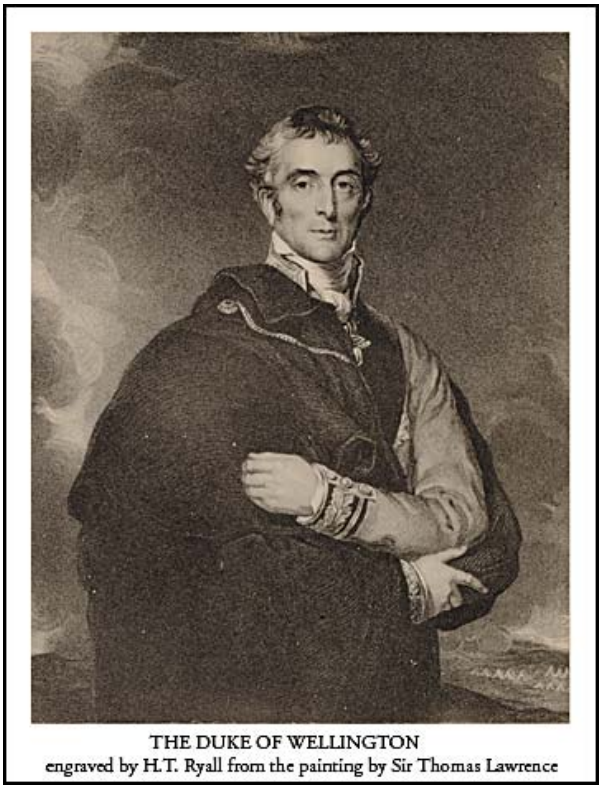


THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON
engraved by H.T. Ryall from the painting by Sir Thomas Lawrence

"KING ARTHUR"
(The Duke of Wellington)

Note:
The following essay was written by ***Francis (Frank) Josiah Hudleston*** **(1869-1927)** C.B.E., Librarian at the War Office, Chevalier of the Legion of Honour.

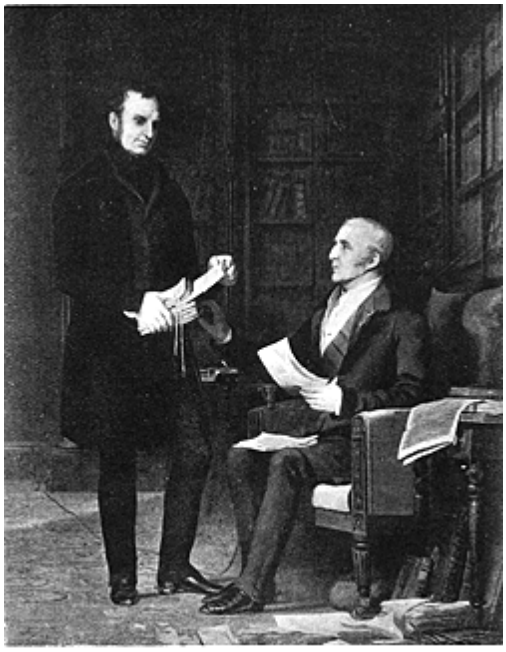
GEORGE IV had probably as many faults as mistresses, but there were redeeming features in his character. He was not so false as his brother, Cumberland; so pompous as his brother, Kent; so half-baked as his brother, Clarence. He treated Mrs. Fitzherbert shamefully, but he always wore her miniature, and it was buried with him. He was an excellent mimic, and would take off to perfection the solemn politicians of his day, Messrs. Boodle, Coodle and Doodle. He possessed, as Mr. Turveydrop noticed, that rare gift, Deportment, and had the courage to wear a kilt when owning a figure not altogether suited for that scanty garb. He bestowed a baronetcy upon Walter Scott, and he gave the Duke of Wellington the admirable nickname at the head of this article.

