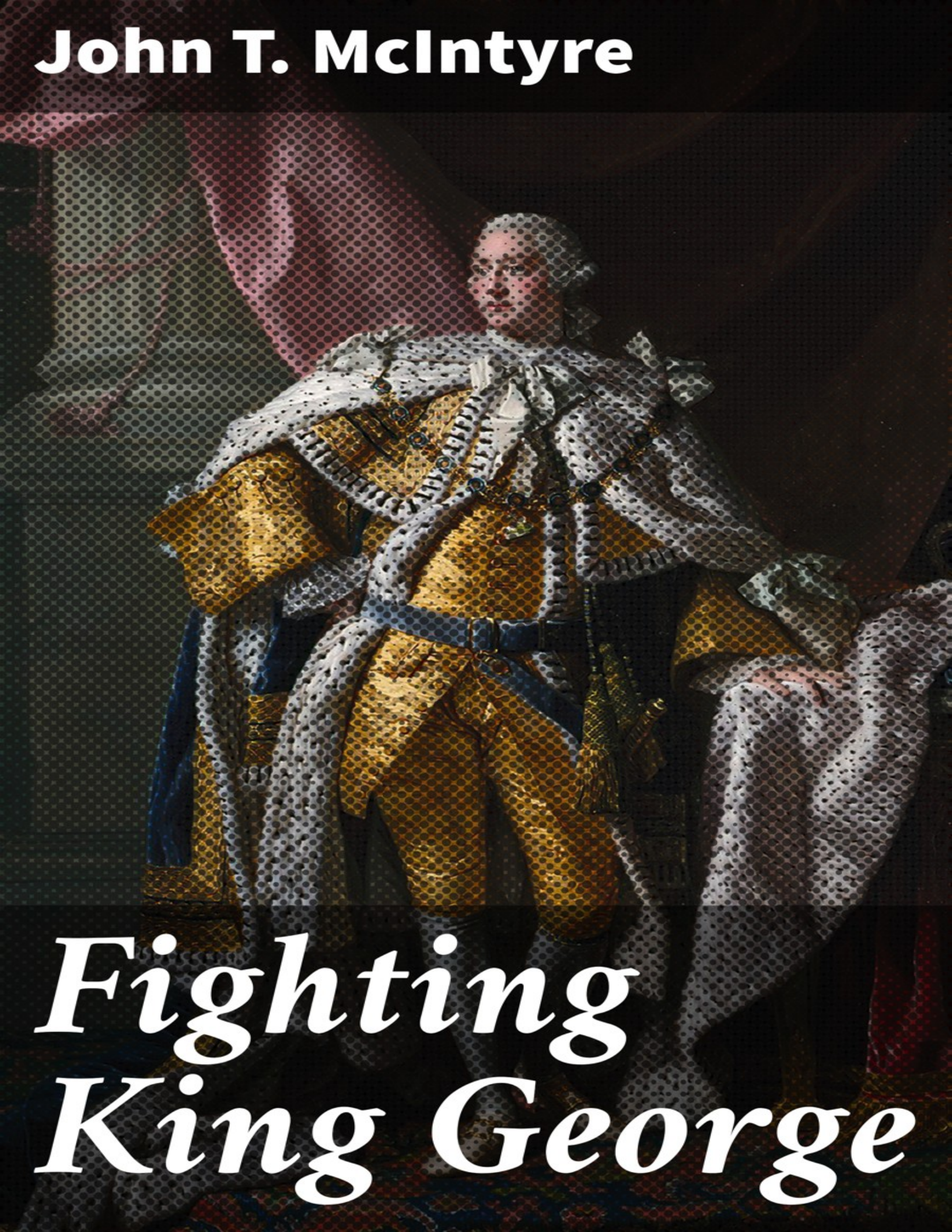
John T. McIntyre



Fighting King George

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CHAPTER I
HOW FORT JOHNSON FELL

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“The wind’s changing again, Cole,” said Tom Deering, as he threw his rudder handle to leeward in order that the sheet might catch the full benefit of the breeze.

