

BIOGRAPHY.

CHARACTER OF THE DUKE OF YORK.

(BY SIR WALTER SCOTT.)

[Concluded.]

The character of His Royal Highness was admirably adapted to the task of this extended reformation, in a branch of the public service in which the safety of England absolutely depended for the time. Without possessing any brilliancy, his judgment in itself clear and steady, was inflexibly guided by honour and principle. No solicitations could make him promise what it would have been inconsistent with these principles to grant; nor could any circumstance induce him to break or elude the promise which he had once given. At the same time, his feelings, humane and kindly, were, on all possible occasions, accessible to the claims of compassion; and there occurred but rare instances of a wife widowed, or a family rendered orphans, by the death of a meritorious officer, without something being done to render their calamities more tolerable.

As a statesman, the Duke of York, from his earliest appearance in public life, was guided by the opinions of Mr. Pitt. But two circumstances are worthy of remark. First, that His Royal Highness never permitted the consideration of politics to influence him in his department of Commander-in-Chief, but gave alike to Whig as to Tory, the performance their service or their talent deserved. Secondly, in attaching himself to the party whose object is supposed to be to strengthen the Crown, His Royal Highness would have been the last man to invade, in the slightest degree, the rights of the people. The following anecdote may be relied upon: At the table of the Commander-in-Chief, not many years since, a young officer entered into a dispute with Lieutenant-Colonel —, upon the point to which military obedience ought to be carried. "If the Commander-in-Chief," said the young officer, like a second Seid, "should command me to do a thing which I knew to be civilly illegal, I should not scruple to obey him, and consider myself as relieved from all responsibility by the commands of my military superior." "So would not I," returned the gallant and intelligent officer who maintained the opposite side of the question. "I should rather prefer the risk of being shot for disobedience, by a commanding officer, than hanged for transgressing the laws, and violating the liberties of my country." "You have answered like yourself," said His Royal Highness, whose attention had been attracted by the vivacity of the debate; "and the officer would deserve both to be shot and hanged that should act otherwise. I trust all British officers would be as unwilling to execute an illegal command, as, I trust, the Commander-in-Chief would be incapable of issuing one."

The Religion of the Duke of York was sincere, and he was particularly attached to the doctrines and constitution of the Church of England. In this his Royal Highness strongly resembled his father; and, like his father, he entertained a conscientious sense of the obligations of the coronation oath, which prevented him from acquiescing in the further relaxation of the laws against Catholics. We pronounce no opinion on the justice of His Royal Highness's sentiments on this important point, but we must presume them to have been sincerely entertained, since they were expressed at the hazard of drawing down upon His Royal Highness an odium equally strong and resentful.

In his person and countenance the Duke of York was large, stout, and manly; he spoke rather with some of the indistinctness of utterance peculiar to his late father, than with the precision of enunciation which distinguishes the King, his royal brother. Indeed, His Royal Highness resembled his late Majesty perhaps the most of any of George the Third's descendants. His family affections were strong, and the public cannot have forgotten the pious tenderness with which he discharged the duty of watching the last days of his royal father, darkened as they were by corporeal blindness and mental incapacity. No pleasure, no business, was ever known to interrupt his regular visits to Windsor, where his unhappy parent could neither be grateful for, nor even sensible of his unremitting attention. The same ties of affection united His Royal Highness to other members of his family, and particularly to its present royal head. Those who witnessed the coronation of his present Majesty, will long remember, as the most interesting part of that august ceremony, the cordiality with which His Royal Highness the Duke of York performed his act of homage, and the tears of affection that were mutually shed between the royal brethren. We are aware that, under this heavy dispensation, His Majesty will be chief mourner, not in name only, but in all the sincerity of severed affection. The King's nearest brother in blood was also his nearest in affection; and the subject who stood next to the throne was the individual who would most willingly have laid down his life for its support.

