VARIOUS

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Содержание

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THE DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH. [1]

Mr Alison's *Life of the Duke of Marlborough* is an enchaining romance – the romance of a dazzling but stern reality; and Marlborough is its equally stern and dazzling hero. It is, moreover, a romance equally exciting and instructive to both soldier and civilian; told, too, with the scrupulous truthfulness befitting reality, and by one of sagacity sufficient to perceive that, by so doing, he would preserve the ethereal essence of the romance, rendering it intense to the reader for mere excitement, (whose name, alas! is now legion,) while irradiating the path of the plodding inquirer after mere matter of fact. We assert that in these volumes are to be found many essential elements of the most enthralling romance of actual life.[2] Hairbreadth personal 'scapes of the hero, from captivity and death; glorious battles, but of long doubtful issue; devouring and undying love; plots and counterplots without end, now on a grand, then on a paltry scale, national and individual; implacable animosities, deadly jealousies; enthusiastic gratitude suddenly converted into execrable ingratitude; court favour now blazing in its zenith, then suddenly and disastrously eclipsed; stern fortitude, magnificent heroism amidst exquisite trials and tremendous dangers; the wasting anxieties of the stateman's cabinet and the warrior's tent; what would one have more? And yet there is more, and much more, to be found in these volumes, as we shall hereafter see.

Mr Alison's hero is he who was known as "the handsome Englishman;" a title conferred upon him, not by sighing ladies fair, but by a man who saw him in his blooming youth, in his twenty-second year – by no less a personage than the great warrior Turenne, under whose auspices he began playing, very eagerly, the brilliant game of soldiering. This was *in the matter* (as the lawyers say) of the French against the Dutch, wherein he learned the art by which he afterwards gave his teachers fearful evidence of the extent of his obligation to them. – And he *was* handsome. Of that fact Mr Alison has enabled us to judge, by a fine portrait, after Sir Godfrey Kneller, of Marlborough, when in the prime of manhood. We cannot conceive a nobler countenance than here looks on the reader; it is the perfection of manly beauty. There is a certain serene frankness, a dignity, a subdued vivacity and power in those symmetrical features which would have enchanted Phidias. The Englishman thinks, and his pulse quickens the while, of that countenance, now so tranquil, suddenly inflamed at Blenheim, Ramilies, Oudenarde, Lille, Malplaquet; then excited by the anxieties of harassing statesmanship, and the indignities inflicted by envy, malevolence, and ingratitude; by and by relaxed with grief, by the loss of an only son; and finally beaming with proud tenderness upon a beautiful, gifted, idolised, and idolising wife – one who, after his death, loftily spurned a ducal suitor for her widowed hand, saying, "If you were the emperor of the world, I would not permit you to succeed in that heart which has been devoted to John Duke of Marlborough."[3] No man or woman can read these words

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[1] *The Life of John Duke of Marlborough; with some Account of his Contemporaries, and of the War of the Succession.* By Archibald Alison, LL.D. Second edition, greatly enlarged, 2 vols. 8vo. William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh and London. 1852.

[2] "How much do the events of real life outstrip all that romance has figured or would venture to portray!" observes Mr Alison, (vol. i. p. 403,) in describing the pious and enthusiastic greeting given by Prince Eugene to his aged mother, whom he had not seen since his youth, having been driven into exile by the haughty Louis XIV., on whom he had since inflicted such crushing defeats, and at whose expense he had become so great a hero! This interview took place at Brussels, whither Eugene eagerly repaired, immediately after the bloody victory of Oudenarde. "The fortnight I spent with her was the happiest of my life," said her laurelled son.

[3] Alison, vol. ii. p. 320.

without a swelling heart, and a belief, which he would be loth to have disturbed, that they indicated a noble nature. What must such a man, he will say, have thought of such a woman? what must such a woman have felt for such a man? Each bound to the other, through all the vicissitudes of life, in adamantine bonds of love and admiration! each, too, possessing great qualities, materially affecting those of the other, as well for good as for evil. Nor was this remarkable man possessed of a handsome countenance only. His person and gesture were dignified, graceful, and commanding. He had indeed a signal *presence*; he was a perfect master of manner, and his address was so exquisitely fascinating as to dissolve fierce jealousies and animosities, lull suspicion, and beguile the subtlest diplomacy of its arts. His soothing smile and winning tongue, equally with his bright sword, affecting the destinies of empires. Before the bland, soft-spoken commander, "grim-visaged war" in the person of Charles XII. of Sweden, "smoothed his wrinkled front," and the rigid warrior-king, at his instance, bade adieu to the grand and importunate suitor for his alliance, Louis XIV., whom it was the great mission of Marlborough to defeat and humble. The consummate diplomatist was never – no, not for an instant – thrown off his guard: his watchfulness knew no relaxation; and his penetration into the designs of the most astute was quick as profound. He was, in fact, equally great in camp and cabinet – born for the conduct of affairs, which he regulated with a sort of frigid masterliness: a condition, however, which he maintained by rigorous self-command; for, as we shall in due time see, he had powerful feelings and quick sensibilities. Lord Bolingbroke said of him, that "he was the greatest general and greatest minister that this country or any other had produced – the perfection of genius, matured by experience." If we may presume to say it, he appears to have been one of those raised by Providence as a great instrument, for a great exigency in the affairs of mankind. It is true that Marlborough had his faults, and grave ones; but the genius of history is, in such a case, equally outraged by an attempt at suppression or exaggeration. "In estimating the character of the dead," justly observes Mr Aytoun, in his able vindication of the memory of Claverhouse against certain incautious allegations of Mr Macaulay, "some weight ought surely to be given to the opinion of contemporaries;" and one of the Duke of Marlborough's most eminent military rivals and political opponents, the celebrated Earl of Peterborough, said of him, in a noble spirit, "He was so great a man, *that I have forgotten his faults*."[4] But can History? No: she abdicates her functions, unless she records truthfully, for the guidance of mankind, both the faults and the excellencies of the great characters whom she has undertaken to delineate. Without scrupulous fidelity here, history may degenerate into a libel, and a lie – a lie of unspeakable baseness, for it is regarding the dead, who cannot burst indignant from the tomb in which they were laid with honour, it may have been amidst the tears and sighs of a proud and bereaved nation; – a lie of unspeakable wickedness, for it is designed to live, and, living, to lie to all future ages, in proportion to the strength of the pen which writes it. These are truths to which the heart of mankind instantly responds; and we enunciate them here, only by way of making *continual claim*, to adopt the now exploded phraseology of English law, upon the attention of all biographers and historians. Not that we think this to have been rendered necessary by any recent and glaring cases – for we know of none whatever among English men of letters, in the departments just referred to, in which we have detected any *intention* to slander the dead, or misrepresent the living. We indignantly repudiate the bare possibility; and only desire to impress the necessity of a caution all but excessive, in making derogatory imputations upon the dead, through placing too great a reliance upon the tittle-tattle of days gone by, written or spoken; upon the means of knowledge possessed by those who gave currency to discreditable rumours; and the trustworthiness of contemporaries, often eager rivals outwitted in the game, and distanced in the race of life and distinction, by him whom they thereupon revengefully resolve to blacken before the eyes of posterity. We concur, in a word, cordially with Lord Mahon in saying that which we are bound to add he has uniformly acted up to, in his candid, luminous, and elegant *History*: "Unjustly to lower the fame of a political adversary, or unjustly to raise the fame of

[4] Mr Alison seems to attribute this speech, or a similar one, to Lord Bolingbroke.

an ancestor – to state any fact without sufficient authority, or draw any character without thorough conviction, implies not merely literary failure, *but moral guilt*."[5]

That the Duke of Marlborough is one of the foremost figures in the picture of England's glory, in that radiant quarter crowded by her warriors and statesmen, is undeniable; and so is Lord Bacon, who stands forth among her philosophers a very giant. But would any biographer or historian deal justly, who failed to apprise us of the real blot upon the character of each? Surely, however, he would not dwell upon that blot with eagerness or exultation! but point it out in the spirit of a benignant sadness – in the reluctant discharge of a painful duty – and that only after having deliberately weighed everything that a judicial mind would require, before arriving at a conclusion so humiliating to humanity.

