

HAROLD WHEELER

THE STORY OF
WELLINGTON

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Harold F. B. Wheeler

The Story of Wellington

*'For this is England's greatest son,
He that gain'd a hundred fights,
Nor ever lost an English gun'*

TENNYSON

"Vera amicitia sempiterna est"

Foreword

In this, the last of a trio of volumes dealing with three great contemporary men of action, I have attempted to tell the story, in its main lines, of the crowded life of Wellington. The narrative provides as substantial a view of Wellington as is possible within the limits of my space, but I hope that readers of my book will be so interested that they will go on to the perusal of its companions, for the careers of Napoleon, Nelson, and Wellington should be studied together. They are the three sides of a triangle of which Napoleon is the base.

The Duke's career, when compared to the others, is "a plain, unvarnished tale," not altogether devoid of romance, certainly not of adventure, but lacking in many of the qualities which have endeared less notable men. It would be obviously untrue to state that Wellington lacked humanity, but he was certainly deficient in that attractive personal magnetism so evident in Nelson. Speaking broadly, he did not repose that confidence in his subordinates which was one of the great sea-captain's most marked characteristics, and he often said hard things of the men under him. Nelson is "the darling Hero of England"; Wellington will always be known as the Iron Duke. If it ever became the fashion to canonize military and naval men, Nelson's nimbus would be of rosemary, Wellington's of steel. The mob never broke the windows of Merton Place, but it shattered

every exposed pane in Apsley House. The incident arose from his conscientious opposition to reform, and occurred in 1831, sixteen years after the battle of Waterloo. A little over a decade later, an immense mob cheered him as he proceeded up Constitution Hill. His acknowledgment was to point to the iron shutters of his house when he reached Hyde Park Corner. They had been put up after the bombardment by brickbats, and were never taken down during his lifetime.

In a way, Wellington is the typical John Bull of our fancy. He gloried in an open-air life, he enjoyed sport, he was a man wedded to duty, stern and uncompromising once his mind was made up. We love to imagine that the average Briton displays the same characteristics, although we know at heart that he does not do so, and that the secret of our material success as a nation is our extraordinary power of absorption, of “setting our sail to every passing breeze,” of compromising provided we get the best of the bargain.

This is how the Duke appeared to a foreigner, the Duchesse de Dino, Talleyrand’s niece: “He has a very exact memory, and never quotes incorrectly. He forgets nothing, and exaggerates nothing, and if his conversation is a little dry and military, it attracts by its fairness and perfect propriety. His tone is excellent, and no woman has ever to be on her guard against the turn that the conversation may take.” In later years Wellington’s memory failed somewhat. He was invariably precise, always a soldier, and never given to what is generally known as small talk. In a word,

he commanded.

A more intimate and less familiar view of Wellington is afforded us in the diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon, who painted the Duke's portrait at Walmer Castle in the autumn of 1839. During breakfast, he tells us, "six dear, healthy, noisy children were brought to the windows. 'Let them in,' said the Duke, and in they came, and rushed over to him, saying, 'How d'ye do, Duke? How d'ye do, Duke?' One boy, young Grey, roared, 'I want some tea, Duke!' 'You shall have it if you promise not to slop it over me, as you did yesterday.' Toast and tea were then in demand. Three got on one side, and three on the other, and he hugged 'em all. Tea was poured out, and I saw little Grey try to slop it over the Duke's frock coat. Sir Astley [Cooper] said, 'You did not expect to see this.'

"They all then rushed out on the leads, by the cannon, and after breakfast I saw the Duke romping with the whole of them, and one of them gave his Grace a tremendous thump. I went round to my bedroom. The children came to the window, and a dear little black-eyed girl began romping. I put my head out and said, 'I'll catch you.' Just as I did this the Duke, who did not see me, put his head out at the door close to my room, No. 10, which leads to the leads, and said, 'I'll catch ye! Ha, ha, I've got ye!' at which they all ran away. He looked at them and laughed and went in."

That is a very human picture of the grim warrior when the sword had been put aside for ever and the smoke of battle was cleared. "I hit his grand, upright, manly expression," Haydon

adds. "He looked like an eagle of the gods who had put on human shape, and had got silvery with age and service.... His colour was fresh. All the portraits are too pale.... 'Twas a noble head. I saw nothing of that peculiar expression of mouth the sculptors give him, bordering on simpering. His colour was beautiful and fleshy, his lips compressed and energetic."

From this passive scene in the evening of his days let us turn to the more stirring days of the storming of Badajoz for our final portrait of the Duke, for it is in the field that we like to remember him. The glimpse is afforded us by Robert Blakeney, one of the boy heroes of the Peninsular War. "I galloped off," he writes, "to where Lord Wellington had taken his station: this was easily discerned by means of two fireballs shot out from the fortress at the commencement of the attack, which continued to burn brilliantly along the water-cut which divided the 3rd from the other divisions. Near the end of this channel, behind a rising mound, were Lord Wellington and his personal staff, screened from the enemy's direct fire, but within range of shells. One of his staff sat down by his side with a candle to enable the general to read and write all his communications and orders relative to the passing events. I stood not far from his lordship. But due respect prevented any of us bystanders from approaching so near as to enable us to ascertain the import of the reports which he was continually receiving; yet it was very evident that the information which they conveyed was far from flattering; and the recall on the bugles was again and again

repeated. But about half-past eleven o'clock an officer rode up at full speed on a horse covered with foam, and announced the joyful tidings that General Picton had made a lodgment within the castle by escalade, and had withdrawn the troops from the trenches to enable him to maintain his dearly purchased hold. Lord Wellington was evidently delighted, but exclaimed, 'What! abandon the trenches?' and ordered two regiments of the 5th Division instantly to replace those withdrawn. I waited to hear no more, but, admiring the prompt genius which immediately provided for every contingency, I mounted my horse."

I shall not attempt to enumerate the lengthy list of authorities I have consulted in writing this volume, but special mention must be made of Professor Oman's monumental "History of the Peninsular War," which corrects Napier in many important points. Four volumes have now been published, and I am under obligation to the eminent scholar whose name appears on the title-pages for his kindness in allowing me to use without reserve the labour of many years. The "Cambridge Modern History" (vol. ix.), Rose's "Napoleon," Croker's "Correspondence and Diaries," Siborne's "Waterloo Letters," the "Lives" of Wellington by Sir Herbert Maxwell, W. H. Maxwell, Gleig, Hooper, Yonge, and many others have been laid under contribution, as well as contemporary works by soldiers who fought with the Iron Duke. As I have endeavoured to let Wellington speak for himself whenever possible, Gurwood's "Dispatches" have been frequently consulted, and for sidelights I

have had access to a large number of volumes of correspondence, autobiography, and biography in which he plays a part, however insignificant.

Finally, I must express the hope that my readers, as they progress over the field which I have endeavoured to open up to them, will share the love of the strong, silent Man of Duty which has grown upon me as I have become more intimate with the story of his life.

*The path of duty was the way to glory.
His work is done.
But while the races of mankind endure,
Let his great example stand
Colossal, seen of every land.*

HAROLD F. B. WHEELER
Northwood, Middlesex.

CHAPTER I

The Fool of the Family

(1769–93)

“I don’t know what I shall do with my awkward son Arthur.”
Lady Mornington.

Gathering clouds, dark and ominous, obscured the political horizon in the year 1769. The habitués of London coffee-houses discussed one of three things—“The Letters of Junius,” the most remarkable series of political exposures ever penned; the election of the notorious John Wilkes for Middlesex; and the rebellious conduct of the North American colonists. On the other side of the Channel the Duc de Choiseul was skilfully planning ways and means of fanning into a fierce outburst the flames of discontent now flickering in the West. To heap coals of fire on the country which, during the Seven Years’ War (1756–63), had enforced her claims to Canada and India, would be a triumph worthy of the statesman who had banished the Jesuits from the hereditary possessions of Louis XV.

Had the people who lived in those stirring times been gifted with the power of penetrating the future, their eyes would have turned in the eventful year of 1769 from the larger stages to

the comparatively insignificant islands of Corsica and Ireland, for the former was the birthplace of Napoleon and the latter of Wellington, and both were born in 1769.

There are other remarkable coincidences connected with the childhood of Napoleon and Wellington. Their respective fathers were easy-going, unpractical men, their mothers were women of marked force of character, left widows early in life with large families. In addition, the hero of Austerlitz was the fourth child of Letizia Bonaparte, his conqueror at Waterloo the fourth son of the Countess of Mornington.

A certain amount of obscurity is associated with their juvenile days. Although the date of the entrance into the world of "the little Corporal" is now fairly well established, it was long before historians ceased to discuss it. There is still much uncertainty as to that of Wellington. The Duke was always vague on the point, and celebrated his birthday on the 1st May, which is the day following that on which he was baptized at St Peter's, Dublin, presuming the parish register to be correct.¹ Lady Mornington announced that Arthur was a Mayday boy, but her nurse as stoutly maintained that the event took place on the 6th March. Dangan Castle, West Meath, and Mornington House, Marion Street, Dublin, contest the honour of being his birthplace. The

¹ Sir Herbert Maxwell in his "Life of Wellington" (p. 2) suggests that the confusion arose owing to the then comparatively recent alteration of the calendar. Supposing Arthur Wellesley was born on the 1st May (new style), that date would be the 18th April (old style), and the 30th April (old style) the 12th May according to the present way of reckoning.

witness for the country home is the afore-mentioned nurse; a prescription of the physician who attended Lady Mornington about the period was sent to a chemist in Ireland's capital, and attests the claim of the town mansion. The matter is not of prime importance, but serves to show the somewhat casual habits of a less practical generation than our own. The real family name of the Westleys, Wesleys, or Wellesleys—the different forms were all used—was Colley or Cowley, but the Duke's grandfather inherited the estates of his kinsman, Garret Wesley, on condition that he assumed that surname. He became Baron Mornington in 1747. It was the son of this fortunate individual, also a Garret, who was created the first Earl of Mornington in the year previous to his marriage to the eldest daughter of Viscount Dungannon. They became the parents of the future Duke of Wellington as well as of several other children.

Of Arthur Wellesley's scholastic career little can be ascertained with certainty. We know that he spent a little while at a preparatory school in Chelsea, then a very different place from what it is now, and that he and his eldest brother, Lord Wellesley, who had succeeded his father on his sire's death in 1781, were at the same house at Eton. Unfortunately the two rooms which they occupied are now demolished. While it would be incorrect to call Arthur a dull boy, he certainly displayed little interest in learning. Indeed, his mother was so cynical regarding his ability, or want of it, that she called him "the fool of the family."

The dictum that Waterloo was won on the playing fields of

Eton may have been true so far as other officers were concerned, but the younger Wellesley showed not the slightest interest in games. He preferred the fiddle to cricket, for he inherited his father's passion for music. "I was a player on the violin once myself, sir," he mentioned to an acquaintance in after years, "but I soon found that fiddling and soldiering didn't agree—so I gave it up, sir! I gave it up!" He was a great admirer of Handel's compositions.

One precious anecdote regarding his life at the famous public school has been spared to posterity, and appropriately enough it is a record of his first serious fight—not with a sword, but with fisticuffs. Robert Smith, brother of Sydney Smith, the witty divine and essayist, happened to be bathing in the river when Wellesley was passing. Prompted by some evil or jocular spirit the latter picked up a handful of small stones and began to pelt his fellow student. Smith yelled that he would thrash him if he did not stop. Wellesley defiantly dared him to do so. The enraged "Bobus" promptly waded out and accepted the challenge, which he regretted before many rounds had been fought.

