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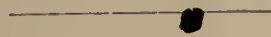


LIFE AND EXPLOITS

17

— OF —

ROBERT ROGERS, THE RANGER.



A PAPER READ BEFORE THE MEMBERS OF THE

**NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC-GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY,**

AT THEIR MONTHLY MEETING IN BOSTON,

**NOVEMBER 5, 1884.**

— BY —

JOSEPH B. WALKER,

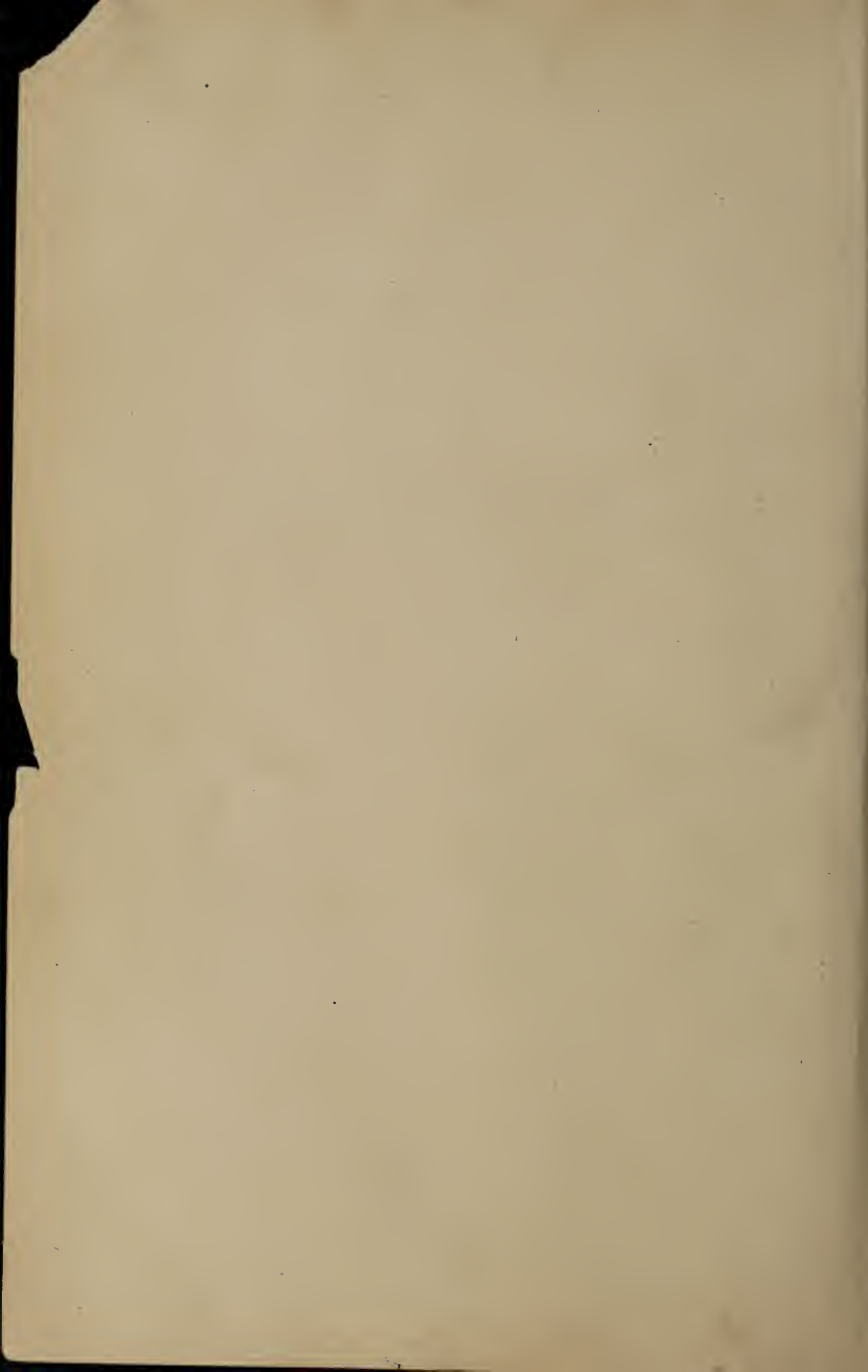
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## ROBERT ROGERS, THE RANGER.

By JOSEPH B. WALKER.

No man has been universally great. Individuals who have made themselves prominent among their fellows have done so by achievements in special directions only, and confined to limited portions of their lives. Particularly true is this remark when applied to Major Robert Rogers, the Ranger, who, in our last French war, greatly distinguished himself as a partisan commander, and gained as wide fame as did any other soldier of equal rank and opportunity.

I do not introduce him here as a saint, for, as is well known, no quality of sanctity ever entered his composition; but rather, as the resolute commander of resolute men, in desperate encounters with a desperate foe; as a man eminently fitted for the rough work given him to do. And just here and now I am reminded of a remark made in his old age by the late Moody Kent, for a long period an able member of the New Hampshire bar, and there the associate of Governor Plummer, George Sullivan, and Judge Jeremiah Smith, as well as of Jeremiah Mason, and the two Websters, Ezekiel and Daniel, all of whom he survived. Said Mr. Kent, one day, evidently looking forward to the termination of his career, "Could Zeke Webster have been living at my decease he would have spoken as well of me, yes, as well of me as he could." If one can summon to his mind and heart the kindly charity attributed to Mr. Webster, he may, should he care for it, find a comfortable hour in the society of this famous Ranger. He was born of Scotch-Irish parents, in the good old Scotch-Irish town of Londonderry,

New Hampshire, in the year 1727.\* At the time of his birth, this was a frontier town, and its log houses were the last civilized abodes which the traveller passed as he went up the Merrimack valley on his way to Canada. It was the seed-town from which were afterwards planted the ten or a dozen other Scotch-Irish townships of New Hampshire.† It was the first to introduce and scatter abroad Presbyterian principles and Irish potatoes over considerable sections of this Province.

