

With Marlborough to Malplaquet eBook

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Contents

With Marlborough to Malplaquet eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	6
Page 1.....	7
Page 2.....	9
Page 3.....	10
Page 4.....	12
Page 5.....	14
Page 6.....	16
Page 7.....	18
Page 8.....	20
Page 9.....	21
Page 10.....	23
Page 11.....	25
Page 12.....	27
Page 13.....	29
Page 14.....	31
Page 15.....	33
Page 16.....	35
Page 17.....	37
Page 18.....	39
Page 19.....	41
Page 20.....	43
Page 21.....	44
Page 22.....	46

Page 23.....	48
Page 24.....	49
Page 25.....	51
Page 26.....	53
Page 27.....	54
Page 28.....	55
Page 29.....	57
Page 30.....	59
Page 31.....	60
Page 32.....	62
Page 33.....	64
Page 34.....	66
Page 35.....	68
Page 36.....	70
Page 37.....	72
Page 38.....	73
Page 39.....	75
Page 40.....	77
Page 41.....	79
Page 42.....	81
Page 43.....	83
Page 44.....	85
Page 45.....	87
Page 46.....	89
Page 47.....	91
Page 48.....	93

Page 49.....	94
Page 50.....	96
Page 51.....	97
Page 52.....	98
Page 53.....	100
Page 54.....	102
Page 55.....	104
Page 56.....	106
Page 57.....	108
Page 58.....	110
Page 59.....	112
Page 60.....	114
Page 61.....	115
Page 62.....	116
Page 63.....	118
Page 64.....	119
Page 65.....	121
Page 66.....	123
Page 67.....	124
Page 68.....	125
Page 69.....	127
Page 70.....	129
Page 71.....	131
Page 72.....	133
Page 73.....	135
Page 74.....	137

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	
Section	Page
Start of eBook	1
CHAPTER I	1
CHAPTER II	6
CHAPTER III	12
CHAPTER IV	17
CHAPTER V	24
CHAPTER VI	29
CHAPTER VII	35
CHAPTER VIII	41
CHAPTER IX	47
CHAPTER X	54
CHAPTER XI	59
CHAPTER XII	65
CONCLUSION	65
REIGN OF QUEEN ANNE	68
CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF PRINCIPAL EVENTS	71
Herbert Strang's Stories for Boys	73

Page 1

CHAPTER I

A BOUT AT SINGLESTICK

“Get thee down, laddie, I tell thee.”

This injunction, given for the third time, and in a broad north-country dialect, came from the guard of the York and Newcastle coach, a strange new thing in England. A wonderful vehicle the York and Newcastle coach, covering the eighty-six long miles between the two towns in the space of two-and-thirty hours, and as yet an object of delight, and almost of awe, to the rustics of the villages and small towns on that portion of the Great North Road.

It was the darkening of a stinging day in the latter part of December, in the year 1701—it wanted but forty-eight hours to Christmas Eve—when the coach pulled up at the principal inn of the then quiet little country town of Darlington, a place which roused itself from its general sleepiness only on market and fair days, or now, since the mail-coach had begun to run, on the arrival or departure of the marvellous conveyance, whose rattle over the cobble-stones drew every inhabitant of the main street to the door.

No reply coming from the boy on the roof, the guard went on, “Eh, but the lad must be frozen stark,” and swinging himself up to the top of the coach, he seized the dilatory passenger by the arm, saying, “Now, my hearty, come your ways down; we gang na further to-day. Ye are as stiff as a frozen poker.”

“And no wonder,” came a voice from below; “’tis not a day fit for man or dog to be out a minute longer than necessary. Bring the bairn in, Charley.” The invitation came from a kindly and portly dame, the hostess, who had come to the door to welcome such passengers as might be disposed to put up for the night at the inn.

“I don’t think I can stir,” the boy replied; “I’m about frozen.”

He spoke in low tones and as if but half awake. He was, in fact, just dropping into a doze.

“Here, mates, catch hold,” the guard cried, and without more ado the lad was lowered down to the little group of loafers who had come to see the sight and to pick up any stray penny that might be available. A minute later George Fairburn was rapidly thawing before the rousing fire in the inn’s best parlour, and was gulping down the cup of hot mulled ale the good-natured landlady had put into his trembling hands.

“I’m all right, ma’am, now, and I’ll go. Thank you and good night, ma’am.”

“Go, Fairburn?” cried another boy of about his own age, who sat comfortably in the arm-chair by the cosy chimney corner. “Surely you are not going to turn out again this bitter night?”

“Indeed I am,” was the somewhat ungracious reply; “my father is not a rich man, and I’m not going to put him to needless expense.”

The other boy blushed, but the next moment his face resumed its usual pallor. He was tall for his fourteen years, but evidently not particularly strong. He had, in truth, somewhat of a bookish look, and his rounded shoulders already told of much poring over a student’s tasks. Fairburn, on the other hand, though less tall, carried in his face and form all the evidence of robust good health.

Page 2

"I've relatives somewhere in Darlington, Blackett," George explained, in a rather pleasanter tone, as if ashamed of his former surly speech, "and I'm going to hunt them up."

"Look here, Fairburn," said the other, springing from his seat and placing a patronizing hand on his companion's shoulder, "just make yourself comfortable here with me for the night, and I'll settle the bill for both of us in the morning." He spoke rather grandly, jingling the coins in his pocket the while.

"I can settle my own bills, thank you," answered Fairburn, a proud hot flush overspreading his face. And, seizing his little bag, the lad strode from the room and out of the inn, shivering as the chill northeasterly breeze caught him in the now dark and almost deserted street.

"Confound the fellow with his purse-proud patronage!" he muttered as he hurried along.

"Bless me, why is he so touchy?" Blackett was asking himself at the same moment. "We seem fated to quarrel, Fairburn's family and ours. Whose is the pride now, I wonder! Fairburn thinks a deal of his independence, as he calls it; I should call it simply pride, myself. But I might have known that he wouldn't accept my offer after his refusal of an inside place with me this morning, and after riding all those miles from York to-day in the bitter cold. Heigh-ho, the quarrel won't be of my seeking anyhow."

These two lads were both sons of colliery owners, and both pupils of the ancient school of St. Peter of York, the most notable foundation north of the Humber. But there the likeness ended. Matthew Blackett's father was a rich man and descended from generations of rich men. He owned a large colliery and employed many men and not a few ships. He was, moreover, a county magnate, and held his head high on Tyneside. In politics he was a strong supporter of the Tory party, and had never been easy under the rule of Dutch William. He was proud and somewhat arrogant, yet not wanting his good points. George Fairburn, on the other hand, was the son of a much smaller man, of one, in truth, who had by his energy and thrift become the proprietor of a small pit, of which he himself acted as manager. The elder Fairburn was of a sturdy independent character, his independence, however, sometimes asserting itself at the expense of his manners; that at least was the way Mr. Blackett put it. Fairburn had been thrown much in his boyhood among the Quakers, of which new sect there were several little groups in the northern counties. He was a firm Whig, and as firm a hater of the exiled James II. He had made some sacrifice to send his boy to a good school, being a great believer in education, at a time when men of his class were little disposed to set much store by book learning.

Page 3

After breakfast by candlelight next morning the passengers for the coach assembled at the door of the inn. Blackett was already comfortably seated among his many and ample rugs and wraps when George Fairburn appeared, accompanied by a woman who made an odd figure in an ancient cloak many sizes too big for her, covering her from head to foot. It had, in fact, originally been a soldier's cloak, and had seen much hard service in the continental campaigns under William III. The good dame was very demonstrative in her affection, and kissed George again and again on both cheeks, with good sounding smacks, ere she would let him mount to the roof of the coach. Then she stood by the window and talked volubly in a rich northern brogue till the vehicle started, and even after, for George could see her gesticulations when he was far out of earshot.

"It is bitter cold, bairn," she had said for the third or fourth time, "and I doubt thou wilt be more dead than alive when thy father sees thee at Newcastle. But don't forget that pasty; 'tis good, for I made it myself. And there's the sup of summat comforting in the little bottle; don't forget that."

"Good-bye, aunt, and thank you over and over again," George called from the top of the coach. "Don't stay any longer in the freezing cold. I'm all right."

But the talkative and kindly old dame would not budge, and Blackett could not help smiling quietly in his corner. "What a curious old rustic!" he said to himself, "and she's the aunt, it appears." As for George himself, he was thinking much the same thing. "A good soul," he murmured to himself, "but, oh, so countrified!"

Fairburn's limbs were pretty stiff by the time the grand old cathedral and the castle of Durham standing proudly on their cliff above the river came in sight. There was an unwonted stir in the streets of the picturesque little city. My lord the bishop with a very great train was coming for the Christmas high services.

"Our bishop is a prince," explained the guard, who had had not a little talk with George on the way. "There are squires and baronets and lords in his train, and as for his servants and horses, why—" the good fellow spread out his hands in his sheer inability to describe the magnificence of the bishops of Durham.

"Yes," Fairburn made answer, "and I've heard or read that when a new bishop first comes to the see he is met at Croft bridge by all the big men of the county, who do homage to him as if he were a king."

The guard stared at a youngster, an outside and therefore a poor passenger too, who appeared so well informed, and then applied himself vigorously to his horn.

The afternoon was fast waning when the coach brought to its passengers the first glimpse of the blackened old fortress of Newcastle and the lantern tower of St.

Nicholas. Fairburn, almost as helpless as on the previous afternoon, was speedily lifted down from his lofty perch by the strong arms of his father.

Page 4

"Ah, my dear lad," the elder cried as he hugged George to his breast, "the mother has a store of good things ready for her bairn and for Christmas. And here is old Dapper ready to jog back with us and to his own Christmas Eve supper. How do you do, sir?"

These last words were addressed to a gentleman who had just driven up in a well-appointed family equipage.

"I hope I see young Mr. Blackett well," Fairburn continued.

"Ah! 'tis you, Mr. Fairburn," said the great man condescendingly. "This is your boy? Looks a trifle cold, don't you think? 'Tis bitter weather for travelling outside."

And with the curtest possible nod to the father, and no recognition whatever of the son, Mr. Blackett linked his arm in Matthew's and strode away to his carriage.

George flushed, his father looked annoyed; then his face cleared.

"Come, lad," he said, "let us get along home."

Thursday, Christmas Day, and the Friday following passed quietly but happily in the little Fairburn family. The father was in excellent spirits, and he had much to tell his son of the prosperity that was at last coming. Orders were being booked faster than the modest staff of the colliery could execute them. Best of all, Fairburn had secured several important contracts with London merchants; this, too, against the competition of the great Blackett pit.

"The truth is," the elder explained, "Mr. Blackett is too big a man, and too easy-going to attend to his business as he should. But I suppose he's rich enough and can afford to be a trifle slack."

"Whereas my dad has energy and to spare," George put in with a smile, "and by that energy is taking the business out of the hands of the bigger man. The Blacketts won't be exactly pleased with us, eh?"

"They are not. And, more, I hear the Blackett pit is working only short time; it is more than likely that several of the men will have to be discharged soon, and then will come more soreness."

"We can't help that, dad," the boy commented, "it's a sort of war, this business competition, it seems to me, and all is fair in love and war, as the saying goes."

"True, my lad; yet I'm a peaceable man, and would fain enter into no quarrels."

On the Saturday afternoon a neighbour brought word up to the house that there was some sort of a squabble going on down at the river side.

“Better run along and see what is the matter, George,” said the mother. “Father’s gone to the town and won’t be back till supper time.”

So the boy pulled on his cap, twisted a big scarf about his neck, and made off to the Tyne, nearly a mile away.

He found a tremendous hubbub on the wharf, men pulling and struggling and cursing and fighting in vigorous fashion. What might be the right or the wrong of the quarrel, George did not know, and he had not time to inquire before he too was mixed up in the fray. The first thing that met his eye, in truth, was one of the crew of the Fairburn collier brig lying helpless on his back and at the mercy of a fellow who was showing him no favour, but was pounding away at the upturned face with one of his fists, whilst with the other hand he held a firm grip of his prostrate foeman.

Page 5

"Let him get up, coward!" the lad shouted as he rushed to the spot. "Let him get up, I tell you, and fight it out fair and square."

The fellow was by no means disposed to give up the advantage he had obtained, however, and redoubled the vigour of his blows.

He was a strong thickset collier, not an easy man to tackle; but without more ado George flung himself at the bully, and toppled him over, the side of his head coming into violent collision with the rough planks of the landing-stage.

"Up with you, Jack!" George cried, and, seizing the hand of the prostrate sailor, he jerked him to his feet. Jack, however, was of little more use when he had been helped up, and staggered about in a dazed and aimless sort of way. He was, in truth, almost blind, his eyes scarce visible at all, so severe had been his punishment, while his face streamed with blood.

Meanwhile his antagonist had jumped to his feet, his face black with coaldust and distorted with fury.

"Two on ye!" he yelled with an oath, "then I must fend for myself," and he seized a broken broom handle that was lying near.

"A game of singlestick is it?" George replied gleefully, as he made a successful grab at another stick a couple of yards away. It was the handle of a shovel; there were several broken tools lying about the quay.

"Come on," said the boy, brandishing his short but heavy weapon, "this is quite in my line, I can tell you!"

It was a curious sight as the two rushed upon each other, so unequal did the antagonists seem. Bill, the collier, was tall as well as strongly built, and in the very prime of life; while George, though a sturdy lad for his age, was many inches shorter, and appeared at first sight an absurdly inadequate foeman.

In a moment the sticks were clattering merrily together, the lad hesitating not a whit, for he felt sure that he was at least a match for the other. George Fairburn had ever been an adept at all school games, and had spent many a leisure hour at singlestick. In vain did Bill endeavour to bring down his stick with furious whack upon the youngster's scalp; his blow was unfailingly parried. It was soon evident to the man that the boy was playing with him, and when twice or thrice he received a rap on his shoulder, his arm, his knuckles even, his fury got quite beyond his control, and he struck out blindly and viciously, forcing the lad backwards towards the edge of the wharf.

But Fairburn was not to be taken in that style. Slipping agilely out of the way, he planted another blow, this time on his opponent's head. In a trice Bill threw down his cudgel

and, raising his heavy boot, endeavoured to administer a vicious kick. It was time to take to more effective tactics, and while the man's leg was poised in the air, George put in a thwack that made his skull resound, and threw him quite off his already unstable balance. Bill fell to the ground and lay there stunned, a roar of laughter hailing the exploit, with shouts of, "Thrashed by a lad; that's a grand come off for Bill Hutchinson!"

Page 6

George now had time to look about him. He found that the enemy, whoever they might be, had been beaten off, and the crew of the Fairburn brig was in possession of the landing-stage.

“What is it all about, Jack?” he inquired of the man to whose rescue he had come.

“Why,” returned Jack, “they are some of Blackett’s men. They tried to shove us from our berth here, after we had made fast, and bring in their big schooner over there. Some of ’em are vexed, ’cos ’tis said there’ll be no work for ’em soon. Your father’s taking a lot of Blackett’s trade, you see.”

“Did they begin, Jack, or did you?”

“Begin? Why, it was a kind of mixed-up job, I reckon. We’d both had a drop of Christmas ale, you see—a drop extra, I mean—and—why, there it was.”

“Well, you’ll be sailing for London in a day or two,” said George. “See that you keep out of the way of Blackett’s men, or you’ll find yourself in the lock-up and lose your place.”

Then he walked away.

Mr. Fairburn was annoyed when he heard of the incident.

“I don’t like it, George,” he said. “There’s no reason why there should be bad blood between Blackett’s men and mine; but if they are going to make disturbances like this I shall have to take serious steps, and the coolness between Blackett and me will become an open enmity. ‘As much as lieth in *you*,’ says the Apostle, ‘live peaceably with all men;’ but there’s a limit, and if Mr. Blackett can’t keep his men in order, it will come to a fight between us.”

The brig started in a couple of days for London, in fulfilment of an important contract that had for years fallen to Mr. Blackett, but now had been placed in the hands of his humbler but more energetic rival. Its departure was hailed by the shouts and threats of a gang of pitmen from the Blackett colliery, but nothing like another fight occurred, thanks to the vigilance of Fairburn the elder.

CHAPTER II

THE ATTACK ON THE COLLIERY

Not often has Europe been in a greater state of unrest than it was at the time this story opens. James II, the exiled King of England, had lately died in his French home, and his son, afterwards famous as the Old Pretender, had been acknowledged as the new English king by Louis XIV of France, to the joy of the many Jacobites England still

contained, but to the dismay of the majority of Englishmen. There was likely to be dire trouble also respecting the vacant throne of Spain. There had been originally three candidates for the throne of the weakling Charles, not long dead—Philip of Anjou, whose claims had the powerful support of his grandfather, the ambitious Louis; Charles, the second son of the Emperor Leopold of Austria; and Joseph, the Electoral Prince of Bavaria. But the last mentioned had died, leaving the contest to Philip and Charles, the French and Austrian claimants.

Page 7

The rest of Europe was naturally in alarm when the already too-powerful Louis actually placed his grandson on the Spanish throne. Practically the step amounted on the part of France to an annexation of the once predominant kingdom of Spain with all its appanages. And when the Grand Monarque, as his flatterers called him, proceeded further to garrison the strongholds of the Netherlands, then a Spanish province, with his own troops, it was clear that Louis considered himself King both of France and Spain. As for the Protestants of Europe, their very existence seemed to be threatened by the designs of the French sovereign.

Who was there, then, to withstand the ambitious and arrogant Louis? There was but one great and effective opponent, William of Orange, King of England. He had spent his life in thwarting the ambitious policy of the French monarch, and so long as William lived Louis was sure of a vigorous and powerful antagonist. And William was preparing, in both his English and his Dutch dominions, for yet another conflict. War was indeed imminent; the sole question being when it would actually break out, and who would be ruler over England when it did. For William III was in feeble health; his death might occur any day, and his crown pass to his sister-in-law Anne. Such was the condition of affairs at the time George Fairburn left St. Peter's School at York.

January brought many new orders for the Fairburn pit, and the owner had work for more men. So greatly was his business increasing, that the proprietor of the little colliery came to a decision that seemed likely to affect his son's whole future life.

"What would you like to be, my lad?" he one day inquired abruptly.

"A soldier, dad," was the prompt reply, the boy regarding his father in some wonderment, nevertheless.

"A soldier, says the lad!" Fairburn exclaimed, no less surprised by the answer than George had been by the question. "It is the most detestable of all trades, that of soldiering, and about the most empty-stomached. Don't talk of such a thing, my good lad."

In vain George entered into a defence of the military profession, referring to the many great soldiers with whom his school readings in the histories of Greece and Rome and England had made him more or less acquainted. Fairburn was not to be charmed, and with a deep sigh the boy gave up the contest. He was still more upset when his father proceeded to tell him that he would not return to St. Peter's, but would remain at home to assist in the business till a place could be secured for him in some great London house.

It was not a task he cared about; anybody could have done it, he thought, as he entered the weights on little tickets. But George had a large fund of common sense and a deep respect for his father. He did not grumble or sulk, but resolved that as he had to do the work he would do it thoroughly.

Page 8

Half an hour later he started and flushed to see Mr. Blackett and Matthew, both well mounted, and followed by a groom in livery, come riding by. He trusted they would not notice him at his dusty and disagreeable task. Alas! the field path they were pursuing led close past the spot, and George observed the look of surprise on their faces when they saw him. The father gave no sign of recognition; Matthew looked uncomfortable and nodded in a shamefaced kind of way. George flushed, and for a moment felt a bitter anger surge within him; then he called himself a dolt for caring a straw what they thought of him. It was a little hard, however, to think that Matthew Blackett would be going back to his beloved school and studies, while he, also a Peterite, was engaged in such a humdrum task as weighing coal at the pit mouth.

His father's energy at this time was prodigious. Fairburn was afoot early and late. In spite of the cold and stormy weather of winter he made two or three trips to London in his collier brig, always to report on his return a notable addition to his trade. Once, too, on his homeward voyage, he had had himself put ashore a little north of Spurn, and had trudged the five and twenty miles to Hull, the rising port on the east coast. Then, after appointing an agent and starting what seemed likely to grow into a big business, he had tramped the hundred and twenty miles or more that separated him from Newcastle and his home, cutting a quaint figure on the road, with his old-fashioned hat and cloak, and his much-twisted and knotty oak stick. The result of all this energy was that when he was in a joking mood he would say, "We shall have to see about buying another pit, mother—Blackett's, perhaps, as I hear they have little going on there at present."

And indeed the Blackett colliery did at that time seem to be under a cloud. Trade fell off, and almost every week hands were discharged. Fairburn was secretly a little afraid of mischief from these out-of-works, especially when he himself was absent from home.

Towards the end of February England was startled by the news that King William had been thrown from his favourite steed Sorrel, at Hampton Court, and was lying in a precarious state, his collar-bone broken. A week or two later came the tidings of William's death, and of the proclamation of the Princess Anne as Queen.

The news had an extraordinary effect on Mr. Blackett. Ordering his coach, he drove in haste to his colliery, hoisted a big flag there, proclaimed a holiday on full pay, and sent for a copious supply of ale. His son Matthew, who had not gone back to school at York, amused himself and the men by firing unnumbered salvoes from a couple of small cannon he possessed.

"Now that Billy the Dutchman is out of the way," Squire Blackett cried exultingly, "Whiggery will soon be dead, and England will be ruled by its rightful sovereign, who will be assisted by lords and gentlemen of sound policy."

Page 9

A huge banner was hoisted, and the Squire and his son headed a procession to the neighbouring villages. The jubilant colliery owner and his merry men took care to pass the Fairburn pit, with frantic cheerings and hallooings.

“What does it all mean?” George, who was in charge in the absence of his father, inquired of the old overlooker of the colliery.

“It means beer, George,” the ancient replied, “beer and froth, and nothing else.”

“Nothing else! I hope that is a true word, Saunders, that’s all. I mislike the looks of some of those fellows.”

“Why, to judge from all the whispers we hear,” the overlooker commented, “we are like enough to get our backs well hazelled before long.”

George gave a word of caution to the pitmen when they left work that afternoon.

“There are sure to be insults,” he said, “but take no notice, and keep out of harm’s way.”

