The North Carolina Booklet.

GREAT EVENTS IN . . . . . NORTH CAROLINA HISTORY.

Greene's Retreat

—BY—

D. H. HILL.

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GREENE'S RETREAT.

BY
D. H. HILL.

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NATHANAEL GREENE

"Carolina! Carolina! Heaven's blessings attend her!
While we live we will cherish, protect and defend her."

GREENE'S RETREAT.

"The retreat of Gen. Greene and the pursuit of Lord Cornwallis are worthy to be placed among the most remarkable events of the American war; they would have done honor to the most celebrated captains of that, or any former epoch."—Botta.

Not even the Valley Forge days brought more gloom to the American revolutionists than did the summer of 1780 and the following winter. Almost every adventure, whether of arms or of statecraft went awry. The British were making a supreme effort to dismember the colonies by the conquest of the Southern states. They thought, says Holmes, that "important advantages might be expected from shifting the war to the rich Southern colonies, which chiefly upheld the financial credit of the Confederacy in Europe, and through which the Americans received most of their military and other supplies."

To effect this end, the English commander had, since December 1778, been concentrating troops in that section. Taking Georgia as a starting point, his purpose was to sweep northward in a march of subjugation. Georgia was overcome and occupied, and in 1780 South and North Carolina became objectives.

Washington, in order to meet the new invasion, was forced to divide his army and send his Southern regulars to defend their homes. Most of these, after a terrible winter march from New Jersey, went to reinforce Lincoln at Charleston. The Northern army, thus reduced in number, was compelled to remain inactive. Moreover,

small as it was, there was no money to support it, and hunger and indignation added to supineness drove the men to mutiny. Congress seemed powerless and resourceless. The continental currency was expiring. Enlistment was ceasing. Treachery was added by Arnold's shameless act of perfidy. Even Washington, on whom all hopes stayed, became so despondent that he wrote Mr. Mason, "Unless there is a material change both in our civil and our military policy, it will be in vain to contend much longer." Lafayette, buoyant and optimistic, refrains from writing to his government, declaring, "pride has stopped my pen." The only alleviation to the general gloom in the North was the coming of the French force under Rochambeau.

In the South disaster followed disaster. On the 12th of May, Lincoln surrendered Charleston, and nearly all the continental, or regular soldiers of the South, thereby became prisoners. On the 29th of the same month, Buford's Virginia continental regiment that had failed to get to Charleston to aid in the siege, was hacked to pieces at Waxhaws by Tarleton. Congress, hoping to help matters, now detailed Gen. Gates, Saratoga's hero, to command all the troops in the Southern department. This included the Maryland division of two thousand men and the Delaware regiment both of which Gen. Washington had already generously detached to go South under Gen. DeKalb. But Gates marched to Camden, S. C., only to be appalingly defeated by Earl Cornwallis. Only two days later, at Fishing Creek, Tarleton defeated Sumter, apparently the last hope of South Carolina.

The only gloom-dispelling exploits were Col. Locke's defeat of the Tories at Ramseur's Mill, the signal victory of the allied colonels over "Fierce Ferguson" at King's Mountain, and Sumter's retaliation on Tarleton at Blackstock.

Following the reverses in South Carolina, and the apparent subjugation of that State, came Cornwallis's determination to invade and subdue North Carolina. This further movement in the development of the original plan of the campaign was expected to bring a third state into vassalage. If the British could conquer North Carolina as they had done Georgia and South Carolina, then Cornwallis with his army could join Arnold in Virginia, crush that colony, and the two armies then unite with the Northern army in offensive operations against Washington. The British had been led to believe that North Carolina was full of royal adherents. But the reckless resistance of Davie and Graham to Lord Cornwallis's entering Charlotte, the untiring cutting down of all his detached parties, and the fact stated by Rawdon, that "not a single man attempted to improve the favorable moment to join us," convinced his lordship not only that the "assurances of attachment from our poor distressed friends in North Carolina" were only assurances, but that he was, as he profanely expressed it, "in a d——d rebellious country." His colleague, Gen. Leslie, was meeting with the same sort of reception from at least a part of the inhabitants of Eastern North Carolina, for he writes disconsolately, "I am sorry to observe that the women don't smile on us." However the defeat of Ferguson forced Cornwallis to retire from North Caro-

lina and to order Leslie to join him in South Carolina. Thus reinforced by two thousand men, he made ready for a second invasion of North Carolina.

