

HERO TALES FROM AMERICAN HISTORY.

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

III.—KING'S MOUNTAIN.

THE close of the year 1780 was, in the Southern States, the darkest time of our Revolutionary struggle. Cornwallis had just destroyed the army of Gates at Camden, and his two formidable lieutenants, Tarleton the light horseman, and Ferguson the skilled rifleman, had destroyed or scattered all the smaller bands who had been fighting for the patriot cause. The red dragoons rode hither and thither, and all through Georgia and South Carolina none dared lift up their heads to oppose them; while North Carolina lay at the feet of Cornwallis as he started through it with his army to march into Virginia. There was no organized force against him, and the cause of the patriots seemed hopeless. It was at this dark hour that the wild backwoodsmen of the Western border gathered to strike a blow for liberty.

When Cornwallis invaded North Carolina he sent Ferguson into the western part of the State to crush out any of the patriot forces that might still be lingering among the foothills. Ferguson was a very gallant and able

officer, and a man of much influence with the people wherever he went, so that he was peculiarly fitted for this scrambling border warfare. He had under him a battalion of regular troops and several battalions of Tory militia, in all eleven or twelve hundred men. He shattered and drove the small bands of Whigs that were yet in arms, and finally pushed to the foot of the mountain wall, till he could see in his front the high ranges of the Great Smokies. Here he learned for the first time that beyond the mountains there lay a few hamlets of frontiersmen whose homes were on what were then called the Western Waters—that is, the waters which flowed into the Mississippi. To these he sent word that if they did not prove loyal to the king he would cross the mountains, hang their leaders, and burn their villages.

Beyond the mountains, in the valleys of the Holston and the Watauga, dwelt men who were stout of heart and mighty in battle; and when they heard the threats of Ferguson their hearts burned with a flame of sullen anger. Hitherto the foes against whom they had warred had been, not the British, but the Indian allies of the British—Creek and Chero-

kee and Shawnee. Now that the army of the king had come to their thresholds, they turned to meet him as fiercely as they had met his Indian allies. Among the backwoodsmen of this region there were at that time three men of special note: Sevier, who afterward became governor of Tennessee; Shelby, who afterward became governor of Kentucky; and Campbell, the Virginian, who died in the Revolutionary

the stump-dotted clearings, and the hunters from their smoky cabins in the deep woods.

The meeting-place was at the Sycamore Shoals. On the appointed day the backwoodsmen gathered, sixteen hundred strong, each man carrying a long rifle, and mounted on a tough, shaggy horse. They were a grim and fierce people, accustomed to the chase and to warfare with the Indians. Their hunting-shirts



THE CHARGE OF THE AMERICAN FRONTIERSMEN AT KING'S MOUNTAIN.

War. Sevier had given a great barbecue, where oxen and deer were roasted whole, horse-races were run, and the backwoodsmen tried their skill as marksmen and wrestlers. In the midst of the feasting Shelby appeared, hot with hard riding, to tell of the approach of Ferguson and the British. Immediately the feasting was stopped, and the feasters made ready for war. Sevier and Shelby sent word to Campbell to rouse the men of his district and come without delay; and they sent messengers to and fro in their own neighborhood to summon the settlers from their log huts on

of buckskin or homespun were girded in by bead-worked belts, and the trappings of their horses were stained red and yellow. At the gathering there was a black-frocked Presbyterian preacher; and before they started he addressed the tall riflemen in words of burning zeal, urging them to stand stoutly in the battle and to smite "with the sword of the Lord and of Gideon." Then the army started, the backwoods colonels riding in front.

Two or three days later word was brought to Ferguson that the Back-water men had come over the mountains; that the Indian-fighters

of the frontier, leaving unguarded their homes on the Western Waters, had crossed by wooded and precipitous defiles to the help of the beaten men of the plains. Ferguson at once fell back, sending out messengers for help. When he came to King's Mountain,—a wooded, hog-back hill on the border line between North and South Carolina,—he camped on its top, deeming that there he was safe; for he supposed that before the backwoodsmen could come near enough to attack him, help would reach him. But the backwoods leaders felt as keenly as he the need of haste, and choosing out their picked men,—the best warriors of the force and the best mounted and armed,—they made a long forced march to assail Ferguson before help could come to him. All night long they rode the dim forest trails and splashed across the fords of the rushing rivers. All the next day—the 6th of October—they rode too, until in mid afternoon they came in sight of King's Mountain.

The little armies were about equal in numbers. Ferguson's regulars were armed with the bayonet, and so were some of his Tory militia, whereas the Americans had not a bayonet among them; but they were picked men, confident in their skill with the rifle, and they were so sure of victory that their aim was not only to defeat the British, but to capture their whole force! The backwoods colonels, counseling together as they rode at the head of the column, decided to surround the mountain and assail it on all sides. Accordingly, the bands of frontiersmen split one from the other, and soon encircled the craggy hill where Ferguson's forces were encamped. They left their horses in the rear, and immediately began the battle, swarming forward on foot, their commanders leading the attack.

The march had been so quick and the attack so sudden that Ferguson barely had time to marshal his men before the assault was made.

Most of his militia he scattered around the top of the hill to fire down at the Americans as they came up; while, drawing up his regulars and a few picked militia, he charged in person, with the bayonet, first down one side of the mountain and then down the other. Sevier, Shelby, Campbell, and the other colonels of the frontiersmen led each his force of riflemen straight toward the summit. Each body in turn, when charged by the regulars, was forced to give way, for they had no bayonets wherewith to meet their foes; but the backwoodsmen retreated only so long as the charge lasted, and the minute that it stopped they stopped too, and came back ever closer to the ridge, and ever with a deadlier fire. Ferguson, blowing a silver whistle as a signal to his men, led these charges, sword in hand, on horseback. At last, just as he was once again rallying his men, the riflemen of Sevier and Shelby crowned the top of the ridge. The gallant British commander became a fair target for the backwoodsmen; and, as for the last time he led his men against them, seven bullets entered his body, and he fell dead. With his fall resistance ceased. The regulars and Tories huddled together in a confused mass, while the exultant Americans rushed forward. A flag of truce was hoisted, and all the British who were not dead surrendered.

The victory was complete, and the backwoodsmen at once started to return to their log hamlets and rough, lonely farms. They could not stay, for they dared not leave their homes at the mercy of the Indians. They had rendered a great service; for Cornwallis, when he heard of the disaster to his trusted lieutenant, abandoned his march northward, and retired to South Carolina. When he again resumed the offensive, he found his path barred by stubborn General Greene and his troops of the Continental line.