But the fates were against George and his pit that day. Hardly had the little gang of Fairburn colliers turned the corner of the lane when they were met by an excited mob carrying a huge sheet on which was rudely printed in big characters, “Down with all Whigs!”

“An insult to the gaffer, that’s as plain as the nose on a man’s face,” cried one of the Fairburn fellows, and without more ado, he dashed forward and made a grab at the offending canvas. He was forestalled, however, a man of the opposing party deftly tripping him up and sending him sprawling into the mud. Before the unlucky pitman could rise the whole mob had surged over him, amidst shrieks of laughter.

On this the Fairburn men threw all George’s cautions to the winds, and charged the mob. Instantly a hot fight was going on around the big banner. Even old Saunders, the overlooker, caught one of the opposition gang by the collar, crying, “Ye loons, what for are ye coming our way again? Ye ha’ been once to-day, wi’ your jibes and jeers; isn’t that enough?”

“Jibes and jeers, old lad! Eh, there’ll happen be mair than that afore bedtime.”

Meanwhile there was rough work around the banner. In spite of the efforts of the bearers and their friends to protect the canvas, one of the Fairburn men had got a grip of it, and in a second the thing had been torn from its supporting poles, amid mingled cheers and execrations. The canvas itself was pulled hither and thither by the opposing gangs, each striving to retain possession of it. Bit by bit the banner was torn to pieces, the men fighting savagely for even the smallest shred of it, each man pocketing his piece as a trophy, till at length there was nothing of the thing left visible.

Cries of, "On to the pit wi' ye, lads!" were by this time plentiful, and with a dash the now much augmented mob surged in that direction. Under old Saunders the Fairburn men disputed every yard of the way, but they were entirely outnumbered, and were slowly but surely forced back upon the works they had so recently left. All had happened in the course of a very few minutes.

Page 10

George, on his way to his home, some half mile away, had made scarce half the distance when his ears were assailed by the noise of conflict somewhere behind him. He stopped and listened, the yells growing louder and fiercer every instant. Then he darted back towards the pit, reaching the spot just in time to see his men make a dash for the shelter of the sheds around the mouth, followed by a howling, threatening mob.

In a moment the youngster sprang through the entrance of the largest of the sheds, and closed the door, shooting home the two thick rough bars of wood that did duty for bolts, amid shouts from his men of "The young gaffer! We'll all stick to him!" And in spite of his youth, George was at once installed as captain of the little Fairburn band. He had always been highly popular with the men of the colliery; they liked his entire freedom from vain show and swagger, and his pleasant-spoken manner.

"What have we in the way of weapons, lads?" he asked, taking a hasty glance round the dimly-lit shed. Darkness was coming on apace even outside; within the shed the men had to grope their way about.

There was very little that would serve, except a number of pickaxes, a few shovels, and two or three hayforks belonging to the stables. These were served out, and then one man found the master's gun, with a powder-flask and a handful of sparrow shot.

"Better let me have that," said George, quietly relieving the man of the weapon, the old overlooker approving with a "Aye, that's right; you'll keep a cooler head than Tom there."

The mob outside surged down on the door in force, and with loud yells. The door stood the shock, and the major part of the attackers in a trice turned their attention to the smaller buildings dotted here and there about the pit's mouth. One by one these sheds were pulled to pieces, to the ever-increasing delight of the mob. George and his men were powerless to stop the destruction.

"We must not venture out," the boy said, "unless the scoundrels turn their attention to the windlasses and the gear."

So his men had to grind their teeth in rage and look on helplessly.

As was expected, the rioters presently came back to the big shed, one of them, evidently the leader, advancing with a felling-axe.

"Keep back, rascal!" shouted George. "Keep from the door, or I'll put a few peppercorns into your hide."

From a chink in the door George recognized him as the very man he had so unceremoniously knocked from his perch and so merrily battered in the bout of singlestick that day on the landing-stage.



The fellow answered with a curse and lifted his axe to stave in the door. Before the weapon could descend a report rang out in the twilight, and with a scream the attacker sprang from the ground, and then fell to rubbing his legs vigorously.

“One on ’em peppered,” remarked old Saunders grimly.

Page 11

The crowd outside fell back in haste, and a burly fellow at that instant appearing on the scene with a small cask of ale on his shoulder, a diversion was caused. The fight was transferred to the circle round the ale barrel, the already half-crazy fellows struggling desperately to get at the liquor.

“By Jupiter!” cried George, seeing his opportunity in a moment, “now is our chance! Let them get fully occupied and we have them. Let them once return and they will be madder and more reckless than ever.”

And seizing every man his weapon, the little party in the shed prepared to sally forth, old Saunders whispering to his next neighbour, “The lad is a game ‘un, if ever I saw one.”

Just as George was preparing to draw the bolts he caught sight of young Blackett. His old schoolfellow was haranguing the men, gesticulating violently, and pointing excitedly towards the large shed. Matthew had in reality just heard of the fray, and had at once run up to do what he could to stop it. But George Fairburn did not know this. “The knave!” he exclaimed, beside himself with anger, “he’s the very ringleader of the party! He’s kept himself till now in the background. But he shall pay for his pains!”

Flinging back the bars, George dashed forth upon the ale-drinking group his little band following at his heels. With a shout they swooped down upon the foe, and in an instant a score of heads were broken, the luckless owners flung in all directions around the cask. One of the prostrate ones held the spigot in his hand, and the remainder of the liquor bubbled itself merrily to the ground.

So utterly unprepared were the fellows for the onset, and so mauled were they in the very first rush, that a general alarm was raised. In the darkening they imagined themselves surrounded by a strong reinforcement of the Fairburn party, and at once there was a wild stampede from the premises. Men and hobbledehoys stumbled off in hot haste, pursued by the victorious handful under George.

Not that George himself gave any heed to all this. At the very first he had dashed to the spot where Matthew Blackett was excitedly shouting to the rioters.

“Coward!” cried Fairburn, “to set on your scoundrelly fellows—”

“Set on the fellows!” Matthew began in amazement, but he got no farther.

“Up with your fists!” cried George, “and we will see which is the better man!”

There was no time for explanations, though young Blackett opened his mouth to speak. He had in truth but time to throw up his hands to ward off George’s vigorous blow, and the next moment the fight was in full swing. Matthew was no coward, and once in for warm work, he played his part manfully. At it the two boys went, each hitting hard, and both coming in for a considerable share of pummelling. For a time none heeded them,

every man having enough to do in other quarters. But at length they were surrounded by a small group of the Fairburn men who had now driven off the enemy and remained masters of the field.

Page 12

Once or twice, when the two stopped a moment to recover breath, Matthew opened his mouth again to make an explanation, but as often his pride held him back, and he said nothing. So the fight went on.

How long this fierce duel might have lasted it is hard to say. But just as the boys were almost at the end of their strength there was an effective interruption. It was time, for both combatants were heavily punished. They had not been so ill-matched as one might at first sight have suspected. George was the stronger and harder fellow, but Matthew had the advantage in the matter of height, and more particularly in length of arm, which enabled him to get in a blow when his opponent's fell short; though the less robust of the two he had as much pluck as pride, and would have fought on to the last gasp.

The sound of clattering hoofs was heard, and, from opposite quarters, two horsemen dashed up. They were Mr. Blackett and the elder Fairburn.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRE AT BINFIELD TOWERS

The fight stopped even more suddenly than it had begun, and the two combatants stood away from each other, with hanging heads but with fists still clenched.

Fairburn took a glance around on the destruction, a thing he was able to do by the glare from some burning wreckage which had now got well into a blaze. Then his eyes wandered down to the two boys with their bruised and bleeding countenances, and finally up into Mr. Blackett's face.

"So this is the kind of thing your Tory and your Jacobite is capable of!" he remarked with stinging scorn to his richer rival.

"Don't you think, Mr. Fairburn," answered the Squire with dignified calmness, restraining himself marvellously well, "don't you think that instead of vilifying a cause as far above your comprehension as the majority of its advocates are above you in breeding, in education, in station, it would be more sensible to give me your help in attending to these poor misguided fellows lying wounded on all sides?"

Fairburn winced; his rival had certainly the advantage in the controversy, and none knew it better than the two boys. George did not fail to observe the little flush of satisfaction that for an instant lit up his antagonist's countenance, and, like his father, he too winced.

However, not another needless word was said, while the two men and their sons, with the help of some of the Fairburn colliers who were still on the spot, gave attention to the

wounded and extinguished the burning rubbish. Then the Blacketts, father and son, raising their hats to the Fairburns, took their departure.

It may well be supposed that this series of unhappy incidents did not tend to narrow the breach between the two colliery owners and their people. Fairburn, unlike his old self, was greatly incensed, and talked much of prosecutions and so forth. But nothing came of it, the man's sound native sense presently leading him to adopt George's opinion. Said the boy, "Where would be the good, father? Their side got most of the broken heads anyhow, and that's enough for us." It was a youngster's view of the case, but it had its merits.

Page 13

So Fairburn grumbled and rebuilt his few wrecked sheds, his grumblings dying out as the work proceeded. George's own thoughts were bitter enough, however, so far as Matthew Blackett was concerned. He could not get it out of his head that the young squire, as the folks around styled Matthew, was at the bottom of the riot and indeed secretly its ringleader.

A month or two passed away, and spring came. One day the elder Fairburn, on his return from London in his collier, made a great announcement.

"I've got you a grand place, my lad," he said. "It is in the office of Mr. Allan, one of the finest shipping-merchants in London. 'Tis a very great favour, and will be the making of you, if you prove to be the lad I take you to be. You are now fifteen, and it is time you went from home to try your fortune; in fact, you'll be all the better away from here—for certain reasons I need not go into. You are a lucky lad, George,—I wish I had had half your chance when I was in my teens."

The son knew very well from his father's tone and manner that it was useless to argue the matter with him. To London he would have to go, and he prepared to face the unwelcome prospect like a man.

Yet, to add to his chagrin and disappointment, there came to him just at that time the news that young Blackett was proposing to enter the army as soon as he was old enough. The Squire was anxious that his son should have a commission, and as he was wealthy, and his party was now decidedly winning in the political race, there would not only be no difficulties in Matthew's way, but a fine prospect of advancement for the youth.

"Who would have thought that that lanky weakling would choose a soldier's trade!" George Fairburn said to himself. "I had quite expected him to go to Oxford and become either a barrister or a bishop. He's a lucky fellow! And I—I am—well, never mind; it's silly to go on in this way. I don't like Blackett, but I am bound to confess he's got good fighting stuff in him."

When William III was on his deathbed he is reported to have said, "I see another scene, and could wish to live a little longer." His keen political foresight was soon confirmed. It was in March, 1702, he died; in the May of the same year war was proclaimed, the combination of powers known as the Grand Alliance on the one side, Louis XIV, the Grand Monarque, on the other. The nations belonging to the Grand Alliance were at first England, Holland, and the Empire; at later dates Sweden, Denmark, and most of the States of Germany came in, a strong league. But it was needed. Louis was the most powerful sovereign in Europe, and France the richest nation. To its resources were added those of Spain and her dependencies; for the most part, at any rate, for there were portions even of Spain which would have preferred the Archduke Charles to Philip of France, and it was the cause of Charles that England and the other members

of the Alliance were espousing. Thus began the war known in history as the War of the Spanish Succession, which for several years gave work to some of the most remarkable generals in European story.

Page 14

Of these great soldiers, John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, or rather, as he was at the outbreak of the war, the Earl of Marlborough, was at once the most gifted with military genius and the most successful. He was now fifty-two years of age, and one of the leading men at the Court of Queen Anne. He had seen a fair amount of military service, and had earned the praise of William III, a judge of the first order in such matters. But the England of that day could not be blamed if it failed to foresee the brilliancy of fame with which its general would ere long surround himself.

[Illustration: Map Of Western Europe In The Time Of Queen Anne. The shading represents the dominions of Louis XIV.]

He was known as a brave and an able officer, not much more, except that he was known also to be a great miser. His wife, Sarah Jennings, now the Countess of Marlborough, was in high favour with the new Queen; indeed, she was at that time the most influential subject in the kingdom.

To Marlborough, then, was given the command of the combined English and Dutch forces.

It needs no telling that the declaration of war, a war in which the greater part of Europe would most likely be involved, caused no small consternation among those whose business was with the sea and with shipping. Fairburn's business necessitated that his single brig should be constantly running to and from London, and it was early rumoured that French cruisers and privateers were prowling about the North Sea and the Channel. A schooner of considerable size, belonging to Squire Blackett, had, indeed, been chased, off the Norfolk coast, and had escaped only by the fact that it was lightly laden—it was returning in ballast to the Tyne—and by its superior sailing qualities. Such things brought home to every collier the realities of the situation. George's mother grew alarmed.

"Who knows," said the good woman, "whether the same Frenchman may not still be on the watch, and seize the *Ouseburn Lassie* and her cargo; and, worse than all, my dear boy on board of her?"

Her husband was not without his fears either, but George laughed at the notion of capture by a French vessel.

"I'll go and have a talk with old Abbott, the skipper," he said, "and see what he thinks about it."

"Well, George, my lad," the old salt said when the boy questioned him on the point, "it's like this. It's not impossible we may get a Frenchy down on us. But we shan't strike our colours if there's the least chance of doing anything by a bit of fighting. The master's a man of peace, but between you and me"—the old fellow sank his voice to a whisper—

“I’ve got stowed away, unbeknown to him, four tidy little guns; real beauties they are, if small. You shall help me to use ’em on the Mounseers, if they won’t leave us alone.”

Page 15

To a lad of George Fairburn's stamp such a prospect was glorious. "I'm quite ready to go, mother," he announced, "on the brig's very next trip." Mother and father made no reply, but the former turned away to hide her tears. The lad must go and begin his new life. For a few days all was bustle and preparation, George in the seventh heaven of delight. The long voyage in a grimy and uncomfortable collier had no terrors for him; he was too much accustomed to coal dust for that. And was there not a chance that before the Thames was reached he might see a brush with a Frenchman?

The last evening at home for him came, and he took a stroll to get a final look at the familiar surroundings. It was now the very heart of summer, the weather glorious: could any boy be sad at such a time, even though there was before him the parting from home, from an indulgent and much-loved mother, from a just and honourable as well as affectionate father? George whistled and sang as he wandered across the fields, careless whither his footsteps led him.

As fate would have it, he was proceeding generally in the direction of Mr. Blackett's great house, Binfield Towers, a mansion almost entirely hidden by thick woods from the public gaze. George knew these woods well, with their acres of bluebells and their breadths of primroses in the Spring, and their wealth of dogroses in June. He turned into the footpath that crossed the plantations, and presently found himself gazing at the mansion a hundred yards away. The place was almost new, the style that was known in later days as Queen Anne's. But George knew nothing of architectural styles, and was idly counting the multitude of windows when he was startled by a cracked old voice calling to him from the other side of the fence that separated the wood from the grassplots in front of the house.

"For God's sake, come along and help, my good lad," cried an old man in livery, beckoning him frantically.

"What's the matter?" George asked quickly.

"The house is on fire," was the reply, "and there's nobody at home but the women folk, except old Reuben, and he's just about as much use as me, and that's none at all, I reckon."

"Where's Mr. Blackett?" the lad asked as he cleared the fence at a bound, and stood by the old man's side on the lawn.

"Gone off to a party, and young Master Matthew with him. Run and do what you can, for Heaven's sake, and I'll follow."

George bounded across the grass like a hare, and bolted into the house without ceremony, for he now perceived smoke issuing from several of the front windows. In the hall he found old Reuben, the aged butler, whom Mr. Blackett still provided with a

home, doing what he could to stay the progress of the flames, by throwing upon the burning staircase little pailfuls of water brought by the maid servants. But, in truth most of the women were screaming, and those who were not were fainting.

Page 16

"I'm almost moidered with it all," the old fellow cried helplessly, to which the superannuated gardener, who now came wheezing in, added, "Aye, we're both on us moidered."

George glanced at the futile old couple, then cast his eye upwards, to the various stretches of the grand staircase which could be seen from the well below. Almost every length of the banisters was blazing, and the cracked and broken skylight above caused a fierce upward draught.

"It's at the top the water should be poured down," George cried, taking in the situation in an instant. "I'll see if I can get up." And in spite of the shouts of the old fellows, and the redoubled shrieks of the maids, the lad skipped up two or three of the flights that zigzagged up the staircase well.

At the second floor, however, he was almost overwhelmed by a great mass of smoke mingled with flame that shot suddenly out of the long corridor running right and left. Blinded, choked, scorched, George staggered back, tripped, and with a clatter fell down the six or eight steps he had mounted of that flight, and lay for a moment on the broad carpeted landing half-dazed. But speedily recovering himself, he perceived that the portion of the stairs from which he had just fallen was now blazing fiercely.

"It is useless!" he cried to himself, as he turned to descend to the servants below.

Then, before he had made two steps agonizing shrieks rang out from somewhere above, and he stopped dead, almost appalled.

"Miss Mary and Mrs. Maynard!" he heard the old men shout from below, and the cries of the women servants grew frantic, as the little band gazed terror-stricken upwards. George, too, cast his eyes aloft, and there, to his utter dismay, were dimly seen through the smoke a couple of female forms peeping from the topmost corridor.

He knew well enough by sight Mr. Blackett's little daughter of eleven and her governess, a stately old lady, said to be an impoverished relative of the Squire himself. The little pony chaise in which the two were wont to drive about the neighbourhood was, indeed, familiar to every soul in the district.

"We had forgotten them, we had forgotten them!" came a voice just below him, and there stood old Reuben, who had pulled himself up the steps a little way. "They are lost!" the aged servant moaned. "Oh dear, oh dear!" And the poor old fellow blundered down the steps again, weeping like a child.

"Is there any other staircase up to the top of the house?" the boy called after him.

"Only that in the servants' wing," was the reply, "and that is gone already. God help us all!"

“Any long ladders about? And the stablemen, where are they all?”

“Coachman with the Squire, the grooms gone off to the town for an hour or two.”
Reuben shook his head sorrowfully.

George waited no longer. With a bound he darted up the stairs again, and in a moment had reached the spot where the fire was fiercest. Without hesitation he dashed on, watching his chance after a big gust of smoke and flame had surged across the well. Through the fire he rushed, protecting his face with his arms, and stumbling blindly on. The worst was soon passed, and the next instant he had gained the top of the staircase.

Page 17

"Save her—*her!*" Mrs. Maynard cried piteously, "leave *me*, and see to *her*, for mercy's sake!"

George caught the girl in his arms and prepared to make a dash down the staircase. But he drew back in dismay. A big piece of the burning banister below them fell with a crash and a shower of sparks to the bottom of the well.

"It is impossible!" he cried. "Let us see what can be done from one of the windows." And the three ran to the end of the corridor farthest away from the fire. Into a room George dashed, and threw up the window. It was Mary's playroom, and it was in this place that she and her governess had been till now too much frightened by the flames and smoke to make a dash for safety.

Alas! there was no way of escape. The height from the ground was too great; to leap meant certain death. George gazed frantically down and around, to see if any help was arriving. Not a soul was to be seen. Smoke was pouring from almost every window. The ladies were speechless with alarm when they saw the look of despair on the boy's face.

"Don't leave us!" Mary pleaded piteously.

"No, no!" cried George. "We'll find a way yet." But cheerfully as he spoke, in his heart he almost despaired.

It was but a few seconds the three had been in the playroom, but when they looked out into the corridor again, to their horror they found it blazing, the flames leaping towards them with astonishing bounds, carried along by the evening breeze that had sprung up. The sight seemed to drive Mrs. Maynard demented. With a shriek she darted away, sped along the burning passage, and before the boy and girl could realize the situation, she had dashed down the blazing staircase. The sound of a crash and a fearful scream reached their ears, telling their own tale. The girl clung to George, her head sank, and she fainted.

Desperate now, the lad placed her on the floor, and, thrusting his head from the window, perceived that he could clamber up the two or three feet of rain spout that ran close by, and gain a position on the roof just overhead. If he could gain that, he thought he might run to a further wing of the building that seemed at present untouched by the fire. But the girl, what of her? He cast his eyes about and descried two or three skipping ropes in a corner. Hastily he tied them end to end, fastened a portion round Mary's waist, his movements hastened by the burst of flame that just then shot into the room. Then clambering desperately to the roof, the rope in his teeth, he got a footing on the parapet, and began to haul up the fainting girl.



Hand over hand he hauled up the cord and its burden. The child was dangling between earth and sky when suddenly a great shout came from below. George glanced down, and there, running with up-turned horror-stricken face, was Matthew Blackett. Help at last! But had it come too late?

CHAPTER IV

Page 18

THE RESCUE

Matthew stopped short, unable to move a yard further, his eyes fixed upon the slight form hanging so dangerously high above him. It was truly an awful moment for both the lads, a moment never afterwards to be forgotten by either of them. The time of suspense was but seconds; it seemed years. But George, his knees firmly pressed against the low parapet wall that ran along the top in front of the house, had no difficulty in supporting the weight, and not too much in actually hauling up his living burden. Another moment and he had seized one arm with a strong grip; the next he had pulled the child to him on the roof.

"Safe! thank God!" he murmured, almost breathless with his exertions and still more with his agitation.

Safe! As if to mock him a great tongue of flame shot from the window from which rescuer and rescued had but now emerged, and a cry of despair rose from Matthew below.

"Run for the library!" Blackett shouted, a thought suddenly striking him. "Run, run!" And the boy pointed to a sort of wing, an addition to the mansion recently made by the Squire, and devoted to his books and the extensive and valuable collection of antiquities and curiosities of which he was very proud. This building was connected with the body of the house by only one small arched door, on the ground-floor.

George understood, and cautiously but rapidly edging his way along the broad leaden gutter behind the parapet, he drew the girl, by this time conscious once more, but dazed with fright, to the outlying portion of the roof, which was as yet untouched by the flames. He peered over for Matthew, but could see nothing of him.

For the moment the two were in no danger. But the flames were already licking the portion of the library immediately adjoining the house proper; soon the whole wing must be ablaze. The boy gazed wildly around, to see if there was any means, however risky or even desperate, by which escape might be made. He saw nothing but the slender branches of a magnificent yew that grew in the retired garden behind and close to the library. These boughs overtopped even the tall building, and some of them overhung the roof a little. But the nearest of them was ten feet above the heads of the two, and hopelessly out of reach. Would that some great gust of wind would drive those branches within clutching distance!