The State was ill prepared to withstand his fierce coming. With its usual unselfishness, the province had, to aid the common cause, almost stripped itself of defenders. How freely it had aided imperiled districts is shown by a letter from Charles Pinckney: "They have been so willing and ready on all occasions to afford us all the assistance in their power that I shall ever love a North Carolinian, and join with General Moultrie in confessing that they have been the salvation of this country." All her Continental Troops, after long service with Washington, had, during the severe winter of '79 and '80, marched every step of the way from New Jersey to South Carolina to aid beleaguered Charleston. There together with a thousand of her militia, they had been surrendered by Lincoln. Between three and four hundred of her militia, with their ranking officer, General Rutherford, had been captured in Gates's untimely defeat at Camden. Many of her officers and better trained militia, who had served in other States, were broken down in health or "fettered by paroles."

Hence, in the emergency created by the coming of Cornwallis, the State had almost entirely to rely on levies of raw militia.

The militiaman of Western North Carolina was unique in his way. Regarded by his government, in the words of Governor Graham, as a "self-supporting institution," he went forth to service generally without thought of drawing uniform, rations, arms or pay. A piece of white paper

pinned to his hunting cap was his uniform; a wallet of parched flour or a sack of meal was his commissariat; a tin-cup, a frying-pan and a pair of saddle-bags, his only impedimenta; his domestic rifle—a Deckard or a Kutter, and sometimes a sword made in his own black-smith shop, constituted his martial weapons; a horse capable of "long subsisting on nature's bounty" was his means of rapid mobilization or hasty "change of base"; a sense of manly duty performed, his quarter's pay. Indeed, his sense of propriety would have been rudely shocked by any suggestion of reward for serving his endangered country. He had mental characteristics that made both for and against good soldiership. An expert rider and an unerring shot, he was yet disdainful of the discipline that must mechanize a man into a soldier or convert a mob into an army. Patient under hardship, inured to constant activity, unmoved in reverses, he was however so tenacious of personal freedom as to be jealous of the authority of officers chosen by his own suffrage. Of little worth when commanded by untried officers, he was, when led by men of daring whose success had won his confidence, a dauntless and persistent fighter.

To this militia the State appealed after Gates's defeat and on the second approach of Cornwallis. This appeal was in some cases even anticipated; for a letter to Washington says: "Upon this defeat the yeomanry of North Carolina turned out unsolicited." Governor Burke, in a letter to John Adams declares: "The people, under all the distresses inseparable from an unprovided soldiery flew to arms with the greatest alacrity." In fact, the militia seemed at last to be catching the spirit of the indomitable Davie, who

on meeting the fleeing Gates responded to that officer's "Flee or Tarleton will be upon you," "We are accustomed to Tarleton and do not fear him."

To command this militia, "the remnants of the regulars" and Lee's Legion detached from Washington and ordered South, Congress now sent an officer whose very "coming was worth a thousand men."

Great soldiers are often made of queer stuff: a Narses out of a household slave; a Stilicho out of a Vandal's boy; a Cromwell out of a country squire; a Vauban out of a priest's protege. But none ever came from a more unexpected quarter than did Nathanael Greene, now sent to supersede Gates; for not only was he a man of thirty-two years, utterly unlettered in the art of war, before he had ever touched a musket, but he was bred in the bosom of sectaries whose fundamental tenet is the eschewing of all violence, and his own father was a straight-laced Quaker minister, a zealous preacher of the doctrine of passivity. So great however were Greene's powers of acquisition that, although raised behind the plow and beside the anvil, he became one of the most polished gentlemen of the army and so distinguished was his natural ability that in the rough school of the camp he became, according to the statements of his opponents, "a soldier as dangerous as Washington."

