HUGH MERCER,

MAJOR-GENERAL IN THE AMERICAN ARMY.

To fight
In a just cause, and for our country's glory,
Is the best office of the best of men;
And to decline when these motives urge,
Is infamy beneath a coward's baseness.
Havard's Regulus.

IN the revolution which released our country from the domination of Great Britain, foreigners as well as native Americans, espoused the cause of the colonies. No examples are necessary to prove this:—we at once think of Steuben,—of Lafayette,—of Kosciusko—of the many who left their native land to strike a blow for freedom in the Western World. Numerous were the Britons, also, who joined the standard of patriotism, even though it was raised in opposition to the lion of their own banner. Instances of two of the most celebrated of these, both for their noble qualities and early deaths,—for they occurred during an early period of the contest,—we see in James Montgomery, and Hugh Mercer. The former

we need not further mention in this place,—but of the latter we will give a brief sketch.

Hugh Mercer was born near Aberdeen in the north of Scotland, about the year 1723. He studied medicine, and as an assistant surgeon he was with the army of the Pretender, Charles Edward, at the field of Culloden. That battle was fought on the 16th April, 1746, and early in the year 1747, Mercer, fleeing from Scotland in consequence of his participation in the rebellion, landed at Philadelphia. Thirty years afterwards his corpse was interred in that place—and finally, on the 26th November 1840, his remains, with all the 'pride, pomp, and circumstance, of glorious war,' were removed from their first resting place, and buried in the beautiful cemetry of Laurel Hill, near the same city.

From Philadelphia Mercer proceeded to the frontier of Pennsylvania, and settled near the present village of Mercersburg, Franklin County. Here he remained engaged, it is believed, in farming occupations, until the commencement of the French and Indian war of 1755. After Braddock's defeat, the whole frontier of this province lay exposed to the attacks of the savages. The colonists were

continually harassed by their incursions, and at last the Legislature raised a force of three hundred men, and gave the command to Colonel John Armstrong, under whom Mercer was appointed captain. The troops marched, in 1756, from Fort Shirley through a hostile country to the Alleghany river, and, unknown to the enemy, arrived at an Indian town called Kittaning, within twenty-five miles of Fort Du Quesne. At day-break the Americans attacked the place, and after a short action carried the town, and completely destroyed it. In this conflict Mercer was severely wounded in the right wrist and during the confusion which succeeded the taking of the Fort, he became separated from the rest of his company, and was obliged to set off alone, for the settlements. Becoming faint from loss of blood, and hearing the war-whoop of a body of Indians who approached, he secreted himself in the hollow trunk of a large tree. The savages came up, and stayed about the place some time, for the purpose of resting themselves, but soon continued their way. Mercer then pushed on, and, having reached the waters that emptied into the Potomac, he finally, after wandering

in the woods for some weeks, arrived at Fort Cumberland.

In 1758, the provincial forces were reorganized, and placed in a more effective condition. Mercer was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel, and accompanied General Forbes in his expedition to Fort Du Quesne. He was left with two hundred men in charge of the fort, and maintained it until he was relieved, notwithstanding the difficulties which attended it. Washington—with whom Mercer first became acquainted in this expedition—wrote to Governor Fauquier that the men left in the fort were "in such a miserable condition, having hardly rags to cover their nakedness, and exposed to the inclemency of the weather in this inclement season, that sickness, death and desertion, if they are not speedily supplied, must destroy them." As soon as he was relieved, Mercer left the army, and repaired to Fredericksburg, in Virginia, where he continued to practise his profession.

"The repose which the colonies enjoyed between the peace of 1763 and the beginning of the revolution, was short and restless. The young Nation lay, not in the slumber of exhaustion, but in the fitful sleep which the

consciousness of a great futurity allows. It slept too with arms by its side, and there needed but the trumpet's feeblest note to arouse it to action. The involuntary concord of the Colonies at the outbreak of the Revolution is one of its most singular characteristics. It was a concord that transcended all mere political relations—it was beyond, and above all political union. It was the instinctive appreciation of common right, the quick sense of common injury. There seemed to be but one frame, and when the hand of tyranny was rudely laid on a single member, the whole system quivered beneath the contact, and braced itself to resistance."*

None of the colonies was more distinguished n the contest, for firm resistance to the arbitrary measures of the mother country, than were Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Virginia. Hancock and Adams, Morris and Hopkinson, Henry and Jefferson,—all were untiring in their efforts to arouse their countrymen. Nor were these alone: other men, less celebrated in the annals of our country, perhaps, but yet equally patriotic, aided them. Of these Mercer was one. On the 25th of April 1775, he

* Reed's eulogy on General Mercer.

wrote to Washington informing him of an attack upon Williamsburg by some seamen from a British vessel, and of their removal of the powder from the magazine, by order of the Governor. He also said that the volunteer company of Fredericksburg intended to march in a few days to Williamsburg to secure the military stores yet remaining there. In June of the same year Washington was appointed Commander-in-chief, and on June 5th 1776, at the instance of Washington himself, Mercer was created Brigadier-General of the American troops.

