

# SIR WILLIAM BUTLER

SIR CHARLES NAPIER

William Butler  
**Sir Charles Napier**

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# **Sir William Francis Butler**

## **Sir Charles Napier**

### **CHAPTER I**

### **THE HOME AT CELBRIDGE – FIRST COMMISSION**

Ten miles west of Dublin, on the north bank of the Liffey, stands a village of a single street, called Celbridge. In times so remote that their record only survives in a name, some Christian hermit built here himself a cell for house, church, and tomb; a human settlement took root around the spot; deer-tracks widened into pathways; pathways broadened into roads; and at last a bridge spanned the neighbouring stream. The church and the bridge, two prominent land-marks on the road of civilisation, jointly named the place, and Kildrohid or "the church by the bridge" became henceforth a local habitation and a name, twelve hundred years later to be anglicised into Celbridge. To this village of Celbridge in the year 1785 came a family which had already made some stir in the world, and was destined to make more.

Colonel the Hon. George Napier and his wife Lady Sarah Lennox were two remarkable personages. The one a tall and majestic soldier, probably the finest specimen of military manhood then in the service of King George the Third; the other a lady of such beauty, wit, and grace that her fascination had induced the same King George to offer her all his heart and half his throne. Fate and politics marred this proposed romantic royal union, and the lovely Lady Sarah, after a most unhappy first marriage, became in 1777 the wife of Colonel George Napier, and in the following dozen years the mother of a large family, in whose veins ran the blood of a list of knights and kings and nobles sufficient to fill a peerage all to itself; for on one side the pedigree went back to the best of the old Scottish cavaliers – to Montrose, and the Napiers of Merchiston, and the Scotts of Thirlestane; and on the other it touched Bourbon, Stuart, and Medici, and half a dozen other famous sources. It would have been strange if from such parents and with such stock the nest which was built in Celbridge in 1785 did not send forth far-flying birds.

The house in which the Napiers took up their residence in this year stood a short distance from the western end of the village. It was a solid, square building of blue-gray limestone, three-storied and basemented, with many tall narrow windows in front and rear, and a hall door that looked north and was approached by arched steps spanning a wide stone area surrounding the basement; green level fields, with fences upon which grew trees and large bushes, spread around the house to north and west, and over the tops of oak and beeches to the south a long line of blue hills lay upon the horizon. Looking south towards these hills the eye saw first a terrace and garden, then a roadway partly screened by trees, and beyond the road the grounds of Marley Abbey sloping to the Liffey, holding within them still the flower-beds and laurel hedges amid which Vanessa spent the last sorrow-clouded years of her life. But to the boys up in the third-story nursery, looking out in the winter evenings to snowy Kippure or purple Sleve-rhue, the loves and wrongs of poor Vanessa mattered little. What did matter to them, however – and mattered so much that through a thousand scenes of future death and danger they never forgot it – was, that there stood a certain old larch tree in the corner of the pleasure-ground where the peacocks fluttered up to roost as the sun went down beyond the westmost Wicklow hill-top, and that there was a thick clump of Portugal laurels and old hollies where stares, or starlings as they call them in England, came in flocks at nightfall, and sundry other trees and clumps in which blackbirds with very yellow winter beaks flew in the dusk, sounding the weirdest and wildest cries, and cocked their fan-spread tails when they lighted on the sward where the holly and arbutus berries lay so thick.

When Colonel Napier settled at Celbridge he was still in his prime, a man formed both in mind and body to conquer and direct in camp, court, or council; and yet, for all that, a failure as the world counts its prizes and blanks in the lottery of life. He had recently returned from the American War, where he had served with distinction. He had filled important offices abroad and at home, and by right of intellect and connection might look forward almost with certainty to high military command, but he had one fatal bar against success in the career of arms, as that noble profession was practised in the reign of George the Third and for a good many years after – he was in political opinion intensely liberal and intensely outspoken. The phrase "political opinion" is perhaps misleading. Colonel Napier's liberalism was neither a party cry nor a prejudice. It sprang from a profound love of justice, an equally fixed hatred of oppression, and a wide-reaching sympathy with human suffering that knew no distinction of caste or creed. The selection of Celbridge as the Napiers' family residence at this period was chiefly decided by the proximity of the village to the homes of Lady Sarah's two sisters – the Duchess of Leinster at Carton, and Lady Louisa Conolly at Castletown – indeed only the length of the village street separated the beautiful park of Castletown from the Napiers' home, and Castletown woods and waters were as free to the children's boyish sports and rambles as its saloons were open to them later on when the quick-running years of boyhood carried them into larger life. Whatever was beautiful and brilliant in Irish society – and there was much of both – then met in the Castletown drawing-rooms. They were to outward seeming pleasant years, those seventeen hundred and eighties and early nineties in Ireland. The society that met at Castletown formed a brilliant circle of orators, soldiers, wits, and statesmen, many of whose names still shine brightly through the intervening century. Grattan, Curran, Flood, Charlemont, the Ponsonbys, Parnell, the Matthews, and younger but not less interesting spirits were in the group too; the ill-fated Lord Edward Fitzgerald (first cousin to the Napier boys); young Robert Stewart, still an advanced Liberal, – not yet seeing that his road to fortune lay behind instead of before him; and there was another frequent guest at Castletown – a raw-boned, youthful ensign, generally disliked, much in debt to his Dublin tailor, but nevertheless regarded by Colonel Napier, at least, as a young man of promise, who, if fate gave him opportunity, would some day win fame as a soldier – one Ensign Wellesley, or, as he then wrote his name, Arthur Wesley.

When the Napier coach drove into Celbridge with the newly-arriving family in 1785, there was in it a very small boy, Charles by name, the eldest son of the handsome colonel and his beautiful wife – a small, delicate-looking child, who had been born at the Richmond residence in Whitehall just three years earlier. Two other children younger than Charles made up, with the due complement of nurses and boxes, an imposing cavalcade, and for days after the arrival baggage and books – these last not the least important items in the family future – continued to trundle through the village.

Twelve years go by; 1797 has come. Long ago – what an age in childhood seem these few flying years! – little Charles has made himself at home in a circle ever widening around the Celbridge nest. He has a fishing-rod, and the river east and west has been explored each year a longer distance. He has a pony, and the mountains to the south have given up their wonders to himself and his four-footed friend. And finally, grandest step of all in the boy's ladder, he has a gun, and the wood-pigeons of Castletown and the rabbits out in big fences to the west know him as one more enemy added to the long list of their foes.

And how about the more generally recognised factors of boy-training – school and schoolmaster? Well, in these matters we get a curious picture of army-training in that good old time when George the Third was King. At the age of twelve little Charlie Napier had been nominated to a pair of colours in His Majesty's Thirty-Third Regiment of Foot. War had broken out with France. Mr. Pitt was borrowing some fifty millions every year, and commissions in Horse, Foot, and Dragoons, in Hessian and Hanoverian Corps, in Scotch Fencibles and Irish Yeomanry and English Militia, were plentiful as blackberries in the Celbridge fields. But though Charles had on many occasions shown himself a little lad of big heart and steady courage in sundry encounters with fish, flesh, and fowl,

he was still too young to fight a Frenchman; and besides, it was even then a canon of war that before you are fit to kill an enemy in the field you must be able to write a nice letter to him, and perchance to talk to him in his own language, and to draw little lines and tracings of the various emplacements and scarps and counter-scarps by which you propose to knock his cities about his ears, and otherwise blow him and his off the face of the earth. So, instead of proceeding with the Duke of York's army to Flanders, Charles was sent to Mr. Bagnel's school in Celbridge village. A very humble and unpretending scholastic institution was Mr. Bagnel's academy, – not much further removed from the hedge-school of the time than the single street of Celbridge was distant from the green hedges around it; and of a very mixed description were the numerous boys who gathered there to receive from Mr. Bagnel's mind, and frequently also from his hand, the instruction mental and physical which he deemed essential for their future guidance. The boys were chiefly the sons of Dublin merchants or local better-class farmers, and were, with the exception of the Napiers, all Roman Catholics. That Charles and his brothers George and William should soon become the leaders of the school, and the child-champions of its youthful democracy, was not to be wondered at. They represented to the other boys the three most taking and entrancing things of boy life – genius, courage, and strength. All three boys were plucky as eagles, but Charles was captain by reason of his superior intelligence; George was lieutenant on account of reckless daring; William was ensign because of immense strength; and all were beloved because they, the grandsons of a duke, were ever ready to uphold with the weapons of boyhood the rights and freedom of their Catholic comrades against the overbearing usurpations and tyrannies of a large neighbouring seminary, where the more favoured sons of Protestant ascendancy were being booked and birched.