This tantalizing thought had hardly taken possession of George's mind when his attention was attracted by shouts from below. Peering down he was astonished to see Matthew rapidly climbing the yew. The same thought had struck him also! Up the climber swarmed, higher and higher. Then he began without hesitation to crawl along some of the topmost branches that overhung the library roof. Outwards he crept,

embracing tightly half a dozen of the long thin boughs; they seemed but little more than twigs.

“You’ll be dashed to pieces!” Mary cried; “go back, go back!”

Page 19

"Haven't you a rope anywhere?" George asked eagerly.

"Every rope and ladder locked up in the stable yard," was the breathless reply, "and the men away. This is our only chance. Catch hold."

As Matthew spoke, the end of the long swaying branches, swinging ever lower, came down to the roof, and a good yard or more of the greenery was within George's grasp. Matthew lay at full length on his collection of boughs in order that his weight might keep the ends down. It was a precarious position truly, but Matthew was very light, and had absolutely no fear for himself.

"Lash her well to three or four of the strongest of the boughs," he said hurriedly; "give the rope half a dozen good turns about her waist and the boughs. They are yew and very tough. Quick!"

Hardly knowing what he was doing, George obeyed. He was a bit of a sailor, and in a couple of minutes he had bound the child to the branches in a way to satisfy even Matthew, who still lay amongst the foliage, some three yards away.

"Now cling for your life to the rest of the branches you've got, Fairburn, till I go down to the long thick arm there below. Can you hold?"

"Yes!" cried the other cheerfully, light beginning to dawn upon him. "I can hold on; you go down."

Matthew moved down, and the branches, relieved of their burden, began to exert a considerable upward pull. But the weight of the boy and the girl held down the ends, and they awaited Matthew's call. It soon came, though the interval of waiting seemed an age.

"Now then!" came the shout, and George could see his quondam enemy firmly seated on a stout branch that had been cut shorter, its foliage having interfered with the light of one of the windows of the library. Matthew was sitting astride, his legs firmly gripping the branch. "Now drop yourselves over," he went on. "You'll fall right on the top of me, and I'll grab you. Throw one arm round Mary's waist, and then seize the branches with both hands and stick tight."

"I'll stick like a leech," George replied, "but it's a fearful drop."

"There's no other way, none! See! the blaze has caught the library roof behind you! It will be upon you in another minute. Drop over, for pity's sake!"

George set his teeth, placed one arm round the child's slender form, gripped hard a handful of the pliant boughs, and dropped over the parapet, Mary closing her eyes in her mortal fright. With a huge swing the branches bent, and in an instant the two were

swaying a good fifteen feet below, George almost jerked from his hold. The boughs creaked but did not snap.

“Thank heaven!” cried Matthew, “I have you!” And reaching up, he got a grip of George’s foot and dragged down the swinging pair.

“Grab the branch with your legs, Fairburn! and I’ll cut Mary clear.”

Page 20

No sooner said than done. By the aid of a good clasp-knife Matthew severed the cords and secured his little sister, her weight, however, as it came upon him, almost knocking him from his perch. But he held desperately, and in another moment had Mary on the branch beside him. Then George, throwing his legs apart, suddenly loosed his hold of the branches and dropped also astride of the bough, which he grasped tight with both hands. He swung round and hung from the branch head downwards. But the next minute he had righted himself, and was ready to help with Mary.

The rescue was complete. To guide the child along the branch, towards the middle of the tree, and then to lower her from limb to limb of the old yew was mere play to the two boys. The three dropped the last four or five feet to earth just as a man rushed forward with a great cry, to clasp in his arms the fainting girl.

“God is merciful!” he ejaculated. It was Squire Blackett, who had arrived just in time to see his beloved child saved from an awful fate.

For a few moments father and children clung to each other. When at length they looked round to express their gratitude to the plucky rescuer, he was nowhere to be seen. Seeing a great crowd of the Blackett pitmen arrive with a run, George had felt that he could be of no more use, and slipping into the wood had made for home. He wanted no thanks, and moreover the brig was to sail at four in the morning, at which time the tide would serve.

“He’s gone—George has gone!” cried Matthew.

“We can never repay him,” murmured Mr. Blackett. “We must go on to see him at the earliest moment in the morning.”

When Mr. Blackett, with Matthew and the rescued Mary, drove early next day to the Fairburns’ house, it was only to learn that George had sailed for London some hours before. There was no help for it, and all they could do was to overwhelm the father and mother with words of gratitude and praise. They informed the Fairburns that by the exertions of the men the library and its contents had been saved; the rest of the mansion was left a wreck. Mrs. Maynard had been drawn from the mass of burning rubbish at the foot of the staircase, and was now lying between life and death.

George had had a bad quarter of an hour at the parting from his parents, but by the time the vessel felt the swell of the open sea he was full of spirits again. The sea voyage, even in a dirty collier, was a delight. Then there was London the wonderful at the end of it, and he had long desired to see the great capital of which he had heard and read so much.

Page 21

The London of Queen Anne's reign was not the huge overgrown London of our own day. But it was a notable city, and to George Fairburn and his contemporaries the grandest city in the world. The Great Fire had taken place but twenty years before George was born, yet already the city had risen from its ashes, with wider and nobler streets, and with a multitude of handsome churches which Wren had built. The new and magnificent St. Paul's, the great architect's proudest work, was rapidly approaching completion. George's father had witnessed the opening for worship of a portion of the cathedral five years before, and soon the stupendous dome, which was beginning to tower high above the city, would be finished. Sir Thomas Gresham's Exchange, the centre of the business life of the city, had been replaced by another and not less noble edifice. The great capital contained a population of well over half a million souls, a number that seemed incredible to those who knew only Bristol, and York, and Norwich, the English cities next in size. The houses stretched continuously from the city boundary to Westminster, and soon the two would be but one vast town. George had heard much of London Bridge, with its shops and its incessant stream of passengers and vehicles, and he hoped to visit the pleasant villages of Kensington and Islington, and many another that lay within a walk of great London. He hoped one day, too, to get a glimpse of some of the clever wits, Mat Prior, Wycherley, Dick Steele, and others, who haunted the coffee-houses of the capital, and of the rising young writer, Mr. Addison, not to mention a greater than them all, the incomparable Sir Isaac Newton. For George had ever been a great reader, even while he loved a good game as well as any boy in the land.

It was many a long year, however, ere George Fairburn was destined to see the mighty capital. Once fairly at sea, the skipper brought out and mounted his four little guns, to the lad's huge joy.

"You mean business, captain," he remarked with a merry laugh.

"I do, if there comes along a Frenchy who won't leave us alone," the old fellow replied, "leastways if she isn't too big a craft for us altogether."

The evening was coming in, the town of Yarmouth faintly visible through the haze, when suddenly the crew of the *Ouseburn Lassie* became aware of a big vessel in the offing.

"She's giving chase, by thunder!" cried the skipper, after he had taken a long look through the glass; and all was excitement on board the brig. Anxiously all hands watched the stranger, and at last the shout went up, "She's a Frenchy!"

"Aye, and a big 'un at that," somebody added.

Hastily the preparations were made to receive her, though the captain shook his head even as he gave his orders.

“It’s no go,” he whispered to George. “We’ve got these four small guns, but what’s the good? We’ve nobody to man ’em; only a couple on ’em, leastways. And the Frenchman’s a monster.”

Page 22

"We'll show them a bit of fight all the same," George put in eagerly. The old salt shook his head again.

Quickly the big vessel overhauled the collier brig, and signals were made to pull down her flag, whereupon the Englishman grunted.

Within a minute a puff was seen, and a round shot whizzed close past the *Ouseburn Lassie's* bows.

"Give them a reply!" George urged in great excitement.

"Wait a bit, my lad," and the skipper bided his time.

"Now!" came the order at length, and a couple of eight-pound balls flew straight to the Frenchman.

"Well hit!" shouted the Englishmen, as a shower of splinters was seen to fly upwards from the enemy's deck.

"It's enough to show 'em we've got mettle in us," growled the old captain, "and that's all we can say."

His words were justified, for the next moment there came another flash, and with a crash the brig's mast went by the board.

"Done for!" groaned the skipper. "We shall see the inside of a French prison, I reckon."

The enemy's long boat put out with a crew four times that of the brig. Within a quarter of an hour the Englishmen had all been transferred to the *Louis Treize*, and an officer and half a dozen men left in charge of the prize. The Frenchman at once set a course for Dunkirk, and, with a spanking breeze behind her, she made the port in fifteen hours. The noon of the next day saw George Fairburn and his companions clapped into a French prison.

"A bonny come off," the old skipper grumbled, "but we shall ha' to make the best on it."

It will not be forgotten that the war just begun was, to put it bluntly, a war to determine which of two indifferent princes, Philip of France and Charles of Austria, should have the Spanish crown. Lord Peterborough declared that it was not worth his country's while to fight for such "a pair of louts."

[Illustration: "Now!" came the order.]

Into the war, however, England had thrown herself, under the direction of Harley, the famous Tory minister now in power, at home, and with Marlborough as commander-in-

chief of both the English and the Dutch forces abroad. The General's first aim was to take back from Louis XIV all those fortresses in the Spanish Netherlands which had been seized and garrisoned by the French troops as if the country were a French possession.

He started from Kaiserwoerth, a town on the Rhine, which his troops had captured from one of Louis's chief allies, the Elector of Cologne, before Marlborough arrived to take command. Venloo was taken in gallant style, and then the important city of Liege, on the Meuse. The result of the campaign was that the French had been chased from the Lower Rhine, and Holland, much to its relief, made far more safe from attack. Returning to England, the victorious commander was given a grand reception. And no wonder, for it was the first time for many a year that the French had received a real check.

Page 23

While these things were going on in the Netherlands, another leader under the Grand Alliance, Prince Louis of Baden, took Landau, on the Rhine, from the French. In Italy, too, the allies triumphed, the gallant Prince Eugene, presently to be the warm and life-long friend of Marlborough, defeating the French brilliantly at Cremona, a fortunate thing for the Empire, which was thus secured from a French invasion through the Tyrol.

To crown the successes of the Grand Alliance during the campaign of 1702, the first of the war, the brave sailor Sir George Rooke, following the Spanish galleons and the French war vessels into the harbour of Vigo, destroyed the greater number of them. It was a repetition of Drake's famous expedition to "sing the King of Spain's beard."

All these things happened while George Fairburn and other English prisoners ate their hearts out in captivity at Dunkirk. The lad chafed under the surveillance to which he was subjected, and never passed a day without turning over in his mind some scheme of escape. How it was to be done, he did not see. But he waited for his chance, and meanwhile, partly to avoid being suspected, and partly to while away the hours he made friends with the soldiers on guard. He already knew a little French, and with his natural quickness he soon made rapid progress. At the end of a month he could get along capitally in the language; at the end of three months he could speak the tongue fluently; at the end of nine months—for thus did his term of captivity drag itself out—he was, so far as the language was concerned, almost a Frenchman. Thus the winter passed, and the spring of 1703 came round, George Fairburn still an inmate of a French prison, hopeless of escape, so far as he could see.

But his chance came at last suddenly and unexpectedly. One morning he was escorted to the Hotel de Ville, to interpret for an officer examining a batch of English prisoners who had been brought in from the Netherlands border. The way to the town lay at no great distance from the shore, and he observed how a boat lay close in on the low sandy beach, no owner in sight. His heart leapt into his mouth, and he had much ado to keep himself from betraying his thoughts by the flush that mantled hotly on his cheek.

One, two, three hundred paces the boat was left behind. Now or never! Instantly the lad started off back to the spot, his feet flying across the sand.

A shout broke from the throats of his astonished guards, and a half score of bullets whistled after the runaway. George ducked his head and sped on unhurt. A second volley did little more harm than the first, merely grazing the lobe of his right ear. The race was furious, but the lusty English lad was far and away the superior of the heavy Frenchmen. He gained the boat, the enemy still a hundred paces behind. The painter was loosely wound round a large stone, and in a trice George had leapt with it into the little craft. He had just time to give a vigorous shove off before the pursuers came up, the foremost dashing into the sea after him.



Page 24

CHAPTER V

GEORGE RECONNOITRES

Splash through the water rushed the French soldiers in full chase. Already they were beginning to cheer, for the leading man had all but grabbed the boat, and the prisoner was as good as retaken. George looked down for something with which to strike, for he did not intend to submit without a struggle, but there was no oar on board. There had been a small boat-hook, but that he had left sticking in the sand when he gave his lusty shove off. The pursuer, up to his neck in water, seized the boat, and for a moment his chin rested on the side. But the next instant the lad had kicked out with the clumsy wooden shoes he wore, and the soldier fell back half stunned into the sea. The rest of the fellows instantly raised their guns, but George did not wince; he perceived what they in their wild scamper after him had not noticed, that they had dragged their muskets through the water, and for the time had rendered the weapons useless. The boy laughed in spite of his predicament, as he hastily ran up the little sail.

The breeze at once caught the canvas, and the bark moved briskly away. But two of the soldiers, who had not entered the sea, hastily reloading—they had not done so hitherto, after the recent discharges—levelled their pieces at the retreating prisoner. George flung himself to the bottom of the boat as he saw the move, and the bullets whistled harmlessly overhead. Springing up again, he perceived that he was now beyond range, and with a shout of joy he waved his cap triumphantly. The whole escape had been planned and successfully carried out in the space of five minutes. He was free!

But his joy was presently tempered by the thought of what might follow. That the men would endeavour to give chase he well knew; indeed he could make out their forms running in search of another boat. However, he had gained a start; that was something. As to whither he was destined to be driven, or how he was to get food and water, these things were for the present of less consequence than the fact that he was free.

Fortune favoured him, for within ten minutes a thickness came on, and soon the boat was enveloped in fog. The chase was now rendered impossible to the enemy. Hour after hour George kept his sail hoisted, driving briskly he knew not whither.

"I am bound," said he to himself, "to stumble upon either the English or the Dutch coast, and in either case I shall be among friends." Thus the lad comforted himself.

The day wore on, and he was becoming ravenously hungry. He would have given much for a basin of even the prison *soupe maigre*. The sky was darkening and he began to feel drowsy; he resigned himself to a night of hunger. All at once he heard shouts, and

the hull of a big vessel loomed up within a few yards of him. He was instantly wide awake. Was the stranger French? Thank Heaven, no! She was Dutch built, and as her flag showed, Dutch owned. Hurrah!

Page 25

His cheer attracted the attention of the crew, and much wondering the sailors drew him up on deck. "A Frenchman," was the verdict in gruff Dutch. George did not understand Dutch, but he instantly guessed their meaning.

"Not I," he cried, in English, and was delighted to be answered in the same tongue by the skipper.

George's account of his escape, translated by the captain, set the fat Dutchmen a-rolling. And, after the lad had had the good square meal the skipper ordered for him, he spent the evening in going over his adventures again. The jolly-hearted English lad became an immediate favourite with the sailors and the soldiers, for, as he soon learnt, the ship was a Dutch transport carrying troops and stores for the war in Spain.

"Where are we, sir?" George inquired of the skipper next morning when he came on deck, to find a clear sky, and land faintly seen on the starboard bow.

"Off the Isle of Wight, my lad," replied the Dutchman.

"Can't you put me ashore, captain?" he pleaded.

The master smiled and shook his head.

"Impossible, boy; you must go with us to Spain. And here comes a gentleman to speak with you."

An officer in military uniform approached, and the boy touched his cap. With the skipper as interpreter the major made George an offer of service under him.

"We want fellows of your sort," he said. "And there will be brave doings in Spain, and plenty of good pay, and glory to be won. Besides, you will be fighting under one of your own countrymen, most likely Sir George Rooke himself. Say the word, my good lad."

George's face flushed.

"I have always wanted to be a soldier, sir," he stammered.

"Of course you have, my lad. Then we may take it that the matter is settled. Good luck go with you, my boy."

Here then was George Fairburn, who ought to have been driving a quill in the office of Mr. Allan, shipping merchant, of London, sailing to join the allied forces in Spain, and to fight against the French. His head swam with the thought of it.

But what of George's friends at home all this long while? When Fairburn learnt that his brig had not arrived in port, though she had been spoken in Boston Deep by another

collier which was returning to the Tyne, his heart misgave him. There had been a bad storm on the coast; it seemed only too likely that the *Ouseburn Lassie* had gone down in it! When week after week passed without news it seemed more and more likely that the vessel had foundered in the gale. News of captures by French privateers usually filtered through sooner or later; but for long there were no tidings of the *Ouseburn Lassie*. The Blacketts did what they could to console the bereaved parents, but father and mother would not be comforted. At length, months afterwards, they learnt in a casual way that a collier had been captured off Yarmouth by a French privateer, about the time the *Ouseburn Lassie* was making her trip; at least that was the construction the Yarmouth salts who saw the affair from the shore put upon the movements of the two vessels. So a ray of hope came to Fairburn and his wife.

Page 26

"The lad will be somewhere in a French prison," the father said, "and some day he will be set free and come home to us again."

The spring of 1703 brought Matthew Blackett's seventeenth birthday, and with it an ensign's commission in a well-reputed regiment of foot. He already stood six feet one in his stockings, and mighty proud he felt when his lanky figure was clothed in his gay uniform.

"Perhaps I shall come across George in my wanderings," he said, when he went to bid a very friendly adieu to the Fairburns. "Won't it be jolly if we do meet!" And the parents were constrained to smile in spite of their sadness.

One of the commonest subjects of conversation in our days is the state of "political parties," and every child of school age can tell you which is "the party in power." Three hundred years ago such expressions would not have been understood at all, in their modern sense, and "government by party" was a thing as yet undreamed of. Usually the strongest man of his time, whether sovereign or subject, was the real ruler in England. Elizabeth, for instance, was the sole mistress in her own realm, though even she was greatly helped by the famous minister Burleigh. In later times a Strafford, a Laud, an Oliver Cromwell, a Clarendon presided over the destinies of England.

But in the second half of the seventeenth century there began that division of politicians into two sides or parties which has continued ever since. This division sprang, no doubt, from the civil wars between King and Parliament, between Cavalier and Roundhead. By the times of Queen Anne the terms Whig and Tory, replaced in our days for the most part by Liberal and Conservative, had come into common use, and no one who desires to understand the history of her reign can wholly neglect the movements of these two opposing parties in politics. For Marlborough—with his wife—may be said to be the last powerful statesman who ruled England without the formal and acknowledged help of party. Since then the "party in power" has always, through its chief member, the Prime Minister, and his Cabinet, been the actual ruler in the State.

At the beginning of Anne's reign the Whigs were leading in matters of state, but presently Rochester and Nottingham, the former a very strong Tory, came into power. Later on, in 1703, the former was replaced by a more moderate Tory, Harley, and in the following year St. John succeeded Nottingham. The truth was, Marlborough, beginning to see that he was more likely to receive support in his great wars from the Whig side, was working gradually towards the placing of their party in office, though he himself had all along been a Tory. Thus it was that he tried to rule with a coalition, or a mixture of Whigs and Tories. This was in the year 1705, a little after the time to which this story has as yet been carried. But Marlborough and his Duchess were still the real power in the land.

Page 27

We may rejoin George Fairburn, some three weeks after the day when he had been picked up by the Dutch transport. With others he had been landed in the Tagus, and at once drafted into one of the regiments under the Earl of Galway, a Frenchman by birth, but now, having been driven out of France by the persecutions he and the rest of the Protestants had had to endure, a general in the English army. George learned that Portugal had joined the Grand Alliance, in consequence of the Methuen Treaty between her and England, by which Portuguese wines were to be admitted into English ports at a lower customs duty than those of other countries. This step on the part of Portugal had greatly enraged the French King, and he had poured his troops into Spain. The Allies, therefore, were preparing to attack Spain from the eastern and the western sides of the Peninsula at the same time. So George and his comrades began their march eastward, while the gallant admiral Sir George Rooke was attacking Barcelona on the opposite coast.

It was a new life for the English lad, and the heavy marches in a hot climate tried him. But he was growing into a stout youth, and was not afraid of a bit of hard work.

“Besides,” he would say to himself, when disposed to grumble, “am I not a soldier? And isn’t that what I’ve always wanted to be? And I might have been chained up in a French prison still! A thousand times better be here, even in this scorching place.”

If it seemed odd to the lad that the English soldiers were commanded by a Frenchman, it was still stranger that the French forces they were marching to meet were under an Englishman. Yet so it was; the commander of Louis’s army in Spain being the Duke of Berwick, a son of James II and Arabella Churchill, Marlborough’s sister. The two generals were well matched, according to the opinion that prevailed among the troops.

Weeks passed, and as yet George Fairburn had seen no actual fighting. He was all eager to get into action, and was not much comforted by the declaration of the old sergeant under whom he marched.

“Bide your time, my lad,” the veteran would say, “you will get your full share of fighting; enough to satisfy even a fire-eater such as I can see you’re going to be.”

One evening, to his intense delight, the lad was sent forward with a skirmishing party, a report having come in that the enemy was concealed somewhere in one of the wooded valleys of the neighbourhood. After a cautious march of three or four miles, the little company, commanded by a lieutenant of foot, dropped down into a dingle, at the bottom of which ran a stream almost everywhere hidden by the thick growth of trees. The men were startled, on turning a corner in the break-neck path, to see below them the French flag flying from what appeared to be an old mill. Scattered about were the roofs of a dozen cottages, and at the doors could be perceived a number of soldiers lolling at their ease.

Page 28

"The enemy, by Jove!" whispered George, who was leading in his usual eager fashion, pointing out the flag and the hamlet to the lieutenant. "Wouldn't it be a good joke to whip off their flag from that old mill, sir!"

The officer laughed at the notion; he was not much more than a boy himself.

"My lad," said he, "we must know how many the enemy are first."

"I'll climb to the roof there, and from it I can see right down into the village and command a view of everything in it."

"Do you mean to say, youngster, that you would risk it?" the officer asked in surprise.

"Oh, wouldn't I, sir," the lad replied with flushed face. "Say the word, sir, please."

The lieutenant nodded, saying, "It's worth it. But be cautious."