Parson McGregor and his people had been in their new homes but four years when they had ready for occupancy a log school-house, sixteen feet long and twelve feet wide. It was in this, or in one like it, that Robert Rogers acquired his scanty stock of "book-learning," as then termed. But education consists in much besides book-learning, and he supplemented his narrow stock of this by a wider and more practical knowledge, which he obtained amid the rocks and stumps upon his father's farm and in the hunter's camp.

The woods, at this day, were full of game. The deer, the bear, the moose, the beaver, the fox, the muskrat, and various other wild animals existed in great numbers. To a young man of hardy constitution, possessed of enterprise, energy, and a fondness for forest sports, hunting afforded not only an attractive, but a profitable employment. Young Rogers had all these characteristics, and, as a hunter, tramped through large sections of the wilderness between the French and English settlements.

\* Stark's History of Dunbarton, p. 178.

† Parker's History of Londonderry, p. 180.



On such excursions he mingled much with the Indians, and somewhat with the French, obtaining by such intercourse some knowledge of their languages, of their modes of hunting, and their habits of life. He also acquired a fondness for the woods and streams, tracing the latter well up towards their sources, learning the portages between their headwaters, many of the Indian trails and the general topography of the great area just mentioned.

During the French and Indian wars small bodies of soldiers were often employed to "watch and ward" the frontiers, and protect their defenceless communities from the barbarous assaults of Indians, turned upon them from St. Francis and Crown Point. Robert Rogers had in him just the stuff required in such a soldier. We shall not, therefore, be surprised to find him on scouting duty in the Merrimack Valley, under Captain Ladd, as early as 1746, when he was but nineteen years of age;\* and, three years later, engaged in the same service, under Captain Ebenezer Eastman, of Pennycook.† Six years afterwards, in 1753, the muster rolls show him to have been a member of Captain John Goff's company, and doing like service.‡ Such was the training of a self-reliant mind and a hardy physique for the ranging service, in which they were soon to be employed.

I ought, perhaps, to mention, that in 1749, as Londonderry became filled to overflowing with repeated immigrations from the North of Ireland, James Rogers, the father of Robert, a proprietor, and one of the early settlers of the township, removed therefrom to the woods of Dunbarton, and settled anew in a section named Montelony, from an

Irish place in which he had once lived.\* This was before the settlement of the township, when its territory existed as an unseparated part only of the public domain. He may, quite likely, have been attracted hither by an extensive beaver meadow or pond, which would, with little improvement, afford grass for his cattle while he was engaged in clearing the rich uplands which surrounded it.

Six years only after his removal (1755), he was unintentionally shot by a neighbor whom he was going to visit; the latter mistaking him for a bear, as he indistinctly saw him passing through the woods. This incident was the foundation of the story said to have been told by his son, some years after, in a London tavern. The version given by Farmer and Moore is as follows, viz. :† "It is reported of Major Rogers, that while in London, after the French war, being in company with several persons, it was agreed, that the one who told the most improbable story, or the greatest falsehood, should have his fare paid by the others. When it came to his turn, he told the company that his father was shot in the woods of America by a person who supposed him to be a bear; and that his mother was followed several miles through the snow by hunters, who mistook her track for that of the same animal. It was acknowledged by the whole company that the Major had told the greatest lie, when in fact, he had related nothing but the truth.‡

\* New Hampshire Gazeteer, 1823, p. 121.

† Historical Collections, by Farmer and Moore, vol. 1, p. 240.

‡ The Great Meadow and the site of the elder Rogers' house is easily accessible to any person possessed of a curiosity to visit them. They are in the South-Easterly section of Dunbarton, some six or seven miles only from Concord. The whole town is of very uneven surface, and the visitor will smile when he reads upon the ground, in Farmer and Moore's New Hampshire Gazeteer, that he will find there but "few hills, nor any mountains." He soon learns that the declaration of its people is more correct when they assure him that its surface is a "pimply" one.

\* New Hampshire Adjutant General's Report, 1866, vol. 2, p. 95.

† Same, p. 99.

‡ Same, p. 118.



As the largest part of Roger's fame rests upon his achievements in the ranging service of our Seven Years' War, we must recall for a moment the condition of things in the British Colonies and in Canada at the beginning of this war.

The thirteen American Colonies had, at that time, all told, of both white and black, a population of about one million and a half of souls (1,425,000.)\* The French people of Canada numbered less than one hundred thousand.†

The respective claims to the Central part of the North American Continent by England and France were conflicting and irreconcilable. The former, by right of discovery, claimed all the territory upon the Atlantic coast from New Foundland to Florida, and by virtue of numerous grants the right to all west of this to the Pacific Ocean. The latter, by right of occupation and exploration, claimed Canada, a portion of New England and New York, and the basins of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, together with all the territory upon the streams tributary to these, or a large part of the indefinite West.

To maintain her claims France had erected a cordon of forts extending diagonally across the continent from the mouth of the St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Mexico. If one will follow, in thought, a line starting at Louisburg, and thence running up this great river to Quebec and Montreal, and thence up Lake Champlain to Crown Point and Ticonderoga, and on westward and south-westward to Frontenac, Niagara and Detroit, and thence down the Ohio and Mississippi to New Orleans, he will trace the line across which the two nations looked in defiance at each other, and see instantaneously that the claims of France

were inadmissible, and that another war was inevitable. It mattered little that of the forty-five years immediately preceding the treaty of Aix La Chapelle, fourteen, or one-third of the whole number, had been years of war between these two neighbors. They were now, after a peace of only half a dozen years, as ready for a fresh contest as if they were to meet for the first time upon the battle field. In fact, another conflict was unavoidable; a conflict of the Teuton with the Gaul; of medievalism with daylight; of conservatism with progress; of the old Church with the new; of feudalism with democracy — a conflict which should settle the destiny of North America, making it English and Protestant, or French and Roman Catholic; a contest, too, in which the victor was to gain more than he knew, and the vanquished was to lose more than he ever dreamed of.

