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THE REVOLT OF THE

British American Colonies, 1764-84.

CHAPTER XLIV.

The events of the campaign had again turned the tide of fortune in favor of the Americans; at its commencement they were driven into Virginia, and if Lord Cornwallis had followed up his success at Guilford Court House by an attack on Greene's position at High Rock Falls there can be no doubt that he would have defeated and dispersed his already weakened and disheartened army, an event which would have secured the conquest of both Provinces, and in all probability decided the fate of the war—but unfortunately his habits of procrastination or indecision led him to compromise all the advantages which fortune placed within his reach.

The British posts were now contracted within the three rivers Santee, Congaree and Edisto. After the retreat of the American army the British under Colonel Stuart moved forward to the Congaree and encamped near the junction of that river with the Wateree. General Greene being reinforced by a brigade of regular troops from North Carolina marched from the hills of Santee and proceeding up the north bank of the Wateree, crossed it near Camden, from whence he marched to Friday's ferry on the Congaree where he was joined by General Pickens with the militia of Ninety-Six and by South Carolina State troops under Colonel Henderson.

Lieut. Colonel Stuart upon receiving intelligence that General Greene was on the march to attack him fell back with his whole force to Eutaw, about 40 miles from the Congaree, for the purpose of meeting a convoy of provisions then on the road from Charleston rather than weaken the army whilst an attack was expected, by sending off a strong detachment as would be necessary to insure its safe arrival.

General Greene having passed the Congaree continued to advance towards Eutaw by

very slow marches in order to allow General Marion to join him with his brigade of militia, this junction was effected on the 7th of September about seventeen miles from Eutaw, and at 4 o'clock on the following morning he marched with his whole force to make the contemplated attack.

The British commander was apprised as early as 6 o'clock by two deserters from the Americans of General Greene's movement, but their report was neither credited nor inquired into, and they themselves were sent to prison. A party of 400 men, with a small guard to cover them, were sent in search of potatoes and other vegetables, on the road by which the American troops were advancing and fell into their hands without resistance; as this force was fully one third of the whole British troops in the field it was anticipated that an easy victory would be obtained, but a few straggling horse-men escaping apprised the British commander of the approach of the enemy, at the same time infusing a panic into all with whom they communicated. Whatever may have been Lieutenant Colonel Stuart's faults, as a prudent commander he did not lack skill; his troops were drawn up across the road at Eutaw Springs, the right flank being covered by a battalion posted as a reserve, both coercing and supporting that part of the line, two pieces of artillery and a covering party of infantry occupied the road the remainder of the force was drawn up obliquely thereto. The American troops advanced in two lines, both flanks covered by cavalry, and a force of cavalry and infantry composed their reserve, in front of their first line they had two three pounder field pieces and two six pounders with the second line—their whole force was not less than 4,000 men. They attacked with great impetuosity and directed their principal efforts against the right of the British position where the artillery was posted, but were unable to shake it, they forced back the left of the line to a field in rear of the right, but here their career was checked by the fire from a stone house; they brought up four six pounders to batter it down, but the defenders killed or disabled every artilleryman who attempted to man the guns. During this

action Colonel Washington with his cavalry attempted to double round the right of the British line, but the reserve pouring in a destructive fire sent his squadron flying from the field, killed his horse and took himself prisoner. In the confusion the artillery on both sides were several times taken and retaken; at length the left wing of the British having rallied and reformed again advanced while the American troops slowly and sullenly gave ground leaving in the hands of the victors two six pounder field pieces, and being in killed, wounded and prisoners over 700 men; the British lost 600 men in killed, wounded and prisoners, including the rooting party, and one piece of artillery, or rather more than half their whole force.

Both parties claimed the victory; Congress voted Greene a gold medal and a British standard although his despatch, which is a masterpiece of tergiversation, did not distinctly claim a victory or acknowledge a defeat, and he dated it at Martin's tavern near Ferguson's swamp, seven miles in the rear of the field of battle.

The British occupied the field of battle the night of the 8th Sept., and on the following day retiring slowly to Monk's Corners for the care of the wounded, while General Greene retreated to the hills of Santee, placing a deep river between himself and his antagonist, nor was he able during the remainder of the contest to again try the fortunes of a stricken field; verily Nathaniel was a soldier, but no general. This remarkable action lasted four hours and would have reflected great honor on Lt.-Col. Stuart if he had been as prudent as he was brave and skilful.

The plan of operations which Lord Cornwallis had determined on were based on the supposition that a movement on Virginia would have the effect of recalling General Greene from South Carolina which his lordship's change of base had uncovered, and compel the astute Quaker General to leave the fruits of assured and easy success for the very doubtful advantage of combating a force more than double in numbers of those who had beaten him at Guildford, Hobkirk's