Although Wellesley was by no means of a pugnacious disposition, a second fight, in which he was not victorious, took place during a holiday spent at the Welsh home of his maternal grandfather, Lord Dungannon. His opponent was a young blacksmith, named Hughes, who lived to hear of the mighty exploits of the Iron Duke. He was never tired of telling how he once conquered the vanquisher of Napoleon. It was his

one title to fame.

After leaving Eton, Wellesley was taken to Brussels in 1784 by his mother, who found the many attractions of London society a heavy tax on a slender purse, for she had removed to the Metropolis on the death of her husband. As her son seemed to take little or no interest in anything but the army, and as that service was then considered a desirable alternative to the Church for the fool of the family, Lady Mornington accepted the offer of some friends to provide for his military education. Whatever ability her fourth son displayed seems to have been less obvious to her than to others, as frequently happens. "They are all," she writes with reference to her family, "I think, endowed with excellent abilities except Arthur, and he would probably not be wanting, if only there was more energy in his nature; but he is so wanting in this respect, that I really do not know what to do with him." However, the youth whom she described as being "food for powder and nothing more" was packed across the frontier to Angers. She herself returned to London in 1785, Wellesley proceeding to the quaint old town associated with King John of England. Here he had his first encounter with the French, and there is a celebrated picture showing him in conversation with the Marquis of Pignerol.

Pignerol, who presided over an Academy, not exclusively devoted to the training of would-be soldiers as some writers have assumed, was an engineer officer, and did his best to initiate the Irish lad into some of the mysteries of the science of war. As

his pupil only remained at Angers for about twelve months, he cannot have learned more than the rudiments, but he assimilated French with comparative ease. Unlike Napoleon, who was never happier than when he was poring over military books at Brienne, Wellesley enjoyed much good society. He made the acquaintance of the Duc de Brissac, who seems to have been a delightful foster-father of the scholars, for he frequently entertained them at his château. The Duc de Praslin, the Abbé Siéyès, later one of the French Consuls, D'Archambault, Talleyrand's brother, Jaucourt, who afterwards became Secretary for Foreign Affairs under Louis XVIII, were all on his visiting list. It is quite probable that among his schoolmates was Chateaubriand, destined to fill an honoured place in the world of letters, but of this, said the Duke, he was not absolutely certain.

The British army was not then the skilfully organised fighting-machine it has since become. Entrance into its ranks as an officer was not difficult, provided one had financial support and influence. This explains the rapid promotion of Wellesley. At the age of seventeen he began his military career as an ensign in a Foot regiment, his gazette being dated the 7th March 1787. Nine months later he was promoted lieutenant into the 76th. By successive steps he rose to be captain (1791), major (1793), lieutenant-colonel (1793), and colonel (1796). A colonel at twenty-seven is beyond the dreams of mortal men to-day, and this advancement contrasts oddly with the slow progress of Nelson, Wellesley's great naval contemporary, who had to

depend upon his own unaided merits for promotion. In 1793, six years following his first appointment, he was placed in command of the 33rd Foot, after having experience of the cavalry by serving in both the 12th and 18th Light Dragoons.

A little influence went a long way in those casual times, there was nothing so valuable as “a friend at court.” Unlike many aristocratic nobodies who secured high position, Wellesley afterwards proved his worth, but he scarcely would have ascended the military ladder with such astonishing quickness had not his brother Richard held office under the younger Pitt. Lord Westmorland, Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, also took a fancy to him and made him one of his *aides-de-camp*.

In 1790, when he was still in his twenty-first year, he entered the Irish House of Commons as Member of Parliament for Trim, County Meath, a “pocket borough” of the Wellesley family. We are told by Sir Jonah Barrington, who made his acquaintance some three years later, that the young soldier “was then ruddy-faced and juvenile in appearance, and popular enough among the young men of his age and station. His address was unpolished; he occasionally spoke in Parliament, but not successfully, and never on important subjects; and evinced no promise of that unparalleled celebrity and splendour which he has since reached, and whereto intrepidity and decision, good luck, and great military science have justly combined to elevate him.” The same authority then proceeds to introduce us to Lord Castlereagh, and adds: “At the period to which I allude, I feel confident nobody

could have predicted that one of those young gentlemen would become the most celebrated English general of his era, and the other one of the most mischievous statesmen and unfortunate ministers that has ever appeared in modern Europe.² However, it is observable that to the personal intimacy and reciprocal friendship of those two individuals they mutually owed the extent of their respective elevation and celebrity: Sir Arthur Wellesley never would have had the chief command in Spain but for the ministerial manœuvring and aid of Lord Castlereagh; and Lord Castlereagh never could have stood his ground as a minister, but for Lord Wellington's successes."

Another contemporary tells quite a different story of Wellesley's ability, and as he also heard him in 1793 it is printed here in order that the reader may not be prejudiced by Barrington's opinion. So much is determined by the point-of-view of the witness. The occasion was a debate on the perennial question of the Roman Catholics. Captain Wellesley's remarks, we are told, "were terse and pertinent, his delivery fluent, and his manner unembarrassed." Gleig, who was intimately acquainted with the Duke, says that he "seems to have spoken but rarely, and never at any length. His votes were of course given in support of the party to which he belonged, but otherwise he entered

² It must be remembered that Barrington wrote from the point of view of a "patriot," and that Castlereagh had much to do with the Union of Great Britain and Ireland. Castlereagh entered the Irish Parliament in 1790, served in the Pitt, Addington, Perceval, and Portland ministries, was present at the Congress of Vienna, and died by his own hand in 1822.

very little into the business of the House.” He mentions but one incident connected with this period, namely, Wellesley’s attachment to the Hon. Catherine Pakenham, an acknowledged Society beauty and a daughter of Baron Longford. His Lordship, possessing a keen eye for the practical affairs of life, objected to the match on the score of lack of money, but there is little doubt that the couple came to a mutual understanding.

That Wellesley took more than a casual interest in his military duties is evident, and if he did not display the inherent genius of Napoleon he certainly went about his duties in a highly commendable and workmanlike manner. For instance, he had scarcely donned the uniform of his first regiment before he entered into calculations regarding the weight of the accoutrements, ammunition, and other paraphernalia carried by a private when in marching order. For this purpose he ordered a soldier to be weighed both with and without his trappings.

“I wished,” he says, “to have some measure of the power of the individual man compared with the weight he was to carry and the work he was expected to do. I was not so young as not to know that since I had undertaken a profession I had better endeavour to understand it.” He adds, “It must always be kept in mind that the power of the greatest armies depends upon what the individual soldier is capable of doing and bearing,” a maxim which still holds good, notwithstanding the many changes effected in the course of a century and a quarter. However excellent the gun, it is the man behind it which determines the issue.

It was not until 1794 that Wellesley underwent the hardships of active service. Before that phase of his career is detailed we must make a hasty and general survey of the wide and scattered field of action. The occasion was the second year of the great strife which occupied the attention of Europe, with little intermittance, for over twenty years. The gauntlet had been flung down by France in 1792, when war was declared against the Holy Roman Empire, with which Prussia made common cause. The campaign was an eye-opener to all Europe, for although the Prussians and Austrians began well they did not follow up their advantages, particularly when the road to Châlons and Paris lay open to the former. At Valmy the Prussians were defeated, and subsequently withdrew across the frontier in a deplorable condition of dearth and disease. Dumouriez then invaded Flanders, and was victorious over the Austrians at Jemappes, a success followed by the fall of Mons, Malines, Ghent, Brussels, Antwerp, and Namur, while smaller towns, such as Tournay, Ostend, and Bruges welcomed the victorious troops with open arms as the heralds of a new era.

In Savoy the scanty Sardinian forces were routed by Montesquiou, and the country annexed, as was Nice by Anselme. With the dawning of 1793 Belgium shared a similar fate, and the occupation of Dutch territory was decided on. This latter was an extremely foolish move, as events soon proved.

England and Holland became involved in the second month of the new year, when the French Convention announced hostile

intentions to both Powers. Previous to this, Great Britain had maintained a strict neutrality. She now commenced proceedings by sending 10,000 troops to Holland under the incompetent Duke of York, where they united with a similar force of Hessians and Hanoverians, whose expenses were met by English gold, a plentiful supply of which also found its way into the coffers of other Powers. The Island Kingdom and Russia had already allied themselves, although the Czarina's designs on Poland precluded immediate co-operation, and during the next few months Sardinia, Spain, Naples, Prussia, the Holy Roman Empire, and Portugal joined in mutual support.

Dumouriez duly appeared on Dutch territory, but was compelled to retreat on Flanders by the defeat of the general engaged in besieging Maestricht. On resuming offensive operations he himself lost the battle of Neerwinden. Within a fortnight the French had abandoned all their conquests in Belgium, which again passed into the possession of Austria. Dumouriez took refuge in the camp of the Imperialists after negotiating with Coburg, the commander of the "White Coats," to place the frontier fortresses into his hands and to unite the two armies. Neither arrangement was carried through, for the defeated general found it more prudent to fly the country.³ Mayence, on the Rhine, was invested by the Prussians, to whom it eventually capitulated, and Valenciennes and Condé were

³ Dumouriez was in London from the 12th June until the 22nd, 1793. He lived in England from October 1803 until his death on the 14th March 1823.

successfully besieged by the Austrians and British. All three fortresses fell during July 1793.

The tide was beginning to turn even in France, for Toulon and Lyons openly revolted, and civil war broke out in La Vendée. Had the Allies made a concerted effort, the defeat of the Republican cause could scarcely have failed to follow, but they quarrelled amongst themselves instead of following up their advantage. They squandered their strength by dividing their army into detachments, and much precious time was wasted by the diversion on Dunkirk made by the English, Hanoverian, Hessian, and some of the Austrian forces, about 37,000 strong.

The Revolutionary Government, augmenting its fighting body, instructed General Houchard to attack the enemy before the historic seaport. As a sequel to this movement the Duke of York was forced to retreat and abandon forty guns and much of his baggage. Houchard's triumph was short-lived. He met with disaster at the hands of the Austrians, and paid the price of failure with his head. With the Convention defeat spelt death. Professing the Cause of Humanity, it refused to be humanitarian.

By the middle of September all the important fortresses which blockaded the way of the Allies to the Capital had fallen, with the exception of Maubeuge. The victory of Jourdan, the successor of Houchard, over the covering force at Wattignies saved the situation, and on the 17th October the French marched into Maubeuge. On the Upper Rhine the Allies found themselves in possession of Metz only, at the end of 1793. In the south-

west of Europe the campaign made no further progress, and the Republican cause gained fresh impetus by the crushing of the royalist risings at Lyons and Toulon. It will be remembered that Napoleon won his first laurels in helping to subjugate the great arsenal in the south of France, and in forcing the withdrawal of the British fleet under Hood which had gone to support the rebellious inhabitants.

These facts, dry as dust though they may be, are essential to a correct understanding of the part played by Wellington in the early days of the Great War detailed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER II

Wellington's Baptism of Fire (1794–97)

*"I learnt what one ought not to do, and that is always something."
Wellington.*

The pages of military romance teem with references to the disappointed lover who seeks to assuage his sorrow by active service. In actual life one doubts whether such things often happen, but it appears that it was true of Arthur Wellesley. He asked his eldest brother to use his influence with Pitt to persuade Lord Westmorland to send him "as major to one of the flank corps," his own regiment being "the last for service." The request was refused, and the young officer had to wait until May 1794. Orders were then issued for the 33rd to proceed on foreign service as part of a contingent under Lord Moira which was urgently required to reinforce the Duke of York.