The soldiers looked on while the boy carried out his freak, for such they judged his bit of reconnoitring to be. Cautiously George crept towards the mill, the sloping roof of which came almost down to the very hill side. Tying a wisp of long grass and weeds round each boot, he crawled noiselessly up till within a foot or two of the ridge. He paused a moment to gaze down the dingle. There, well seen from his vantage point, a couple of miles away, ran a far larger valley, which was filled with tents. "The enemy's main body!" he thought. He waved his arm in the direction of the camp, but his comrades did not understand the action, as they stood peering down upon the lad from among the trees higher up the slope.

Now flat on his face the boy ventured to peep over the roof ridge down into the village street at no great distance below. Not an eye was directed upwards, so far as he could see, the men laughing and chattering gaily as they drank. Then the temptation seized him, and in a moment he had lifted the flag from the old chimney in which the staff was loosely set. "I'm in for it now!" he cried to himself, as he slid like an avalanche down the roof, leapt to the ground, and made off up the steep slope towards his comrades, the flag triumphantly in his hand.

He had reached a spot half way up when suddenly wild shouts were heard from below, and at the same instant a bullet whistled close past his ear. A little turn in the path had discovered his head to the enemy.

"In for a penny, in for a pound," shouted the lieutenant, and the Englishmen prepared to receive the French soldiers dashing up to the attack. George stumbled on unhurt, but fell at his officer's feet, utterly breathless. There he lay, unable to rise, while shots were rapidly exchanged. For a minute's space it was hot work, but then the French began to fall back, and with a shout the English handful followed. Fairburn pulled himself

together and stood on the edge of the rock-shelf where he had fallen breathless. To his horror, he saw a Frenchman on the shelf below, taking deliberate aim at the lieutenant.

With a loud cry, the lad sprang down upon the enemy, regardless of the steepness of the place, and in an instant the man was locked in his arms, just as the musket report came. Down the two fell, bounding over two or three shelves of rock, and then pitching headlong some twenty or thirty feet into the thick brushwood below.

Page 29

"You have saved my life, my lad; you are an Englishman worth knowing," were the next words the boy heard.

They came buzzing into George's ears some ten minutes later, when, the brush with the French over, the Englishmen were hastening back to report to the General.

"What happened when I fell, sir?" George asked with curiosity, as the officer walked by the side of the litter. He was astounded to learn that the Frenchman had been found still held in tight grip, his neck broken. The enemy had been put to the rout and had fled, leaving their flag behind them. Moreover, the French camp a couple of miles away had been spied.

"You have three ribs broken, Fairburn," the officer went on, "and you've got about as many bruises as there are days in a year. But what of that. By Jerusalem! I wish the honour had fallen to me!"

"I don't mind the wounds a bit, sir," George answered, cheerfully, "so long as I've been of some use."

The next day no less a person than the great Earl of Galway himself came to speak to the wounded lad.

"I have heard from your lieutenant here the tale of your doings yesterday," he said, with a smile. "You are a boy of pluck. You are done for so far as the present campaign is concerned, and must be sent back to hospital. But there's work cut out yet for a lad of your mettle."

George heard all this praise as if in a dream. He was never sure in after years whether the Earl had really said so much. But Lieutenant Fieldsend, who was destined to become his comrade on many a hard-fought field, and his warm friend for life, was always prepared to tell the full and correct story.

CHAPTER VI

THE ROCK OF GIBRALTAR

"This is better than lying on one's back in hospital, sir, and better than dodging about in a close-packed transport."

The words came from George Fairburn, as with his officer, Lieutenant Fieldsend, he stood surveying, from its northern vicinity, the far-famed Rock of Gibraltar. It was the summer of 1704. His doings since the day of his injuries in the dingle are soon recorded. After months of sickness and a winter of inaction, his service under Lord Galway had come to an end, much to his disgust at first. With others, he had been sent

on board a vessel and carried round the coast of Spain to the neighbourhood of Barcelona, where Sir George Rooke was operating. The new troops had arrived too late. The Admiral, despairing of making any impression on the strongly-fortified Barcelona, was about to sail for home. On the way the idea had come to Sir George that the commanding fortress of Gibraltar would be worth trying for. He had accordingly landed a number of troops on the narrow isthmus of flat land that joins the rock and town of Gibraltar to the mainland.

“Yes, Fairburn,” the lieutenant replied, with a laugh, “my Lord Galway foretold that you had work cut out for you. Here it is, I fancy, and plenty of it.”

Page 30

It was a striking sight on which the two friends looked—for though the one was but a private and the other a commissioned officer, yet by this time Fieldsend and Fairburn had begun their life-long friendship. Away in front of them towered the huge irregular mass called the Rock of Gibraltar, or, more commonly, simply “the Rock,” with the little town clustered at its base and on its gentler slopes. To their right was the indentation in the coast known as the Bay of Gibraltar, which was protected by a long stone-built jetty, the Old Mole. From this protection ran a stout sea defence called the Line Wall, with two or three strong bastions. This wall ended at another projection, the New Mole. But neither the Line Wall nor the New Mole was visible from the spot where George and his superior stood. Filling all the narrow neck of connecting ground were the allied forces just landed, five thousand of them. Immediately in front stood the only outlet from the city on its north side, the Land Point gate.

“I wish they would settle the thing, and either let us get to work or else re-embark for home,” George said, as he sat in what shade he could find to defend himself against the fierce blaze of the sun.

“I am with you there, Fairburn,” the lieutenant agreed, with a yawn.

The speakers were alluding to the answer that was expected at any moment from the garrison within. A formal demand had been made to the Governor for the surrender of the fortress to the Archduke Charles, “the rightful King of Spain.” This was on the twenty-first of July, 1704. The demand had been made on the part of the Allies by the Prince of Hesse-Darmstadt, who was present with three Dutch admirals and several Dutch ships. The English admirals concerned in the siege were, besides Sir George Rooke, the chief of them, Byng, Sir Cloudesley Shovel, and Leake. Many famous ships were in the Bay or rode off the Rock, including Rooke’s own vessel, the *Royal Catherine*, and Shovel’s still more famous *Barfleur*.

The day wore to its close, the guards were posted, and the men prepared for rest. Then there came the long-expected answer from the Marquis de Salinas, the Governor of the fortress. It was a stout and dignified refusal. He and his men had sworn allegiance to King Philip, the old fellow said, and in Philip’s name he held the town and Rock of Gibraltar, and would continue to hold them as long as he could.

“That looks like business,” cried George, gleefully, to a little group of his comrades around, and the men smiled at the eager enthusiasm of the lad. The orders were passed round that the attack should begin with daybreak on the following morning, and the soldiers went to roost at once, with easy minds. It was believed that the attack would be but a harmless bit of child’s-play, as it was more than suspected that the defending force within the town was very small, though how ridiculously small it really was none of the besiegers at the time even guessed.

Page 31

"Turn out, mate," cried one of the soldiers, shaking George vigorously by the shoulder, and the boy sprang up to find everybody astir.

"How I do sleep in this hot country!" he yawned, to which the sergeant replied with a laugh, "It'll be hotter still before long, my lad, never fear."

It was a long time before the first shot was fired, however, the disposition of the troops and the guns not being complete. At length a movement was made. The *Dorsetshire*, with Captain Whitaker in command, was sent to capture a French privateer with twelve guns, which lay at the Old Mole, and the boom of cannon rose in the air.

Presently, from near the spot where Lieutenant Fieldsend and his little company were posted, a shot was fired into the fortifications; then another, and afterwards a third. Work had begun at last.

A puff, a boom in the distance, and there came screaming through the air a big round shot, striking the ground, ploughing it up, and covering those near with dust and dirt.

"Quite near enough, eh, sir?" George observed to his lieutenant, as they shook the earth from their clothing. "And, by Jove, there's another of them!" A second shot flew just overhead, to do its deadly work on the unfortunate men who stood immediately behind. George Fairburn's first task in the siege was to help to carry to the rear two or three badly wounded men. On the ground lay a couple who needed no surgeon.

As yet only a few preliminary shots had been fired into the fortress, but the defenders were evidently quite ready with their reply, and the order for a general attack rang out. Within a few minutes the fight was raging in terrible fashion. From land and sea alike the shot poured into the town; sailor and soldier joining, and often standing side by side. As George afterwards expressed it, "any man set his hand to any job there was to do." Sailors were to be seen on land in many places, while not a few soldiers helped with the firing on board the ships.

All that long morning, however, George Fairburn worked at the gun to which he had been assigned. Black with smoke, powder, dust, perspiration, the lad toiled among his companions. For an hour or two none of the enemy's shots fell very near the spot. But at length, and almost suddenly, the balls began to fly in too close proximity to be pleasant. Shot after shot fell within a yard or two of the gun, and not a few gallant fellows dropped to earth dead or wounded.

"By Jupiter!" cried the lieutenant, who was assisting, "they have got our measure at last! I wonder what it is that makes us so conspicuous."

Then, looking round, he beheld behind them, and not five yards distant, a small clump of elder on which some man had tossed the flaming red shirt he had thrown off in the broiling heat.

“Ah!” Fieldsend ejaculated, “there’s the offender.”

He sprang away and whipped the tell-tale garment from its bush. Just as he seized it another shot came, striking the gun in front, entirely disabling the weapon, and then bounding off. When the men, hastily scattered by the mishap, looked for the lieutenant, he was observed lying in front of the bush.

Page 32

“Dead!” one of the fellows cried.

“No,” answered George, whose keen eyes detected a movement of the officer’s arm, “but he soon will be, if he is left lying there!” Another shot struck the bush, only just missing the body of the prostrate man. In a moment George darted forward towards the place, in spite of the loud warning shouts of his mates.

He reached the spot, seized Fieldsend by the shoulders, and by main force dragged him quickly a dozen yards to the right. It was a heavy task, but the lad was as sturdy a fellow of his years as one might have found in a week’s march, and his efforts were rewarded with a cheer from his comrades.

While the shouts were still ringing, yet one more shot came, this time striking the exact spot where the lieutenant had a moment before been lying, and ploughing up the little elder bush by its roots.

“As plucky a job as ever I see!” cried the sergeant, running up with three or four others, and he slapped George on the back with a heartiness that made the lad wince.

The wounded man was hastily carried off the field.

“More stunned than hurt,” reported the surgeon, “a nasty tap on the left shoulder; but he’ll be all right in a day or so.”

Within half an hour George Fairburn found himself on board the *Dorsetshire*, to assist in the operations against the New Mole. The signal had come to Captain Whitaker to proceed against that place, and the ship was headed for the spot. To the surprise of those on board, they perceived two other ships in advance of them; they were the *Yarmouth*, Captain Hicks, and the *Lennox*, Captain Jumper, a gallant pair. Boats from the two vessels were perceived hastening to the shore. The crews landed, and almost immediately their feet touched ground a dense cloud was seen to fly up into the air, followed by a deafening explosion.

“A mine!” rose from a hundred throats, as the *Dorsetshire* men watched with straining eyes. It was true; two score gallant fellows were afterwards found lying on the fatal ground.

With a determined rush the *Dorsetshire* men fell upon the defenders, and George found himself engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter. It was all over in a few minutes; the handful of Spaniards could not stand against so powerful a force, and the New Mole was taken. Hot and excited, the men were carried against Jumper’s Bastion, a strong work a little to the north of the New Mole, and that place, too, was rushed in an incredibly short space of time, and with scarcely any loss worth the naming. From this time George Fairburn kept no count of the long series of exciting incidents that followed

each other, the assault having been carried to the Line Wall that stretched away northwards to the Old Mole.

The attack when at its height was a terrible affair. Sixteen English ships under the immediate command of Byng, and six Dutch men-of-war under Admiral Vanderdusen, faced the Line Wall, while three more English vessels were off the New Mole.

Page 33

[Illustration: George found himself engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter.]

No place so meagrely manned with defenders as was Gibraltar could long stand such an attack, and at length the two Moles, and the long Line Wall between them, were in the hands of the Allies. Of all the attacking party none showed more vigorous and fearless dash than a certain lad of sturdy build, and Hicks himself perceived the fact.

“Who is that boy in your company?” he enquired of the sergeant.

“Name Fairburn, sir,” was the reply; “all along he’s been a hot member,” to which the captain said with a smile, as he turned away, “He most certainly is.”

The next day was a saints’ day, and it was strongly suspected, and at length clearly perceived, that the Spanish sentinels had left their posts and gone off to mass. It would have been easy to carry the place at once, but the necessary storming had been done, and the allied commanders were only waiting for the besieged to give the signal of capitulation. The besiegers, soldiers and sailors, had nothing to do but chat.

Presently some of the sailors declared that it would be a prime joke to climb the heights and plant their flag there. The notion was taken up, and presently the temptation grew irresistible to certain of them, and with merry chuckles the fellows prepared for the task, an enterprise that was risky in the extreme.

“I’m one of you!” cried George Fairburn, as he followed the handful of sailors to the foot of the steep rock.

“And I!” chimed in yet another voice, and, to George’s astonishment, Lieutenant Fieldsend ran up, his arm in a sling.

“Better go back, sir,” exclaimed the lad, gazing up at the towering cliff in front of them.

“Better both on ye go back, I reckon,” growled one of the sailors; “this ain’t no job for a landsman.”

Nothing heeding this rebuff, the two soldiers followed up the steep rock, George giving a hand at the worst spots to his friend and superior. Up, up, the scaling party mounted, the business becoming every moment more difficult and more full of danger. More than once the gallant fellows-in front paused and declared that further progress was impossible.

“Oh, go on!” called out George, impatiently, on one of these occasions, from below, where he was helping up the lieutenant, “or else let me come,” he added, grumblingly.

The sailor lads needed no spur, however, and amid growing excitement the summit of their bit of cliff was perceived not far away. In the dash for the top the active lad passed

his fellows in the race, catching up the foremost man, who held the flag. Seizing the staff, George Fairburn assisted in the actual planting of the colours. There, fluttering at the very summit of the Rock, was the English flag, its unfolding hailed with bursts of cheering, again and again repeated, from the throngs far below.

The deed was done, and from that day, the twenty-third of July, 1704, according to the old reckoning, the third of August by the new style, the British flag has floated from the Rock of Gibraltar.

Page 34

Desperate efforts were made by the garrison to haul down the flag, but they all failed, and the Governor capitulated. The Prince of Hesse-Darmstadt was for claiming the fortress, but this Rooke would not have, and he promptly declared the Rock to be the possession of his august mistress, Queen Anne. Those of the defenders who were prepared to take the oath of allegiance to Charles III were permitted to remain, the rest for the most part retired to St. Roque.

The handful of harum-scarum fellows who had scaled the heights and planted the flag before long found themselves facing the great Admiral Sir George Rooke himself, on his quarter-deck, Lieutenant Fieldsend and George Fairburn being of the party. The admiral said a few words of commendation; few as they were, they were a full reward for all the efforts the little band had made. Rooke kept the lieutenant behind for a moment.

"What do you propose to do now, Mr. Lieutenant?" he inquired, with much kindly condescension; "our work is about finished, and we are proceeding home."

"By you leave, Sir George," the young man replied, with flushed face, "I should like to join his Grace the Duke in the Netherlands, and so would the lad Fairburn."

"Good," said the Admiral, approvingly, "we will see what can be done when we reach Portsmouth. I have heard something of the boy's doings. He will go far, if he is fortunate."

Accordingly, when, after a great fight with the French fleet under the formidable Count of Toulouse, off Malaga, a doubtful affair, the English ships reached home, the lieutenant and George at once offered for service under the Duke, and were accepted. They sailed away again, for the Netherlands, Fieldsend carrying in his pocket a few words of recommendation from Sir George to the commander-in-chief himself.

The year 1703 had been a sorry year for Marlborough. In the winter he had lost his son, the Marquis of Blandford, a promising youth, a Cambridge student. When the spring operations began, he had found himself hampered at every turn by the jealousies and oppositions of the Dutch rulers and their commanders. In despair, Marlborough had marched up the Rhine and taken Bonn. Meanwhile the French were striving to reach Vienna, there to attack the Emperor. Returning, the Duke was all eager to attack the great port and stronghold of Antwerp, the capture of which would be a heavy blow to Louis. He had, however, to content himself with seizing Huy, Limburg, and Guilders, a success more than counterbalanced by the defeat of the Emperor at Hochstaedt, by the French and Bavarians. Disheartened and disgusted, Marlborough went home at the end of the summer, and it was only by the strong persuasion of Lord Godolphin, now at the helm of state, that he retained his command at all. As a set-off against all these disappointments, there were two matters for rejoicing. The alliance with Portugal has

already been mentioned; now there came the accession to the Allies of Savoy, for the Duke of Savoy had quarrelled with Louis.

Page 35

With intense interest, Lieutenant Fieldsend and George Fairburn heard, on landing in the Netherlands, of the great victory of Blenheim that had just been gained by the Allies under Marlborough, against the combined French and Bavarian forces, commanded by the famous generals Tallard and Marsin, and the two young soldiers hoped to learn more of the great fight when they reached the front.

"What a bit of ill-luck not to have been there in time, sir!" George exclaimed.

The boy had, during his stay in hospital at Lisbon, communicated with his parents at home, and, to his delight, had received their consent to his following the profession of a soldier. "It is useless to stand in the boy's way," the elder Fairburn had said, "though I could have wished he had taken up almost any other trade." So the lad had no hesitation in thus taking service in the army once more.

When the two, in company with others, reached head quarters, Lieutenant Fieldsend presented the letter he held from Sir George Rooke, and was received with the utmost pleasantness by the great Duke.

"Humph, Mr. Fieldsend," Marlborough began, when he had glanced over the contents of the short epistle. "You are a lucky young fellow to have got Sir George's good word. But where is the lad he speaks of—Fairburn, I see?"

"Just outside, your Grace," was the reply, and at a nod the lieutenant fetched George in.

The Duke scanned the boy's ruddy face and took note of his sturdy figure.

"My lad," he began, "you have begun early. Do you know what request Sir George makes in this note?"

"No, sir—my Lord Duke," George stammered in reply, his knees almost shaking under him.

"He recommends you for a commission as ensign," the Duke said quietly, the boy standing almost open-mouthed. "We will give you a short trial first, for as yet we don't know you. No doubt we soon shall." And the great man smiled.

He rapped smartly on the table and an aide-de-camp entered the tent, saluting.

"Here, Mr. Blackett," Marlborough gave the order, "take this lad to your captain, who will see that he is enrolled in your company."

The next moment George Fairburn was shaking the other hard by the hand, the astonishment on both sides too great to admit of a word between them.



CHAPTER VII

BLLENHEIM

"Now I can thank you, my dear Fairburn! We shall never forget it!" were the first words Blackett uttered, and he pressed George's hand once more in his warm grip.

"Forget what, Blackett?" the other asked in surprise, "and for what do you thank me?"

"Surely you have not forgotten it all, my dear fellow—Mary—the fire—your splendid rescue!"

"Ah!" cried George, "and you have been keeping that in mind all this time?"

"Not a doubt of that. As I have just said, and repeat, we can never forget it. From that day you became the dearest friend of our family, if you will let us call you so."

Page 36

"Let you! Heaven knows I am more than delighted to be so. We are no longer silly schoolboys to fight for the merest trifle."

The reconciliation between the old rivals was complete, and the two boys chatted long together.

"But you are in a cavalry regiment, I see," remarked George presently, "and a lieutenant. I understood from my father's letter that you had joined a line regiment with an ensign's commission."

"So I did, my boy; but there are queer turns of fortune in war, and one of them came to me—only a week or two since, it was." And the lieutenant laughed pleasantly.

"Tell me how it was," said George, eagerly.

"It is like singing my own praises, Fairburn," the young officer went on, "but here goes. I'll put it in a score of words. All last year I went as Ensign Blackett, seeing bits of service here, there, and everywhere—at Bonn, on the Rhine, then at Huy, and again at Guelders—but there was no chance for me. But this summer, as we were marching here, not a man of us except the Duke himself, with a notion why we were coming this way at all, we stopped to storm the Schellenberg, a hill overlooking the Danube near Donauwoerth. We were all dog tired—dead beat, in fact, for we had marched till we were almost blind. However, as it was the Duke's, day, he set us at it."

"Duke's day?" interrupted George, in surprise; "isn't every day the Duke's day?"

"It's a funny thing," went on Blackett, laughing, "but as a matter of fact at that time the Duke was taking alternate days of command with the Prince of Baden."

"A queer go!" the listener interjected.

"Well, to cut my tale short, we made two attacks on that hill, and both times were driven back. Things began to look like a drawn game, when up comes Louis, the Prince, you know, with a lot of his Germans, and at it we went again. In the thick of it, my colonel suddenly called out, 'Can you ride, Blackett?' 'Try me, sir,' I says. And he gave me a note for the Duke, telling me that he had not another officer left who could ride, all our fellows had been laid low or dispersed. I galloped off like the wind, on a big hard-mouthed brute. Just as I was nearing the spot where the Duke stood, a dozen Bavarians suddenly blocked my path and levelled their muskets. I was on a bit of a slope and above their heads, in a manner, so I kicked up my nag and in an instant I flew over them, guns and all. It was a clean jump, and not a shot hit me, by good luck. My horse managed to carry me on to the Duke, and then fell dead. The poor beggar had caught what had been intended for me. Well, now I've done. The Duke, who had seen

it all, had me transferred to a cavalry regiment, with the rank of lieutenant, and here I am.”

“Yes, and here am I, a private, talking in this off-hand sort of way to a commissioned officer.”

“That’s all right, Fairburn,” laughed Blackett, “we haven’t entered you yet. It’ll be quite time enough to bother about that sort of thing then. Officially we shall have to be master and man; actually we shall be brothers.”

Page 37

Thus the ancient rivals became comrades in arms, and members of the same regiment, for George from that time was a cavalry man. His other friend, Fieldsend, was attached to a line regiment again.

Bit by bit Lieutenant Blackett, during the next days, contrived to give his friend a full and vivid account of the great battle of Blenheim, just won by the Allies. He was not a great hand at a tale, whatever he might be on the field, and we may piece together his story for him. His adventures and his doings in that memorable fight may well delay our tale for a little space.

