

Nathanael Greene.

MAJOR-GENERAL NATHANAEL GREENE was the second son of a Quaker preacher and was born at Warwick, Rhode Island, August 7, 1742. He was of English extraction and his ancestors came to this country during the reign of Charles the Second, among the first settlers of the little colony. Like most men of his calling, the good divine was not rich in this world's goods, and Nathanael was given far more training at the plow and in his father's blacksmith shop than in the school-room. The boy's mind was naturally keen, however, and he had the good fortune to meet with two men whose influence affected his whole career. One of these was a youth named Giles who had been to college and who filled his companion with a desire for the companionship of books. The other was the noted Lindley Murray, and the impetus thus received from association with them carried young Greene forward until he was the possessor of a very fair education. Over his forge he pursued his studies as far as Latin, higher mathematics and metaphysics, until at the beginning of the fierce discussions which arose with the mother country at the outbreak of the Revolution he was well prepared to take an active part as a leader.

In 1770 he was elected to the General Assembly of the colony and aided in the discussions, but as the Stamp Act and other aggressive measures on the part of England gave evidence of the approaching conflict, he turned his attention to military studies. Cæsar's Commentaries and Turenne's



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Memoirs were his constant companions until Cupid superseded Mars one evening when he looked into the eyes of a damsel by the name of Catherine Littlefield. He married this lady in July, 1774.

A year later the battle of Lexington was fought and the colonies called the patriots of America to arms. Rhode Island responded with a force of sixteen hundred men and Greene was made the leader with the rank of Major-General. His military bent of mind had already attracted the censure of his Quaker friends, and finding him bidding defiance to the principles of non-resistance he was formally expelled from the society. The young officer took command of the troops in May, 1775. He was thirty-three years of age, and well fitted by nature for the duties of his difficult position. At Cambridge, where he went with his command to join the regular army, he met with Washington, and the great Virginian early perceived his ability and formed with him a friendship that endured throughout life.

After the evacuation of Boston, Greene was placed in command on Long Island. To his great mortification he was sick with bilious fever while his forces were engaged with the enemy. He soon recovered, however, and had the experience of his first battle at Harlem. Other engagements followed in which he had a prominent part. In December, 1776, Greene crossed the Delaware, and was in command of the left wing of the army in the brilliant movements that resulted in the victories of Trenton and Princeton.

In the disastrous battle of Brandywine, Greene covered the retreat of the Continental forces and stopped the advance of the exulting enemy. Shortly afterward at Germantown it was the skillful leadership of the same general that brought off the American army in safety and disappointed the fresh

troops of Cornwallis, confident of success. Greene thwarted the designs of the same officer when he advanced against Fort Mercer a few days later.

During the winter which followed, the terrible Valley Forge experience occurred. The American army was destitute of food and clothing and suffered terribly. Washington was helpless, but this did not prevent a movement on the part of several unscrupulous and ambitious officers for his overthrow. This plot was called the Conway cabal, and its prime movers were Generals Conway, Gates and Mifflin.

It failed completely, but General Greene, who remained faithful to his Commander-in-chief, long felt the hostility engendered by the wretched conspiracy. The situation of the army was improved, when, at the request of Washington and Congress, he undertook temporarily the duties of the Quartermaster and by energetic effort gave some relief to the suffering soldiers.

At the battle of Monmouth, Greene bore himself with coolness and intrepidity and played no small part in turning retreat into victory. In the unsuccessful attack upon Newport—a failure because the French commander, Count D'Estaing, thought it best to abandon the enterprise, to the great disgust of his American allies—he was a prominent figure and protected the rearguard of the army as it was drawn off.

He had now been Quartermaster for two years, in addition to his other military duties, but criticism of his thankless task on the part of some members in Congress furnished him the welcome opportunity of resigning it, and of devoting himself exclusively to the more agreeable work of fighting the enemies of his country. At Elizabethtown, Greene repelled the advance of Clinton, and fought successfully in the face of an army three times as large as his own.

His next service to his country was in connection with the treason of Benedict Arnold and the capture of the ill-starred Major Andre. Greene was called to preside over the court-martial which convicted the young British officer, and the safety of the nation demanded that this unfortunate spy should be sacrificed. In spite of his sympathies, Greene showed himself possessed of the true warrior spirit, and was alike unmoved by the tears of the sentimentalists or the threats of the English general.

The defeat of General Gates at Camden rendered it necessary to send Greene to the South. The conqueror of Burgoyne at Saratoga was too rash and it was necessary to supersede him with a man who was more endowed with the Fabian quality of prudence. The new commander found the Southern forces at Charlotte, but they were small in number and utterly dispirited. He had splendid assistance, however, in the partisan leaders, Marion, Sumter, Pickens and others. These brilliant soldiers lay hidden in the swamps of the Carolinas with small bands of ragged but devoted followers, and at unexpected times would sally forth to harass the armies of their foes. With their assistance Greene soon put new life into his troops and found himself in condition to meet the enemy. Lord Cornwallis was in command of the British, and the two armies met on the banks of the Catawba river. The Americans were defeated and retreated to Salisbury. An incident occurring at this place well illustrates the spirit of the Southern women. Greene had stopped at an inn for refreshment. He had ridden all day through the rain and storm, his clothes were wet and covered with mud, he looked depressed, and in response to inquiry he said that he was "tired, hungry, and penniless." As soon as he had dined the good landlady took

him aside and placed in his hands two bags of money—the savings of a lifetime—and said: “Take these; I can do without them and they are necessary to you.”