Gen. Greene arrived at Charlotte to take his new command on the 2d of December, 1780. Even his imperturbable spirit sank somewhat when he found, as he wrote to Washington, "only the shadow of an army." There were but two thousand troops in all—over half militia. "Only eight hundred," Gates reported, "are properly clothed or

equipped," Col. Lee writes: "The only covering of the Virginians is an old shirt and trousers* *the whole [army] is without shoes; our provisions are from hand to mouth. If we leave here I know not on what we will employ our teeth." Gen. Greene wrote to Gen. Washington: "Nothing can be more wretched and distressing than the condition of the troops starving with cold and hunger, without tents and without camp equipage. Those of the Virginia Line are literally naked and a great part totally unfit for any duty. * * A tattered remnant of some garment, clumsily stuck together with the thorns of the locust tree forms the sole covering of hundreds. We have three hundred men without arms and more than one thousand are so naked that they can be put on duty only in case of desperate necessity."

There were more serious difficulties even than lack of clothing and lack of arms. The Regulars were utterly dispirited by frequent defeats and by want of confidence in their leaders. "The shoals of militia," as Bancroft styles them, were accustomed to go and come at pleasure—"one day" growls Davie, "in camp; another day gone to secure their property." They were called out for only sixty or ninety days, and as their times were constantly expiring, the number of available men was a variant. To enforce proper discipline without alienating the good will of these independent soldiers was a serious problem in tact and judgment. Greene accomplished its solution by forbearance at first, whereby he won the sympathy of the thoughtful among the militia; by shooting a deserter at last, whereby he frightened into obedience all foolish recalcitrants.

The same prudence and foresight were shown in all his

acts. He had written Gen. Washington: "I will recover the country or die in the attempt," and every energy was bent to that end. He thoroughly re-organized his little army. William R. Davie, one of those sunshiny forces, like Sidney, whose gracious personality wins heart and brain obedience, not mere hand service, was reluctantly induced to become Commissary-General. Col. Edward Carrington, a trained organizer and tireless worker, was appointed Quarter-Master General. Indeed Greene had the power that all men of executive genius have, the power to so read character as to select the fittest agents and then to leave them untrammeled to do their work. "No General in the war," comments Prof. Daves, "was surrounded by a more brilliant group of officers. Smallwood, Williams and Howard, of Maryland; Sumner, Eaton and Davie, of North Carolina; Morgan, Lee, Washington, Pickens, Sumter, Huger, Marion, Kirkwood, Carrington—what a list in the rolls of honor! And many a simple Lieutenant or Captain, as Duval, of Maryland, or Forbis, of North Carolina, was well worthy to be ranked with these illustrious leaders."

Nothing better illustrates Greene's thoroughness than his study of the topography of the country in which he operated. Seeing the State intersected by rivers, he had each with its tributaries carefully mapped. Carrington mapped the Dan; Stevens the Yadkin; and Kosciusko, his chief-engineer, the Catawba. So completely did Greene master these maps that when in Morgan's retreat, the question of fords came up, Gen. Davidson exclaimed in surprise and admiration, "Greene never before saw the Catawba, but he knows more about it than those who have been raised on

its banks." This knowledge subsequently savedh is army.

Opposed to Greene's "shadow of an army" was a well equipped corps of seasoned soldiers, commanded by trained officers in whose mastery of their art the men had so much reliance that they looked upon their foes with contempt, and went into battle with no other thought than that of victory. Lord Cornwallis, its leader, had worked his way from ensign to commander. Capable, cold-blooded, indifferent to suffering, too fastidiously delicate to imbrue his own hands in the innocent blood of non-combatants and captives, yet too callous to stay the hand of the ruthless and bloody-minded, he was an opponent worthy of any man's steel. Upon the projection of his entry into North Carolina, Sir Henry Clinton, his Commander-in-Chief, had written him, "As your move is important, it must not be stinted, I will give you all you wish of every sort." Hence his army moved with comforts unknown to the Americans.

Greene, as soon as the state of his little army permitted movement, established himself in a comfortable camp on the Pee Dee river. The object of this move from Charlotte was to find in a less exhausted country, a suitable camp for drill and discipline. Before he left Charlotte, he detached Gen. Morgan to take post south of the Catawba. Morgan was instructed "to give protection to that part of the country and to spirit up the people, to annoy the enemy in that quarter and to collect forage and provision out of their way." With three hundred and twenty regulars of the Maryland line, two hundred Virginia militia and sixty of Col. Washington's dragoons, Morgan, who is justly called

the ablest commander of light troops of his time, set out for his new station. He was speedily joined by about three hundred North Carolina militia, collected by Gen. W. L. Davidson and Major Joseph McDowell, and by some South Carolina and Georgia militia under Gen. Pickens and Col. McCall. To protect as much territory as possible, Morgan pitched camp on the Pacolet river.