That year Louis of France had determined to make a vigorous effort, or rather a series of efforts, and sent various armies to oppose the different members of the Grand Alliance. But his main plan was to attack the Empire, making Bavaria, the Elector of which was his only supporter in that part of the world, his advance post. For some time Louis had been secretly encouraging Hungary in the rebellion she was contemplating. He trusted, therefore, that the Emperor would find himself attacked by his Hungarian subjects to rearward, while he was engaged with the combined French and Bavarian forces in front. It was a very fine scheme.

But there was one man, and only one, who saw through it—Marlborough. At once the Duke set off southwards, carrying with him also a force of Dutchmen, deceiving their rulers by a ruse. He sent for the valiant Prince Eugene to meet him, and the two famous generals saw each other for the first time. Mutual admiration and friendship sprang up between them, to last through the rest of their lives. Prince Louis of Baden had given some trouble by wishing to share the command with Marlborough. Him they at last got rid of by sending him to take the important fortress of Ingolstadt, commanding the Danube. Marlborough's magnificent march from the Netherlands to the upper Danube is one of the finest things in military story.

Marlborough and Prince Eugene met with the French and Bavarian forces near the village of Blenheim, on the same river, and close to Hochstaedt, the scene of the defeat of the allied troops the year before, and joyfully the leaders prepared to join battle. The commanders on the side of the enemy were Marshal Marsin, the Prince of Bavaria, and Marshal Tallard. The last of these had managed to slip past Eugene some time before and join his colleagues.

The order of battle on the side of the Allies was this. The right was commanded by Eugene, the left by Lord Cutts, a gallant officer, the centre, a vast body of cavalry mainly, by Marlborough himself. Opposed to Eugene were the Elector and Marsin, while Tallard faced the Duke, but on the farther bank of the little brook Nebel, which empties itself into the Danube just below. Tallard's centre was weak, as he had crowded no fewer than seventeen battalions into the village of Blenheim, on his extreme right and close to the bank of the great river.

Page 38

"Now, gentlemen, to your posts." These words, quietly and pleasantly spoken by Marlborough, began the great battle of Blenheim. It was about midday, August 13, 1704. The Duke had been waiting till he heard that Prince Eugene was ready, and he had occupied the interval in breakfast and prayers. Every man of his division was provided with a good meal. He himself had attended divine service and had received the sacrament the evening before.

Lieutenant Blackett found himself one of a body of 8,000 cavalry, which were ordered to cross the Nebel so as to be within striking distance of Tallard's troops drawn up beyond the brook. This work of crossing was likely to be a long and tedious, not to say a difficult bit of business, the intervening ground being very boggy. Matthew was far towards the rear of this large body of horse, and it was evident that it would be hours before his turn came to cross. In company with hundreds of his comrades, he began to long for something more exciting.

The first division to get into serious action was that under the brave Lord Cutts, to the left of the allied forces. Cutts went by the nickname of Salamander, so indifferent was he to danger when under fire. This gallant leader led his men to attack the village of Blenheim. Twice the assault was made with the utmost vigour and determination; twice Cutts was driven back. The village was not only filled with an immense force of French, but was protected by a strong palisade.

A horseman was presently seen galloping towards the spot where the Duke was posted, and his movements were watched with interest by Blackett and others of the cavalry waiting their orders to cross.

"Seems to me he is wounded," the lieutenant observed to a man near him; to which the other replied, "Yes, he does seem wobbly, doesn't he?"

Hardly had the words been spoken when the advancing rider suddenly fell from his horse, which kept on, however, dragging his master along by the stirrup. Without a second's delay, Blackett threw his own beast across the track of the runaway steed, caught his head, and pulled him up. Then in a moment the youngster was down on the ground to the assistance of the poor fellow who had fallen.

"To the Duke!" the man cried, glancing at a note he held tightly clutched in his hand. "Quick!" he moaned; "I'm shot through the back, and done for!"

"Poor fellow!" murmured the lieutenant, and he seized the letter, sprang with a bound into his saddle, and was off like the wind, before his companions had quite realized what it all meant. Thus for the second time within a few days Matthew Blackett presented himself before his commander in the part of unofficial aide-de-camp. The Duke nodded as he recognized the lad, and, pencilling a few words of reply, said, "To Lord Cutts; then back to your post." And as Blackett rode off like the wind in a bee-line

for Cutts's division, Marlborough murmured, "A fearless fox-hunter, I'll be bound." The order, it was afterwards found, was for Cutts to make no more attempts on Blenheim, but to hold himself in readiness when his services should again be requisitioned.

Page 39

Meanwhile, Prince Eugene was having a lively time of it on the right wing. He began by leading a cavalry charge against the French and Bavarians, who were under the command of Marsin and the Elector respectively. In a few minutes he had forced back the front line and had captured a battery of six guns. On he sped to confront the second line, and the opposing forces met with a tremendous shock. For a moment all was doubtful, but the enemy stood their ground stoutly. Eugene could make no impression and had to fall back. By this time the scattered front line of the French had rallied, and, in spite of the Prince's desperate efforts, the battery was retaken. The danger to that division of the allied forces soon became extreme. To save the day, Eugene immediately galloped away in person, and returned presently, bringing a body of Prussian infantry he had in reserve. The help of these alone saved him from defeat.

At last! Blackett and his comrades were ordered to advance, and moved towards the Nebel. The ground was in a shockingly bad state. At its best marshy and water-logged, it was now a sea of mire. The worst spots had been bridged over, as it were, by the help of fascines, with here and there pontoons. By this time, however, many of these had been shifted from their places by the passage of so many thousands of horse, and the road became worse and worse as the burn was neared. In one place the men were compelled to come to a full stop, the ground being simply impassable.

"We cannot advance, gentlemen," cried the colonel commanding the regiment, "till we have done some repairs. Now for willing hands!"

Some of the officers glanced dubiously at the mud in which the horses were standing knee-deep, and they did not budge. Not so Matthew Blackett; with a bound he sprang to the ground, and waded through the mire, half of his long legs submerged, his brethren endeavouring to keep their countenances.

"That's the right way!" sang out the colonel in high commendation, and a little crowd of the men following the example of the young lieutenant, the work of repairing the road was soon in rapid progress, the colonel standing by to direct the operations. Other officers speedily came to help, rather ashamed to think that they had allowed the youngster to set them a lead.

"It's nothing," cried Matthew, cheerfully, as he toiled with a will. "Many's the time I've stood up to my waist in deadly-cold water digging out an old dog otter."

The lad's good-humour and willingness were infectious, and in a remarkably short space of time the track had been repaired. Then, with many a joke at each other's expense, the men remounted and pursued their journey, covered from head to foot with mire, but cheered by the colonel's approving, "It will serve for all the rest of the horse, my lads."



All this time the cavalry were wondering why Tallard took no steps to stop their passage, and none was more surprised than Marlborough himself. He did not at the time know that Tallard had left his centre weak, by sending so many men into the village on the right. Still less, of course, could the Duke know that Tallard was expecting a very easy victory. Be that as it may, the Marshal made no move till Marlborough had got a large part of his men across the stream and had formed his first line.

Page 40

When Blackett arrived on the scene with his regiment he found that a force of Eugene's cavalry had taken the village of Oberglau, near the spot. A minute later, almost before the colonel had drawn up his men, there was a fierce shout, and there came thundering down upon the village, with almost irresistible shock, a body of the enemy.

"Irishmen, by Jove!" cried a man by Matthew's side. "They'll fight like demons!"

The attack, in truth, came from the Irish Brigade, a doughty body of Irishmen, exiles from their country, in the service of Louis. Before the Englishmen realized the situation the Irishmen had dashed clean through the force occupying Oberglau, and had taken up a position between the men and Eugene.

The confusion was extreme, and the allied troops could scarce be got to face the resistless Irishmen at all. Things looked desperate. The colonel of Blackett's regiment, seeing the state of things at Oberglau, as he toured it, shouted, "Go and tell the Duke, Mr. Blackett!" and away dashed Matthew once more to the General. He was a pretty spectacle, but he did not give the matter a thought, and his news prevented the Duke from paying much heed to the condition of the messenger.

"Lead the way," came the sharp order, and Blackett thundered on in front, the great commander with a body of men hard after him, to find the energetic and plucky colonel fallen badly wounded, and the regiment in difficulties. With a swoop, the reinforcements fell upon the Irishmen, and, almost for the first time, Matthew found himself engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter. He did not know how long the conflict lasted, but presently he found the enemy in full flight, his comrades cheering lustily around him. Marlborough's promptitude had saved the situation.

"You fought like a very fiend, Blackett," remarked the major, laughingly, a little later on, when for the moment operations had ceased, to which Matthew replied simply, "Did I, sir? I don't remember anything about it," whereat the major laughed again.

It was five in the afternoon, and there was a lull on the field. Up to the present neither side could be said to have gained any real advantage over the other. All the allied cavalry had crossed the stream, and the men wondered what would come next.

They were not left long in doubt. The order came to mass the horse in preparation for a grand charge. For a time the field was a scene of rapid and puzzling movement, but order was quickly evolved out of the seeming confusion.

Then the trumpet rang out, and there bore down upon Tallard a magnificent body of eight thousand cavalry. Bore *down*, we have written; the course was slightly upwards, as a matter of fact, from the stream. There was one check, and the Allies were stopped for a moment. Then like a whirlwind the horse dashed forward, at a tremendous speed.

It was too much. The French fired one volley, then turned and fled. On the Englishmen galloped, and in a few moments the enemy's line was cut in two. In two different directions the French cavalry ran, and Marlborough followed after that section which was making for Blenheim. It was a wild stampede, and Matthew Blackett, as he dashed after the retreating enemy, always considered it the most exciting episode in his life.

Page 41

It did not last long. By great good fortune the lieutenant found himself one of those surrounding Marshal Tallard. Amidst a wild burst of applause the gallant Frenchman surrendered, and before he knew well what he was doing, Blackett was leading Tallard's horse by the bridle. The lad saw the Duke glance towards him as he dismounted to receive the gallant leader and invite him into his carriage.

The victory was practically won. There remained only the seventeen battalions in the village of Blenheim, and these, hemmed in on the one side, and bounded by the river on the other, gave little trouble. The poor fellows, in fact, were unable to stir, and many a man of them sprang into the river in his desperation, only to be hopelessly carried away by the swift current, and drowned.

It was a terrible scene of bloodshed, and it was an untold relief to the Englishmen when their gallant foes in the village gave in. One French regiment had actually burnt its colours to save them from being taken.

Thus ended the great fight of Blenheim, a fight in which the enemy had lost no fewer than forty out of their sixty thousand men. The Allies had had fifty thousand troops and had lost eleven thousand of them. The wonderful renown of the French army had received a mighty blow. No longer could Louis boast that his troops were invincible.

To Marlborough the victory brought the royal manor of Woodstock and the palace of Blenheim. To the humble Matthew Blackett it gave a place near the great Duke's own person, as we have seen.

CHAPTER VIII

COMRADES IN ARMS

It was always a puzzle to George Fairburn that the Duke had so unexpectedly assigned him to a cavalry regiment, and his friend Lieutenant Blackett could not help with the solution.

"I suppose it was just an accident," Matthew said with a laugh; "he saw a horse-soldier before him in the person of your servant here, and so turned you over to me. I'm mighty delighted, anyhow, that we are thrown together. We shall have a good time of it, I feel sure."

"We shall, if there's plenty to do," George assented with a smile.

There was plenty to do. At the very moment when the boy and Lieutenant Fieldsend arrived, the Duke had given orders to prepare for another long march, and within a couple of days George found himself one of a large body of troops heading for the Rhine valley. A halt was called before Landau, and the siege of this stronghold began.

The affair proved to be a slow business, the attacking force being very short of military material. Days passed; the fortress stood firm, no apparent impression being made at all.

“I dare wager the Duke won’t stand cooling at this job,” remarked Matthew to George and Fieldsend one evening. The latter with his regiment was assisting in the siege, and he had already taken a great liking for Matthew Blackett, a liking Matthew was not slow to reciprocate.

Page 42

The prophecy was not far wrong. Almost before dawn the very next morning Marlborough was marching, with twelve thousand men, largely cavalry, towards the Queich valley, across a bit of country that for badness could hardly be matched even in the wilds of Connemara. On man and horse tramped, till the ancient city of Treves was reached. The Duke prepared for a siege, but he was saved the trouble. The garrison was far too weak to hold the place, and the place fell into his hands almost without a blow. George Fairburn grumbled at his luck, but was cheered by Matthew's laughing reply, "Don't seek to rush things too quickly, my dear lad; your time is coming."

It was. After ordering the siege of Traerbach, Marlborough flew back with a portion of his men to Landau, in his own breathless fashion, and before many hours were over Fairburn was as keenly interested in the siege as if he had never scampered all the way to Treves and back again. A week or two passed by, and still the place held out, though it was plain the end was near.

One day a sudden assault was planned on a weak spot in the defences, a spot where some earlier damages had been ineffectively repaired. George, with a troop of cavalry on foot, under the orders of Lieutenant Blackett, suddenly started off at the double, spurred by their officer's "Come along, lads! through or over!" With a roar of delight the men, mostly young fellows, dashed toward the spot, regardless of the whistling bullets that flew around. In a breach of the defences, a place not more than four or five feet wide, stood a huge Frenchman, whirling his sword over his head. The attackers pulled up for a moment, all except George, who kept right on, till he was close upon the big fellow with the sword. The Frenchman lunged out fiercely at the lad, but the Englishman skipped out of the way like a cat. Then before the man could use his weapon again George had charged him head first, like a bull, his body bent double. With a shock his head came into contact with the fellow's knees, and in a moment the Frenchman had tumbled helplessly on his face. The rest of Blackett's little band dashed over the prostrate enemy and into the fortress. The stronghold was taken.

"Send Cornet Fairburn to me, Mr. Blackett," said the colonel that same evening, and much wondering the lieutenant obeyed.

"Cornet Fairburn sounds well," he remarked to George. "Wonder if the old colonel has made a mistake about it."

There was no mistake at all. When George Fairburn returned from his interview with his commanding officer, it was as Cornet, not as Trooper Fairburn. It was by the Duke's own order, it appeared. That night the three friends, all with commissions in their pockets now, made merry in company. Sir George Rooke's desire had been speedily realized, and George had taken his first step upwards.

Marlborough marched to meet the King of Prussia, whom he persuaded to send some eight thousand troops to the help of the Duke of Savoy, in Italy. Then he went home to receive his honours, and the memorable campaign of 1704 came to an end.

Page 43

Marlborough was a statesman as well as a brilliant commander, and he had his work at home as well as abroad, a work the winters enabled him to deal with. He was now quite aware that his best friends, that is to say, the chief supporters of his war schemes, were the Whigs, and he was working more and more energetically to put their party in power. Harley and St. John took the place of more violent Tories, and in 1705 a coalition of Whigs and Tories, called the Junto, managed public affairs, more or less under Marlborough's direction. The Duchess still held her sway over the Queen, and the two ladies addressed each other as Mrs. Morley (the Queen) and Mrs. Freeman respectively. Already there were influences at work to undermine the power of the Marlboroughs, but their political downfall was not yet.

Scottish matters were giving a good deal of trouble to the English government. Two years before, in 1703, the Scotch Parliament had passed an Act of Security, the object of which was to proclaim a different sovereign from that of England, unless Scotland should be guaranteed her own religious establishment and her laws. Now this year, 1705, the Parliament in London placed severe restrictions on the Scotch trade with England, and ordered the Border towns to be fortified. The irritation between the two countries grew and grew, and war seemed within sight. A commission was accordingly appointed to consider the terms of an Act of Union, the greater portion of Scotland, however, being strongly opposed to any such union at all.

The spring of 1705 found the Allies active once more. The main interest centres in the Netherlands and in Spain. The Earl of Peterborough, who took the command in Spain, was one of the most extraordinary men of his time. His energy and activity were amazing, and he would dash about the Continent in a fashion that often astounded his friends and confounded his enemies. No man knew where Peterborough would next turn up. "In journeys he outrides the post," Dean Swift wrote of him, and the Dean goes on to say,

So wonderful his expedition,
When you have not the least suspicion,
He's with you like an apparition.

Add to this that the Earl was a charming man, full of courage and enthusiasm, and able to command the unbounded affection of his troops, and you have the born leader of men. Of Peterborough's brilliant exploits in the Peninsula in 1705 a whole book might be written. His chief attention was first given to the important town of Barcelona, a place which had successfully withstood Rooke, and in the most remarkable fashion he captured the strong fort of Monjuich, the citadel of the town, with a force of only 1,200 foot and 200 horse. Barcelona itself fell for a time into the hands of Peterborough and the Archduke Charles, now calling himself Charles III of Spain. Success followed upon success, and whole provinces, Catalonia and Valencia, were won over. So marvellous was the story of his doings, indeed, that when, in the course of time, George Fairburn

heard it, in the distant Netherlands, he was disposed to wish he had remained in Spain. Yet he had done very well, in that same year 1705, as we shall see.

Page 44

Almost from his resumption of the command in the early spring of that year, Marlborough met with vexations and disappointments. He had formed the great plan of invading France by way of the Moselle valley, and our two heroes, who had heard whispers as to the work being cut out for the Allies, were ready to dance with delight. They were still frisky boys out of school, one may say. But the plan was opposed in two quarters. First, the Dutch, statesmen and generals alike, threw every obstacle in the way. They would not hear of the project. Then Louis of Baden was in one of his worst sulky fits, and for a time refused his help. When he did consent to go, he demanded a delay, pleading that a wound he had received at the Schellenberg, in the previous year, was not yet fully healed. The troops the Duke expected did not come in; instead of the 90,000 he wanted, but 30,000 mustered.

"It is no go," Blackett said to his friend with a groan.

At this juncture the Emperor Leopold died, and the Archduke's elder brother Joseph succeeded him.

"Spain is bound in the long run to drop into the hands of either France or Austria," the two young officers agreed. Already the lads were beginning to take an interest in great matters of state, as was natural in the case of well-educated and intelligent youngsters. And they felt that when either event should happen it would be a bad day for the rest of Europe.

Baffled in his great scheme, Marlborough set his hand to another important work. Across the province of Brabant in Flanders the French held a wonderful belt of strongholds, stretching from Namur to Antwerp. No invasion of France could possibly be made from the Netherlands so long as Louis held this formidable line of defences. Moreover, the near presence of these fortresses to Holland was a standing threat to the Dutch, and, when Marlborough made known his plans to them, they for once fell in with them.

Thus it happened that Lieutenant Blackett and his friend Cornet Fairburn found themselves once more in the thick of war. They had had a preliminary skirmish or two not long before—the retaking of Huy, the frightening of Villeroy from Liege, and what not—but now something more serious was afoot. That the task the Duke had set himself was a difficult one, every man in his service knew, but they knew also that he was not a commander likely to be dismayed by mere difficulties. Villeroy, the leader of the French, had 70,000 troops with him, a larger force than the Allies could get together.

It was near Tirlemont that Marlborough began his operations. The march to the place went on till it was stopped by a small but awkward brook, the Little Gheet, on the farther side of which the French were very strongly posted in great numbers. So formidable an affair did the crossing appear that the Dutch generals objected to the attempt being

made. Marlborough, usually the best-tempered of men, was in a rage, and determined to push the attack in spite of them. It was the morning of July 17, 1705.

Page 45

"We are in for hard knocks to-day, if appearances go for anything," Blackett said quietly to George, as their regiment prepared, with the other cavalry, to open the proceedings.

"So much the better," was George's laughing answer; "without hard knocks there is no promotion, eh?"

All was ready; the bugle rang out the signal for the attack. The long line of Marlborough's horse fronted the Gheet at no great distance away, the field-pieces were in position, the infantry and reserves somewhat to the rear. Beyond the stream, with the advantage of rising ground, were planted the French guns, supported by a powerful host.

Away! The cavalry dashed onwards at a terrific pace. A sharp rattle of musketry rang out, and in a moment a sprinkling of the advancing troopers fell from their saddles. George Fairburn was already warming to the work, and he sat his steed firmly. Then a ball struck the gallant animal, and in an instant the rider was flung over its head. The young cornet narrowly escaped being trampled to pieces by his comrades as they swept by in full career. Up he sprang, however, a trifle stunned for the moment, but otherwise no worse. Quickly recovering his sword, which had flown from his grasp, he darted after his more fortunate companions, and arrived breathless on the scene.

A fierce struggle for the passage of the river was going on, and desperate fighting was taking place in the very bed of the stream, a trifle lower down its course. For a time George endeavoured in vain to find a way through the struggling mass of men and horses to the brink of the Gheet; the press and the confusion were too great. Accordingly he ran on behind the lines of horse, to find a place where he might thrust himself in. Where his own comrades were he could not tell. Bullets were flying thick around him as he ran, but he did not give the matter a thought. It was characteristic of him all through his life, indeed, that when his attention and interest were strongly engaged on one matter he was all but oblivious to every other consideration.

At length his chance appeared, and an opening presented itself. Springing over the prostrate bodies of men and horses, he reached the bank. To his surprise the stream seemed to be very deep. As a matter of fact the waters were dammed lower down by the mass of fallen men and animals lying across their bed. Without hesitation he dashed into the flood, his sole thought being to get himself across and so into the enemy's lines. With his sword held tightly between his teeth, the boy officer swam, as many another lusty Peterite would have been able to do. He reached mid stream.

Suddenly he became aware of a sharp pain in his left shoulder. A moment later he grew faint. In vain he struggled to keep afloat; the world grew dark to him, and he sank beneath the surface.



A tall fellow, fully six foot three in his stockings, if he was an inch, had just managed to wade through the stream, his nose above the surface, a comical sight, if anybody had had the time to notice it. Looking back, this man saw George disappear, and without hesitation he dashed into the water again. Reaching the spot, he groped about, and then, with both hands clutching an inanimate form, he dragged his burden to the bank.

Page 46

"George, by Heaven!" he cried, as soon as he could get a glimpse of the features. It was true; Matthew Blackett had saved his friend's life at the risk of his own. And it had been a risk, for a dozen bullets had splashed around him as he had hauled his heavy load along.

"Blackett!" exclaimed Fairburn, a moment or two later, when, recovering, he opened his eyes. "Where's your horse?"

"Done for, poor wretch! And yours?"

"Shot under me, at the very first volley. And it was you who dragged me out! I shall remember it! But here we are on the right side; come on!"