At ten o'clock every morning the Napier boys proceeded up the village to school, and at three they came down the single street for home. Great was the commotion when this hour of breaking-up arrived; it was the event of the day for the villagers, and no wonder, for then a strange sight was often to be seen. There were pigs in Celbridge in these days, tall gaunt animals with wide flapping ears that hung over their eyes, and long legs that could gallop over the ground; and it is said that, mounted on the backs of those lean and agile hogs, the Napier boys were wont to career homeward with scholars and pig-owners following in wild pursuit.

"What a terrible training!" I think I hear some worthy parent or pedagogue exclaim, reading this deplorable incident. And yet it is not all so clear this matter of boy-training. Would not the guiding lights of Eton and Harrow and Rugby stand aghast at such companionship, such a scene as this hog-race down the village? Still, somehow or other, when I walk round Trafalgar Square or down Waterloo Place, I seem to miss these great centres of training in the statues of Nelson, Havelock, Franklin, Clyde, Gordon, Lawrence, Napier; and I see beyond the bronze or the marble the boy-hero at his village school – one at Foyle, another at Taunton, a third at Celbridge, a fourth at St. Ives, a fifth at Swanscombe – until I come to think it is not quite so certain that we know all about the matter. So too, when my mind turns to the subject of military teaching, and I compare the course of school-training Charles and William Napier received at the hands of Mr. Bagnel with our modern system of competitive cramming, I am forced to the conclusion that both these brilliant soldiers would have been ignominiously "plucked" for entrance to Sandhurst or Woolwich; nor does the outside and casual training which these boys underwent show with less disadvantage beside our modern system. How a professor of military history, for instance, would have scorned the tuition in the practice of war conveyed to Ensign Charles Napier by old Molly Dunne as she sat in her cottage porch of a summer evening telling the listening boys about her battles and sieges. She was the Celbridge carpenter's great-grandmother, and of prodigious age. She could tell her listeners how she had seen the last real lord of Celbridge ride forth to fight for his king, their own great-great-great-granduncle, at the Boyne, just one hundred years earlier, and how she had seen his body brought back to be laid in the old graveyard of Kildrohid, close to their own gateway. That was a long look back, but Molly's memory went further off still, for she could tell of wilder times of war and havoc; of how as a little child she

had heard people speak of the red days at Drogheda and Wexford, when Cromwell imagined that he had found a final method of dealing with the Irish question. This wonderful old woman, who had seen more of actual war than had many of the generals by whose military knowledge and experience Mr. Pitt just at this moment fondly hoped he was going to stop the French Revolution, was said to be about one hundred and thirty years of age.

But Charles Napier and his brothers had the benefit of one outside teacher, the value of whose teaching to them it would not be easy to exaggerate; out of doors and indoors, on the river and the mountain, their father was their best school-master. From him Charles Napier learned a thousand lessons of truth and justice, of honour in arms, of simplicity in life, of steady purpose, of hatred for pomp and show and empty-headed pride, of pity for the poor, of sympathy with the oppressed, of fearless independence of character, which those who care to follow us through these pages will find growing in profusion along the pathway of his life, plants none of which ever withered from the moment they were planted in these youthful days, but many of which were only to blossom into full luxuriance in the autumn of existence. When full fifty years have passed by we shall find the lessons sown along the Liffey, and amid the Wicklow hills, bearing their rich harvest in distant scenes by the shores of mighty Eastern rivers and under the shadows of Himalayan mountains. It has been said that the house at Celbridge held large store of books, and it may be that in the library a copy of old Massinger was to be found, wherein, if the boys were not allowed promiscuously to read, they had read to them that wonderful picture of the real soldier which the dramatist drew so uselessly for the Cavaliers of his time, so terribly useful for their Roundhead enemies.

If e'er my son  
Follow the war, tell him it is a school  
Where all the principles tending to honour  
Are taught, if truly follow'd; but for such  
As repair thither as a place in which  
They do presume they may with license practise  
Their lusts and riots, they shall never merit  
The noble name of soldiers. To dare boldly  
In a fair cause, and for their country's safety  
To run upon the cannon's mouth undaunted;  
To obey their leaders, and shun mutinies;  
To bear with patience the winter's cold  
And summer's scorching heat, and not to faint,  
When plenty of provision fails, with hunger,  
Are the essential parts make up a soldier —  
Not swearing, dice, or drinking.

At last the time came for Charles to quit home and go out by himself into the world. He had been an officer on that wonderful institution called the Irish Establishment since he was twelve years old, and now he must join the army; so, in the last year of the century, he takes his first flight on the Limerick coach, and arriving in that old city is installed as extra aide-de-camp to the general officer there commanding. He remains at Limerick for a year, where the usual subaltern officer's drill is duly passed through. He is very often in love; he rides, shoots, breaks his leg jumping a ditch, and altogether feels quite sure that he has thoroughly mastered the military art. Still among these inevitable incidents of a young soldier's existence we get a glimpse of the nature of the future man coming out clear and distinct. He and his brother George are out shooting; a snipe gets up, Charles fires and the bird drops, but a deep wide ditch intervenes, and in springing across this obstacle the boy falls and breaks his leg. It is a very bad fracture, and the bone is sticking out above the boot. His gun



(a gift from his father) has fallen one way, he is lying another. First he draws himself near enough to recover the weapon, then he crawls on to where the snipe is lying, and then when his brother George has come up and is looking deadly pale at the protruding bone, the fallen sportsman cries cheerily out, "Yes, George, I've broken my leg, but I've got the snipe." They carry him home on a door, and for two months he is laid up with this shattered leg; but at eighteen a broken heart or leg is soon set right, and early in 1800 we find him impatient to be off to wider scenes of soldiering. He has been run very low by this accident, and his general – fearful for his aide-de-camp's life – has written to Colonel Napier, advising leave of absence and rest for the boy. Charles hears of this letter shortly after, and is highly indignant at his general's action. "I am sure," he writes to his father, "you will never consent to do anything of the sort" (to apply to the Commander-in-Chief for leave of absence), "which you must think, and which you may be certain I think, would be disgraceful and unbecoming the character of a British soldier. The general would not have done such a thing for himself, and could not have considered much when he proposed it for me." Just fifty years later we shall see the war-worn old veteran taking leave of the officers of India in words of advice and farewell couched in the same lofty spirit of military duty which is expressed in this boy's letter. And now the scene changes.

Early in 1801 Charles Napier mounts his little Irish cob and rides away from Limerick to begin the career which was to be carried through such stirring and varied scenes. He rode in a single day from Limerick to Celbridge, more than one hundred miles, on the same horse. We know nothing of that long day's ride, save the bare fact of its accomplishment; but it requires no effort of imagination to picture this ardent, impetuous boy pushing forward mile by mile, intent upon proving by the distance he would cover that despite what generals might write or doctors might say, he *was* fit for any fatigue or duty; and as the Irish hill-tops rose before him in fresh horizons we can fancy the horseman's mind cast far ahead of the most remote distance, fixed upon some scene of European or Egyptian battle, where the great deeds of war then startling all men by their splendid novelty were being enacted before a wondering world. For only a few months prior to the date of this long ride a great battle had been fought at Marengo in Italy, and the air was still ringing with its echoes; then had come the news of Hohenlinden, that terrible midnight struggle in the snow of the Black Forest. Never had the world witnessed such desperate valour; never had such marches been made, such daring combinations conceived, such colossal results achieved. A new world seemed to be opening before the soldier; and France, victorious for a second time over the vast forces of the European coalition, appeared to have given birth to conquerors before whose genius all bygone glory grew pale and doubtful.

And already, amid the constellation of command which the seven years' aggression of Europe against France had called forth from the great Revolution, one name shone with surpassing lustre. Beyond the Alps, amid scenes whose names seemed to concentrate and combine the traditions of Roman dominion with the most desperate struggles of medieval history, there had arisen a leader in the first flush of youthful manhood, before whom courage had been unavailing, discipline had become a reed, numbers had been brought to ruin, combination had been scattered, the strength of fortress had been pulled down, until the great empire whose name had been accepted as the symbol of military power in Europe, and whose history went back through one thousand years of martial glory, lay prostrate and vanquished at his feet.

