

THE LIFE

OF

GEN. EDWARD LACEY,

WITH A LIST OF

BATTLES AND SKIRMISHES IN SOUTH CAROLINA,

DURING THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR,

BY

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McLure, and others, beat up for volunteers, and got together nearly all the fighting men in the neighborhood, amounting to nearly four hundred. About the same time. Cols. Hill and Neel, with one hundred and thirty-three men, left Sumter at Clem's Branch, crossed over the Catawba into York, with a view of raising more men for Sumter's camp. Hearing of the intended assault upon Huck's corps, they joined the Patriots. Their force being now augmented to more than five hundred men, they determined to drive Huck from the Mills, and out of the settlement.

The plan of the Whigs was to steal a march upon the Royalists, and make an attack by night; accordingly they were directed to assemble near the Mills, at sun-down, on July 11th, A. D., 1780. Having tied their horses in the woods, a quarter of a mile from the Mills, and formed themselves into platoons of six,* they marched towards the Mills in perfect order. However, before reaching the Mills, they met Capt. McLure and his party, who had been sent to reconnoitre; they told Lacey who was in the front platoon, that Huck had that day taken up the line of march, and had removed his whole army to Bratton's in the lower edge of York District, a distance of about twelve miles. After a short consultation, the word was given,—“march to your horses,” but before the command had passed half way back through the platoons, it was changed to “run to your horses,” which caused great confusion and excitement. About one hundred and fifty men mounted their horses, and never stopped till they reached Charlotte, North Carolina, a distance of forty miles. A second consultation was held; it being left to a vote, they unanimously resolved to pursue Huck, and surprise him before day, with what men were left; being now about three hundred and fifty. The Whigs mounted their horses, and took the trail of the British army; on their way, they passed old Mr. William Adair's, a wealthy man of that day, and a bountiful liver. Here they halted to get some

*A distinguished settlement, a soldier of the Revolution, who was present, informed the writer that there was no commander, and that on this occasion, the men seemed to act “more by instinct, than by any order or command.”

Lacey received a Colonel's commission in 1780; organized and commanded a regiment of Infantry, which continued in active service to the end of the war, mostly under General Sumter's command. He was nearly two years, at one time, from home; while he was away, the Tories took and destroyed all his property: not leaving his wife even a cow to milk for her children. The only horse he owned at the close of the war, was a fine little black charger that had belonged to Col. Ferguson, and on which he was killed at the Battle of King's Mountain.

Capt. Christian Huck, or Hook as he was more generally called, a Tory, and a Philadelphia lawyer, who commanded two hundred British Regulars, one hundred Dragoons, and one hundred mounted Infantry, with about five hundred Tories, had been for some time lying with his army at White's Mills, on Fishing Creek, in Chester District, South Carolina; where he was desolating the country, and had committed many outrages on the unoffending inhabitants. About this time a party of his men, on a plundering expedition, killed an inoffensive and good young man, (by the name of Strong,) while he was reading his Bible on Sunday morning. They burned down Parson Simpson's dwelling-house, also Mrs. McLure's, and had, a short time previously, burned down Col. Wm. Hill's Iron Works, (for he was casting ordnance and cannon ball for the Patriots,) which was a great calamity to the Whigs, and a general misfortune to the farmers, for forty or fifty miles around; many of them expected that they would have to return to the wooden plough.*

Huck's conduct so incensed the people, that Lacey, Bratton,

*This reminds the writer of John Miller, of Rutherford County, North Carolina, a true Hibernian Whig, who was noted for his originality and fervor; being called on by one of his brother elders to pray, said—“Good Lord, our God, that art in Heaven, we have great reason to thank thee for the many favors we have received at thy hands, the many battles we have won. There is the great and glorious Battle of King's Mountain, where we kill the great General Ferguson, and took his whole army; and the great battles at Ramson's and at Williamson's; and the ever-memorable and glorious Battle of the Coopers, (Cowpens,) where we made the proud General Tarleton, run down (down) the road better-askelter, and good Lord, if ye had na suffered the Greel Tories to burn Belly Hell's (Billy Hill's) Iron Works, we would na have asked any mair favors at thy hands. Amen.”