Hostilities may be said to have been commenced by the French, when, on the 18th day of April, 1754, they dispossessed the Ohio company of the fort which they were erecting at the forks of the Ohio River, afterwards named Fort Du Quesne.

The plan of a Colonial Confederation, formed at the Albany convention in July of that year, having failed of acceptance by the mother country and the Colonies both, the Home government was forced to meet the exigency by the use of British troops, aided by such others as the several Provinces were willing to furnish.

The campaign of the next year (1755) embraced:

1st. An expedition, under General Braddock, for the capture of Fort Du Quesne.

2d. A second, under General Shirley, for the reduction of Fort Niagara, which was not prosecuted.

\* Bancroft's History of the United States, vol. 4, p. 127.

† Encyclopedia Britannica.



3d. A third, under Colonel Moncton, against the French settlements on the Bay of Fundy, resulting in the capture and deportation of the Acadians.

4th. A fourth, under General William Johnson, against Crown Point, a strong fortification, erected by the French, in the very heart of New England and New York, whence innumerable bands of Indians had been dispatched by the French to murder the defenceless dwellers upon the English frontiers, particularly those of New Hampshire, to destroy their cattle and to burn their buildings and other property.

To the army of this latter expedition New Hampshire contributed, in the early part of this year, a regiment of ten companies, the first being a company of Rangers, whose Captain was Robert Rogers, and whose Second Lieutenant was John Stark.\*

But a few words just here in explanation of the character of this ranging branch of the English army. It was a product of existing necessities in the military service of that time. Most of the country was covered with primeval forests and military operations were largely prosecuted in the woods or in limited clearings. The former were continually infested with Indians, lying in ambush for the perpetration of any mischief for which they might have opportunity.

It became necessary, therefore, in scouring the forests to drive these miscreants back to their lairs, as well as in making military reconnoissances, to have a class of soldiers acquainted with Indian life and warfare; prepared, not only to meet the Indian upon his own ground, but to fight him in his own fashion. The British Regular was good

for nothing at such work. If sent into the woods he was quite sure, either not to return at all, or to come back without his scalp. And the ordinary Provincial was not very much better. From this necessity, therefore, was evolved the "Ranger."

He was a man of vigorous constitution, inured to the hardships of forest life. He was capable of long marches, day after day, upon scant rations, refreshed by short intervals of sleep while rolled in his blanket upon a pile of boughs, with no other shelter but the sky. He knew the trails of the Indians, as well as their ordinary haunts and likeliest places of ambush. He knew, also, all the courses of the streams and the carrying places between them. He understood Indian wiles and warfare, and was prepared to meet them.

Stand such a man in a pair of stout shoes or moccasins; cover his lower limbs with leggins and coarse small clothes; give him a close-fitting jacket and a warm cap; stick a small hatchet in his belt; hang a good-sized powder-horn by his side, and upon his back buckle a blanket and a knapsack stuffed with a moderate supply of bread and raw salt pork; to these furnishings add a good-sized hunting-knife, a trusty musket and a small flask of spirits, and you have an average New Hampshire Ranger of the Seven Year's war, ready for skirmish or pitched battle; or, for the more common duty of reconnoitering the enemy's force and movements, of capturing his scouts and provision trains, and getting now and then a prisoner, from whom all information possible would be extorted; and, in short, for annoying the French and Indian foe in every possible way.

If you will add three or four inches to the average height of such a soldier, give him consummate courage,

\* New Hampshire Adjutant General's Report, vol. 2, 1866, p. 129.



coolness, readiness of resource in extremities, together with intuitive knowledge of the enemy's wiles, supplemented with a passable knowledge of French and Indian speech, you will have a tolerable portrait of Captain Robert Rogers at the beginning of our Seven Year's war.\*

He received his first Captain's commission in the early part of 1755, and was employed by the New Hampshire government in building a fort at the mouth of the Ammonoosuc River and in guarding its Northern and Western frontiers until July, when he was ordered to Albany to join the army of Major General Johnson. His first service there was in furnishing escort, with a company of one hundred men, to a provision train from Albany to Fort Edward. From this latter point he was afterwards repeatedly despatched, with smaller bodies of men, up the Hudson River and down Lake George and Lake Champlain to reconnoiter the French forts. Some of these expeditions extended as far north as Crown Point and were enlivened with sharp skirmishes. He was absent up the Hudson upon one of these when the French were defeated at the battle of Lake George and Baron Dieskau was made prisoner.

The efficiency of the campaign of the next year (1756), which contemplated the taking of Crown Point, Niagara and Fort Du Quesne, was seriously impaired by the repeated changes of Commander-in-Chief; Major General Shirley being superceded in June by General Abercrombie while he, about a month later, yielded the com-

mand to the inefficient Lord Loudoun. The only occurrences of particular note during this campaign were the capture of our forts at Oswego by General Montcalm and the formal declarations of war by the two belligents.

Rogers and his men were stationed at Fort William Henry, and made repeated visits to Ticonderoga and Crown Point to ascertain the power of the enemy and to annoy him as they had opportunity. They went down Lake George, sometimes by land upon its shores, and sometimes by water and in boats. In the winter their land marches were frequently upon snow-shoes, and their boats were exchanged for skates. On such occasions each Ranger was generally his own commissary and carried his own supplies.

In his journal for this year (1756) Rogers notes thirteen of these expeditions as worthy of record. The first was down Lake George on the ice, in January, with seventeen men, resulting in the capture of two prisoners and two sledges laden with provisions.