Many volumes have been written about the Duke as a soldier, our greatest General since Marlborough, and, indeed, never likely to be eclipsed, as our next great General, if mechanicalization goes the full swing, is likely to be a kind of Internal Combustion Robot; and you cannot compare a man with a machine. There have also been many biographies of the Duke, mostly indifferent, excepting, of course, that by Sir Herbert Maxwell. Most of these lives are painfully official panegyrics, and it is difficult to get from them any idea as to what he really was as a man. The truth seems to be that he was not, as others have pointed out, a lovable character.

He was, of course, first and foremost, an aristocrat; although the Duc de Berri described him, rather ungratefully, as a parvenu. It is typical that the best-known incident of his schooldays is that he fought and knocked out a boy of the plebeian name of Smith (Bobus Smith, brother of the Cheerful Canon). He was always an enemy of what the early Victorians used to call “Calico and Cant." He distrusted and loathed the populace, and democracy filled him with disgust. The soldiers who helped him to win battles were "scum", and the only thing that did them any good was flogging.

But, after all, is there anything more impressive than a real old "honest-to-God”, blue-blooded, red-nosed, purple-cheeked, port-drinking, fox-hunting English peer? Not, of course, a peer of more modern creation, like "Lord Plush” (of Plush's Perfect Pies) and his fellows; many of whom, probably, do not know who and what their great-grandfathers were, or, if they do know, would not wish any one else to share their knowledge of facts which you will certainly not find in Burke. For “burke”, thanks to the ingenious friend of Mr. Hare, is a verb as well as a proper name.

There is an historical picture commemorating the completion of the "Dispatches” showing the Duke looking somewhat haughty, and his editor, Colonel Gurwood, looking like a Melancholy Monument of Dyspepsia. One would give much to have a companion painting to this, by that eminent Victorian artist, Augustus Fudge, R.A., portraying young Mr. Alfred Tennyson ("Schoolmiss Alfred”, as Lord Lytton called him) announcing to the Duke that he (Mr. A. T.), after giving the matter his serious consideration, had, on the whole, come to the conclusion that Kind Hearts were more than Coronets. and Simple Faith than Norman Blood. (And Echo answered: *Blood!)*



THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON
AND JOHN GURWOOD

Stemmata quid faciunt? Well, if they do nothing else they enable one to go about one's business, or pleasure, without worrying unduly about other people's feelings. What Englishman, for example, cannot but admire that later Duke, who, on being informed "by a demnition Yankee, by Gad, Sir", that he (the condemned one) was, as the courteous American phrase goes, "pleased to meet him," drew himself up, and said, with icy hauteur, "And so you damned well ought to be." It is incidents like this which cause one to quote with faltering voice and glistening eye those noble lines (written by another Duke) equal in sentiment to anything in "Paradise Lost“:

> Let wealth and commerce, laws and learning die,
> But leave us still our old Nobility.

Perhaps the Duke of Wellington carried his carelessness for other people's feelings almost to an extreme, as witness the cases of Norman Ramsay, Colonel Bevan, Major Todd, Colonel Sturgeon and Colonel Gurwood.

The Ramsay incident took place two days after Vittoria. Ramsay was in the Artillery, an arm in praise of which the Duke was always very grudging, some might say, unjust. He had intended that Ramsay's troop should not move until he himself had sent orders, and he declared that he had told Ramsay so. Ramsay got a different idea of what the Duke had said and produced four witnesses who gave exactly the same account of the Duke's instructions as he himself. The Duke would not hear a word, Ramsay's name was left out of the dispatch and he was kept under arrest for four weeks. ”He was present with his troop at Waterloo, and Wellington spoke kindly to him as he rode down the line. Ramsay did not answer, merely bowed his head gravely, and was shot through the heart [like George Osborne] about 4 p.m."

The Bevan incident is more painful. Lord Stanhope (Wellington's Boswell) once asked him, "How came the French garrison (under Brennier) at Almeida to escape?" The Duke: "That was the fault of our Colonel Bevan, who afterwards shot himself when he had found out what he had done. *I don't think* (one cannot omit italics) *it appears in the Dispatches.*" What really seems to have happened is that Sir William Erskine, who, before he went out to the Peninsula had been under restraint as a lunatic, and who was not unacquainted with the Demon, Rum, kept an important order in his pocket and forgot to send it to Colonel Bevan. Sir C. Oman says, "Public opinion in the army held that Bevan had been sacrificed to the hierarchical theory that a General must be believed before a Lieutenant-colonel."