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY SERVICE – THE PENINSULA

Poor, proud, and panting for opportunity of action, Napier began his military career at this wonderful epoch, only to find his aspirations for fame doomed to disappointment. Marengo came to scatter the slowly built combinations of Europe. The victor held out the olive branch to his enemies; his offer of peace, which had been so insultingly refused one year earlier, was now accepted, and the Treaty of Amiens put an end to hostilities which had lasted for nearly ten years. All Charles Napier's hopes of service were destroyed. For six years he was to wander aimlessly about the south of England in that most soul-rusting of all idlenesses – garrison life at home. "What can one do?" he wrote to his mother upon hearing of the peace. "My plan is to wait for a few months and then get into some foreign service. Sometimes my thought is to sell my commission and purchase one in Germany or elsewhere; but then my secret wish could not be fulfilled, which is to have high command with British soldiers – rather let me command Esquimaux than be a subaltern of Rifles forty years old." Meanwhile he set vigorously to work at his books and studies. Already at Celbridge he had read every hero-book or war-history he could lay his hands on; now he applies himself incessantly to study. "I quit the mess," he writes in November, 1801, "at five o'clock, and from that to ten o'clock gives me five hours more reading. There is a billiard-table; but feeling a growing fondness for it, and fearing to be drawn into play for money, I have not touched a cue lately." Yet with all this longing for fame, the heart of the boy is full of his home memories. "Nobody but myself," he writes to his sister, "had ever such a longing for home. I shall go mad if you don't come to England or I go to Ireland; my heart jumps when thinking of you all merry in the old way. This wishing for home makes me gad about in a wild way; for melancholy seizes me when alone in a cold barrack-room, and I cannot read with thoughts busy in Kildare Street. I should like to go to London and stay with Emily [another sister], but I am too poor. I have no coloured clothes, and they are expensive to buy. My horse also is costly and must be sold; very sorry, for he is the dearest little wicked black devil you ever saw, and so pretty." But though this poor hard-up subaltern cannot afford to purchase plain clothes, and has to sell his dearly prized horse, he can find money to do a kind act to a friend. He is writing to his mother, that ever-ready listener to all his troubles and his joys.

*January 1st, 1801.*– Happy New Year and many of them to my dearest mother. Now to ask a favour *not* to be told to dad unless you think there will be no inconvenience to him. Cameron [a brother officer] has been in a very disagreeable situation for some time about family affairs. Several things have happened to put him to enormous expense, and he intends borrowing money from the Jews, which must do him much mischief in the end, though he will have a very good property when of age. Now if my father has not drawn the £100 of forage money belonging to me which Armitt has had these eight months, to repay the money you advanced, can he spare it for Cameron? You know the Comptroller [his father] as well as I do, and if you showed him the letter at once he would do the thing to oblige me, when perhaps it was troublesome. Cameron has not the least idea of this matter.

A very beautiful letter for all concerned – father, mother, son, and friend – and worth many long pages of description. Then he falls in love, is very miserable, goes to London, sees several of his rich relations, finds out he cannot afford fine life, and comes back again to his books and his dreams. The regiment is now at Shorncliffe. The colonel, a type of warrior at that time and for years later peculiar to our service, lived much at Carlton House and seldom saw his soldiers, who, groaning under a well-nigh intolerable discipline, were left to the mercy of the second in command. The picture we get of the result is a curious one. "*Shorncliffe, December, 1802.*– We are going on here as badly as need

be. Two or three men desert every night, and not recruits either. The hospital is full of rheumatic patients and men with colds and coughs, caught from standing long on damp ground and being kept in mizzling rains for hours without moving."

Enough to damp a less ardent spirit must have been this barrack-room warfare, so delightful to so many excellent persons who imagine that a uniform coat makes a soldier. At last a slight change for the better came to Napier. A relation, General Fox, was made Commander-in-Chief in Ireland, and to Dublin went Charles as aide-de-camp. Through this move we get an inventory of his kit, which is suggestive of many things. He is writing to his mother: "You talk of magazines of clothes," he says; "why, I have no clothes but those on my back. I have indeed too many books – above thirty volumes; but books and clothes all go into two trunks." How the modern staff-man would shudder at the list of uniform which follows. "Nothing of mine, except linen, will do for an aide-de-camp. My pantaloons are green, and I have only one pair; my jacket, twice turned; a green waistcoat, useless; one pair of boots, without soles or heels; a green feather; and a helmet not worth sixpence." A meagre outfit, certainly, to cover the little fever-worn frame; for the mizzling rains and the damp ground and the wretched inaction already spoken of have brought on sickness, and he is now thinner and paler than ever. The service on the staff in Ireland was short. The Commander-in-Chief had that sense of humanity without which a soldier is only a butcher, and, like Moore and Abercromby, he quarrelled with the Irish Executive of the day, whose idea of government was the scaffold and the triangles. It was the period following the wild revolt of Emmett. The hangman was busy at his work. "We passed the gibbet in Thomas Street," wrote the Commander-in-Chief's wife in her diary, "which is now fixed there with a rope suspended, and two sentries to guard it, for so many of the rebels are now executed it is in daily use. What a horrible state for a country to be in!" This was in the year 1803, and in 1804 Charles Napier is back in England again. A great sorrow has fallen upon him. His father has just died. "Sarah, take my watch, I have done with time," Colonel Napier said to the beautiful woman who had loved him so well, handing his watch to her as she stood beside his death-bed. Yet Time had not done with him, and no man who reads of George Napier's sons can ever forget the father to whom they owed so much of their glory.

The short peace is over. War with France has been declared. Pitt is again in Downing Street, busy at fresh coalitions, borrowing his half hundred millions a year and scattering them broadcast over Europe, chafing and raging when he looks at the Horse Guards close by, and longing to be able to infuse something of his own spirit into that establishment, yet all the while obliged to put a good face on it and pretend that he thinks the King's generals are as good as any in Europe. When he gets back to his house at Putney he half forgets his worries, and can even laugh at the feeble tools he has to work with. Here is a little glimpse given us by William Napier in this year, 1804, into Pitt's personal experience of some of the commanding officers who at this time were holding the south coast of England in hourly anticipation of a French descent from Boulogne, where Bonaparte and his Grand Army were encamped almost within sight of the Kentish shore. Pitt has come home to Putney, as usual very fagged and tired after the day's work in Downing Street. He drinks half a dozen glasses of port quickly one after the other, his strength and spirits revive with the stimulant, and then he relates the exciting events of the day. A Cabinet Council is going on. At any moment news may come that the enemy is in Kent or Sussex. Anxiety is strained to fever pitch. Suddenly a dragoon is heard thundering up the narrow street; it is a despatch from the south. The man has ridden in hot haste. The packet is addressed to the Prime Minister. Amid breathless expectation Pitt opens the despatch. A night-cap tumbles out! Is it some stupid hoax? Not at all. One of the ministers has been spending a day or two at the military headquarters on the south coast; he has forgotten his night-cap, and the general, with a keen eye to the importance of ministerial interest, has sent a mounted express bearing the lost head-gear to its owner! Another evening the Prime Minister tells them that he had that day received a despatch announcing the landing of French troops from two ships at three different parts of the coast! As may be supposed, from these and other instances of military sagacity, the Napier estimate of our

generals was at this period not a high one. "It is d – d easy to be a general," we find William writing in 1807; and three years earlier Charles tells us that "most of our generals are more obliged to the Duke of York than to the Deity for their military talents." But perhaps the most absurd instance of the state of military command in England at that time is to be found in a letter written by a general officer very high in command to a notorious lady of the period,<sup>1</sup> in which, describing his inspection of the army cantoned between Dover and Hastings, he tells his correspondent that "from Folkestone he had had a good view of the enemy's works at Boulogne" – an instance of far-sighted reconnaissance not easily to be paralleled in the annals of war. It is really difficult to read with patience in the diaries and letters of the subordinate officers the state of military mismanagement that existed at this time. We have heard a good deal in recent years of the evil done by letting the light of public opinion into military administration; but if men care to know what happened to our army when the Press was gagged, when authority strutted its way from blunder to blunder unchecked by the fear of public censure, they should study the military history of the early years of the century from the rupture of the Peace of Amiens to the campaign of Corunna. Here is a little glimpse of the interior economy of a regiment quartered in the healthiest part of England in the year 1807. Charles Napier is now in the Fiftieth Regiment, quartered at Ashford in Kent. "Our men," he writes, "have got the ophthalmia very badly, and are dying fast also from inflammation of the lungs caused by the coldness of the weather and bad barracks; in some cases typhus supervenes, but is not contagious. There is no raging fever, cold alone is the cause, yet the men die three or four a day. No officer suffers; they are warmer." This was in the month of March. But two months later, in May, the story is not better. "The soldiers have got pneumonia at Hythe," he writes, "and are dying as fast as we folks at Ashford. Only think of a surgeon taking in one day one hundred and sixty ounces of blood, and the man is recovering! They say bleeding to death is the best way of recovering them!" And all this time a very savage and inhuman discipline was going on. Nine hundred lashes was a common punishment for a trifling offence. Both William Napier and Charles Napier have left us many terrible pictures of "the ferocity of a discipline which was a disgrace to civilisation." Writing of the campaign of 1793-94 in Flanders Sir Robert Wilson is still more emphatic. It was a common sight, he tells us, to see a court-martial sitting in the morning the members of which were not yet sober after the debauch of the previous night, but still sentencing unfortunate private soldiers to nine hundred lashes for the crime of drunkenness, the punishment being inflicted summarily in presence of the still inebriated dispensers of justice!