The person to whom he spoke was a negro, young in years but of colossal size; as he sat amidships in the skiff, with the sheet rope in his hand, his sleeveless shirt showing his mighty arms bare to the shoulder, he resembled a statue of Hercules, cut out of black marble. Tom Deering was about sixteen, and the son of a rich planter, just below Charleston; he was a tall, strongly built boy for his years, but beside the giant negro slave he looked like an infant. Cole had been born upon Tom’s father’s plantation and was about five years the elder; the two were inseparable; where Tom went the huge black followed him like a shadow.

When he had the sail drawing nicely, Tom continued:

“I wonder, Cole, how all this is going to end?”

Cole shook his woolly head and grinned; then suddenly his face changed and he held up one hand as though bidding his young master to listen.

From across the bright stretch of water between them and the shore came a drum beat; the evening sun slanted down upon the white crests and upon the meadow-lands below the city. No one was in sight, but the hollow rub-a-dub of the drum continued. Seeing his master had caught the sound Cole turned and silently pointed out into the bay.

Two armed vessels, flying the British flag, were standing on and off Sullivan's Island. From where he sat in the stern of the skiff, Tom's keen eyes noticed that an unusual air of alertness hung about the vessels; and the wind now and then carried toward them the sound of an officer's command sharply spoken through a trumpet.

"It's the Tamar and the Cherokee," said Tom. "They've been lying in Rebellion Roads for the last couple of days. When I saw them up anchor an hour ago I thought something was going to happen, and I was right. Perhaps Colonel Moultrie is going to strike a blow for liberty and South Carolina at last."

It was the fourteenth of September, in the year 1775. Because of the oppressive acts of the mother country, the British colonies in North America had risen in protest. But their words had been mocked and jeered at by King George and his counselors; and the heavy burdens of the afflicted colonies were only added to. This was more than a spirited people could stand; so from words the colonists proceeded to deeds; in the April before the first shot of the Revolution had been fired at Lexington; and now South Carolina was about to follow the glorious example of her sister state in New England.

If the people of Boston had a "tea party" in Massachusetts Bay, so had the residents of Charleston one in the Cooper river. The public armory of the town was broken open during one dark night and eight hundred stand of arms, two hundred cutlasses, besides cartouches, flints and other material of war were seized by the patriots.

Another party possessed itself of the powder at a town near by; while still another emptied Cochran's magazine.

An army of two thousand infantry and four hundred horse had been raised by the colony. This force was divided into three bodies; the second regiment was placed under the command of Colonel Moultrie, a gallant Indian fighter who had served with credit in the campaigns against the Cherokee nation.

The tap of the drum from the town came to the boys' ears every little while; the wind was blowing freshly and the sail of the heavy skiff bellied to it, causing her bow to cut through the water at a great rate.

"We'll soon be on the ground, Cole," said Tom, peering under the boom to see how far they were away from their usual mooring-place when they sailed up to Charleston. "If it's Colonel Moultrie's men being summoned together for service perhaps the hour is at hand when you can settle your account with those who treated you so inhumanly."

The giant held up one great arm, its huge muscles standing out in knots; the fist clinched and was shaken at Fort Johnson, on James Island, whose guns grinned wickedly across the calm water and whose sentries could be seen pacing backward and forward on the bastions. There was an expression of hate in the face of the slave; he turned to Tom, a strange sound coming from his throat, the forefinger of his left hand pointing to his open mouth. Tom reached forward and pressed Cole's hand and his dark eyes glowed as he swept his glance toward the British flag which flowed from the tall staff at Fort Johnson.

Cole, by a horrible act of brutality, had been rendered dumb!

A year before, during one of the spasmodic outbreaks of indignation which had become so frequent, the authorities had occasion to suspect Tom Deering's father of some act against the government.

A party of dragoons were sent to his plantation to secure evidence against him; the leader of this party was a young and arrogant lieutenant, noted for his cruelty even to his own men. The colossal size of Cole at once attracted the officer's attention when the slaves were summoned to testify against their master.