Another incident that "does not appear in the Dispatches” (though it probably gave the Recording Angel food for thought) is the case of Major Todd. The ghastly snobbishness of this is almost incredible. The Rev. G. R. Gleig (1) tells the story. Major Todd of the Staff Corps was the son of the butler of one of the Royal Dukes. Soon after the army had entered France from the Pyrenees, a bridge, for the construction of which he was responsible, broke down. The Duke was at dinner. Major Todd arrived and was promptly informed that his excuses were worthless. He stood riveted to the ground near the Duke's chair. Wellington turned round with, "Are you going to take up your father's trade?” The next day there was a skirmish in a vineyard, and the officer in command of our troops, seeing Todd present, rode up to him and said, "They can hardly miss you if you place yourself in an alley like that" "I don't want them to," was the answer, and "almost immediately the poor fellow dropped dead, riddled with musket balls."

General Sir George Napier (2) tells us a somewhat similar story of the same date about Colonel Sturgeon, also of the Staff Corps. Colonel Sturgeon, who had done admirable work during the Peninsular War, was Commandant of the Corps of Guides, and when called upon by the Duke upon an important occasion to produce a guide, was unable to do so. “He was very severely reprimanded by Lord Wellington in presence of a number of officers who were at dinner at headquarters. Poor Sturgeon sank completely under it, and a few days afterward, took the opportunity to gallop in among the enemy's skirmishers, and got shot through the head." Sir George adds, “I am sure Lord Wellington felt it afterwards and deeply, (3) too, but he always kept to

that system of never acknowledging he was wrong or mistaken." It is an extraordinary coincidence that there should have been two unhappy cases like this at the same place and date. It seems very probable that Gleig, who, of course, as an ex-Chaplain General, could not be guilty of a lie, has confused Major Todd with Colonel Sturgeon. He was a very old man when he wrote his "Reminiscences", and Todd was certainly not killed on this occasion.

It is also the pleasantly garrulous Gleig who gives us the case of Colonel Gurwood. Gurwood, the editor of the "Dispatches", had kept a careful diary of the Duke's conversation, just as Lord Stanhope did. But Gurwood was not a Peer, and when the Duke heard what he had done, he sent for him and requested that the MS. should be burnt. "He made a bonfire of his precious memoranda, and he never held up his head again." He cut his throat in December, 1845. The Duke gave no "sign of commiseration", but peremptorily demanded what papers had been in the possession of the dead man. Mrs. Gurwood, the delightful Fanny Mayer of that fascinating book, "A Romance of the Nineteenth Century", by C. H. Dudley Ward, wrote a letter to the Duke, the tone and temper of which "seem to have touched him on a raw spot." The apology that he wrote to the indignant and unhappy widow was of a very grudging nature.

That the Duke was an excellent father is evident from the fact that he declined to encourage his eldest son in extravagance by refusing to pay Mrs. Tompkins for his son's washing bill, which this good lady complained had been outstanding for some time; and also from the story that he joined Crockford's so as to be able to blackball the Marquis of Douro. Lord Douro told Sir William Napier, in 1830 that Sir John Moore was as great a man as his father, which is perhaps arguable, and he added that "what he liked best in Sir John Moore was his kindness of disposition" - which is significant. The Duke did much for his brother and his brother did more for him. But when his brother died he said of him - on the day of his death - "an agreeable man - when he had his own way." There is nothing so vulgar as fraternal gush.