The Allies had not only experienced a series of defeats, but Prussia had withdrawn many of her forces on the Rhine for service in Poland, the dismemberment of which seemed to offer more tangible advantages than the protracted warfare against "armed opinions." As a member of the Holy Roman Empire she

had of necessity to supply 20,000 troops—a mere handful—and she announced her intention of merely fulfilling this obligation. Again British gold came to the rescue, and Prussia, by a treaty signed on the 19th April 1794, agreed to keep 62,000 men at the disposal of the Allies in return for a handsome subsidy. The unfortunate Austrian general, Mack, was then given command of the new campaign. The fatal mistake was repeated of dividing the army, with the result that while the Imperialists under Clerfait were forced to retreat on Tournay, the Duke of York, aided by Prince Schwartzenberg, secured an advantage at Troisville. A series of actions around Tourcoing followed on the 16th to the 18th May, during which his Highness narrowly escaped being made a prisoner, owing partly to his having been left isolated by the cutting off of his communications, and partly to a praiseworthy determination to hold the positions his troops had gained. At Pont-à-chin, near Tournay, the repeated attempts of Pichegru to secure the village ended in disaster. On the 26th June the Austrians, in their endeavour to relieve Charleroi, which had surrendered to the growing forces of the French under Jourdan a few hours before, were forced to retreat from the plains of Fleurus. “The loss of Flanders,” says Alison, “immediately followed a contest which an enterprising general would have converted into the most decisive triumph.” The Duke of York, having sustained a reverse at Oudenarde, was also retreating, intent upon covering Antwerp and Holland.

Wellesley arrived at Ostend with his regiment in June 1794,

from whence he was sent to Antwerp, on which the Duke of York and the Prince of Orange shortly afterwards fell back, while Moira marched to Malines. The Colonel held that his senior officer would have been better advised had he and his troops proceeded up the Scheldt or the Maes in boats, an opinion subsequently confirmed by events.

After settling necessary matters Wellesley carried out his instructions and reached the Duke of York several days before Moira was in touch with him. It was a moral victory for the young officer, and doubtless served the very useful purpose of stimulating his ambition.

For three months the Duke of York and the Prince of Orange remained at Antwerp. The Commander of the Dutch troops then retired towards the Rhine, and the former moved towards Holland. During the march General Abercromby was told to secure the village of Boxtel, captured on the previous evening by one of Pichegru's divisions. A desperate affray ensued, and notwithstanding the intrepid bravery of the British infantry, cavalry, and artillery, it ended in disaster. It is extremely probable that the entire force would have been annihilated but for Wellesley's promptitude in covering the retreat. No opposition was offered until the British were passing through a wood, when a masked battery opened fire. A little later there was considerable confusion, and a body of French Hussars charged forward only to meet Wellesley's battalion drawn across the road. They were repulsed, thanks to the valour of the young commander.

Throughout an extremely severe winter the British were continually pressed by the ardent Republicans. From October to January 1795 Wellesley held a post on the Waal, and the arduous nature of his duties is described by him in letters written at the time. “At present,” he says on the 20th December 1794, “the French keep us in a perpetual state of alarm; we turn out once, sometimes twice, every night; the officers and men are harassed to death, and if we are not relieved, I believe there will be very few of the latter remaining shortly. I have not had the clothes off my back for a long time, and generally spend the greatest part of the night upon the bank of the river, notwithstanding which I have entirely got rid of that disorder which was near killing me at the close of the summer campaign. Although the French annoy us much at night, they are very entertaining during the daytime; they are perpetually chattering with our officers and soldiers,⁴ and dance the *carmagnol* upon the opposite bank whenever we desire them; but occasionally the spectators on our side are interrupted in the middle of a dance by a cannon ball from theirs.”

It is a genial, good-natured message, but Wellesley always held his feelings well under control. In the above he chose to reveal the humorous aspect of the long-drawn-out agony. There was plenty to complain about had he desired. The food supply was deficient; the wounded had to bear their agonies with the patience of Stoics, because the stock of medicines ran short; and the general privation was terrible. A pitiful lack of foresight

⁴ Similar incidents occurred during the Peninsular War.

characterised the whole campaign. What could be expected of a Commander-in-Chief who gave preference to the pleasures of the table if a dispatch arrived during a meal, and contemptuously remarked, “That will keep till the morning”? During the time of his sojourn on the Waal, Wellesley “only saw once one general from the headquarters,⁵ which was old Sir David Dundas.... We had letters from England, and I declare that those letters told us more of what was passing at headquarters than we learnt from the headquarters ourselves.... It has always been a marvel to me how any of us escaped.”

That “old Sir David Dundas” thought very highly of the young officer’s conduct is evident. When he succeeded as Commander-in-Chief of the British forces, on the recall of the Duke of York in the following December, Wellesley was appointed Brigadier and given command of the rear guard. By a series of retreats the tattered army eventually reached Bremen. It embarked for England early in 1795.

In summing up Wellesley’s first experience of field service, Earl Roberts states that it was, “no doubt, extremely valuable to Wellington in after years. It must have taught him that soldiers even of the best quality, well drilled, disciplined and equipped, cannot hope to be successful unless proper arrangements are made for their supply and transport; and unless those who direct

⁵ At Arnheim, on the Rhine, less than twenty-five miles distant. According to the de Ros MS., consulted by Sir Herbert Maxwell, Dundas paid a visit to Wellesley “about once a fortnight.”

the operations have formed some definite plan of action, and have sufficient zeal and professional knowledge to carry it out. If the French generals had taken full advantage of the opportunities which the incapacity of the English and German commanders threw in their way, the British force must have been annihilated."

One is inclined to doubt whether the troops were "well drilled, disciplined and equipped" at this period. The gross incompetence of many of the highest officers is abundantly proved, and continued lack of success speedily reduces the vital strength of any regiment.

As already noted, the commissariat was execrable. We have it on the authority of one who was present that during the retreat hundreds of invalids succumbed, "whilst the shameful neglect that then pervaded the medical department, rendered the hospitals nothing better than slaughter-houses for the wounded and the sick."

Shortly after Wellesley reached England he decided to leave the Army. The cause is unknown, but it seems highly probable that either his recent experience had disgusted him with the service as constituted, or he wished to obtain more remunerative employment so that he might be in a position to marry the lady of his choice. He also owed money to his brother, who had made advances for his promotion. This sum could be repaid by the sale of his commission. Although Wellesley was always scrupulous in money matters, the reason seems scarcely credible. We are therefore forced to accept one of the other alternatives, perhaps

both, for mention is made of the miserable state of the Army in his letter to Lord Camden⁶ regarding the desired appointment. He consulted Mornington on the matter, and it was decided that a position under the Revenue or Treasury Boards would serve his purpose. "If your Excellency," he writes to the Viceroy, "is of opinion that the offices at these boards are too high for me, of course you will say so; and as I am convinced that no man is so bad a judge of a claim as he who makes it, I trust you will not believe that I shall feel otherwise towards you than as I have always felt, with sentiments of the greatest regard.... You will probably be surprised at my desiring a civil instead of a military office. It is certainly a departure from the line which I prefer, but I see the manner in which the military offices are filled, and I don't want to ask you for that which I know you cannot give me."

Research has failed to discover what answer, if any, was vouchsafed this communication. Wellesley remained in the Army. In October 1795 he and his regiment sailed from Southampton as part of an expedition against the French settlements in the West Indies. The vessels encountered a terrible gale, still known as "Christian's Storm," after the name of the admiral who commanded the fleet. While it might be untrue to say that the ships were in an unseaworthy condition, their sanitary state was deplorable, for they had but recently returned from a long voyage as hospital and prison transports. Scarcely forty-eight hours after they had sailed, and when they were off

⁶ Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, 1794–8.

Weymouth, the full force of the blast struck them. One vessel foundered with all hands, half-a-dozen or more were totally dismasted, and hundreds of soldiers went to their death in a battle with the elements against which all the drill in the world was ineffectual. Fortunately Wellesley escaped, but when he received orders, in April 1796, to embark his men for India he was too ill to accompany them. However, he set sail for Calcutta in June, and overtaking the 33rd Regiment at the Cape of Good Hope, duly reached his destination in February 1797. “The station is so highly advantageous to him that I could not advise him to decline it,” says Lord Mornington.⁷ The good-natured Earl little knew what advantage, both to Wellesley and the Empire, was to accrue as the result of the failure of his brother’s civil ambitions.

⁷ Letter to Sir Chichester Fortescue, dated 20th June 1796, cited by Sir Herbert Maxwell, vol. i. p. 19 n.

CHAPTER III

The Campaign of Seringapatam (1797–1800)

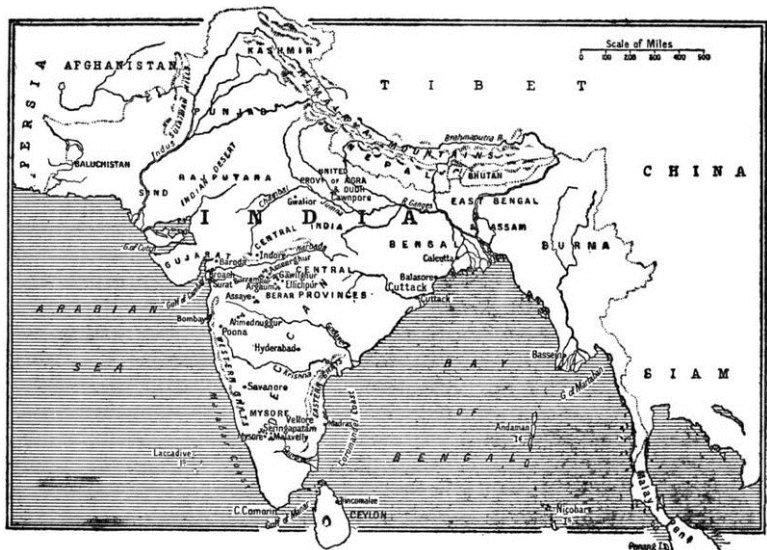
*India, "a country fertile in heroes and statesmen."
Canning.*

The proverb to the effect that "History repeats itself" is not strictly true. The further we study the subject, the more we find that like causes do not necessarily bring about similar effects. The ill success which attended the expedition to the West Indies, ere it left the English Channel, has a fitting parallel so far as its practical utility is concerned in the force placed at General St Leger's disposal to attack Manilla, the Philippine Islands then being in the possession of Spain, with whom Great Britain was now at war. Fortunately it did not meet with disaster, but neither expedition reached its destination. Wellesley accepted the offer of Sir John Shore, the Governor-General of India, to command a brigade, and the troops were embarked. They had not proceeded farther than Penang before an order was issued for their recall owing to troubles brewing in India itself.

