

**BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS OF
THE HON. WILLIAM CORNWALLIS,
ADMIRAL OF THE BLUE, AND REAR-ADMIRAL OF
ENGLAND.**

*Iustum ac tenacem propositi virtum
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
Non vultus instantis tyranni
Mente quatit solida; neque Ausser
Dux inquieti turbidus Adriæ;
Nec fulminantis magna Jovis manus:
Si fractus illabatur orbis,
Impavidum ferient ruinæ.* *Horace, lib. 3. 111.*

Thus the grim lion his retreat maintains,
Beset with watchful dogs and shouting swains,
Long stands the showering darts, and missile fires,
Then sourly slow the indignant beast retires.
So turn'd stern Ajax, by whole hosts repell'd,
While his swollen heart at every stroke rebell'd.

Pope's Liad.

THE noble family of Cornwallis are said to have come originally from Ireland, and it was a younger branch of the house which settled in this kingdom about the reign of Edward the Third.

William Harvey, Esq. Clarenceux, King of Arms, in his visitation of the county of Suffolk in 1561, mentions Thomas Cornwalleys (as the name was anciently written), of London, merchant, who is the first that appears in this account, and gives the particulars of a deed drawn in Edward the Third's time, which he saw, and also the arms of the family engraven on stone in the church porch of Otley, near Broome, which corresponded with the seal on the above mentioned deed; this gentleman was Sheriff of London in 1378. In the succeeding reign of Richard the Second, John Cornwallis was Knight of the Shire for Suffolk in two Parliaments. About this period the Lordship of Broome, which now gives a title to the eldest son of the Marquis, came into the family by a marriage.

They continued to prosper during the succeeding reigns, and in that of Henry the Seventh, we find William Cornwallis among those gentlemen of the country who were certified to have an estate sufficient to support the dignity of Knighthood; this was one of the various modes used by that monarch to draw money from his subjects, and on the creation of Henry Prince of Wales, many opulent and respectable gentlemen were knighted, it is supposed as much with a view of the profits arising to the Crown from the fees, as any particular mark of regard intended to the parties.

In the 9th of Henry the Eighth, we find this gentleman among the principal persons in the county of Suffolk that were nominated by act of Parliament to assess a subsidy granted for defraying the expence of the expedition to France, in which Tournay was taken.

William was succeeded by his son John Cornwallis, he distinguished himself greatly in the expedition commanded by Howard Earl of Surrey, the Lord High Admiral, who, after repulsing the French in an attack on our coast, scoured the Channel, and landed at Morlaix, which place was carried by assault; Mr. Cornwallis was very conspicuous in this assault, and was knighted as a reward for his gallantry on the occasion by Lord Surrey. Sir John was appointed Stewart of the Household of Prince Edward.

Thomas Cornwallis, his eldest son, was knighted at Westminster in 1548. He greatly distinguished himself by his exertions when the commotion in Norfolk, headed by Ket the Tanner, took place, bringing forces to the assistance of the Marquis of Northampton; at the attack of Norwich he bravely entered the town with Lord Sheffield, who was slain, and Sir Thomas being overpowered, was made prisoner, but shortly after relieved by the arrival of the King's troops. In the last year of King Edward's reign he was Sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk, and with the forces he headed, was very instrumental to the advancement of Queen Mary to the throne; he was then at Framlington castle, in Suffolk; during the whole reign of Queen Mary he continued in great favour, was particularly active in suppressing Wyatt's rebellion, and he served twice in Parliament, once for Gatton, and again for the county of Suffolk. In 1554, he was appointed member of the Privy Council, and in 1557, Comptroller of the Household.