In social intercourse the Duke of York was kind, courteous, and condescending, general attributes, we believe, of the blood royal of England, and well befitting the princes of a free country. It may be remembered, that when, in "days of youthful pride," His Royal Highness had wounded the feelings of a young nobleman, he never thought of sheltering himself behind his rank, but manfully gave reparation by receiving the (well nigh fatal) fire of the offended person, though he declined to return it.

We would here gladly conclude the subject, but to complete a portrait, the shades as well as the lights must be inserted, and in their foibles as well as their good qualities, princes are the property of history. Occupied perpetually with official duty, which to the last period of his life he discharged with the utmost punctuality, the Duke of York was peculiarly negligent of his own affairs, and the embarrassments which arose in consequence, were considerably increased by an imprudent passion for the turf and for deep play. Those unhappy propensities exhausted the funds with which the nation supplied him liberally, and sometimes produced extremities which must have been painful to a man of temper so honourable. The exalted height of his rank, which renders it doubtless more difficult to look into and regulate domestic expenditure, together with the engrossing duties of His Royal Highness's office, may be admitted as alleviations, but not apologies for their imprudence.

A criminal passion of a different nature, proved, at one part of the Duke's life, fraught with consequences likely to affect his character, destroy the confidence of the country in his efforts, and blight the fair harvest of national gratitude, for which he had toiled so hard. It was a striking illustration of the sentiments of Shakespeare:—"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices Make whips to scourge us—"

The Duke of York, married to Frederica, Princess Royal of Prussia, Sept. 29, 1791, lived with her on terms of decency, but not of affection; and the Duke had

formed, with a female called Clarke, a connexion, justifiable, certainly, neither by the laws of religion or morality. Imprudently he suffered this woman to express her wishes to him for the promotion of two or three officers, to whose performance there could be no other objection than that they were recommended by such a person. It might doubtless have occurred to the Duke, that the solicitations of a woman like this were not likely to be disinterested; and, in fact, she seems to have favoured one or two persons, as being her paramours—several for mere prospect of gain, which she had subordinate agents to hunt out for, and one or two from a real sense of good nature and benevolence. The examination of this woman and her various profligate intimates before the House of Commons, occupied that assembly for nearly three months, and that with an intenseness of anxiety seldom equalled. The Duke of York was acquitted from the motion brought against him by a majority of eighty; but so strong was the outcry against him without doors, so much was the nation convinced that all Mrs. Clarke said was true, and so little could be brought to doubt that the Duke of York was a conscious and participant actor in all that person's schemes, that His Royal Highness, seeing his utility obstructed by popular prejudice, tendered to His Majesty the resignation of his office, which was accepted accordingly, March 20, 1809. And thus, according to Solomon, a dead fly can pollute the most precious unguent, was the honorable fame, acquired by the services of a life time, obscured by the consequences of what the gay world have termed a venial levity. The warning to those of birth and eminence, is of the most serious nature.—This step had not long been taken, when the mist in which the question was involved began to disperse. The public accuser, in the House of Commons, Colonel Wardie, was detected in some suspicious dealings with the principal witness, Mrs. Clarke, and it was evidently expectation of gain that had brought this lady to the bar as an evidence. Next occurred in the calm moments of retrospect, the great improbability that His Royal Highness ever could know on what terms she negotiated with those in whose favour she solicited. It may be well supposed she concealed the motive for interesting herself in such as were his own favoured rivals, and what greater probability was there, that she should explain to him her mercenary speculations, or distinguish them from the intercessions which she made upon more honourable motives? When the matter of accusation was thus reduced to His Royal Highness's having been, in two or three instances, the dupe of an artful woman, men began to see, that when once the guilt of entertaining a mistress was acknowledged, the disposition to gratify such a person, who must always exercise a natural influence over her paramour, follows as a matter of course. It was then that the public compared the extensive and lengthened train of public services, by which the Duke had distinguished himself in the management of the army, with the trifling foible of his having granted one or two favours not in themselves improper, at the request of a woman who had such opportunities to press her suit, and, doing to His Royal Highness the justice he well deserved, welcomed him back in May, 1811, to the situation from which he had been driven by calumny and popular prejudice.