Shortly after his return to Calcutta the Colonel was placed in command of the forces in Madras. He also heard that his eldest brother had been offered the extremely responsible and difficult

post of Governor-General in succession to Sir John Shore. It was now his turn to feed the flames of Mornington's ambition. He writes: "I strongly advise you to come out. I am convinced that you will retain your health; nay, it is possible that its general state may be improved, and you will have the fairest opportunity of rendering material service to the public and of doing yourself credit." Mornington lacked self-confidence, and a thousand and one doubts and fears possessed his mind. The Colonel reminded him that if he refused so advantageous a position on account of his young family, "you forego both for yourself and them what will certainly be a material and lasting advantage."

Mornington accepted, and arrived at Calcutta with his youngest brother, Henry, as private secretary in the middle of May 1798. He speedily found an antidote for home-sickness in endeavouring to unravel the tangled skein of affairs in Mysore, where Tipú Sultan was intriguing with the French Republic for assistance in attacking the possessions of the East India Company in Southern India. The pugnacious character of the son of Hyder Ali was typified by the tiger's stripes on his flag. He possessed the fanaticism and barbarity of the Oriental at his worst, and when opportunity occurred would feed a beast of prey with an English prisoner.



WELLINGTON'S CAMPAIGN IN INDIA.

To secure either the friendship or the neutrality of the Nizám, whose territory abutted that of the bloodthirsty Tipú, now became of paramount importance. His army was officered by Frenchmen, which was proof positive that in the event of war it would assist Britain's enemy, although the Nizám had a distinct leaning towards the English. As it happened, the native troops mutinied against their officers, and, seizing his opportunity, the Nizám dismissed them. They were sent to England as prisoners, and subsequently allowed to return to their own country, a most humane consideration, for which Mornington was largely

responsible. The military positions they formerly occupied were promptly filled by our own officers. A new treaty was made to preclude the Marhattás from allying themselves with Tipú, and a force of 6000 British troops was maintained by the Nizám at Hyderabad.

Meanwhile Wellesley had proceeded with his regiment to Madras, and, owing to the death of the senior officer, was placed in temporary command of the troops. In communication with Lord Clive, the Governor of the Presidency, and General Harris, the Commander-in-Chief, he busied himself with the multitudinous arrangements necessary for an advance upon Seringapatam, the capital of the Mysore Dominions. Horses, bullocks, and elephants had to be provided for the purpose of transport; forts equipped and provisioned; the siege train properly organized. He drew up a plan of campaign, and bent himself to the task with exacting energy. Notwithstanding the preparations for war, he still hoped that a resort to arms would prove unnecessary. Those who are apt to think that all military men delight in strife for the mere love of it will do well to remember this fact and judge less harshly, for Wellington is the typical representative of the British Army. But he believed in being ready, and hated nothing so much as “muddling through.”

There was still a possibility, though scarcely a probability, that Tipú would repent. He had received word that Napoleon, then on his famous Egyptian expedition, was coming to his aid with an “invincible army.” So far he had refused a definite statement

of policy. Not until it was abundantly evident that the protracted negotiations of the Sultan of Mysore with the Government were merely to gain time, was a declaration of war issued on the 22nd February 1799. According to Wellesley, General Harris “expressed his approbation of what I had done, and adopted as his own all the orders and regulations I had made, and then said that he should mention his approbation publicly, only that he was afraid others would be displeased and jealous. Now as there is nothing to be got in the army except credit, and as it is not always that the best intentions and endeavours to serve the public succeed, it is hard that when they do succeed they should not receive the approbation which it is acknowledged by all they deserve. I was much hurt about it at the time, but I don’t care now, and shall certainly do everything to serve General Harris, and to support his name and authority.”

Wellesley never feared to speak his mind, as his voluminous dispatches abundantly testify. In a letter to Mornington he admits that he had “lectured” the Commander-in-Chief because he allowed the Madras Military Board too much license in the matter of appointments. On the other hand, he had “urged publicly to the army (in which I flatter myself I have some influence) the necessity of supporting him, whether he be right or wrong.” In his opinion it was “impossible” to hold the General “too high, if he is to be the head of the army in the field.”

Harris certainly compensated Wellesley to some extent by placing him in command of thirteen regiments, including the

Nizám's contingent, with the rank of brigadier. The strength of this force was about 16,000 men, that of the whole army 35,000, excluding 120,000 camp followers, the bugbear of the old-time commander. The Bombay corps under General Stuart attacked a portion of the enemy, commanded by the wily Tipú, in the vicinity of Sedasser, on the 6th March. This success augured well, for the Sultan was forced to retire.

Harris's first serious engagement took place near Malavelly on the 27th, Wellesley advancing to the attack and turning Tipú's right flank. After an engagement lasting three hours the enemy withdrew, with the loss of some 2000 men by death or wounds against the British 7 killed and 53 wounded. Tipú was a skilful soldier, and had not neglected to throw up a line of entrenchments before Seringapatam, into which city he now withdrew. To drive in the advanced outposts before definitely besieging the place was Harris's first object. This duty was intrusted to Wellesley and Colonel Shaw respectively, each having charge of a detachment. It was the task of the former to carry a tope, or thicket, and a village called Sultanpettah. He failed, for reasons explained in the following letter:

"On the night of the 5th, we made an attack on the enemy's outposts, which, at least on my side, was not quite so successful as could have been wished. The fact is, that the night was very dark, that the enemy expected us, and were strongly posted in an almost impenetrable jungle. We lost an officer, killed, and nine men of the 33rd wounded, and at last, as I could not find out

the post which it was desirable I should occupy, I was obliged to desist from the attack, the enemy also having retired from the post. In the morning they re-occupied it, and we attacked it again at day-light, and carried it with ease and with little loss. I got a slight touch on the knee, from which I have felt no inconvenience, and I have come to the determination never to suffer an attack to be made by night upon an enemy who was prepared and strongly posted, and whose posts had not been reconnoitred by daylight.” It should be added that twelve soldiers were taken prisoner and executed by the brutal method of nails being driven through their heads, and that Wellesley had previously given it as his opinion that the projected attack on the thicket would be a mistake. The operation undertaken by Colonel Shaw was successful.

The siege now proceeded in earnest, but a breach was not made in the solid walls surrounding Seringapatam for three days. On the 4th May the place was stormed by General Baird. General Sherbrooke’s right column was the first to ford the Cauvery River. His men speedily scaled the ramparts, and engaged that part of the Sultan’s 22,000 troops stationed in the immediate vicinity. The defenders fought with the fatalistic energy and determination so characteristic of the natives of India. The left column followed, but found the way more difficult. Tipú, mounting the ramparts, fired at the oncoming red-coats with muskets handed to him by his attendants. It was his last battle; his body was afterwards discovered in a covered gateway, together with hundreds of others. Wellesley, with his corps, occupied the

trenches as a first reserve.

“About a quarter past one p.m.,” says an eye-witness, “as we were anxiously peering, telescope in hand, at the ford, and the intermediate ground between our batteries and the breach, a sharp and sudden discharge of musquetry and rockets, along the western face of the fort, announced to us that General Baird and the column of assault were crossing the ford; and immediately afterwards, we perceived our soldiers, in rather loose array, rushing towards the breach. The moment was one of agony; and we continued, with aching eyes, to watch the result, until, after a short and appalling interval, we saw the acclivity of the breach covered with a cloud of crimson,—and in a very few minutes afterwards, observing the files passing rapidly to the right and left at the summit of the breach, I could not help exclaiming, ‘Thank God! the business is done.’”

“The firing continued in different parts of the place until about two o’clock, or a little afterwards; when, the whole of the works being in the possession of our troops, and the St George’s ensign floating proudly from the flagstaff of the southern cavalier, announced to us that the triumph was completed.”

On the 5th, Wellesley took over the command from Baird, who had requested temporary leave of absence, and without delay began to restore some kind of order among the British troops, whose one object after victory was plunder, in which matter they showed little delicacy of feeling. The city was on fire in several places, but the flames were all extinguished within

twenty-four hours, and the inhabitants were “retiring to their homes fast.” Having stopped, “by hanging, flogging, etc.,” the insubordination of the troops and the rifling of the dead by the camp followers who had flocked in, Wellesley proceeded to bury those who had fallen.

During the four weeks of the siege the British lost 22 officers and 310 men, and no fewer than 45 officers and 1164 men were reported as wounded and missing.⁸ The Commander mentions that jewels of the greatest value, and bars of gold, were obtained. As the prize agents assessed the treasure taken at £1,143,216, the wealth of Seringapatam must have been astounding. Wellesley’s share came to about £4000.⁹ Hundreds of animals were required to carry the rich stuffs, plate, and richly-bound books from this city of opulence. A little humorous relief to so much sordidness is afforded by Wellesley’s difficulties regarding some of the late Sultan’s pets. “There are some tigers here,” he writes, “which I wish Meer Allum would send for, or else I must give orders to have them shot, as there is no food for them, and nobody to attend to them, and they are getting violent.” Tipú’s 650 wives gave less trouble than the wild beasts. They were removed to a remote region and set at liberty.

Wellesley’s next appointment was as Commander of the

⁸ Sir Herbert Maxwell, p. 35.

⁹ Gleig (p. 26) says £7000, Roberts (p. 11) £7000 in money and £1200 in jewels. Sir Herbert Maxwell (p. 39) calls attention to a letter, dated the 14th June 1799, in which Wellesley “gives it as 3000 pagodas in jewels, and 7000 in money; in all, 10,000 pagodas, equal to about £4000.”

Forces in Mysore. He proved himself to be particularly well fitted for the post, which obviously required a man of infinite tact, who could be lenient or severe as circumstances demanded. It was Wellesley's testing-time, and he did not fail either in administration or the rough and tumble of the "little war" so soon to fall to his lot. He had already served on a commission appointed to go into the question of the partition of the conquered Dominions, a small part of which was made over to the Peshwá, and larger shares to the Nizám and the East India Company respectively. The dynasty overturned by Tipú's father was restored. As the new Rájá of Mysore was only five years of age, he was scarcely able to appreciate the fact that his territory was so greatly diminished.

We now come to a story worthy of a place in the Arabian Nights. It concerns an adventurer who, later, assumed the truly regal title of King of the World. Dhoondia Waugh, to give him the name by which those who were unfortunate enough to make his acquaintance first knew him, was the chief of a band of robbers whom Tipú had captured and thrown into prison. Recognizing in him a brave man, the Sultan remitted the sentence of death and gave him a military appointment, thus turning his acknowledged abilities into a less questionable channel, for a thief must needs be fearless and daring if he is to succeed. For some reason not altogether clear, Dhoondia Waugh was again imprisoned, and he did not regain his liberty until the fall of Seringapatam, when he was liberated, together

with a number of other gaol-birds. The old thieving instinct reasserted itself, and as he encountered no difficulty in collecting a band of the late Tipú's cavalry, he speedily resorted to means and measures which alarmed the inhabitants of every place he visited. When pressed by the troops sent after them the horde took refuge in the territory of the Peshwá, the nominal head of the Marhattá confederacy. There they received anything but a cordial welcome, although it seems probable that reinforcements were obtained among the malcontents. However that may be, Dhoondia Waugh duly appeared near Savanore. Having the safety of the Mysore Dominions very much at heart, for he had supreme civil and military control, Wellesley started in pursuit of the freebooter. Several fortresses held by Dhoondia's unlawful bands were stormed, his baggage taken, and a number of guns captured.