"We'll have this fellow out," cried he, pointing to Cole. "He's the one that will tell us what we want to hear. He knows; I can see it in his face."

In vain Cole protested his ignorance of anything his master had done.

"You know, you black hound," thundered the dragoon. "Tie him up, men; we'll make him talk fast enough."

Cole was bound to a cottonwood-tree in front of his master's door; he continued to protest that he knew nothing, but in vain. The elder Deering and Tom were detained by a sergeant and a file of men inside the house and consequently had no knowledge of what was going forward without.

They heard the angry voice of the young lieutenant raised now and then in a shower of horrible oaths, apparently urging his men to the commission of something which they were reluctant to do. At length a dreadful scream sounded—a sharp, agonizing cry that caused the planter

and his son to turn pale and stare at one another with eyes filled with horror. Then the sergeant and his file were hurriedly called from the house; as they were mounting in the yard, Tom and his father rushed out; Cole hung limp against the ropes that bound him to the tree, covered with blood. As the hoofs of the dragoons' chargers grew faint down the road, it was discovered what had occurred. Wild with rage at what he considered Cole's defiance the brutal officer had had the slave's jaws pried open, and had cut his tongue with the point of his sabre.

The great strength of the giant negro and his superb condition carried him through the effects of this barbarous act; in a remarkably short time he had recovered; but he was deprived of speech forever; it was only in gestures such as that which he had made against Fort Johnson that he could convey the longing that filled him, to come to hand-grips with those who had treated him so inhumanly.

They had reached the wharf and were running in alongside; Cole loosed the halyard and lowered the sail. While he was furling it, he stopped suddenly, and by his gestures, which Tom could read very plainly, he called the attention of his companion to a strange stillness on the river.

Tom gazed up and down the stream for a moment and his eyes snapped.

"All the shipping has dropped down the river," cried he. "That can only mean one thing! Colonel Moultrie is about to attack——"

"Belay there, nevvy," growled a rough voice, almost in his ear. "Not quite so slack with the jaw tackle."

“Uncle Dick,” exclaimed Tom, in surprise.

“Yes, it’s the old sea-horse,” responded the owner of the voice, from above them on the wharf.

“You frightened me,” laughed Tom, as he climbed up over the wharf log.

“My frightening you, nevvy,” said the other, “will be nothing to the scare you’ll get if any of Governor Campbell’s spying swabs heard what you were just now going to say.”

Uncle Dick, or as the world knew him, Capt. Richard Deering of the schooner Defence, nodded in a friendly fashion to Cole, who grinned back, from his seat in the bow of the skiff. The captain of the Defence was a sturdy-looking man of about fifty, with his long, gray hair gathered in a cue, sailor-fashion; his weather-tanned face was smoothly shaven; he wore a round, glazed hat, a short pilot coat with metal buttons and long leather boots.

“What is going on, Uncle Dick?” asked Tom, seating himself at the old salt’s side. “I heard a drum beat while we were sailing in the shallows below the town and noticed the Cherokee and the Tamar standing up and down, with all hands ready.”

Captain Deering spat carefully over the wharf log into the water; and then looked up and down the river.

“There is going to be something happen on this river to-night,” said he, “that in the days to come they’ll write in their history books. See all them boats pulled up on the sand, above there?”

There was a long line of galleys and barges and other heavy boats lying half out of the water, under guard of some half dozen men.

“Behind them trees, further up,” continued Captain Deering, “is the whole of Colonel Moultrie’s command—or, at least, all of them as can be got together at short notice.”

“Then it is coming at last,” breathed Tom, his eyes aglow. “South Carolina is to strike for her liberty as those in the north struck, months ago.”

“She is,” cried Captain Deering, catching some of his nephew’s enthusiasm. “Blow my tarry tops, lad, we can’t let those Lexington fellows beat us in the cause. The first shot out of the locker is to be the capture of Fort Johnson; I know, for I collected the boats up there; the attacking party is going to cross the river in them. Those chaps keeping watch are from the crew of the Defence.”

