Lush meadows, deep forests of oak and hickory, broken fields of red clay watered by numerous small streams, plateaus studded with snow-capped mountains shining in the sun—this was the back country of North Carolina which in the middle of the eighteenth century embraced the sparsely settled counties of Orange, Granville, Rowan, Anson and Dobbs.

The first settlers in the region built their cabins before 1740 along the lower western valleys of the Yadkin, Haw, Tar, Catawba and Deep rivers, occupying the region between the present cities of Raleigh and Morganton. The succeeding years saw them arriving in ever increasing numbers—German, Scotch-Irish, Highlander, Welsh and English immigrants from New England, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland. In 1765 Governor Tryon reported that more than a thousand pioneer wagons passed through Salisbury on their way to the back country.

The settlers lived a life of poverty and hard work. Most of them were destined to go to their graves ignorant of plank floors, feather beds, riding carriages and side saddles. Many districts had no schools. Most of the children went from high chair to field and forest where labor in all kinds of weather left many of them with rheumatic fever and the facial ravages of old age before they reached their prime.

To this bare and hard existence was added the burden of oppressive government. Coming from a more liberal colony, the average backwoodsman resented the political institutions of
North Carolina because they gave him no voice in public affairs. Cut off from communication or sympathy with the governing classes of the province, his impulsive nature led him in time of stress to seek redress of grievances by forceful means.

The executive branch of the colonial government consisted of the governor, who represented the royal prerogative, and his council who, appointed by the King on his recommendation, nearly always displayed gratitude for their positions. The governor in council named the justices of the superior and inferior courts. In addition, he appointed the officers of the militia and selected the sheriff from among freeholders whose names he had obtained from each inferior or county court, which was the sole unit of local government. Its justices executed their commands through the sheriff and his liberal number of deputies.

The legislative branch of the government consisted of an assembly of two houses: the upper house, composed of the members of the council; and the lower house, composed of deputies elected by freeholders. Elections were held by the sheriff. In the absence of political parties influential men in the county named the candidates, who were usually elected. The effects of this system are easily seen. A few men in each county controlled
the political offices, whose effectiveness depended on the personal honesty of their incumbents. Oddly enough the system worked well in the eastern counties, but in the back country where social and economic conditions were quite different officers often proved tyrannical and mercenary. To counteract the stench of this Augean stable the people eventually adopted as cleansing agent an association known as the Regulators.

The county court levied taxes and the sheriff collected them. Taxes were apportioned by the poll; the wealthy planter in the east paid no more than the poor farmer in the west. In the back country money was scarce. Business was conducted largely through barter, and the farmers seldom kept money in their homes. What little cash they needed they usually obtained from one of the few men in the region who practiced the business of lending small sums.

When the sheriff came for the taxes—and for mercenary reasons he contrived to come unexpectedly—the farmer would propose that they go and get the tax money from one of the lenders. The sheriff would not only refuse the request but would proceed to distrain on some of the farmer’s property, for which service he took a sizable fee. The farmer would then hasten to the lender, borrow the needed money and hurry after the sheriff; but this officer had departed by a route different from that he had promised to take.

The farmer, going to the county seat, would find that his property had been sold to some friend of the sheriff for much less than its value. From such an experience the farmer adduced that governmental officers were in collusion for the purpose of robbing him. He became convinced that the county seat was full of men who had amassed large sums of money at the expense of poor farmers like himself.

Debt and taxation often took the farmer’s horse from the plow and stripped his wife of her homespun dress. In Orange County not far from the present town of Chapel Hill, a sheriff who was distraining and selling property came to the house of a farmer but found him absent. Disappointed in his design but determined to satisfy his demands somehow, he forced the farm-
er's wife to take off her dress, slapped her on the buttocks, told
her to make herself another and sold the dress at auction for her
husband's tax.

In Granville County rapacious officers picked flaws in the titles
of properties, compelling their owners to remedy pretended or
insignificant defects by taking out new patents. In other back
counties officers would resolve a service into two or three and
demand a fee for each. Lawyers and court officials postponed
cases in order to obtain more fees.