An affray which took place near the Malpurda River at the end of July 1800, not only reduced the chief's forces, but caused many of his followers to forsake the cause, although their strength in the following September was considerably more than that at Wellesley's command; in actual figures, some 5000 against 1200. The operation on the 10th of that month, which proved decisive, was extremely difficult, for the enemy was strongly posted at a village called Conahgull. The Colonel charged with such cool daring and so determined a front, that after having stood firm for some time the enemy made off, closely pursued for many miles by the British cavalry. A dire and just retribution

was exacted; those who were not killed “were scattered in small parties over the face of the country.” The King of the World had fought his last battle. He was found among the slain.

It is frequently asserted that Wellesley held but a low opinion of the troops which he commanded, and he certainly passed harsh judgment on those who shared his later campaigns. Not so in this particular instance, however. In the dispatch detailing “the complete defeat and dispersion” of the forces of Dhoondia, he expressly remarks on the “determined valour and discipline” of the soldiers, the patience and perseverance displayed in “a series of fatiguing services,” and the excellent organization of the commissariat department.

Wellesley also showed that a kind heart is not necessarily the attribute of a weak nature. With a humanity entirely worthy so great a man, he had Dhoondia’s “supposed or adopted son” cared for, and afterwards placed £400 in the hands of trustees for his future use.¹⁰ “Had you and your regicide army been out of the way,” writes Sir Thomas Munro to Wellesley, “Dhoondia would undoubtedly have become an independent and powerful prince, and the founder of a new dynasty of cruel and treacherous Sultauns.”

This short campaign likewise furnishes us with one of the secrets of the success of our national military hero. Just before he set out on the long chase after the King of the World, he

¹⁰ In later years Wellington offered to provide for the unfortunate Spanish general, Alava, and gave him a small house in the park of Strathfieldsaye.

was offered a position particularly rich in prospects, namely, the military command of an expedition for the surrender of the Dutch island of Batavia. The sole condition was that Lord Clive, the Governor of Madras, to whom he was responsible, could spare him. A man who was moved by purely personal ambition would have had no hesitation in bringing all his influence to bear on the Governor in order to secure so good an opening. Wellesley, however, recognizing that he had already begun preparations for the running to earth of the bloodthirsty and cruel Dhoondia—an end much to be desired—asked Clive to accept or decline for him as he thought best. He neither pleaded for nor against, although he hoped that if Admiral Rainier were not starting at once he might be able to join him when the work on hand was finished. “I am determined that nothing shall induce me to desire to quit this country, until its tranquillity is ensured. The general want of troops, however, at the present moment, and the season, may induce the Admiral to be desirous to postpone the expedition till late in the year. In that case it may be convenient that I should accompany him....”

The Governor of Madras refused his permission, and there the matter ended. Months afterwards, when there seemed a probability of operations in the Marhattá Territory, Wellesley wrote a lengthy Memorandum on the means of carrying such a campaign to a successful issue. “The experience,” he notes in his opening remarks, “which has been acquired in the late contest with Dhoondia Waugh, of the seasons, the nature of the country,

its roads, its produce, and its means of defence, will be of use in pointing them out.”

Thus it will be seen that the knowledge gained by Wellesley during the performance of an individual duty was stored up for future use. A march or a campaign was not simply carried out and then dismissed. It was a lesson learned and to be remembered. In military matters he was to a very appreciable extent self-taught. No drill-book in existence can furnish skill or assure victory, and genius itself is valueless on the battle-field without a clear perception based on things ascertained—“the experience which has been acquired” referred to in the above communication. Napoleon, against whom Wellesley was to fight in the years to come, early recognized the supreme importance of this principle. “The adroit man,” he says, “profits by everything, neglects nothing which can increase his chances.”

The “Sepoy General” was such a man.

CHAPTER IV

War with the Marhattás

(1801–3)

“We must get the upper hand, and if once we have that, we shall keep it with ease, and shall certainly succeed.”

Wellington.

That disappointments are frequently blessings in disguise had already been proved by Arthur Wellesley. Unfortunately, it is easier to forget such a precept than to practise it, and each apparent failure to climb another rung of ambition's ladder is apt to be regarded as a definite set back. It was so with Wellesley, and a time of trial and perplexity followed the campaign of Seringapatam and the defeat of Dhoondia.

He eventually weathered the storm of depression which pressed upon him, as he weathered many another, but it must be admitted that he bent before it. It came about in this way. The French army in Egypt was still very active, although Napoleon had long since left it. He was now First Consul, and gradually preparing himself and the nation for the assumption of the Imperial crown. The Governor-General, henceforth to be known

as Marquis Wellesley,¹¹ was of opinion that a small expedition should be sent either to Batavia or the Mauritius, or to assist Sir Ralph Abercromby in his attempt to drive the French out of Egypt.

With one of these desirable objects in view his brother Arthur was given 5000 troops. He at once set off for Trincomalee, in the island of Ceylon, the headquarters of the little army, intent on personally superintending the arrangements. Shortly afterwards instructions came to hand from the Home Government that 3000 men were to be sent to Egypt. Colonel Wellesley was informed of this decision, and determined to lose no time in forwarding the project. Without receiving official word to do so, and still believing he held the premier post, he embarked the men and sailed for Bombay, where he had ordered an ample supply of provisions to be ready.

When off Cape Comorin, Wellesley received a letter from his brother, stating that he had appointed Major-General Baird to the command of the troops destined for the island of Batavia, which made it clear that the Governor-General had not then received the dispatches of the Secretary of State. Knowing that some at least of the troops on the transports would be required for Egypt, he proceeded on his way, and wrote to Baird of his intention. A little later a further letter came to hand from another source; but the fleet was in want of water, some of the troops had died, and "I was induced to adhere to my original plan."

¹¹ Created 20th December 1800.

Baird, who, on arriving at Trincomalee, found “the cupboard was bare,” was deeply incensed at Wellesley’s high-handed behaviour. The “culprit’s” feelings as to the Governor-General’s new appointment were also far from pacific. That he acted in perfect good faith is evident from the preceding, which is borne out in a lengthy dispatch in which he sought to justify his action in the eyes of his brother.

“I have not been guilty of robbery or murder,” he writes to Henry Wellesley from Bombay on the 23rd March 1801, “and he has certainly changed his mind; but the world, which is always good-natured towards those whose affairs do not exactly prosper, will not, or rather does not, fail to suspect that both, or worse, have been the occasion of my being banished, like General Kray, to my estate in Hungary.¹² I did not look, and did not wish, for the appointment which was given to me; and I say that it would probably have been more proper to give it to somebody else; but when it was given to me, and a circular written to the governments upon the subject, it would have been fair to allow me to hold it till I did something to deserve to lose it.

“I put private considerations out of the question, as they ought and have had no weight in causing either my original appointment or my supercession. I am not quite satisfied with the manner in which I have been treated by Government upon the occasion.

¹² The Austrian general, Kray, had succeeded Archduke Charles as Commander-in-Chief of the army in Germany in the campaign of 1800, but owing to his ill-success he was superseded in a few months by Archduke John, hence Wellesley’s reference.

However, I have lost neither my health, spirits, nor temper in consequence thereof. But it is useless to write any more upon a subject of which I wish to retain no remembrance whatever.”

Baird would have been scarcely human had he not felt hurt by finding himself head of a force which had disappeared, especially as the Colonel had already superseded him as Governor of Seringapatam. But he forgave, if he did not forget, and so did Wellesley. Some thirty years afterwards, when Baird's days of active soldiering were over, he remarked, during the course of a chat with Sir John Malcolm, who had himself done good service in India: “Time's are changed. No one knows so well as you how severely I felt the preference given on several occasions to your friend Wellesley, but now I see all these things from a far different point of view. It is the highest pride of my life that anybody should ever have dreamed of my being put in the balance with him. His name is now to me joy, and I may almost say glory.”

It is satisfactory to know that Arthur Wellesley was not foolish enough to allow the iron to enter into his soul to such an extent as to prevent him from co-operating with Baird, into whose hands he placed a “Memorandum on the Operations in the Red Sea,” accompanied by a letter acknowledging “the kind, candid, and handsome manner in which you have behaved towards me.” When the expedition was ready, Arthur Wellesley was laid low with a fever, consequently the Commander-in-Chief was obliged to sail without his lieutenant, not altogether to his discomfiture

one would surmise.

An attack of the dreaded Malabar itch did not tend to a speedy recovery of the invalid, but he was sufficiently well in May 1801 to resume his former duties at Seringapatam, where he had been reinstated by his brother. By living moderately, drinking little or no wine, avoiding much medicine, taking exercise, and keeping his mind employed, he eventually recovered. As Baird saw no fighting, his rival lost nothing by remaining in India.

Sir Herbert Maxwell¹³ assumes that Arthur Wellesley's fever was caused by disappointment, but as the latter expressly states that Baird's "conduct towards me has by no means occasioned this determination (namely, to resign the appointment), but that it has been perfectly satisfactory,"¹⁴ the statement is obviously based on a surmise that the Colonel was diplomatically lying. Everybody fully appreciates the influence of mind over matter, and thwarted desire may have weakened Wellesley's health, but surely the facts of the case scarcely justify so definite an assertion.

Colonel Wellesley remained in Mysore for nearly two years, during which he did his work both wisely and well, showing favour to none and justice to all. It was in February 1803 that the future Wellington, now a Major-General, received news that he was required for active service against the Marhattás. The war-like intentions of this powerful confederacy, which alone

¹³ "The Life of Wellington," pp. 45–6.

¹⁴ "Dispatches," vol. ii. p. 312.

could challenge British supremacy, had not escaped the notice of Government. The nominal head of the five native princes who constituted it was Baji Rao, the Peshwá of Poona, the others being Daulat Rao, Sindhia of Gwalior; Jeswant Rao, Holkar of Indore; the Gaikwár of Baroda, and the Bhonsla Rájá of Berar. Sindhia was the most powerful, and possessed a fine army drilled by French officers and commanded by Perron, a deserter from the French Marine.

Holkar had at his disposal no fewer than 80,000 splendidly-equipped men, mostly cavalry, likewise organized by European soldiers. Intense rivalry existed between these princes, and when, in October 1802, the latter invaded Poona, the armies of Sindhia and the Peshwá met with disaster. The Peshwá sought refuge with the British, and forthwith entered into an offensive and defensive alliance with Lord Wellesley as the only means of saving his territory. The chief clauses were that 6000 British troops should be kept at Poona, the expense being met by the assignment to the East India Company of certain territory; that the Peshwá would not make war with the other princes or allow them to prey on each other without the consent of Government; and that he should be reinstated in his capital. This arrangement, known as the Subsidiary Treaty of Bassein, soon had the effect of drawing together the remaining members of the Marhattá confederacy, cementing a friendship between Sindhia and Holkar, and an alliance between Sindhia and the Bhonsla Rájá. It is clear that the continued acknowledgment of the Peshwá as head of the

confederacy, now that he was under the ægis of the British, would have been to admit the supremacy of the conquering Power they so much resented. Lord Wellesley had already signed a defensive alliance with the Gaikwár of Baroda, and in order to be ready for eventualities, men from the armies of the three Presidencies, namely, Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta, were concentrated at various points, the first for operation on the north-west frontier of Mysore, the second for action about Surat and Broach, and the third for the occupation of Cuttack. A large force was also ordered to assemble at Cawnpore under General Lake, the Commander-in-Chief in India, while three corps were held in reserve. Major-General Wellesley was placed in command of a detachment of some 10,600 troops, to which must be added the Nizám's contingent of 8400 men under Colonel Stevenson, making 19,000 in all. His orders were to secure Poona, now held by a small garrison of Holkar's soldiers totalling not more than 1500. He was already on the march when he heard of the intention of the Governor, acting on Holkar's instructions, to burn the town on the approach of the British.