Four living writers – of high personal character, of great eminence in the ranks of literature, and characterised almost equally by painstaking industry in the collection of materials, but clothing the results of their researches in very different styles of composition – have respectively placed on record their deliberate estimate of the moral and political character of the Duke of Marlborough. These writers are – Mr Hallam, Lord Mahon, Mr Macaulay, and Mr Alison. Mr Hallam's writings are already English classics. He is a stern, straightforward, independent, learned man, of great and exact knowledge. His style is pure, yet characterised chiefly by a kind of rugged vigour. Thus has *he*, in his Constitutional History, dealt with the Duke of Marlborough: "What, then, must we think, if we find, in the whole of this great man's political life, nothing but ambition and rapacity in his motives, nothing but treachery and intrigue in his means? In short, his whole life was such a picture of meanness and treachery that we must rate military services very high indeed, to preserve any esteem for his memory." "The extreme selfishness and treachery of his character make it difficult to believe that he had any further view than to secure himself in the event of a revolution, which he deemed probable. His interest, which was always his deity, did not lie in that direction; and his great sagacity must have perceived it." These are blighting words, and they fall from a writer of great authority, yet liable to the suspicion of occasionally labouring, however unconsciously, under political bias. Lord Mahon, in his *History of England*, speaks with the utmost temper, forbearance, and unwillingness, but in unequivocal condemnation of one important act of Marlborough. He states that "the extent of infidelity" to the cause of the Revolution, among leading ministerial statesmen, "which has more recently come to light from the publication of original papers, is truly appalling. Above all, it is with shame and sorrow that I write it, the Duke of Marlborough's conduct to the Stuarts is, indeed, a foul blot on his illustrious name." After reciting facts which seem, unfortunately, incontestable, he adds, mournfully, "What defence can possibly be offered for such conduct?" Mr Macaulay writes in a spirit of deadly detestation of Marlborough. This gentleman, it need hardly be said, is a gifted disciple of the same political school as Mr Hallam; and, without desiring to convey erroneous inferences and impressions, he seems to us, nevertheless, a glaring instance of one-sidedness. Mr Macaulay is a man of very great ability; and his History promises to constitute a splendid addition to the stock of enduring English literature. It will also have a powerful and wide-spread influence, whether for good or for evil, over the minds not only of literary and political students, but of that huge class who are content to let others think for them; for its tone is one very confident and peremptory; the knowledge which it displays is obviously as extensive as minute; and he is a consummate master of English, and writes with such alluring brilliance as renders it nearly impossible to lay down his volumes till the perusal of them has been finished, or to pause, as one goes along, to reflect and weigh. Hence the great moral responsibility which such a writer incurs; and all are interested in warning him, as he proceeds with his great undertaking, to throw himself as thoroughly as he may be able into the *judicial* character. We wish that such a writer had never cared a single straw for either Whig or Tory! As for his style, it is one of ceaseless glitter, and lacks the simplicity, *repose*, and dignity of history. What a contrast to the immortal composition of Hume! to whom he stands in perilous proximity, absolutely challenging

[5] *History of England, from the Peace of Utrecht to that of Aix-la-Chapelle*, vol. i. p. 3.

comparison. Before parting with this brilliant writer, we would, as one of the public which is proud of him, offer him, in the most friendly spirit, an earnest hint that he would, in continuing his labours, disengage the true events of history from merely local and temporary details; and be searchingly on his guard in dealing with characters and principles which run counter to his own views and opinions. Let us now see in what terms Mr Macaulay has ventured to speak of one of the greatest men who ever figured in our history. He says that Marlborough was a man "not less distinguished by avarice and baseness than by capacity and energy – as one whose renown was strangely made up of infamy and glory; thrifty in his very vices, levying ample contributions on ladies enriched by the spoils of more liberal lovers." A "letter written with a certain elevation, was a sure mark that he was going to commit a baseness." Another is written "with that decorum which he never failed to preserve in the midst of guilt and dishonour." And finally, he *already* thus stands before posterity in the pages of Mr Macaulay: —

> "So inconsistent is human nature, that there are tender spots even in seared consciences. And thus this man, [!] who had owed his rise in life to his sister's shame, who had been kept by the most profuse, imperious, and shameless of harlots, and whose public life, to those who can look steadily through the dazzling blaze of genius and glory, will appear a prodigy of turpitude, believed implicitly in the religion which he had learned [!] as a boy, and shuddered at the thought of formally abjuring it. A terrible alternative was before him. The earthly evil which he most dreaded was poverty. The one crime from which his heart recoiled was apostacy. And if the designs of the Court succeeded, he could not doubt that, between poverty and apostacy, he must soon make his choice. He therefore determined to cross those designs; and it soon appeared that there was no guilt and no disgrace which he was not ready to incur, in order to escape from the necessity of parting either with his places or with his religion."[6]

Such was Marlborough, according to Mr Macaulay; and when we bear in mind that he has yet to deal with thirty-four years' public life of this illustrious personage, whom he may at this moment be painting in, if possible, still darker colours than the above, we may feel excused in feeling anxiety, not only on patriotic grounds, but on Mr Macaulay's own account.

The last of our four living writers dealing with Marlborough is Mr Alison – a gentleman who has conferred world-wide service, and earned an enduring celebrity in English letters, by the fidelity and power with which he has recorded the mightiest series of events which the world has hitherto seen, and enforced their true teaching. That his *History of Europe* is not open to criticism, it were childishness to deny; but the *maculæ* totally disappear when set against his uniform and even fastidious fidelity, his prodigious industry, his dispassionate candour in dealing with men and events, his huge accumulation of important, instructive, and deeply-interesting facts – which, but for him, might have been irrecoverably scattered abroad – and his vivid and picturesque eloquence. Few must they be of his readers who have not hung breathless over his battle-scenes on flood and field; hearing again the awful roar of the cannonade, the deadly rattle of musketry, the thundering charge of cavalry, the steady tramp of vast columns of infantry; beholding the glistening of sabre and bayonet, and all the bloody scene, now fearfully visible, and then, again, as fearfully invisible, for a while, amid the sulphurous smoke! Again, Mr Alison always *places* his attentive reader well, before entering into the battle or siege; giving him an admirable, idea of localities, without a knowledge of which his picture would become like the cloudy but glistening confusion of the later productions of Turner. All this, however, is subordinate to the moral and political aspect of those turbulent times and multitudinous transactions with which Mr Alison had to deal – an aspect which he keeps steadily

[6] Macaulay's *History of England, from the Accession of James II.*, p. 255.

before his reader's eye, and thus instructs while delighting him; making the past truly and practically tributary to the future. He is ever watchful of the effect produced on affairs, civil or military, by overmastering personal character, which, with its workings, he develops patiently and distinctly: and so with combinations of men and parties; with systems of policy abruptly changed, or subtilely varied to suit purposes, and gain objects, not at first sight visible or easily suspected. Either by natural constitution or from long habit, there may be observed in Mr Alison a disposition to take large views of human affairs – to deal with mankind and their transactions in masses, and on a grand scale – a tendency this, which, if accompanied by accurate thinking, and due attention to details, proportionably indicates the highest order of historical genius. But we must repeat the remark, and with it close these general observations, that Mr Alison's capital qualification as an author, especially a biographical and historical author, appears to us to be his unvarying love of truth, in comparison with which all other objects which can be contemplated by an author are absolutely as nothing.