Under these conditions American hatred for oppression
quickly asserted itself. In 1765 the enraged people found a
champion in George Sims, a militant journalist whose Address
to the People of Granville County exposed the vicious methods
by which dishonest lawyers, and especially Samuel Benton, clerk
of the County Court, extorted fees from their victims. In his
homespun style, understood by all, Sims shot ironic darts with
deadly aim:

We will suppose ourselves all to be men, who labour for our liv­
ings, and there is a poor man among us, who has dealt for 4 or 5
pounds in such things as his family could not possibly do without,
and in hopes of being spared from the lash of the law till he can
sell some of his effects to raise the money; he gives a judgment
bond to his Merchant, and before he can accomplish his design
his bond is thrown into Court, and Benton the poor mans Burgess
has it to enter on the Court docquet and issue an execution the
work of one long minute. Well, Gentlemen, what has our poor
neighbour to pay Mr. Benton for his trouble? Why, nothing but
the trifling sum of forty one shillings and five pence. Well he is
a poor man and cannot raise the money. We will suppose Mr.
Benton condescends to come to terms with him. Come (says he)
and work. I have a large field and my corn wants weeding (or
something like that). I will give you 1/6 a day, which is the
common wages of a labourer in these times till you pay it off
because you are a poor man, and a neighbour I will not take away
your living. Well how many days work has our honest neigh­
bour to pay Mr. Benton for his trouble and expense in writing
about a minute? Why, he must work something more than 27
days before he is clear of his clutches. Well the poor man reflects
within himself. At this rate says he when shall I maintain my own family. I have a wife and a parcel of small children suffering at home and I have none to labour but myself, and here I have lost a month's work and I do not know for what, my merchant not yet paid, I do not know what will be the end of these things; however, I will go home, and try what I can do toward getting a living. Stay neighbour, you must not go home, you are not half done yet, there is a damned Lawyers mouth to stop before you go any further, you impowered him to confess that you owed £5, and you must pay him 30/ for that, or else go and work nineteen days for that pick-pocket at the same rate, and when that is done, you must work as many days for the Sheriff, for his trouble, and then go home and see your living wrecked and tore to pieces to satisfy your merchant.

The leader of this hierarchy of public thieves was William Tryon, who became governor of the colony in the same year that Sims published his essay. Like Stratford in the days of Charles I, Tryon epitomized his public policy by the word "thorough." He worshiped money with the passion of a Croesus. While he averred that the aim of his administration was to preserve the prerogative of his royal master, his real ambition was to amass a private fortune. In this he could rely on the full support of his officers, who were even more experienced than he in the art of fleecing the public.

Tryon felt obliged to defend his lieutenants as representatives of his government against the growing criticism of the people. Vain as Rehoboam, he taxed the colony £20,000 in order to build himself a magnificent palace at New Bern. The Venezuelan patriot, Francisco Miranda, saw this edifice in 1783 when time had marred some of its beauty and said it had no equal in all South America.

Isolated from and out of sympathy with the dominant classes of the province, the backwoodsmen only awaited a leader who would inspire them to organize against their oppressors. They found one in Hermon Husband, a well-to-do, industrious, shrewd and honest Quaker from Maryland who was a member of the assembly from Orange County. His assiduity as a pamphleteer and his activities as a writer, agitator and legislator in pressing for
redress of their complaints won him the entire support of the men of the back country. Although he always claimed he had never officially joined them, Husband inspired the backwoodsmen to form an association called the Regulators—a title borrowed from a group of men who had organized in South Carolina to suppress robbers and to correct many abuses in the back country of that province.

The North Carolina association first resorted to action in Orange County in April 1766 when the sheriff declared that he intended to distrain two shillings and eight pence for each delinquent tax. The Regulators replied by drawing up a paper which is typically American in character: they expressed their unwillingness to pay oppressive taxes, determined to stand by their constitutional rights, resolved to seek redress of grievances through their representatives in assembly and to vote corrupt officials out of office and promised one another to abide by majority rule.

