JOHN STARK,

BRIGADIER-GENERAL IN THE AMERICAN ARMY.

GENERAL STARK was a native of New-Hampshire, and was born in Londonderry, August 17th, 1728. From his early youth he had been accustomed to the alarm of war, having lived in that part of the country which was continually subject to the incursions of the savages. While a child, he was captured by them, and adopted as one of their own; but after a few years was restored.

Arrived at manhood, his manners were plain, honest, and severe; excellently calculated for the benefit of society in the private walks of life; and as a courageous and heroic soldier, he is entitled to a high rank among those who have been crowned with unfading laurels, and to whom a large share of glory is justly due. He was captain of a company of rangers in the provincial service during the French war, in 1755.

From the commencement of the difficulties with the mother country, until the closing scene of the revolution, our country found in

General Stark one of its most resolute, independent, and persevering defenders. The first call of his country found him ready. When the report of Lexington battle reached him, he was engaged at work in his saw-mill: fired with indignation and a martial spirit, he immediately seized his musket, and with a band of heroes proceeded to Cambridge. The morning after his arrival, he received a colonel's commission, and availing himself of his own popularity, and the enthusiasm of the day, in two hours he enlisted eight hundred men. On the memorable 17th of June, at Breed's Hill, Colonel Stark, at the head of his backwoodsmen of New-Hampshire, poured on the enemy that deadly fire, from a sure aim, which effected such remarkable destruction in their ranks, and compelled them twice to retreat. During the whole of this dreadful conflict, Colonel Stark evinced that consummate bravery and intrepid zeal, which entitle his name to perpetual remembrance.

His spirit pervaded his native state, and excited them to the most patriotic efforts. The British General Burgoyne, in one of his letters, observes, "That the Hampshire Grants, almost unknown in the last war, now abound in the

most active and most rebellious race on the continent, and hang like a gathering storm upon my left."

Distinct from his efforts in rallying the energies of his native state, he obtained great credit in the active operations of the field. At that gloomy period of the revolution, the retreat of Washington through New Jersey, in 1776, when the saviour of our country, apparently deserted of heaven and by his country, with the few gallant spirits who gathered the closer around him in that dark hour, precipitately fled before an imperious and victorious enemy—it was on this occasion that the persevering valour of Stark enrolled him among the firm and resolute defenders of their country; and, with them, entitles him to her unceasing gratitude.

But as he fearlessly shared with Washington the dark and gloomy night of defeat, so also he participated with him in the joy of a bright morning of victory and hope. In the successful enterprise against Trenton, Stark, then a colonel, acted a conspicuous part, and covered himself with glory. General Wilkinson, in his memoirs, says, "I must not withhold due praise from the dauntless Stark, who dealt death

wherever he found resistance, and broke down all opposition before him."

Soon after this affair, Colonel Stark, from some supposed injustice toward him on the part of Congress, quitted the continental service, and returned to New Hampshire.

"When he was urged by the government of New Hampshire to take the command of their militia, he refused, unless he should be at liberty to serve or not, under a continental officer, as he should judge proper. It was not a time for debate, and it was known that the militia would follow wherever Stark would lead. The assembly therefore invested him with a separate command, and gave him orders to 'repair to Charlestown, on Connecticut River; there to consult with a committee of the New Hampshire Grants respecting his future operations, and the supply of his men with provisions; to take the command of the militia, and march into the Grants; to act in conjunction with the troops of that new state, or any other of the states, or of the United States, or separately, as it should appear expedient to him, for the protection of the people and the annoyance of the enemy.'"

Agreeably to his orders, Stark proceeded, in

a few days, to Charlestown; his men very readily followed, and, as fast as they arrived, he sent them forward to join the troops of Vermont under Colonel Warner, who had aken his situation at Manchester. At that place he joined Warner with about eight hundred men from New Hampshire, and found another body of men from Vermont, who put themselves under his command; and he was at the head of fourteen hundred men. Most of them had been in the two former campaigns, and well officered; and were, in every respect, a body of very good troops. Schuyler repeatedly urged Stark to join the troops under his command, but he declined complying. He was led to this conduct not only by the reasons which have been mentioned, but by a difference of opinion as to the best method of opposing Burgoyne. Schuyler wished to collect all the American troops in the front, to prevent Burgoyne from marching on to Albany. Stark was of opinion that the surest way to check Burgoyne was to have a body of men on his rear, ready to fall upon him in that quarter, whenever a favourable opportunity should present. The New England militia had not formed a high opinion of Schuyler as

general; and Stark meant to keep himself in a situation in which he might embrace any favourable opportunity for action, either in conjunction with him, or otherwise; and with that view intended to hang on the rear of the British troops, and embrace the first opportunity which should present, to make an attack upon that quarter. But Stark assured Schuyler that he would join in any measure necessary to promote the public good, but wished to avoid any thing that was not consistent with his own honour; and if it was thought necessary, he would march to his camp. He wrote particularly, that he would lay aside all private resentment, when it appeared in opposition to the public good. But in the midst of these protestations he was watching for an opportunity to discover his courage and patriotism, by falling upon some part of Burgoyne's army.