The second was made in February with a party of fifty men to ascertain the strength and operations of the French at Crown Point. Having captured one prisoner at a little village near by the fort, they were discovered and obliged to retire before the sallying troops of the garrison. With very marked sang froid he closes his account of this reconnoissance by saying: "We employed ourselves while we dared stay in setting fire to the houses and barns in the village, with which were consumed large quantities of wheat, and other grain; we also killed about fifty cattle and then retired, leaving the whole village in flames."

There often appears a ludicrous kind of honesty in the simple narratives of this journal. He occasionally seized

\*"An engraved full-length portrait of Rogers was published in London in 1776. He is represented as a tall, strong man, dressed in the costume of a Ranger, with a powder-horn strung at his side, a gun resting in the hollow of his arm, and a countenance by no means prepossessing. Behind him, at a little distance, stand his Indian followers."- [Parkman's Conspiracy of Pontiac, vol. 1, p. 164.



certain stores of the enemy which a Ranger could destroy only with regret. He naively remarks, in narrating the capture in June, of this same year, of two lighters upon Lake Champlain, manned by twelve men, four of whom they killed: "We sunk and destroyed their vessels and cargoes, which consisted chiefly of wheat and flour, wine, and brandy; some few casks of the latter we carefully concealed."

His commands on such occasions varied greatly in numbers, according to the exigency of the service, all the way from a squad of ten men to two whole companies; and the excursions just mentioned afford fair specimens of the work done by the Rangers under Rogers this year.

Rogers possessed a ready wit and an attractive bonhomie, which made him agreeable to his men, notwithstanding the necessary severity of his discipline. A story has come down to us which well illustrates this trait in his character. Two British Regulars, it seems, a good deal muddled, one night, by liberal potations, became greatly concerned lest their beloved country should suffer dishonor in consequence of inability to discharge its national debt, and their loyal forebodings had, at length, become painful. The good-natured Captain, encountering them in their distress, at once relieved them by the remark: "I appreciate the gravity of your trouble, my dear fellows. It is, indeed, a serious one. But, happily, I can remove it. I will, myself, discharge at once one-half the debt, and a friend of mine will shortly pay the other half." From this incident is said to have arisen the expression, at one time common, "We pay our debts as Rogers did that of the English nation."

But Captain Rogers had qualities of a higher order, which commended him

to his superiors. His capacity as a Ranger Commander had attracted the notice of the officers on duty at Lake George. The importance of this branch of the service had also become apparent, and we shall not be surprised to learn that, in March, 1756, he was summoned to Boston by Major General Shirley and commissioned anew as Captain of an independent company of Rangers, to be paid by the King. This company formed the nucleus of the famous corps since known as "Roger's Rangers."

In July another company was raised, and again in December two more, thereby increasing the Ranger corps to four companies. To anticipate, in a little more than a year this was farther enlarged by the addition of five more, and Captain Rogers was promoted to the rank of Major of Rangers, becoming thus the commander of the whole corps.

The character of the service expected of this branch of the army was set forth in Major General Shirley's orders to its commander in 1756, as follows, viz.: "From time to time, to use your best endeavors to distress the French and allies by sacking, burning, and destroying their houses, barns, barracks, canoes, and battoes, and by killing their cattle of every kind; and at all times to endeavour to way-lay, attack and destroy their convoys of provisions by land and water in any part of the country where he could find them."\*

On the fifteenth of January of the next year (1757) Captain Rogers, with seventy-four Rangers, started down Lake George to reconnoiter the French forts; travelling now for a time upon the ice, and by and by donning snow-shoes and following the land. On the twenty-first, at a point

\* Roger's Journal (Hough's edition), p. 46.



half way between Ticonderoga and Crown Point, they discovered a train of provision sledges, three of which they captured, together with six horses and seven men. The others fled within the walls of Ticonderoga and alarmed the garrison. Feeling the insecurity of his situation he commenced at once his return. By two o'clock in the afternoon, his party was attacked by two hundred and fifty French and Indians, who endeavored to surround it. A vigorous fight was kept up until dark. Rogers was wounded twice and lost some twenty of his men. The French, as was subsequently ascertained, lost one hundred and sixteen. The proximity of Ticonderoga rendered vain the continuance of the contest, and he availed himself of the shelter of the night to return to Fort William Henry.

For this exploit he was highly complimented by General Abercrombie, and, at a later period of this same year, was ordered by Lord Loudoun to instruct and train for the ranging service a company of British Regulars. To these he devoted much time and prepared for their use the manual of instruction now found in his journals. It is clearly drawn up in twenty-eight sections and gives very succinctly and lucidly the rules governing this mode of fighting.

The campaign of 1757 contemplated only the capture of Louisburg. To the requisite preparations Lord Loudoun directed all his energies. Having collected all the troops which could be spared for that purpose, he sailed for Halifax on the twentieth of June with six thousand soldiers, among them being four companies of Rangers under the command of Major Rogers. Upon arriving at Halifax his army was augmented by the addition of five thousand Regulars and a powerful naval armament. We have neither time nor incli-

nation to consider the conduct of Lord Loudoun on this occasion farther than to say that his cowardice and imbecility seem wonderful. Finding that, in all probability, Louisburg could not be taken without some one getting hurt, he returned to New York without striking a blow. If about this time our heroic commander of the Rangers used some strong language far from sacred, it will become us to remember "Zeke Webster" and think as charitably of his patriotic expletives "as we can." He returned to New York three weeks after the surrender of Fort William Henry, where with his Rangers he might have done something, at least, to prevent the horrible massacre which has tarnished the fair fame of Montcalm indelibly.

England and America both were humbled in the dust by the events of 1757 and 1758. Failure, due to the want of sufficient resources is severe, but how utterly insufferable when, with abundant means, incompetency to use them brings defeat. Still, we are under greater obligation to Lord Loudoun than we are wont to think. His imbecility helped rouse the British nation and recall William Pitt to power, whose vigor of purpose animated anew the people of other countries and promised an early termination of French dominion in America.