The British army followed the retreating Americans, and so determined was Cornwallis to crush his foe that he destroyed all his baggage in order that his advance might not be impeded. The eyes of the whole country were upon the two leaders, and Greene proved himself equal to the emergency. Reaching the Yadkin he barely had time to throw his forces across the river and destroy the boats when the pursuers appeared. The enraged British opened fire with their cannon upon the Americans, but were impotent, especially as severe rains had swollen the stream. Their shot tore the shingles from the roof of the cabin where Greene was writing dispatches, but they did not disturb his composure nor cause him to stop until he had finished his labors.

His movements were so skilfully managed as to win praise from all. Washington wrote, “Your retreat is highly applauded by everybody.” Even the enemy praised him. Tarleton, their famous cavalry leader, said, “Every measure of the Americans during their march from Catawba to Virginia was judiciously designed and vigorously executed.” And this movement was made by raw militia without sufficient clothing or food in the face of a foe that far outnumbered them.

Greene soon received supplies and reinforcements. After getting his army in shape he turned southward to again meet his foe. At Guilford Court-House, North Carolina, they joined in battle with no decided success for either commander. Cornwallis claimed the victory, but a British speaker in the House of Commons declared they were undone if they suffered another such “victory.”

at Hobkirk's Hill and at Ninety-Six Greene again met the enemy in doubtful contest. Later he turned still further southward and attacked the British General Stewart at Red Bank. The first onset was successful, but unfortunately the unwarmed Americans succumbed to temptation as they were in their possession the tents filled with all the comforts to which they had so long been strangers. They broke camp and ate and drank to their hearts content as they gave themselves up to the gratification of their appetites. While they were thus occupied the British returned and scattered the disorganized forces. The Americans rallied and the British soon retreated to Charleston. It was a victory for the Continental troops but a most disappointing one.

By a series of skilfull maneuvers the American commander, aided as he was by the brilliant exploits of Marion and Sumner, the “Swamp Fox” and “Game-cock” of the Revolution, soon recaptured from the British the whole of North Carolina with the exception of Charleston. Into this city General Leslie had led the army under his command, and he soon threw a strong cordon of troops about the place to prevent a siege. Desperate, the British leader endeavored to purchase his way by bribery what he feared to attempt in the open field. There were several mutinous spirits in the American ranks and the plot was formed with them to capture Greene and carry him into the city. The treacherous scheme was frustrated through the courage and fidelity of a woman. The author of the movement, Sergeant Gornell, was hanged, and the others were put in chains. The failure of this plot discouraged the British General, and the capture of Cornwallis at Yorktown made it certain that the further continuance of the war was useless. As the British drew closer to the city the garrison soon felt the

need of provisions, and finally on the 14th of December evacuated the city. Greene entered with the Governor by his side, and the long siege was at last over.

Greene was everywhere congratulated for the splendid part he had taken in the struggle. Congress, on his arrival at Princeton, voted him two pieces of ordnance taken from the enemy and a medal. South Carolina and Georgia, more practical in their patriotism, presented him with two plantations. The Carolina land he had to give up on account of the pressing debts he had incurred during the war.

In 1785 he removed with his family to the Georgia farm, which was at Mulberry Grove, twelve miles above Savannah. Here he spent the last days of his career, enjoying his domestic happiness in the midst of the pleasures of plantation life. One unpleasant incident marred this period. Captain Gunn, who had been associated with him in the army, deeming himself wronged about some military decision with reference to the capture of a horse, challenged the General. Greene refused to meet him in the duel, after consulting Washington, and thus helped in the formation of a better public opinion with regard to the foolish code of honor.

But he did not long enjoy the comforts of private life. On the 19th of June, 1786, he died from brain fever at the age of 44. The whole country was in sorrow at the untimely taking away of this great man. Especially was he mourned by the people of Georgia, among whom he had cast his lot and by whom he was sincerely loved. He was buried in the old Colonial Cemetery at Savannah, and, not being marked, the identity of his burial place soon became lost. In 1819 the City Council of Savannah appointed a committee to locate the grave, but the investigation was unsuccessful.

In March, 1901, the Rhode Island State Society of the Cincinnati took up the matter, and, together with several gentlemen of Savannah, prominent among whom was Superintendent Otis Ashmore, undertook a systematic search for the grave. On the 4th of that month their efforts were successful, and they fully identified the remains by means of the coffin plate, military buttons, etc. The bones of General Greene and his son, George Washington Greene, were enclosed in a zinc-lined box and placed in the vaults of the Southern Bank until their ultimate disposition should be definitely determined. It was finally decided to re-inter them at the base of the Greene monument in Savannah where they now remain. The occasion was made a solemn public ceremony on November 14, 1902, and an address was delivered by the president of the Rhode Island Society of the Cincinnati, Hon. Asa Bird Gardiner. Thus fittingly was honored the memory of this great patriot by the people of his native and adopted States.

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