While the American army was thus assuming a more respectable appearance, General Burgoyne was making very slow advances towards Albany. From the 28th of July to the 15th of August, the British army was continually employed in bringing forward batteaux, provisions, and ammuniton, from Fort George to the first navigable part of Hudson's River.

a distance of not more than eighteen miles. The labour was excessive; the Europeans were but little acquainted with the methods of performing it to advantage, and the effect was in no degree equivalent to the expense of labour and time. With all the efforts that Burgoyne could make, encumbered with his artillery and baggage, his labours were inadequate to the purpose of supplying the army with provisions for its daily consumption, and the establishment of the necessary magazines. And after his utmost exertions for fifteen days, there were not above four day's provisions in the store, nor above ten batteaux in Hudson's River.

In such circumstances, the British general found that it would be impossible to procure sufficient supplies of provisions by the way of Fort George, and determined to replenish his own magazines at the expense of those of the Americans. Having received information that a large quantity of stores were laid up at Bennington, and guarded only by the militia, he formed the design of surprising that place; and was made to believe that as soon as a detachment of the royal army should appear in that quarter, it would receive effectual assistance from a large body of loyalists, who only waited

for the appearance of a support, and would in that event come forward and aid the royal cause. Full of these expectations, he detached Colonel Baum, a German officer, with a select body of troops, to surprise the place. His force consisted of about five hundred regular troops, some Canadians, and more than one hundred Indians, with two light pieces of artillery. To facilitate their operations, and to be ready to take advantage of the success of the detachment, the royal army moved along the east bank of Hudson's River, and encamped nearly opposite to Saratoga; having, at the same time, thrown a bridge of rafts over the river, by which the army passed to that place. With a view to support Baum, if it should be found necessary, Lieutenant-Colonel Breyman's corps, consisting of the Brunswick grenadiers, light infantry, and chasseurs, were posted at Battenkill.

General Stark having received information that a party of Indians were at Cambridge, sent Lieutenant-Colonel Greg, on August the 13th, with a party of two hundred men, to stop their progress. Toward night he was informed by express that a large body of regulars was in the rear of the Indians, and advancing toward

Bennington. On this intelligence, Stark drew together his brigade, and the militia that were at hand, and sent on to Manchester, to Colonel Warner, to bring on his regiment; he sent expresses at the same time to the neighbouring militia, to join him with the utmost speed. On the morning of the 14th, he marched with his troops, and at the distance of seven miles he met Greg on the retreat, and the enemy within a mile of him. Stark drew up his troops in order of battle; but the enemy, coming in sight, halted upon a very advantageous piece of ground. Baum perceived the Americans were too strong to be attacked with his present force, and sent an express to Burgoyne with an account of his situation, and to have Breyman march immediately to support him. In the meantime small parties of the Americans kept up a skirmish with the enemy, killed and wounded thirty of them, with two of their Indian chiefs, without any loss to themselves. The ground the Americans had taken was unfavourable for a general action, and Stark retreated about a mile, and encamped. A council of war was held, and it was agreed to send two detachments upon the enemy's rear, while the rest of the troops should make

an attack upon their front. The next day the weather was rainy, and though it prevented a general action, there were frequent skirmishes in small parties, which proved favourable and encouraging to the Americans.

On August the 16th, in the morning, Stark was joined by Colonel Symonds and a body of militia from Berkshire, and proceeded to attack the enemy, agreeably to the plan which had been concerted. Colonel Baum in the meantime had entrenched on an advantageous piece of ground near St. Koick's mills, on a branch of Hoosic River; and rendered his post as strong as his circumstances and situation would admit. Colonel Nichols was detached with two hundred men to the rear of his left, Colonel Herrick with three hundred men to the rear of his right; both were to join, and then make the attack. Colonels Hubbard and Stickney, with two hundred men, were ordered on the right, and one hundred were advanced towards the front, to draw the attention of the enemy that way. About three o'clock in the afternoon the troops had taken their station, and were ready to commence the action. While Nichols and Herrick were bringing their troops together, the Indians were alarmed at the prospect, and