The relative position of the two armies is shown by a capital V with its right prong elongated. Greene was at the right apex of the letter, fifty-five miles west from Charlotte and a hundred from Morgan, who was at the left apex. Cornwallis was at the base of the V, and about forty-five miles from Morgan and eighty from Greene.

Cornwallis rejoiced to hear of the division of the American army. He at once determined on the following plan: Tarleton was to be set on Morgan, an easy prey, he thought; Leslie was to threaten Greene by a march up the river; he himself was to march between his two lieutenants, and in the neighborhood of Charlotte to receive into outspread arms the fugitives from Tarleton's ruthless sword.

In pursuance of this plan, Tarleton moved out hot-footed "to destroy Morgan's corps or push it before him to King's Mountain." Cornwallis moved north, but never advanced beyond Turkey Creek.

Morgan soon learned of Tarleton's rapid coming and fell back to Cowpens. There, contrary to the advice of his best officers, he drew up line of battle to await Tarleton's onset. On the 17th of January 1781, Tarleton rushed in his precipitate way upon this grimly waiting foe whose sledge-hammer blows the British of the North had learned to

dread. In less than an hour and a half Tarleton's army "was scattered and slain," and he himself scampering in mad haste from the stricken field.

This battle at Cowpens is memorable for five things: first, that Tarleton, usually clear-headed and brilliant, if hasty, should have so soon forgotten his experience at Blackstock; second, the confidence that a born leader like Morgan can inspire; "I am accustomed to beat my foes," was his self-assured declaration in a speech to the militia on the day of battle, "and if you stand by me and give me two fires at killing distance, I will beat them to-day;" third, the cool stand of the raw militia as its marskmen, in accordance with Morgan's orders, "picked off the epaulette men"—another illustration of what untrained volunteers can do when led by fighters like Pickens and directed by veteran tacticians like Morgan; fourth, the heroism of Col. Howard and his Maryland Line, and of Col. Washington and his horse; fifth, for the sweeping demolition of the British detachment. Of a thousand men taken into action, only about two hundred returned to Cornwallis. In addition to the unusually large number killed and wounded, 527 prisoners were taken. Two field pieces, several hundred muskets, thirty-five supply wagons and one hundred horses fell into the hands of the victors.

The effects of this battle are best stated in the words of the British historian Stedman: "Had Lord Cornwallis had with him at Guilford Court House the troops lost by Col. Tarleton at the Cowpens, it is not extravagant to suppose that the American colonies might have been re-united to the empire of Great Britain." The victory at Cowpens led

to Cornwallis's chase of Greene, and that chase led to the surrender at Yorktown.

Morgan's next thought was to secure his prisoners and sorely-needed munitions of war, and effect a junction with Greene before Cornwallis, who was only twenty-five miles away, could demolish his little force and re-capture the prisoners. Hence, even before his cavalry returned from pursuing Tarleton's fugitives, he paroled the captured officers and marched for the fords of the Catawba. Thus the retreat that was to continue for twenty-eight weary days and nights, and that was to be the admiration of two continents was begun.

Stung to unwonted celerity by this startling disaster to his favorite officer, Cornwallis, after impatiently waiting two days for Leslie to unite, took up from Fisher's Creek the pursuit of Morgan. "He was determined," says Lee, "on unceasing efforts to destroy Morgan and recover his captured troops; to keep separate the two divisions of Greene's army, and should he fail in these attempts, to bring Greene to action before he could reach Virginia."—thus was the pursuit joined.

As army set out to follow army, neither realized the grievous suffering it was to undergo in that desolate winter march of two hundred and thirty miles; neither anticipated the hunger, fatigue, rain, icy rivers, sleepless nights that were before them. Prof. Daves thinks:

"On no page of military history can be found greater skill of leadership or more admirable examples of heroic endurance on the part of troops. Cornwallis was in hot pursuit with four thousand well equipped veterans, while Greene could muster but two thousand men, deprived al-

most of the necessaries of life. The roads were few and wretched; the country traversed by great rivers; the season cold and wet, and yet in this march of four weeks, in the depth of winter, the men half-naked, marking their steps with blood which flowed from their bare feet; pinched with hunger, without tents, without money, destitute of blankets, drenched with perpetual rain, often wading waist-deep through rapid streams—not one man deserted!"