He appears to have conducted himself with great integrity on all occasions, and when it was debated in Council to send the Princess Elizabeth out of England, with the intention of excluding her from the succession, Sir Thomas Cornwallis is supposed to have been the principal cause of dissuading the Queen from so unjust a design. On the accession of Queen Elizabeth, being a Catholic, he was left out of the Privy Council, and removed from his place of Comptroller of the Household; he then retired to his estate in Suffolk. His successor, William, embarked with the Earl of Essex in his expedition against the rebels in Ireland, and was knighted for his services in that kingdom. Charles Cornwallis, the second son, also highly distinguished himself during the reign of James the First, by whom he was knighted, and appointed Ambassador to the Court of Spain, where he resided several years with great reputation. In 1610, when the household of Henry Prince of Wales was established, Sir Charles Cornwallis was appointed Treasurer to his Royal Highness, this accomplished Prince died at an early age, much lamented by all ranks; there is an account of his life extant, written with great elegance by Sir Charles.

Thomas the next heir, who succeeded Sir William, dying unmarried, the estate devolved to his brother Frederic (first Lord); this gentleman in his youth, was introduced by his uncle Sir Charles into the service of Prince Henry, eldest son of James the First; after his death he was noticed by Charles the First, when Prince of Wales; was about his person, and attended him on the romantic journey which this Prince made into Spain. Shortly after the accession of Charles the First, he was created a baronet, by letters patent, dated the 4th of May, 1627. He was returned member for the borough of Eye in the fifteenth year of Charles the First; he was also in Parliament in 1640, when discerning that the violent measures of the predominant party tended to the ruin of the kingdom, he opposed them warmly,

and was thereon inserted in the list of those who were called Siraffordians. He attached himself firmly to the royal cause, and was one of the members who assembled in Parliament at Oxford, 1643. Sir Frederic was concerned in most of the principal actions which took place during the civil wars, and distinguished for his gallantry on many occasions; when all the places of strength had surrendered to the Parliament's forces, and there were no hopes of restoring his Royal Master, his estates being sequestered, he followed the fortunes of King Charles the Second into exile, and accompanied him on his return; the day after the King's public entry into London, May 29, 1660, Sir Frederic was declared Treasurer of His Majesty's Household, and sworn member of his Privy Council. He was chosen member for Ipswich in the same year, on the death of Sir Nicholas Bacon.

On the 20th of April, 1661, three days previous to the coronation of Charles the Second, he was created a Baron, by the title of Lord Cornwallis, of Eye, in the county of Suffolk, "having," as the preamble to the patent sets forth, "from his youth, with great fidelity, served King Charles the First, in court and camp, for which he suffered the loss of his estate, imprisonment, and exile, and in testimony of the high esteem His Majesty had of his merits, he advanced him to the said degree and dignity."

The Hon. William Cornwallis, the subject of our present Memoir, is son of Charles, the fifth Lord, and first Earl, by a marriage with Elizabeth, eldest daughter of Lord Viscount Townshend, and was born in the year 1744; he embarked early in the perilous and honorable profession of which he is at present so distinguished an ornament, and may be said to have received his professional education in what is called the Old School, under the auspices of Boscawen and Saunders. The dazzling achievements of our naval heroes during the late war, have carried the glory of the British flag to an unexampled height, but we should not forget the brave men by whose instructions and example many of the commanders who have led our fleets to victory were formed; and who ever attentively considers the events that occurred at the capture of Cape Breton, and the siege of Quebec, must acknowledge, that there were difficulties to contend with, the surmounting of which would have added lustre to the names of the gallant chiefs who humbled the pride of Iberia, and conquered at Aboukir.