In that high command His Royal Highness continued to manage our military affairs. During the last years of the most momentous war that ever was waged, His Royal Highness prepared the most splendid victories our annuals can boast, by an unceasing attention to the character and ta-

lents of the officers, and the comforts and health of the men. Trained under a system so admirable, our army seemed to increase in efficacy, power, and even in numbers, in proportion to the increasing occasion which the public had for their services. Nor is it less praise, that when the men so disciplined returned from scenes of battle, ravaged countries and stormed cities, they reassumed the habits of private life as if they had never left them; and that of all the crimes which the criminal calendar presents, (in Scotland at least,) there are not above one or two instances in which the perpetrators have been disbanded soldiers. This is a happy change since the reduction of the army, after peace with America in 1783, which was the means of infesting the country with ruffians of every description; & in the prison of Edinburgh alone, there were 6 or 7 disbanded soldiers under sentence of death at the same time.

This superintending care, if not the most gaudy, is amongst the most enduring flowers which bloom over the Duke of York's tomb. It gave energy to Britain in war, and strength to her in peace. It combined tranquility with triumph, and morality with the habits of a military life. If our soldiers have been found invincible in battle, and meritorious in peaceful society when restored to its bosom, let no Briton forget that this is owing to the paternal care of him, to whose memory we here offer an imperfect tribute.

Summary of the Duke of York's services.—His Royal Highness entered the service on the 1st of November 1780, as Colonel by brevet; was appointed on the 23d March, 1782, Colonel of the 2d regiment of horse grenadier guards; was made, on the 20th November, 1782, major-general; on the 27th of October, 1784, Colonel of the Coldstream regiment of guards; on the 12th of April, 1793, General; on the 18th of February, 1796, Field-Marshal; on the 23d August, 1797, Colonel-in-Chief of the 60th regiment of foot; and on the 5th of September, 1805, Colonel of the grenadier regiment of guards. He was appointed in February, 1795, Commander-in-Chief; retired from office in March, 1809; and was re-appointed May, 1811.

COLONIAL.

QUEBEC, MARCH 7.

PROROGATION OF THE PROVINCIAL PARLIAMENT.—This Day, at Three o'clock, His Excellency the GOVERNOR-IN-CHIEF came down in State to the Legislative Council Chamber, and being seated on the Throne, the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod was sent to command the presence of the Assembly, which being come up, His Excellency was pleased to deliver the following

SPEECH:

"Gentlemen of the Legislative Council; Gentlemen of the Assembly: "I come to close this Session of the Provincial Parliament, convinced, by the state of your proceedings, that nothing likely to promote the public interest, can be now expected from your deliberations. "To you, Gentlemen of the Legislative Council, who have attended your duties in this Session, I offer my thanks on the part of His Majesty, as an acknowledgment of the regard which, by your presence, you have shown to the welfare of your Country, and also of that proper respect which you have manifested for the Sovereign from whom your honors are derived.

"Gentlemen of the Assembly: "It is painful to me, that I cannot speak my sentiments to you in terms of approbation and thanks. The proceedings of this

Session imp however un a faithful Se friend to the "Many forms and ac to clear up a moderation terminated no efforts o Government those differ ture; but ferences of jecton of Majesty's your consi "The Session wo was an exa of last year ther of app been done the result "Hav Expendit ted the S name? o the refusa understoo "Hav ty's Rep ed, and a forms of respect w Legislatu "Hav ing' in attende cognize Crow These you are and answ turn to "Th answer are bou try and "In ment, withou public for futu confusi same y vernme of the tion, a have disrega assumpt of that your s "7 Session plies of Go the fa tenan Hous Insan lishm a tota prov "expe cons high hope prese but publ as d der ane "the ed