

breastwork in a sputtering fashion. The shooting was at long range and with the musket of that time such shooting was almost harmless. Nobody was killed, but it was different with a party of American skirmishers who tried to flank the breastwork at its north end. They encountered a band of Indians. There was hot work for a few minutes, ending in the flight of the Americans. At this juncture a messenger, who had swam the Chateauguay, about a hundred feet wide, hurried to Hampton to tell him that the firing he heard was caused by an attack of the British on Purdy's brigade, which he had repulsed with difficulty. Instead of carrying the Morrison ford, Purdy was now on the defensive and most anxious to extricate his force from what was a dangerous position. Hampton sent the order for him to retreat to a point where he could ford the river and rejoin the main army. Hampton was crestfallen. He had depended on Purdy's flanking movement, and its failure disconcerted him. He sat on his horse silent and irresolute. He knew it was in his power to storm the rude brush barricade that faced him and the others behind it, but that would involve loss of life. He was angry at Purdy for not notifying him earlier of his failure to carry the ford. Had he known that in time, he would not have broken camp at Spears. The explanation of why he had not heard from Purdy was simple. The messenger Purdy had sent in the morning with the despatch describing his situation had, after much difficulty, succeeded in reaching the camp at Spears, where he naturally expected to find the General. To his surprise, he discovered the army had moved forward, and thus the despatch was not placed in Hampton's hands until too late for him to change his plans. The day had been dull and now great steamy clouds were gathering that told of a rainy night, and the brief light of a day in late October was about spent. He would suspend operations and consider what should be done on the morrow. The bugles sounded his order to retire. In perfect order, undisturbed by a single shot, the Americans filed into the road and marched back to the field where their commissariat wagons had halted. The pause before Hampton came to his decision was unique in military history. His best brigade stood in line ready to charge, yet not firing a shot, while their opponents watched them from their place of concealment reserving their fire for the assault that did not come. Had Hampton known that among the watchers was Sir George Prevost it might have spurred him to an attempt to capture him, and end the war.