lane fence formed a kind of breast-work, and gave the Whigs some little protection against the enemy's musketry, and afforded them a god rest for their rifles, with which they took unerring and deadly aim. The British platoons, under the command of Maj. Ferguson, charged bayonets three times, but from the galling and destructive fire of the American rifles, were forced to fall back. At last Huck, who had at first considered the attack a small matter, hurriedly arose from his bed, mounted his horse* without his coat, and while riding backwards and forwards, trying to rally his men for another charge, was shot, and fell dead; with that, the word "Boys, take the fence, and every man his own commander!" was passed along the Whig ranks; no sooner said, than done, the Whigs leaped the fence and rushed upon the enemy, who, after a feeble resistance, threw down their arms and fled in great confusion. A few, on their knees, begged for quarters; the Patriots refused this to Maj. Ferguson, (a Tory,) and put him to the sword; for report said he commanded the squad that killed young Strong. The Patriots soon mounted their horses, and pursued the flying Royalists for thirteen or fourteen miles, wreaking their vengeance, and retaliating very heavily on the retreating foe; teaching them a lesson, that their wanton and barbarous depredations were not to be perpetrated with perfect impunity. The battle lasted about one hour; the Whigs had one man killed, the British between thirty and forty killed, and about fifty wounded, who were mostly billeted upon a few Tory families in the neighborhood, and attended by a Dr. Turner, who resided near the battle ground. However, many of the wounded Tories escaped into the woods, and were afterwards found dead. Lacey's prediction to old Mr. Adair were thus verified. Before sun-rise, Huck was killed, and his army scattered to the four winds.†

* A fine English stallion, named Blanch, of which he had robbed Mr. Daniel Williams, of York, together with a negro man (weaver George) whom he kept as a body servant.
† When the Whigs went to release old "Sam Log Horse," Thos. Clendenen, and Charles Curry, who had been taken prisoners the evening before, and put in an old corn-crib, guarded by a British soldier, they found the tables turned; for the old men were so inspired by the sight of the battle and success of the Whigs, that they had seized the market belonging to the guard and held him a prisoner.

The battle at Williamson's has been barely noticed by historical writers, and called a little affair; nevertheless, it will compare favorably with any action of the American Revolution. It was valiantly fought and won by a handful of men, (all as true as steel,) against a much superior force—more than three to one. It was productive of very great and important consequences. The entire overthrow of Huck's army was the first repulse the British arms had met with in South Carolina, after she was by many considered a subdued province, and proved that the British bayonet was not invincible. It greatly revived the drooping spirits of the Patriots, and, no doubt, contributed much to the victory on King's Mountain, which happened little more than two months afterwards, only twenty miles from Williamson's. (Note 1, 2 and 3.)

Soon after Huck's defeat, Col. Lacey collected most of his Regiment and joined Sumter, ten miles East of the Nation Ford, at Cler's Branch, where the latter had recently formed a camp. The North Carolinians had generously let Sumter have (for that purpose) horses, wagons and camp equipage, taken from the Tories at the battle of Ramsour's Mills.

Note 1.—The evening after the battle at Williamson's, some old ladies came in to administer to the sick and wounded. Among them was old Mrs. William Adair, who seeing a British officer (Capt. Anderson) lying wounded, said to him, "Captain, on your knees when you passed my house, you greatly owe me to bring in my rebel sons; here, sir, are two of them. He, greatly ashamed and somewhat chastised, only replied, "Yes, madam, I see them."

2. The writer recollects a fine English grey mare which his father received as his share of the spoil. Gen. John Adair told him that he, on the same occasion, came in possession of a fine silver-mounted gun, and a roan horse.

3. Some thirty years ago, the author saw old Thos. Carroll on his black horse, with Huck's sword buckled around him; he was then about ninety-three years old, and entirely in his hands some flourishes with it; I, of course, drew the sword; soon as I rode up, and made some flourishes with it; I, of course, drew the sword. His two sons, John and Joe Carroll, were on foot, walking along before him. After our fight was over, the sons told me that their father, at the same moment of the battle of Williamson's, (which was just as day began to peep) saw Huck mount his horse in his shirt, and rode him riding "back the fair sin forward several times." "Now," said Carroll to his comrades, "take the fair sin at that fellow's on horseback, in the white shirt;" he died and Huck fell. "If I killed him," said Carroll, "there are two bullet holes close together for I had two in my rifle." After the battle was over, Huck was examined, and there were two in his shirt through his head, one about half an inch above the other. So Carroll took Huck's sword, and kept it as a trophy. I know the tradition of that part of the country is, that John Carroll, a brother, killed Huck.