Greene's bearing was most admirable during these trying days. His personal example of participation in every hardship, of dangers sought rather than avoided, of thoughtful and restless activity of mind and body, of consideration of every detail of routes, march, supplies, camps, was an inspiration to his followers. Only once did his dauntless mettle quail, and then his spirits were revived by the patriotism of a woman. Johnson thus gives the story: On his arrival at Salisbury after his long cross country ride, Dr. Reid asked whether he were alone. "Yes, alone, fatigued, hungry, penniless," answered Greene. Mrs. Steele heard the despondent remark, and brought him two bags of specie, saying nobly: "Take these, for you will want them, and I can do without them."

If Cornwallis had been as prompt and persistent in pursuit at the beginning of the great retreat as he was at its close, Morgan and Greene could hardly have escaped either destruction or battle against great odds. But his delay of two days for Leslie to unite gave Morgan an opportunity that he joyously utilized. He sent Col. Washington with the militia to escort the prisoners on the Gilberttown road while he with the rest of his force, moved on the lower Flint Hill road. Both bands marched incessantly to get the

Catawba river between them and the British. Should a winter rain make that river impassable, their doom was sealed. Col. Washington with the prisoners, crossed safely at Island ford. After getting his prisoners over the river, Col. Washington and his cavalry turned South to rejoin Morgan, who had reached and crossed Sherrill's ford on the 23d of January. Gen. Pickens then conducted the prisoners on toward Virginia. Morgan on being informed of Cornwallis's tardy movements and his stop at Ramseur's Mill remained on the East bank of the river to rest his men.

On the 25th Greene learned by courier of Morgan's signal victory. Realizing the dangers threatening Morgan, he made speedy preparations for his second in command, Gen. Huger, to move the whole army up the Yadkin and be ready to form a junction with Morgan, near Salisbury. Greene himself "with only a guide, an aid, and a sergeant's guard of cavalry struck across the country to join Morgan and aid him in his arduous operations." He traveled the hundred miles intervening in three days, reaching Sherrill's Ford on the 30th. In a twenty minute conference the two veterans planned their future operations, and each rode off: Morgan to overtake his men who were retiring under Howard over the Salisbury road; Greene to arrange for the safe withdrawal of the neighborhood militia who were to oppose the British crossing.

Meantime Cornwallis, leaving Turkey Creek on the 19th, had reached Ramseur's Mill on the 25th of January. Had he moved on a direct instead of a circuitous route, he could have marched this distance in two days instead of six, and could most probably have struck Morgan a blow before he

crossed the river. Ramseur's is only twenty-five miles from the Catawba; hence, after a six days' march, Cornwallis was exactly the same distance from the Americans that he was on the day of battle. At Ramseur's, the British commander resolved to facilitate his march by destroying all his heavy stores. He destroyed all wagons except those loaded with hospital stores, salt and ammunition and four empty ones for the sick or wounded. This destruction of supplies so far from his base, in a hostile country, subsequently proved well-nigh fatal to his army. Either two days were required for this destruction or, as Schenck says, "some fatuity overshadowed his reason;" for, as already seen, the Americans used that time to get their prisoners safely away and to give their army a needed rest. It has often been stated that the Americans were saved from the pursuing British by the swelling of the Catawba just after their passage. This is an error. Graham, who was present, says: "It was fordable from the week before until two days after this time."

At last, on the 28th, Cornwallis with a force stated by Sir Henry Clinton to be "considerably above three thousand, exclusive of cavalry and militia," moved towards Beattie's Ford. Henceforth his army was to move with most soldier-like precision and swiftness. On the 31st, the very day that Morgan took up his march for Salisbury, Cornwallis approached the Catawba. Feinting at Beattie's Ford with his main force, he sent Gen. O'Hara's division to force a crossing at Cowan's Ford, four miles below. There the intrepid Gen. Wm. Lee Davidson had arrayed a small body of local militia to retard the passage over the riv-

er. The object of this one-sided fight was, if possible, to delay the British long enough for the coveted union between Morgan and Huger to be effected.

