

Part II: "Some Account of the Achievements of the Celebrated Virginian Hero, George Rogers Clark, in the Western Country," March 30, 1816

Some account of the achievement of the celebrated Virginian hero, George Rogers Clarke, in the Western Country 1778-9

[CONCLUDED FROM OUR LAST]

A tempest, however, was hanging over him, which perhaps, no efforts but his could have dispelled. The governor of Detroit, Hamilton, a man no less remarkable for his boldness and activity, than for his barbarous disposition, and his tyrannical abuse of delegated power, formed the daring project of driving Clarke from his conquest. On the 15th of Dec. with a strong body of men, he took possession of Fort St Vincent - repaired its ruined battlements - and converted it into a formidable repository of warlike implements of every description. His plan was to attack Kaskaskias in the spring This place he considered as an easy conquest. Two hundred Indians from Michillimachinac, and five hundred Cherokees and Chickasaws, were then to join his banner. With this body he intended to penetrate, up the Ohio, to Fort Pitt - the devastation of Kentucky was a branch of his extensive scheme of ruin - He proposed to sweep its principal settlements on his way. For this purpose, he was supplied with light brass cannon- and, as in his advance, he expected to see his numbers swelled by hourly accessions of Indiana, he proudly and confidently anticipated the subjugation and ruin of all West Augusta. In no resource connected with the success of his plan, was Hamilton deficient. The British commander in Canada had furnished him with ample means. Destruction hovered on the Western borders of the commonwealth- Clarke received no reinforcements - In his letter to Governor Henry, written on the 29th April, 1779, he says that, at the time of those formidable preparations, he had not heard from the Executive for nearly twelve months. The communication was difficult and uncertain. - Already hostile detachments infested the neighborhood of Kaskaskias, but they did not presume to attack. Under these circumstances, Clarke thought it prudent to concentrate his small force. Major Bowman was directed to evacuate the fort at the Cones, in order to strengthen the principal point of defence. When comparing his situation with that of the expected assailants, Clarke despaired of his ability to keep possession of the country - Still, he was resolved to maintain a siege, and preserve, at least, the post of Kaskaskias, or die in the attempt. To this end, he and his gallant associates were making active preparations- strengthening the fortifications of the place - erecting or demolishing, as necessity dictated. - Whilst they were thus employed, a Spanish merchant, who had been at fort St. Vincent, arrived. He informed Col. Clarke that Hamilton had weakened himself by sending his Indians against the frontiers, and up the Ohio- In the fort, he had only retained eighteen men, three pieces of cannon, and a few mounted swivels - His intention was to attack Kaskaskias as soon as the season would permit- and he had no doubt of clearing the Western waters before the Autumn. This information was for the genius of Clarke, a flash of electric light. It discovered to him, not only safety, but new glory. He saw the whole by intuition. - Hamilton must be attacked before he