A full decade before the Declaration of Independence these crude and unschooled frontiersmen forecast its spirit in their own program “for regulating Publick Grievances and Abuses of Power in the following particulars, with others of like nature that may occur”:

That we will pay no taxes until we are Satisfied they are agreeable to Law and Applied to the purpose therein mentioned, unless we cannot help and are forced.

That we will pay no Officer any more fees than the Law allows, unless we are obliged to do it, and then to show a dislike to it & bear open testimony against it.

That we will attend our meetings of Conferences as often as we conveniently can or is necessary in order to consult our representatives on the amendments of such Laws as may be found Grievous or unnecessary, and to choose more suitable men than we have heretofore done for Burgesses and Vestrymen, and to petition His Excellency our Governor, the Hon’ble Council and the Worshipful House of Representatives, His Majesty in Parliament, &c., for redress of such grievances as in the course of this undertaking may occur, and inform one another & to learn, know
and enjoy all the Privileges and Liberties that are allowed us and were settled on us by our worthy ancestors, the founders of the present Constitution, in order to preserve it in its Ancient Foundation, that it may stand firm and unshaken.

That we will contribute to collections for defraying necessary expenses attending the work according to our abilities.

That in cases of difference in judgment we will submit to the Majority of our Body.

To all of which we do solemnly swear, or, being a Quaker or otherwise scrupulous in Conscience of the common Oath, do solemnly Affirm that we will stand true and faithful to this cause until We bring them to a true Regulation according to the true intent & meaning of it in the judgment of the Majority.

The Regulators sent printed copies of this paper to all the officers in the colony. At the same time they refused to pay the taxes demanded by the sheriffs, while Husband undertook to act as sheriff of Orange County by collecting in it the exact amount of tax lawfully due from every Regulator. When Husband’s name was called in the assembly as a member from Orange, Governor Tryon in a haughty voice demanded to know why the King’s subjects in that county had refused to pay their taxes. In reply Husband threw a bag containing money on the table before Tryon. “Here, sir,” he said, “are the taxes which my people refused your roguish sheriff. I brought it to keep it from dwindling, seeing that when money passes through so many fingers, it, like a cake of soap, grows less at each handling. The people have sent it down by their commoner and I am now ready to pay it over to the treasurer if he will give me a receipt to show my people that the money has been paid.”

Tryon eyed him with contempt and wanted to have him arrested on some pretext. Summoning his council, he asked it for advice concerning the propriety of issuing a warrant against Husband. The council disapproved. Nevertheless, at Tryon’s request, one of its members issued warrants against Husband and another leading Regulator, William Butler, both of whom were charged with “Traiterously and feloniously conspiring with others in stirring up an Insurrection.”
On May 2, 1768, on Tryon's orders, Edmund Fanning, colonel of the Orange County militia, with twenty-seven armed men seized Husband and Butler and took them to Hillsboro, where they were given a brief trial and thrown into jail. They were told that they would be tried again in New Bern and that there they would surely be convicted and hanged. Fearing for their lives, they sent for Fanning, who got them to sign a paper in which they promised to refrain thenceforth from criticizing the laws of the colony and from voicing Regulator grievances. They were released under bond to appear for trial at the following term of court.

Though Husband kept his promises, he failed to calm the people. Indeed, their resentment grew with every new dishonest act. They were especially incensed against Fanning and John Frohock, clerk of the court of Rowan County, both of whom had recommended imprisonment and even death for prominent members of their organization. Fanning, a New Englander who had been educated at Yale, was a man of eloquence and superior ability. For some years he had served as one of the leading men in the assembly. Unfortunately, he belonged to the office-holding class, and, like his associates, he stretched his authority as much as possible in order to make money. Like them, too, he believed he had a legal right to take all he could get. In this belief he was no better and no worse than his colleagues. His frankness and haughty manner, however, gained him the particular hatred of the Regulators, who regarded him as the prototype of the officers from whose hands they had suffered.