At daybreak on the 1st of February, O'Hara's men forced the passage, killed Gen. Davidson, a wise and gallant officer, and scattered his militia. Davidson's men however, made a stubborn stand, and slew Col. Hall, of the leading regiment, and thirty of his men. The rest of the day was consumed in getting all the British troops across at Beattie's and at Cowan's Ford and in dispersion of militia.

On the 2d, over miry roads, the British resumed pursuit of Morgan. The ever active militia of Mecklenburg and Rowan collected behind the Redcoats and followed sullenly in their rear, ready to strike hard whenever their foes made a small measure of success possible. To expedite the pursuit, Cornwallis placed all the cavalry under Gen. O'Hara's orders, and mounting some infantry to accompany the cavalry, directed O'Hara to press on ahead of the marching columns and bring Morgan to bay. However, the horrible state of the roads and the day and night's lead obtained by the Americans enabled them to reach Trading Ford on the Yadkin, seven miles from Salisbury, just before the stream became impassable on the 3d. The cavalry forded the rapidly rising stream at midnight, and at dawn the infantry was ferried over in boats collected for miles up and down the river. O'Hara in fierce following arrived on the river bank in time to capture a few stuck-in-the-mud wagons that one hundred and fifty militia still on the west bank of the river, made him pay for with a dozen lives.

His disappointment found expression in a harmless cannonade across the rushing waters.

Gen. Greene, who had remained in much peril behind Morgan to be of service to the militia, was disappointed in getting many immediately together, and after a lonely ride reached Salisbury during the night of the 2d. On the 3rd he overtook Morgan and crossed the Yadkin with him. Prior to this he had sent orders to Huger to bear to the right and effect the desired junction at Guilford Court House.

This second escape of the Americans was a bitter disappointment to Cornwallis, but he did not allow it to slacken the sinews of his pursuit. It necessitated the giving up of his hopes of defeating Morgan before he could unite with Huger, but he at once recurred to his other alternative—the cutting off of Greene's united army from the fords of the Dan. He says: "The river had now become impassable, and I determined to march to the upper fords and with great expedition get between them and Greene—in hopes that he would not escape me without a blow." He reasoned that as the high water would prevent Greene from crossing the lower Dan, the Americans would have to make a trial of the upper fords. Hence, if he could first reach these fords, Greene being intercepted, must fight on British terms. Accordingly, although he recognized fully the danger of getting daily farther away from his supply base, he resolutely decided to dash ahead with every man and beast strained to utmost marching capacity. The prize was tantalizingly near and tantalizingly great. To secure it he turned up the Yadkin, crossed at Shallow Ford on the 6th,

and marched direct for the upper Dan, keeping Greene on his right.

But his lordship had far underestimated the forethought and resourcefulness of the American commander. Before Cornwallis had made a day's march, Greene had divined his plans and was preparing to contravene them. After resting his army from the 3d to the afternoon of the 4th of Feb., he set forward for Guilford Court House, where he expected Huger. To appear to be falling into the trap set by Cornwallis, he bore to the north until he reached the site of the present town of Salem. At that secluded Moravian settlement, founded in faith, built upon industry, justice and equality, destitute of all defence except that "it had raised the symbol of the triumphant Lamb," Greene halted for his scouts to bring in accurate information as to his enemy's movements. Finding that Cornwallis was following, he turned almost due east and marched to Guilford Court House. There the two divisions of his army were safely united. On the day of their union the British army was at Salem—twenty-five miles away. Thus after a continuous pursuit of twenty-two days, the British were again no closer to their adversaries than on the day of Cowpens. The Americans had so far outbattled them, outmarched them and outgeneraled them.

Although Gen. Greene had already been maturing ways and means for crossing the Dan, he knew how depressed in spirit and how harassed in body the patriots of North Carolina would be if he entirely left the State, and he had not been without hope of giving Cornwallis battle on the union of Morgan and Huger. Before he reached Guil-

ford he sent out orders for a concentration of local militia at that point, and after his arrival he went so far as to select favorable ground for a passage at arms. Nothing can better show the soldierly skill of Greene than the fact that he forced Cornwallis, a month later, to fight on the very ground selected upon this February survey. However, as the camp at Hillsboro had no reinforcements to send, and as so few militia responded to his summons, Gen. Greene felt impelled to avoid the risk of a battle. A council of war unanimously confirming him in this opinion, preparations were at once made to continue the retreat.

