

## PONTIAC'S CONSPIRACY.

Early in the spring of 1763, it appears to have been announced to the tribes, that by the terms of peace between the two nations, the King of France had ceded all their country to the King of England, without even asking their consent or permission. This greatly increased their enmity, and at once excited a ferment of indignation among them. Within a few weeks a plot was matured, such as was never, before or since, conceived or executed by a North American Indian. The grand scheme was to attack all the forts upon the same day; then, having destroyed their garrisons, to turn upon the defenceless frontier, and ravage and lay waste the settlements, until, as many of the Indians fondly believed, the English should all be driven into the sea, and the country restored to its primitive owners.

It was difficult to determine which tribe was first to raise the cry of war; all the savages of the backwoods were ripe for an outbreak, and the movements seemed almost simultaneous. Pontiac, the great chief of the Ottawas, is credited as the author of the great plan of the simultaneous attack along the entire border, by which all the posts and garrisons were to be captured on the same day. Pontiac was one of the most famous chiefs known in Indian annals, and was pre-eminently endowed with all the attributes for a great leader among the tribes. He began preparing for his conspiracy before the close of 1762, and he sent messengers to the different nations for the purpose of concentrating all the western tribes in one great effort to drive out the English. The scheme was worthy the genius of a Napoleon, and had arranged with accuracy to strike every English post at the same moment, giving no time for one to assist another, which was to be followed by a rapid and relentless war throughout the settlements. He reserved for himself the attack on Detroit, and made a regular siege of the place. He neglected no expedient that savage warfare could invent, and obtained food for his warriors from the Canadians by issuing promissory notes drawn upon birch bark and signed with the figure of the otter, which were all redeemed. Though the attack on Detroit resulted in a failure, by the garrison being apprised of the approaching danger, the plot was generally successful along the border.

The storm fell nearly simultaneously, like the simoon of the Sahara, upon all the English fortifications. Mackinaw, La Bay, and St. Joseph, on or near Lake Michigan; Miami, on the Maumee; Ouatonenon, on the Wabash; Sandusky, Presq' Isle, Le Beouf, and Venango, all fell into the hands of the savages. Only Detroit, Fort Pitt, and Niagara escaped. Niagara was deemed too strong, and was not molested. Detroit very nearly fell by treachery, but an Indian girl revealed to Major Gladwin the plan of Pontiac and the fort was saved. Foiled in his attempt, Pontiac sat down before the place and deliberately besieged it for many months, and had it not been for its water communications, it would undoubtedly have fallen.

The Ottawas, hurons, and Pottawattomies took the lead in the Northwest, and the Delawares, Shawanese, Senecas, and others bore the brunt of the region in Indiana.

Lee Boeuf was surrounded on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May by a great multitude of Indians. After a furious attack, the block-house was fired at night, and while they were waiting to murder the inmates as they escaped from the flames, Ensign Price and his seven remaining men escaped unperceived to the forest, and after enduring great hardships reached Fort Pitt. Passing by Venango, they found that place in ruins, and the garrison slaughtered. Long after its fate was revealed to Sir William Johnson, a large party of Senecas gained entrance on pretense of friendship, massacred the garrison, and tortured the commandant, Lieutenant Gordon, for several nights over a slow fire, and then burned the fort.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of May bands of Indians, flushed with their victories, appeared before Fort Pitt, and after prowling around, scalping stragglers, and firing on the garrison, a delegation of their chiefs appeared and demanded the surrender of the fort. They were friends of the English, and they wanted to give them good advice. Six great nations had taken up the hatchet against the English; numerous bands were now coming to scalp them. They ought to leave the post and go to the settlements, where they would be safe. If they went now they would protect them. If they waited till their enemies came nothing could save them. Captain Ecuyer was not to be so easily outdone in politeness by his tawny friends. He was very well off in his fort, and meant to stay there. But they ought to take care of their women and children. There was a great army of six thousand coming to Fort Pitt. There was an army of three thousand going up the lakes. There was another with a great multitude of Cherokees, coming from the south. He wished them to hide, for he did not want them to get hurt; but he hoped they would not tell the hostile Indians, lest they might escape. The chiefs were beaten at their own game; the shadows of Ecuyer's three armies frightened them, they abandoned the fort and fled down the river.

## SCENES AT THE ATTACK ON FORT PITT ON THE 26<sup>TH</sup> OF JULY.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of July the Indians again appeared in considerable force around Fort Pitt. Thinghis, Turtle's Heart, and some other chiefs appeared and were admitted to a conference. They bitterly recounted the wrongs the English had inflicted upon their people. They recited a message they had received from the great Pontiac. His bands were coming to strike the English at the forks of the Ohio. If they would go home to their wives and children they would be safe; if they would not, they would be in danger. Ecuyer told them he had warriors and arms enough to defend himself three years against all the Indians in the woods. That was his home, and if they came about it, he would fire bagfuls of bullets at them. They had better go home, for he did not want to hurt them.