But the Iron Duke could unbend, and was distinctly a ladies' man. (4) Who was not at this period? He said that no woman ever loved him; but, from all accounts, he himself was not insensible to female blandishments, nor did he cast a cold and disapproving eye upon the charms of the fair. But he was discreet. Mr. Windham (who, one is apt to forget, was a friend of Doctor Johnson) in defending the Duke of York, said, "If a Commander-in-Chief is to have a mistress, one hardly knows how he should regulate his conduct so as to render it less injurious to public morals." The same may be said of the Duke of Wellington. It is related of him that a phrenologist, whom he once consulted, was much struck by his bump of caution. Young Mr. W. E. Gladstone also noticed this in 1836. He addressed several remarks to the Duke, possibly on those lively topics, Church and State, and the Duke, rather in the manner of an Edmund Lear limerick, merely replied "Ha!" The simplicity of this "Ha!" must have struck that master of tortuous verbiage, the late G.O.M., like a brick dropped from a great height upon his head. (5) Lord Lytton wrote of the Duke:

"Warm if his blood, he reasons while he glows;
Admits the Pleasure, ne'er the Folly knows.
If for our Mars his snare had Vulcan set,
He had won the Venus; but escaped the net."

Which is sad stuff. Moreover, it is not human to "glow" and reason at the same time. Basil Jackson, in his "Notes and Reminiscences-of a Staff Officer", tells us of a glowing episode in Brussels, just before Waterloo. He was sitting in the park when a "very great man walked past, and immediately a carriage drove up and a lady got out of it and joined him. They went down into a hollow where the trees completely screened them. Another carriage then arrived and from it alighted Lady M. N., who went peering about searching in vain for her daughter, Lady F. W." Lady Mountnorris seems to have been an interfering old lady, and the Duke had later to write to Captain Webster, Lady Frances's husband, that he "declined to have any communication with Lady Mountnorris." In this story of Jackson's one does not know whether to admire more the strategist who brought the lady unchaperoned to the battlefield, or the tactician who immediately took cover.

Mrs. Arbuthnot was another of his fair friends. The mischievous Creevey (6) calls her "the Beau's Flirt." She was a beauty of the day and was, with her husband, the Duke's constant companion. Scandal was whispered of them, but *ce cher* Gleig, while admitting that she and the Duke walked together arm-in-arm in the streets, remarks, very wisely, "Regent Street is scarcely the locality which persons meditating any outrage on decorum would select as the place of recreation." I am sure all my readers, whichever their sex will endorse this. (7) It is pleasant to read that Mr. Gleig firmly believed in the "possible existence of a pure and lasting friendship between persons of opposite sexes": the fact that he was nearly ninety when he wrote this is immaterial.

Mrs. Arbuthnot

How different from that cynical and slightly deaf general officer who, when asked by a lady, "Do you, then, General, believe that Platonic affection is impossible, even in the case of a philosopher? " replied coldly, "Madam, 1 can make no exception, not even in the case of a Field Officer." Perhaps he was right, at all events so far as field officers are concerned. In the Duke's relations with women there is nothing queerer than the " Miss J." episode. Miss J. was that astounding Young Person whose correspondence with the Duke, ranging from 1834 to 1851, lay hidden "in a trunk in an attic within thirty miles of New York City" until 1890, when it was published in this country. (8) An attic near New York City does not somehow inspire confidence: indeed, 1 have seen many at the cinema and they are generally most sinister. Were I a native of the city in question, 1 should be inclined to describe the whole story as bunk. But there can be no doubt from the style and wording of the Duke's letters that they are genuine. Sir Herbert Maxwell, who has seen the actual MSS., says that "they are indubitably in the Duke's handwriting."

Miss J. appears, to use the modern jargon, to have suffered from complexes and repressions. She began well by converting "poor Cook, a hardened criminal lying under sentence of death." She then, although Bonaparte and Waterloo were mere vague names to this attractive young woman, turned her attention to the Duke of Wellington, and persuaded him to call upon her. He “waited in the parlour" and Miss J., "after compliments", as they used to say in the East, said, "I will now show you my Treasure! " She did so. It proved to be - was the Duke, one wonders, disappointed? - "a large beautiful Bible." Shortly afterwards "to my astonishment he eagerly seized my hand, exclaiming “Oh! *How I love you*." This remarkable interview (for which, of course, we have only Miss J.'s authority - it is not "mentioned in the Dispatches”) ended with the Duke exclaiming: “God Almighty!”