All realized that the last stage of the great retreat had now been reached. All equally realized that this was to be the hardest of all, for hitherto only Morgan's light division had been endangered; now the united army was, while yet too weak to fight, to be the quarry chased. A third time the objective was to be the passage of an uncertain river. A third time the same commanders were strategetically pitted against each other. A third time, over winter-washed roads, with shoeless feet frozen and bleeding, with bodies, only in too many cases, fluttering with rags, the liberty-loving privates of America were for four days and nights to measure endurance and fortitude with well-equipped Britons.

A decision to continue the retreat having been reached, several further questions arose. Where should a crossing be attempted? How should it be made? What steps should be taken to cover the crossing? Upon Col. Carrington's presentation of facts obtained from his survey of the river and of routes, Irwin's Ferry, seventy miles from Guilford

Court House was selected as the place. This selection settled the manner, for there the crossing could be only by ferry, and Carrington and Smith went forward at once to collect boats. To secure the march and to protect the passage, Greene embodied a light corps. Col. Lee, who was a prominent officer in this corps, says: "Gen. Greene formed a light corps consisting of some of his best infantry under Lieutenant-Col. Howard, of Washington's cavalry, the legion of Lee, and a few militia riflemen, making in all seven hundred. These troops were to take post between the retreating and the advancing army, to seize every opportunity of striking in detail, and to retard the enemy by vigilance and judicious positions; while Greene, with the main body hastened toward the Dan, the boundary of his present toils and dangers."

The command of this body was offered to Gen. Morgan, but that officer had become so enfeebled by rheumatism that he was forced to decline it. Col. Otho Williams, of Maryland, was then put in command, and nobly did he measure up to all the requirements of that difficult position.

Leaving Col. Williams to front the enemy and mask the movement, Greene on the 10th put his army in motion for Irwin's Ferry, seventy miles distant, and in a well-ordered march of seventeen miles a day continued to press for the river. This division of the army escaped in a measure the forced marches, the nerve-wearing apprehension and rear-guard fighting that fell to the lot of Williams's light troops. But as the men were without shoes and without tents and proper clothing, and as the weather was very

cold, the roads miry and washed, the march was one of great discomfort.

After Greene had fully disappeared, Williams rather ostentatiously moved out on a road that intercepted the British line of march, there saucily placed himself in Cornwallis's front, and marched to the left, as though making for the upper Dan.

This light corps was composed of the choice soldiers of Greene's army, both in military quality and equipment. Not a man in it but was elated at being deemed worthy of such important, if arduous service; not a man but was bent on showing that his mettle was equal to the call made upon it. Each, with the American soldier's intelligent appreciation of public events, knew that the salvation of Greene's army and the fate of the Southern Colonies depended upon the ability of his little corps to mislead and delay the British army. And, while every one was impressed with the conviction that it might become necessary for him to throw himself recklessly and unsupportedly against the British to secure time by his death for Greene's passage, each was resolved, if the necessity came, to do so with the utmost cheerfulness. So in spite of the facts that they began the days' march at three o'clock in the morning in order to get far enough ahead of their enemies to cook breakfast, the only meal eaten during the day; that they marched continuously until dark; that after the days' journey one-half of them were on patrol or picket duty every night; that they got only six hours of sleep out of every forty-eight hours, that what little sleep they got was on wet ground and without blankets or tents—in spite of all these things,

there is abundant testimony that through the four days and nights of the march there was not only no grumbling nor discontent, but that the men were happy and proud of the responsibility put upon them. Thus constituted then were the troops who now by a cross road marched into the road ahead of Cornwallis.