America was the first scene of his naval career, he went out, we believe, on board the Newark, in the fleet commanded by Admiral Boscawen; from this ship he removed to the Kingston, Capt. Parry, and was on her quarter-deck at the capture of Louisbourg, in 1758. There have been few occasions on which the military prowess of our countrymen were more conspicuous than at this siege, in the course of which the gallant and lamented General Wolfe distinguished himself so nobly. The fatigue and difficulties of the naval department were extreme, it will be recollected the landing of the army was performed in defiance of obstacles that were deemed by the French engineers to be insurmountable: A heavy surf on a rocky shore, lined with troops to oppose the debarkation. The night attack on two 74 gun ships that were moored in the inner harbour, and protected by the fire from the batteries and town, will ever rank high on our naval records; this daring service was performed by the boats of the fleet, under the command of Captains Laforey and Balfour, who, after capturing them both, were compelled to burn the Prudent, which was aground, and the Bienfaitant was triumphantly towed out of the harbour, under a heavy fire both from the forts and the town of Louisbourg. Early impressions are acknowledged to have a great share in forming the human mind; and we doubt not but this animating scene contributed much to steel the native fortitude of our young seamen, and inspire him with the hope of emulating such glorious achievements. Shortly after the reduction of this important fortress the Kingston returned to Europe, and in March, 1759, Mr. Cornwallis was removed to the Dunkirk, Capt. Digby, then on the Channel service; this ship was one of the fleet under the command of Sir Edward Hawke, which, after contending with much adverse weather, were at length fortunate enough to come up with the enemy; they had taken advantage of a gale which forced the British fleet into Torbay, to sail from Brest; the Commander in Chief immediately went in pursuit of them, and on the 17th of November received intelligence of their motions, and on the 20th got sight of Mons. Conflans, who was then chasing a squadron of fifty-gun ships and small vessels, that had been detached under the command of Capt. Duff. The particulars of this glorious victory have been so recently recorded in our Chronicle, vol. vi. that we shall not dwell on them. Shortly after this period the Dunkirk was ordered to the Mediterranean, under the command of Admiral Sir Charles Saunders; in the month of November, 1760, we find her with the Shrewsbury, Preston, Somerset, and several frigates, blocking up a French fleet in the Island of Candia. On the 27th of December, in the same year, Mr. Cornwallis was removed to the Neptune, on board which ship Admiral Saunders' flag was flying. On the 5th of April, 1761, Mr. Cornwallis, after passing the usual professional ordeal, was appointed Lieutenant into the Thunderer, commanded by Capt. Proby. This Officer was one of those who accompanied Commodore, afterwards Lord, Anson, in his voyage round the world, and was concerned in all the various and eventful scenes that took place on the coast of South America, and in the course of that memorable circumnavigation. The Capt. of the Thunderer was detached with the Modeste and Thetis under his command, in July 1761, to watch the motions of the Achilles and Bouffon, who were known to be in the harbour of Cadiz, standing in on the 14th the French ships were missed, Capt. Proby immediately disposed his force in the most likely manner to intercept the enemy, and on the afternoon of the 16th, got sight of them; after a chase until one o'clock on the morning of the 17th, the Thunderer came up with the Achilles, when a very sharp though short contest ensued, the action continued little more than half an hour before the French ship struck. This battle must, however, have been very hot while it lasted, as the loss on the English side was 17 killed and 113 wounded, among whom were the Second and Third Lieutenants, and the Thunderer was much disabled in her masts and rigging.

About the same time that Capt. Proby commenced the engagement, the Thetis brought the Bouffon to action; in about half an hour, on the Modeste coming up, she struck. Lieutenant Cornwallis remained in the Thunderer until July, 1762, when he was promoted to the rank of Master and Commander, and appointed to the Wasp sloop; on the 14th of October he was removed to the Swift, in which ship he continued until April, 1765, when he was promoted to the rank of Post Captain, and appointed to command the Prince Edward, in which ship he remained until the month of May, 1766, when she was paid off.

The subject of our Memoir attained the rank of Post Captain at a time of life which encouraged him to look forward to the highest rank in his profession, with a degree of certainty, and he seems to have eagerly embraced every opportunity of acquiring the experience necessary to qualify himself for the important commands to which he aspired. At an age that might have excused a wish to enter into the gaieties and luxury of the capital, where peace seemed to invite him to repose, and enjoy the elegant society which his rank in life rendered familiar to him, he turned his thoughts on professional improvement alone, and after a short interval of relaxation again applied for employ, and hoisted his pendant on board the Guadaloupe in September, 1766. He continued employed, except at very short intervals, during the whole of the peace, commanding different ships on the West-India station and in Europe.