Lord Loudoun was succeeded in the early part of 1758 by General Abercrombie and plans were matured for capturing the Lake forts, Louisburg and Fort Du Quesne. By the close of November, the two last, with the addition of Fort Frontenac, were ours. The movement against Crown Point and Ticonderoga did not succeed. In the assault upon the latter Rogers and his Rangers fought in the van and in the retreat brought up the rear.

In the spring of this year (1758) Rogers went down Lake George at the



head of about one hundred and eighty-men, and near the foot of it had a desperate battle with a superior body of French and Indians. He reported on his return one hundred and fourteen of his party as killed or missing. Why he was not annihilated is a wonder. General Montcalm, in a letter dated less than a month after the encounter, says: "Our Indians would give no quarter; they have brought back one hundred and forty-six scalps." For his intrepidity on this occasion he was presented by General Abercrombie with the commission of Major of Rangers, before alluded to.

The adroitness with which Rogers sometimes extricated himself from extreme peril is illustrated by his conduct on one occasion, when pursued by an overwhelming number of savages up the mountain, near the south end of Lake George, which now bears his name. Upon reaching the summit he advanced to the very verge of the precipice, on the east side, which descends 550 feet to the lake. Having here reversed his snow shoes he fled down the side opposite to that by which he had come up. Arriving soon after the Indians, upon seeing the tracks of two men, apparently, instead of one, and Rogers far below upon the ice, hastening towards Fort Edward, concluded that he had slid down the precipice aided by the Great Spirit, and that farther pursuit was vain.

Mr. Pitt proposed in the campaign of 1759 the entire conquest of Canada. Bold as was the undertaking it was substantially accomplished. Ticonderoga and Crown Point were abandoned in July, Fort Niagara capitulated the same month, and Quebec was surrendered in September.

Their violation of a flag of truce in this last month now called attention to

the St. Francis Indians, who had been for a century the terror of the New England frontiers, swooping down upon them when least expected, burning their buildings, destroying their cattle, mercilessly murdering their men, women, and children, or cruelly hurrying them away into captivity. The time had now come for returning these bloody visits. The proffering of this delicate attention was assigned by Major General Amherst to Rogers. In his order, dated September 13, he says: "You are this night to set out with the detachment, as ordered yesterday, viz., of 200 men, which you will take under your command and proceed to Misisquey Bay, from whence you will march and attack the enemy's settlements on the south side of the river St. Lawrence in such a manner as you shall judge most effectual to disgrace the enemy, and for the success and honour of his majesty's arms.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Take your revenge, but don't forget that tho' those villains have dastardly and promiscuously murdered the women and children of all ages, it is my orders that no women or children are killed or hurt."

In pursuance of these orders Major Rogers started the same day at evening. On the tenth day after he reached Misisquoi Bay. On the twenty-third, with one hundred and forty-two Rangers, he came, without being discovered, to the environs of the village of St. Francis. The Indians had a dance the evening following his arrival and slept heavily afterwards. The next morning, half an hour before sunrise, Rogers and his men fell upon them on all sides, and in a few minutes, ere they had time to arouse themselves and seize their arms, the warriors of that village were dead. A few, attempting to escape by the



river, were shot in their canoes. The women and children were not molested.

When light came it revealed to the Rangers lines of scalps, mostly English, to the number of six hundred, strung upon poles above the door-ways. Thereupon, every house except three containing supplies was fired, and their destruction brought death to a few who had before escaped it by concealing themselves in the cellars. Ere noon two hundred Indian braves had perished and their accursed village had been obliterated.

The operations of the next year (1760) ended this long and fierce struggle. The attempted re-capture of Quebec by the French was their final effort. The army of the Lakes embarked from Crown Point for Montreal on the sixteenth day of August. "Six hundred Rangers and seventy Indians in whale-boats, commanded by Major Rogers, all in a line abreast, formed the advance guard." He and his men encountered some fighting on the way from Isle a Mot to Montreal, but no serious obstacle retarded their progress. The day of their arrival Monsieur de Vaudreuil proposed to Major General Amherst a capitulation, which soon after terminated the French dominion in North America.

The English troops, as will be remembered, entered Montreal on the evening of the eighth of September. On the morning of the twelfth Major Rogers was ordered by General Amherst to proceed westward with two companies of Rangers and take possession of the western forts, still held by the French, which, by the terms of the capitulation, were to be surrendered.

He embarked about noon the next day with some two hundred Rangers in fifteen whale-boats, and advanced to the west by the St. Lawrence and the Lakes. On the seventh of November

they reached the mouth of the Cuyahoga, where the beautiful city of Cleveland now stands. The cross of St. George had never penetrated the wilderness so far before. Here they encamped and were soon after waited upon by messengers from the great chieftain Pontiac, asking by what right they entered upon his territory and the object of their visit. Rogers informed them of the downfall of the French in America, and that he had been sent to take possession of the French forts surrendered to the English by the terms of the capitulation. Pontiac received his message remarking that he should stand in his path until morning, when he would return to him his answer.

The next morning Pontiac came to the camp and the great chief of the Ottawas, haughty, shrewd, politic, ambitious, met face to face the bold, self-possessed, clear-headed Major of the British Rangers. It is interesting to note how calmly the astute ally of the French accepted the new order of things and prepared for an alliance with his former enemies. He and Rogers had several interviews and in the end smoked the pipe of peace. With dignified courtesy the politic Indian gave to his new friend free transit through his territory, provisions for his journey and an escort of Indian braves. Rogers broke camp on the twelfth and pushed onward towards Detroit. By messenger sent forward in advance he apprized Monsieur Belletre, Commandant of the fort, of his near approach and the object of it. The astonished officer received him cautiously. Soon satisfied, however, of the truth of the unwelcome news thus brought, he surrendered his garrison. On the twenty-ninth of November the British flag floated from the staff which ever before had borne only the lilies of France.



