

**THE LIFE OF SILAS TALBOT:  
A COMMODORE IN THE  
NAVY OF THE UNITED  
STATES**

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**HENRY T. TUCKERMAN**

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# LIFE OF TALBOT.

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## CHAPTER I.

ONE great cause of the triumph of our Revolution, was the mutual confidence that prevailed among its friends ; another, still less recognized, was individual disinterestedness. Not in the biographies of a few signal actors, or in the results of two or three battles, can we discover the real means of success ; but in the allied and consistent energy of those who, separated by a vast extent of country, were yet side by side and heart with heart in allegiance to her cause. As the greatest forces of Nature are latent,

and only surmised by their partial development, so moral agencies often work unseen, and accumulate with the silent but intense growth of the oak and the avalanche. If we compare the American with the Continental revolutions of the last two years, we cannot but perceive that the repeated failures of the latter are often traceable to selfishness and the absence of intelligent unanimity. In accordance with that great principle of compensation, now so generally recognized, it would seem that in public affairs not less than in personal achievement, self-sacrifice is essential to eminent results. One reason that the American war furnishes so ineffective a subject for the epic poet, is that its most impressive and significant phases are to be found in its episodes;—in the countless instances of modest valor, cheerful privation, and secret martyrdom. The domestic correspondence, and the household traditions of the people, yield more dramatic hints of that eventful struggle than

the annals of the historian. The "pomp and circumstance" of war were so abridged by the limited resources and simple habits of the colonists, that its glories were almost exclusively revealed by feats of personal daring and quiet endurance.

It is often thought derogatory to the spirit of republicanism, to manifest any faith or interest in genealogy; but this prejudice arises from the evils associated with the idea of fixed rank, and the absurd ostentation displayed in heraldic devices. Natural aristocracy has become recognized as a great fact in human society—a law of race, and an ordination of the Creator. It is, therefore, not only deemed justifiable as a merely curious question, but highly interesting and important as an element in the philosophy of character, to trace mental and physical distinctions to their ancestral origin. Indeed, one of the most inviting aspects of this subject is opened by the social life of this country; for to a philosophic

mind it is a most attractive study to investigate the effect of a pioneer life, a new form of government and development of the religious sentiment, upon the original emigrants from Europe to America; and then realize the modification of taste, habit and character, thus induced upon succeeding generations. The climate, theology, and occupations of New England, essentially changed the nature of the children of the pilgrims; yet, here and there, especially during the Revolution, the family instincts of individuals, recorded by the historian of their progenitors, reappears in striking contrast with their wholly diverse condition and habits.

Captain Talbot came honestly by his adventurous impulse and resolved courage. He was a lineal descendant of that Richard de Talbot who witnessed the grant that Walter Gifford, Earl of Buckingham, made to the monks of Cerasie, in the reign of William the Conqueror. His Norman blood asserted itself in a thirst for honorable



activity, in the zeal with which he dedicated himself to the crusade for freedom, and the quickness of thought and deed that signalized his enterprises. Not less obviously was his military aptitude an inherited quality. The Earldom of Shrewsbury was bestowed, in the fifteenth century, upon John Talbot, for his prowess and skill in war. It is remarkable that one of his ancestors was the antagonist of the Maid of Orleans, and another had the custody of Mary Queen of Scots. The line, although illustrious in English history, presents the usual mingled chronicle of shame and glory that belongs to the authentic record of an unbroken and venerable lineage. Thus Geoffrey Talbot was banished by King Stephen for cruelty in his military exploits on behalf of Maud; while Hugh Talbot is renowned as a benefactor to the monks of Beaufort, with whom he eventually took orders. Macaulay, in two of his striking portraits, gives us the most opposite char-

acters in members of this race :—Richard Talbot, lord-lieutenant of Ireland, under James the Second, is described as one of the most infamous public men of his day; and Charles, lord-lieutenant of Staffordshire, and colonel of one of the regiments of horse raised during the Western Insurrection, is portrayed as a singularly accomplished and winsome gentleman. The inscription on a monument to another of the family, at Sheffield, declares of him, that “though noble by descent he was more noble and illustrious in his actions; famous at home and abroad, loyal to his prince, and true to his country;” and that he “resigned his soul in a good old age.”

It is evident that the chivalric element, though sometimes overlaid by cruelty and craft, was innate in the blood; it came from the Norman knights; while the less elevated instincts perhaps are of Celtic origin; at least, such appears to be the inference of a keen and well-informed annalist.

Like his renowned ancestor, Captain Talbot was eminently "true to his country." It was justly recorded of him by a distinguished contemporary, that "America had not a more active friend. Alternately in the army and the navy, as his country called for his services, through the whole war, he devoted himself to her cause."

Large families and early self-dependence were characteristic of colonial life. Education was the great, if not the only duty incumbent on a parent, except that of providing for the material comfort of infancy. So certain and available were the means of subsistence, if either physical strength or mental aptitude existed;—so far removed even from the imagination of the thriving settlers, was the problem of the inadequacy of labor that now agitates civilized society,—that a child with a good constitution and the rudiments of learning, was thought quite prepared for the exigencies of life. To insure this equipment was, however, a