pushed off between the two corps; but received a fire as they were passing, by which three of them were killed and two wounded. Nichols then began the attack, and was followed by all the other divisions; those in the front immediately advanced, and in a few minutes the action became general. It lasted about two hours, and was like one continued peal of thunder. Baum made a brave defence; and the German dragoons, after they had expended their ammunition, led by their colonel, charged with their swords, but they were soon overpowered. Their works were carried on all sides, their two pieces of cannon were taken, Colonel Baum himself was mortally wounded and taken prisoner, and all his men, except a few who had escaped into the woods, were either killed or taken prisoners. Having completed the business by taking the whole party, the militia began to disperse and look out for plunder. But in a few minutes Stark received information that a large reinforcement was on their march, and within two miles of him. Fortunately at that moment Colonel Warner came up with his regiment from Manchester. This brave and experienced officer commanded a regiment of continental troops, which had

been raised in Vermont. Mortified that he had not been in the former engagement, he instantly led on his men against Breyman, and began the second engagement. Stark collected the militia as soon as possible, and pushed on to his assistance. The action became general, and the battle continued obstinate on both sides till sunset, when the Germans were forced to give way, and were pursued till dark. They left their two field-pieces behind, and a considerable number were made prisoners. They retreated in the best manner they could, improving the advantages of the evening and night, to which alone their escape was ascribed.

In these actions the Americans took four brass field-pieces, twelve brass drums, two hundred and fifty dragoon swords, four ammunition wagons, and about seven hundred prisoners, with their arms and accoutrements. Two hundred and seven men were found dead upon the spot, the numbers of wounded were unknown. The loss of the Americans was but small; thirty were slain, and about forty were wounded. Stark was not a little pleased at having so fair an opportunity to vindicate his own conduct. He had now shown that no neglect from Congress had made him disaffected

to the American cause, and that he had rendered a much more important service than he could have done by joining Schuyler, and remaining inactive in his camp. Congress embraced the opportunity to assign to him his rank; and though he had not given to them any account of his victory, or wrote to them at all upon the subject, on October the fourth they resolved, "That the thanks of Congress be presented to General Stark, of the New-Hampshire militia, and the officers and troops under his command, for their brave and successful attack upon, and signal victory over the enemy, in their lines at Bennington: and that Brigadier Stark be appointed a brigadier-general in the army of the United States." And never were thanks more deserved, or more wisely given to a military officer.

"In his official account of the affair, General Stark thus writes: 'It lasted two hours, *the hottest I ever saw in my life;* it represented one continued clap of thunder: however, the enemy were obliged to give way, and leave their field-pieces and all their baggage behind them: they were all environed within two breast-works with artillery; but our martial courage proved too strong for them. I then gave orders to rally

again, in order to secure the victory; but in a few minutes was informed that there was a large reinforcement on their march, within two miles. Colonel Warner's regiment luckily coming up at the moment, renewed the attack with fresh vigour. I pushed forward as many of the men as I could to their assistance; the battle continued obstinate on both sides until sunset; the enemy was obliged to retreat; we pursued them till dark, and had day lasted an hour longer, should have taken the whole body of them.'

"On what small events does the popular humour and military success depend! The capture of one thousand Germans by General Washington, at Trenton, had served to wake up, and save the whole continent. The exploit of Stark at Bennington, operated with the same kind of influence, and produced a similar effect.

This victory was the first event that had proved encouraging to the Americans in the northern department, since the death of General Montgomery. Misfortune had succeeded misfortune, and defeat had followed defeat from that period till now. The present instance was the first in which victory had quitted the royal standard, or seemed even to be wavering. She

was now found with the American arms, and the effect seemed, in fact, to be greater than the cause. It raised the spirit of the country to an uncommon degree of animation; and by showing the militia what they could perform, rendered them willing and desirous to turn out and try what fortunes would await their exertions. It had a still greater effect on the royal army. The British generals were surprised to hear that an enemy whom they had contemplated with no other feelings than those of contempt, should all at once wake up, and discover much of the spirit of heroism. To advance upon the mouth of cannon, to attack fortified lines, to carry strong entrenchments, were exploits which they supposed belonged exclusively to the armies of kings. To see a body of American militia, ill dressed, but little disciplined, without cannon, armed only with farmers' guns, without bayonets, and who had been accustomed to fly at their approach; that such men should force the entrenchments, capture the cannon, kill and make prisoners of a large body of the royal army, was a matter of indignation, astonishment and surprise."

"General Stark volunteered his services under General Gates at Saratoga, and assisted in

the council which stipulated the surrender of General Burgoyne; nor did he relinquish his valuable services till he could greet his native country as an independent empire. General Stark was of the middle stature, not formed by nature to exhibit an erect soldierly mien. His manners were frank and unassuming, but he manifested a peculiar sort of eccentricity and negligence, which precluded all display of personal dignity, and seemed to place him among those of ordinary rank in life. His character, as a private citizen, was unblemished, and he was ever held in respect. For the last few years of his life, he enjoyed a pecuniary bounty from the government. He lived to the advanced age of ninety-three years, eight months, and twenty-four days, and died May 8th, 1822."