On the tenth of December, after disposing of the French force found in the fort, and having taken possession of the forts *Miamie* and *Gatanois*, with characteristic ardor Rogers pushed still farther westward for *Michilimackinac*. But it was a vain attempt. The season was far advanced. Indeed, the winter had already come, and while the ice prevented his progress by water, the snows rendered impracticable his advance by land. With reluctance he relinquished for the first time the completion of his mission. Turning eastward, after a tedious journey, he reached New York on the fourteenth of February, 1761.

From New York, there is reason to suppose, that he went this same year as Captain of one of the His Majesty's Independent Companies of Foot to South Carolina, and there aided Colonel Grant in subduing the Cherokees, who had for a year or two been committing depredations upon the Carolinian frontiers.

From this time onward for the next two years we lose sight of Major Rogers, but he re-appears at the siege of *Detroit* in 1763. Hither he went with twenty Rangers as part of a body of soldiers sent from *Fort Niagara* under the command of Captain *Dalzell* for the re-inforcement of the beleaguered fort. He arrived on the twenty-ninth of July, and on the thirty-first took an active part in the fierce battle of *Bloody Bridge*. His valor was as useful as it was conspicuous on that occasion, and but for his daring efforts the retreat of the British troops would have been more disastrous even than it was. Having, for a time, in the house of the Frenchman, *Campeau*, held at bay a throng of savages which surrounded it, his escape with a few followers at one door was hardly achieved ere these burst in at another.

The next glimpse we get of Major Rogers is at *Rumford* (now *Concord*) where he had a landed estate of some four or five hundred acres. Good old *Parson Walker*, who here kept open house, and for more than fifty years watched with solicitude the interests of his parish and his country, says, in his diary for 1764, against date of February 24: "Major Rogers dined with us" and again December 22: "Major Rogers and Mr. Scales, Jr., dined with me."

It is probable that his private affairs now occupied his attention. A year or so after the surrender of *Montreal* he was married to *Elizabeth*, daughter of *Rev. Arthur Brown*, Rector of *St. John's Church*, in *Portsmouth*, *New Hampshire*. He considered this town his residence, and in papers executed this very year (1764) sometimes designates himself "as of *Portsmouth*," and at others, as "now residing at *Portsmouth*."

For three or four years, between 1762 and 1765, he trafficked a good deal in lands, buying and selling numerous and some quite extensive tracts. Some twenty-five different conveyances to him are on record in the Recorder's office of *Rockingham County*, and half as many from him to other parties.

Some of these lands he seems to have purchased and some to have received in consideration of military services. In 1764 *Benning Wentworth*, as Governor of *New Hampshire*, conveyed to him as "a reduced officer" a tract of three thousand acres, lying in the southern part of *Vermont*.

\*One conveyance made by him and

\*The old "Rogers house," so called, is still standing upon the former estate of Major Rogers, on the east side and near the south end of *Main Street*, in *Concord*, *New Hampshire*. It must be at least a hundred years old, and faces the South, being two stories high on the front side and descending by a long sloping roof to one in the rear. It was occupied for many years by Captain and Mrs. *Roach*, and later by *Arthur*, son of Major Rogers, who was a lawyer by profession and died at *Portsmouth*, in 1841.



bearing date December 20, 1762, arrests our attention. By it he transferred to his father-in-law, Rev. Arthur Brown, before mentioned, some five hundred acres of land in Rumford (now Concord, New Hampshire) together with "one negro man, named Castro Dickerson, aged about twenty-eight; one negro woman, named Sylvia; one negro boy named Pomp, aged about twelve and one Indian boy, named Billy, aged about thirteen." For what reason this property was thus transferred I have no means of knowing. If the object of the conveyance was to secure it as a home to his wife and children against any liabilities he might incur in his irregular life, the end sought was subsequently attained, as the land descended even to his grand-children.\*

And I may as well, perhaps, just here and now anticipate a little by saying that Major Rogers did not prove a good husband, and that seventeen years after their marriage his wife felt constrained, February 12, 1778, to petition the General Assembly of New Hampshire for a divorce from him on the ground of desertion and infidelity. An act granting the same passed the Assembly on the twenty-eighth day of February and the Council on the fourth of March following.†

I may, perhaps, here venture the ir-

\* A portion of this estate was subsequently sold by his descendants to the late Governor Isaac Hill, of Concord, New Hampshire.

† "An act to dissolve the marriage between Robert Rogers and Elizabeth, his wife.

"Whereas, Elizabeth Rogers of Portsmouth, in the County of Rockingham, and State aforesaid, hath petitioned the General Assembly for said State, setting forth that she was married to the said Robert Rogers about seventeen years ago; for the greater part of which time he had absented himself from and totally neglected to support and maintain her—and had, in the most flagrant manner, in a variety of ways, violated the marriage contract—but especially by infidelity to her Bed; For which reasons praying that a divorce from said Rogers, a vinculo matrimonii, might be granted. The principal facts contained in said petition being made to appear, upon a full hearing thereof. Therefore,

"Be it enacted by the Council and House of Representatives for said State in General Assembly convened, That the Bonds of Matrimony between the said Robert and Elizabeth be and hereby are dissolved."—[New Hampshire State Papers, vol. 8, p. 776.

relevant remark that "women sometimes do strange things," and cite the subsequent conduct of Mrs. Rogers in evidence of the declaration. After her divorce she married Captain John Roach, master of an English vessel in the fur trade. The tradition is that, having sailed from Quebec for London, he most unaccountably lost his reckoning and found himself in Portsmouth (New Hampshire) harbor. Here for reasons satisfactory to himself, he sold the cargo on his own account and quit sea life.\* After his marriage he lived with his wife and her son by the former marriage on the estate in Concord, previously mentioned as having been conveyed by Rogers to her father. Captain Roach is said to have been most famous for his unholy expletives and his excessive potations.

