

**THE MARQUIS
WELLESLEY. THE
STANHOPE PRIZE
ESSAY, 1887; PP. 1-59**

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The Marquis Wellesley. The Stanhope prize essay, 1887; pp. 1-59 by Charles Harding Firth

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CHARLES HARDING FIRTH

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THE MARQUIS WELLESLEY.

THE
STANHOPE PRIZE ESSAY,
1877.

BY
SIR CHARLES HARDING FIRTH,
SCHOLAR OF BALLIOL COLLEGE.

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THE MARQUIS WELLESLEY.

10/11/45 THE interest of a statesman's life depends upon the greatness of the events in which he took part, and its value is proportionate to the influence which he exercised over their course. The establishment of the British power in India, the long war against Napoleon, and the struggles for Catholic Emancipation and Parliamentary Reform, were the leading features of the political career of the Marquis Wellesley. It is by his action with reference to these that his rank amongst English statesmen must be determined.

Richard Colley Wellesley was born on the 20th of June, 1760. His father, Lord Mornington, was a man of great musical taste, his mother a woman of strong practical ability. He was sent to

Harrow. Harrow. part in the riots which followed the election of Heath to the Headmastership in preference to Parr. The story that he was "the chief ringleader" in those disturbances seems to be untrue, from the fact that he was barely eleven years old at that time.* From 1772 to 1778 he was at

Eton. Eton. development of his character. His classical taste begins to show itself in his Latin verses, and the excellence of his scholarship testifies to his general literary power. His rhetorical gifts were shown in the school debating society, and in that recitation of Strafford's speech which moved George III. to tears, and gained the praise of Garrick.^b He passed his holidays with Archbishop Cornwallis at Lambeth, and there met Lord Cornwallis, from whom he learnt much of India.^c Important also in their results were the friendships he formed at Eton.^d "Under Mrs. Young's tree at Eton, the brotherhood, for such it was, of Wellesley, Grenville, and Newport, commenced." Wellesley and Grenville acted together politically for some part of their lives, and the Grenville connection was of great value to Wellesley in his early official career.

* Torrens, *Empire in Asia*.

^b Jesse, *Memoirs of the Reign of George III.*

^c Auber, *Rise and Progress of British Power in India*, ii., 159.

^d Letter from Sir John Newport to Wellesley. Plunkett's *Life*, vol. ii., about p. 130.

Sir John Newport was six years older than Wellesley, so that his influence was naturally of very great weight. "You are the founder of my public character," wrote Wellesley to him in 1840. "You found me an idle boy, and by your example I was made diligent and studious, and inspired with that glowing passion for solid fame, that noble ambition to attain power and honour by deserving them, which has been my 'Star of Arcady,' my 'Tyrian Cynosure,' through my long and active life."

In 1778, Wellesley left Eton for Christ Church, and two years later gained one of the University prizes for his Latin poem on the death of Captain Cook. In the year before, the same prize had been gained by Lord Grenville, and it was on the occasion of the recitation of Grenville's verses on Electricity in the Theatre that Wellesley first met Addington.^a Addington was there to read the English Essay, Wellesley as prompter to Grenville; and a friendship which lasted for more than sixty years began then. In 1781, the death of Lord Mornington recalled Wellesley to Ireland; he left the University without taking his degree, and he returned home to superintend the education of his brothers, pay his father's debts, and take his seat in the Irish House of Lords.

It was the time when the great national movement which sprang out of the American war was at its full height in Ireland. The contest for free trade was now over, and the struggle for legislative independence was nearing its victorious close. Lord Mornington at once attached himself to the national party, joined the volunteers, and became the friend and follower of Grattan.^b Being patron of the borough of Trim, it was only natural that he should be chosen Colonel of the Trim Volunteers; and when in 1821 he came to govern Ireland, men significantly remembered that this body was the first which admitted Catholics amongst its members.^c Grattan formed a high opinion of the character and abilities of his young follower. "This prognosticates good," he said, when, as he was dying, they told him that Wellesley had been appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland; and a little afterwards he added, "We