The British commander seeing both horse and foot ahead of him, and seeing apparently a movement to cover Dix's Ferry, naturally concluded that the entire American army was before him. Consequently, after halting for an hour or two for his extended marching lines to close up on O'Hara's light troops in front, he did just what Williams desired—followed his command and left Greene an unmolested march. Cornwallis at first followed on a parallel road to the left of the one upon which Williams was traveling—Greene using a parallel one to the right. But on the wide plantations the two armies were frequently in rifle range of each other. At first approximation the fiery spirits on each side blazed up, and skirmishes were of almost hourly occurrence. But, as they soon realized, the sacrifice of a few heroic souls in this way was fruitless, and the practice was discontinued. Then followed a rare sight. Through the peaceful solitudes of the winter roads, two armies each bent on the ultimate destruction of the other marched hour after hour with no more apparent animosity than though they were following the same flag and engaged upon the same mission.

So thoroughly did Williams's movements deceive Cornwallis, and so cleverly did his patrols keep royalist messengers from reaching his lordship, that it was not until the

evening of the 12th or the morning of the 13th that Cornwallis received the mortifying intelligence that Greene was on the Irwin's Ferry road, and that he had been chasing only a detachment. Determining that his prey should nevertheless not escape him, Cornwallis wheeled sharply to the right, and with every nerve and muscle strained to the cracking point made straight for Greene's rear.

About the same time that the British discovered their error and tried to rectify it, Williams received the joyful tidings that the American army was nearing the ferry. His task thus being accomplished, he too turned to the right and came into the Irwin's Ferry road just ahead of the hastening British.

Immediately preceding and during the turn for the new road, Lee's Legion, the rear-guard of Williams's force, and O'Hara's front had one or two sharp clashes. Lee however, drew his men well in. "Only," says he in his narative, "when a defile or water-course crossed our route did the enemy exhibit any indication to cut off our rear, in which essays, being always disappointed, their useless efforts were gradually discontinued." Stakes were now too high to play any but trump cards.

On the night of the 13th, the Americans, still doggedly pressed even after dark by their desperate adversaries, were dismayed to see camp-fires brightly burning just before them. "Surely," they cried out, "that must be our commander's army with camp pitched and with men utterly unprepared for the onset of the British." The determination that followed was so noble that it must be told in the words of one of the little band: "Our dauntless corps was

convinced that the crisis had now arrived when its self-sacrifice could alone give a chance of escape to the main body. With one voice was announced the noble resolution to turn on the foe, and by dint of desperate courage, so to cripple him as to force a discontinuance of pursuit." But happily Greene's camp fires of the night before had been mistaken for his camp of that night.

On this night the light corps was allowed a rest of only from nine o'clock until midnight. They were then aroused by the advance of the enemy who was resolved to rest neither night nor day until Greene was destroyed. All day over deep roads incrusted with frost, pursuer and pursued tramped painfully, but continuously. At noon a courier set the wearied Americans into a frenzy of delight by bringing word that Greene's army was safely across the Dan. Not in vain had they suffered and marched as an army is seldom called upon to suffer and march. "One more effort," shouted their officers, "and we too will have shaken off our foes." With a quickened step that the British could not rival the men swung onward. So much distance did they gain that at three o'clock, Col. Williams felt safe in leaving only Lee's Legion in front of the enemy. He took the nearest road for Boyd's Ferry, only fourteen miles away, where Carrington awaited him with boats. Later in the day Lee withdrew his infantry from the Irwin's Ferry road, and then at dark his cavalry, leaving fires burning, turned also into the Boyd's Ferry road. All were safely ferried over before ten o'clock, and "in the camp of Greene joy beamed in every face."

An impassable river lay between them and their baffled

oe, who now without supplies lay in the dead of winter in an enemy's country, with "an ever increasing militia swarming in his rear." The hazard had been the safety of the South, and they had won. Thus ended on the 14th of February, a pursuit that will always remain a monument to both American and British pluck and endurance. Perhaps no commander but a British one would have thus cut loose from his base, cast prudence to the wind and followed recklessly for two hundred and thirty miles an enemy that he felt impelled to destroy: perhaps no opponents except Americans could have endured the pitiless hardships of the pursuit and successfully thwarted its object.

That Greene and his officers conducted every operation with consummate ability is testified to by friend and foe. "Your retreat before Cornwallis is highly applauded by all ranks," wrote Washington. "Every measure of the Americans during their march from the Catawba to Virginia" comments Tarleton, "was judiciously designed and vigorously executed." Lord Germain wrote almost admiringly, "the rebels conduct their enterprises in Carolina with more spirit and skill than they have shown in any other part of America."