Nor can one blame him. And he must have repeated it many a time with a groan, for this singular girl pelted him with letters, tracts and "spectacle wipers." Her avowed object was to save his poor sinful soul, which she appears to have regarded as being black, with yellow spots. The Duke's courtesy in bearing with her evangelical frenzies is remarkable, but, as he said himself, "I am in the habit of writing answers to all letters." And, indeed, he was, for “Miss J.” received from him some three hundred and ninety letters, of most of which he might have said:

“On fire that glows
With heat intense
I turn the hose
Of Common Sense."

Poor Miss J., in fact, suffered from religious mania. Her real name was Jenkins and her motto, so far as the Duke was concerned, appears to have been, " Up Jenkins and at him."

That careful observer, Greville, wrote of Wellington, “The Duke is a very hard man, he takes no notice of any of his family, (9) he never sees his mother, (10) and has only visited her two or three times in the last few years; and he has not now been to see Lady Anne, though she has been in such affliction for the death of her only son, and he passes her door every time he goes to Strathfieldsaye." His brother also said that "he had a hard heart." (11)

He inherited from his father a taste for music, and, when a subaltern, was fond of playing the violin: in later years Madame de Lieven would play "Hanoverian Waltzes" upon the piano, and he would accompany her on that pleasant, but not very difficult instrument, the triangle. He was a constant attendant at the concerts of Ancient Music (12) at the Hanover Square Rooms, and, when there, "always took care to sit between two handsome women on a sofa." He had a grim rather than a keen sense of humour, and Lord Broughton says that he had only made one joke in his life, and that not a very good one. When some plan of the youthful Disraeli's had miscarried, the Duke remarked, "The Jew boy's harp is out of tune." Disraeli bore no malice, and, when Wellington died, delivered a magnificent panegyric on him - which he borrowed almost in its entirety from an *oraison funebre* by Thiers. But the Duke made one excellent bon mot: when the mob in Pall Mall insisted on his saying "God bless Queen Caroline," he did so, and added, sardonically, "And may all your wives

be like her."His laugh was not melodious: indeed, Sam Rogers says that it was "like the whoop of a whooping-cough often repeated."

Lord Stanhope said of him that he was fond of children, and particular mention is made of his kindness to “Oggy” and "Bo" (both in the Peerage, though not under these delightful names). This is all very well, but were children fond of him? I happen to know a benevolent and mild old gentleman who is as fond of children as he is of cats. And I have been privileged to observe a child, so soon as this fond old gentleman's back was, apparently, turned, contort his little face horribly and protrude his ungrateful little tongue until he looked more like a gargoyle than a Soaring Human Boy.

There are two remarkable instances of the Duke's generosity. He gave Alava (13) the run of his bank - but Alava was a grandee. He offered a sum of money to Lord Hill when in difficulties - but Lord Hill ("Daddy" as his men called him) was in face and nature a military Samuel Pickwick, and radiated benevolence. One cannot help thinking that this was the reason for the Duke's offer, just as Tony Weller offered to help Mr. Pickwick because he was the most kind-hearted man that this unfortunate victim to the wiles of a "widder" had ever met.

He did not make a parade of religion, but with his stem sense of duty believed implicitly in the doctrines of the Church of England as by Law Established. W. H. Fitchett puts it well: "He had the same sort of belief in religion that he had in the Regulations of the War Office." In the pleasant old manner, he had in his pew -at the Strathfieldsaye church "a little stove heated by wood which he kept supplying pretty frequently." According to Gleig he usually went to sleep during the sermon, and sometimes " snored audibly." And no wonder: most "War Office Regulations" are more lively reading than the average country parson's sermons of the Duke's day.