It was with no little interest that we saw the announcement of Mr Alison's being engaged upon an elaborate Life of Marlborough, who would now be depicted by the same brilliant and faithful pencil which has delineated Wellington. These are two of the names which glitter brightest in the rolls of fame, and Mr Alison is able thoroughly to appreciate each. Let us ask, in passing, what if these two heroes had changed times and places? Each was thrown on troubled and terrible times; each possessed great intellect, and resplendent military genius. Would Marlborough have played Wellington's, or he Marlborough's part, on the scene of moral and political action? As far as the illustrious living hero is concerned, the question admits of an instant answer.

We have now, however, the character of Marlborough fairly delivered into the hands of Mr Alison, to be dealt with according to truth and honour. Will he concur with Mr Hallam and Mr Macaulay? If he do, Marlborough must, we suppose, be henceforth regarded as a sort of splendid fiend – revelling in his defiance of the precepts of honour, morality, and religion; prostituting transcendent powers for the basest purposes, and exhibiting the vices of our nature in colossal proportions. – Can Mr Alison vindicate his hero against the sorrowful censures of his noble brother historian? No: he does not attempt it. On the contrary, he is even more emphatic in denouncing the faithlessness of Marlborough than Lord Mahon, placing his treachery to James II., "in a moral point of view," even deeper in infamy than that of Marshal Ney. "And yet," says he, "such is often the inequality of crimes and punishments in this world, that Churchill was raised to the pinnacle of greatness by the very treachery which consigned Ney, with justice, so far as his conduct is concerned, to an ignominious death. History forgets its first and noblest duty when it fails, by its distribution of praise and blame, to counterbalance, as far as its verdict can, this inequality, which, for inscrutable, but doubtless wise purposes, Providence has permitted, in this transient scene. Charity forbids us to scrutinise such conduct too closely."[7] This is conceived in a spirit at once generous and just; and the acknowledgment thus early and pointedly, of Marlborough's great fault, is marked by signal discretion, such as is likely to carry the reader cheerfully along with his author, and induce a hearty concurrence in his ultimate conclusion. We rejoice, then, that Marlborough has fallen into such hands; and shall proceed, as briefly as is consistent with our space, and the importance of the subject – for it is of importance, and great importance too, and Mr Alison's is a very *timely* biography, as we shall soon show – to give such an account of the contents of these two volumes as will, unless we are mistaken, induce our readers to become his.

There are four reasons why we regard Mr Alison's new work as specially well-timed; and we believe that our readers will, without difficulty, concur in these reasons. First, *a full*, *fair*, and *popular* biography, personal, political, and military, of the great Duke of Marlborough, has recently become a matter of mere justice, because of the blighting disparagement of his conduct and character which Mr Macaulay has so recently exhibited in his widely-circulated volumes, and is doubtless at this moment

[7] Alison's *Marlborough*, vol. i. p. 16, 17, 18.

engaged, *totis viribus*, in enhancing. Secondly, because a great store of invaluable materials for such a biography is in existence, the principal portion having only recently become so, continuing, however, in a state which renders the whole but a sealed book to the public at large. Thirdly, Mr Alison is peculiarly qualified to deal with this state of things, by his unbiassed faithfulness, and the multifarious qualifications which he has acquired in the preparation of his *magnum opus*, the *History of Europe during the French Revolution*. Lastly, because of the course of public events, now daily becoming the source of greater anxiety to those who look beneath the surface, and would apply effectually the experience of the past, in order to comprehend our present position, and provide against our dark and – as to some eyes it may well appear – blood-red future. Let us recur for a moment to the second of these reasons, in order to give the reader a just idea of his obligations to Mr Alison. He may be said to have sunk shafts into five mines. First, the *Marlborough Despatches*, which had lain buried in an unaccountable manner till the month of October 1842, when they were accidentally discovered, under a mass of old military accounts, and other waste paper, by Mr Whately, the solicitor of the present Duke of Marlborough. In the lumber-room of a house for a long series of years used as the steward's residence, there lay, one upon another, three large boxes; and it was in the undermost one that Mr Whately made the fortunate discovery, with which his name will ever be deservedly associated, of eighteen folio books, bound in vellum – inestimable documents! "being," says that gentleman, "manuscript copies of despatches and letters of John Duke of Marlborough, in English, French, and some few in Latin," – extending over the resplendent *decennium* from 1702-1712. These had been, to that moment, totally unknown to any one living; and, what is exceedingly singular, had also escaped the watchful and anxious eye of Archdeacon Coxe, the author of the compendious, elaborate, and authentic "Life" of the great Duke. These precious documents were placed in the hands of an eminent and accomplished military authority, the late Sir George Murray, who published at intervals, beginning in 1845, a selection from the *Despatches*, in five large octavo volumes, most ably edited, with copious historical and military notes. As Mr Alison has remarked, Sir George's *Marlborough Despatches* constitute a work of inestimable importance to the historian, and also to the military reader; but they will rarely, if ever, be opened by the general reader. We ourselves have turned from its pages, more than once, hopelessly, with yet a feeling that they contained matter of great interest and importance to a competent and determined military or historical reader. This is Mr Alison's first and richest mine, sunk in his own country. In quest of another he crosses the Channel, and there encounters the *Military Life of Marlborough*, in three volumes, written in France in 1807, at the instance of his mighty admirer, Napoleon:[8] "towards the composition of which," says Sir George Murray, "every facility of information was afforded which the power of the Emperor could command." This Mr Alison pronounces "the best military narrative of the Duke's exploits which has yet appeared." But Mr Alison is indebted to France for another grand source of authentic information on "the Continental side of the great wars waged by Marlborough" – General *Pelot's* Collection of original Memoirs and Despatches, published in nine quarto volumes, and entitled, "*Mémoires Militaire Rélatifs à la Succession d'Espagne*." Again, we have the *Dutch* account of this ever-memorable war, published at the Hague in 1721 – the "magnificent work" of *Rousset*, in three volumes folio. And yet again, *Kausler's* "admirable summary of great battles, collected from the best authorities, and annexed to his splendid military Atlas." To these must be added, Archdeacon Coxe's *Life*, in three volumes quarto – "the most authentic and valuable which exists," founded on a close examination of all the correspondence known to be in existence at the time; but liable to a serious drawback – that "it is long and expensive, and too full of long documents, and letters, *in the text*." What are all these works, exclaims the embarrassed general reader, to *me*? – having neither time, nor inclination,

[8] "Napoleon hummed the well-known air, *Malbrook s'en va-t-en guerre*, when he crossed the Niemen to commence the Russian campaign. The French nurses used to frighten their children with stories of *Marlbrook*! – as the Orientals, when their horses start, say they see the shadow of Richard Cœur-de-Lion crossing their path." —*Pref.*, iv. v.