The lads gripped each other warmly by the hand, and side by side dashed on into the thick of the *melee*. A large number of the allied cavalry had by this time made good their passage across, in spite of the fiercest opposition on the part of the enemy. In vain Blackett urged his companion to withdraw and get himself away with his wounded arm. George would not budge an inch. It was only a flesh wound, it afterwards appeared. So the two North-country lads stood by each other. For an hour or more they were hotly engaged, the enemy falling back inch by inch.

Then came ringing cheers. The French had abandoned the position; the famous and hitherto impregnable line of defences had been broken. Our heroes breathed more freely when a short respite came. But the interval of rest was short. Colonel Rhodes, their commanding officer, catching sight of the pair, as he was collecting his men again, joyfully hailed them, and a minute later George and Matthew, provided once more with mounts, were cantering with the rest to the renewed attack. The enemy had made another stand some distance farther back.

Another struggle, and this second position was like wise carried, with a grand sweep. Victory was at hand.

Suddenly a startling report ran through the English lines. The Duke was missing! Where was the mighty General? was the question on every lip. Somebody ran up and said a word to Colonel Rhodes. Instantly the gallant officer and his men were galloping off to a distant part of the field, the troopers wondering what was afoot. The explanation soon appeared. Marlborough had become separated from the main body of his army, and now, with but a very few men around him, was in imminent danger of capture by the French troops, who were pouring thick upon the spot.

Colonel Rhodes charged at the head of his regiment straight upon the French, and a lane was cut through. It was a matter of a few minutes. The Duke was saved, and the enemy retired in woeful disappointment. The first to reach the Duke were Blackett and Fairburn, and the lads were flushed with joy and pride when their distinguished leader,

looking at them with a smile, said, with all his old pleasantness of manner, "Gentlemen, I thank you."

The Brabant line of strongholds was broken. Villeroy fell back, and Marlborough had his will on the defences. No inconsiderable section of the belt was rendered useless. No longer did an impassable barrier stretch between the Netherlands and France. The importance of the victory could hardly be overstated. As one writer has well pointed out, "All Marlborough's operations had hitherto been carried on to the outside of these lines; thenceforward they were all carried on within them."

Page 47

A day or two later the Duke came to inspect the regiment to which our boys belonged, just as he was inspecting others. The men with their officers were drawn up, and the General's eyes ran along the line. Presently he spoke a word to the colonel in command of the regiment, and, to their no small confusion, Lieutenant Blackett and Cornet Fairburn were called out to the front.

"How old are you?" the Duke inquired, as the youths saluted.

"Nearly twenty, may it please your Grace." "Just turned nineteen, by your Grace's leave." Such were the replies.

"Hum!" said the Duke thoughtfully, "you shall have your promotion in due course. You are young, and can afford to wait for it." This to Matthew. "As for you"—turning to George—"you have fairly earned your lieutenancy." And he turned away.

CHAPTER IX

ANNUS MIRABILIS

"Don't imagine, my dear lad, that they are going to make captains of mere boys like ourselves." This was the reply, given with a hearty laugh, when George Fairburn, after receiving his friend's warm congratulations at the close of the inspection, was condoling with Matthew on his failure to get his step. "A captain at twenty is somewhat unlikely," Blackett went on. "I suppose so," replied George. "After all we are only glorified schoolboys, some of our fellows tell us. Yet you look three-and-twenty, if a day. However, all will come in time, let us hope."

The brilliant operations on the defence line proved to be but the prelude to Marlborough's second great life disappointment. He saw his chance. He had but to follow up his success by a decisive victory over Villeroy's forces, and the way lay open to Paris. His hopes ran high.

Alas! the Dutch had to be reckoned with. Eager to follow up his advantage, Marlborough called for assistance, immediate and effective, from them; in vain; the assistance did not come, or came too late. With what help he could get from the Dutch, nevertheless, he went forward to the Dyle. Here again the Dutch balked him, raising objections to the crossing of that river. In despair the Duke gathered his troops, as it happened, strangely enough, on the very spot where, a hundred years later, another great Duke gained his most famous victory over the French. Could Marlborough have but had his chance with Villeroy in that spot, there is little doubt that Europe would have seen an earlier Waterloo.

But it was not to be. Just as the Margrave of Baden had stopped his advance along the Moselle into France the previous year, so now the supineness and factious opposition of

the Dutch prevented Marlborough from dealing the French power a crushing blow. Deeply disgusted, he threatened once more to resign his command. "Had I had the same power I had last year," he wrote, "I could have won a greater victory than that of Blenheim." It was a bitter trial for him.

Page 48

The campaign of 1705 soon after came to a close, and the Duke set off on what we may call a diplomatic tour among the allied states, his travels and negotiations producing good results. It was not till the beginning of 1706 that he went back to England, and thus it was late in the spring of that year when the campaign was reopened.

Rejoining his army in the Netherlands, he proposed to make another of his great marches, namely into Italy, there to join his friend Prince Eugene in an invasion of France from the south-east. This plan was made impossible by the crookedness of the kings of Prussia and Denmark, and some others of the Allies. Swallowing this disappointment also, as best he might, Marlborough started from the Dyle and advanced on the great and important stronghold of Namur, at the junction of the Sambre with the Meuse. Namur had always been greatly esteemed by the French, and, in dread alarm, Louis ordered Villeroy to take immediate action. The result was that the two hostile armies, each numbering about sixty thousand men, met face to face near the village of Ramillies, half way between Tirlemont and Namur, and near the head waters of the Great and Little Gheet and the Mehaigne.

Lieutenants Fairburn and Blackett from their position on a bit of rising ground could take in the general dispositions of the respective forces, and the same thought passed through both their minds. The French and Bavarian troops were drawn up in the form of an arc, whose ends rested on the villages of Anderkirk, to the north, and Tavieres, on the Mehaigne, to the south. The villages of Ramillies and Offuz, with a mound known as the Tomb of Ottomond at the back of the former, were held by a strong centre. Marlborough, on his part, had disposed his men along a chord of that arc. If it came to a question of moving men and guns from one wing to the other, it was plain that the Duke had the advantage, the distance along an arc being necessarily greater than that along its chord, and it was that thought which came into the heads of the two lieutenants.

Marlborough directed his right to attack the enemy around the village of Anderkirk, backing up the assault with a contingent from his centre. Blackett and his friend were soon taking part in the gallop over the swampy ground in the neighbourhood of the village. A sharp encounter followed, the Frenchmen beginning to waver. Hereupon Villeroy in alarm promptly sent from his centre a large number of men to support his staggering left at Anderkirk, thereby leaving his centre weak.

All at once Marlborough withdrew his troops to the high ground opposite the hamlet of Offuz, as if for a fresh attack. Then sending back a part to keep up the pretence of continuing the combat in the marsh, he took advantage of the concealment afforded by the higher ground, and, cleverly detaching a large body, ordered them to slip away round to seize Tavieres, on the Mehaigne. George and his friend were thus

Page 49

separated, the latter being of those who remained in the swamp to keep up appearances. It was a clever bit of strategy, and, before Villeroy realized the truth, Tavieres had been rushed with a splendid charge. The fact that the attack on Anderkirk had been only a feint came to the French commander's understanding too late. His centre, with the village of Ramillies and the Tomb of Ottomond commanding it, the really important positions of the day, was weakened by the loss of troops sent on a wild-goose chase.

Ere Villeroy could repair the mischief and summon his men from Anderkirk, Marlborough had sent down upon the French centre a great body of cavalry under the command of Auerkerke, the Dutch general. English and Dutch horse combined in this assault, and George Fairburn found himself one of a host dashing upon the village of Ramillies. There was a terrific shock, a few moments of fierce onslaught, and the first line of the enemy gave way. Through the broken and disorganized line the cavalry swept, to charge the second.

Another shock, even greater than the first. The Frenchmen of the second line stood firm, for were they not the famous Household Regiment—the Maison du Roi—of Louis, and probably the finest troops in Europe. The advance of the Allies was instantly checked. In vain Auerkerke urged on his men; in vain those men renewed the attack. The enemy stood steadfast; they began to drive back their antagonists; the position of the Allies was becoming critical.

“Go and inform the Duke! Quick, quick!” the Dutchman called out to a young officer whom he had observed fighting with the utmost determination near by, but who had stopped for a moment to recover his breath.

It happened to be Lieutenant Fairburn, and George once more found himself face to face with the Duke, for the first time since he had met him after the rush of the French defence line near Tirlemont last year. Marlborough, the youth could see by his quick glance, knew him again. In a word or two George delivered his startling message.

“By Jove, sir,” declared the subaltern, when telling his story to his colonel afterwards, “never did I see so spry a bit of work as I did when I had said my little say. The Duke was ten men rolled into one, sir. Orders here, there, and everywhere; fellows sent darting about like hares. In a few minutes—minutes! I was going to say seconds—every sabre had been got together, and we were all tumbling over each other in our hurry to get along to the fight. It was a fine thing, sir.”

The commander, sword in hand, led his reinforcement to the fatal spot with the speed of the whirlwind. He had almost reached it when he was suddenly set upon by a company of young bloods belonging to the Maison du Roi. They were nobles for the most part,

and utterly reckless of their lives. Recognizing the Duke, they made a desperate attempt to secure him, closing round him with a dash.

Page 50

“Great Heaven!” ejaculated George Fairburn, as his eye suddenly fell upon the Duke fighting his way out of the group, and in company with fifty more he flew to the spot. At that moment Marlborough, now almost clear, put his horse to a ditch across his track. How it happened no one could tell exactly, but the rider fell, and dropped into the little trench. Marlborough’s career appeared at an end. His steed was cantering madly over the field.

But friends were at hand, and before the Frenchmen could complete their work the little company had beaten them off. George leapt to the ground, and drew his horse towards the General, who had sprung to his feet in a trice, nothing the worse.

“Here, sir,” said the lieutenant, handing the bridle to an officer in a colonel’s uniform, who stood at hand, and the colonel held the animal while the Duke mounted.

[Illustration: The Rescue of Marlborough.]

Before the Duke had fairly gained his seat in the saddle, a ball with a rustling hum carried off the head of the unfortunate colonel. It was an appalling sight, and George Fairburn was forced to turn away his eyes.

The crisis was too serious, however, to waste time in vain regrets. Without the loss of a moment Marlborough led the charge upon the enemy. The famous Household Brigade fell back, and the village of Ramillies was taken. Then another fierce struggle, but a brief one, and the Tomb of Ottomond was secured, the position which commanded the whole field. The battle was almost at an end.

There remained only the village of Anderkirk in its marshy hollow, and Marlborough called together his forces from the various parts of the confused field. Another charge was sounded, the last. The enemy turned and fled. Ramillies was won.

The victory, quite as important in its way as Blenheim, had been gained in a little over three hours. The loss on the side of the Allies was hardly four thousand; that of the French and Bavarians, in killed, wounded, and prisoners, was four times as great. All the enemy’s guns, six only excepted, fell into the hands of the victors.

There was one heavy drawback to the pride which the young Lieutenant Fairburn naturally felt at having had a humble share in the great victory. At the muster of the survivors of his regiment Blackett was missing. Half the night did George search for him, and was at last rewarded by finding the young fellow lying wounded and helpless on the boggy ground. It was an intense relief when the surgeon gave good hopes of Matthew’s ultimate recovery.

“I’m done for this campaign, old friend,” Blackett said with a feeble smile to George, “and must be sent home for a while. But I hope to turn up among you another year.”

Page 51

If to follow up a great victory promptly, vigorously, and fully, be one of the distinguishing marks of a great commander, then the Duke of Marlborough was certainly one of the greatest generals of whom history tells. Hardly anything more striking than his long and rapid series of successes in the weeks after Ramillies can be credited to a military leader, not even excepting Wellington and Napoleon. Louvain, Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges, all fell into his hands. Menin, Ostend, Dendermonde, and a few other strongholds gave pore trouble, and the brave Marshal Vendome was sent to their assistance. It was useless; Vendome turned tail and fled, his men refusing to face the terrible English Duke. "Every one here is ready to doff his hat, if one even mentions the name of Marlborough," Vendome wrote to his master Louis. The remaining towns capitulated, and the Netherlands were lost to the Spanish. Of the more important fortresses only Mons remained.

But Marlborough's were by no means the only successes that fell to the Allies that wonderful year. Prince Eugene and the Duke of Savoy, the former after a rapid march, appeared before Turin, and on the 7th of September that notable place fell into the hands of the Prince, after brilliant efforts on both sides. The result was of the utmost importance; the French were demoralized; Savoy was permanently gained for the Grand Alliance; while Piedmont was lost to the French, who were thus cut off from the kingdom of Naples.

George had often wondered what had become of his old friend Fieldsend, whom he had not seen since the capture of Landau. But in the autumn of this year, 1706, while Fairburn was quartered at Antwerp, he received a letter from the lieutenant. It appeared that at his own request Fieldsend had been allowed to return to Spain, and he had served ever since under Lord Peterborough. The writer's account of the victories gained by Peterborough and the Earl of Galway in Spain that year read more like a fairy tale than real sober history. The sum and substance of it was that Peterborough had compelled the forces of Louis to raise the siege of Barcelona, and that Galway had actually entered Madrid in triumph. Had the Archduke Charles had the wit and the courage to enter his capital too, his cause might have had a very different issue from that which it was now fated to have.

Just before Christmastide George received permission to return to England on leave for a few weeks. He had never visited his old home all those years, and it was with delight he took his passage in a schooner bound for Hull. Hardly had he landed at that port when he ran across the old skipper of the *Ouseburn Lassie*. The worthy fellow did not at first recognize the schoolboy he had known in the sturdy handsome young fellow wearing a cavalry lieutenant's uniform, and he was taken aback when George accosted him with a hearty "How goes it, old friend? How goes it with you?" The skipper saluted in

Page 52

some trepidation, and it was not till George had given him a handshake that gripped like a vice that he knew his man again. Soon the two were deep in the work of exchanging histories. The crew of the captured collier brig, it appeared, had been kept at Dunkirk till the autumn of 1704, when they had been exchanged for certain French prisoners in ward at Dover. The Fairburn colliery had prospered wonderfully, and the owner now employed no fewer than four vessels of his own, one of which ran to Hull regularly. In fact, the skipper was just going on board to return to the Tyne.

Within an hour, therefore, Lieutenant Fairburn was afloat once more, to his great joy. On the voyage he learnt many things from the old captain. Squire Blackett was in very bad odour with the men of the district. For years his business had been falling off, and he had been dismissing hands. Now his health was failing; he was unable or unwilling to give vigorous attention to his trade, and he talked of closing his pit altogether. The colliers of the neighbourhood were desperately irritated, and to a man declared that, with anything like energy in the management, the Blackett pit had a fortune in it for any owner.

The well-known wharf was reached, a wharf vastly enlarged and improved, however, and George sprang ashore impatiently. Leaving all his belongings for the moment, he strode off at a great rate for home, rather wondering how it was that he did not see a single soul either about the river or on the road. He rubbed his eyes as he caught a sight of his boyhood's home. Like the wharf, the house had been added to and improved until he scarcely recognized the spot at all. "Father must be a prosperous man," was his thought. Opening the door without ceremony, he entered. A figure in the hall turned, and in a moment the boy had his mother in his arms, while he capered about the hall with her in pure delight.

The good woman gave a cry, but she was not of the fainting kind, and soon she was weeping and laughing by turns, kissing her handsome lad again and again. Presently, as if forgetting herself, she cried, "Ah, my boy, there's a parlous deed going on up at the Towers! You should be going to help." And George learned to his astonishment that the Squire's house was being at that moment attacked by a formidable and desperate gang. Fairburn had gone off to render what assistance he could. It was reported that the few defenders were holding the house against the besiegers, but that they could hold out little longer. The Fairburn pitmen had declined to be mixed up in the quarrel, as they called it.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed George, "what a state of things!"

Bolting out of the house, he ran back at full speed to the wharf, his plan already clear in his head. Within ten minutes he was leading to Binfield Towers every man jack of the little crew, the old skipper included. The pace was not half quick enough, and when, at

a turn in the road, an empty coal cart was met, George seized the head of the nag, and slewed him round, crying "All aboard, mates!" The crew tumbled in, and in an instant the lieutenant was whipping up the animal, to the utter astonishment of the carter.

Page 53

Nearer to the mansion the party drew, but, hidden by the trees, it was not yet in sight. The old horse was spent, and, when a point opposite the house had been gained, George sprang out, vaulted over the fence into the wood, dashed through the growth of trees, and with another spring leapt down upon the lawn, almost on the selfsame spot where he had jumped over on the evening of the fire. For the last hundred yards he had been aware of the roar of angry voices. The sight that met his eyes, now that he was in full view of the scene, was an extraordinary one.

Scattered about the trampled grassplots was a crowd of pitmen, surging hither and thither, some armed with pickaxes, some with hedge-stakes, some with nothing but nature's weapons. One fellow was in the act of loading an old blunderbuss. Reared against the wall of the house were two or three ladders, one smashed in the middle. The lower windows had been barricaded with boards, but the mob had wrenched away the protection at one point, and men were climbing in with great shouts of triumph.

From the bedroom windows men were holding muskets, ready to fire, but evidently unwilling to do so except as a last resource. George spied his old friend Matthew at one window; at another, astonishing sight! stood no other than Fieldsend! His own father was at a third.

At that moment the fellow below raised his blunderbuss and took deliberate aim at the old Squire, who, all unconscious of his danger, was endeavouring to address the mob from an upper window. The sight seemed to grip George by the throat.

George carried a handspike, a weapon he had brought along from the collier vessel. A dozen rapid and noiseless strides over the grass brought him within striking distance, and instantly, with a downward stroke like a lightning flash, he had felled to earth man and blunderbuss. The report came as the man dropped, and with a yell one of the rioters climbing through a lower window dropped back to the ground, shot through the thigh by one of his own party.

"Saved!" the lieutenant shouted, a glance showing him that the old Squire was still unhurt. All eyes, those of the defenders no less than those of the attacking party, were immediately attracted to the new-comer, who was just in the act of seizing the blunderbuss from the grasp of the prostrate and senseless pitman.

"George!" "Fairburn!" "My boy!" came the cries from the upper windows, and the defenders cheered for pure joy.

The mob, startled for a moment, prepared to retaliate, a hasty whispering taking place between two or three of the leaders. "Look out for the rush!" cried Matthew, warningly. George, with a bound, gained the wall, where, back against the stonework, he stood ready with the handspike and the clubbed musket. So formidable an antagonist did he seem to the men that they held back, till one of them, with a fierce imprecation, dashed

forward. In a trice he was felled to the ground, a loud roar of rage escaping the man's comrades. An instant later and the young lieutenant was fighting in the midst of a howling mob.

Page 54

“Ah! Drat you!” came a bellow, and there rushed upon the rear of the attackers the old skipper, cutlass in hand, followed close by the rest of his little crew. This apparition, sudden and unexpected, upset the nerves of the pitmen, and in a moment they began to run, falling away from George and tumbling over each other in their haste.

“No you don’t!” hissed the youngster between his firm-set teeth, and making a grab at a couple he had seen prominent in the fight, he held them with a grip they could not escape.

The attackers were routed; Binfield Towers was saved. Within a minute George was being greeted, congratulated, thanked, till he was almost fain to run for it, as the bulk of the mob had done. His father, Matthew, Fieldsend, even old Reuben—all crowded around with delight. In no long time Mrs. Maynard and Mary Blackett appeared, smiling through their tears of joy at their great deliverance. The latter had so grown that George hardly recognized her. All came up except the old Squire, and he was presently found in an alarming condition, one of his old heart attacks having come on. It was the only drawback to the joy of the meeting and the ending of the danger that had threatened the household.

Early next morning word was carried to the Fairburns that Squire Blackett was dead; he had never recovered from the shock and the seizure consequent thereon.

“Poor old neighbour!” Fairburn said, with a mournful shake of the head, “I am afraid he has left things in a sorry state.”

Fairburn’s fears were only too well founded. Mr. Blackett had left little or nothing, and Matthew and his sister would be but indifferently provided for. Then it was that Fairburn came out like a man. He proposed to run the colliery for their benefit. To the world it was to appear that the collieries had been amalgamated or rather that the Blackett pit had been bought up by his rival. The advantage to Matthew and Mary was too obvious to be rejected, and the required arrangements were made. Before the time came for the three young officers to go back to their duties they had the satisfaction of seeing Mrs. Maynard and Mary settled in a pretty cottage near, and the colliery in full work and prospering, the district employed and contented. Mary had been pressed by the Fairburn family to take up her abode with them, but had preferred to go into the cottage with her old governess and friend. Yet she was overwhelmed with gratitude towards the kindly couple.

CHAPTER X

“OUR OWN MEN, SIR!”

Marlborough was late in taking the field that year. Important matters engaged his attention at home. He saw more clearly than ever that the Whigs alone were the real supporters of him and his war plans. The party even passed a resolution to the effect that they would not hear of peace so long as a Bourbon ruled over Spain. Then there were the intrigues at work that were undermining the influence of the Duchess of Marlborough, and consequently of the Duke himself, at Court. Harley was known to be working for the overthrow of Marlborough. He was preparing to introduce a formidable rival to the Duchess in Anne's regards.

Page 55

The young men were nothing loth to go back to their respective regiments, to say truth, when the time came. Inaction did not seem to agree with their young blood. Matthew, his wound now quite healed, was eager to get his next step. Fieldsend was already captain, and hoped ere the close of the 1707 campaign to get his majority. As for George Fairburn, he was quite content to be a soldier for soldiering's sake, yet would thankfully take promotion if it came his way. Blackett had paid a visit to the west-country home of the Fieldsends, and it was whispered that he had there found a mighty attraction. But more of this may come later.

The year, to the bitter disappointment of our young officers, proved an unlucky one. In all directions things went wrong. As for Marlborough, from the very opening he experienced the old Dutch thwartings and oppositions, and, after a short and vexatious summer, he closed the campaign almost abruptly, and much earlier than in former years. There was to be no promotion for anybody yet awhile.

In Spain there was an overwhelming disaster. The French and Spanish forces, commanded by the redoubtable Berwick, completely defeated the combined English, Dutch, and Portuguese troops under Galway, at Almanza. So great a misfortune was this that Galway declared that Spain would have to be evacuated by the Allies. The cause of the Archduke Charles was to all intents and purposes lost, and the Bourbons were henceforth firmly seated on the throne of Spain.