In the year 1778, when the junction of France added strength and confidence to the revolted colonies, Captain Cornwallis commanded the Lion, of 64 guns, and was attached to the ill-fated squadron under the orders of Adm. Byron. In spite of the utmost exertions, this unfortunate Commander was always too late in his arrival to counteract the projects of the enemy. The fleet, which sailed from England in June in order to reinforce Lord Howe, and by taking the northern passage had every probability of reaching New-York before the French Squadron commanded by D'Estaing, was retarded by adverse gales of wind, and at length almost totally dispersed; some of the ships arrived singly at New-York, six only under Admiral Parker were fortunate enough to keep together, and reached that port on the 29th of August; the Admiral, separated from his Squadron, after having made good his passage to within thirty leagues of Sandy Hook, fell in with twelve ships of the French fleet, which being to leeward, and between him and the land, cut him off from New-York, he bore up for Halifax, where, after refitting with the utmost expedition, he sailed for New-York, and joined his fleet about the middle of September: the different ships had suffered so much in gales of wind, that it was the 18th of October before they were in readiness to proceed in search of Count D'Estaing, who was refitting in Boston.

Soon after the fleet reached Boston Bay, on the 1st of November, a tremendous storm arose, forced the ships to sea, and so disabled them, that Admiral Byron was obliged to return to Rhode Island to refit; the gale that had shattered the English fleet was fair for D'Estaing, who profited by their absence to push out of Boston, and directed his course to the West-Indies. Thus were the best intentions and exertions of Admiral Byron marred by the opposition of the elements; indeed that zealous and good Officer seemed never to have been a favourite of fortune; his first voyage was in the Wager, one of the Squadron who went to the South Seas with Lord Anson; the ship was cast away on the coast of Chili, and, after suffering incredible hardships, Mr. Byron was among the surviving few that reached England.

The British fleet were detained at Rhode Island for some time after they were in readiness to sail, by contrary winds, or he would have arrived in the West-Indies at the time D'Estaing was occupied in his ineffectual attack on the fleet and army besieging St. Lucia; the gallant resistance made by Admiral Barrington with six ships, against the whole of the French force on that occasion, will ever be remembered as one of the first of our naval achievements.

The arrival of Admiral Byron confined the French in Fort Royal Bay. During the winter both fleets were reinforced, the English by a squadron under Commodore Rowley, and the French by a division under Count De Grasse. The Count, however, did not choose to risk an action, although frequently tempted by squadrons sent off Martinique to cruise. At length the season arriving for the departure of the West-India fleet of Merchant ships for England, the Admiral was under the necessity of going to St. Christopher's to collect them, and proceeding to windward of the Islands, for the protection of the convoy.

The French immediately availed themselves of this opportunity, a small force sailed for St. Vincents, which fell without opposition, and the Count D'Estaing went to attack Grenada with the whole fleet, which, reinforced by the junction of Mons. La Motte Piquet, amounted to twenty-six ships of the line, and six large frigates: With this force, and 9000 troops, he appeared before Grenada on the 2d of July, and immediately landed the army; Lord Macartney, being deserted by most of the people of colour, was compelled to surrender the Island on the 4th of July, after a gallant but ineffectual resistance.

A strong easterly wind and lee current retarded Admiral Byron for some days in his attempts to weather Martinique, and it was only on his arrival at St. Lucia on the first that he was informed of the capture of St. Vincents, he immediately made arrangements for the recovery of that Island, and sailed with the troops which had been embarked on General Grant, on the 3d of July. In the passage to Vincent he received information, that D'Estaing was gone to attack Grenada; but the various accounts all differed in the amount of the force they stated him to possess; none however, made it amount to more than nineteen sail of the line, some even rated it so low as eight; the English fleet consisted of twenty-one sail of the line and a frigate. Adm. Byron, on approaching this Island on the night of the 8th, prepared to attack the enemy's fleet next morning, and drew the transports from among the ships of war, leaving them protected by three line of battle ships, under the orders of Admiral Rowley, who was directed to join the fleet should occasion require.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)