nor means for mastering them? You might as well place a man seeking for a richly-chased golden goblet in the midst of the Californian or Australian gold-fields, and point him with exultation to piles of sacks filled with the auriferous dust! Now Mr Alison has, in the two moderate-sized volumes before us, presented the impatient applicant with his desired goblet, and entitled himself thereby to due gratitude. He is scrupulous in owning his obligations, and also in enabling his reader at once, if disposed, to verify facts, and extend his inquiries, by placing at the end of every paragraph, as in his *History of Europe*, the authorities on which that paragraph is founded. To these are added a very carefully-prepared map of France and the Netherlands, "so arranged as to show the positions of every place, in strict accordance with the text;" and plans of the battles, accurately reduced from the great German work of Kausler, "so well known from the splendour of its finishing, and the accuracy of its details." To all this we have yet to add, that Mr Alison appears also to have consulted every other work hitherto published, having reference to the personal or military life of his hero, and to be familiarly acquainted with everything of importance that has appeared, either contemporaneously or subsequently, concerning the part which the Duke of Marlborough took, or is supposed to have taken, in the momentous politics of the day.

We have taken the trouble of being thus particular, out of justice to Mr Alison; for without this detail, neither the value nor the extent of his labours could have been appreciated by the reader; who, if he share our fate, will be carried evenly and rapidly along, from the beginning to the end of these two eloquent volumes, charmed with the result, but never adverting to the laborious and praiseworthy *process*. And we repeat that all this is thoroughly *tanti*– as a matter of even justice to the sedulously-slandered illustrious dead, in this respect sharing the fate of a prophet, who is not without honour, *save in his own country*, (for abroad, Marlborough's memory is radiant with imperishable glory,) and also because, as we have intimated, there is a portentous resemblance between Marlborough's time and our own. He was the great champion of Protestantism, in its tremendous encounter with Popery, of which Louis XIV. was the worthy and formidable exponent. "The siege of Lille," says Mr Alison, at the close of his first volume, "one of the most memorable and glorious of which there is any mention in history, like those of Troy and Carthage in ancient, and Malta and Jerusalem in modern times, was not merely the theatre of contest between rival powers, but of struggle between contending principles and rival faiths. The great contest between the Romish Church and the Reformation ultimately issued, as all such schisms in belief must issue, in a terrible war. Louis was the head of the ancient, Marlborough the champion of the new, faith. The circumstance of the Spanish Succession was but an accident, which brought into the field forces on either side, previously arranged under these opposite banners. It was the great division of men's minds which drew them forth, in such strength, into the field of war."[9] Now let any *thinking* person of 1852 survey the existing attitudes of these fearful and implacable belligerents, as exhibited in their relations, both in this country and on the Continent, and in certain recently-developed political conditions, which they are rapidly moulding, and arranging with a view to action on a scale such as the world has perhaps never witnessed; and the "boldest may hold his breath for a time." He will at length, probably, ask, not without anxiety – Where are we to look for *our* Marlborough by and by? and perhaps he may add, with an indignant sigh, We would not treat him as our fathers treated *theirs*!

The romance of the *Life of Marlborough* begins with the very beginning of that life. He bursts upon us a beautiful boy, fascinating everybody by his charming manners – the little heir to the all but ruined fortunes of an ancient and loyal family, which, on the father's side, had come in with the Conqueror, while in his mother's veins ran the blood of the illustrious Sir Francis Drake. He had an only sister, who, a victim to the licentiousness of the times, became mistress of the future James II., the great patron of her brother, and to whom she bore a son: who, as Duke of Berwick, was destined, almost single-handed, to uphold the tottering throne of Louis XIV. against the terrible sword of her

[9] Vol. i. p. 447, 448.

brother! That son, commanding the forces of France and Spain during the War of the Succession, almost counterbalanced, by his military genius, his uncle's victories in Germany and Flanders! Lord Bolingbroke said of the nephew, that "he was the *best* great man that ever existed" – and of the uncle, that "he was the perfection of genius, matured by experience – the greatest general and greatest minister that our country, or any other, has produced." These two great personages were signalised by the same grand qualities of military genius, of humanity in war, of virtuous conduct in private life: would, however, we could say that the elder hero had no bar sinister on his moral, as the younger had on his heraldic, 'scutcheon! Forgetting, however, for a moment, that solitary blot – would we could forget it for ever! – let us concur with Mr Alison in noting so singular and interesting a coincidence, that "England has equal cause to be proud of her victories, and her defeats, in that warfare; for they both were owing to the military genius of the same family, and that, one *of her own*."[10] There was a difference of twenty years between them; and it is again singular, that each, at the same early age, fifteen, showed a sudden irrepressible ardour for arms, impelling them, at the same age, to quit the seductive splendour of the court of Charles II. for foreign service – the uncle, as a volunteer in the expedition to Tangiers, against the Moors; the nephew, twenty years afterwards, against the Turks, under Charles, duke of Lorraine, in Hungary. It is indeed a most extraordinary fact, already adverted to, that, while the uncle all but subverted the throne of France by his Flemish campaigns, and, but for infamous domestic faction, would have done so, his nephew, single-handed, preserved that of Spain for the house of Bourbon! If this be the first step in this romance of reality, the next is one profoundly suggestive to a contemplative mind. We have spoken of a splendid *Decennium* in the Duke of Marlborough's campaigns – that from 1702 to 1712. But what a preceding *Quinquennium*– that from 1672 to 1677 – have we here, for a moment, before us! The "handsome young Englishman" – an idol among the profligate beauties of the court of Charles II. – had made at length a conquest of his celebrated and favourite mistress, the Countess of Castlemaine, afterwards Duchess of Cleveland. To remove so dangerous a rival in her fickle affections,[11] Charles gave him a company in the Guards, and then sent him to the Continent —*proh pudor*– to *aid* Louis XIV. in subduing the United Provinces. There he sedulously learnt the art of war under Louis's consummate generals, Turenne, Condé, and Vauban: thus acquiring, under Louis's own auspices, that masterly knowledge of the science of war, which was destined to be wielded so soon afterwards, with triumphant and destructive energy, against himself! How little was such a contingency dreamed of, when Louis XIV. publicly, at the head of his army, thanked the handsome young hero for his services, and afterwards prevailed on his brother sovereign, Charles, to promote him to high command! And here is suggested the first of several deeply interesting and instructive parallels to be found in this work, between our own incomparable Wellington, and his illustrious predecessor: that Wellington went through the same practical course of study, but in inverse order – his first campaign being *against* the French, in Flanders, and his next against the bastions of Tippoo, and the Mahratta horse, in Hindostan. Shortly after his return occurred that event which is of great importance in the lives of all men to whom it happens – marriage; but which to the young soldier was pregnant, for both good and evil, with immense influence upon the whole of his future career, and also upon his personal character. He married the beautiful lady in attendance on the Princess Anne – Miss Sarah Jennings, of spotless purity of character, and like himself, of an ancient and ruined Royalist family. He was then in his twenty-eighth, she in her eighteenth year: and, to anticipate for a moment, after a fond union of forty-four years' duration,

[10] Vol. ii. p. 298.