In the autumn of 1805 the most pressing danger of French invasion passed away. Pitt had raised another vast coalition against France. The Austrians and the Russians were again moving towards the Rhine. Then from the cliffs of Boulogne the great captain, now Emperor, turned off to begin that famous march across Europe which in sixty consecutive days carried him to Vienna, taking by the way sixty thousand prisoners, two hundred cannon, ninety standards, great stores of the material of war, and doing this prodigious damage to his enemy with trifling loss to himself, and as a prelude only to the vaster victory he had yet to gain over his combined antagonists on the field of Austerlitz. Still the same dreary round of garrison routine life went on in England. From his monotonous billet in Bognor, Hythe, or Shorncliffe, Napier watched with anxious and yearning eye the great deeds of war which were being enacted at Jena, Auerstadt, and Eylau. It is evident from his journal that at this time he had learned to read with accuracy between the lines of the Government despatches from the seat of war, and the "crushing defeats of Bonaparte" by the Prussian or Russian armies, which so frequently appeared in the *London Gazette*, were read by him with considerable reservation. On February 6th, 1807, we find him discounting the "victory at Pultusk" with these words: "Bonaparte's defeat at Pultusk is dwindling to a kind of drawn battle, which is probably drawing and quartering for the poor Russians."

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Mary Anne Clarke.

After the victory of Friedland in June 1807, Napoleon stood at the very summit of his glory. The armies of Austria, Prussia, and Russia had been vanquished in three colossal combats. This Corsican captain had utterly upset all existing theories, contradicted all previous facts, refuted all accepted certainties. He had made a winter campaign in the northern provinces of Prussian and Russian Poland, seven hundred leagues from Paris, and had vanquished his combined enemies at their own doors. It seemed as though destiny had determined to erase for ever from Europe the feudal tradition and the hereditary principle, and to write across the Continent the names of one man and one nation – Napoleon and France. From the raft at Tilsit Bonaparte went back to France to begin these great legislative, industrial, and commercial works which still remain prouder memorials of his greatness than even his most brilliant victories. It was in the midst of these peaceful but ceaseless labours that the little cloud arose beyond the Pyrenean frontier of France which was destined to exert so deep an influence upon his fortunes. Although there existed many and powerful reasons to justify the intervention of France in the affairs of Spain in 1808, it is certain that the course followed by Napoleon on this occasion was neither in keeping with his true interests nor with the policy which had hitherto guided his actions. The state of Spain was notoriously wretched: the treachery of the king and his minister towards Napoleon had been clearly established during the critical period preceding the battle of Jena; but nevertheless, admitting all these facts as politically justifying the French invasion of the Peninsula, there were still stronger and better reasons in favour of non-intervention. Spain was the land of contradictions; the country was the best in Europe for irregular warfare, and the worst for the operations of regular armies. Long before this time it had been well defined as a land where a small army might be defeated, and where a large one would be sure to starve. But beyond all these reasons for non-intervention was the great fact that in invading Spain Napoleon was departing from the rule which hitherto had regulated his action. He was the first to draw the sword. Early in the year 1808 the people of the Peninsula rose in arms against the French. On the field of Baylen a French division was overpowered. The effect of the defeat was electrical; the whole nation was in revolt. Joseph Bonaparte quitted Madrid, and the French withdrew behind the Ebro. The moment was deemed auspicious by the British Government for trying once more the fortunes of a continental war, and in the middle of the year a large English army was despatched to the Peninsula. In the second division of that army Charles Napier sailed for Lisbon to begin his long-wished-for life of active service; he was then twenty-seven years of age. When this second division reached its destination the first phase of the war was over. Vimeira had been fought, the Convention of Cintra signed, and the three generals, Wellesley, Burrard, and Dalrymple, had gone home to appear before a court of inquiry to answer for the abortive result of the campaign. By this strange incident Sir John Moore became Commander-in-Chief of the English forces in Spain, in spite of the elaborate manœuvres of those members of the British Cabinet who had so laboriously planned to keep him out of that position, and in the autumn of the year the march from Lisbon, which was to end at Corunna, began.

In this long and eventful march the three brothers Napier, Charles, George, and William, all young soldiers thirsting for military distinction, came together for the first time since they had quitted the Eagle's Nest at Celbridge. We must glance for a moment at the field of combat which was now opening before these young soldiers. In the month of October, 1808, when Moore began his march from Lisbon, the Spanish armies, some seven in number, formed a great curved line of which the Somo Sierra between Madrid and the Pyrenees was the centre, while the flanks touched the Mediterranean on one side and the Bay of Biscay on the other. Within this curve, with its back to the Pyrenees and its face to the Ebro, lay the French army. Napoleon was still engaged far away in France with his harbours, canals, roads, and codes of law; but his soldiers were already moving from the Rhine to the Pyrenees, and a storm little dreamt of by either the English or the Spaniards was about to burst from the defiles of these snow-capped mountains. The objective of Sir John Moore's march was the north of Spain. So vague was the knowledge possessed by the British Government of the actual condition of affairs in the Peninsula and of the power of the French Emperor that the

wildest anticipations of speedy success were indulged in by the English Government at this time, and it was confidently expected that Moore's junction with the Spanish armies would be the prelude to the passage of the Pyrenees by the combined forces and the conquest of France. We have already indicated the position of these Spanish armies in this month of October, 1808. At the close of the month Moore was well on his march into Spain. Napoleon was still in Paris; but all was now ready for the swoop. Early in November he passed the Pyrenees, struck right and left with resistless force upon the Spanish armies on his flanks – first annihilating Blake and Romana at Gamoual and Espinosa, then destroying Palafox and Castanos at Tudela; and finally, breaking with his cavalry the Spanish centre, he forced the gorges of the Somo Sierra, and appeared before the gates of Madrid before the English army had time to concentrate at Salamanca. Never was victory so complete. To fall back upon Lisbon was now the duty and the desire of Sir John Moore, but he was not permitted to follow this course which was so clearly the right one. Yielding to the importunities of Mr. Frere, the English minister to the Junta, Moore abandoned his communications with Lisbon, and directed his march to the north with the intention of attacking the right of the French army now in Leon. It was Christmas when Napoleon heard in Madrid of this unexpected movement of the English army almost across his front. Divining at once the object of the English general, he quitted Madrid, crossed with his guard and a chosen corps the snow-choked passes of the Guadarrama, and, descending into Leon, was in the rear of the English army before Moore had even heard of the movement. It was no wonder that Napoleon should have been almost the bearer of the tidings of his own march; for in ten days, in the depth of winter and in a season of terrific snow and storm, he had marched two hundred miles, through some of the worst mountain roads in Spain. The bird that would forestall the eagle in his flight must be quick of wing. Then began the race from Sahagun, first to Benevente and then to the sea at Corunna. No space now to dwell upon that terrible march – more terrible in its loss of discipline and failure of the subordinate officers to hold their men in command than in stress of fatigue or severity of weather. What would have been its fate if Napoleon had continued to direct the pursuit can scarcely admit of sober doubt; but other and more pressing needs than the pursuit of the English army had called him away to distant and vaster fields of war.