Rednap Howell, a witty and satiric versifier who came to North Carolina from New Jersey, taught the children of the back country to chorus the infamy of dishonest officials in more than forty humorous ballads and jingles. In the following stanzas he attributes the theft of a horse to John Frohock, misspelled "Frohawk." The verses show Frohock and Fanning in cynical confab:

Says Frohawk to Fanning, "To tell the plain truth,  
When I came to this country I was but a youth;  
My father sent me, I wa'nt worth a cross:  
And then my first duty was to steal a horse.
I quickly got credit and then ran away,
And haven't paid for him to this day."

Says Fanning to Frohawk, " 'Tis folly to lie,
I rode an old mare that was blind in one eye.
Five shillings in money I had in my purse,
My coat it was patched, but not much the worse.
But now we've got rich, as 'tis very much known
That we will do very well if they'll let us alone."

On another occasion when Howell learned that Fanning had ordered "some double gold lace for a hat and some narrow double gold lace for a jacket," he wrote the following:

When Fanning first to Orange came
He looked both pale and wan.
An old patched coat upon his back,
An old blind mare he rode on.
Both man and mare wa'nt worth five pounds
As I've been often told,
But by his cavil robberies
He's laced his coat with gold.

What were "his cavil robberies"? The fee bill allowed the register two shillings and eight pence for recording each conveyance "or any other writing, or giving a copy thereof." A deed, for example, was regarded as more than a mere conveyance; it contained also the certificate of the examination of a feme covert, the certificate of the examiner and the oath of execution. The people regarded a deed as a single conveyance; Fanning regarded it as four. He therefore claimed that he was entitled to four fees, one for each service.

Such a man as Fanning will employ any weapon at his command to shield himself from the popular resentment which he feels he has aroused. In May 1768 Tryon told the Regulators that if they should send him a petition containing their grievances and then return peacefully to their homes, he would use all the power of his office to obtain justice for them. When the Regulators met to prepare the petition, however, Fanning, fearing it
might prove offensive to his interests, requested them through Husband to accept one written by himself; no other petition, he said, would "go down with the governor."

The colonel warned Husband that if this request was ignored, he would represent his case which was scheduled to be tried in September as one involving treason. Confused by this threat, the Regulators resorted to the expediency of appointing a committee which would lay before Tryon and his council all the papers of their organization together with a request to pardon anything they had done contrary to the King's peace and government. At the same time they procured affidavits to support charges against the sheriff, clerk and register in twenty cases of alleged illegal fees and sent them to the governor.

Tryon frowned on this procedure, darkly hinted treason and championed Fanning, though he promised to prosecute any person found guilty of taking illegal fees and to issue a proclamation against the same abuse. This proclamation, posted in Hillsboro, brought no relief. Indeed, Husband claimed that it resulted in higher fees than before. The people retaliated by refusing to pay their taxes. In a message to Tryon they explained that officers paid no attention to his proclamation.

"Seeing that these sons of Zeruiah are like to prove too hard for your excellency, as well as for us," they said, "we have come to the resolution to petition the lower house, as the other branch of the legislature, in order to strengthen your excellency's hands."

The Regulators soon heard that Tryon intended to reply to their threat to his prerogative by sending against them a force which included Indians. To forestall this purported intention, the Regulators gathered about twenty miles from Hillsboro on August 11, 1768, and selected a deputation of eight men to interview the governor. Tryon replied that he had no intention of enlisting either the militia or Indians against them, that he was always ready to secure justice for them, that Fanning had agreed to submit the charges of illegal fees to the next superior court—by whose decision he promised to abide—and that the sheriff's accounts in Orange County had been examined and approved.