Misfortune trod on the heels of misfortune. Prince Eugene attempted to take Toulon, the chief naval station in the Mediterranean, but failed to accomplish the task he had set himself. On the Rhine the Prince of Baden was badly defeated by Villars, at Stollhofen, the disaster laying Germany open to invasion by Louis. The gallant Sir Cloudesley Shovel, who had risen from the position of cabin-boy, was drowned in a great storm off the Scilly Islands, England thereby losing one of her ablest admirals.

Glad were George and Matthew when, after a dull winter, the Duke opened his campaign of 1708. The young men were now greater friends than ever, and not unnaturally so, after all that had happened and was happening. The reports they had occasionally from the elder Fairburn were in the highest degree cheering. The two ladies were well; the pits were prospering marvellously.

The feeling at home, rumour said, was setting strongly in favour of ending the war and coming to terms with France. This discontent at home was supplemented by murmurings among the troops quartered at Antwerp, and still more by the uneasiness of the Dutch, who were disposed to make a separate treaty with France and drop out of the conflict. Marlborough felt that he must achieve some brilliant success before that campaign was ended.

“There is going to be hot work for us, that is plain,” the two lieutenants said to each other, “and, if we have luck, we shall get the promotion we have been waiting so long for.”

Page 56

Bruges and Ghent had gone back to the French allegiance, and Louis determined to make an attempt to secure Oudenarde also, an important fortress lying between the French borders and Brabant. The French army boasted two generals, the royal Duke of Burgundy, an incapable leader, and the Duke of Vendome, a most capable one. A more unfortunate partnership could not well be imagined; Burgundy and Vendome were in everything the opposite of each other, and the quarrels between them were as numerous as they were bitter, so that the army of Louis XIV was handicapped at the very outset.

It was three in the afternoon of July 11. The Allies were fagged out with the marchings and the heat of the day when they came in sight of the enemy's forces near Oudenarde.

"Precious glad of a rest!" Matthew Blackett remarked when the signal to halt came. To his surprise and dismay the order to form immediately followed.

"Just like the Duke," commented his friend Fairburn.

Quickly the cavalry were got together for a charge.

"The old fellow doesn't intend the Frenchmen to slip away without fighting," the men remarked to one another.

Suddenly, almost before the whole body of horse was ready, Marlborough directed a charge to be made. For the first time our lieutenants found themselves not in the Duke's own division. The commander of the right wing, a very strong force, was Prince Eugene, who, having now nothing to do in Italy, had hurried northwards to join his friend. In such hot haste had the Prince travelled, indeed, that he had out-stripped his own army. Here was Prince Eugene, but not Prince Eugene's men. His wing at Oudenarde consisted entirely of English troops, while Marlborough's own wing was composed of men of various other nationalities.

Almost all writers on military tactics agree that the battle of Oudenarde was one of the most involved and intricate on record, and that it is well nigh impossible to give any detailed account of the puzzling movements. The leading points were these.

Marlborough's force crossed the Scheldt; then the opposing wing of the French left the high ground they occupied and swooped down upon him, endeavouring to force the Allies back into the river. A terrible hand-to-hand encounter followed, bayonet and sword alone being used for the most part in such cramped quarters. In the thick of it the Duke sent the Dutch general with a strong detachment to seize the vantage ground on the rise which the enemy had lately left. The move was successful, and the French found themselves between two fires.

It was growing dusk. Eugene and his men had forced back their opponents and were now following hard after them. Suddenly shots came flying in, and in the dimness of the departing day an advancing column was observed to be moving towards them. What could it mean? Apparently that the enemy had rallied and were once more facing them. It was an entirely unexpected change of front, but Eugene prepared to meet the shock once more. George Fairburn took a long look, shading his eyes with his hands.

Page 57

"By Heaven, sir!" he said, addressing Colonel Rhodes, "they are our own men!"

"Impossible, Fairburn!" the colonel answered. But Blackett and others backed up George's opinion. The word ran quickly along the line that the shots came from friends, not from the foe, and some consternation prevailed.

The next moment, at a nod of assent from the colonel in answer to their eager request, Lieutenants Blackett and Fairburn were galloping madly across the intervening space, each with his handkerchief fastened to the point of his sword, and both shouting and gesticulating. Bullets began to patter around them, but heedless they dashed on. It seemed impossible they could reach the advancing column alive.

Half the distance had been covered, when the two horsemen saw on their left a great body of troops tearing along towards them in furious haste. "The French!" George exclaimed; "there's no mistake about them!" On the two flew towards their friends, for the men towards whom they were speeding had by this time discovered their mistake and had ceased firing. It was a neck and neck race, and a very near thing. As the horsemen cleared the open space and dashed safe into the arms of their friends, a huge rabble of demoralized French swept across the path they had just been following. No narrower escape had the two young fellows yet had.

The truth was at once evident. The Dutchman's division, having driven the enemy from the high ground, had wheeled, and was thus meeting the Prince's wing, which in its turn had advanced along a curving line. Each body in the growing darkness had mistaken the other for the enemy. The plucky dash made by the two young fellows, though happily not in the end needed, nevertheless received high praise from their brother officers, and especially from the colonel himself.

For the next half-hour the fleeing French poured headlong through the gap across which the lieutenants had galloped, between the Dutchman's division and the Prince's. Darkness alone prevented the slaughter from being greater than it was. The numbers of those who fell on the field of Oudenarde, important as the battle was, were in fact far short of those killed at Blenheim or Ramillies.

What was there now to prevent Marlborough from marching straight on Paris itself? He was actually on the borders of France, victorious, the French army behind him. He was eager; the home Government would almost certainly have approved of the step. The heart of many a young fellow under the great leader beat high, when he thought of the mighty possibilities before him. But it was not to be. The Prince raised the strongest objections to the Duke's bold plan, and the Dutch were terrified at the bare thought of it. So Marlborough turned him to another task, the siege of the great stronghold of Lille. It may be observed in passing that Vendome wanted to fight again the next day after Oudenarde, but Burgundy refused. Vendome in a rage declared that they must then

retreat, adding, “and I know that you have long wished to do so,” a bitter morsel for a royal duke to swallow.

Page 58

Lille had been fortified by no less a person than the great master of the art, Vauban himself. In charge of its garrison was Marshal Boufflers, a splendid officer. Louis was as resolute to defend and keep the place as the Allies were to take it. The actual investment of the town was placed in the hands of Eugene, whose men had by this time arrived, while Marlborough covered him. The siege train brought up by the Duke and his generals stretched to a distance of thirteen miles. Berwick and Vendome were at no great distance away.

The siege of Lille lasted a full two months, and few military operations have produced more splendid examples of individual dash and courage.

Blackett and his friend found themselves one day taking part in a risky bit of business. Throughout the siege there had been some difficulty in procuring provisions for the Allies, and supplies were drawn from Ostend. On this occasion an expected convoy had not arrived to time, and a reconnoitring party had accordingly been sent out to glean tidings of it. From a wooded knoll a glimpse of the missing train was caught, and at the same moment a large body of French was perceived approaching from the opposite direction. The Frenchmen had not yet seen the convoy, being distant from it some miles, the intervening country thickly studded with plantations. But in half an hour the two bodies would have met, and the provisions sorely needed would have fallen into the enemy's hands. It was a disconcerting pass, and George Fairburn set his wits to work.

"I have a plan!" he cried a moment later, and he hastily told it to the officer in command, Major Wilson. That gentleman gave an emphatic approval.

Behold then, a quarter of an hour later, a couple of young peasants at work in a hayfield down below. Stolidly they tossed the hay as they slowly crossed the field, giving no heed to the tramp of horses near. A voice, authoritative and impatient, caused them to look round in wonderment, as a mounted officer came galloping up. He inquired of the peasants whether they had seen anything of the convoy, describing its probable appearance. The listeners grinned in response, and the face of one of them lit up with intelligence, as he made answer in voluble but countrified French.

"Where have you picked up such vile French?" inquired the officer.

"I'm from Dunkirk, please your honour," the man replied with another grin, to which the other muttered, "Ah! I suppose the French of Dunkirk is pretty bad!"

In another minute the yokels were leading the way through a plantation, along which ran a little stream. At one spot the water was very muddy, and the marks of hoofs were plentiful. "We are evidently close upon them," remarked the officer jubilantly, and at a brisk trot he and his men rode on, a gold louis jingling down at the feet of the peasants as the party dashed away.

“Now for it!” whispered George, for he and Matthew were the two rustics, “we can save the convoy. Our men, after trampling over the burn here, will have turned as we agreed. We shall find them in the next plantation.”

Page 59

He was right in his conjecture. The two regained their friends just as the head of the convoy hove in sight. To lead the train in a different direction, and to safety, was now easy. The supplies reached their destination.

"Ton my honour, young sirs," the Colonel exclaimed, when he learnt the story, "it was a smart trick, but a risky one—confoundedly risky, gentlemen!"

The fall of Lille reduced France to desperation. Louis was at his wits' end. To his credit, he sought earnestly to negotiate a peace for his unhappy and exhausted country. The terms offered by the Allies, however, were too exacting, and not a Frenchman but rose to the occasion; this, however, was in the following year. So the campaign ended, the enemy beaten and exhausted, but not in utter despair.

Captains Blackett and Fairburn were once more granted a term of leave when late autumn came round. From London, which George saw now for the first time, the two travelled all the way to Newcastle in the wonderful stage-coach which ran from the English to the Scotch capital.

In high spirits they hurried towards their native village. At the entrance to it they came all at once upon a gentleman walking in the company of three ladies.

"Fieldsend!" declared Matthew.

"Yes, by Jove!" cried George, "And with three ladies all to himself. It's too much!"

CHAPTER XI

THE HARDEST FIGHT OF THEM ALL

There had been an attempted descent on the shores of Scotland in 1708, the Old Pretender, under the auspices of Louis XIV, seeking to land 4,000 men in the Firth of Forth. Admiral Byng with sixteen vessels was ready for the French expedition, and their fear of the redoubtable sailor kept the enemy from doing anything, so that this attempt came to less even than that which followed seven years later.

Politics about this time demanded much of Marlborough's care and thought. The power of the Whigs was still growing, Harley, St. John, and others of the moderate Tories giving way to such strong and active Whigs as Somers, Walpole, and Orford. It was in 1709 that a violent quarrel took place between "Mrs. Morley" and "Mrs. Freeman." The Queen was becoming more than ever dissatisfied with Marlborough's policy. The overthrow of the Churchills was coming nearer.

Abroad matters did not improve. It was true that Stanhope, the English general, took Minorca. But the cause of Philip of Spain was now strong. When, therefore, the Whigs

demanded that as a condition of peace Louis should turn his grandson out of Spain, Europe was astounded. The proposal was impossible, ludicrous. Philip prepared to go on with the conflict, saying, with fine spirit, "If I must continue the war, I will contend against my enemies rather than against my own family." Such was the state of things in the summer of 1709.

We have left a group of ladies and gentlemen standing in the lane all this time. Matthew had his sister in his arms in a moment, for one of the ladies was Mary Blackett.

Page 60

“My sister,” Fieldsend said, “and Miss Allan,” by way of response to the inquiring looks of the newcomers. Then George and Matthew learnt many things that surprised them. They had had no news from home all the summer, the one letter that had been sent having miscarried. Binfield Towers was once more occupied, Mr. Fairburn having found an excellent tenant for the place in Mr. Allan, the eminent shipping-merchant of London, the very man into whose office George was to have gone. The little group laughed merrily at the thought of the gallant Captain Fairburn wielding a long quill in a dingy office. Mr. Allan, a widower, who had taken up his abode in the mansion, bringing with him his only daughter, Janet, had not been two months in the village before he had made an offer of marriage to the devoted Mrs. Maynard, and the old lady was now mistress of Binfield Towers. Mary Blackett had thereupon taken at their word the affectionate offer of the Fairburns, and was now to them as a daughter. Nor was this all. Fieldsend’s old father had lately died, and the Major himself had succeeded to the baronetcy and had left the army. Brother and sister had accepted with pleasure the invitation that had come to them to spend a few weeks with the kindly Mr. and Mrs. Fairburn. Matthew was to make the same hospitable roof his abode.

“The good old dad will find it a bit of a squeeze,” George ruminated, as he walked with the rest towards the family cottage. Cottage! He gave a jump when the home came into full view. It was a veritable mansion. The original nucleus was there, but so deftly added to and surrounded by a regular series of new wings, and so framed and embellished by wide lawn and flower-bed that George did not know this fine place. He remarked on the change when his mother came to his room at bedtime, to give him his good-night kiss as she had been wont to do in the days of old.

“Father wanted to make the place a bit more presentable now we have an officer son,” the good dame explained, with simple and pardonable pride. “And we can afford it,” she added, blushing like a shy schoolgirl as she made this whispered confession; “besides we had Mary to consider, too.” It was all very charming, George thought.

The winter passed all too quickly. Mr. Allan proved to be a capital neighbour, and had a great liking for young people about him. So there were pleasant times, at the Towers—dinner, balls, shooting and hunting parties, and the like. All the eligible society of the country-side found its way to Binfield Towers. Yet somehow George Fairburn did not fall into a fit of the blues when Sir Mark Fieldsend took his sister back to their west-country home; in fact, strange to say, George rather rejoiced to see the back of the retired major, his old comrade-in-arms. Why this was so he would have found it hard to explain, for a more unassuming and agreeable fellow than the baronet it would not have been easy to find.

Page 61

It was a real delight to everybody to hear how the Blackett pit was now prospering. Under Fairburn's management the colliery had made a clear profit of five thousand odd pounds in the course of a single year's working. It was astounding. "Mary and you will be rich folks again, my dears," the good Mrs. Fairburn remarked, in her own homely but kindly way, to the brother and sister, and Matthew felt a lump in his throat.

The wrench to George, when the time came for him and Matthew to return to the Continent, seemed somehow vastly greater than it had been on the two former occasions. However, once across the sea, he cast all else than his profession to the winds. He did not know it, of course, but the campaign that was coming was to prove to the Allies the most costly they had yet experienced. The negotiations for a peace had ended in nothing, and here was Marshal Villars, the only great French leader as yet unbeaten by Marlborough, ready with a force of no fewer than 110,000 men. True, many of his soldiers were raw recruits while those of his opponent were mostly seasoned veterans. True also, France was so crippled for money and munitions of war that it was rarely possible to give every man of the army a full breakfast. Yet Villars was a general that would have to be reckoned with, and this Marlborough well knew when he used every effort to swell the numbers of his troops in the Netherlands.

Marlborough's aim was that of the previous year, to force his way into France and to its capital. In order that such a step might be made possible, it was necessary that no stronghold should be left behind. Accordingly the Allies set about reducing the three that still remained,—Mons, Valenciennes, and Tournai, not forgetting that they had also Villars to deal with. A beginning was made with Tournai, an enormously strong place, and reckoned to be of the best of all Vauban's works.

Marlborough employed stratagem, and it succeeded as usual. He made a pretence of advancing, and Villars, to strengthen his force, withdrew a number of troops from Tournai. Then the Duke, with a swift night movement, invested the town. The garrison made a stout defence, and our two captains had their work cut out for them. Never in all his career had George Fairburn been so careless of his own safety, his brother officers declared. It was not that he despised danger, or was ignorant of its existence; he simply did not think of it, his mind being occupied solely with the problem of reducing this impregnable fortress.

"Be not rash, gentlemen," Colonel Rhodes thought it advisable to say to the younger men among his officers. "There are mines in all directions, if rumour is to be believed. Do not expose yourselves to needless risk. We are already losing heavily, and men are not to be had for the whistling." And privately the kindly old fellow—the youngsters called him old, though he was still short of fifty—added an extra word of caution

Page 62

to George. "You are a born soldier, Fairburn, but you never seem to be able to remember when you are in danger; you forget it like a thoughtless schoolboy. Well, now, for our sakes, if not for your own, take care of yourself, so far as it is possible, there's a good fellow." And with a kindly smile and a fatherly shake of the hand, the colonel turned away. He had said the last word he was ever to say to George.

An hour later a terrific explosion was heard; a cloud of dust flew into the air. A mine had been exploded, and the report came in that more than a hundred poor fellows of Marlborough's forces had perished. George Fairburn was more than ever determined to do what he could to discover hidden mines.

That very afternoon a company of men, who had prosecuted their search in spite of the deadly hail of bullets that came from a neighbouring battery, found another mine, a particularly formidable affair. Eagerly George Fairburn pressed forward, his friend Matthew close behind. Suddenly Colonel Rhodes dashed up, crying, "Fall back, for Heaven's sake! There's another mine below this, I have just learnt. For your lives!" And the brave man galloped off, his retreat followed by a startled rush for safety on the part of the men.

"Come along, George! What are you after?" cried Matthew, observing that his friend did not budge.

"I'm not going till I've settled this mine," Fairburn answered.

Even as they spoke the ground heaved with a mighty convulsion beneath their feet, and an appalling roar rent the air, the echo resounding far and near.

"Ah! You're feeling better? That's right."

George Fairburn opened his eyes and beheld the face of none other than the Duke himself gazing kindly down upon him! It was the evening after the fearful explosion, and Marlborough was making a tour of the hospital wards, where lay long rows of wounded men. George had been unconscious, and the Duke's words were caused by the fact that the young man happened to open his eyes for the first time as the General passed him. Before the sick man could answer a word, Marlborough had passed on, with a quiet remark to Major Wilson, "I know the lad's face well."

"Where's Blackett?" George now inquired. The Major shook his head. "And the Colonel?" Another mournful shake. George closed his eyes dazed, stupefied.

Three hundred poor fellows had perished in that double explosion. Colonel Rhodes's battered body had been picked up; Blackett's could not be distinguished, but doubtless

the gallant lad was one of the mass of victims whose remains were mangled beyond recognition.

Captain Fairburn took no further part in the siege of Tournai. After a month of terrible fighting, all but the citadel was captured by the Allies, and five weeks saw that also in their possession.

Page 63

There was a long glade or clearing between two extensive plantations. At the southern end of this glade, behind strong entrenchments, the great army of Villars was drawn up, every man eager to fight, for every Frenchman believed in the Marshal's luck, and that his presence would certainly bring them victory. Away to the north was Marlborough, equally eager to begin the combat, Eugene and the Dutch generals with him. In deference to the wishes of the Prince the Duke had made the fatal mistake of waiting two days, and all that time the enemy had been throwing up their formidable trenches. It was the famous field of Malplaquet, the last on which Marlborough was fated to fight a pitched battle. The object of Villars was to prevent the Allies from taking Mons, not far away, to northwards, the siege of which was in progress. Marlborough had lost heavily at Tournai; Villars, behind his defences, had suffered comparatively little. But on the other hand the Prince of Hesse had broken through the strong line of defence works which the French had rapidly and skilfully thrown up. Now, here, at Malplaquet, the Allies had a hard task before them. Villars held not only the glade but the woods on either side, and, moreover, sat in safety behind his extensive entrenchments.

For some reason not well understood the Duke for the first time began the battle, though it would have seemed clearly his best policy to endeavour to draw Villars from the strong position he held. There was little in the way of fine tactics displayed, or even possible, on either side; it was a question simply of sheer pluck and dogged determination. The Highlanders, for the first time, had joined the army of the Allies, and they and the famous Irish Brigade under Villars specially distinguished themselves, if any detachment can be said to have gained special distinction in a fight where all showed such conspicuous gallantry.

Eugene was wounded behind the ear, but refused to withdraw and have his wound dressed. "No," said he, "it will be time enough for that when the fight is over." Villars was also badly hurt, yet he had a chair brought, in which he sat to direct his men till he fainted. Boufflers, the hero of Lille, took his place.

Charge after charge was made by the Allies into the woods, and desperate fighting took place. Once and again Marlborough's troops were repulsed with awful loss; as often they returned to the attack. After four hours of heavy fighting the French fell back, and the victory remained with the Allies.

Just before Villars sounded his retreat George Fairburn, who had charged and fought all the while with his usual forgetfulness of himself and of danger, found himself just outside the eastern edge of the wood Taisniere, in company with the others of his troop. He was almost exhausted with his efforts, and, besides, was hardly himself again yet, after his terrible experience at Tournai, and he sat for a moment half listlessly in his saddle. A cry near him drew his attention, and, turning his head, he beheld Major Wilson in the act of falling from his charger. He had received a bullet in the leg. Before George could get to this side, Wilson was on the ground, his horse galloping away.

Page 64

At the same instant a fierce shout was heard, and George saw dashing to the spot one of the redoubtable Irish Brigade. Like lightning the young captain leapt from his horse, lifted Wilson from the ground, and by main strength threw him across the animal, crying, "Off with you!" giving the horse a thump with his fist on the quarters to start him into a gallop. Then, looking round, he found the Irishman bearing down upon him at desperate speed, and but a yard or two away.

In a trice Fairburn darted behind the trunk of a fine tree at his elbow. It was an oak, from which ran out some magnificent limbs parallel with and at a distance of six or eight feet from the ground. Nothing heeding, the Irishman kept on, his sword ready for a mighty stroke. Then instantly he was swept violently from his horse, and backwards over the tail, his chest having come into contact with one of the great boughs. All this had passed like a flash.

George made a grab at the bridle, but, missing it, fell sprawling to the ground. Springing up, he found his fallen antagonist risen and upon him. "English dog!" roared the Irishman, and the next moment the two men were at it, both excited, both reckless.

How long they fought they never knew. Apparently the spot was deserted save for themselves and sundry wounded who lay around. It was a desperate encounter. The Irishman had the advantage in height and strength, Fairburn in youth and activity. In the matter of swordsmanship there was little to choose between the two; in respect of courage nothing. It was to be a duel to the death.

The moments flew by, each man had received injuries, and the blood was flowing freely. Still the swords flashed in the air. Then suddenly the Irishman's weapon snapped at the hilt, and the gallant fellow dropped at the same moment to the ground. Instantly George set his foot on the prostrate man's chest, and cried, "Now your life is at my mercy! What say you?"