“When is the affair to begin?” asked Tom, hardly able to keep still, so excited was he.

“As soon as it is dark enough to conceal the approach of the boats. There don’t seem to be any unusual goings-on in the fort, so I don’t think they suspect anything; but them two war craft, down in the roads, look bad; they must have had news from somewhere.”

Scarcely had the old sailor ceased speaking when there came a sudden rattle of hoofs; turning they saw a party of scarlet-coated dragoons wheel around a corner and, at a sharp gallop, proceed up the river road. A tall, burly man rode in the midst of them; his red face was angry and fierce looking, and he carried one hand upon his sword in a manner that told his thoughts as plainly as words.

“It’s Lord William Campbell, the new governor!” exclaimed Tom, with a gasp, “and they are on their way to the place where Moultrie’s men are assembled.”

The captain of the Defence arose to his feet.

“There is likely to be trouble,” remarked he. “You climb back into your boat, nevvy, and make sail for the plantation.”

“Not I!” Tom Deering drew himself up proudly. “If there is anything to be done, I am going to help.”

Uncle Dick looked at him sharply for a moment; then he uttered a short laugh, that had a satisfied ring in it.

“Good lad!” cried he. “Blow my tarry old hulk, but there never was a Deering yet that wasn’t always on hand when wanted.” He clapped the boy proudly on the back as he spoke. “Well, come along; we’ve got no time to lose; the breeze is fresh and straight up the river. What kind of a sailer is that craft of yours?”

“There is not a better in these waters for the sort of wind that’s blowing now.”

They clambered into the skiff; Cole shoved the boat clear of the wharf and hauled up the sail. A few strokes of the paddle brought her out into the stream, Uncle Dick threw her into the wind, and away she raced up the river.

The dragoons could still be seen proceeding at their sharp pace along the river road; the black, lowering figure still rode in the midst of them, his hand still upon the hilt of his sword.

“It’s good,” said Tom, “that there is a ridge between the road and the river, just above there; otherwise they’d see the boats, and maybe would try to scatter them and so break up the attempt on the fort.”

Captain Deering smiled.

“Moultrie is nearer than you think for, nevvy,” said he. “A whistle from one of my fellows there on shore would bring a hundred men to the boats in five minutes.” The skiff turned a wooded headland at this moment. “Look there; what did I tell you?”

Upon a smooth piece of ground, which the trees had hidden until they rounded the headland, was gathered the slender force of South Carolina; an awkward-looking body of men, poorly armed, and with a total lack of soldierly appearance. They were mostly planters, woodsmen and artisans who had volunteered for service to their country, without hope of pay. They wore their ordinary dress, though here and there there was an attempt at military smartness; their weapons were fowling-pieces, cutlasses, axes and the plunder of the town arsenal. They were drawn up in order and their officers were putting them through a drill.

The distance by water to this point was much shorter than by road; the skiff had lowered its sail and run its nose up on the sand before the dragoons reached the spot. Captain Deering was just about to hail the militia when there was a flash of red from amidst the green of the trees and Lord Campbell and his company came into view. So sudden was their appearance that the untrained militia would have been thrown into confusion at the bare sight of them had it not been for the sharp commands of their officers. They dressed ranks at the word and wheeled to face the dragoons. The latter had their weapons ready as they lined up on the verge of the woods; Lord Campbell, his face still dark with anger, rode forward toward a small group

of officers who stood apart within easy hearing distance of where Tom stood at the water's edge.

"What body of men is this?" demanded the governor.

An officer of commanding appearance stepped forward.

"It is the authorized force of the colony of South Carolina," said he.

"Authorized!" Lord Campbell's eyes blazed. "Authorized by whom?"

"By the Provincial Congress," returned the officer.

"There is no power in the colony to collect armed bodies of men save my own—under the authority of the king. I command you all in the name of King George to lay down your arms and disperse!"