Tryon also set August 20 as the day on which the Regulators
were to be permitted to examine the public accounts. But when this date approached he sent them a letter stating that their measures were illegal and that they had made every man of "property and probity" in the country believe they intended to stage an insurrection rather than seek legal process against those whom they accused. In the circumstances, he said, he felt he should adopt measures to protect the next term of court, when Husband and Butler were to be tried. And he demanded that twelve prominent Regulators meet him on August 25 at Salisbury and become surety in bond of £1,000 that they would make no attempt to rescue Husband and Butler. The Regulators refused this demand on the ground that they had no plans to rescue their friends; all they asked was that the governor should dissolve the assembly, a procedure which they thought would stop every complaint. Tryon ignored this plea. Instead he called nearly fifteen hundred soldiers to protect the Hillsboro court.

Before this array of force the Regulators were not prepared to stand. Assembling on September 22 about half a mile from the town, they sent a proposal to Tryon seeking to know on what terms their submission would be accepted. Tryon replied that if they would surrender five of their leaders from Orange, two from Anson and two from Rowan, lay down their arms before the army and promise to pay their taxes in the future, they would be pardoned. Husband and Butler were excluded in the nine acceptable persons. The Regulators refused these terms but, undecided about what they should do, quietly returned to their homes.

At their trials both Husband and Butler were charged with inciting the King’s subjects to riot. Husband was acquitted, but Butler was sentenced to six months’ imprisonment and to pay a fine of £50. The officers were tried next. Every precaution was taken to prevent Regulators from making a possible attempt to obstruct justice. Troops asked the business of every man who wished to attend court. If a man admitted an intention to testify against the officers, he was sent away. If he insisted on staying, he was ordered to leave town.

Nevertheless, some of them returned and succeeded in testify-
ing against Fanning and other officers. Their efforts, however, proved vain. Fanning convinced the jury that in taking a fee for each service on a deed he had simply conformed with the decisions of certain justices of the county court. In consequence the court held that he was innocent of "tortuous taking," a ruling which constrained the jury to impose on him a merely nominal penalty: he was fined a penny for each offense. On being convicted, he immediately resigned his position as register.

By this time the Regulators were active in nearly all the back counties. In Rowan they tried to prosecute John Frohock for extortion, but the grand jury was packed. Its members, the Regulators found, were not the same as those who had originally been chosen. Such cases were numerous. The Regulators naturally deduced that the laws favored the officers and that, therefore, they should be changed.

In a pamphlet addressed to the people Husband recounted their grievances and urged them to arouse themselves from their own "blind, stupid conduct" by electing honest members to the lower house in the next assembly. When it met in October 1769 the lower house showed itself sympathetic toward the people. It passed a bill to regulate legal fees, and it introduced an act which provided means for recovering small debts. This good beginning, however, was soon nullified by an event unrelated to it.

On November 2 the lower house unanimously passed a resolution on a question then at issue between the colonies and the Royal Government. Tryon disapproved of the resolution and dissolved the assembly. In the succeeding elections for delegates to the lower house the Regulators showed surprising strength: two from their organization were elected, one of whom was Husband. Tryon hastened to repair this loss by making Hillsboro a borough, which promptly returned Fanning to the assembly.

No sooner had this body resumed its duties when in September 1770 it received alarming information concerning Regulator activity in the Hillsboro district. Failing to obtain relief of grievances through petitions to the governor, the assembly and the court, they had resolved on force. They prefaced this with an
elaborate petition to the superior court, demanding unprejudiced juries and public accounting of taxes. Their frame of mind is clearly disclosed in these sentences:

Our only crime with which they can charge us is vertue [sic] in the very highest degree, namely, to risque our all to save our country from rapine and slavery in our detecting of practises which the law itself allowed to be worse than open robbery. . . . As we are serious and in good earnest, and the cause respects the whole body of the people, it would be a loss of time to enter into argument on particular points, for though there is a few men who have the gift or art of reasoning, yet every man has a feeling and knows when he has justice done him as well as the most learned.

The presiding judge, Richard Henderson—the future proprietor of Transylvania—agreed to take their petition under careful consideration until the following Monday morning. On that day Hillsboro was filled with a vociferous army of men. When the court convened at eleven o’clock, the Regulators crowded into the courtroom “as close as one man could stand by another,” many of them armed with switches, cowhide whips and clubs. Their spokesman on this occasion was Jeremiah Fields, who told Henderson they were determined to have their cases tried and had come down to see justice done. They charged the court with injustice at the preceding term, objected to the appointment of jurors by the common court and expressed their determination to have the panel changed and another appointed in its place.