refreshment; the old man informed them that Huck had passed that evening, and had taken away *every eatable* from him; that he had "not meal enough to make himself a hoe-cake." Col. Lacey said to him, "By the Lord! uncle, we will make them pay for all this, before sun-rise." The old man replied, "Ned, you are a hot-headed fool,* what can three hundred and fifty raw militia do with nearly one thousand British soldiers-?" The old gentleman had two sons, James and John Adair, then in the ranks under Lacey, (his son William was in the continental service.) About one mile farther on, lived the father of Col. Edward Lacey who had removed to South Carolina, not long before the commencement of the war, and was an uncompromising Tory; Col. Edward Lacey detailed four men to guard him all night, and tie him, if necessary, so as to prevent him from going to the enemy and giving them notice of the intended surprise. Old Lacey, by some artifice, eluded the guard, and started for Huck's camp, only two miles from his residence; fortunately, before he had gone two hundred yards, he was overtaken, brought back, and absolutely tied in his bed till morning.

The Whigs having arrived near where they supposed the British were encamped, tied their horses in the woods, and counted their men again; ninety had dropped off, while they were on Huck's trail. Although they now had not more than two hundred and sixty men left, they still determined to attack the Royalists before daylight. While they were here they found out that Huck was not at Bratton's, but had encamped at Williamson's,† about one quarter of a mile further off, and down nearer to a creek. In consultation, it was agreed that the men should be divided in two parties; one detachment to go up the road, led on by Cols. Neel

* Col. Lacey was not related to old Mr. Adair. He had served his apprenticeship to him; hence the great familiarity, and easy intercourse between them. † The tradition of the country is, that it was known that "blind Reuben Lacey" (Bratton's) was that evening along with Huck's army, as it passed up towards Bratton's; Col. Lacey being acquainted with the habits of his brother-in-law, that he would return home before day. He therefore took with him Col. John Mills, (father of the late Col. Robert Mills,) of Chester District, and laid in wait, about twenty paces from the main road, not far below Bratton's; and as the story goes, Reuben Lacey was blind of an eye, his horse blind of an

and Bratton, the other division, led on by Col. Edward Lacey, down the road, so as to meet simultaneously at Williamson's house. Part of the road down to Williamson's, by which Lacey's detachment had to march, was on the low-grounds of a creek-swamp. It was dark, and the leader not being familiar with the way, called out to know if any one was present that knew the road; Maj. James Moore† stepped forward and said that he knew the track perfectly, and led Lacey and his men to where they shot down the sentinel; he (it has always been supposed) was asleep on his post, for they were in twenty-five steps of him when he was killed.‡

The British and Tories were encamped round about Williamson's house, which was enclosed by a fence, forming a right angle about seventy-five paces from their encampment, and a road outside corresponding with the fence, by which the whigs were enabled to commence their attack on two sides—North and East. The Whig divisions having met just as the day began to dawn, were rapidly formed in the lane, and began to fire at the same time, about seventy-five paces from where the British were lying; the

eye, and his dog also blind of an eye. After midnight, here the blind all came; they bailed him with assumed voices.

"Who comes there?"

"A friend."

"A friend to whom?"

"A friend to—to the—the King."

"So are we, but have unluckily straggled off to the rear of the army; where are you from?"

"From Huck's camp."

"Where is the encampment?"

"About Williamson's house."

"Where are the sentinels posted? for we must pass them, and get in before Reveille."

"One is placed North, up the road, near the breach; one West, half way towards Bratton's; one South, down the road, one hundred yards from Williamson's, and one East, towards the creek."

After getting all the information they wanted from blind Reuben. "Pass on, friend," said they, still with counterfeit voices. Col. Lacey and important information returned to their comrades, and gave them the important information that Huck was encamped in the enclosure round Williamson's house.

† This gallant officer left two sons, Phillander and James Moore,* now residing in York District, S. C.

‡ The tradition of the neighborhood is, that Mr. Samuel Williamson, of York District, shot down the sentinel. I know, Mr. John Craig says in his narrative, that Col. Neel shot the sentinel.

* Since dead.