

## The Critic.

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### THE CONQUEROR OF QUEBEC.

BY PROF. GOLDWIN SMITH, D.C.L.

A discussion which was raised some time ago by a very pleasant article of Professor Wilson in the *Canadian Monthly* disclosed the fact that Wright's "Life of Wolfe," though it had been published some years, was still very little known. It is not only the best but the only complete life of the soldier, so memorable in Canadian annals, whom Chatham's hand launched on our coast, a thunderbolt of war, and whose victory decided that the destiny of this land of great possibilities should be shaped not by French but by British hands. Almost all that is known about Wolfe is here, and it is well told. Perhaps the biographer might have enhanced the interest of the figure by a more vivid presentation of its historic surroundings. It is when viewed in comparison with an age which was generally one of unbelief, of low aims, of hearts hardened by vice, of blunted affections, of coarse excesses, and in the military sphere one of excesses more than usually coarse, of professional ignorance and neglect of duty among the officers, while the habits of the rank and file were those depicted in Hogarth's *March to Finckley* that the life of this aspiring, gentle, affectionate, pure and conscientious soldier shines forth against the dark background like a star.

Squerrys Court, near Westerham, in Kent, is an ample and pleasant mansion in the Queen Anne style, which has long been in the possession of the Warde family—they are very particular about the estate. In later times it was the abode of a memorable character in his way—old John Warde, the "Father of Fox-hunting." There it was that the greatest of all fox-hunters, Asheton Smith, when on a visit to John Warde, rode Warde's horse *Blue Ruin* over a frozen country, through a fast run of twenty-five minutes and killed his fox. On the terrace stands a monument. It marks the spot where in 1741, James Wolfe, the son of Lieut. Col. Wolfe, of Westerham, then barely fourteen years of age, was playing with two young Wardes, when the father of the playmates approached and handed him a large letter "On His Majesty's Service" which, on being opened, was found to contain his commission in the army. We may be sure that the young face flushed with undisguised emotion. There cannot be a greater contrast than that which the frank, impulsive features, sanguine complexion, and blue eyes of Wolfe present to the power expressed in the

commanding brow, the settled look, and the evil eye\* of Napoleon.

James Wolfe was a delicate child, and though he grew energetic and fearless, never grew strong, or ceased to merit the interest which attaches to a gallant spirit in a weak frame. He escaped a public school, and without any forfeiture of the manliness which public schools are supposed exclusively to produce, retained his home affections and his tenderness of heart. He received the chief part of his literary education in a school at Greenwich, where his parents resided, and he at all events learned enough Latin to get himself a dinner, in his first campaign on the Continent, by asking for it in that language. He is grateful to his school-master, Mr. Stebbings, and speaks of him with affection in after-life. But no doubt his military intelligence, (as well as his military tastes,) was gained by intercourse with his father, a real soldier, who had pushed his way by merit in an age of corrupt patronage, and was Adjutant-General to Lord Cathcart's forces in 1740. Bred in a home of military duty, the young soldier saw before him a worthy example of conscientious attention to all the details of the profession—not only to the fighting of battles, but to the making of the soldiers with whom battles are to be fought.

Wolfe's reign of peace was over, the "Patriots" had driven the nation into war, and the trade of Colonel Wolfe and his son was again in request. Before he got his commission, and when he was already thirteen years and a-half old, the boy's ardent spirit led him to embark with his father as a volunteer in the ill-fated expedition to Carthageia. Happily, though he assured his mother that he was "in a very good state of health," his health was so far from being good that they were obliged to put him on shore at Portsmouth. Thus he escaped that masterpiece of the military and naval administration of the aristocracy, to the horrors of which his frail frame would undoubtedly have succumbed. His father saw the unspeakable things depicted with ghastly accuracy by Smollett, and warned his son never, if he could help it, to go on joint expeditions of the two services—a precept which the soldier of an island power would have found it difficult to observe.

Wolfe's mother had struggled to prevent her boy going, and appealed to his love of her. It was a strong appeal, for he was the most dutiful of sons. The first in the series of his letters is one written to her on this occasion, assuring her of his affection and promising to write to her by every ship he meets. She kept all his letters from this one to the last written from the banks of the St. Lawrence. They are in the stiff old style, beginning "Dear Madam," and signed "dutiful;" but they are full of warm feeling, scarcely interrupted by a little jealousy of temper which there appears to have been on the mother's side.

Wolfe's first commission was in his father's regiment of marines, but he never served as a marine. He could scarcely have done so, for to the end of his life, he suffered tortures from sea-sickness. He is now an Ensign in Duroure's regiment of

\*The late Lord Russell, who had seen Napoleon at Elba, used to say that there was something very evil in his eye.