“We were within forty miles of the place”—Wellesley himself tells the story¹⁵—“when this resolution of Holkar's lieutenant was communicated to me. My troops had marched twenty miles that day under a burning sun, and the infantry could no more have gone five miles farther than they would have flown. The cavalry,

¹⁵ “The Life of Arthur Duke of Wellington,” by G. R. Gleig, M.A., F.R.G.S. (London Ed. 1864), pp. 33–4.

though not fresh, were less knocked up, so I got together 400 of the best mounted among them, and set off. We started after dark on the night of the 19th of April, and in the afternoon of the 20th we got close to the place. There was an awful uproar, and I expected to see the flames burst out, but nothing of the kind occurred. Amrut Rao—that was the Marhattá's name—was too frightened to think of anything except providing for his own safety, and I had the satisfaction of finding, when I rode into the town, that he had gone off with his garrison by one gate as we went in by another. We were too tired to follow, had it been worth while to do so, which it was not. Poona was safe, and that was all I cared for." In the following month the Peshwá returned to his capital.

Sindhia and the Rájá of Berar now busied themselves with gathering a large army at Burhanpur, ready to threaten the Deccan, Holkar retiring to Indore. Wellesley was no less active at Poona; his experience in Holland had taught him the all-important lesson that an efficient organization is a powerful ally. In addition, he was busy endeavouring to come to terms with Sindhia and the Rájá, for which purpose he had been given chief command of the British forces in the Marhattá states, with the fullest political authority. Similar powers were vested in General Lake in Northern India. After wasting as much time as possible in the negotiations so as to gain it for military preparations, Wellesley anticipated the inevitable. "I offered you peace on terms of equality," he writes on the 6th

August 1803, “and honourable to all parties: you have chosen war, and are responsible for all consequences.” On the following day hostilities were declared against Sindhia and the Rájá of Berar.

The stone-built fortress of Ahmednuggur, the capture of which would safeguard his communications with Poona and Bombay and prevent reinforcements from Southern India reaching the enemy, was his first object of attack. The main body of Sindhia’s men was threatening Hyderabad, but the place was well garrisoned and so solidly constructed that it looked as though it would defy whatever artillery could be brought to bear on it. Wellesley said that with the exception of Vellore, in the Carnatic, it was the strongest country fort he had ever seen. However, he began operations against the outworks on the 8th, after having made proposals for its surrender without favourable result. “The Arabs,” we are told, “defended their posts with the utmost obstinacy,” but towards evening were forced to quit the wall. On the following day the ground in the neighbourhood of the fort was reconnoitred and a commanding position seized, on which a battery of four guns was constructed for use during the attack. The first shots were fired on the 10th at dawn, and the storming party speedily began its work. Three times an officer ascended a scaling ladder propped against one of the walls, and thrice he was hurled down by the defenders. The fourth attempt was successful, and, followed by some of his men, the gallant soldier literally hewed a way into the town. The remaining troops,

pressing on, took the place of those who fell. At length the Commander of the enemy's forces surrendered, "on condition that he should be allowed to depart with his garrison, and that he should have his private property." His fourteen hundred men marched out of the fort, and Wellesley's troops took possession.

On the 23rd September the General found himself and his small contingent of some 8000 soldiers face to face with the whole combined army of Sindhia and the Rájá of Berar, a state of affairs brought about by unreliable information, causing the separation of Wellesley and Stevenson. At least 50,000 of the enemy were posted in a strong position behind the river Kaitna, near the village of Assaye. As Wellesley had received no reinforcements, and had only 17 guns compared with 128 commanded by skilful French officers at the disposal of the Marhattás, the disproportion of the forces was sufficiently obvious. To a general less experienced or daring the situation would have been considered sufficient cause for an instant retreat; even he called the attack "desperate." The problem for him to settle was, should he wait a few hours for Stevenson, or begin immediately with the scanty resources at his disposal? Although only 1500 of his men were British, the Commander-in-Chief decided on the latter alternative, ignoring the information vouchsafed by his guides that the river was absolutely impassable. Yet it was only by crossing the stream that he could take advantage of the opportunity to attack. Here Wellesley's native wit and acute intelligence—he himself called

it “common sense”—assisted him. His telescope merely revealed a village on either side of the stream. This fact suggested the probability of a neighbouring ford. On investigation such proved to be the case, and if the passage was difficult the General was at least fortunate in being able to carry out the operation without severe molestation by the enemy, who had foolishly neglected to guard this point. They repaired the omission so far as was possible by firing upon the oncoming army as it slowly waded across, but the losses were comparatively trivial. “All the business of war,” Wellesley once told Croker, “and indeed all the business of life, is to endeavour to find out what you don’t know by what you do.”

The battle began well by the routing of some of the infantry and artillery by the Highlanders and Sepoys. This advantage was almost immediately counterbalanced by the mistaken zeal of the officer commanding the pickets, supported by the 74th Regiment. He foolishly led his men against the village, thereby exposing them to the concentrated fire of the enemy’s artillery and musketry stationed there. Had he taken a less direct route, this could not have happened, but his enthusiasm overruled his caution. Men dropped down like ninepins in a skittle-alley when the ball is thrown by a skilful player. They fell by the dozen as they came within the zone of fire. Their comrades filled up the tell-tale gaps and continued to push on with a dogged tenacity entirely worthy their intrepid commander. Meanwhile what few British guns remained pounded away, and were silenced one by

one as the men who worked them fell dead at their post. The enemy's cavalry then proceeded to decimate the already sorely depleted ranks of the 74th.

At this moment the 19th Light Dragoons, under Colonel Maxwell, were hurled at Sindhia's troops. The charge turned the fate of the day. What remained of the 74th rallied under the support thus given, and when Wellesley led the 78th into action the village fell. An attempt was made by the enemy to rally, but it was too late. Men who, with true Oriental cunning, had fallen as though killed in order to avoid the oncoming British cavalry as they charged, and had escaped the iron-shod hoofs of the horses, rejoined the ranks, only to find that the day had been lost. The whole body was soon flying helter-skelter from the blood-stained field towards Burrampur, abandoning artillery, baggage, ammunition—everything that precluded swift movement. Twelve hundred of the Marhattás breathed their last on this memorable day.

In fighting this battle—"the hardest-fought affair that ever took place in India"—o'er again in the twilight of his days, the Duke of Wellington made light of the indiscretions of the officers at Assaye and remembered only their bravery. "I lost an enormous number of men: 170 officers were killed and wounded, and upwards of 2000 non-commissioned officers and privates;¹⁶ but we carried all before us. We took their guns,

¹⁶ 79 officers and 1778 soldiers were killed and wounded.—Sir Herbert Maxwell, p. 58.

which were in the first line, and were fired upon by the gunners afterwards, who threw themselves down, pretending to be dead, and then rose up again after our men had passed; but they paid dearly for the freak. The 19th cut them to pieces. Sindhia's infantry behaved admirably. They were in support of his cannon, and we drove them off at the point of the bayonet. We pursued them as long as daylight lasted and the exhausted state of the men and horses would allow; and slept on the field."¹⁷

Wellesley himself, although not wounded, lost two horses. An eye-witness has recorded that he had never seen "a man so cool and collected as he was the whole time." Stevenson arrived on the following evening, and set out almost immediately to follow the enemy, Wellesley being forced to remain owing to his lack of transport for the wounded, whom he refused to leave. The Colonel seconded Wellesley's magnificent victory by reducing the fortress of Burrampur on the 16th October, and that of Asseerghur on the 21st. Wellesley covered Stevenson's operations and defended the territories of the Nizám and the Peshwá. "I have been like a man who fights with one hand and defends himself with the other," he notes on the 26th October. "I have made some terrible marches, but I have been remarkably fortunate: first, in stopping the enemy when they intended to press to the southward, through the Casserbarry ghaut; and afterwards, by a rapid march to the northward, in stopping Sindhia, when he was moving to interrupt Colonel Stevenson's

¹⁷ Gleig, pp. 37–8.

operations against Asseerghur; in which he would otherwise have undoubtedly succeeded.”

CHAPTER V

Last Years in India

(1803–5)

“Time is everything in military operations.”
Wellington.

Bhonsla Rájá now became the immediate object of Wellesley's attention. While proceeding in quest of him the General received envoys from Sindhia requesting an armistice. This was granted on the 23rd November 1803, the principal condition imposed by Wellesley being that the enemy's army should retire forty miles east of Ellichpúr. This clause was not fulfilled, the cavalry of the wily Sindhia encamping at Sersooly, some four miles from the position occupied by Manoo Bappoo, brother of the Rájá, ready for immediate co-operation. Having again united their divisions, Wellesley and Stevenson pushed towards them. “A confused mass” about two miles beyond Sersooly proved to be the enemy's armies on the march. A little later the General made out “a long line of infantry, cavalry, and artillery, regularly drawn up on the plains of Argaum, immediately in front of that village.”

“Although late in the day,” says Wellesley in describing the events of the 29th November, “I immediately determined to attack this army. Accordingly, I marched on in one column, the

British cavalry leading in a direction nearly parallel to that of the enemy's line; covering the rear and left by the Mogul and Mysore cavalry. The enemy's infantry and guns were in the left of their centre, with a body of cavalry on their left. Sindhia's army, consisting of one very heavy body of cavalry, was on the right, having upon its right a body of pindarries and other light corps. Their line extended above five miles, having in their rear the village and extensive gardens and enclosure of Argaum; and in their front a plain, which, however, was much cut by watercourses, etc.

"I formed the army in two lines; the infantry in the first, the cavalry in the second, and supporting the right; and the Mogul and Mysore cavalry the left, nearly parallel to that of the enemy; with the right rather advanced in order to press upon the enemy's left. Some little time elapsed before the lines could be formed, owing to a part of the infantry of my division which led the column having got into some confusion. When formed, the whole advanced in the greatest order; the 74th and 78th regiments were attacked by a large body (supposed to be Persians), and all these were destroyed. Sindhia's cavalry charged the 1st battalion, 6th regiment, which was on the left of our line, and were repulsed; and their whole line retired in disorder before our troops, leaving in our hands 38 pieces of cannon and all their ammunition.

"The British cavalry then pursued them for several miles, destroyed great numbers, and took many elephants and camels and much baggage. The Mogul and Mysore cavalry also pursued

the fugitives, and did them great mischief. Some of the latter are still following them; and I have sent out this morning all of the Mysore, Mogul, and Marhattá cavalry, in order to secure as many advantages from this victory as can be gained, and complete the enemy's confusion.... The troops conducted themselves with their usual bravery....”

One of the bravest deeds performed during the battle of Argaum was that of Lieutenant Langlands, of the 74th. Wounded in the fleshy part of the leg by a spear, he promptly pulled out the weapon and thrust it through the body of the Arab who had thrown it. A Sepoy who witnessed this extraordinary display of self-possession, forgetting all discipline, rushed from the ranks and patted the young officer on the back, yelling in his native tongue, “Well done, sir; very well done!”