[11] It would seem that Charles II. would have surprised him, on one occasion, in the company of the Countess; but, to save her credit with the King, he leaped through the window at the risk of his life; in return for which she presented him with £5000. With reference to this latter part of the business may be noted a diversity between two of Marlborough's biographers. Archdeacon Coxe ludicrously attempts to explain this splendid present of £5000, on the ground of Churchill's being in some way *distantly related* to the Duchess! "If the reverend Archdeacon," says Mr Alison – with a quaint approach to sarcasm very rare with him – "had been as well acquainted with *women* as he was with *his books*, he would have known that beautiful ladies do not, in general, bestow £5000 on distant cousins, whatever they may do on favourite lovers!"

he died in his seventy-second year; she, twenty-two years afterwards, in her eighty-fourth! Want of fortune for some time delayed their union, which, however, an enthusiastic declaration of his passion at length accelerated. She married, in the young and already celebrated general, a man of not only transcendent capacity, but gentle and generous feelings, and a magnanimity which displayed itself on a thousand trying occasions. Their hearts were passionately true to each other, through every moment of their protracted union. Her fair fame was never, even in those days of impunity, tarnished by the momentary breath of slander. She possessed great talents, but was also of a haughty ambitious temper, bent upon aggrandisement, and grievously avaricious; and to the ascendency over her husband, which she maintained unabated from first to last, may perhaps be attributed the development of those features in his character which have excited the grief of honourable posterity, and afforded scope for the foulest misrepresentations of his conduct and motives to contemporary and succeeding traducers, rabid with the virus of political hostility. Though impatient to quit the topic, but only for the present, we shall here advert to Marlborough's inexcusable conduct towards James II., for the purpose of citing a passage in the Duchess's own Vindication, on which Mr Macaulay relies, as conclusively demonstrating the mercenary motives influencing Marlborough. That passage, however, does not necessarily sustain the imputation made by Mr Macaulay, though it may justify a suspicion of the sort of motives which *she* might have been in the habit of urging on her confiding husband: – "It were evident to all the world that, as things were carried on by King James II., everybody, sooner or later, *must be ruined* who would not become a Roman Catholic. *This* consideration made me very well pleased at the Prince of Orange's undertaking to rescue me from such slavery."[12]

That Marlborough should be in high favour with William III. may be easily conceived; for he not only essentially facilitated the enterprise of William, but actively supported him in all those critical measures necessary to consolidate his power and strengthen his novel and splendid position. He acquitted himself so admirably in the Netherlands in 1689, in Ireland in 1690, and again in Flanders in 1691, where he served under William himself, that he was on the way to almost unbounded power with William. But behold! to the consternation of the whole country, almost immediately after his return with William, early in 1692, he was suddenly arrested and committed to the Tower, on a charge of *high treason*, in having entered into an association for bringing about the restoration of James II.! As the charge, however, could not be legally substantiated – and was indeed proved to have been supported by fabricated evidence[13]– he was liberated, but not restored for a considerable time to his former position, there being good reason for believing him, at all events, no stranger to a clandestine correspondence with the exiled family. Well, indeed, may Lord Mahon lament his "perseverance in these deplorable intrigues."[14] We concur with Mr Alison in his remark, that, with all the light subsequently thrown on Marlborough's history, upon this portion of it there still rests a mystery: and moreover, within five years afterwards he was completely reinstated in William's confidence; and in June 1698 the King positively intrusted his recently-discarded servant with the all-important function of tutor to the young Duke of Gloucester, William's nephew, and heir-presumptive to the throne! – saying, on apprising him of the appointment, "My lord, *make my nephew to resemble yourself*, and he will be everything which I can desire!" When William's stern and guarded character is borne in mind, this transaction becomes exceedingly remarkable. Marlborough continued ever after to rise higher and higher in the confidence of his sovereign, who thrice named him one of the Lords Justiciars, to whom the administration of affairs in this country was intrusted, during William's absence in Holland; and also appointed him, in 1701, ambassador-extraordinary at the Hague, and commander-in-chief of the Allied forces in Flanders. This double appointment, observes Mr Alison, in effect invested Marlborough with the entire direction of affairs civil and military, so far as England

[12] Macaulay, 256, note.

[13] Alison, i. 22.

[14] Mahon, i. 21, 22.

was concerned, on the Continent. And even yet further, previously to his unexpected death shortly afterwards, William enjoined on his successor, the Princess Anne, that she should intrust Marlborough with the supreme direction of the affairs of the kingdom, both civil and military! Three days after her accession, accordingly, she made him a Knight of the Garter, Captain-general of the English forces at home and abroad, Master-general of the Ordnance, and Plenipotentiary at the Hague; Lady Marlborough, Mistress of the Robes and Ranger of Windsor Forest; and her two daughters Ladies of the Bedchamber. He instantly went over to the Netherlands to assume the command of the Allied army, sixty thousand strong, then lying before Nimeguen, threatened by a superior French force; and, after displaying infinite skill, succeeded in constructing that famous Alliance which was soon to work such wonders in Europe. Here commences the lustrous *decennium* of which we have spoken; and, most fortunately, here also, as we have seen, commence the Despatches so recently recovered. Here he became invested with that unsullied and imperishable glory, which dazzled all eyes but those of his rancorous and inveterate detractors; who were probably influenced not only by venomous jealousy, the canker of little minds, but also, in no slight degree, by his having extinguished all their fond hopes of his co-operation in restoring the discarded Stuarts.

From this point Mr Alison starts brilliantly on his course of chequered and exciting narrative, military and political; revelling amidst marches, counter-marches, feints, surprises, stratagems, sieges, battles; intercalating vivid glimpses of domestic tenderness, grief, and joy; then the plots and counter-plots of tortuous faction and intrigue, in the senate, in the cabinet, and even in the palace. And with all this, the interest ever centres in one object —

"In shape and gesture proudly eminent,"

John Duke of Marlborough: not because the author appears to wish it, but because of his faithfulness; he has almost unconsciously exhibited his hero, equally whether off his guard or on his guard, manifesting the full power and intensity of a grand character impressing its will upon men and affairs, irresistibly, and in defiance of agencies capable of annihilating one only a single degree inferior to the energy which in Marlborough mastered everything, everybody. "To write the life of Marlborough," said the late eloquent Professor Smyth of Cambridge,[15] "is to write the history of the reign of Queen Anne;" let us add – and also, to write it in light. Mr Alison makes a similar observation in the preface to his present work. He intimates that Marlborough was so great that his Life runs into general history: exactly as he who undertakes to write the history of the French Revolution will soon find his narrative turn into the biographies of Wellington and Napoleon, so he who sets about the Life of Marlborough will ere long find that he has insensibly become engaged in a general history of the War of the Succession. Well, be it so, if only because that war it is of infinite importance to have better known than in fact it is.

If Mr Alison's object, in the work before us, were to produce a *biography*, to delineate character, and so to group events as to illustrate *individuality*– he has eminently succeeded; but his very success renders it difficult for those in our position to allow him to speak for himself, as copiously as doubtless he, and also our readers, would wish. As he has mastered his subject, so have we mastered his treatment of it, as, at least, we suppose; and as he took his own course, so shall we; wishing that we could give our readers the pleasure which his book has afforded ourselves. In order, however, to attain that object, they must read the book itself; and to induce them to do so, we proceed to indicate its leading characteristics in our own words, using his own, as far as is consistent with our space and our object.

