

*The Life and Opinions of General Sir Charles James Napier, G.C.B.* By Lieut.-General Sir W. Napier, K.C.B., &c. &c. 4 vols 12 mo. With Portraits. London, 1857.

'Thus,' says Sir William Napier, 'shall be the story of a man who never tarnished his reputation by a shameful deed—of one who subdued distant nations by his valor, and then governed them so wisely that English rule was revered and loved where before it had been feared and execrated.' This, we may add, is the story of a man who united in his person qualities as fascinating as were ever combined in a hero—of a man who joined to the chivalry of a soldier the sensitiveness of a woman—whose soul seemed by turns to be flaming with fire and melting with tenderness—whose life presents a singular combination of romantic adventures with domestic virtues—of memorable deeds with the unflinching commentary of sagacious reflections and touching sentiments.

Romance meets us at the opening page of the biography. The maternal grandfather of Charles Napier was the second Duke of Richmond, who was summoned from college to wed the daughter of Lord Cadogan, a girl in the nursery. The principals had not been consulted on the match, which was arranged between their parents in settlement of a gambling debt; and when the young Lord March caught sight of his bride, he exclaimed with alarm, 'Surely you are not going to marry me to that dowdy?' Immediately after the ceremony he was hurried away to the continent in charge of a tutor, and remained abroad for three years. Dreading on his return to see the dowdy he had led to the altar, he went to the theatre instead of to his house, and had his attention attracted to a beautiful woman, the reigning toast of that day. He inquired her name, and found that this admired of all admirers was his own wife. He died in 1730, and such was the happiness which had resulted from the inauspicious alliance, that his widow pined away through grief at his loss, and only survived him a twelvemonth.

Her daughter, Lady Sarah, the future mother of Charles Napier, had not been without her share of romance, for if George III. had had his will she would have been queen of England. 'She was,' says Horace Walpole, 'a lady of the most blooming beauty, shining with all the graces of unaffected but animated nature.' Though she once refused the monarch, she persevered in his courtship till he gained her consent. Then his mother interposed, and such was her ascendancy at that period, that he mechanically accepted the bride she had selected for him, and resigned the choice of his heart.

On his mother's side Charles Napier was fourth in descent from Charles II. of England, and sixth in descent from Henry IV. of France. On his father's, says Sir William, 'he traced his lineage to the great Montrose, and the still greater Napier of Merchiston, the inventor of logarithms. Hence the blood of the white-plumed Bearnos commingled with that of the heroic Highlander in his veins, and his arm was not less strong than theirs in battle.' The lapse of years produces strange conjunctions. The grandson of the mathematician lost his lands fighting for Charles I., and, having asked them back in vain at the hands of Charles II., he died in destitution. 'Now,' continued Sir William, 'a descendant of the ungrateful dissolute monarch, whose merry life made others so sad, was united to a descendant of the despoiled lord, and they and their children were to struggle with poverty.—Had the confiscated lands been restored, the Napier inheritance would have been vast; for the lost estate is said to have comprised all the ground covered by the new town of Edinburgh, up to the tower of Merchiston.' The royal blood shows well in the Napier line. They have not been a race renowned for meekness, but the celebrated brothers with whom our generation is familiar have always displayed a kinglike grandeur of mind.

The Honorable George Napier, the father of our hero, was himself an extraordinary person. His son looked back to him throughout life as the model of all that was great and commanding, and, at a late period of his own career, when reviewing the distinguished deeds of himself and his brothers, he declared that they were

none of them equal to him. 'I have never,' he adds, 'seen his equal, but sons are possibly not good judges. However, we all resolved not to disgrace him, and were he alive he would be astonished.' George Napier had been a pupil of Hume the historian, had served in the American war, had subsequently filled a variety of situations, in all of which he distinguished himself, though none of them afforded sufficient scope for his remarkable talents, and ended by becoming Comptroller of Military Accounts in Ireland, where he recovered several millions of money for the public. He was of large stature, and, as will be seen from the description in one of the journals of his son, was possessed of proportionate strength:—

"He was 6 feet 3 inches, and the handsomest man I ever laid eyes on. I do not think there was a perceptible fault in his figure. Sir Joshua Reynolds said his only fault was that his neck was too short. I have known him take a powder quart, and squeeze it out in his hand like a bit of paper. He took me in his arms, and carried me in his arms about Prince Alexander's Cathedral, a friend, who was a friend. My father once stood under a great statue, which extended straight from the shoulder, and his head scarcely touched the Prince's arm; he said no two men would have had a chance in comingling with Great."

