of zeal in restraining them from committing outrages, and asserted that acts of cruelty had been perpetrated by the rangers when no Indians were present.

To these charges Walter Butler made a prompt and indignant reply.

"We deny any cruelties to have been committed at Wyoman either by whites or Indians; so far to the contrary, that not a man, woman or child was hurt after the capitulation, or a woman or child before it, or taken into captivity. Though should you call it *inhumanity*, the killing *men in arms in the field*, we in that case plead guilty. The inhabitants killed at Cherry Valley do not lay at my door, my conscience acquits me. If any are guilty (as accessories) it's yourselves; at least the conduct of some of your officers. First, Col. Hartley of your forces sent to the Indians, the enclosed being a copy of his letter, charging them with crimes they never committed, and threatening them and their villages with fire and sword, and no quarter. The burning one of their villages, then inhabited only by a few families—your friends—who imagined they might remain in peace and friendship with you, till assured a few hours before the arrival of your troops that they should not even receive quarter, took to the woods; and to complete the matter Colonel Denniston and his people appearing again in arms with Colonel Hartley after a solemn capitulation and engagement not to bear arms during the war, and Colonel Denniston not performing a promise to release a number of soldiers belonging to Colonel Butler's corps of rangers, then prisoners among you, were the reasons assigned by the Indians to me after the destruction of Cherry Valley for their not acting in the same manner as at Wyoman. They added that being charged by their enemies with what they never had done, and threatened by them, they had determined to convince you it was not fear which had prevented them from committing the one, and that they did not want spirit to put your threats against them in force against yourselves.

"The prisoners sent back by me or any now in our or the Indians' hands but must declare I did everything in my power to prevent the Indians killing the prisoners or taking women and children captive, or in anywise injuring them. Colonel Stacey and several other officers of yours, when exchanged, will acquit me; and must further declare that they have received every assistance before and since their arrival at this post that could be got to relieve their wants. I must however beg leave by-the-bye to observe that I experienced no humanity or even common justice during my imprisonment among you."

About the same time, Joseph Brant seized the opportunity to visit Quebec and make his grievances known to the Governor. Writing to Colonel Butler on the 8th of April, Haldimand said:

"Joseph Brant's good character and faithful disposition has induced me to engage him to return to Niagara with Captain Brehm, my aide-de-camp. I am persuaded that nothing on your part will be neglected to maintain the savages firm in our interest. I derived great pleasure in seeing Capt. Butler, who has given me a very satisfactory detail of his expedition last summer. The prospect you have of securing the liberty of your family is a sufficient motive for me to acquiesce in the exchange you propose, and I have written to Niagara for all the prisoners to be sent down to Montreal, where they will remain till exchanged."

On the 12th of April he added:

"I am confident no pain or trouble will be spared on your part to keep the different tribes in humour of acting for the service of the Crown, and that every argument will be made use of by you to convince them how severely they would feel the contrary behavior. I have ordered your son to join you without delay. His former good conduct gives me reason to expect he will exert himself much to the advantage of the service and to his own credit and honor, by harrassing the rebels and thwarting as much as possible their plans of operations."

Early in the spring the defences of Fort Erie were seriously damaged by a great storm. We have a report on this subject by Capt. R. Mathews, dated the 17th of March, 1779:

"The state of this place, owing to the late storm and flood—the wall upon which the logwork and picketing is erected on the side next the river, is almost entirely destroyed, there being four breaks made quite through it, one being 24 feet long, from within three feet of the salient angle of the east bastion towards the water port, another of twelve feet under the water port, and two smaller ones. There are several others but not through the wall, and other parts of the fort that remain standing are considerably shaken. In this season of the year nothing more can be done than to make up the breaches in the most expeditious and best manner possible to prevent the bastions from falling.

"In the summer it will be absolutely necessary to pull the whole down and rebuild it properly with stone and lime or (what I should think would answer better) with a very stout frame filled in with dry stone work. The situation is a flat solid rock, where a foundation for a wall cannot be sunk. Masonry, therefore, unless well executed and very solid, must always be subject to injury from a very violent surf which rolls in against it from the lake with strong westerly winds, which prevail most here and always occasion very high water. The place in other respects is much in need of repairs; the pickets are become very rotten and the barracks and storehouses must be new shingled the ensuing summer. I have wrote to stop the lime from Niagara as it will be attended with much less expense and perhaps more certainty from the precariousness of the passage. I have determined to burn some lime here. I am in the meantime cleaning the barracks and making other preparations for the work."

The end of March brought alarming news from Detroit. Hamilton, the Governor of that place, who had retaken Vincennes from the Americans on the 17th December, 1778, had been himself surprised and made prisoner on the 24th of February. The garrison of Detroit had been considerably weakened by the detachment Hamilton had taken with him and was then menaced by an attack by his triumphant assailants.

Referring to this unlooked for mishap, Butler said (April 2nd), I fear that Governor Hamilton's disaster may incline the Indians more than they have hitherto done to the artful messages which the rebels are continually sending among them. Col. Bolton has ordered fifty of the rangers under Capt. Caldwell to be ready to set out for Detroit the 5th inst."

Col. Bolton wrote the same day:—

"I have sent 50 men from the King's and the same number of the best men of the rangers to Detroit. If I had double the number in this garrison there is work for them all, as the fort is really in a ruinous state. I hope Lieut. Twiss (of the engineers) will be ordered up, and a strong reinforcement."

A week later he states that, "Thomas Hill, a person I employed twelve months ago to carry a message to Sir Wm. Howe and General Clinton, whom I concluded to have fallen into the enemy's hands, has returned with information that 15,000 men were expected at New York. Capt. Johnson was at Canadasaga when he arrived and read the letters and newspapers to the Indians and fully explained it to them. Johnson has been very serviceable. The Indians were dejected when he arrived, but it put them in the greatest spirits. He (Johnson) lives among them and is looked upon as one of themselves. Hill was sent here to see if the upper posts were still in our possession and the Indians willing to assist us, and has promised to be back by the 6th of May. Five thousand refugees had lately joined the army at New York. I have sent a party to take a prisoner at Fort Stanwix. The Indians have been very active about Fort Pitt. They fell in with a detachment of the enemy and killed sixteen and took thirteen