The army was at New York when Mercer joined, and he remained with it constantly. The projected attack on Staten Island was confided to him—he was with the forces at White Plains—during the retreat through New Jersey,—and in short he continued in active service until his death.

The Americans had at last retired across the Delaware, but the gloomy appearance of their prospects increased. In Philadelphia "all able bodied men who were not conscientiously scrupulous about bearing arms," were ordered by General Putnam to "appear in the State House yard with their arms and accoutrements,"

that they might be sent to reinforce General Washington. With the assistance of these militia, it was resolved by the Commander-in-chief,—and the design was warmly seconded by Greene, Reed, and Mercer,—to attack the Hessian troops at Trenton. The result of this plan need not be here given; it is too well known to every reader of American history. General Washington immediately after the action recrossed the Delaware with his prisoners, and remained in his former position until the 29th of December, when he again entered New Jersey, and on the 2d of January met the main body of the British troops. The approach of darkness deferred the action, and during the night a council of the American officers was held to consider the means of rescuing themselves from the difficulties which surrounded them. In this state of affairs Mercer proposed the brilliant plan of ordering up the Philadelphia militia, and making a night march upon Princeton and Brunswick. It was agreed to without dissent and the troops were set in motion. General Mercer commanded the advanced party, and as day broke he observed a large body of British troops marching towards Trenton. He immediately proposed to the

Commander-in-chief to throw himself between this corps, and their reserve at Princeton, and thus bring on a general action,—and upon the consent of Washington he executed the movement. The Americans were however thrown into confusion at the death of Colonel Hazlet, and fell back. Mercer's horse was killed, but notwithstanding that he was alone, he refused to surrender and fought single handed with a British detachment which advanced towards him. The combat was too unequal, however, and he was beaten down by the butts of muskets and mortally wounded by bayonets. After the American troops had gained the day he was removed to a neighbouring house, and there expired, January 12th, 1777.

"On the 14th of January the remains of Mercer were brought to Philadelphia, and on the next day but one were interred in the grave from which they were removed to Laurel Hill November 26th 1840.

"There are aged men yet amongst us—so aged that before the brief remnant of this year expires the generation may cease to live—who remember the solemnity of that funeral. It was the Nation mourning for her first child. It was a people in sad amazement that a

gallant citizen had indeed died for them. And when the ancient inhabitants of this city thus gathered in throngs to bear the soldier's mangled corpse to its place of rest, it was committed to the ground with the sacred service which bade them look to the promised day when "the earth and the sea shall give up their dead." The grave thus solemnly closed has been unsealed—affectionately, reverently, piously.—But yet upon the solemnities of this day, the reproach of a vain and profane pageant may fasten, if the mouldering remains of the dead can be placed in the midst of the living without stirring every heart to its very centre."*

* Reed's eulogy. Delivered at Philadelphia November 26th, 1840, when the remains of Mercer were disinterred and again buried at Laurel Hill.

ETHAN ALLEN,

BRIGADIER-GENERAL IN THE AMERICAN ARMY.

GENERAL ALLEN was born in Salisbury, Connecticut, from whence, while he was yet young, his parents emigrated to Vermont. By this circumstance he was deprived of the advantages of an early education. But, although he never felt its genial influence, nature had endowed him with strong powers of mind; and when called to take the field, he showed himself an able leader, and an intrepid soldier.

At the commencement of the disturbances in Vermont, about the year 1770, he took a most active part in favour of the Green Mountain Boys, as the first settlers were then called, in opposition to the government of New York. Bold, enterprising, and ambitious, he undertook to direct the proceedings of the inhabitants, and wrote several pamphlets to display the supposed injustice and oppressive designs of the New York proceedings. The uncultivated roughness of his own temper and manners seems to have assisted him in giving a just description of the views and proceedings of speculating land-