

VOL. IV.

MARCH, 1905

NO. 12

THE

NORTH CAROLINA BOOKLET

“CAROLINA! CAROLINA! HEAVEN’S BLESSINGS ATTEND HER!
WHILE WE LIVE WE WILL CHERISH, PROTECT AND DEFEND HER.”

The object of the BOOKLET is to aid in developing and preserving
North Carolina History. The proceeds arising from its publication
will be devoted to patriotic purposes.

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SHORT SKETCH OF THE BATTLE OF GUILFORD COURT-HOUSE FROM THE VIEW-POINT OF RESULTS.

BY MAJOR JOSEPH M. MOREHEAD.

The name of Washington overshadows of course that of every other Revolutionary soldier, and yet the inquiry presents itself, did Washington assume graver responsibility, or evince truer courage in accepting the command of the American Army than that assumed and displayed by Greene in accepting the command of the Southern Department in December, 1780? I take it to be true that when England determined in the winter of '79-80 to transfer the seat of active hostilities to the Southern Department from Delaware to Virginia, inclusive, Greene was Washington's choice as commander for the same, as he was his favorite of all the officers under him. But the fearful lessons of the fall of Charleston in May '80 and of the disastrous defeat at Camden in August following, it seems were necessary before the appointment was allowed to be made and accepted. Upon his arrival at Charlotte, N. C., in December '80 Greene in the face of a hitherto victorious army of British Regulars was under the necessity of creating an army from militia who had borne the brunt of war for five weary years—around a nucleus of Regulars—a handful—too naked to appear on dress parade. After the battle of Cowpens, January 17th, 1781, Greene retreated rapidly as possible across North Carolina and effected

his escape from Cornwallis by crossing the Dan river below Danville, Va., on February 15th or 14th. Cornwallis arrived on the south bank the same day. With what courage, fortitude and skill Greene and his men pushed their forlorn hope to victory let the fathers tell. The reader is referred to the Diplomatic Correspondence of the American Revolution published by Congress in 1890.

Here we read, Volume 4, page 363, John Adams to Benjamin Franklin (Paris).

"Leyden, Holland, April 16, 1781—I think the Southern States will have the honor, after all, of putting this continent in the right way of finishing the business of the war. There has been more sheer fighting there in proportion than anywhere."

Page 419, Adams to Franklin (Amsterdam).

"May 16, 1781—The news from the Southern States of America of continual fighting, in which our countrymen have done themselves great honor, has raised the spirit of Holland from that unmanly gloom and despondency into which they had been thrown by defeats by the English."

Page 802, Robert Livingstone, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to Dana, in Europe.

"Philadelphia, October 22, 1781—I have the pleasure of communication to you the important account of two signal victories lately obtained over the enemy in these quarters: One by General Greene, which has been followed by the re-establishment of the governments of South Carolina and of Georgia. The other at Yorktown. You will not fail to make the best use of this intelligence which must fix our independ-

ence not only beyond all doubt, but even beyond controversy."

Page 817, Robert Morris to General Greene:

"Office of Finance, November 2, 1781—Your favor of the 17th of September last has been delivered to me. I hope it is unnecessary to make assurances of my disposition to render your situation both easy and respectable." * * I have neither forgotten nor neglected your department. I have done the utmost to provide clothing, arms, accoutrements, medicines, hospital stores, etc., and I flatter myself that you will receive through the different departments both benefit and relief from my exertions. * * * * * You have done so much with so little that my wishes to increase your activity have every possible stimulus."

Beyond doubt Guilford was the most important battle embraced within all this fighting. But the one fact that Cornwallis kept the field has wrongfully transferred victory there to the British instead of to the American Army. King's Mountain and Cowpens, glorious and complete victories as they were, by no means drove Cornwallis from his original purpose and plan of capturing South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia, though they conducted tremendously to that triumph achieved at the battle of Guilford Court House; just as the release of South Carolina and Georgia flowed from it.

Upon receipt of the news of the "victory" Fox said, that the results to Cornwallis of the "victory" were identical with those that would have been caused by defeat. In Tarleton's Campaigns, page 320, we read the following extract from a letter of General Greene to Philadelphia—the battle having been fought March 15th, when Greene had retired

northward "in good order," as Stedman affirms, to his fortified camp eighteen miles north of the battlefield.

Tarleton affirms that when urged to come out and again join battles Cornwallis replied that among the streams of South Carolina Greene might entangle and destroy his army.

"GREENE'S HEADQUARTERS, RAMSEY'S,
"DEEP RIVER, March 30, 1781.

"I wrote you the 23rd instant from Buffalo Creek (South Guilford) since which time we have been in pursuit of the enemy with the determination to bring them into action again. On the 27th we arrived at Rigden's Ford, 12 miles above this, and found the enemy then lay at Ramsey's. Our army was put in motion without loss of time, but we found the enemy had crossed some hours before our arrival and with such precipitation that they had left their dead unburied upon the ground."

Tarleton says, pages 279 and 280: "The British obtained information that General Greene's army had reached Buffalo Creek, southward of Guilford Court House. The day before the King's troops arrived at Ramsey's the Americans insulted the Yagers in their encampment. The Royalists remained a few days at Ramsey's for the benefit of the wounded and to complete a bridge over Deep River, when the light troops of the American again disturbed the pickets. The British crossed the river and the same day General Greene reached Ramsey's with the intention to attack them. The halt of the King's troops at that place nearly occasioned an action which would not probably have been advantageous to the royal forces

on account of the position and the disheartening circumstance of their being encumbered with so many wounded officers and men in the action at Guilford."

Having reached his ships at Wilmington Cornwallis was tendered the alternative of again fighting Greene or of seeing him unmolested destroy in detail the British troops, then garrisoning South Carolina and Georgia. He chose the former.

Stedman, perhaps the most trustworthy historian of the period, in his account of the Battle of Guilford Court House, gives us the most unique commentary, account or criticism upon or of any battle whatever, that I ever saw. It is a literary curiosity, as well as a curiosity historical. He says: "Thus we find that the battle of Guilford drew after it some, and it will afterwards appear that it was followed by all the consequences of something nearly allied to a defeat." So will the conscientious squirm when too hard pressed.

As soon as Greene had passed southward Cornwallis hastened to Virginia with no one to confront him—thus abandoning South Carolina and Georgia to their fate and the original plan and purpose of his campaign in hopes, I suppose, that something might turn up in Virginia. Vain hope! Confronted in Virginia by no force worthy of his steel he idled around effecting nothing till Washington, giving Clinton in New York the slip, bagged him at Yorktown.

I recall no battle of the Revolutionary War more extensive or more fortunate in its results to the American cause, than that of the battle of Guilford Court House.

My allotted space being occupied I add hurriedly and in conclusion that it is a matter of easy proof, that the plan and conduct of the battle of Guilford Court House was conceived in wisdom and courageously and effectively carried out, and that even Greene's retreat from the field was a matter of judgment and not of necessity. Greene had, as he had previously written Washington that he would do, so crippled Cornwallis and burdened him with wounded men and officers as to rid North Carolina of his presence, and he had, as he had affirmed he would do, preserved his regulars—the last he could hope to get, with whom as a nucleus he released two States and caused the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. That was the end of the war.