After some parley Henderson yielded to their demands. But they had already become an unruly mob. When the session resumed, several of them fell on John Williams, Henderson’s law partner, who escaped a beating by taking refuge in a near-by store. They next threatened to strike Henderson while he endeavored to placate them from the bench window. Instead, they turned on Fanning. Dragging him by his heels from the bench where he sought refuge, they beat him until he managed to break away and flee to a store. Pursuing him, they threw dirt, brick-bats and stones at the building. They broke all its windows, but
they failed to draw Fanning outside. Then they turned their wrath on Henderson, who gradually succeeded in appeasing them by promising to hold court until the end of the term. Permitting him to adjourn court, they conducted him "with great parade" to his lodgings. After exacting a promise from Fanning to surrender next day, they permitted him to go home.

Henderson had no intention of keeping his word. That evening at about ten o'clock he made his escape by a back way, putting Fanning in a desperate situation. The next morning Regulators threatened the colonel with death, but they reconsidered and permitted him to run out of town as fast as his legs would go. They spent their fury by burning his house, his furniture and practically all his personal belongings.

Enraged by Henderson's perfidy, the Regulators took possession of the court, called over their cases and, in futile protests over conditions they were powerless to remedy, made profane entries in the records: "Damned rogues"; "Fanning pays costs but loses nothing"; "Negroes not worth a damn, Cost exceed the Whole"; and in a case of slander, "Nonsense, let them argue for Ferrell has gone hellward."

On the night of November 12, 1770, they avenged themselves on Henderson by burning his brother's barn and stables, destroying several horses and a quantity of corn and two days later burning the residence of the judge himself. Governor Tryon offered £100 reward for clues leading to the arrest of the incendiaries, who, however, were never apprehended.

Amid all this alarm and confusion the assembly met in early December. Tryon's first object of vengeance was Hermon Husband. He was arraigned before the lower house and expelled on a charge of "false and seditious libel" for publishing a circular letter bearing the signature of a leading Regulator named James Hunter and addressed to Maurice Moore, a judge of the supreme court and a member of the assembly. Tryon also had him arrested and imprisoned without bail to keep him from returning to the Regulators. A few weeks later the assembly passed legislation for suppressing riots. This law, an emergency act which was to expire in one year, empowered the attorney general to
try charges involving rioting in any superior court, declared an outlaw any person who failed to obey a court summons within sixty days and authorized the governor to use the militia to enforce the law.

The Regulators resolved to take measures to gain Husband's release. In February 1771 they gathered in the woods and reasserted their principles. Like good Americans, they averred that all laws contrary to God's law of equality were null and void and that all officers who exacted illegal taxes and fees from the poor were guilty of a worse crime than open robbery. They asked that extortioners be brought to trial and "the collectors of the public money called to proper settlements of their accounts." Emboldened by their own words, they prepared to march on the jail at New Bern to rescue their leader.

Unwilling for the present to precipitate a civil war, Tryon freed Husband when he learned that the Regulators were approaching. This stopped their march but did not soften their anger. They decided to pay a visit to the superior court at Salisbury. On March 6, 1771, about four or five hundred of them encamped in the woods west of the Yadkin River.

"The lawyers are everything," they complained. "There should be none in the province."

"We shall be forced to kill them all."

"There never was such an act as the Riot Act in the laws of England." Down with England!

To an officer who requested them to explain their presence they said: "We come with no intention to obstruct the court, or to injure the person or property of any one, but only to petition for a redress of grievances against officers taking exorbitant fees."

"Why, then, are some of you armed?"

"Our arms," they replied, "are only to defend ourselves."