## CHAPTER III

### CORUNNA

When Sir John Moore, on January 10th, 1809, reached the summit of the last hill that overlooked the city and harbour of Corunna, he beheld a roadstead destitute of shipping. "I have often heard it said that I was unlucky," he remarked to his aide-de-camp, George Napier, as they climbed the land side of this eminence; "if the ships are not in the harbour, I shall believe in my evil fortune." There were no ships in sight, and the heart of the gallant soldier must have known a pang such as can come to few men in life. Yet fate, though seemingly so cruel at this moment, was, as she often is, kind and merciful even when striking hardest. Had the winds blown that would have permitted the fleet to move from Vigo to Corunna, the whole English army would have embarked on January 11th and 12th before Soult had concentrated his pursuing columns; there would have been no battle of Corunna, and the memory of Moore would not have been a deathless pride to his countrymen. When the ships hove in sight on the evening of the 14th the French divisions were lining the heights in front of the British position; and on the morning of January 16th the British army, now reduced to fifteen thousand men, drew up in line of battle on the crest of the sloping ridge which covered Corunna to the south. The sick and wounded had been already embarked, the magazines blown up, the cavalry and artillery horses killed, and nothing remained but to strike with the infantry a last blow for honour. Three weeks earlier, when the first retrograde movement from Sahagun to Benevente had become imperative, Moore issued an order to his army which contained words of very significant import. The disorder of the troops had already commenced, and the officers, some of them of high rank but completely ignorant of the real state of affairs, had begun those murmurs and criticisms to which more than to any other cause the disasters of the retreat were to be traced. After telling his soldiers that they must obey and not expect him to tell them the reason of the orders he gave them, the General went on: "When it is proper to fight a battle he will do it, and he will choose the time and place he thinks most fit; in the meantime, he begs the officers and soldiers of the army to attend diligently, to discharge their parts, and to leave to him and to the general officers the decision of measures which belong to them alone." Now the time and place had come. Nothing but Moore's knowledge of the situation had saved his army from falling at Benevente into the grasp of the giant who had seemingly annihilated time, space, and mountains in order to crush him; but matters were now different. Napoleon was already in Paris, and not more than twenty thousand tired Frenchmen stood over yonder on the parallel heights beyond Elvina, with scant supply of food and ammunition; while he was here at Corunna, with well-stocked magazines, his soldiers recruited by a three days' rest, new muskets in their hands replacing the battered and broken weapons of the retreat, and the *morale* and discipline of his army restored by the magic touch of battle.

The forenoon of the 16th passed without any hostile movement. Both armies faced each other on the opposing ridges – so near, indeed, that the unassisted eye could trace the slightest stir on either side across the intervening valley. Such things are not possible now. The zone of fight has been pushed back by modern weapons to distance that has taken from war all the pomp and pageantry that used to attend rival armies drawn up for battle. The narrow valley that lay between the armies was dotted with villages set amid vineyards. Three of these villages were held by the English pickets, and the right village of the three, Elvina, marked the front of that part of the British line where it curved back towards Corunna, forming a kind of salient to the more extended French line of battle which overlapped our right flank. At this critical point in the English position stood the brigade to which Napier's regiment, the Fiftieth, belonged, the Fourth and the Forty-Second being the other battalions completing this brigade. Opposite, on the French side, Mermet's division was drawn up; but more formidable still were the muzzles of eleven guns – eight and twelve-pounders – which from

a commanding height, and only six hundred yards from the village of Elvina, threatened to obliquely rake the English line.

As the morning wore on without hostile movement on the part of the French, Moore, believing that his enemy did not intend to accept the battle he had offered since the preceding day, made preparations to embark his army during the coming night. His reserve, being nearest the roadstead, was to leave the shore as soon as dusk set in, and one by one the brigades opposite the French were to fall back under cover of darkness to the town, and there enter the boats which were to carry them to the ships. These arrangements having been made, the General mounted his charger in Corunna about one o'clock P.M. to visit his army and give the necessary directions for the movement to the shore. He moved slowly out with a heavy heart. Fate seemed steadily set against him. The enemy in front would not attack, and beyond the sea – there, where these vessels were so soon to carry him and his army – he knew but too well that there was another enemy waiting to write him down and vote him down, and to heap sneer and censure upon his actions. All at once there came the sound of a heavy cannon. Another and another shot rolled round the echoing hills. The fine face flushed with the light of hope, spurs were driven deep into the charger's flanks, and, galloping at full speed along the rocky causeway, Moore was soon upon the field – the battle of Corunna had begun.

The right wing of the English army, standing in line on the ridge above the village of Elvina, was exposed to the full force of the eleven-gun battery, whose cannonade had thus opened the battle. Napier's regiment, the Fiftieth, stood just over Elvina, his pickets occupying that village. As each shot gave the enemy a better distance for the succeeding ones, the range was soon found, and the round shot, falling with accuracy upon the line, tore gaps through it and ploughed the surface of the surrounding ground. For a time the men stood silent and motionless under this trying ordeal, but as increasing accuracy caused more frequent casualties in the ranks, a murmur arose from the soldiers, and the cry of "Where is the General?" was audible along the line. Of all the work of war, that of standing steady doing nothing under fire tries the nerves most sorely, and as at this moment in the opening scene at Corunna the forward movement of the French columns became visible, it was no wonder that anxiety for the presence of the chief in whom they so implicitly believed should find vent in words. They had not long to wait the answer to their question. We have seen how the first sound of cannon had roused Moore from his transient gloom, and made him spur forward along the road from Corunna. The picture of his arrival at the scene of action has been given us by Charles Napier, and there are few more striking bits of battle-painting. Napier is standing in front of his line, his pickets are falling back from Elvina before the advancing French skirmishers; behind the enemy's light troops Mermet's heavy column of infantry is coming on rapidly to the attack, their shouts of *En avant!* rising above the crack of musketry or the boom of the battery whose shot is tearing fast through the line.

Suddenly (says Napier) I heard the gallop of horses, and turning saw Moore. He came at speed, and pulled up so sharp and close to me that he seemed to have alighted from the air, man and horse looking at the approaching foe with an intenseness that seemed to concentrate all feeling in their eyes. The sudden stop of the animal, a cream-coloured one with black tail and mane, had cast the latter streaming forward, its ears were pushed out like horns, while its eyes flashed fire, and it snorted loudly with expanded nostrils, expressing terror, astonishment, and muscular exertion. My first thought was, it will be away like the wind; but then I looked at the rider and the horse was forgotten. Thrown on its haunches, the animal came sliding and dashing the dirt up with its forefeet, thus bending the General forward almost to its neck; but his head was thrown back, and his look more keenly piercing than I ever before saw it. He glanced to the right and left, and then fixed his eyes intently on the enemy's advancing column, at the same time grasping the reins with both hands, and pressing the horse firmly with his knees; his body seemed thus to deal with the animal, while his mind was intent on the enemy, and his aspect was



one of searching intentness beyond the power of words to describe. For awhile he looked, and then galloped to the left without uttering a word.