To this Sir William adds that his imposing appearance had such a striking resemblance to the mourning grenadier in West's picture of the death of Wolfe, that he was erroneously supposed to have sat for the figure; 'but his form was grander, his eye more lustrous, his forehead less fleshy, showing more blood, and his jaw more square and determined.' An instance is related in the biography of his prowess. During the period which preceded the Irish rebellion the soldiers were law perpetrators and sometimes the subjects of menial brutality. Two, who were passing along a deep road, asked a question of some hay-makers in a field above, and were answered by a brother of Charles Napier with boyish levity. The men, irritated, climbed the walled fence, and one of them declared he would bayonet the child. The father came in sight at the moment, and 'leaping like a panther rather than a man,' hastened to the spot. 'The soldiers, alarmed in their turn, jumped back into the road. Regardless of the bayonets they presented to the eminence above, Colonel Napier jumped after them, and with a six-foot quarter-staff, which he carried in his hand, laid both the ruffians in the dust. Then seizing the chief offender, he dragged him, striding like a giant as he was, towards the village, and delivered him, roaring for mercy, into the custody of a sergeant. Two remarkable examples of his sagacity will show that his mental qualities kept pace with his physical. Being in the same regiment with Erskine, he saw the direction in which his genius lay, and prevailed on him to quit the army for the bar; and when Ensign Wellesley was commonly considered in Ireland 'a shallow, saucy stippling,' Colonel Napier discerned in him the germs of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington. 'Those,' he said, 'who think lightly of that had are unwise in their generation; he has in him the makings of a great general.' There is another point on which subsequent experience has abundantly proved the justness of his perceptions. Though a liberal in politics, 'his principles were immovably monarchical, and he held democracy to be an ever-seething caldron, in which the steam continually rose to the surface.'

Charles Napier was born at Whitehall the 10th of August, 1782. His parents removed to Celbridge, ten miles from Dublin, when he was three years old, and he grew up amid the turbulent scenes which marked the coming period.—His early character was in keeping with his father. He was only six when a showman, with a wild aspect and a stentorian voice, commanded a terrified sweep to perch himself on the top of a ladder which the performer was about to balance on his chin. Colonel Napier asked his son if he would accept the post from which the professional climber shrunk in dismay. 'Silent for a moment, he seemed to fear, but, suddenly looking up, said Yes, and was borne aloft amid the cheers of the spectators.'

He had his commission at twelve years of age, and accompanied his father to the camp at Netley. Juvenile as he was, he must have appeared still younger from his diminutive form, for tho'

his parents and his brothers were all of the stature, maltreatment by a nurse had stunted his growth. His constitution recovered, but his frame remained slight, and an incident which did not occur till four years after his admission into the army indicates that he must have appeared in the camp at Netley much like a delegate from Lilliput. His father, at the period of the Irish rebellion, secured the country with a company of the Derry militia. In a pitch-dark night they came face to face with some supposed insurgents. Before a light could commence Col. Napier called out a military order, to be sure that they were foes. An answering cry proclaimed their friends. 'At that moment the moon shone out, and Charles Napier was seen, with his small fuzil, charging bayonets in opposition to Tim Sullivan, the biggest man of the Cork militia. Tim looked down in astonishment an instant, and then, catching his small foe up in his arms, kissed him.'

The resolution with which the little hero was about to charge early men in the dark, which always aggravates fear, was a picture of the courage he invariably displayed in situations of peril. The forward bravery, however, for which he was renowned was not the result of physical temperament, but of an indomitable mind. He had that force of will which enables the higher faculties of the understanding to control its weaker instincts—a power which he shared with his Bearnos ancestor, who quavered with apprehension before the battles in which he exclaimed to his soldiers, 'Follow my white plumes, they will ever be found in the path which leads to glory'—a power which he possessed in common with the great Turenne, who, observing his legs shake at the commencement of an action, said, apostrophizing them, 'You would tremble much more if you knew where I was about to carry you.' When the nervous impulses are marked, the mental strength which acts in defiance of them must be of that superior order which conquers circumstances and is a sure indication of a greatness born to command. The natural timidity of Charles Napier did not, perhaps, equal that of either the Monarch or the Marshal, but his during, cool or fiery as the occasion required, and always sustained, was not inferior to theirs, nor his self-control less complete. His father's choice and the associations of childhood carried him into a profession which, much as he shone in it, was never to his taste. Though the sense of duty, the necessity for action, and his genius for war, might excite his enthusiasm, his sentiments were to the last the same which he has described when at twenty-one years of age he got his troop, and could not summon up one emotion of pleasure at this early attainment of the object of a young soldier's ambition. 'To me military life is like dancing up a long room with a mirror at the end, against which we cut our faces, and so the deception ends. It is thus gaily men follow their trade of blood, thinking it glitters, but to me it appears without brightness or reflection, a dirty red.'

In analysing his feelings before he had served against an enemy, Charles Napier recorded that he should be more affected in battle by the dislike of being maimed than by the fear of being killed. By a singular fate his lot was to be twice maimed to a degree which was hardly consistent with life, and in almost unparalleled dangers to escape being killed. His liability to bodily accidents seemed hardly less in peace than in war. At ten in leaping a bank he tore the flesh from his leg in a frightful manner, and at seventeen he broke it in jumping over a ditch. On looking down he saw his foot under his knee, and the bones protruding. Sick at the sight and in violent pain, he had yet the nerve to make a companion hold his leg below while he pulled it up above, and thus set it himself. The surgeons pronounced that it must come off, but deferred the ultimate verdict to the second day. Being young and vain of his legs, he resolved to commit suicide rather than live on mutilated, and he sent the maid to buy some laudanum, which he hid under his pillow. 'Luckily,' says he, 'the doctors found me better, and so saved me from a contemptible action. Perhaps, if it had come to the point, I might have had more sense and less courage than I gave myself credit for.' When he was sufficiently recovered to walk, he found that the bones had been set awry. 'This,'