^a Wellesley to Newport. Letter in Plunkett's Life, vol. ii., 131-133. Newport's influence did not end with the inspiration of a motive. He accompanied Wellesley home, and brought about a better understanding between him and his parents ("frivolous people, I am afraid," writes Wellesley). "You taught them to respect me and my literary pursuits.—You were to me what my father might have been."—Compare, for the sentiment "noble ambition," Speech on the Catholic Claims, 1813: "I have always thought it to be the greatest glory and noblest species of ambition in the members of a free state to aspire to the high and distinguished offices of that state." Lord Brougham; Statesmen of George III. Pearce's Life.

^b Life of Sidmouth. Pellet.

^c Life of Grattan, by his son, vol. ii.

^d O'Connell's Speech, 1822, on the arrival of Wellesley as Lord Lieutenant.

were old friends in our younger days: tell him I
 Connection with love him."¹ At this period Lord Temple was
 Lord Temple. Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and Wellesley, who
 had made his acquaintance, most probably through Grenville,
 lived in confidential intercourse with him and steadily supported
 his government.² To his influence Lord Mornington looked
 for help in his political career, both in England and Ireland,
 and it was through his recommendation that he was in February,
 1783, appointed a knight of the new Order of St. Patrick.
 The government of Lord Northington which followed, seemed
 intentionally to slight Temple, to be actuated by feelings of
 dislike and hostility to his administration, and while affecting to
 adopt his system of economy secretly to try and stultify it.³ For
 these reasons it was opposed by Mornington, who moved a vote
 of thanks to Temple, pronounced an elaborate eulogium on his
 government, and attacked the extravagance of his successor. In
 November, 1783, he voted with the opposition in support of
 Lord Mountnorris' motion for annual Parliaments, but a question
 now arose on which he separated himself from them and sup-
 ported the government. The question of Parliamentary Reform
 which Pitt in the previous year had brought forward in England,
 had been taken up by a large party throughout Ireland, and by
 the volunteers of Ulster in particular. In November, 1783, a
 convention of delegates met in Dublin, and a Reform Bill was
 drawn up, to be brought into Parliament by Flood. But the
 reforms which the Bill proposed were of doubtful benefit, and the
 manner in which it was supported was too palpable an invasion
 of the rights of Parliament. The convention of delegates, said
 Mornington, was illegal, and the volunteers had gone beyond
 the original idea of their institution. "We ought to lend the
 government our assistance whenever its imbecility may require it,
 to support the constitution."⁴ For these reasons, though he
 approved of the principle of the Bill, he both spoke and voted
 against it. He was now rising rapidly in public estimation.⁵
 Fox applauded his conduct in resisting the Convention, and one
 of the first acts of Pitt's government was to name him a member
 of the Irish Privy Council.⁶ In August, 1784, Pitt wrote to the
 Duke of Rutland to urge Lord Mornington's claims to state
 favour, and the Duke replied that his merits and powers to
 render the public essential service should be rewarded by the
 first office worthy of his acceptance which fell vacant.⁶

¹ Life of Plunkett, vol. II.

² Court and Cabinets of George III. 1—210.

³ Court and Cabinets. 1., 268—270.

⁴ Speech quoted in Pearce.

⁵ Wellesley's Speech on Lord Fitzwilliam's motion on the State of Ireland, 1812.

⁶ The appointment is announced, Feb. 24th, 1784. Annual Register.

⁶ Quoted in Memoir of Wellesley, Asiatic Journal, 1842.

In the same year he entered the English House of Commons, under the patronage of Lord Beverley, as member for Beeralston.^p In opposition to Grattan he voted for Pitt's resolutions on Irish Trade, and thus justified his conduct to his former leader:—"I cannot discern the danger you seem to apprehend. I am persuaded that the administration never has had the invasion of the independence of Ireland in contemplation." Henceforth he adopted Pitt as his leader, and the prime minister had no more devoted friend and admirer than Lord Mornington.^q He pronounced Pitt, many years later, the greatest statesman England had ever seen. Any promotion the minister vouchsafed to him he regarded as a mark of personal favour much more than as the reward of political adherence.^r When he was passed over, what mortified him most was the decided preference Pitt showed to another; when office was promised, it satisfied his chief apprehension by assuring him that he was not entirely out of Pitt's mind.