Shortly after, Moore came back to the Fiftieth again. The fight had thickened, Elvina had been carried by the French column, and the enemy's light troops had begun to ascend the foot of the British position. Napier asks if he may send his grenadier company down the slope? Moore thinks they may fire upon our own pickets; but Napier tells him that the pickets have already fallen back. "Then send out your grenadiers," replies the General, and away he gallops again to another part of the field. Once more he comes back to where Napier is standing. The round shot are falling thickly about, the enemy's attack is now fully developed, and it is evident he means to try his best at this salient of the position to turn the English right and cut the army from its base; but he has not infantry for such a movement. A large proportion of his total force is cavalry, and they are of little use in the enclosures and high fenced lanes that cover the ground. While Moore stands talking this third time to Napier a round shot from the French battery strikes full between the two men. Moore's horse wheels on his haunches, but the rider forces him to front again, while he asks Napier if he has been hit. "No, sir." Then comes a second shot plump into the right of the Forty-Second, which is next in line to the left. A Highland grenadier has had his leg torn off, and in the agony of the wound he cries out. A wave of agitation begins to pass through the men nearest the sufferer; the gap in the ranks is slower to fill up than when men had fallen who were silent. Moore rides to the spot. "This is nothing, my lads," he says; "keep your ranks; take the man to the rear." Then addressing the wounded man, he says: "My good fellow, don't cry out so, we must bear these things quietly." Then he rode to another part of the field; but soon returning again to the ridge above Elvina, he directed the Forty-Second to descend the slope and attack that place. A fierce struggle ensued amid the enclosures and houses of the village. Napier, seeing the Forty-Second pass his flank, ordered his regiment to advance in line upon the village. He made this movement entirely upon his own responsibility; for except when Moore was present the initiative of command appeared to be wholly wanting among the English generals at Corunna. Passing the Forty-Second, Napier carried his regiment through Elvina, until at the side of the village nearest to the enemy his advance was checked by an overwhelming fire. So deadly was the storm of cannon and musketry at this point that both the colours went down almost together, as the ensigns who carried them were shot. Napier's sword-belt was shot off, and the Fiftieth being the advanced regiment in the battle found itself encircled on three sides by a sheet of fire. Looking to his front, Napier saw the heavy battery now close above him. The idea at once occurred to him to assault it; and gathering by great personal exertions about thirty of his men and three or four officers together, he led them straight upon the battery. But his efforts were useless. The companies had become broken and disordered in carrying the village: the Forty-Second had not continued its advance to Elvina; and no supporting corps was sent to strengthen and secure the success which the Fiftieth had achieved. This forlorn hope leading straight upon the battery went down between a fire which smote them almost as much from their friends in rear as from their enemies in front, and by the time the foot of the steep ascent was gained, Charles Napier found himself almost alone before the enemy. The reason why this bold onslaught upon the battery, which was the key of the French position, was thus allowed to run out into a useless sacrifice of life was easily explained later on, although at the moment Napier, knowing nothing of what was happening in his rear, angrily cursed at the supposed hesitation of his men to follow him. To explain the unfortunate result of this attack we must go back to the original position on the ridge. Scarcely had Napier led the Fiftieth upon Elvina than Moore rode up again to the point where he had before stood, and casting his eye upon the tide of battle flowing below him took in at once the situation. Riding forward in the wake of the Fiftieth, he cheered on that regiment to the attack. "Well done, Fiftieth; well done, *my majors*," he cried; for Napier's promotion to field-rank had been due to his influence, and Stanhope the other major was endeared to him by stronger ties. Charles Stanhope was the brother of the woman to whom Moore a few hours later was to send his last message. When thirty years later men criticised with idle censure the life of Lady Hester

Stanhope, they forgot how much she had suffered before they had been born. Austerlitz had broken the heart of her illustrious uncle; her lover and her brother slept on the battle-field of Corunna.

The advance of the Fiftieth and Forty-Second from the ridge had left a gap in that part of the line of battle. Turning to one of his staff, Moore directed him to ride back to the reserve and bring up a battalion of Guards to fill the vacant place; then noticing that some companies of the Forty-Second had got into confusion and were falling back, he called out to that regiment to "remember Egypt," and reminded "his brave Highlanders" that they had "still their bayonets left." It was at this moment that a round shot from the battery on the height struck him. The hurtle and crash of the ball made the cream-coloured charger plunge into the air, and the rider fell backward to the ground, but so firm had been his seat that those who were looking on did not believe the shot had struck, so quietly did he seem to fall. This impression was further strengthened when they saw the tall figure half rise from the ground, while his look sought the enemy's ranks with the same calm and intent expression which his face had before worn. But though no sound or sign of suffering seemed to come between the General's mental consciousness and the battle before him, all the worst hurt that shot can do to poor humanity had been done. The left shoulder had been shattered, the arm hung by a shred, and the flesh and muscles of breast and side had been terribly lacerated. When those who were near became aware of the dreadful nature of the wound they tried to disengage the sword from the mangled side. Who can ever forget the dying man's words as he noticed the kindly attempt: "Let it be. I had rather it should leave the field with me." Then he is placed in a blanket and carried to the rear by some Highlanders of the Forty-Second. By this time a couple of surgeons have come up; but he knows the wound is past human cure, and he tells them to go to the soldiers to whom they can still be of use. As they carry him farther back from the fight he makes the bearers often pause and turn him round again to the front, so that he may see for a little longer how nobly his soldiers hold their ground. When they bring him to his quarters his French servant François is overcome with tears at the sight, but Moore says quietly to him, "My friend, this is nothing." And so the day closes, and darkness brings news that the attack of the enemy has failed, and that the ridge from Elvina to the sea is still held by the British. Then, with the honour of his soldiers safe, he turns to his friends. He forgets no one; the interests of aides-de-camp and of the members of his staff are remembered; he sends messages to many friends – one in particular to Lady Hester Stanhope – and once only his voice fails; it is when he mentions the name of his mother. Then, as the shades of rapidly-approaching death gathered closer, it seemed that the images of the cowardly men at home, who, he felt, were certain arose before his fading vision, for with a great effort he appealed from those "posthumous calumniators" to "the people," suddenly exclaiming, "I hope the people of England will be satisfied. I hope my country will do me justice." That dying hope has been realised. Few names stand in purer lustre than that of Sir John Moore. Fortunately immortality is not always measured by success. The chiefs and people of England, who know so little of real war themselves, are perhaps the hardest censors upon military misfortune. Moore's memory was vehemently assailed by the Ministers and Government officials of the day, who tried to screen their own flagrant shortcomings by calumniating the name of the heroic soldier who was no longer there to answer them, and all the paid scribblers and talkers of the time were busy at their truculent work. But justice came at last, earlier and more conspicuously from the enemies who had fought against Moore than from the nation for whose honour and in whose service he had died. Soult and Ney raised a monument to his memory at Corunna almost at the time when Southey, finding out what the world had long known, viz. that although the King might make him a laureate, nature had not made him a poet, began to attempt to write history and to criticise military genius. But a greater soldier than Soult or Ney had still earlier placed the military fame of Moore beyond the reach of little minds. When Napoleon heard of Moore's march from Salamanca to Sahagun, in December, 1808, he exclaimed, "I shall advance against Sir John Moore in person. He is now the only general fit to contend with me." "Where shall we find such a king?" asks William Napier in a letter written from the battle-fields of Portugal two years after Corunna. Fifteen years

later the first volume of the *Peninsular War* appeared, and if the spirits of the illustrious dead can read the books that record their actions on earth, that of Moore might well exclaim, "Where has king found such a chronicler?"

Lightly to speak of the spirit that's gone,  
And o'er his cold ashes upbraid him,

We must go back to Charles Napier, fighting fiercely in the enclosures between Elvina and the great battery, and raging because the supports which might have turned his withered effort into success were denied him. We have seen the reason of this denial. The fall of Moore paralysed the thinking power of those who succeeded to the command. Instead of supporting the attack of the Fiftieth, orders were sent to recall that regiment, and Napier and the few men who were still with him were left alone in the extreme front. This withdrawal from Elvina allowed the French light troops to surround Napier's party. Finding himself thus enclosed in a net, he gathered the few survivors around him and made a dash to cut his way through to the English line, but it was too late. He was surrounded and made prisoner. Both sides would appear to have exhausted their ammunition at this point, and the fight was now entirely of cold steel. It is so full of graphic detail, and gives so many glimpses of national characteristics under stress of battle, that it had best be told in Napier's own words.

I said to the four soldiers [Irish privates of the Fiftieth and Forty-Second] "Follow me and we will cut through them." Then with a shout I rushed forward. The Frenchmen had halted, but now ran on to us, and just as my spring was made the wounded leg failed, and I felt a stab in the back; it gave me no pain, but felt cold, and threw me on my face. Turning to rise, I saw the man who had stabbed me making a second thrust. Whereupon, letting go my sabre, I caught his bayonet by the socket, turned the thrust, and raising myself by the exertion, grasped his firelock with both hands, thus in mortal struggle regaining my feet. His companions had now come up, and I heard the dying cries of the four men with me, who were all instantly bayoneted. We had been attacked from behind by men not before seen, as we stood with our backs to a doorway, out of which must have rushed several men, for we were all stabbed in an instant, before the two parties coming up the road reached us. They did so, however, just as my struggle with the man who had wounded me was begun. That was a contest for life, and being the strongest I forced him between myself and his comrades, who appeared to be the men whose lives I had saved when they pretended to be dead on our advance through the village. They struck me with their muskets, clubbed and bruised me much, whereupon, seeing no help near, and being overpowered by numbers and in great pain from my wounded leg, I called out *Je me rend*, remembering the expression correctly from an old story of a fat officer whose name being James called out *Jemmy round*. Finding they had no disposition to spare me, I kept hold of the musket, vigorously defending myself with the body of the little Italian who had first wounded me; but I soon grew faint, or rather tired. At that moment a tall dark man came up, seized the end of the musket with his left hand, whirled his brass-hilted sabre round, and struck me a powerful blow on the head, which was bare, for my cocked hat had fallen off. Expecting the blow would finish me, I had stooped my head in hopes it might fall on my back, or at least on the thickest part of the head, and not on the left temple. So far I succeeded, for it fell exactly on the top, cutting me to the bone but not through it. Fire sparkled from my eyes. I fell on my knees, blinded but not quite losing my senses, and holding still on to the musket. Recovering in a moment I saw a florid, handsome young French drummer holding the arm of the dark Italian, who was in the act of repeating the

blow. Quarter was then given; but they tore my pantaloons in tearing my watch and purse from my pocket and a little locket of hair which hung round my neck. But while this went on two of them were wounded, and the drummer, Guibert, ordered the dark man who had sabred me to take me to the rear. When we began to move, I resting on him because hardly able to walk, I saw him look back over his shoulder to see if Guibert was gone; and so did I, for his rascally face made me suspect him. Guibert's back was towards us; he was walking off, and the Italian again drew his sword, which he had before sheathed. I called out to the drummer, "This rascal is going to kill me; brave Frenchmen don't kill prisoners." Guibert ran back, swore furiously at the Italian, shoved him away, almost down, and putting his arms round my waist supported me himself. Thus this generous Frenchman saved me twice, for the Italian was bent upon slaying.