Though they were informed that no court would be held on account of the disturbances, the officers, finding them "peacefully disposed beyond expectation," agreed to settle their differences with them by arbitration on the third Tuesday in May. After each side had chosen referees, the Regulators marched through Salisbury, gave three cheers and quietly returned to their homes.
Tryon was bent on revenge. Displeased with himself for having been obliged to set Husband free, he dismissed the term of court and called another for March 11. The sheriffs of the several counties in the district were directed to elect as jurors only "gentlemen of the first rank, property, and probity in their respective counties." Thus Tryon took means to obtain jurors and witnesses suited to his purpose.

On the appointed day the court opened. With willing witnesses and a unanimous grand jury, sixty-one indictments were found for felonies or riots against leading Regulators in Orange County, many of whom lived two hundred miles away and who had been at home during the riots of which they were accused.

Tryon next received the grand jury at his palace and informed it of his intention to lead an armed force against the "insurgents." The jury joined the council to applaud his purpose. The governor obtained the necessary funds, which the assembly had refused to provide, by creating a paper currency by drafts on the treasury. Before leaving New Bern he ordered Hugh Waddell—now a general—to march to the Yadkin with a detachment of 250 men and to collect forces all along the road to his destination, where he was to await a convoy from Charleston, South Carolina, with a supply of powder for Tryon's army.

On May 1, 1771, the governor himself, with somewhat fewer than a thousand men, marched westward and eight days later encamped at Hillsboro. On the same day General Waddell, while awaiting the convoy from Charleston, received word that it had been seized and that the ammunition he expected had been blown up by nine young Regulators disguised with blackened faces.

Deciding to try to join Tryon, Waddell sent messengers to Hillsboro to advise him of the capture of the convoy. On the next day he broke camp and started for Hillsboro, intending to join Tryon at the Haw River. Hardly had he crossed the Yadkin, however, when he received a message from the Regulators warning him to halt or retreat. Finding his men inclined to desert rather than fight the Regulators, he retreated toward Salisbury. The Regulators pursued him, engaged him in a skirmish
The Regulators of North Carolina

and, surrounding his detachment, took most of his men prisoners. They permitted him to escape with a few of his men.

On May 11 Tryon moved from Hillsboro to relieve Waddell. Marching through Regulator country, he crossed the Haw River where he received small reinforcements and proceeded to the Alamance River which he reached on May 14. Learning that a large group of Regulators had gathered on the hills about five miles farther on, he marched his men toward them in two columns.

The Regulators numbered about two thousand, half of whom were armed. They had no desire for battle; indeed, they hoped that a show of force would frighten the governor into granting their demands. In the interest of peace they addressed to him a petition which was delivered by Dr. David Caldwell, a preacher. Tryon replied:

I lament the fatal necessity to which you have now reduced me by withdrawing yourselves from the mercy of the crown and from the laws of your country. To require you who are now assembled as Regulators, to quietly lay down your arms, to surrender up your leaders, to the laws of your country and rest on the leniency of the Government. By accepting these terms within one hour from the delivery, of this dispatch, you will prevent an effusion of blood, as you are at this time in a state of rebellion against your King, your country, and your laws.

The Regulators refused the terms. In vain did Dr. Caldwell try to persuade them to withdraw, pointing out that they had no cannon, no military training, no ammunition and no commanding officers to lead them into battle.

At this juncture an old Scotchman called out to the minister: "Doctor Caldwell, get out of the way or Tryon's army will kill you in three minutes!" The preacher hastily cleared the field.

Hermon Husband, too, had deserted. Though he had bravely faced threats, imprisonment and torture, he shrank, like a true Quaker, from violence. He had come along in the hope of helping to reach a compromise, but when he saw no hope he mounted
his horse and quietly rode away. Realizing his danger, he fled to his old home in Maryland, and from there to western Pennsylvania where he remained for the rest of his days.

To the last minute the Regulators hoped to avoid bloodshed. About noon on May 16 they sent Robert Thompson, an amiable but outspoken man, to speak to Tryon once more. During their conversation Thompson must have uttered some plain truths, for Tryon killed him with a gun he had snatched from a militiaman. Soon perceiving his folly, he decided to placate the Regulators by sending a flag of truce toward their side of the field; but they, enraged by his murderous act, began firing with deadly aim. Tryon then angrily mounted a white charger, shouting, "Fire! Fire!" Seeing his men hesitate, he bellowed, "God damn it, fire! Fire on them!"

