

tinguished junior officers of the British army were placed; such as TARLETON, SIMCOE, and FERGUSON, the corps being generally known by the name of the leaders as TARLETON's light horse SIMCOE's rangers or FERGUSON's rangers the latter were detached as corps of observation whose duty it was to hold the country between the Wateree and Saluda Rivers.

On the 16th of August, 1780, Earl CORNWALLIS with a force not exceeding 1500 regular soldiers, completely defeated, dispersed, or captured General GATES's army of 6000 well equipped soldiers, capturing all his artillery, camp equipage, baggage and colors, and driving the relics before him in such utter confusion that one hundred men could not be rallied twenty miles from the battle field, at Rugeley's Mills, three miles north of Camden; and on the 18th, TARLETON defeated SUMPTER at Catawba ford, capturing all his arms and artillery.

The country was effectually cleared, and the march to the sea open if the men had been there to take advantage of the opportunity. The inefficiency of the British commissariat department was the cause of all the subsequent disasters, as it became necessary to occupy a much greater extent of country than the force warranted.

It having been decided to establish a garrison at Charlottetown, Major FERGUSON and his command was detached considerably in advance; he reached Gilberttown at the foot of the Blue Ridge at the same time the British main body occupied Charlottetown.

Almost simultaneously an attack was made on the British post of Augusta by a partisan named CLARK, but he was defeated with a loss of over 150 men, and in fear of his retreat being cut off he retreated towards the head waters of the Congaree.

Intelligence was at once sent to FERGUSON with orders to intercept him, but he had already advanced beyond all reach of support and was in a critical position. CLARK's retreat had cut off his communications.

A report had spread that a valuable deposit of presents for the Creek and Cherokee Indians were at Augusta, and the border ruffians of the period had assembled in the neighborhood of Gilberttown to aid CLARK or plunder him as might be, they heard of his defeat and were about to disperse, but Cols. CLEVELAND, SHELBY, and others arriving with some hastily collected battalions of militia, bringing their whole force up to 3000 men, they were persuaded to attack FERGUSON's detachment which did not exceed 300 men. The latter apprised of his danger commenced a rapid retreat; first despatching messengers to Lord CORNWALLIS apprising him of his danger, but they were intercepted by CLARK and the pursuit urged with double vigor. Finding however that he could not be overtaken they detached 1500 mounted men who came up with him on the 9th of October, 1780, at King's mountain, surprised his detachment, and after a brief engagement Major FERGU-

SON was killed, the greater part of his soldiers surrendered on quarter, but the ruffians hanged ten of the leading loyalists in cold blood.

Emboldened by this success they attacked Polk's mill near Charlottetown, but were defeated with severe loss, and immediately disbanded with as great celerity as they came together.

"An exceedingly rare volume, published in London 1789, and entitled "An Essay on Shooting, in a chapter upon rifle-barrels thus refers to an invention for loading at the breech, which, though tried first in London, was first used in America :

"By far the most ingenious way of charging rifled pieces, however, is by means of an ingenious contrivance which now generally goes under the name of Ferguson's rifle-barrel, from its having been employed by Major Ferguson's corps of riflemen during the last American war. In these pieces there is an opening on the upper part of the barrel, and close to the breech, which is large enough to admit the ball. This opening is filled by a rising screw, which passes up from the lower side of the barrel, and has its threads cut with so little obliquity that when screwed up close a half turn sinks the top of it down to a level with the lower side of the calibre. The ball being put in the opening above runs forward a little way, the powder is then poured in so as to fill up the remainder of the cavity, and a half round brings the screw up again, cuts off any superfluous powder, and closes up the opening through which the ball and powder were put. The chamber where the charge is lodged is without rifles, and somewhat wider than the rest of the bore, so as to admit a ball that will not pass out of the barrel without taking on the figure of the rifles, and acquiring the rotatory motion when discharged. The only advantage of this contrivance is the ease and expedition with which the piece can be charged, and which are even much greater than in a plain barrel."

The cut, illustrative of this first breech-loading small arm used in America, is reduced from photographs of the rifle used by the inventor himself, and presented to a favorite loyalist officer, Frederick de Peyster. This piece still in the best condition, is in possession of General J. Watts de Peyster, of this (New York) city. From a communication, prepared by the latter gentleman for Norton's forthcoming work upon "American Small Arms," we quote the following paragraphs :

"One of the most distinguished officers of the British army, Patrick Ferguson, Junior Major of the Seventy-first regiment. Highlanders, Second Battalion, was not only most distinguished for his military abilities and his skill as a marksman but for his prescience as an inventor. He was particularly charged with the duty of organizing the Loyalists, and Lord Cornwallis seems to have placed the most exalted and implicit confidence in his special as well as general capacity.

"Ferguson was authorized to arm and drill his troops according to his own ideas; and if tradition and circumstantial evidence are to be relied on, it was his purpose to place in their hands a breech-loading rifle with a variety of improvements, considered of recent

date. Some of these rifles were used in the battle of King's Mountain, 7th October, 1780, the turning point of the war at the South—as Oriskany, another rifleman's fight, 6th August, 1777, had been at the North,—a battle in which he was defeated and slain, and that blew all his hopeful plans into air.

"Although a breech-loader not of American invention, it has become American from the fact that it made its first appearance as a weapon of war on the battlefields of America, and is the first instance of a breech-loading rifle ever having been used on this continent or any other.

"The first allusion to this fire-arm is in the *Annual Register* of 1776, June 1, page 148. In the second part of the same volume, pages 131, 132, etc., its distinguishing feature (132 (2) par. 3) is referred to in an article entitled the 'Effects of rifling gun barrels' which also contains the first recommendation of oblong bullets as superior to round ones, not carried into effect until within a very few years. For further information the curious reader is referred to Emerson's "Miscellaneous Treatises," published in the same year, 1776.

"The drawings of Ferguson's invention as applied to a breech-loading rifle, likewise of his other inventions for breech-loading cannon, (1) 'Turn-cock,' (2) 'Cross-slider,' are to be found in volume No. 1,139 of English Patents for 1776, the text of which is on the lower shelf of alcove 132 in the Astor Library.

"On the first of June, 1776, he made some experiments at Woolwich before Lord Viscount Townsend, Lord Amherst, General Harvey, Deragliers, and several other officers with the rifle-gun on a new construction, which astonished all beholders. The like had never before been done with any small arms. Notwithstanding a heavy rain and the high wind, he fired, during the space of four or five minutes, at the rate of four shots per minute, at a target 200 yards distance. He next fired six shots in one minute, and also fired (while advancing at the rate of four miles an hour) four times in a minute. He then poured a bottle of water into the pan and barrel of the piece when loaded, so as to wet every grain of the powder, and in less than half a minute he fired six shots with it as well as ever without extracting the ball. Lastly, he hit the bull's eye lying on his back on the ground, incredible as it may seem to many, considering the variations of the wind and the wetness of the weather. He only missed the target three times during the whole course of experiments. A patent was afterwards granted him for all his improvements. It passed the great seal on the fourth of December following (1776)."

Our space does not permit us to reproduce General de Peyster's full description of this patent, and his generous defence of Ferguson's military record from the aspersions which have been perhaps unjustly cast upon it. Mr. Irving, in his "Life of Washington," gives the Loyalist soldier and organizer credit, not only for remarkable ability, but even chivalric humanity—instancing his act of sparing the life of a patriot officer upon whom he had drawn a sure head—who afterwards turned out to be Washington himself, as a proof of the latter quality. Doubtless the intense partizan spirit of the Caroline patriots inspired very much of animosity, demonstrated towards the British leader's memory