One is strongly tempted to believe that there is something in the theory that Wellington was raised up by Providence (14) to be a Scourge to Napoleon. In this connection the hard-headed Greville has a very curious note in recording the death of Huskisson in 1830. Huskisson was accidentally killed by one of the pernicious, newfangled Steam Loco-Motives before the very eyes of the Duke. Greville writes: "As to the Duke of Wellington, a fatality attends him, and it is perilous to cross his path. Canning had scarcely reached the zenith of his power, when he was swept away; and no sooner is he (the Duke) reduced to a state of danger and difficulty than the ablest of his adversaries is removed by a chance beyond all power of calculation." Odd words these, from a dried-up old public servant, that "old official hack of quality" as Carlyle calls the Gruncher.

This Scourge theory is a very attractive theory, and would explain many things. You cannot expect a Predestined Scourge to be kind-hearted and affable.

But the Duke, whatever his failings as a man, never lost a gun, and, Blucher or no Blucher, beat "Boney” at "that damned near run thing, that pounding match”, Waterloo, where, as everybody knows, Lord Anglesey suddenly observed, " By God, I've lost my leg!” "Have you, by God?" replied the Duke. There is a noble simplicity about this reply; it is what the French call *un mot historique*. Is there any phrase in English military history equal to it?

We are too near to the Great War to be able to guess what the Muse of History will say of the chief actors in it. The memories of its battles will live forever on the Colours, and Macaulay's New Zealander will gravely salute the Cenotaph. But will the names of the Generals who won it, and who lost it, and of the politicians who did what they did, ever become such household words as the names of Napoleon and Wellington always have been and always will be?

This is a question to which one can only reply in the terse and expressive phrase of Main Street – “Search me"

Author’s footnotes:
(1) Whom I remember describing many years ago in the Army Review -an early literary victim of the European War -as "an indefatigable bookmaker." Alas! How flippant one can be when young! Return

(2) The Duke summed up the Napiers admirably: "All clever - but troublesome." Return

(3) One wonders. Return

(4) George Elers, writing of Wellington in India in 1801 says: "Colonel Wellesley had at that time a very susceptible heart, particularly towards, I am sorry to say, married ladies." Return

(5) The Duke could be even more laconic than this. At midnight, after Waterloo, when von Muffling said to him: “The Field-Marshal (Blucher) will call the battle 'Belle-Alliance ' he made no answer, and 1 perceived at once that he had no intention of giving it this name." Return

(6) Creevey had a nickname for everybody. His own should have been The Gossiping Imp." Return

(7) Although, of course, as the old story has it, those who walk up or down Regent Street can always “take Liberty's on the way." Return

(8) It was reprinted in 1924. It is curious that it was also in New York that another batch of famous love letters was discovered. These were the letters of Mrs. Piozzi (Dr. Johnson's Mrs. Thrale) to "dearest Mr. Conway", the handsome actor. She was nearly eighty when she wrote them. What would the Doctor have said! Return

(9) "He seems," says Larpent, "not to think much about you when once you are out of the way." Return

(10) Who, however, one must remember, when he was a child, used to call him "my ugly boy", and said contemptuously that he "would be only food for powder." Return

(11) Elers, who had been on the best of terms with Col. Wellesley in India, offered him, in 1836, a "Newfoundland Dog." Wellington wrote back coldly, “The Duke has no occasion for a Newfoundland Dog and will not deprive Mr. Elers of him." No

wonder poor Elers endorsed another letter from the Duke: “Can this man have a heart!” It is painful to learn from the editor of the Elers “Memories" "There is no trace of what became of the Dog after the Duke's refusal to adopt it." Return

(12) Which of course does not mean Stone Age, but what we call Classical. Return

(13) Alava was not only present at Trafalgar and Waterloo, but was also the nephew of an Inquisitor. That this is a record there can be, to quote a gentleman in the same line of business as Alava's uncle, "No manner of doubt, No possible, probable shadow of doubt, No possible doubt whatever." Return

(14) He wrote from the field of Waterloo to Lady Frances Webster, “I have escaped unhurt: the finger of Providence was on me." Return