

GENTLEMAN AND SOLDIER

“JOHNNY” BURGOYNE.

Reviewed by CAPTAIN B. H. LIDDELL HART.

GENTLEMAN JOHNNY BURGOYNE. By F. J. Hudleston, with a Biographical Note by Arthur Machen. (Cape. 12s 6d.)

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One of the wisest and wittiest men who ever sat in the War Office—he sat, often shivering, in an ice-cold basement—has here written, in historical form the most delicious of satires upon the military mind, and, indeed, upon the British character. And it is all the more deadly because Hudleston knew so well, and loved despite their faults, those at whom his almost caressing shafts are directed.

In this book he deals ostensibly, of course, with eighteenth-century soldiers, but the reader needs little discernment to see how the author's modern experience, is reflected in the older mirror. As historical biography or as analysis of human nature it is equally good and doubly effective. Those who want to know why we lost the American colonies—both the causes of the revolt and the source of military failure—will find a better and truer answer in these pages than in all the musty tomes of excavated documents.

Modern historians have laboured to show the falsity of the old legend of British oppression. And they have succeeded beyond question. But while documents will serve to bring out the unreality of concrete grievances they are essentially superficial and do not penetrate to the things of the spirit, which are far more galling and provocative of revolt than material disabilities. The probable real cause of the American revolution was not, British oppression, but British condescension, and nowhere has it been brought out so clearly yet subtly as in this book.

THE WAR OFFICE LIBRARY

For many years “Frank” Hudleston sat in his gloomy cellar—to which the library of the War Office, its mental provender, was relegated—and thither generations of soldiers descended to profit by his encyclopaedic knowledge of military literature. They came to learn, and they did learn both of literature and life, but they stayed to laugh. And while they laughed and read his books, he read them and laughed—ever so gently and kindly. He is gone—never a man more missed by his friends, and they comprised and over-

flowed the establishment of the Army—but has left us a book which will never let his memory or his wit fade.

If, his publishers had liked to copy the crudities of modern publicity they might have advertised it as a “laugh on every page.” Yet the laughs provoke reflection and self-questioning as he guides us through the course of Burgoyne's career from Boston to the surrender at Saratoga and thence to his decline as the scapegoat for “that man”— the scoundrel Germain. Burgoyne, in contrast, is ably delineated as “pompous, he was a gambler, in morals a latitudinarian. . . . and, I have left the worst for the list, he was a politician.” But he was a Gentleman. Even in the House of Commons he “voted according to his conscience,” which, on occasion, King George thought ‘so extraordinary’ that ‘I almost imagine it was a mistake.’

IRONY AND WIT.

As a soldier he and his fellows lend point to many of ‘Mr. Hudleston’s ironical comments on the Army mind. “Circumlocutions! are all very well in a despatch, but ‘fetching a compass’ in the field was (unfortunately) not the British way.”

“And it is most probable that the generals were anxiously waiting each his turn, all queued up, to borrow the Quartermaster-General’s London Gazette, to see who had been promoted. . . . “The principles of strategy are eternal”; those unprincipled warriors who monkey about with them and fight according, to the light of nature are iconoclasts, and, even if they win, deserve the heaviest censure for not conducting warfare à la Cocker Militaire, i.e., some old Prussian General von und zu Schmellfungus.”

It is no small part of the book’s historical value that it puts the courage, skill, and generosity of the American troops in a far better light than has been done by previous military historians here. But Burgoyne was a British gentleman to the end, even when he surrendered “as if he were condescendingly bestowing some order of knighthood upon” his captor. *“I once saw a bumble-bee, a gorgeous red fellow indignantly struggling in a spider's web, Burgoyne . . . plunging through the woods of North America, reminds me very much of him.”* But Mr. Hudleston makes us not only laugh at but sympathise with the bumble-bee and his species.