Wellesley next marched on the mountain fort of Gawilghur, strongly garrisoned by the Rájá's troops. This defence consisted of an outer and inner fort, the former protected by strongly-built walls, and the whole by ramparts and towers. Admittance was gained only by three gates, all extremely difficult of access by an invading army owing to the roads leading to them. That to the south, communicating with the inner fort, was long and steep, and could only be negotiated on foot; the second was exposed to the guns mounted on the west side and was extremely narrow and scarped by rock; the third, or north gate, communicated with the village. Wellesley chose the last as being the most practicable for his purpose, although he did not blind his eyes to the fact that

“the difficulty and labour of moving ordnance and stores from Labada would be very great.”

From the 7th December, when the corps under Wellesley and Stevenson marched from Ellichpúr by different routes, till the 12th, “on which Colonel Stevenson broke ground near Labada, the troops in his division went through a series of laborious services, such as I never before witnessed, with the utmost cheerfulness and perseverance. The heavy ordnance and stores were dragged by hand over mountains, and through ravines, for nearly the whole distance, by roads which it had been previously necessary for the troops to make for themselves.”

On the night of the 12th, Stevenson erected two batteries in front of the north face of the fort, and Wellesley one on the mountain, “under the southern gate.” Although firing was begun on the following morning, the breaches in the walls of the outer fort were not sufficiently large for practical purposes until the 14th. Next day, while the storming party was getting to work, Wellesley made two attacks from the southward so as to draw the enemy’s fire upon himself as much as possible. The north-west gate was carried, and a detachment entered without difficulty. Captain Campbell, with the light infantry of the 94th, then succeeded in fixing ladders against the wall of the inner fort. They “escaladed the wall, opened the gate for the storming party, and the fort was shortly in our possession.” In a later communication Wellesley mentions that he never knew a place taken by storm which was so little plundered, “and it is but doing

justice to the corps to declare that in an hour after having stormed that large place, they marched out with as much regularity as if they had been only passing through it.”

Bhonsla Rájá had already sent his vakeel¹⁸ to sue for peace. This was granted by his ceding to the Company the province of Cuttack, with the district of Balasore, and dismissing the European officers who had played so important a part in the drilling of his army. Sindhia also “began to be a little alarmed respecting his own situation,” and shortly afterwards concluded hostilities, handing over all the country between the Jumna and the Ganges, and several important fortresses. These happenings did not relieve Wellesley from active service. Several bands of freebooters, “the terror of the country,” consisting mainly of fugitive soldiers from the defeated armies, were carrying on lawless practices in the West Deccan. After crossing the Godavery, he and some of his troops marched many weary miles along bad roads, often at accelerated speed, in order to attack them, only to find that the enemy had received intelligence of their approach, probably from a traitor in Wellesley’s own ranks. With set purpose the General continued to follow where the marauders led, and eventually broke up the bands, securing the whole of their guns, ammunition, and baggage, thus depriving them of their means of warfare: “they have lost every thing which could enable them to subsist when collected.” Wellesley afterwards asserted that his chase of the freebooters was the

¹⁸ Envoy.

greatest march he ever made.

Towards the end of May 1804 Wellesley received instructions from the Governor-General to break up the army in the Deccan, the task of running to earth Holkar, the sole remaining enemy of the confederacy, being given to Lake. In the following month he relinquished his command, and after a short visit to Calcutta returned to Seringapatam. He had already requested that he might be allowed to leave India “when circumstances will permit it,” and the Commander-in-Chief had given him the necessary permission. He was dissatisfied because he had not been promoted since he became Major-General, “and I think that there appears a prospect of service in Europe, in which I should be more likely to get forward.” In addition, he was suffering from rheumatism, “for which living in a tent during another monsoon is not a very good remedy.” He sailed for the Homeland on the 10th March 1805, after six years of hard work, and still harder fighting, in the interests of British rule in India.

The following contemporary pen-portrait of “the Sepoy General,” sketched for us by Captain Sherer, will enable us to visualize him as he appeared at this time:

“General Wellesley was a little above the middle height, well limbed, and muscular; with little incumbrance of flesh beyond that which gives shape and manliness to the outline of the figure; with a firm tread, an erect carriage, a countenance strongly patrician, both in feature, profile, and expression, and an appearance remarkable and distinguished: few could approach

him on any duty, or on any subject requiring his serious attention, without being sensible of a something strange and penetrating in his clear light eye. Nothing could be more simple and straightforward than the matter of what he uttered; nor did he ever in his life affect any peculiarity or pomp of manner, or rise to any coarse, weak loudness in his tone of voice. It was not so that he gave expression to excited feeling.”

To what extent did the Governor-General influence his brother's career in India? First of all we must understand the position of the Marquis Wellesley. It was naturally one of tremendous power and responsibility. The glamour attached to the post was sufficiently evident to the general public. There it ended, for it was glitter rather than gold to its holder. The Directors of the East India Company, ever on the side of rigid economy and large dividends, expressly forbade the costly system of conquest and annexation, yet this was necessarily the sheet anchor of Wellesley's policy, as former chapters have shown. When pacific measures were tried and failed, it would have been disastrous to continue them. As it usually took over three months¹⁹ for a communication from India to reach England, it follows that the same period was necessary for a reply. The consequences of indecision on the part of the Viceroy, of waiting for advice from home in matters requiring urgency,

¹⁹ Alison in his “Lives of Lord Castlereagh and Sir Charles Stewart” (vol. i. p. 175), says that it generally took six months to make the voyage. When Sir James Mackintosh sailed from Portsmouth for Bombay in 1804 his vessel only occupied three months and thirteen days (see his “Memoirs,” vol. i. p. 207).

were therefore fraught with dire peril. On the other hand, if he showed too despotic tendencies he ran a grave risk of incurring displeasure. Indeed, this is exactly what happened, for Lord Wellesley was recalled in 1805 and censured by the Court of Proprietors. When, after thirty years, it became evident that his administration had been wise and not foolish, that he had carried out what would have had to be done eventually to establish British influence, the Directors relented and voted him a grant of £20,000.

Fortunately there was “a barrier state” in London between the Governor-General and the Directors in the person of the President of the Board of Control, the said Board consisting of Cabinet Ministers. This position had been occupied since July 1802 by Lord Castlereagh, who, on taking office, found that Wellesley had come to the conclusion that resignation was better than humiliation. He did much to smooth over the difficulties, and from that time until Wellesley’s return to England Castlereagh loyally supported the Viceroy on every possible occasion. For instance, when the reduction of the Indian establishment to 10,000 troops was seriously mooted by the Directors and the Cabinet at home, notwithstanding the threatening attitude of the Marhattá confederacy, it was largely due to Castlereagh’s support of Lord Wellesley’s demands that so absurd a policy was prevented.

The President of the Board of Control never interfered in the matter of patronage, knowing full well that the Governor-

General on the spot was better able to recognize merit for the special requirements of the service than a man thousands of miles away. This brings us back to our proper subject.

We have noted how Lord Mornington discerned the opportunity awaiting his brother in India, and how that brother reciprocated when the former was diffident in the matter of accepting the chief official post there. It is true that Wellesley was made Governor of Seringapatam over the head of Baird, his senior officer, but whether this appointment was due to the fact that Mornington influenced General Harris in the matter of his choice is not sufficiently evident. There is a strong suspicion that it was,²⁰ because Arthur Wellesley had only served as commander of the reserve, whereas Baird was the leader of the assault, and as such military tradition unquestionably favoured his appointment.

Again, in the matter of the Batavian expedition, the Governor-General offered Wellesley the appointment as military commander: "The King has given me the power of selecting the persons who are to conduct this expedition; ... and a conscientious sense of duty induces me to think that you are the most fit person to be selected for that service, provided you can safely be spared from Mysore for the period of the expedition...." In Mornington's opinion, "the expedition will be

²⁰ "His relationship to the Governor-General naturally lent much weight to his views with Lord Clive and General Harris, but," Sir Herbert Maxwell adds (p. 24), "it is remarkable how freely and frequently the elder brother sought the younger's advice."

very advantageous to the naval and military commanders.” On the other hand, we know that when the project was abandoned for a diversion on the coasts of the Red Sea, he superseded his brother. One wonders what would have happened when Wellesley set off for Bombay without instructions, had he not been closely related to the Governor-General. The Marquis certainly did not minimize Arthur’s successes to those at home. Writing to Addington, then Speaker of the House of Commons, in October 1800, he says, “My brother Arthur has distinguished himself most brilliantly in an expedition against an insurgent, who had collected a great force of predatory cavalry—the wreck of Tippú’s army.” Three years later, when Addington was Prime Minister, he again drew attention to his brother’s achievements, as follows:—

“My public duty will not permit me to be silent respecting Major-General Wellesley. His march from Mysore to Poona, his able conduct of the measures adopted for restoring the Peishwah, for conciliating the feudatory Mahratta chiefs who maintained their allegiance to the Peishwah, for preserving the dominions of the Nizám, and our interests at Hyderabad, combined with his sieges of Ahmednuggur, Burrampur, and Asseerghur, his glorious and splendid victories at Assaye and on the plains of Argaum, with the entire ruin of Sindhia’s French troops and powerful artillery in the Deccan, must place the name of General Wellesley among the most bright and distinguished characters that have adorned the military history of the British power in

India. He is now employed in reducing the main fortress of Perar, and in negotiating, with the utmost judgment and skill, the conditions of peace. I leave his merits to your justice, and to the judgment of his King and country. The pride and honour of being allied by the nearest ties of blood to such an officer cannot absolve me from the obligations of my public station, as the representative of the supreme civil and military authority in India; and I cannot, therefore, omit this testimony to the merits of General Wellesley without a positive violation of my duty.”²¹

Whatever may be thought of such glowing praise from a brother on the score of good taste, it evidently achieved its purpose, for before he left India, Arthur Wellesley was appointed an extra Knight Companion of the Bath and received the thanks of the King and Parliament.

Earl Roberts,²² in summing up this phase of the future Duke’s career, remarks: “On his arrival in India he found himself in a country where in almost every matter the power and influence of the Governor-General were supreme, and the Governor-General being his brother, he was quickly placed in a position of responsibility, which gave him the opportunity of developing his talents as a soldier and statesman in the best of all schools

²¹ “The Life and Correspondence of the Right Honble. Henry Addington, first Viscount Sidmouth,” by the Honble. George Pellew, D.D. (London, 1847), vol. ii. p. 242. In this connection see also “Wellington’s Dispatches,” vol. ii. pp. 335–36 n., and “Despatches, Minutes, and Correspondence of the Marquess Wellesley, K.G.,” vol. iii. p. 543.

²² “The Rise of Wellington,” by Earl Roberts, V.C., p. 26.

—the school of practice. It cannot be denied that in early life Wellington owed much to family influence,²³ and to a system of promotion which would now be stigmatized as jobbery. On the other hand, he took full advantage of every chance that was thrown in his way, and by his industry and capacity fully justified the exceptional favour with which he was treated.”

With this conclusion the present writer heartily agrees; whatever Sir Arthur gained from his relative’s assistance was amply repaid in his achievements. British India owes much to the brothers Wellesley.

²³ “Personal interest was as much recognized in those days as the chief motor in military promotion, as seniority and merit are now.”—Sir Herbert Maxwell, vol. i. p. 67.

CHAPTER VI

Service in England, Ireland, and Denmark (1805–7)

“I am not afraid of responsibility, God knows, and I am ready to incur any personal risk for the public service.”
Wellington.

