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CHAPTER XLV.

The despatches requiring that a portion of the British troops under Lord Cornwallis's command be sent to New York reached that General at Williamsburgh, and he at once prepared to comply, but as it was evident that he would be unable to hold so advanced a post he resolved to cross the James River and retire to Portsmouth. As it was found that the most convenient place for crossing was at James Island, the Royal army on the 4th July marched by the left from Williamsburgh, and the same evening arrived opposite James Island; in order to cover the right flank and rear of the army Lieut. Colonel Tarleton with the legion cavalry and two companies of mounted infantry moved to a church eighteen miles from Williamsburgh which the Americans had fortified and garrisoned by riflemen as an advanced post covering the front of their army—this work was carried by surprise and the garrison dislodged with some loss—the victors then proceeded to Tyre's plantation where they drove in the pickets and communicated a general alarm to La Fayette's corps.

The position occupied by the King's troops to cover the embarkation was very strong, the right was covered by ponds, the centre and left by swamps over which a few narrow causeways connected it with the country. On the morning of the 6th July the cavalry foragers reported the enemy were advancing, Tarleton sent a negro and dragoon as deserters to inform the Americans that the legion and a detachment of infantry composed the rear guard the main body of the Royal army having passed James River: this ruse succeeded, the Americans advanced rapidly and in the afternoon beat back a patrol of cavalry over one of the causeways on the left, and soon after the outposts were fired upon by their riflemen while a division of their army advanced towards the morass. The British

army supported the pickets on the left in order to prevent the American army passing the woods till their whole force was fully committed. Just before sunset the Marquis de la Fayette passed the swamp on the left with about 1500 men and some artillery, the remainder of his troops took post at a brick house beyond the swamp. Upon the first cannon shot being fired the British army formed and advanced, and after a smart action of an hour's duration drove the Americans over the swamps with a loss of 300 men, and their artillery; night alone prevented the destruction of the whole, for the American troops were so exhausted by a long march that they bivouacked within six miles of the British lines for twenty-four hours unable to move—nor was any advantage taken of their circumstances beyond the advance of a party under Colonel Tarleton who drove in the pickets on the main body who were found at Green Springs unable to move and could have been captured or dispersed by the advance of a division of the British army, but the opportunity was neglected for striking a fatal blow, and fortune was wearied of favoring Generals unable to take any advantage of her gifts.

The British army having crossed James River the troops ordered to New York proceeded to Portsmouth for embarkation, but before they could put to sea an order arrived to countermand their sailing, while Lt. Col. Tarleton was ordered to proceed to Prince Edward Court House and thence to New London in Bedford County, to destroy on his march all military stores or provisions for the American army and to relieve any British prisoners which might be sent Northward. The information on which this expedition was founded was very defective; after reaching Prince Edward Court House they found the stores there had been forwarded to Gen. Greene upwards of a month before, and it was discovered that he had not sent any expedition northward but was engaged in the siege of Ninety Six; these facts induced Tarleton to return to the Royal army which he rejoined at Suffolk fifteen days after starting from Cobham, having completed a march of 400 miles in that time with more loss and damage to his men and horses than they in-

flicted on the enemy. After this junction had been effected the remainder of the troops marched to Portsmouth, Lord Cornwallis having received a letter from Sir H. Clinton in which he expressed his surprise that he should have left the Peninsula at Williamsburgh without consulting him and directing that it should be re-occupied for the purpose of establishing a post for the safety and protection of ships of the line either at Old Point Comfort or Yorktown.

It seems to have been Clinton's intention to try and transfer the seat of war to Virginia, as his predecessor Howe had transferred it from Boston to New York and thence to Philadelphia—there can be no doubt that if the British fleet had been properly commanded such a movement would have placed the rebels at the mercy of Great Britain from simple exhaustion alone, not because they had been compelled thereto by the successful strategy of the British Generals, but simply because the preponderance of force was against them.

It now remained with Lord Cornwallis to decide which of the stations submitted for his consideration should be selected as that best adapted to meet the requirements of a port and a defensive position commanding the entrance into Hampton Roads—a survey of Old Point Comfort elicited the fact that it was not in any way adapted as a good defensive harbor—Portsmouth was altogether out of the question as it afforded no anchorage for line of battle ships—it appeared therefore to the British General that Yorktown on the York River met all the requirements of the case, and on the 1st of August it was occupied by a division of the army, the remainder being employed in dismantling Portsmouth which was effected by the 21st, and on the 22nd Lord Cornwallis's whole force was concentrated at Yorktown and Gloucester, the first on the right and the latter on the left bank of the York River, which is about a mile in width—the river or more properly inlet expands to nearly double that dimension for a considerable distance inland furnishing a desirable anchorage for line of battle ships.

The village of Gloucester is situated on a point of land on the north side of York