

**LETTERS OF AN OFFICER OF THE CORPS
OF ROYAL ENGINEERS, FROM THE
BRITISH ARMY IN HOLLAND, BELGIUM,
AND FRANCE, TO HIM FATHER, FROM
THE LETTER END OF 1813 TO 1816**

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Letters of an Officer of the Corps of Royal Engineers, from the British Army in Holland, Belgium, and France, to Him Father, from the Letter End of 1813 to 1816 by John Sperling

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JOHN SPERLING

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LETTERS OF AN OFFICER

OF THE

Corps of Royal Engineers,

FROM THE

BRITISH ARMY IN HOLLAND, BELGIUM,
AND FRANCE,

TO HIS FATHER,

FROM THE LATTER END OF 1813 TO 1816.



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TO THE READER.

THE existence of the following letters requires some explanation.

On looking over the papers of my father, at his decease, I found all my letters preserved.

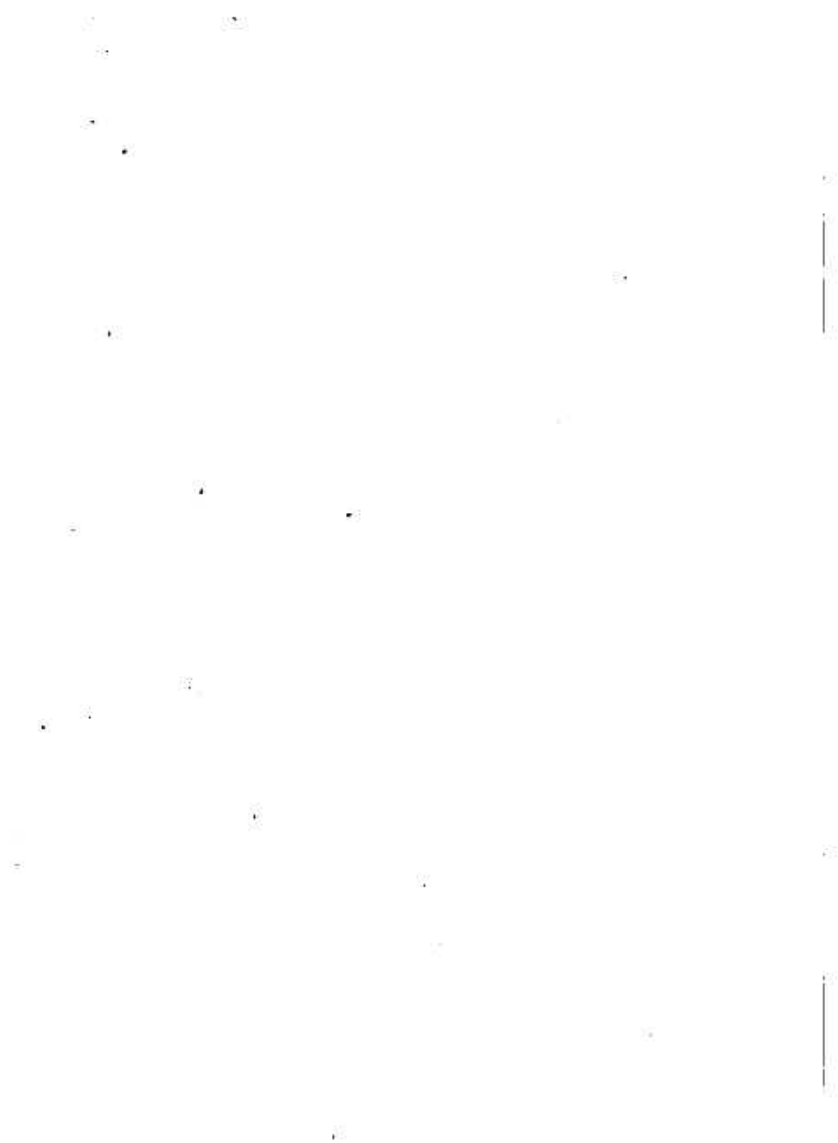
Some time since it occurred to me to examine them, with a view to their destruction. I became, however, interested in the journal, and set about transcribing it, which was accomplished in the leisure afforded by autumnal visits to relatives.