His angry glance swept along the gathered patriots before him; his burly frame was quivering with rage at the idea to their daring to assemble in defiance of his power and that of his royal master. But there was no movement to obey; he paused for a moment, and then in a voice choking with passion he inquired of the officers:

"Which of you is Mr. Moultrie?"

The question was greeted with dead silence. The governor's face lit up with triumph; their leader was afraid to proclaim himself; it would be an easy task to put them down.

"I have had information," cried he fiercely, "that this insurrection is under the leadership of a Mr. Moultrie. Let him stand forth."

A small, dark officer of infantry stepped forward.

"In this command," said he, "I will venture to say that there is no Mr. Moultrie. But," he paused and looked the

wrathful governor in the eye with great coolness, “there is, however, a Colonel Moultrie.”

“Ah!” Lord Campbell stared at the speaker with a bitter sneer. “Then will Colonel Moultrie have the goodness to step forward?”

The officer who had answered him in the first instance, advanced, a quiet smile upon his handsome face.

“Colonel Moultrie,” blazed forth the angry king’s man, not giving the other a chance to speak, “do you or do you not intend to disperse this gathering?”

“It is not in my power,” answered Colonel Moultrie.

“Do you not command them?”

“I do; under the Council of Safety.”

“Bah!” The governor’s teeth snapped in a fury of rage at this. “That is all one hears these days—the Provincial Congress, the Committee General, the Council of Safety. I know nothing and care nothing for these rebels against the king and their usurped authority. I recognize none but you in this matter. You are here at the head of an armed force, in open rebellion; and I call upon you to lay down your arms and unconditionally surrender yourself, in the king’s name. Refuse and you must take the consequence of your folly.”

Tom Deering, with a thrill at his heart, saw the small, dark officer, who had spoken so coolly to Lord Campbell, step back and give a command to his company in a low voice. The line of the militia closed in a resolved fashion and the ducking guns were held in instant readiness for use. Lord Campbell saw it, also; and he saw the determined faces of those before him; a glance at his own slender company showed him that smart and soldier-like though

they were, they were not a match for the assembled patriots. He turned to Colonel Moultrie, who still stood quietly watching him.

“You refuse?”

“Can you doubt it?”

Without a word the governor wheeled his horse and rode back to his men; another moment and they were going down the river road at the same sharp gallop with which they had arrived.

Dusk had thrown its shadows across the waters of the river; the lights at Fort Johnson began to twinkle. Colonel Moultrie and his officers consulted together. The sharp businesslike departure of Lord Campbell and his men was not at all to their liking. In a few moments they had summoned Captain Deering, of the Defence, and after a few questions the latter turned and beckoned to Tom.

“Captain Deering,” said Colonel Moultrie, smilingly, “tells us that you are a patriot and a native son of the colony.”

“I am both, sir,” answered Tom, gravely.

“Good! You saw the Cherokee and Tamar under sail in Rebellion Roads a while ago, I understand.”

“I did, sir,” said the boy.

“Did they seem as though they intended to ascend the river?”

“No, sir.” Tom answered the question quickly enough; then the actions of the two vessels came back to him, and he added, a light breaking upon him: “But they seemed as though they’d like to; it was just as though they were waiting for a signal.”

“And that,” cried Colonel Moultrie, “is just exactly what they are waiting for. And Lord Campbell is now on his way to give it. Gentlemen,” turning to his officers, “we must cross the river and make the attempt upon the fort at once; otherwise we will have two war vessels scattering cannon shot among us in our passage.”

The orders were quickly given; the patriot force was soon at the water’s edge, embarking in the boats which Captain Deering had collected. Small as their numbers were, the boats were too few to accommodate them, and a good quarter were forced to remain behind. The attacking party had pushed off and was already pulling toward the fort through the quickly gathering darkness, when the small, dark officer who had spoken so coolly to Lord Campbell, came hurrying along. He had been making a disposition of the companies remaining behind and now seemed destined to be left also. He dashed out waist deep in the river in an effort to catch the last galley, but too late. At that moment Tom Deering’s skiff passed slowly by; there was room for another, and Tom called eagerly:

“Climb in, captain. We’re going, too; and we’ll land you there ahead of any of them.”