could collect his Indians - There was no other means of saving the country - With Clarke, to resolve and execute required but a moment - Immediately dispatching a small galley which he had fitted up, mounting two four pounders, and four swivels, with a company of men, and necessary stores on board, he directed the Person whom he appointed to command her, to force his way up the Wabash if possible, and station himself a few miles below the enemy-suffering nothing to pass- and awaiting further orders. In the mean time, garrisoning Kaskaskias with militia, embodying the inhabitants for the protection of the other towns, and enlisting for the expedition several of their young men, who displayed the most promising ardor, he himself marched across the country, with one hundred and fifty gallant comrades, on whose devotion, intrepidity and perseverance, he could well rely. A (sic) though his band was small and unincumbered (sic) with heavy baggage, such was the inclemency of the season, and such the difficulty of the route, that he slowly advanced, not without apprehensions of the ultimate failure (sic). When within three leagues of the enemy, it took this Spartan band five days to cross the drowned lands of the Wabash- having to wade, often upwards of two leagues, to their breast in water. + Had not, during this period of the expedition, the weather assumed and preserved a milder character, all these brave men must inevitably have perished Heaven seemed to shield them. On the evening of the 23d, they reached the dry land, unperceived by the enemy, yet having themselves a sufficient view of the fort. - No time was to be wasted - no deliberation to precede the long mediated blow- at seven o'clock, the attack was made, before the enemy knew any thing (sic) of the assailants. The town immediately surrendered with joy, and assisted in the siege of the fort. For 18 hours, a continual fire was kept up on both sides. Col. Clarke ‡ did not calculate on carrying the fort before the arrival of his Artillery. During the night, however, after the setting of the moon, he had an intrenchment thrown up, within rifle shot of the enemy's strongest battery, and, at morning, poured into their posts such a shower of well directed balls, that he silenced, in 15 minutes, two pieces of cannon, without having one of his men killed or even wounded. As his numbers were small, he took every possible precaution to prevent a waste of lives - On the following day, Governor Hamilton demanded a parley; and intimated an intention to surrender - difficulties arose -but in the evening, the terms of the surrender were arranged. The Governor and the garrison became prisoners of war; and considerable stores fell into the hands of the conqueror.

In the height of the attack upon the fort, one of the Indian parties detached on all sides by Hamilton, returned. Ignorant of what had happened, the savages were marching into the town, with two prisoners. Clarke, upon hearing of this, detached a party of his men to give them battle in the commons- nine Indians were taken- and the two prisoners released.

Other circumstances, equally auspicious crowned this wonderful success. A convoy of goods from Detroit was on its way to the Post. Clarke informed of this, sent a party of 60 men, in armed boats, well mounted with swivels, to surprise and intercept the convoy. The plan was completely effected - 40 prisoners, goods and provisions to the amount of 10,000l - the mail from Canada to Governor Hamilton, were brought to Col. Clarke; and to add to the general joy, his express to the Governor, who was thought to have been killed, near the falls of the Ohio, returned with very satisfactory letters from the executive, and the thanks of the Assembly to this gallant little band, for the reduction of the country about Kaskaskia. This climax of fortunate circumstances, so singular that it seems to partake of the marvellous and the romantic, and might if not well authenticated, excite doubt and even incredulity, so much elevated the brave men under Clarke, that they would have attempted the reduction of Detroit, had he led them against that place. He was not disinclined to the measure; but the necessity of securing his prisoners, and the difficulty of raising a number of men such as he then thought requisite for such an expedition, prevented him from indulging the ardor of his associates, and his own impulse. This he had soon cause to

regret He was informed that, upon receiving intelligence of his success at Fort St. Vincents, the people of Detroit, and of the circumjacent country, openly manifested their joy during three whole days, by every method which social festivity could devise, and they so far counted upon Clarke's speedy arrival, that the merchant provided for him and his men those necessaries and comforts which they imagined would be wanted. The haughty, capricious, tyrannical, and bloody disposition of the captive Governor had alienated from him every virtuous and feeling heart. Most of the inhabitants, too, were the descendants of French settlers; and the news of the alliance had just reached them. The garrison, amounting only to 80 men, could not oppose this burst of sentiment- but when Clarke received his intelligence, Detroit had been reinforced; the fair opportunity was no more.

The above narrative, though it contains some of the most important operations of the gallant Geo: Rogers Clarke, falls far short of the full extent of his exploits for the aggrandisement of Virginia, in territory and in fame. We have recorded these exploits in a work, which soon will be submitted to the public eye, and gratify, we trust, the laudable curiosity of Virginians in respect of the Western Hannibal.

**A league is about three miles*

+ Justly has Mr. John Randolph compared Clarke with Hannibal, and this wonderful advance with the passage of the Thrasimene marsh.

‡ These details were given by Col. Clarke, himself, in a letter, dated April 29th, 1779 (Kaskaskias) and addressed to P. Henry, then Governor, but received by Thos. Jefferson, who was chosen Governor, on the first of June following.