To which a Regulator replied, "Fire and be damned!" The battle was joined.

At first the Regulators controlled the situation. They sought the protection of trees, rocks and fences while they fired. Their sharpshooters found easy targets in Tryon's men who, fighting in the open fields, were unable to do more than shoot. Worse followed for the governor. Captain Montgomery led a charge of his mountain boys that routed Tryon's force and compelled it to abandon two cannon. But Montgomery soon fell while Tryon succeeded in rallying his troops.

The Regulators, lacking officers with authority to give orders, became confused. Unable to fire their cannon, they fled from the field in bands of hundreds. In less than two hours the battle came to an end. Nine men had been killed on each side while Tryon counted sixty-one wounded and his opponents a larger number. About fifteen Regulators were taken prisoners. One of these, James Few, a carpenter who had been outlawed for participating in the Hillsboro riots, was executed on the spot.

From Alamance Tryon led his troops to Sandy Creek, where he exacted an oath of allegiance from the people. He also issued a proclamation pardoning all persons who should submit to an oath of allegiance. Six thousand met this demand within a month. Tryon soon returned to Hillsboro where the prisoners were court-martialed. Twelve were convicted of treason, and
half of these were condemned to death. Among them was Benjamin Merrill, a former captain in the Rowan County militia, who repudiated the Regulators just before he was led to the scaffold. He was hanged by his neck, cut down while he was still alive, and disemboweled, decapitated and quartered. "And may the Lord have mercy on your soul," the judicial sentence had added.

Another condemned man, James Pugh, remained steadfast in his principles. Mounting the barrel which served as the scaffold, he berated Tryon with Scotch-Irish vehemence for several minutes. He had turned to address Fanning when the barrel was overturned.

Thus ended in failure the attempts of the Regulators to secure reform in local government. Should they submit to the continued oppression, or should they accept the alternative of moving westward? Some of them, regarding the hopelessness of their condition as a greater evil than the danger of the wilderness, packed their belongings and mingled with the tide of emigration that was crossing the mountains into the western country of the colony which later became the state of Tennessee. Morgan Edwards, who visited this region in 1772, wrote that fifteen hundred—most of them of Scotch-Irish stock—had departed since Alamance, and that many more intended to follow as soon as they could dispose of their farms.

Was Alamance the first battle of the American Revolution? Several local historians, eager to make the most of every historical event falling within their state, have answered in the affirmative. A more objective writer, John Spencer Bassett, saw no connection in the two events. In fact, most of the Regulators were Tories. While they hated Tryon, they remained loyal to the King. They had aimed against the oppressive agents of the government, not against the government itself. If the movement had never happened, said Bassett, "the armies of Washington and Clinton, of Greene and Cornwallis, would have fought out their battles much the same as they did fight them."

Nevertheless, historians cannot overlook the fact that the movement was an authentic expression of western principles, and therefore of American character. It provided an "object lesson
for the whole country.” The Regulators, wrote George Ban-
croft with some grains of truth,

... form the connecting link between resistance to the Stamp
Act and the movement of 1775; and they also played a glorious
part in taking possession of the Mississippi valley, towards which
they were carried irresistibly by their love of independence. It
is a mistake if any have supposed that the Regulators were cowed
down by their defeat at the Alamance. Like the mammoth, they
shook the bolt from their brow and crossed the mountains.

Though they failed, they showed that the colonists were capable
of armed resistance; and that British armies, however formidable
in other circumstances, would be rendered weak in a hostile
country. Tryon’s campaign, finally, developed the military or-
ganization of North Carolina. This was shown during the Revo-
lution when that colony’s troops won the battle of Moore’s Creek
which, though small in comparison with other victories, pre-
vented the Tories in the southern colonies from joining the
British.