With a hasty word of thanks the officer scrambled into the boat and took up a position in the bow, from which point he could see all that was going forward.

This was Tom Deering’s first meeting with Francis Marion, afterward to become the great partisan chief of the Revolution and be known to the world as the Swamp-Fox.

Within an hour the attacking party had arrived at James Island and deployed in the darkness before the walls. Marion

had sprung ashore as soon as the prow of the skiff grated upon the sand; Tom and Cole were left alone, for they had touched at a point slightly further down than Colonel Moultrie's men.

"I'm glad Uncle Dick did not cross in our skiff," said Tom to Cole, as they drew the boat up on the sand. "Now we can look into things on our own account."

While the militia was arranging, front and rear, for the attack, the boy and his companion were stealing through the bush that grew thickly about the walls of the fort, and wondering at the silence within. It required a half hour for Moultrie to get everything in readiness; and at last, just as he was about to give the word for the attack to begin, two figures bounded upon the walls from inside the fort; one was a handsome youth of seventeen; the other was a giant negro slave. Each waved a blazing torch above his head exultantly.

"Colonel Moultrie," cried Tom Deering, "the place belongs to you. The British have fled to their ships."

It was true; the creaking of blocks and the dark loom of a mainsail showed them a vessel scudding down the river. Fort Johnson had fallen without firing a shot.

CHAPTER II
HOW TOM DEERING MADE A NAME

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Tom Deering and Monsieur Victor St. Mar, late of the French army, lowered the small swords and stood panting and smiling at each other, in the orchard one afternoon, not long afterward.

“You grow proficient,” said St. Mar in very good English, considering that he had been in the colonies but a few years, “your guard is excellent and your thrust, monsieur, is growing formidable.”

Praise from the French soldier was praise indeed, for he had been a master of the sword in the regiments of King Louis, among which were the greatest swordsmen in the world. He had paused for a time at Charleston on his way from New Orleans to Philadelphia; and during his stay he taught the use of his favorite weapon to the young men of the city. Tom was the youngest and most apt of his pupils; the youth’s strength, length of arm and sureness of eye made him a natural swordsman. At the French soldier’s praise he flushed with pleasure.

“I am glad, monsieur,” said he, as he wiped his brow, “that you think I am progressing. I like the practice of sword play.”

“The rapier,” said the Frenchman, “is a grand weapon—a gentleman’s weapon. I have taught many persons, and have studied the use of the cutlass, the broadsword, the pike, bayonet and dagger; but the rapier is the king of them all;

with three feet of bright steel in his hand the master of the sword should fear the attack of nothing that breathes."

He began buckling the long, slender weapons into their leather case, but paused and looked up at Tom, seriously.

"Study—practice steadily—experiment. That is the way to become a master. You have the material in you for a swordsman; but you must see to the defence—the parry—the guard. You Americans, I find, think the attack is everything. But it is not so. Study the guard. Some day you may meet a foe who has a thrust which you have never seen before. If you have not the parry to meet it your skill in attack will be like that."

He snapped his fingers and puffed out his cheeks; then he buckled up his sword-case and took his leave with many bows.

Tom Deering had long been a good horseman, a dead-shot with rifle or pistol; but sword-practice was new to him and he threw himself into the art with all the ardor of his seventeen years. Trouble was brewing between the king and his colonies, that was evident, and he was anxious to prepare himself for the struggle, for he had firmly made up his mind that, should the dark cloud of war that he saw gathering burst, he would be one of the first to offer himself for service.

