

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CLOSE OF THE WAR.

In the month of May, Corn-wal-lis had planned to bring his troops to Pe-ters-burg and strike a blow at La-fay-ette, who was near Rich-mond. La-fay-ette fled as soon as he heard that Corn-wal-lis had crossed the James Riv-er, for he had but few troops and did not care to bring on a big fight till the men came up who were then on the way to aid him.

Corn-wal-lis thought he could soon catch "the boy"--as he called him--but his youth made him spry, and the red-coats did not get up to him.

On June 10, Gen-er-al Wayne came up with 900 men, to add to La-fay-ette's strength, and this made him change his whole plan. With 4,000 men and Ba-ron Steu-ben he might hope to win in a fight with the red-coats, and he turned his face to the foe. Corn-wal-lis was at that time 'twixt La-fay-ette and Al-be-marle Court House, where stores were kept. The Mar-quis, by a night march through a road that had long been out of use, got in front of the King's troops, and held them in check.

Corn-wal-lis turned back, and marched first to Rich-mond, and then to Will-iams-burg, while La-fay-ette kept close in his rear. Here they had a fierce fight, in which the loss was great on both sides, and the

gain but small.

At this time word came to Corn-wal-lis that Wash-ing-ton had borne down on New York and that he must send some of his troops to that town. This would leave him too weak to stay where he was, so on Ju-ly 4 he set out for Ports-mouth.

La-fay-ette gave chase the next day and took post nine miles from his camp. His plan was to fall on the rear-guard, when the main force should have crossed the ford at James-town. But Corn-wal-lis guessed what he meant to do and laid a trap for him. A sharp fight took place, in-to which Wayne threw him-self like a mad-man, but the foe were as ten to one and our troops were forced back to Green Springs.

In Ju-ly La-fay-ette wrote to Wash-ing-ton that Corn-wal-lis had left Ports-mouth by sea, and he thought he was on his way to New York. It was true the troops had gone on board the boats, but though wind and tide were fair they did not sail.

With the French fleet to help him, Wash-ing-ton saw a chance to fight the foe by land and sea, so he turned from New York and marched to Vir-gin-i-a to aid La-fay-ette, who longed to have his chief at the head of his troops but did not know he was so near.

As our war-worn troops went through Phil-a-del-phi-a they were hailed with shouts and cheers from the throngs that filled the streets. They kept step to the sound of the drum and fife, and raised a great cloud

of dust, for there had been quite a drought.

The French troops passed through the next day, but not in the same style. They made a halt a mile from the town, where they brushed off the dust from their guns, and their gay white and green clothes, and then marched with a light step to the sound of a fine band. Crowds were on the streets, and bright smiles and loud shouts met these who had come from France to lay down their lives if need be for the cause we had at heart.

When Wash-ing-ton turned his back on New York, Sir Hen-ry Clin-ton sent word to Corn-wal-lis that he would not need the troops he had asked for; so Corn-wal-lis went from Ports-mouth to York-town, where he took his stand.

York-town was a small place on the south side of York Riv-er. The stream at this point was not more than a mile wide, but it was so deep that ships of large size and weight could go through. Here he threw up works on both sides of the stream, which gave him a fine strong-hold, as the banks were high and set out from the main-land. He thought there was no foe near but La-fay-ette, and he had no great fear of one so young.

He felt so safe that he wrote to Clin-ton that he could let him have a large force of men to add strength to New York, where it was thought our troops would strike the next blow.

In the mean-time La-fay-ette threw out troops to the rear, to work with the French fleets that would soon be in Ches-a-peake Bay, and so a net was drawn round Corn-wal-lis at a time when he thought he was most safe.

Wash-ing-ton was at Phil-a-del-phi-a on Sep-tem-ber 5, and at Bal-ti-more three days from that time. He left Bal-ti-more on the ninth, at day-break, with but one of his suite, as he was in haste to reach Mount Ver-non. The rest of his suite rode at their ease, and joined him the next day at noon. It was six years since Wash-ing-ton had seen his old home, and how full of toil and care those years had been! In three days he had to leave the dear old place, and with his guests push on to join La-fay-ette, who was at Will-iams-burg. By Sep-tem-ber 25, the French and our troops were in camp near that town, and at once set to work to get things in train for the next fight.

Corn-wal-lis had built forts on the north and south banks of the stream, and had done all he could to add strength to York-town. Ships-of-war were in front, and boats had been sunk at the mouth of the stream. Field-works were at the rear with big guns on top, and there were long rows of trees that had been cut down and left so that their limbs stuck out and made a fence it would not be safe to climb. At the right and left of York-town were deep dells and creeks, and it was not strange that Corn-wal-lis felt that he was in a sure strong-hold.

Our troops were twelve miles off when they took up their march on

Sep-tem-ber 28, and that night they went in camp two miles from York-town. Wash-ing-ton and his staff slept on the ground, his head on the root of a tree. The next morn our troops drew out on each side of Bea-ver Dam Creek, the A-mer-i-cans on the east side and the French on the west. The Count de Grasse, with the main fleet, staid in Lynn Haven Bay so as to keep off the ships that might come from sea to aid the red-coats.

On the night of the first of Oc-to-ber our troops threw up two earth-works, on which the red-coats turned their guns at day-light and killed three of the men. While Wash-ing-ton stood near the works a shot struck the ground close by him and threw up a great cloud of dust. One of his staff who stood near was in a great fright, but Wash-ing-ton was calm and showed no signs of fear.