Friends to whom I showed the manuscripts expressed gratification in the perusal. Talking with a valued acquaintance, familiar with literary pursuits, of what I had been doing, he desired to see the letters, and returned them with warm suggestions for their publication.

From similar observations, the result is that the letters are now committed to the press with some diffidence, but not without a humble trust that it may please God to accompany them with His blessing.

JOHN SPERLING.

KENSINGTON PALACE GARDENS.



INTRODUCTION.

CHATHAM had been my station for a short time, when, in November, 1813, several of the officers of Engineers received orders to hold themselves in readiness for immediate foreign service. Included in this number were Hayter and myself. Having been on the Ordnance Survey together, and afterwards obtained our commissions in December, 1811, we had lived very much in each other's society. This was mutually advantageous, and our intimacy tended both to our profit and enjoyment. Dining at the mess, our other meals were in common, taking them alternately at each other's rooms.

In forwarding our orders from Pall Mall, Colonel Handfield had kindly enclosed a private note, directing us to come to London, to provide the necessary equipments.

Holland we learnt was to be our destination. The Dutch had availed themselves of the disastrous termination of Buonaparte's Russian expedition, which necessitated the recruiting of his army from the various garrisons quartered in their different towns, to assert their national independence, and turn against their oppressors.

The drafts for the French army had only been partially replaced by recruits. Upon the rising of the Dutch, the French who remained were obliged to concentrate themselves in the principal fortifications.

The Dutch had applied to England for the aid of a force to protect them and confirm their independence.

The visit to London gave us an opportunity of taking leave of our friends who were not far off. My grandmother gave me all the guineas she possessed, which proved very useful afterwards. In those days of one pound notes, gold was not to be had. We posted back to Chatham the following day, with our various purchases, there to await our final order.

This soon followed, directing us to proceed to Ramsgate for embarkation. Arriving at Ramsgate we took up our quarters at an hotel. The wind being unfavourable, the transports not collected, we engaged a lodging. A mess was also arranged at an inn where we assembled for dinner.

The Engineer officers appointed for the expedition were Lieut.-Colonel Carmichael Smyth, commanding;

Captain Sir George Hoste, Captain Thompson, commanding the Sappers and Miners; Lieutenants Abbey, appointed Adjutant and Quartermaster, Sperling, Hayter, White, Cooper, Eyre; Sub-Lieutenant Adamson, of the Sappers and Miners. He, with the company, was stationed at Margate.

The delay at Ramsgate was very needful for organizing the different departments of the service, and the various portions of regiments collected from the several *depôts*.

Sir Thomas Graham, afterwards Lord Lynedoch, was Commander-in-Chief; under him Major-Generals Cooke, Mackenzie, and Skerret.

It was our happiness to find Colonel Foy, of the Royal Horse Artillery, with Mrs. Foy, at Ramsgate, whose kindness made our stay very pleasant.

It may impart an interest to these letters to say a word of the late Major-General Sir James Carmichael Smyth, Bart., C.B., K.C.H., K.M.T., and K.S.W., whose name so frequently occurs, from the position the writer occupied under him. It was not, indeed, then clothed with the honours with which, afterwards, his services were so deservedly recognised, but as simply Lieut.-Colonel.

It is a satisfaction to pay a grateful tribute to the memory of one whose uniform kindness was experienced by the writer during their military connection. When that ceased with the breaking up of the Army of Occu-

pation in France, in 1818, it was followed by a pleasant intercourse, kept up either personally or by writing.

I have now before me an interesting letter detailing his very useful labours in the Government of British Guiana, where, after having effected a great reformation, he was suddenly cut off by fever in the year 1838.

After the army was withdrawn from France, the Duke of Wellington entrusted to him to report upon our West Indian possessions and defences; afterwards on Canada, which met with so much approbation that his statement was ordered to be printed for Government circulation.

In the recently published volume of the Supplementary Despatches of the Duke of Wellington, there is a Minute dated 1st May, 1827, relative to extra pay, which indicates that great man's estimate of Sir James Carmichael Smyth. His Grace says:—

“ These matters must always be considered in reference to the precedent likely to be created, particularly when they relate to a man of such high character as Sir J. C. Smyth.

“ His services and opinions have been so useful since his return from his commissions in the West Indies and in Canada, as to be absolutely necessary.”