"If I must die, I must," the Irishman answered doggedly, "but," he added quickly, a sudden thought striking him, "take this first, and see it put into the hands of the person mentioned on it, sir." The trooper pulled from his breast a piece of paper soiled and crumpled, and George, wondering much, took it at the man's hands. His foot still on his fallen foe, Fairburn unfolded the dirty and tattered paper. It was the cover of a letter, and he read with staring eyes the address on it, "To Captain M. Blackett,—Dragoons." The handwriting he well knew; it was that of Mary Blackett.

"Great Heaven!" the reader cried, "where did you get this?"

"It was given me by a poor fellow, an officer, who escaped from the big explosion at Tournai. He blundered by mistake into our lines, and our fellows were about to finish him—leastways one chap was, but I landed him one between his two eyes, and that stopped his game."

“And you saved the Englishman’s life?”

Page 65

"I did, sir; I thought it hard luck when the young fellow had just escaped that terrific blow up as he had, to put an end to him the minute after."

"Get up, for God's sake, man; you have saved the life of my dearest friend!" And seizing the Irishman's arm, George pulled him to his feet, and wrung the hand hard in his own. "You are a fine fellow, a right fine fellow. What is your name? I shall never forget you."

"Sergeant Osborne, sir, at your service. But you have not read the paper yet."

"True," and George deciphered the line or two written in pencil on the back of the paper. "I am alive and well, but a prisoner with the French. Be easy about me; I am well treated. M.B."

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

Almost before Captain Fairburn had read the last word of Matthew's communication, so cheering and so strangely brought into his hands, the French signal to retreat sounded loud all over the field, a mournful sound to one of the two listeners, a delight to the other, George and Osborne glanced into each other's face. "What will you do?" the former asked.

"I am your prisoner and defenceless; it is not for me to say," the Irishman answered simply.

"Nay, not so, good fellow. You shall do exactly as you prefer, so far as I am concerned. I can do no less for you."

The prisoner shrugged his shoulders and muttered something about catching it hot, if he ran, to which the captor replied, "So you would, I am afraid, if any of our men got near you. We have lost heavily, and our temper's a bit ruffled for the moment. If you care to come with me as my prisoner I'll see you through safe. What's more, I'll do my best to get you exchanged for the man you saved."

"Thank you, captain; that's my best card to play, as things are going. But I'd have given something to have it the other way about."

"Of course you would, my good fellow. It's the fortune of war; I'm up to-day, you're up to-morrow. And you've no cause to be anything but mighty proud of yourselves—you of the Irish Brigade. I never saw better stuff than you've turned out this day."

"And many's the thanks, son. A bit o' praise comes sweet even from an enemy."

“Enemies only professionally, Osborne; in private life we’re from to-day the best of friends.”

At a later hour Sergeant Osborne informed Fairburn that he had carried Captain Blackett’s paper about with him for some little time, having had no opportunity of passing it on to any likely Englishman, or having forgotten it when he had the opportunity.

The slaughter at Malplaquet was terrible on the side of the Allies, amounting to 20,000, or one-fifth of the whole number engaged. The French, who had fought under shelter, lost only about one half of that total. Mons surrendered shortly afterwards, and the victory was complete, the road to Paris open. Yet what a victory! Villars declared to his royal master that if the French were vouchsafed such another defeat, there would be left to them no enemies at all.

Page 66

This proved to be the Duke of Marlborough's last great battle and his last great victory. "A deluge of blood" it had been. And, what was worse, rarely has a great victory produced so little fruit. Marlborough had quite expected to see his success at Malplaquet put an end to the war. It did nothing of the kind; for two more years the war continued. The rest of its story, however, may be told in a very few words.

Louis XIV once more asked for peace, and made certain offers to the Allies, but these would be contented with nothing less than the expulsion of Philip from Spain. The conference, at Gertruydenberg, therefore came to nothing. This was in the early part of 1710. The work of capturing the fortresses in French Flanders and the province of Artois was proceeded with, and in 1711 Marlborough took Bouchain, in France. But the Duke had apparently lost heart to some extent, and there was no very vigorous action. At home the war had become hateful to a very large proportion of the people; its cost in men and money frightened them.

The year 1710 was a busy and a decisive time in Spain. At first success seemed to lean to the side of the Allies, General Stanhope, the English leader, defeating the French and Spanish at Almanza, and the Dutch General Staremborg doing the like at Saragossa. Charles the Archduke, styling himself Charles III, now for the first time entered Madrid. It was also the last time. Presently Stanhope was badly defeated at the important battle of Brihuega, and Staremborg shortly afterwards lost at Villa Viciosa. This decided matters in Spain. Charles was compelled to flee the country, and Philip's throne was finally secured to him.

The end of the war came in an altogether unexpected and strange fashion. This was the sudden downfall of the Marlboroughs and of the Whig interest. For some time the Queen had been tired of the Duchess of Marlborough, and had been inclining more and more to Mrs. Masham, formerly Abigail Hill, a cousin of Harley, through whom the minister was intriguing for the overthrow of the Churchills. Then Dr. Sacheverell, a London clergyman, afterwards so notorious, had preached violently against the Whigs, who were foolish enough to impeach him. Sacheverell was suspended for three years, and in consequence became exceedingly popular among the Tories, and their party gained greatly in the country. Moreover the writings of certain pamphleteers tended much to damage the cause of the Whigs. Dean Swift was at once the ablest and the bitterest of these. Harley managed to get Godolphin dismissed from office. And one day, early in 1711, Anne suddenly took from the Duchess her various offices at Court, while later in the same year the Duke himself was deprived of his command of the army, and was succeeded by the Irish peer Ormonde. He, however, was ordered to take no active steps in the war which was still in theory going on. A general election came soon after, and the Tories had a large majority over the Whigs. The Tories came into office, and all Whig members of the Whig ministry were dismissed. From that time to the present the principle has obtained of having the King's Ministers, or the Cabinet, with the other chief administrators, drawn from the same side in politics.

Page 67

The Tories now sought to bring to a close a war that had become so unpopular. Louis XIV was also suing for peace. Then in 1711 the Emperor Joseph died, and his brother the Archduke succeeded him as Charles VI. It was now useless to trouble further to support or oppose the claims of either candidate for the Spanish throne. Spain might as well be in the hands of a Frenchman as be assigned to the powerful Emperor. It would have been absurd, in short, for England to go on fighting for Charles.

The famous treaty of Utrecht, in 1713, brought the war to an end. By this treaty several important matters were settled. Philip retained Spain, but gave up for ever his claim to the throne of France. Louis acknowledged the Hanoverian succession, and gave back to the Dutch the line of "barrier fortresses" about which so much blood had been shed. France gave up to Britain Newfoundland and some other possessions in North America, and Spain resigned Gibraltar and Minorca. The Emperor received Milan, Sardinia, and Naples. The rest of the Allies received little or nothing, and loud was the outcry they raised.

George Fairburn did not remain abroad till the conclusion of peace. During the year 1710, at a time when things were at a standstill in the Netherlands, he received word that his father had been killed in an accident at the pit. With a heavy heart he sought permission to return home for a period, and in pursuing his application he found himself in the presence of the great commander-in-chief himself. To his delight Marlborough recognized him at once. The Duke was full of sympathy, and not only readily granted the young captain any reasonable leave of absence he might desire, but held out his hand with a smile, as he dismissed him: "Major Fairburn, you go with my sympathy and my regard. I have few young fellows under me of whom I think more highly." And in spite of his terrible bereavement the newly-promoted officer left his master's presence with a swelling heart.

With him travelled home Matthew Blackett, whose release George, to his delight, had managed, though with difficulty. The gallant Sergeant Osborne had also been exchanged for an English prisoner in French hands. An additional pleasure to both George and Matthew was an intimation that Matthew, too, had been raised to the rank of major in recognition of his excellent service throughout the war. As it proved, neither officer ever served under Marlborough again.

The months flew by. Mr. Fairburn was found to have left a far larger fortune than the world had dreamt of, the sum amounting to fully fifty thousand pounds. George and his ageing mother were rich. Matthew Blackett had taken to the management of the joint collieries, strange to say, and was preparing to leave the army as soon as he could do so conveniently. Major Fairburn, on the other hand, was first and last a soldier, and he hoped some day to have further opportunities of rising in his profession.

Page 68

The Queen was in a very bad state of health; she might die any day. But the Electress Sophia died first, and her son, Prince George of Hanover, became the next heir to the throne, a prospect not much to the liking of many in England. Some of the leading Tories were making preparations for a revolution in favour of the Pretender, but the death of Anne came before their preparations were complete, and George of Hanover was quietly proclaimed as George I.

Before Marlborough died George Fairburn was a lieutenant-colonel, and, as he happened to be stationed for a time at Windsor, he and his wife, the Mary Blackett of old, had more than once the honour of an invitation to Windsor Park, the Duke's favourite abode, his great palace of Blenheim being not yet ready for him.

* * * * *

We hear of our hero, many long years after all this, a stout old soldier, General Sir George Fairburn, taking part in the memorable chase after the Young Pretender in 1745, and the subsequent great fight at Culloden.

"And I tell you, sir," said Mr. Matthew Blackett, member for Langkirk, as he told the story to a crony in the smoking-room of his club, White's, "I tell you, sir, he trod Culloden Moor with all the vigour and fire he had when we marched with Marlborough to Malplaquet."

REIGN OF QUEEN ANNE

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS AND MOVEMENTS

1. THE SUCCESSION TO THE CROWN

This question, especially after the death of all Anne's children, became a most important one. The Whigs and the country in general were bent upon securing a Protestant succession, but there were some, especially amongst the Tories, who were secret supporters of the Pretender, James Stuart, son of James II. The Act of Settlement had provided for the accession of Sophia as the nearest Protestant descendant of James I, on the failure of Anne's issue. At one time the Scotch Parliament threatened to elect as king a different sovereign from that of England, unless Scotland should be given the same commercial privileges as England possessed. The Act of Security, passed in 1704, declared as much. Both Bolingbroke and Harley were in correspondence with the Pretender, and it was only through the death of the Queen earlier than had been expected that a revolution in favour of the exiled Stuarts was averted.

2. GOVERNMENT BY PARTY

Until the reign of Anne what we now call Party Government was unknown. We may see the beginnings of the division of politicians into Whig and Tory in the Roundhead and

Cavalier factions in the reign of Charles I. Government by the one strong man of the time—a Burleigh, a Cromwell, a Marlborough—was the usual thing. Marlborough was the last who tried to govern without party. During the reign of Anne the Whigs and Tories were combined in varying proportions, till the final return of a Tory House of Commons and the formation of a purely Tory ministry, in 1711. From that time Party Government, as we now understand it, has generally prevailed.

Page 69

3. POWER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS AND THE MINISTERS

Anne was good-natured, and not disposed to give herself too much trouble, which made it possible for her ministers to wield more power over the country and its destinies. Nevertheless, the Queen had a will of her own, and made her influence felt, especially in Church matters. On the whole, however, Parliament and the Ministers gained in importance and influence during the reign. Marlborough, Harley, St. John, Rochester, Nottingham, were some of the leading ministers, and towards the end of the reign Sir Robert Walpole is first heard of as a politician.

4. THE QUESTION OF THE SUCCESSION TO THE SPANISH THRONE

When Philip of Bourbon, the grandson of Louis XIV, was proclaimed as Philip V of Spain, England, Holland, and some other nations felt that the peace of Europe, or rather the freedom of the rest of it, were threatened by the union of two such mighty powers. Accordingly the Allies set up in opposition the Archduke Charles of Austria, and it was in support of the claims of Charles to the throne of Spain that all the wars of Anne's reign were waged. When at length Charles became Emperor, the Allies had no farther reason for fighting, as it would have been equally adverse to the interests of the rest of the Continent to combine Spain and the Empire. Philip thus remained King of Spain, though he had to renounce his claims to France.

5. THE UNION OF ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND

The project for the union of the two countries had been talked of for some time, but there were difficulties concerning religious matters, trade, and the refusal of Scotland to pay any of the English debt, in the way. By the Act of Security Sophia was declared to be ineligible for the Scottish throne, and England was in alarm. A commission was appointed to consider the question of the union, and the Act of Union was passed in 1707. Many Scotchmen were greatly opposed to the step, yet it cannot be denied that Scotland herself has been a great gainer by the Union.

6. THE NATIONAL DEBT

The borrowing of money to pay for wars did not originate in the reign of Anne, but the War of the Spanish Succession added no less a sum than twenty-two millions to the indebtedness of the country, and from that time the National Debt began to assume large proportions. Many people were greatly alarmed at the state of things in this respect, and there were many who prophesied the speedy bankruptcy of the nation.

7. PEACE AT HOME

This reign is remarkable for the entire absence of internal risings and disaffections. Only one person was executed for treason.

8. LITERATURE, AND ITS INFLUENCE ON POLITICS

This has been called the Augustan age of English Literature. Pope, Addison, Steele, Swift, Defoe, Sir Isaac Newton, Vanbrugh, Congreve, Farquhar, Prior, Parnell, Colley Cibber, Gilbert Burnet, and others flourished. The first daily newspaper, the *Daily Courant*, was published in 1709. Pamphleteers, chief among them Swift, Addison, and Defoe, by their writings played a great part in politics, there being no newspaper press to mould people's opinions. No other period in English history, except, perhaps, the times of Shakespeare, has produced so many notable writers.

Page 70

9. THE PEOPLE

The population of England in this reign is supposed to have been about five millions. London itself contained half a million, but even the best of the provincial towns were small, as we reckon populations nowadays. Bristol, the second town in size, possessed not more than some thirty thousand souls, while York, Norwich, and Exeter, which came next, had considerably fewer people than that. The bulk of the people lived in the country, either in the villages, or in the petty market-towns which were not much superior. The country squire class was the most important in the community. Below this, but likewise occupying a very important position in the country, were the clergy and yeomen. Probably at no time was the yeoman class more numerous, more prosperous, and more influential. The squire was in point of education often inferior to the well-to-do farmer of our own day, but very proud of his family.

10. THE CLERGY

The clergymen of the period were, as a rule, especially in the remoter districts, men of inferior standing, often of low origin and of little learning. They were badly paid, generally speaking, and often had to eke out a slender income by taking to farming pursuits. It was not at all unusual for the clergyman to marry the lady's maid or other of the upper servants in the great family of his neighbourhood. Queen Anne, to relieve the poverty of the poorer livings, founded the fund known as Queen Anne's Bounty, giving up for the purpose the *first-fruits* and the *tenths*. It is worth noting that the terms Low and High Churchmen were political rather than religious terms, the former being applied to the Whigs, and the latter to the Tories.

11. DWELLINGS

The style of architecture known as that of Queen Anne prevailed at this time, and many a country mansion of this date, red-bricked and many-windowed, is still to be seen in England. But the houses of the poor were for the most part still wretched, of mud or plaster, and badly thatched. The windows were small and few in number; the furniture was scanty and mean; sanitary matters were scarcely attended to at all. But the growing prosperity of the country was beginning to show itself in the better equipment and furnishing of the household, particularly among the yeomen and the rising town tradesmen. Advantage was taken of the Great Fire to improve the streets and dwellings of the capital.

12. DRESS

Among the gentry the influence of the magnificent court of Louis XIV began to make itself felt in the matter of dress, and both gentlemen and ladies affected gay attire. The hoop-petticoat came into fashion, and the dress was looped up at intervals to show the richly-coloured skirt below. The gentlemen wore knee-breeches and silk stockings, the

former ornamented with knots of ribbon; the scarf was very full and rich, and often fell in folds over the front of the waistcoat; the coat was usually gaily coloured. Swords were worn by the gallants, and the periwig was seen everywhere in high society. The dress of the lower ranks was of sober colour, and of stout but coarse texture. The women wore homespun, and sometimes home-woven linsey-woolsies. The use of linen and silk was coming in among those in better circumstances.

Page 71

13. FOOD AND DRINK

Tea was only just beginning to be known, and was a luxury for the rich. In London the coffee-houses were everywhere, playing a great part in the life of the capital, at least among those whom we should now call clubmen. The common drink was still beer, and, among the farm hands, milk. Port, till the Methuen treaty, was almost unknown in England. Even the gentry, as a rule, did not drink wine at ordinary times. The poorer classes rarely tasted flesh meat, except bacon, which latter cottagers in the country were generally able to command, every cottage having its pig. The best white wheaten bread was used by the richer folk only, the poorer eating coarse and dark bread, of whole-meal, of rye, or even of barley. Pewter was the ware in common use, except among the labourer class, who had wooden trenchers, or a coarse unglazed delft.

14. INDUSTRIES

The main occupation of the country was still farming, with fishing, shipbuilding, and seafaring on the coast. The manufacture of silk, woollen, and linen goods, now occupying so many millions of folk in the North and the Midlands, was then carried on mainly in the small towns and villages, or even in the lonely wayside or moorland cottage. The great manufacturing towns, such as Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, and Sheffield are now, were nowhere to be found in the England of Queen Anne; but their day was coming. London was the great centre of the silk trade, and after it came Norwich, Coventry, Derby, and Nottingham. The cotton industry of Manchester and the surrounding towns in South Lancashire was making a start, while Leeds, Bradford, and Halifax, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, were just beginning to give their attention to the cloth trade on a larger scale. The trade with other countries was growing rapidly, Bristol being, next to London, the chief port. Hull, Liverpool, Southampton, and Newcastle were still small places. It is to be noted that the earliest notions of what we now call *free trade* are to be traced back to the days of the later Stuart sovereigns. Bolingbroke made certain proposals in that direction, but his plans were rejected by the Whigs. Stage-coaches began to run, the earliest being those between London and York, and between London and Exeter. A vast improvement in the high-roads soon came in consequence. The first General Post Office for the whole kingdom dates back to the reign of Queen Anne.

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF PRINCIPAL EVENTS

1702 (February 20). Queen's Accession, on the death of William III.

War of the Spanish Succession begun (May). England, Holland, and the Empire against France and Spain: to determine the succession to the Crown of Spain. Two claimants, Philip, grandson of Louis XIV, and Archduke Charles of Austria, the latter

supported by England and her allies. Duke of Marlborough, in command of allied forces, took the strongholds of Venloo, Ruremonde, and Liege; France cut off from Holland and Lower Rhine. Marlborough made a duke.

Spanish fleet at Vigo captured by Sir George Rooke.

Page 72

Godolphin appointed Lord Treasurer, and Nottingham a Secretary of State.

Louis of Baden defeated by French at Friedlingen.

Battle of Cremona: French stopped by Eugene of Savoy from entering the Tyrol.

1703 Second Grand Alliance. (First Grand Alliance in 1689.) Nearly all Germany, and Savoy join the coalition against the French.

French marching in the direction of Vienna.

Methuen Treaty; Portugal joined the Alliance.

Marlborough hampered by the Dutch Government and unable to follow the French.

Marlborough took Bonn; giving command of Upper Rhine.

1704 Battle of Donauwoerth. Eugene joined Marlborough.

(August 4). Gibraltar taken by Sir George Rooke, Sir George Byng, and Sir Cloudesley Shovel.

(August 13). Blenheim. Marlborough and Eugene defeated French and Bavarians under Marshals Tallard and Marsin. Vienna saved: Marlborough received Woodstock Manor as a reward.

Act of Security passed by Scotch Parliament.

1705 Marlborough opposed by Allies, and prevented from marching into France.

Barcelona taken by Lord Peterborough; the Catalan district of Spain won for the Archduke Charles.

Coalition between the more moderate Tories and the Whigs.

1706 Ramillies (May 12), won by Marlborough against Villeroy:



Allies occupied Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent, Bruges, Ostend, a line of fortresses cutting off French from Holland.

Turin besieged by French: siege raised by Prince Eugene.

1707 Capitulation of Milan signed by Louis: Milan and Naples secured to Archduke Charles.

Minorca captured by General Stanhope.

Battle of Almanza (Spain): English under Lord Galway surrendered.

Ghent and Bruges retaken by French.

Whig resolution not to make peace so long as a Bourbon ruled in Spain.

Union with Scotland (October 23): Scotland to send sixteen peers and forty-five Commoners to United Houses of Parliament: Law and Church of Scotland left untouched: privileges of trade and coinage to be the same for both countries.

1708 Harley and St. John dismissed: Whigs came into power (July 11). Oudenarde: Marlborough and Eugene defeated Vendome: Lille secured. Bruges and Ghent retaken by Allies.

Attempted landing in Scotland by the Pretender prevented.

1709 Peace Conference at the Hague. Louis declined to remove his grandson from the throne of Spain.

(September 11). Malplaquet: Marlborough and Eugene defeated Villars.

Page 73

Mons taken by the Allies.

Quarrel between the Queen and the Duchess of Marlborough.

Dr. Sacheverell's sermons.

1710 Peace proposals by Louis at Gertruydenberg rejected.

Dr. Sacheverell sentenced: Tory party greatly helped thereby.

Battle of Almenara (Spain): French and Spanish defeated by Stanhope.

Battle of Saragossa: French and Spanish defeated by Stanhope.

Battle of Brihuega: Stanhope beaten by Vendome.

Battle of Villa Viciosa: General Staremberg defeated by Vendome: Spain secured for Philip V.

Bouchain taken by Marlborough.

Fall of the Whigs.

General Post Office established.

St. Paul's Cathedral finished.

1711 All Whigs dismissed from office, and Tories alone to form the Ministry, thus establishing the principle that the members of the Cabinet should all be of the same political party.

Duchess of Marlborough supplanted by Mrs. Masham.

Death of the Emperor Joseph, and accession of Archduke Charles: no farther need now to continue the war.

Tories determined to put an end to the war.

1712 Twelve new Tory peers created to destroy the Whig majority which was in favour of continuing the war.



Marlborough deprived of his command: Ormonde to succeed him.

Peace Conference at Utrecht.

Act against Occasional Conformity.

1713 (March 3). Treaty of Utrecht: Spain to Philip: Minorca and Gibraltar to England: Spanish lands in Italy and Netherlands to Emperor Charles: Sicily to Savoy. Prussia made a kingdom.

1714 Quarrel between Harley and Bolingbroke: Harley dismissed.

Schism Act: schoolmasters to belong to the Church of England.

Bolingbroke's free trade proposals defeated by the Whigs.

Death of Electress Sophia: George of Hanover now heir to the British throne.

(July 30). Death of Anne: Accession of George I.

Oxford: HORACE HART, Printer to the University

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Page 74

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