For the capture of Fort Johnson was not immediately followed by open war, as all had expected. For some reason the British did not make any movement. Lord Campbell, the governor, had fled to the Tamar, which still lay in the harbor along with the Cherokee, but, except for sending his secretary to protest he took no steps. The patriots still had a

lingering hope that all might yet be well; there were many that clung to the belief that a reconciliation might yet be effected between king and colonies. The proceedings of the people of Charleston still wore, however loosely, a pacific aspect. Though actively preparing for war, they still spoke the language of loyalty, still dealt in vague assurances of devotion to the crown.

But Tom Deering was wide awake; he had a brain and he used it. The hesitation of the colonists would not last long he felt confident; and when they once cast it aside the storm would come in earnest—the sword would be drawn to be sheathed no more until the struggle was lost or won.

After St. Mar, the sword-master, had taken his departure, Tom took his customary afternoon plunge into the river, after which he was ready for a visit which he had planned. Cole brought his best horse, a powerful, intelligent looking chestnut with strong lines of speed and bottom, around to the front of the house and Tom vaulted lightly into the saddle. Cole mounted another horse, a great bay, and followed his youthful master, as was his custom. There were not many horses upon the Deering plantation capable of supporting the great weight of the giant slave for any length of time and still make speed. But the bay carried him as though he were a feather, hour after hour, sometimes, and never showed more than ordinary weariness.

Tom’s father, a tall, dignified gentleman, with the appearance more of a scholar than a planter, and bearing scarcely any resemblance to his brother, the skipper of the schooner Defence, met them on the road near the house.

“Are you going up to the city?” asked he, drawing rein.

“No, sir,” replied his son. “I’m going over to the Harwood plantation. I have not been there for some weeks.”

“You have not been there, I suppose, since the taking of Fort Johnson?”

“No, sir.”

Mr. Deering looked grave. Jasper Harwood, who owned the large plantations some eight miles from them, was his half-brother, and he knew his real character better than Tom.

“I will not forbid you to go,” said the father. “But it will be just as well if you’d stay away.”

Tom looked surprised.

“Why, father, what do you mean?”

Mr. Deering laughed.

“After the part you took in the little affair of the night of the fourteenth of September,” said he, “I don’t think your presence will be very welcome upon the Harwood plantation. I hardly think Jasper Harwood looks upon the matter from the same point of view as you, Tom.”

“Do you mean that he is a king’s man, sir,” exclaimed Tom.

“I’m sure of it,” answered his father.

“I can’t bring myself to believe it, father. He is, perhaps, like a great many others just now, reluctant to prove disloyal, but when the real time comes to act, I think you will find him as staunch for the Provincial Congress as any of us.”

Mr. Deering laughed at his son’s earnestness.

“Well, my boy, I trust you’re right, but I don’t think so. Jasper Harwood is a Tory, and will hardly take the trouble to

hide it from you. So, you will not be kept long in suspense, if you are going there."

From the time he left his father and struck across the fields and swamps toward the Harwood place, Tom was deep in thought. Perhaps his father was right. He knew that Jasper Harwood was a harsh, arrogant man, with a violent temper and a great respect for the crown; but that he would let the latter blind him to the blessings of liberty, and turn his hand and tongue against his neighbors and friends was more than Tom, boy like, could realize.

"But even if the master of the plantation himself is a king's man, there are others there who are not," mused the boy as he loped along, followed by Cole on the big bay. "Mark will prove true to the colony, I know. And then, there is Laura! Every throb of her heart is of indignation against British oppression. I am confident of that."

He was still deep in thought, and they were ascending a narrow road that led to the Harwood house before Tom realized it. Suddenly Cole uttered his strange cry and touched his horse with the spur. In a moment he was beside Tom, one hand upon his shoulder, and the other pointing to a small clump of trees by the roadside near the house. A half dozen horses were tied there, and from their trappings Tom knew them to be the mounts of the king's dragoons. A like visit to their own plantation was still vivid in his mind; its horrible result to Cole caused all sorts of dreadful fears to crowd into his mind, and with beating heart he urged his steed forward at a gallop and threw himself from its back before the door. The sound of the galloping hoofs coming up the graveled path caused a rush to the doors and windows;