To appreciate the mighty doings of Marlborough, let us glance for a moment at the position in which he found, and the position in which he left, the redoubtable Louis XIV. – him whose memory

[15] Lectures in Modern History, delivered in the University of Cambridge, (Lecture xxiii.)

is for ever rendered detestable by his revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and his bloody exterminating persecution of the Protestants. Marlborough found him the centre of a galaxy of glory of almost every description of military, political, and intellectual distinction. He was blazing in the zenith of his power and success: he was making France the world, and installing the Roman Catholic religion in a black and bloody predominance. "Unbroken good fortune," says Mr Alison, "had attended all his enterprises, since he had launched into the career of foreign aggrandisement." But how did Marlborough leave him? Let the dying monarch speak for himself. When he felt death approaching, he ordered his infant heir, afterwards Louis XV., to be brought to his bedside; and placing his lean and withered hand[16] on the head of the child, said with a firm voice, – "My child, you are about to become a great king; but your happiness will depend on your submission to God, and on the care which you take of your subjects. To attain that, you must avoid as much as you can engaging in wars, which are the ruin of the people: do not follow in that respect the bad example which I have given you. I have often engaged in wars from levity, and continued in them from vanity. Do not imitate me, but become a pacific prince." Thus he had learned, at last, a great lesson through the tremendous teaching of Marlborough![17]

That great man seems to have fathomed the character and the purposes of Louis, in all their depth and comprehensiveness, from the first, with an intuitive sagacity; and the patient determination with which he carried out, under circumstances of unparalleled difficulty, his own great conceptions, exhibits perhaps the grandest spectacle that history can point to, in the case of a single individual. The reader of these volumes will frequently boil over with indignation at the obstacles which were thrown in the way of Marlborough, by envy, faction, selfishness, and stupidity interposing, with a fell punctuality, at almost every great crisis during his career, and blighting the most splendid prospects of success. One only a little inferior in magnanimity to Marlborough would have broken down on many different occasions, and fled from the scene of action in disgust and despair. With him, however, it was not so; and yet he was a man of keen sensibility, and has left on record various traces of heart-wrung anguish. Here are one or two, among many scattered over these volumes: – "The unreasonable opposition I have met with has so heated my blood that I am almost mad." – "I am, at this moment, *ten years* older than I was four days ago!" – "My spirits are so broke, that whenever I can get from this employment, I must live quietly, or die." – "My crosses make my life a burthen to me." All this while, nevertheless, the great warrior-statesman was steadily, yet rapidly, demolishing the vast fabric of French power and glory, and building up in massive proportions that of his own country. "More, perhaps, than to any other man," justly observes Mr Alison at the close of his work, "Marlborough was the architect of England's greatness; for he at once established on a solid basis the Protestant succession, which secured its religious freedom, and vanquished the formidable enemy which threatened its national independence. His mighty arm bequeathed to his country the honour and the happiness of the eighteenth century – the happiest period, by the admission of all historians, which has dawned upon the world since that of the Antonines in ancient story."[18]

Let us now take a very hasty view of his radiant career, remembering the while that he ever bore about with him that which hung like a millstone round his neck – his indefensible conduct towards James II., the recollection of which must have galled and chafed the sensitive spirit of a soldier infinitely more than was known to any human being.

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[16] Alison, ii. p. 300.

[17] "Even the great William," says Professor Smyth, "trained up amid a life of difficulties and war, with an intrepid heart and a sound understanding, was able only to stay the enterprises of Louis; successfully to resist, but not to humble him. It was for Marlborough to teach that unprincipled monarch the danger of ambition, and the instability of human grandeur; it was for Marlborough to disturb his dreams of pleasure and of pride, by filling them with spectres of terror and images of desolation." The lecture from which this is taken is well worthy of a careful perusal.

[18] Alison, ii. p. 347.

Mr Alison opens with a very imposing picture of the state of public affairs, both in this country and on the Continent, when Marlborough commenced his campaigns; and also delineates with truth and force the characters of the leading actors, all remarkable personages. Louis XIV. stands foremost, and is sketched with freedom and power.[19] Then come James II., William III., Queen Anne, Charles XII., Prince Eugene, and last of all Marlborough, who, at the close of his first campaign, was regarded, both at home and abroad, as "The *Man of Destiny*, raised up by Providence to rescue the Protestant religion and the liberties of Europe from the thraldom of France."[20] It is impossible to conceive any conjuncture of circumstances more critical and perilous than those of this country at the period in question. Not only our religion, but our independence as a nation, and the very existence of social order, were at stake. If one may use such an expression, the odds were immensely against us – against all who were opposed to the giant energy of Louis XIV. The first step to be taken was to form an alliance against him – and it was undertaken by Marlborough with consummate ability; then to induce the British Cabinet to take its right place as "the very soul of the Grand Alliance" – in that, also, he at length succeeded; and then came the trumpet-sound of war against France, which was forthwith proclaimed at London, the Hague, and Vienna. Yet still a practical difficulty remained – one of peculiar delicacy – for the post of commander-in-chief of the allied forces was greatly coveted by several powerful candidates. Marlborough's own sovereign, Queen Anne, so strongly supported one of them – Prince George of Denmark, her husband – that she even protested she would not declare war unless he was appointed. The Dutch government, however, were resolute on behalf of Marlborough, as the only man equal to sustain the fearful responsibility; and thus Marlborough became invested with the chief direction, both civil and military, of the forces of the coalition. And it was not difficult to foresee the interminable anxieties and vexations which were in store for him, derived from the jealousies and jarring interests of the various states, their ministers and generals, who were under the guidance of Marlborough. The plan of operations on the part of Marlborough and Louis XIV. was as follows: —

> "A German army, under Louis, Margrave of Baden, was to be collected on the Upper Rhine, to threaten France from the side of Alsace; a second corps, 25,000 strong, composed of Prussian troops from the Palatinate, and Dutch under the Prince of Sarbruck, was to undertake the siege of Kaiserworth; the main army, under the orders of the Earl of Athlone, 35,000 strong, was destined to cover the frontier of Holland from the Rhine to the Meuse, and at the same time cover the siege of Kaiserworth; a fourth body of 10,000, under Cohorn, the celebrated engineer, was collected near the mouth of the Scheldt, and threatened the district of Bruges.
>
> "The preparations on the part of the French were not less vigorous; and from the more concentrated position of their troops, and unity of action among their commanders, they, in the first instance, were enabled to bring a preponderating force into the field. On the Lower Rhine, a force, under the Marquis Bedmar and the Count de la Motte, were stationed opposite to Cohorn, to protect the western Netherlands from insult; Marshal Tallard was detached from the Upper Rhine, with 13,000 men, to interrupt the siege of Kaiserworth; while the main army, under the command nominally of the Duke of Burgundy, really of Marshal Boufflers, a veteran and experienced officer, was stationed in the bishopric of Liege, resting on the strong fortresses with which that district of Flanders abounded. Not only were the forces under his command superior by a third to those that Athlone had at his

[19] In Sir James Stephen's *Lectures on the History of France*, just published, there is an admirable and elaborate portraiture of Louis XIV. If the rest of the work is equal to this portion, which is all that we have as yet been able to examine, Cambridge has cause to congratulate herself on the accession of so accomplished and able a professor of modern history.

[20] Alison, i. p. 108.