Thus was Napier taken prisoner. From this narrative we get many side-lights upon many subjects. Firstly, the composite character of Napoleon's army in Spain, and the fact that the Frank fights with the chivalry of the true soldier; it is the Italian who is all for murder. Secondly, we find all through this narrative of Napier's that our own soldiers were almost wholly Irish. This Fiftieth Regiment which he commands is called the West Kent, but its soldiers are almost to a man Irish.<sup>2</sup> The Forty-Second man who appears on the scene, although nominally a Highlander, is in reality an Irishman. Now, as we proceed further in the narrative, we come to one of the most singular pictures of a Celtic soldier ever put upon paper.

We had not proceeded far up the lane (continues Napier), when we met a soldier of the Fiftieth walking at a rapid pace. He instantly halted, recovered his arms, and cocked his piece, looking fiercely at us to make out how it was. My recollection is that he levelled at Guibert, and that I threw up his musket, calling out, "For God's sake, don't fire. I am a prisoner, badly wounded, and can't help you; surrender." – "For why would I surrender?" he cried aloud, with the deepest of Irish brogues. "Because there are at least twenty men upon you." – "Well, if I must surrender – there," said he, dashing down his firelock across their legs and making them jump, "there's my firelock for yez." Then coming close up he threw his arm round me, and giving Guibert a push that sent him and one or two more reeling against a wall, he shouted out, "Stand back, ye bloody spalpeens, I'll carry him myself; bad luck to the whole of yez." My expectation was to see them fall upon him, but John Hennessey was a strong and fierce man, and he now looked bigger than he was, for he stood upon higher ground. Apparently they thought him an awkward fellow to deal with. He seemed willing to go with me, and they let him have his own way.

They are soon delivered over to a responsible officer. Napier is kindly treated by all the officers he meets; but the exigencies of war call them away, and he remains for two nights and a day exposed to cold and misery on the hill where the English magazine had been exploded a couple of days before the action. On the second day after the battle he is brought into Corunna and made comfortable in Marshal Soult's quarters. Hennessey had disappeared. It was only long months afterwards that Napier knew what had become of this extraordinary soldier; and his ultimate fate and that of the generous drummer Guibert deserve to be recorded.

On the night following the battle Hennessey disappeared. Before going he had unbuckled Napier's silver spurs, whispering at the same time that it was a measure of safety, as "the spalpeens" would be likely to murder the owner for the sake of the metal. Next morning he was marched off

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<sup>2</sup> "The Fiftieth Regiment, although called the West Kent, was chiefly formed of Irishmen." – Napier's *Military Law*.

to the Pyrenees, but at Pampeluna he got away from his captors and made back across the whole breadth of the Peninsula for Oporto. On the road he sold one of the spurs, which he had managed to conceal all that weary way by hiding them under his arm. When Soult took Oporto three months after Corunna, Hennessey was again taken prisoner; but when the English crossed the Douro he again escaped by rushing at the sentry upon the prison and killing him with his own musket. When the first British battalion entered Oporto he joined them, marched with them to Talavera, and fought in that battle, where a cannon-ball carried off his cap. Hearing that George Napier was with the army, Hennessey found him out and told him the whole story of his brother's capture, and produced the remaining spur, which he still held on to. Then he returned to England to rejoin the Fiftieth – the regiment was at Hastings at the time. Garrison life did not suit Corporal Hennessey – as he had now become – so, remembering that he had a wife and child in Cork, he obtained a furlough to visit them, and walking across England, appeared in his native town in due time. Napier had meanwhile set out again for the Peninsula. On reaching Cork Hennessey heard this, and at once exclaiming, "Is it gone back and the regiment not with him? Thin, be my sowl, I'll niver stop behind, but it's off I'll be too!" he started back without waiting to see wife or child. On his first arrival in England from the Peninsula he walked to York, where Miss Napier was then living. Charles Napier had charged him on the night of Corunna to give the spurs to her if he succeeded in escaping. Hennessey never forgot the injunction; and at York, more than a year after the battle, he delivered the remaining spur to Miss Napier. They had been originally her gift to her brother when he obtained the rank of major before going to Spain in 1808.

Hennessey went back to the Peninsula and began again the old life of reckless daring, mixed with insubordination, drunkenness, and robbery. At last, in one of the battles of the Pyrenees, a cannon-ball carried off his head – a relief alike to his friends and foes, for the former were ever in fear that death at the hands of the provost-marshal would be his fate. The end of the brave Guibert is not less sad. Napoleon, upon hearing of his humane and gallant conduct, bestowed the Cross of the Legion upon him. Some man with better interest disputed the drummer's right to the distinction, and obtained the cherished decoration for himself. Guibert, enraged at his well-earned honour being robbed from him, forgot his higher honour, tried to desert, was taken and shot. What strange episodes of individual heroism dashed with human nature's weakest traits does war hold in its vast tragedy! What extremes of pathos and absurdity jostle each other daily along the road of conflict! In the fight at Elvina Napier's bosom friend and comrade, Charles Stanhope, was shot dead while leading on his men to support his senior officer then under the French guns. The two men thus fighting so valiantly had each a brother on Moore's staff – George Napier and Edward Stanhope. Both these aides-de-camp long searched for their brothers amid the dead and wounded. Stanhope's body alone was found, for Napier's capture was not known for months after the battle, and he was reckoned among the missing dead. The body of Stanhope was brought back to the bivouac and buried there. His surviving brother was passionately attached to him, and when the moment came to fill in the hastily-made grave he leant over it to take a last look at the dead man's face. At that moment a ball from the enemy struck him, but the thick folds of his cloak, which was worn rolled across his chest, stopped the bullet, and prevented Death from joining together in the same grave the brothers he had shortly before separated.

The army of Corunna reached England in a terrible condition. The men had embarked on the night of the 16th in great confusion, portions of regiments and corps getting on board any vessel they could reach in the darkness, without regard to order or number. No account of killed or wounded was ever obtained; but the total loss from the time the army quitted Portugal in October, 1808, until it arrived in England in the end of January, 1809, was not short of twelve thousand men and five thousand horses, and all its material had also been lost. A wild and impossible enterprise, pushed on against the advice of all trained and capable military opinion by the ignorance of the English Cabinet and its representative Mr. Frere. These people spoke of the genius of Napoleon and his generals as a gigantic bubble which had only to be pricked to vanish. The defeat of a brave but indifferent

leader like the Duke of Abrantes at Vimieiro, where all the odds of numbers and surroundings were against him, made them believe that they had only to throw another army into the Peninsula and that it would at once combine with the Spaniards and march to Paris. They mistook Junot, in fact, for that extraordinary combination of Jupiter and Mars whom men called Napoleon Bonaparte, and Moore and his gallant troops paid the penalty of the mistake. Nor did the misfortunes of the soldiers end with the campaign. For months after their arrival in England the hospitals were filled with the fever-stricken victims; and many a soldier who had escaped the horrors of the retreat and the battle of Corunna laid his bones in the military graveyards of the south of England. But the authors of the misfortune did not suffer. Secure in a majority returned by a flagrant system of corruption, they laughed at the Opposition; and society, finding a great military scandal soon to divert it, quickly forgot all about the suffering, the misfortunes, and the glory of the campaign of Corunna.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PENINSULA IN 1810-11 – BERMUDA – AMERICA – ROYAL MILITARY COLLEGE

For two months Napier remained a prisoner with the French, and very nobly did his captors treat him, notwithstanding the intense bitterness of feeling caused in France by the way in which prisoners of war were treated in England. Ney, who succeeded Soult when the latter marched from Corunna for Oporto, allowed his captive to live with the French Consul, supplied him liberally with money, and when an English frigate bearing a flag of truce entered Corunna, permitted him to proceed to England on parole not to serve until exchanged. His death had been officially reported, and when he reached England he was to his family and friends as one risen from the grave. A curious figure he must have presented when his brother George and sisters met him at Exeter on the top of the Plymouth coach, still in the old thread-bare red coat that he had worn at Corunna, out at elbows, patched, and covered with the stains of blood and time. On arrival in England he had sent a scrap of paper to his mother with these lines from *Hudibras*:

I have been in battle slain,  
And I live to fight again.

