

**ENGLISH MEN OF
ACTION.
WELLINGTON**

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English men of action. Wellington by George Hooper

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GEORGE HOOPER

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English Men of Action

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BY

GEORGE HOOPER

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CHAPTER I

ARTHUR WESLEY

SOMETIME in the spring of 1769, either in April or May, at Dublin or in Dangan Castle, County Meath, the boy was born whose name became, and is, familiar and famous to all the world—Wellington. His father was Garret, Earl of Mornington, a lover and composer of music; his mother was Anne Hill, a daughter of Lord Dungannon; he was christened Arthur, and he had three brothers who were men of mark in their day. The family name of his house, then Wesley, was afterwards transformed into Wellesley, which is described as the ancient spelling; but if one of that family came from Somerset, the spelling in the reign of Edward the First was Wellesleigh—Richard de Wellesleigh being set down in Rymer as the leader of a body of levies who took part in the Scottish wars. According to Mr. Gleig, Arthur was descended from a man of English stock, Walter Colley or Cowley, who migrated in the fifteenth century from Rutlandshire to Ireland. His surname he derived from the Wesleys, also ancient settlers therein, his grandfather, Richard Colley, having acquired that name

by adoption into the Wesley family. As Lady Mornington always insisted that her son Arthur was born on May-Day, 1769, and as Arthur himself kept that as his birthday, we may reasonably accept it, although his baptismal certificate is dated the 30th, and an election committee of the Irish House of Commons decided that he must have been born before April 29th; but the committee's decision cannot be regarded as trustworthy evidence. Let the Duke's birthday stand as May 1st, just as that of the young Corsican, Bonaparte, who was named Napoleon, is now allotted to August 15th in the same year, despite surviving doubts whether it was on that or on another day that his mother, the beautiful Lætitia, hurried from church to give the world a conqueror. The curious traveller and the political enthusiast visit the Casa Bonaparte, in Ajaccio, the well-spring of a grand realistic romance. Wellington has no shrine; and we must be content to know that he was an Irishman sprung from an English stock, whose birth-place and birthday neither the Duke nor any member of his family "treated as worthy of a moment's consideration." Indifference to non-essentials is one note of Wellington's career, throughout which the theatrical and legendary element was conspicuous by its absence. But it was not wanting in romance; for, as we shall see, "the dunce of the family" came to be the victor of Assaye, Vittoria, and Waterloo.

The incidents of his childhood and youth are only faintly indicated in the traditions which remain. We are told that his mother had no fondness for her son Arthur; Mr. Gleig says that her feeling towards him was "not far removed from aversion"; and thus he had not

much home-life after he had passed out of the nursery. Certain it is that he rarely alluded to his early days, and the conduct attributed to Lady Mornington may account for his perfunctory visits to her when he was "the Duke," which made Mr. Greville, who could know nothing of the facts, write him down a hard man. At some time, then, he was placed in a school at Chelsea, whence, for a brief period, he went to Eton. In neither did he shine, and it has been often said that, in after years, when Eton was proud of him, nothing could be remembered to his credit or discredit except that he fought a battle with "Bobus" Smith, the brother of the witty Canon of St. Paul's. From Eton he was sent to a French military school, England, according to her wont, having none of her own, and no military institutions of any sort, nothing but makeshifts for institutions. The French school selected for Arthur Wesley was at Angers on the Maine. Mr. Raikes was told by General Sir A. Mackenzie that the school was much frequented by young Englishmen, because the Governor, the Marquis de Pignerol, an Engineer, looked after their studies, and also because his brother had a fine riding-school. The General remembered the young Arthur, but all he could say was that the boy was rather weak in health, "not very attentive to his studies, and constantly occupied with a little terrier called Vick, which followed him everywhere." A more definite glimpse of the student than that we cannot get: it is as vague as the boxing-match at Eton; but it enables us to picture the slim bright-eyed boy, idling in the streets of the picturesque old town, or playing with "Vick" on the steep cliffs which rise out of the water just below the confluence of