The Indians then, disappointed in obtaining possession of the fort by stratagem, commenced a general attack. On the next night they crawled along the banks of the rivers, and dug holes with their knives in the bank to shelter themselves from the fire of the garrison. From these a constant fire of many days was poured upon the fort, and it was often on fire from their arrows. A striking picture of the siege is furnished in the statement of one who was present.

"I tell you we had awful times when Fort Pitt was closely besieged by the Indians. You see, the yellow skins lay so close along the bank of the Allegheny river, that we could not get a shot at them, and we dare not venture outside. Any one who showed himself upon the rampart was sure to be a mark for an arrow or bullet. Yet even then they did not always get off scott free. Some of our fellows were more than a match for them in every way. One day, 'Brown Bill' procured some old clothes and straw, and stuffed a paddy with the greatest care. None of us could tell what was in the wind, and his only answer was that he was reinforcing the garrison. At night he told one of us to lift it up slowly above the stockade, and pull it down quickly whenever it was fired at. He then took his station a few feet from it, and when his eye became accustomed to the darkness, directed us to raise it up. We raised it slowly and a bullet passed through it, but instantly Bill, who could fire at a flash, put a bullet through the Indian's head. We all laughed at the result, which made Bill tremendously angry. 'If you had held your jaw,' said he, 'the paddy might have done some time again; now it is of no use, they will smell a rat.' At last we became weary of being cooped up, and the officers began to fear that Bill, and some other kindred spirits, would carry out some mad scheme to their own undoing. Who first planned what I am going to tell you of, I do not know, but the following plan relieved us from our close blockade, and chased the Indians from the bank of the river, the position which most annoyed us. We build upon rollers, a large flatboat, with high sides; the rowers were secured and port-holes bored all around. When finished and ready, we rolled it into the Monongahela, and anchored it in such a position that we could fire up the Allegheny. The Indians were astonished; they were afraid to attack either the boat or the fort, which would have placed them between two fires. We raked them from the boat along the river bank; they set up the most diabolical yell I ever heard, retired up stream and never again ventured so close to us in daylight."

About the first of August a rumor reached them that an army was coming to relieve the fort; the assailants abandoned the siege, to the great relief of the garrison, and penetrated further to the east.

## CONDITION OF THE FRONTIERS.

Meanwhile the most terrible border war known to our history, was raging along the whole line of the western frontier. The western frontier was then the Blue ridge and the Susquehanna. Cabins, clearings, hamlets, even villages, were scattered through the forest west of that border, but a fixed population had not passed beyond it. Along that whole line from Albany to Carolina, the border was attacked about the beginning of harvest. Everywhere were experienced the same horrible cruelties of savage warfare; the sudden surprise, the massacre, the scalping, the burning, everywhere were the ashes of cabins, mingled with the charred bone of their tenants; everywhere the ripe harvest stood without a reaper. Twenty thousand people in Virginia were driven from their homes. The borders of that province were protected by a line of stockade forts, and to these the inhabitants fled for protection. A thousand men were raised and put under the command of Major Lewis, and Colonel Stephen. The force was greatly augmented by the borderers who volunteered to protect their homes. The tide of savage war was stayed; the Indians could not stand their ground against the border riflemen, and security for the Virginia frontier was at length obtained by the prompt measures of her government and the bravery of her citizen soldiery.

The people of the Pennsylvania frontier were unprotected, and they were compelled to crowd into the towns in the interior for safety; and stripped of everything they possessed, were obliged to subsist as best

they could in huts and tents on the charities of the people. The colonial government was divided by factions; its leaders were inimical to the borders, and, to its protection, and left the defense of the frontier to those who had lost all by its desolation.

#### MEASURES OF DEFENSE.

General Amherst was employed in the meantime in providing measures of defense. The colonial establishment had been exhausted by the French war, and further weakened by the Removal of a great part of the troops on the conclusion of peace. Of the regiments that remained, reduced in numbers and weakened by disease, a small force was with difficulty collected and equipped for the service. All that could be immediately done was to provide for the defense of the boats. The fort at Niagara had been besieged by a band of Senecas, and the first step was to send sufficient reinforcements to that important post. The next was to send a reinforcement under Dalzell to Detroit.

The garrison at Fort Pitt consisted of three hundred and thirty men, besides more than two hundred women and children, who had taken refuge within it. The supply of provisions was too small to sustain a long siege, and it was necessary to afford it immediate relief. Orders were therefore sent to Col. Bouquet, at Philadelphia, to organize an expedition without delay, for the relief of that important post.