On Oc-to-ber 6, our troops set out to dig the trench that the first line would use in the siege of York-town. So dark was the night, and so still were the men, that the foe did not know of it till day-light. Then they fired on them from the forts, but the men were screened and kept at their work. By the ninth the trench was dug and the guns fixed to fire at the town.

Wash-ing-ton put the match to the first gun, and a storm of balls and bomb-shells dared Corn-wal-lis to come out and fight. For three or four days the fire was kept up on both sides, and bomb-shells crossed in mid-air, and at night flashed forth like great stars with tails a blaze of light. Our shells did much harm in the town, and to the

earth-works of the foe.

The red-hot shot from the French forts north-west of the town reached the King's ships-of-war. The Char-on a 44 gun ship, and three large boats for troops, were set on fire by them. The flames ran up to the tops of the masts, and as the night was dark the scene was a grand one to the eye, but a sad one to the heart.

On the night of the 11th, a new ditch was dug by the troops led by Bar-on Steu-ben, and for two or three days the foe kept up a fire on the men at work.

At eight o'clock on the night of Oc-to-ber 14, they set out to storm both York-town and the Point on the north bank at the same time.

The van-guard of our troops was led by Al-ex-an-der Ham-il-ton. When at school he wrote to one of his boy friends, "I wish there was a war;" and in 1776 when he was but 19 years of age, he was placed at the head of the men who fired the guns and bomb-shells. The next year he was aide-de-camp to Wash-ing-ton, in whom he found a true and wise friend. With great joy and pride Ham-il-ton led the van in a head-long dash past the trees, which they pushed or pulled down with their own hands, where they could not climb them, and was the first to mount the wall. One of his men knelt so that Ham-il-ton could use him for steps, and the rest of the men got up the best way they could. Not a gun was fired, and the fort fell in-to the hands of our troops with a small loss on both sides.

The French stormed the fort at the Point in as brave a way, but with less speed, and lost more men.

Wash-ing-ton stood on the ground in the grand fort where he could see all that took place. An aide-de-camp near him spoke up and said that he ran a great risk from a chance shot through one of the port-holes. "If you think so," said Wash-ing-ton, "you can step back."

Soon a ball struck the gun in the port-hole, rolled on, and fell at his feet. Gen-er-al Knox seized him by the arm. "My dear Gen-er-al," said he, "we can't spare you yet."

"It is a spent ball," said Wash-ing-ton in a calm voice; "no harm is done."

When each charge was made and both forts were in our hands, he drew a long breath, turned to Knox and said, "The work is done and well done!" Then he said to his black man, "Bring me my horse," and rode off to see where next his lines should move, and how the trap could be closed on Corn-wal-lis.

Corn-wal-lis found that he could not hold his forts; no troops had come to his aid, and he would soon have to yield to the foe.

This was too much for his pride, so he made up his mind to leave those who were sick or had wounds, and fly from York-town. His scheme was to

cross the stream at night, fall on the French camp ere day-break, push on with all speed, and force his way to the north and join Sir Hen-ry Clin-ton in New York.

A large part of his troops had crossed the stream on the night of Oc-to-ber 16, and the rest were on their way when a fierce storm of wind and rain drove the boats down the stream. They could not be brought back till day-light and it was then too late for them to move on or to turn back.

The hopes of Lord Corn-wal-lis were at an end, and on the 17th he sent a flag of truce and a note to Wash-ing-ton and asked that his guns might cease their fire for one day so that terms of peace could be drawn up.

Wash-ing-ton feared that in the mean-time troops from New York would reach Corn-wal-lis, so he sent word back that his guns should cease their fire for but two hours. Wash-ing-ton did not like the terms drawn up by Corn-wal-lis, so he made a rough draft of such terms as he would grant. These were sent to Corn-wal-lis on the 19th, and he was forced to sign them, and in two hours his troops were to march out of the forts.

[Illustration: THE SURRENDER AT YORKTOWN.--P. 109.]

At noon our troops were drawn up in two lines more than a mile in length; the A-mer-i-cans on the right side of the road, the French on

the left. At two o'clock the red-coats passed out with slow steps, and were led to a field where they were to ground their arms. Some of them, in their rage, threw down their guns with such force as to well nigh break them.

On the day that Corn-wal-lis had been forced to lay down his arms at York-town, the large force that was to aid him set sail from New York. They did not reach Ches-a-peake Bay till Oc-to-ber 29, and when they found they were too late they turned their prows and went back to New York.

The down-fall of Corn-wal-lis was felt to be a death-blow to the war, and great joy was felt through-out the land. Votes of thanks were sent to Wash-ing-ton, to De Ro-cham-beau and De Grasse, and Wash-ing-ton gave high praise to all the troops for the way in which they had fought at the siege of York-town.

From that time the red-coats lost heart, and on No-vem-ber 25, 1783, they marched out of New York, and Wash-ing-ton marched in at the head of his brave men, who had fought and bled and borne all the ills that flesh could bear that the land they loved might be free.

In a few days Wash-ing-ton was called to An-na-po-lis to meet with those who made the laws, and his chief men who had been with him through all the sad scenes of the war, came to bid him good-bye.

With a heart full of love he said to them, "I can-not come to each of

you to take my leave, but shall be glad if each of you will come and take me by the hand." This they did. No one spoke a word. Tears were in all their eyes.

Wash-ing-ton left the room, and went on foot to the boat which lay at the end of what was then and is now White-hall Street. His friends kept close in the rear. When Wash-ing-ton was in his barge he turned, took off his hat, and waved good-bye, and those on shore did the same, and watched the barge till it passed out of their sight.