The influence of the Marquis of Buckingham gained Lord Mornington, in 1786, a seat at the Treasury, and in the same year he made his first attempt in the House of Commons.^s

was an attack on Lord North for his conduct with reference to the appointment of Hastings as Governor General, and took place in the debate on the Rohilla war. In the same year he defended the treaty of commerce with France, and in the course of his speech gave utterance to a maxim which might authorise the Manchester school of politicians to claim him as a disciple. "The true majesty of Great Britain is in her trade, and the throne of the commerce of the world the fittest object of her ambition."^t On these speeches his friends founded great hopes, but their expectations were raised only to be disappointed by nervousness and want of resolution on the day of debate. Day after day, during the session he came down to the House with an intention of speaking which he never carried into effect.^u William Grenville wrote to the Marquis of Buckingham begging him to press Mornington very urgently to speak. Pitt laughed at his subordinate for the long time he took to prepare his speeches, and said that Mornington was the animal of the longest gestation he had ever seen.^v

On the regency question in 1789 Lord Mornington distinguished himself by his activity.^w Not satisfied with sup-

^p Life of Grattan.

^q Letter in the Quarterly Review, vol. lvii.

^r Letters to Addington. Pellet's Life of Sidmouth, vol. i.

^s Court and Cabinets, i., 314.

^t Parliamentary Debates.

^u Court and Cabinets, George III., i., 380-2.

^v Stanhope's Life of Pitt.

^w Court and Cabinets, vol. ii., p. 89. Mornington wrote to Buckingham thus about

The Regency. porting Pitt in England, he went over to Ireland to speak for the minority in the House of Lords, to protest, in company with twenty-two other peers, and to back up the Marquis of Buckingham in his refusal to transmit the address. The difficulty was solved by the recovery of the King, and Mornington was rewarded by the royal approbation and a place at the Board of Control.

The Slave Trade. In 1792, when in opposition to Wilberforce, Dundas proposed that the slave trade should be abolished gradually, he brought forward two amendments in support of Wilberforce's plan, but both were lost. But the performance in his early parliamentary career which gained him most reputation was his speech on the war with

The war with France. France, in 1794. The occasion was an address of thanks on the King's speech, and Mornington stood forth as the champion of the ministerial policy, while Sheridan represented the Opposition. The speech occupied over two hours in delivery, and fills rather more than a hundred columns in the volume of parliamentary debates for the year. Its argument, however, was simple. He reviewed the progress of the war, enumerated the aggressions of the French abroad, and examined the principles on which their administration at home was based. At home the French government lived by preying upon all classes of the state, and by an organised system of attack upon commerce, religion, and property; abroad it existed by the annexation and plunder of weaker states. From these considerations, and from a careful study of the utterances of the French leaders, he came to the conclusion that such a state was of its nature hostile to all established governments, and that no peace could safely be made with France.

Sheridan replied in one of his ablest speeches, calling Lord Mornington's performance "a laborious farrago of anecdotes and extracts," and insinuating that his defence of the constitution was inspired by the hope of promotion more than by patriotism.

The Reform movement. Corresponding in time to the French revolution abroad, came the Reform movement and revolutionary excitement at home. When Lord Grey's motion for parliamentary reform was debated in 1793, Mornington spoke against it, and again in 1795 he supported the Seditious Meetings Bill and made a long tirade against the reformers. The theory of the constitution which he formulated in those speeches rendered it impossible that he could approve of the change proposed. For he held that the constitution was a wonderful union of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, so delicately bound up together that the least touch would derange the machine.

Up to this time the career of Lord Mornington had hardly

his former leader: "Grattan is as much a creature of Fox and his party as the meanest libeller in the *Morning Herald*: he lives entirely with them."