> disposal, the latter being 45,000, the former only 35,000 strong, but they had the immense advantage of being in possession of the whole strong places of Brabant and Flanders, which were all garrisoned by French or Spanish troops, forming not only the best and most secure possible basis for offensive operations, but an iron defensive barrier, requiring to be cut through in successive campaigns, and at an enormous expenditure of blood and treasure, before by any road the frontiers of France could be reached."[21]

Such as it was, however, says Mr Alison, the barrier required to be cut through; and Marlborough resolved to commence it with the siege of Kaiserworth, a place of very great importance. He took it – but at a cost of 5000 men; and then took Venloo, and finally Liege – all places, of extreme importance, and desperately defended; and with these feats he concluded the brief but brilliant, campaign which laid the foundation of all his future victories. It stripped the French of many of the chief advantages with which they had opened the war. He had broken through their line, so formidable for offensive and defensive war; he had "thrust his iron gauntlet," says Mr Alison, "into the centre of their resources." And the entire merit was his own, as Lord Athlone, his rival and second in command, thus nobly testified: – "The success of the campaign is entirely owing to its incomparable commander-in-chief; for I, the second in command, was, on every occasion, *of an opposite opinion to that which he adopted*!" His success was like a bright burst of sunshine over a long-troubled land! But here an incident occurred which might have ruined all. While dropping down the Meuse, on his return to England at the conclusion of the campaign, he was positively taken prisoner by a small French force, – whose commander, however, ignorant of the prize which was within his reach, and skilfully misled by a sagacious device of Marlborough's servant, suffered him to depart! The peril in which he had been spread consternation everywhere, equalled only by joy at his escape, which was powerfully expressed to him by the Pensionary Heinsius. "Your captivity was on the point of causing the slavery of these provinces, and restoring to France the power of extending her uncontrollable dominion over all Europe. No hope remained, if she had retained in bondage the man whom we revere as the instrument of Providence to restore independence to the greater part of the Christian world!" On what apparently trivial incidents often depend the greatest events that can happen to mankind! Marlborough was received with transports in England, and raised to the dukedom of Marlborough. The difficulties which the Dutch deputies had thrown in his way during the first campaign, owing, says Mr Alison, to timidity, ignorance of the military art, personal presumption, and the spirit of party, on several great occasions thwarted the most decisive measures of Marlborough, – but proved only a foretaste of what was in store for the harassed commander. Mr Alison gives an interesting letter which Marlborough wrote to his Countess, immediately on his arrival at the Hague. It is full of the passionate fondness of a lover to his mistress; yet was written by a man of fifty-two to a wife to whom he had been married twenty-three years! There are innumerable other instances, in these volumes, of the romantic fervour of their attachment. Such was Marlborough's first campaign, the herald of a long series of resplendent successes, many of them marked by features similar to those of the first. "He never," indeed, "fought a battle which he did not gain, nor sat down before a town which he did not take; and – alone of the great commanders recorded in history —*never sustained a reverse*! On many occasions throughout the war he was only prevented, by the timidity of the Dutch deputies, or the feeble co-operation of the Allied powers, from gaining early and decisive success; and as it was, he broke the power of the Grand Monarque, and if his hands had not in the end been tied up by an intrigue at home, he would have planted the British standards on Montmartre, and anticipated the triumphs of Blucher and Wellington." Here is the key to his position, from first to last – an inkling of the tortures which wrung that great soul throughout his career.

[21] Alison, i. p. 92-3.

In this first campaign, Marlborough had laid the basis of great operations – which, indeed, followed in such rapid succession, each eclipsing its predecessor in magnitude of result and splendour of achievement, as to throw its foregoer comparatively into the shade. In order to appreciate the greatness of Marlborough, his position – harassed daily by the jealousies and selfishnesses of the Allied forces, which he commanded – should be compared with that of Louis XIV., where all was an overwhelming *unity* of will and purpose, perfect subordination, accompanied by immense military resources and consummate generalship. The war had, indeed, become already one of awful magnitude; for Louis XIV. and his advisers could not have failed to observe the settled determination of purpose, and forecasting sagacity, which characterised their great opponent. Louis brought all his power and resources to bear upon the plan of a second and magnificent campaign; showing that he felt the gravity of the situation, and the necessity of making commensurate efforts. "The great genius of Louis XIV. in strategy," says Mr Alison, "here shone forth in full lustre. Instead of confining the war to one of forts and sieges in Flanders and Italy, he resolved to throw the bulk of his forces at once into Bavaria, and operate against Austria from the heart of Germany, by pouring down the valley of the Danube."… "The genius of Louis," he adds, after a lucid explanation of the projected campaign, which was indeed grandly conceived, "had outstripped the march of time; and the year 1703 promised the triumphs which were realised on the same ground, and by following the same plan, by Napoleon in 1805."[22] It was all, however, in vain, though his plans were carried into execution with infinite skill and energy. Marlborough got intelligence of them; and instantly conceived a masterly counter-plan, which, but for his being thwarted, as usual, by the Dutch deputies, would have been completely successful in the first instance. The resources which Marlborough's genius displayed in this transcendent campaign were prodigious. His rapidity of perception, his far-sighted sagacity, his watchful circumspection, his prompt energy, at length triumphed over all obstacles, and eventuated in the glorious battle of Blenheim – than which none more splendid stands on record. The fearful consequences of failure were very eagerly pressed upon him by his own officers. "I know the danger," said he calmly, "yet a battle is absolutely necessary; and I rely on the bravery and discipline of the troops, which will make amends for our disadvantages."[23] Mr Alison's description of this battle is equally brilliant and impressive, and we wish we could transfer it entire into our columns. It was a fearful day for Louis XIV. The total loss of the French and Bavarians, including those who deserted during the calamitous retreat through the Black Forest, was 40,000 – "a number greater than any subsequently lost by France till the still more disastrous day of Waterloo." "The decisive blow struck at Blenheim resounded through every part of Europe. It at once destroyed the vast fabric of power which it had taken Louis XIV., aided by the genius of Turenne and Vauban, so long to construct. Instead of proudly descending the valley of the Danube, and threatening Vienna, as did Napoleon in 1805 and 1809, the French were driven in the utmost disorder across the Rhine. Thus, by the operation of one single campaign, was Bavaria crushed, Austria saved, and Germany delivered … and the Empire, delivered from invasion, was preparing to carry its victorious arms into the very heart of France! Such achievements require no comment. They speak for themselves, and deservedly place Marlborough in the very highest rank of military commanders. The campaigns of Napoleon exhibit no more decisive or important results."[24] His reception at the courts of Berlin and Hanover was like that of a sovereign prince; and, on his return home, the nation welcomed him with ecstasy. The Honour and manor of Woodstock were settled upon him; and the erection of the palace of Blenheim was commenced on a magnificent scale. Before the opening of this campaign he lost his only surviving son, in his seventeenth year – an event which occasioned him a week's paroxysm of grief. Shortly before, two of his daughters, very beautiful women, were married respectively to the

[22] Alison, i. p. 125.

[23] Alison, i. p. 159.

[24] *Ibid.* p. 187.

Earl of Bridgewater and Lord Monthermer, whose father was subsequently raised to the rank of Duke of Montague. Another daughter had been married to Lord Sunderland, who occasioned the Duke of Marlborough intense mortification, by suddenly opposing his policy in the House of Lords. And, indeed, he seems to have suffered exquisitely during this period, from the animosities with which he was assailed at home by the Tories. He sought permission from the Queen to resign, and retire into private life; and it was only on her sending him a holograph letter, couched in terms of unusual affection, that he was induced to abstain from a step which would have been so fatal to the fortunes of his country.[25] It was in this campaign that Marlborough and Prince Eugene came together – the latter a man of great military genius, and a chivalrously noble and generous character. The intimacy and co-operation of such a man must have cheered the spirit of Marlborough in many a dark hour of trial, difficulty, and danger. They never had a difference during all the campaigns in which they acted together. "The records of human achievements can present few, if any, greater men; but beyond all question they can exhibit none in whom so pure and generous a friendship existed, alike unbroken by the selfishness consequent on adverse, and the jealousies springing from prosperous, fortune."