The venerable Colonel William Kent, now living at Concord in his nineties, says that Captain Roach one day brought into the store where he was a clerk a friend who had offered to treat him and called for spirit. Having drawn from a barrel the usual quantity of two drinks the clerk set the measure containing it upon the counter, expecting the contents to be poured into two tumblers, as was then the custom. Without waiting for this division the thirsty Captain immediately seized the gill cup and drained it. Then, gracefully returning it to the board, he courteously remarked to his astonished friend that when one gentleman asks another to take refreshment the guest should be helped first, and should there be found lacking a sufficiency for both, the host should call for more.

Whether Mrs. Rogers gained by her exchange of husbands it would be hard to say. That in 1812 she went willing from this to a land where "they

\* Bouton's History of Concord, p. 351.



neither marry nor are given in marriage," it is easy to believe.\*

In returning to Major Rogers, we must not forget that he was an author as well as soldier. He seems to have been in England in 1765, and to have there published two respectable volumes of his writings. One is entitled "Journals of Major Robert Rogers; containing an account of the several excursions he made under the Generals who commanded upon the continent of North America, during the late War," and embraces the period from September 24, 1755, to February 14, 1761. It is doubtless quite reliable and valuable as a contribution to the history of our Army of the Lakes during the old French war.†

The other is called "a concise view of North America," and contains much interesting information relative to the country at the time of its publication.‡

\* Captain Roach died at Concord in May, 1811.

†The full title is "Journals of Major Robert Rogers: containing an account of several excursions he made under the Generals who commanded upon the Continent of North America during the late war. From which may be collected the material circumstances of every campaign upon that continent from the commencement to the conclusion of the war. London: Printed for the Author, and sold by J. Millan, bookseller near Whitehall, MDCCLXV." 8vo., Introduction, pp. viii; Journals, pp. 236.

An American edition of Roger's Journals, ably edited by Dr. F. B. Hough, was published at Albany in 1883, by J. Munsell's Sons. Besides a valuable introduction, it contains the whole text of the Journals, an appendix consisting largely of important official papers relating to Rogers, and a good index. It is by far the best edition of the Journals ever published.

‡The full title of this volume is "A Concise Account of North America; Containing a description of the several British Colonies on that Continent, including the islands of New Foundland, Cape Breton, &c., as to their Situation, Extent, Climate, Soil, Produce, Rise, Government, Religion, Present Boundaries and the number of Inhabitants supposed to be in each. Also of the Interior and Westerly Parts of the Country, upon the rivers St. Lawrence, the Mississippi, Christino and the Great Lakes. To which is subjoined, An account of the several Nations and Tribes of Indians residing in those Parts, as to their Customs, Manners, Government, Numbers, &c., Containing many useful and Entertaining Facts, never before treated of. By Major Robert Rogers. London: Printed for the Author, and sold by J. Millan, bookseller, near Whitehall. MDCCLXV." 8vo., Introduction and Advertisement, pp. viii; Concise Account, pp. 264.

It is less reliable than the former, but is a readable book, and, when the author keeps within the bounds of his personal knowledge, is doubtless authentic.

Both works are a credit to Major Rogers. To the charge that he was an illiterate person and that these works were written by another's hand, it may be urged, as to the "journals," that the correspondence of their matter to the written reports of his expeditions made to his superior officers and now preserved in the New York State Library, convincingly show that this work is undoubtedly his. If revised before publication by a more practiced writer, this revision should not deprive him of the credit of their authorship.

Rogers laid no claims to fine writing, but his own manuscript reports, written mostly in camp and hastily, attest his possession of a fair chirography, a pretty good knowledge of grammar and spelling, together with a style of expression both lucid and simple; in short, these are such compositions as come naturally from a man who, favored in youth with but a limited common school education, has in mature life mingled much with superiors and been often called upon to draft such writings as fall to the lot of a soldier or man of business. Mr. Parkman also attributes to Rogers a part authorship of a tragedy long forgotten, entitled "Ponteach, or the Savages in America," published in London in 1766. It is a work of little merit and very few copies of it have been preserved.\*

On the tenth of June, 1766, at the King's comand, General Gage appointed Major Rogers Captain Commandant of the garrison of Michili-

\*The full title of this book is "Ponteach; or the Savages of America. A Tragedy. London. Printed for the Author, and sold by J. Millan, opposite the Admiralty, Whitehall, MDCCLXVI."



mackinac.\* Sir William Johnson, then Superintendent of Indian Affairs, when apprized of it was filled with astonishment and disgust. He regarded Rogers as a vain man, spoiled by flattery, and inordinately ambitious, dishonest, untruthful, and incompetent to discharge properly the duties of this office.† But as the appointment had been made and could not be revoked, it was determined to accept the inevitable and restrict his power, thereby rendering him as little capable of mismanagement as possible. He was ordered by General Gage to act in all matters pertaining to the Indians under instructions of the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, and to report upon all other matters to the Commandant at Detroit, to whom he was made subordinate.‡

Commander Rogers probably reached Michilimackinac in August, 1766. He soon after demonstrated his entire unfitness for his position by clandestinely engaging in the Indian trade,§ and by involving the government in unnecessary expenses, which he sought to meet by drafts upon the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, which that officer was

\*Journals, Hough's edition, p. 218.

† Sir William Johnson in a letter to General Thomas Gage, dated January 23, 1766, says of Rogers: "He was a soldier in my army in 1755, and, as we were in great want of active men at that time, his readiness recommended him so far to me that I made him an officer and got him continued in the Ranging service, where he soon became puffed up with pride and folly from the extravagant encomiums and notices of some of the Provinces. This spoiled a good Ranger, for he was fit for nothing else—neither has nature calculated him for a large command in that service."—[Journals, Hough's edition, p. 215.

The same to Captain Cochrane November 17, 1767, says: "I raised him (Rogers) in 1755 from the lowest station on account of his abilities as a Ranger, for which duty he seemed well calculated, but how people at home, or anywhere else, could think him fit for any other purpose must appear surprising to those acquainted with him. I believe he never confined himself within the *disagreeable bounds of truth*, as you mention, but I wonder much they did not see through him in time."—[Journals, p. 241.