When, in 1803, the short-lived Peace of Amiens came to an end, and Great Britain and France again resorted to the sword, Napoleon's first feat of arms was the conquest of Hanover. Thus, at the very beginning of the second phase of the Great War, George III found himself not only minus his hereditary continental possessions, but deprived of a very useful base for those futile military excursions so beloved of the British Government.

That His Majesty received the tidings of his loss “with great magnanimity, and a real kingliness of mind,” may or may not be true. His ministers asserted that such was the case; considerations of policy would have precluded them from saying otherwise.

However this may be, two months after Sir Arthur Wellesley landed in England, that is to say, in November 1805, he was

given the command of a brigade in an expedition to Hanover about to be undertaken by Lord Cathcart. The object was to rout the comparatively few French troops left to garrison the country, and to co-operate with Russian, Swedish, and Danish troops in ridding Germany of the common enemy. The surrender of Mack at Ulm, and Napoleon's wonderful victory at Austerlitz, although it followed within a few weeks of Nelson's signal triumph at Trafalgar,²⁴ completely shattered this desirable object, just as the negotiations that followed put an end to the ambitious hopes of the Third Coalition. The recall of the troops before they had been able to carry out any of the objects of the diversion, beyond gaining some thousands of adherents to the rank and file, therefore became imperative, and was duly effected.

Sir Arthur Wellesley now spent a short time in command of his brigade at Hastings, and he was gazetted colonel of the famous 33rd Regiment, which post had become vacant on the death of the venerable Marquis Cornwallis, his brother's successor in India. The next important event in his life, if not in his career, was his marriage to the Hon. Catherine Pakenham, thus consummating a romance begun many years before,²⁵ and his single ambition apart from the Army. The ceremony was performed in Dublin on the 10th April 1806, the bridegroom

²⁴ Shortly after his return from India Wellesley had his only interview with Nelson, an account of which is given in the author's companion work, "The Story of Nelson," pp. 113–4.

²⁵ See *ante*, p. 23.

being nearly thirty-seven years of age. One wishes it were possible to add that “they lived happy ever after.” Biography, the twin sister of History, tells us that it was not so, and Gleig suggests that a broken engagement with a second suitor, of which Wellesley was not informed on his return from India, was partly the cause.²⁶ Two days after the wedding Wellesley was elected Member of Parliament for Rye, his main object in seeking political distinction being that he might defend his brother’s administration in India, where his system of making recalcitrant States subsidiary to England, whilst retaining their own rulers, was the subject of an embittered attack. The “high crimes and misdemeanours” alleged against Lord Wellesley were referred to from time to time, but on the 17th March 1808, the following motion was carried by 182 votes against 31: “That it appears to this House that the Marquis Wellesley, in his arrangements in the province of Oude, was actuated by an ardent zeal for the service of his country, and an anxious desire to promote the safety, interests, and prosperity of the British Empire in India.” This did not altogether end the unsavoury affair, for another unsuccessful attempt to incriminate the statesman was made some time later.

Sir Arthur was by this time Chief Secretary for Ireland, having been appointed in the previous year. Once again we see two members of this distinguished family holding prominent appointments, for Henry Wellesley became one of

²⁶ “Personal Reminiscences of the first Duke of Wellington” (Edinburgh 1904), p. 274.

the Secretaries to the Treasury in the newly-appointed Portland ministry.

Barrington, whose acquaintance we have already made, relates an interesting anecdote of the soldier at this time. He met Lord Castlereagh, accompanied by a gentleman, in the Strand. "His lordship stopped me," he writes, "whereat I was rather surprised, as we had not met for some time; he spoke very kindly, smiled, and asked if I had forgotten my old friend, Sir Arthur Wellesley? whom I discovered in his companion, but looking so sallow and wan, and with every mark of what is called a worn-out man, that I was truly concerned at his appearance. But he soon recovered his health and looks, and went as the Duke of Richmond's²⁷ secretary to Ireland, where he was in all material traits still Sir Arthur Wellesley, but it was Sir Arthur Wellesley judiciously improved. He had not forgotten his friends, nor did he forget himself. He said that he had accepted the office of secretary only on the terms that it should not impede or interfere with his military pursuits; and what he said proved true...."

Obviously his duties in Ireland bear no comparison with those he so successfully undertook in India, but following his own maxim, "to do the business of the day in the day," he got through a vast amount of routine labour, frequently important, sometimes trivial. Under the former head we must put his investigation of the military defences of the island. It must not be forgotten that although the invasion of the United Kingdom by Napoleon was

²⁷ Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland.

no longer a standing menace, there was always a likelihood of its resurrection, and Ireland was the danger zone.

The Peace of Tilsit, signed between France and Russia on the 7th July 1807, and between France and Prussia on the 9th of the same month, was a most serious blow to British interests. By a secret treaty the Emperor Alexander undertook to aid Napoleon against England if that Power refused to make peace within a certain period, to recognize the equality of all nations at sea, and to hand back the conquests made by her since 1805. As a bait—it really savoured of insult—Great Britain was to be offered Hanover. Should she refuse these terms the Autocrats of France and of Russia agreed to compel Denmark, Sweden, and Portugal to join them in a vast naval confederacy against Great Britain, and to close their ports against her. In addition, the reigning monarchs of Spain and Portugal were to be deposed in favour of the Bonaparte family. For his connivance in the matter Alexander was to be handsomely compensated in the Ottoman Empire and by territorial acquisitions in Western Europe.

Fortunately, or otherwise, according to the point of view, the British Cabinet was put in possession of certain facts regarding these plans. Canning, who was Minister for Foreign Affairs, realizing the responsibilities of his unenviable position, as also of that of his country, determined to forestall the plotters. He felt that some kind of arrangement with Denmark was essential, especially as the Prince Regent of Portugal had communicated news to the effect that Napoleon purposed to invade England

with the Portuguese and Danish fleets. Canning suggested to Denmark that her fleet should be put in the safe custody of England until peace was restored. In addition, he promised a subsidy of £100,000, and the assistance of troops should Denmark be attacked. Mr F. J. Jackson was sent to open negotiations; the Prince Royal promptly vetoed them. "I stated plainly," says Jackson, "that I was ordered to demand the junction of the Danish fleet with that of England, and that in case of refusal it was the determination of His Majesty to enforce it."

Lord Cathcart was put in command of an army of 27,000 troops, the naval portion of the expedition being placed in the hands of Admiral Gambier. No sooner had Sir Arthur Wellesley heard of the project than he communicated with Castlereagh, then at the War Office and ever his staunch supporter, for an opportunity to take part. He was given charge of a division. On the 3rd August a formidable array of twenty-five sail-of-the-line and over fifty gunboats and transports appeared off Elsinore. Gambier and Cathcart were told by Jackson "that it now rested with them to carry out the measure prescribed by the British Government." In a letter to his brother the diplomatist adds, "The Danes must, I think, soon surrender, for they are without any hopes of succour, are unfurnished with any effectual means of resistance, and are almost in total want of the necessaries of life, as far as I could learn or was able to see for myself during my few hours' stay there."²⁸ There were no droves of cattle or flocks of

²⁸ At Copenhagen.

sheep; no provisions of any sort being sent in the direction of the city. No troops marching towards the town; no guns mounted on the ramparts; no embrasures cut, in fact, no preparations of any sort. What the Danes chiefly rely on is the defence by water. They brought out this morning several *praams*²⁹ and floating batteries, and cut away one or two of the buoys.

“The garrison of Copenhagen does not amount to more than four thousand regular troops. The *landwehr* is a mere rabble, as indeed all *levées en masse* must be.

“The people are said to be anxious to capitulate before a conflagration takes place, which must happen soon after a bombardment begins, when, not improbably, the fleet as well as the city will become a prey to the flames.”

Jackson’s prophecy came true, but against his statement that the army disembarked at Veldbeck “in grand style,” we must set that of Captain Napier: “I never saw any fair in Ireland so confused as the landing; had the enemy opposed us, the *remains* of the army would have been on their way to England.”³⁰ Wellesley’s first affray—it can scarcely be termed a battle—took place at Roskilde. Like almost everything connected with the expedition, Jackson has something to say about it, and that “something” in this particular instance is anything but complimentary. “Sir Arthur Wellesley,” he tells his wife, “has had an affair which you will probably see blazoned forth in

²⁹ Flat-bottomed boats, usually armed with small guns.

³⁰ Sir Herbert Maxwell, vol. i. p. 87.

an extraordinary *Gazette*. With about four thousand men he attacked a Danish corps of armed peasantry, and killed and wounded about nine hundred men, besides taking upwards of fifteen hundred prisoners, amongst whom were sixty officers. One was a General officer. I spoke to him this morning, for he and his officers are let off on their parole. The men are on board prison ships, and miserable wretches they are, fit for nothing but following the plough. They wear red and green striped woollen jackets, and wooden *sabots*. Their long lank hair hangs over their shoulders, and gives to their rugged features a wild expression. The knowing ones say that after the first fire they threw away their arms, hoping, without them, to escape the pursuit of our troops. In fact, the *battle* was not a very glorious one, but this you will keep for yourself.”³¹

Wellesley himself afterwards referred to the event as “the little battle at Kiöge,” and mentioned that “the Danes had made but a poor resistance; indeed, I believe they were only new raised men—militia.”³²

The bombardment of Copenhagen began on the 2nd September 1807, and concluded three days later, when an armistice was granted in order that terms might be discussed. On the 7th, Copenhagen capitulated. The conditions imposed by Sir Arthur Wellesley, Sir Home Popham, and Lieutenant-

³¹ Wilson is wrong in some of his facts. The Danish troops numbered some 14,000, and 1100 prisoners were taken. See Sir Herbert Maxwell, vol. i. p. 87.

³² “The Croker Papers,” vol. ii. pp. 120–21.

Colonel Murray were that the British should occupy the citadel and dockyards for six weeks, and take possession of the ships and naval stores. Their troops would then evacuate Zealand. "I might have carried our terms higher ... had not our troops been needed at home," Wellesley writes to Canning. The various clauses were carried out, and fifteen sail-of-the-line, fifteen frigates, and thirty-one smaller vessels of the Danish fleet, as well as 20,000 tons of naval stores, were escorted to England. "That the attack was necessary," says a recent historian, "no one will now deny. England was fighting for her existence; and, however disagreeable was the task of striking a weak neutral, she risked her own safety if she left in Napoleon's hand a fleet of such proportions. In Count Vandal's words, she 'merely broke, before he had seized it, the weapon which Napoleon had determined to make his own.'"³³ Dr J. Holland Rose disapproves, and points out that "In one respect our action was unpardonable: it was not the last desperate effort of a long period of struggle: it came after a time of selfish torpor fatal alike to our reputation and the interests of our allies. After protesting their inability to help them, Ministers belied their own words by the energy with which they acted against a small State."³⁴

Canning's hope for an alliance with Sweden, in order to keep open the Baltic, was destined never to be fulfilled. Sir John Moore was sent to assist Gustavus in his efforts to resist the

³³ H. W. Wilson, B.A., in "Cambridge Modern History," vol. ix. p. 236.

³⁴ "The Life of Napoleon I," vol. ii. p. 143.

attacks of Russia, but the nation deserted the King, deposed him, and joined Napoleon. War speedily broke out between Sweden and Denmark, and also between the latter and Great Britain. The Czar's overtures to England on behalf of France, as arranged at Tilsit, came to nothing. He was not anxious for them to have any other ending, so enraptured was he with Napoleon's grandiloquent schemes. Enraptured? Yes, but only for a few short years.

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