What joy to the poor mother, now a widow and with sight failing, to hear her eldest born was not gone from her, but had come back, notwithstanding his fatigues and many wounds, more determined than ever; for he had now seen war, knew the ins and outs of fighting, and he no longer hoped but was absolutely certain that he could command in battle. After Corunna, they tell us, his whole manner changed. The earnest look of his face assumed a more vehement expression. The eagle had in truth tested his wings and felt his beak and talons, and he knew they were more than equal to the fight of life.

In January, 1810, one year after Corunna, Charles Napier rejoined the Fiftieth Regiment, again in the south of England. Meanwhile another expedition had gone to Portugal, and great events had taken place in the Peninsula. Sir Arthur Wellesley, having driven Soult from Oporto, urged by the Ministry at home and by their representatives in the Peninsula to repeat the movement into Spain which had so nearly ended in the destruction of Sir John Moore's army, advanced along the Tagus, joined Cuesta, fought the French at Talavera de la Reyna, held his position during the battle but fell back from it two days later, leaving his wounded to be captured by the enemy, and narrowly escaping by a forced march Soult's advancing army, retreated back to Portugal with the loss in killed, wounded, prisoners, and by death from disease of fully one-third of his entire army. The British Government, now feeling certain that the last hour of Napoleon had arrived, all at once resorted to the old idea of foreign expeditions; and two of the largest expeditions that had ever left the British Islands had been despatched to the Continent, one to Italy, the other to Holland. In all the long history of abortive military enterprise there is nothing so sad as this Walcheren expedition. It numbered in its naval and military total eighty thousand fighting men. Its fate has been told with vehement truth by Charles Napier's brother. "Delivered over," writes William Napier, "to the leading of a man whose military incapacity has caused the glorious title of Chatham to be scorned, this ill-fated army, with spirit and strength and zeal to have spread the fame of England to the extremities of the earth, perished without a blow in the pestilent marshes of Walcheren." Thus this year 1809, which had opened upon Charles Napier in the gloom of the retreat to Corunna, ran its course of conflict to find him at its close an impatient spectator of these three mighty efforts in Spain, southern Italy, and on the Scheldt, which, though not unattended by brilliant feats of arms in at least one theatre of hostility, had all, so far as

their ultimate object was concerned, left matters precisely where they had found them. For it was not at the extremities of his vast empire that the power of Napoleon was to be successfully encountered. When on the first day of the new year he turned back from the distant Galician frontier to take up the burthen of continental war which Austria, subsidised by England, had so suddenly cast upon him, he realised that in the heart of Europe lay the life or death of his power. The march in the summer of 1809 to Vienna is all old history. Despite the duplicity of Austria, which had succeeded in springing upon him a mine while he was yet unconscious of the impending danger, Napoleon's presence on the Danube was sufficient in a few hours to retrieve the errors of his lieutenants, and to neutralise all the advantages which the selection of their time and attack had already given his enemies. In all the brilliant passages of the *History of the Peninsular War* none record great results in fewer or firmer words than this campaign of 1809 on the Danube. "Then indeed," writes the historian, "was seen the supernatural force of Napoleon's genius. In a few hours he changed the aspect of affairs. In a few days, despite their immense number, his enemies, baffled and flying in all directions, proclaimed his mastery in an art which up to that moment was imperfect; for never since troops first trod a field of battle was such a display of military skill made by man."

Wagram was the result of these brilliant combinations. Once again, as at Austerlitz and Friedland, the decisive blow struck in the centre paralysed all minor successes gained at the extremities; and before the year which had opened with such vast preparation and such glowing anticipation closed, the army of Walcheren had perished, that of Italy had retreated to Sicily, and that of the Peninsula, despite its brilliant achievement on the Douro and its valour at Talavera, had fallen back into the pestilent marshes of the Guadiana, where a third of its force was destroyed by fever.

During the winter of 1809-10 great efforts were made to reinforce the army under Wellington, and in May, 1810, Charles Napier found himself once more in the Peninsula. The campaign in north-eastern Portugal had begun. Ney and Massena, advancing from Leon, took Ciudad Rodrigo and forced Wellington back upon middle Portugal. The marches were long and arduous, the fighting frequent and fierce. The famous Light Division, with its still more famous first brigade, covered the retirement. In this brigade the three brothers came again together. In July Crawford fought his ill-judged action on the Coa, and the Napiers were all in the thick of that hard-contested fray. It was Charles who carried the order to his brother George's regiment, the Fifty-Second, to fall back across the bridge when the French cavalry were swarming through the Val de Mula. William Napier's company of the Forty-Third was the last to pass the river, and it was here that he was wounded. This fight at the Coa was the first battle fought by this famous brigade, Moore's chosen corps. Four years earlier he had shaped them into soldier form at Shorncliffe Camp, for his quick perception had early caught the fact that it was only by a most thorough system of field-drill the power of the French arms could be successfully resisted; and truly did William Napier realise on the Coa the debt his brigade owed to Sir John Moore. "The fight on the Coa," he writes, "was a fierce and obstinate combat for existence with the Light Division, and only Moore's regiments could, with so little experience, have extricated themselves from the danger into which they were so recklessly cast, for Crawford's demon of folly was strong that day. Their matchless discipline was their protection; a phantom hero from Corunna saved them!"

In the heat of this action Charles Napier performed a very gallant action which finds only briefest record in his journal, while whole pages are given to noting "for my own teaching" the errors of the general officer commanding the division. Napier had ridden back to the Forty-Third Regiment – still fighting on the enemy's side of the bridge – after delivering an order upon another part of the field. He finds Captain Campbell wounded. He at once gives the wounded man his horse, and then fights on foot with the Forty-Third through the vineyards to the bridge. Still falling back towards Lisbon, Wellington halted at Busaco and gave battle to Massena. This time only two of the three brothers were in the field, for William was down with the wound received at the Coa. Charles is riding as orderly officer to Lord Wellington. He is in red, the only mounted officer in that colour, as



the staff are of course in blue. When Regnier's corps reached the crest of the position a furious fire was opened upon the British line. The staff dismounts. Napier remains on horseback. "If he will not dismount, won't he at least put a cloak over his flaring scarlet uniform?" – "No, he won't. It is the dress of his regiment, the Fiftieth, and he will show it or fall in it." Then a bullet hits him full in the face, passing from the right of his nose to his left ear, and shattering all before it, and he is down at last. They carry him away, but as he passes Wellington he has strength to wave his hat to his chief; and when they lay him in a cell in the convent behind the ridge of Busaco he is more concerned at hearing the voices of officers who are eating in an adjoining room, and who should be on the ridge under fire, than he is with the torment of his own wound. On the morning of the battle he had received a letter from his mother announcing the death of his sister, and now, while lying wounded in the convent, they come to tell him his brother George has been struck down while leading on his men to charge the French assaulting column.

He was carried away over the rough roads of Portugal, and at length reached rest at Lisbon; for the army on the second day following Busaco resumed its retreat, and Massena was again in full pursuit. The confusion was very great, and the wounded had a dreadful time of it. Wellington was laying waste the country as he retreated, and the army was falling back upon the Lines of Torres Vedras amid a scene of destruction almost unparalleled in the horrors of war. Nevertheless neither the severity of his wound nor the exigencies of the retreat prevented Charles Napier from writing to his mother to assure her of his safety, and to make light of his wounds for her sake. There is something inexpressibly touching in the constant solicitude of this danger-loving soldier towards the poor old mother at home. "I am wounded, dear mother," he writes four days after the battle, and while the confusion of the retreat is at its height; "you never saw so ugly a thief as I am, but melancholy subjects must be avoided, the wound is not dangerous." At last he reaches Lisbon and has more time for writing, and the letters become long and constant.

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