Colonel Ashe, on his removal, sold the Clayton Hall estate to Dr. James F. McRee, who retired from the practice of medicine in Wilmington and made his residence here, where he carried on planting operations with fair success. He abandoned the old settlement, and built on what was known as the Sand Ridge, and renamed the place, calling it Ashe-Moore, in compliment to the two families so long known and distinguished in the Cape Fear region. Dr. McRee had acquired a higher reputation than any other physician of his day in the Lower Cape Fear, or even in the whole State. The writer enjoyed the privilege of being his pupil, and of his long friendship, and to speak of him in such terms as he esteemed him, as a noble gentleman and physician, might seem like extravagant eulogy.

The next place on the river is The Vats. Here the river changes its course, making a sharp, sudden bend, and a prominent point of rocks jutting into the stream gives the name of Rocky Point to all that portion of country lying west, as far as the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad. This place was first located by Maj. Maurice Moore, one of the earliest pioneers of the Cape Fear section. It is related that Major Moore and Governor Burrington, both of them exploring in search of rich lands, happened to reach this point about the same time. As they stepped on shore from their boats, both claimed possession by right of prior location and occupation. But the colonel stoutly resisted His Excellency's pretensions, and by dint of strong will held the property. The arbitrary disposition exhibited on this occasion rather strikingly illustrates what is said to have been characteristic of the Moore family, especially that branch of it. The lands of this place were very rich, and it continued in the Moore family for several generations. It was finally sold by Judge Alfred Moore to Mr. Ezekiel Lane, a most worthy gentleman, who here laid the foundation of quite a large estate, acquired by farming alone. Commencing with small means, he became the largest landowner in the county of New Hanover, his estate being mostly composed of those Rocky Point lands.

The next two places, adjoining and to the south of The Vats, were Spring Field and Strawberry, owned by Mr. Levin Lane, a son of Mr. E. Lane, a planter like his father, and a most worthy and highly respectable gentleman. Mr. Lane resided at Strawberry.

Let us return to The Vats and cross the river by the ferry

there. Traveling eastward by the New Bern Road about four miles, we come to Lillington Hall, the residence of Gen. Alexander Lillington.[1] It would seem like a singular selection for a gentleman to make for a residence, just on the border of the Great Holly Shelter pocosin or dismal, and quite remote from the other gentry settlements. But in those days stock raising was much attended to, and here immense tracts of unoccupied lands furnished rich pasturage and fine range.

General Lillington was nearly allied to the Moseleys, of Moseley Hall, and came to reside on the Cape Fear about the same time with them. He was an ardent Whig and patriot, and taking up arms early in the Revolution, he soon distinguished himself as a bold and sagacious leader. On the attempt of the Scotch settlers about Cross Creek to move on Wilmington for the purpose of coöperating with the British force intended to invade and subjugate North Carolina, General Lillington speedily organized the militia of New Hanover and Duplin Counties and marched rapidly in the direction from which the enemy approached. Selecting a position at Moore's Creek where it was crossed by a ridge, he threw up intrenchments and awaited the approach of the Scots. On the arrival of General Caswell, the superior in command, he approved of Lillington's plans and arrangements for meeting the enemy. The result of the battle which ensued is well known to history, and its success was, by his contemporaries, mainly attributed to Lillington's prompt movement and skillful arrangements.

The Lillington Hall mansion was a quaint old structure of ante-Revolutionary date, and standing alone; there was no house that approached it in size or appearance in that wild region. When the writer visited there while a youth there was quite a library of rare old English books which would be highly prized at this day. At that time it was owned and occupied by Mr. Samuel Black, a highly respectable and worthy gentleman, who had married the widow of Mr. George Lillington, the youngest son of the colonel. This place, like all the residences of the early gentry, has gone out of the family and into stranger hands.

As there is no other place of note on the east side of the river, we will recross the ferry at The Vats, and following the road

[1]General Lillington married a daughter of Mr. William Watters, one of the most esteemed planters of Brunswick. The Watters family in every generation has been most highly regarded for its worth and excellence. Mrs. Lillington is said to have been on the field with her husband at the Battle of Moore's Creek.