‡ Journals, p. 217.

§ Same, p. 242.

obliged to dishonor. To still further curtail his power, a Commissary was appointed to reside at the post and regulate the Indian trade. To this Rogers sullenly submitted, but quarrelled with the officer. As time went on matters grew worse. He engaged in foolish speculations; got deeply into debt to the Indian traders; chafed under his limitations; grew first discontented, and then desperate; entered into treasonable correspondence with a French officer;\* and finally conceived a plan of seeking of the home government an independent governorship of Michilimackinac, and in case of failure to rob his post and the traders thereabout, and then desert to the French on the lower Mississippi.†

His mismanagement and plottings having grown insufferable he was arrested and conveyed in irons to Montreal in September, 1768, to be there tried by court-martial for high treason.† On some ground, probably a technical one, he escaped conviction, and at some date between May, 1769, and February, 1770, he sailed for England.

And there, strange as it may seem, the stalwart, cheeky, fine-looking, wily ex-Commandant was lionized. His acquittal had vindicated his innocence and established his claim to martyrdom. His books had advertised him as a hero. His creditors, to whom he owed considerable amounts, supported his claims in hopes thereby of getting their dues. He was gazed at by the commonalty. He was feted by the nobility. He was received by the king and allowed to kiss his hand. He claimed payment for arrears of salary and other expenses previously disallowed in England and at home, which was made. Encouraged by his successes he pushed boldly on and

\* Journals, pp. 234, 235, 236.

† Same, p. 231.



asked to be made an English Baronet, with £600 a year, and in addition to that, a Major in the army.\* One is in doubt which to wonder at the most, the audacity of the bold adventurer, or the stupidity of the British public. But vaulting ambition had at length overleaped itself. He failed of the coveted knighthood, and sank by degrees to his true level.

We see nothing more of Major Rogers until July, 1775, when he again appears in America as a Major of the British Army retired on half pay. The object of his visit to his native land just at the beginning of our Revolutionary war was not satisfactorily apparent. Some considered him a military adventurer, anxious to sell his services to the highest bidder. Others regarded him as a British spy. He wandered over the country all the way from Pennsylvania to New Hampshire with very little ostensible business. His improbable statements, his associations with persons hostile to the American cause, his visits to places of bad reputation, as well as his whole general conduct, rendered him a suspected person.

He was arrested on the twenty-second of September following his arrival by the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety, but was afterwards paroled upon his solemn declaration and promise that "on the honor of a soldier and a gentleman he would not bear arms against the American United Colonies, in any manner whatever, during the present contest between them and Great-Britain;" † yet, on the twenty-sixth of

\* Benjamin Roberts in a letter to Sir William Johnson, dated February 19, 1770, says: "Kingston has a most extraordinary letter from London, which says that Major Rogers was presented to his majesty and kissed his hand—that he demanded redress and retaliation for his sufferings. The minister asked what would content him. He desired to be made a Baronet, with a pension of £600 sterling, and to be restored to his government at Michilimackinac, and have all his accounts paid. Mr. Fitzherbert is his particular friend."—[Journals, p. 256.]

† Journals, p. 259.

the next November, he makes a tender of his services to the British government, in a letter addressed to General Gage, and was encouraged to communicate more definitely his proposals.\*

On the second day of December, a little more than a month later, in shabby garb he calls upon President Wheelock, at Hanover, New Hampshire. After speaking of his absence in Europe, during which, he said, he had fought two battles in Algiers, under the Dey, he officiously tendered his aid in a proposed effort to obtain a grant of land for Dartmouth College. The President distrusted him, but treated him civilly. At the close of the interview he returned to the tavern where he passed the night, and left the next morning without paying his reckoning. †

Again, on the nineteenth of the same month, at Medford, Massachusetts, he addresses a letter to General Washington, soliciting an interview, but his reputation was such that the Commander-in-Chief declined to see him. ‡

Even this did not discourage him. With an effrontery truly wonderful, on the twenty-fifth of June, 1776, after he had been arrested in South Amboy and brought to New York, he expressed to the Commander-in-Chief his desire to pass on to Philadelphia, that he might there make a secret tender of his services to the American Congress. §

However, by this time, his duplicity had become so manifest that a few days after this interview (July 2, 1776) the New Hampshire House of Representatives passed a formal vote recommending his arrest, || which was supplemented two years later (November 19, 1778) by a decree of proscription.

\* Journals, p. 261.

† Same, p. 118.

‡ Same, p. 263.

§ Same, p. 273.

|| New Hampshire Prov. Papers vol. viii, p. 185.



Finding hypocrisy no longer available, sometime in August, 1776, he accepted a commission of Lieutenant Colonel Commandant, signed by General Howe and empowering him to raise a battalion of Rangers for the British Army. To this work he now applied himself and with success.\*

On the twenty-first of October, 1776, Rogers fought his last battle, so far as I have been able to discover, on American soil. His Regiment was attacked at Mamaronec, New York, and routed by a body of American troops. Contemporary accounts state that he did not display his usual valor in this action and personally withdrew before it was over.

The next year he returned to Eng-

\* Journals, p. 277.

land,\* where, after a disreputable life of some twenty-two or twenty-three years, of which little is known, he is said to have died in the year 1800.

Such are some of the more salient points in the career of Major Robert Rogers, the Ranger. When another century shall have buried in oblivion his frailties, the valor of the partizan commander will shine in undimmed lustre. When the historian gives place to the novelist and the poet, his desperate achievements portrayed by their pens will render as romantic the borders of Lake George, as have the daring deeds of Rob Roy McGregor, rehearsed by Walter Scott, made enchanting the Shores of Lock Lomond.

\* Parker's History of Londonderry, p. 238.