From this period the affairs of perplexed and convulsed Europe may be said to have rested upon the Atlantean shoulders of this marvellous man. The impression left on one's mind, after reading these volumes, is that of wonder how human faculties could sustain, and for such a length of time, so vast and constantly increasing a pressure, alike upon his heart and his intellect. Never, perhaps, was greatness so perseveringly harassed by littleness. He may have exclaimed on a thousand occasions —

> "The times are out of joint! O cursed spite,
> That ever I was born to set them right!"

There is something at once exciting and oppressive in the following vivid picture: —

> "No adequate idea can be formed of the greatness of Marlborough's capacity, or the overwhelming load of cares with which he was oppressed, if the other contests which, in addition to his own, he was obliged to carry on, are not taken into consideration. It was not merely his own campaigns, often of the most active kind, which he was called on to direct; he was at the same time charged with the almost entire direction of those in every other quarter, and constantly appealed to whenever a difficulty occurred. At the very moment when his blood was heated by combat, and he was obliged to be ten or twelve hours a-day on horseback with his own troops, he was compelled to steal half the night to carry on his multiplied correspondence with the Allied generals or cabinets in every part of Europe. Such was the weight of his authority, the avidity for his direction, that not only was he intrusted with the general design of every campaign, alike in Germany, Italy, Spain, and Flanders, but the details of their execution were constantly submitted to him; and, what was much more vexatious, he was continually called on to adjust by his authority, or heal by his urbanity, the quarrels of the generals, and discord of the cabinets to whom their direction was intrusted. His correspondence affords ample evidence of this. Appeals were made to Marlborough at every time, and from every side: from the Imperial ministers against the inactivity of the Margrave of Baden; from the Margrave against the imbecility of the Imperial cabinet; from Lord Peterborough against the jealousy and tardiness of the Spaniards at the court of the Archduke Charles; from them against the irritability and eccentricity of the English general; from the Hungarian insurgents against the exactions and cruelty of the Imperial government; from them

[25] *Ibid.* p. 141.

against the restless and rebellious spirit with which the Magyars in every age have been animated.

"The confidence universally reposed, not only in his wisdom and justice, but in his conciliatory manners and irresistible address, was the cause of this extraordinary load of important cares with which, in addition to the direction of his own army, he was daily overwhelmed. From Eugene alone he was assailed by no appeals, except for such addition to his forces as might put him in a condition to measure his strength with the enemy. Their ideas were so identical, their minds so entirely cast in the same mould, their military knowledge and capacity so much alike, that it invariably happened that, what the one of his own accord *did*, was precisely what the other of his own accord would *have recommended*. Nor was it enough that foreign affairs of such overwhelming magnitude daily oppressed the English general; he had in addition the divisions of the cabinet at home to heal, and the deadly animosity of faction, increasing with every triumph which he won, to appease. No warrior of modern times, not even excepting Wellington, had such a mass of affairs, both civil and military, to conduct at the same time, and none ever got through them with such consummate ability. The correspondence of the Emperor Napoleon alone, since the days of Cæsar, will bear a comparison with it; but although nothing could exceed the energy and capacity of the French emperor, there was this difference, and it was a vital one, between his position and that of Marlborough – Napoleon commanded, after he attained to greatness, everywhere as a master: he directed his generals with equal authority on the Danube and the Tagus, and dictated to cabinets at Vienna or St Petersburg nearly as effectively as at St Cloud; but Marlborough had not even the uncontrolled direction of his own army, and beyond it had no influence but what had been extorted by exploits or won by condescension."

The great event of this third campaign was the battle of Ramilies, where Marlborough was within a hair's-breadth of being taken prisoner on the field, and had to fight his way out from his throng of assailants, like the knights of old, sword in hand. No sooner had he succeeded in this, than he had another escape – his horse fell in leaping a ditch; and his equerry's head was carried off by a cannon-ball while holding the Duke's stirrup as he mounted another.[26] This was a very great battle, and attended by signal results – the acquisition of *nearly all Austrian Flanders*! What now was the position of Louis XIV.? After five years of continued effort, he found himself stripped of all his conquests, shorn of his external influence, and compelled to maintain at once on the frontiers of Germany, Flanders, Spain, and Italy, a contest, from his own resources, with the forces of all Europe… His haughty spirit, long accustomed to prosperity, supported with difficulty the weight of adversity. The war, and all its concerns, was a forbidden subject at court. A melancholy gloom pervaded the halls of Versailles; and frequent bleedings of the monarch himself attested both the violence of his internal agitation and the dread which his physicians entertained of still greater dangers. Overcome by so many calamities, the fierce spirit of Louis was at length shaken, and he was prevailed on *to sue for peace*![27] After the battle of Ramilies, Marlborough was offered the government of the Netherlands, the emoluments of which were no less than £60,000 a-year; but he magnanimously refused it, from a regard to the public good, and on every subsequent offer of the same splendid and lucrative post, did the same. On his return to England he met with a rapturous reception – was thanked by Parliament – £5000 a-year was settled on him and his duchess, and their descendants – and the dukedom extended to *heirs female*, "in order," as it was finely expressed, "that England might never be without a title

[26] Alison, i. 247.

[27] Alison, i. 277, 278.

which might recall the remembrance of so much glory."[28] Equally indefatigable at home as abroad, in peace as in war, he addressed himself at once to his parliamentary duties, and took a leading part in the great and beneficial measure for uniting Scotland with England. His vast influence in the country, and at court, excited intense jealousy among both Whigs and Tories.

The ensuing campaign (A.D. 1707) found Louis XIV. "reduced on all sides to his own resources," and thoroughly wakened from his dream of foreign conquests – seeking only, and that with anxiety and alarm, to defend his own frontier. Here, however, two new actors appear on the chequered scene – the Duke of Marlborough's nephew, the Duke of Berwick, who by his great victory of Almanza counteracted in Spain his uncle's efforts – and Charles XII. of Sweden, a "new and formidable actor on the theatre of affairs in Germany." Louis XIV. made desperate efforts to win over Charles XII., but the exquisite adroitness of Marlborough frustrated them altogether. But Louis, encouraged by the gleams of success which had been visible in Spain and elsewhere, made immense efforts to recover his lost ground. Marlborough's energies were equally divided between delicate and perilous negotiations with the various European potentates, and another decisive campaign in the field. Both he and Louis made prodigious exertions, and at length were on the point of fighting another great battle; "and, by a most extraordinary coincidence, the two armies were of the same strength, and occupied the same ground, as did those of Napoleon and Wellington a hundred and eight years afterwards!" Marlborough was eager for the fight, confident of a great victory; but, at the eleventh hour, a panic seized his old friends the Dutch deputies, and they compelled him to retire to his former position, and decline the encounter, to his unspeakable mortification. The enemy, showing no disposition to encounter him, at length retreated, Marlborough advancing, but finding it impossible to bring on a general action. Both armies were led into winter-quarters, and Marlborough repaired to England, "where his presence had become indispensably necessary for arresting the progress of public discontent, fanned as it was by court and parliamentary intrigues, and threatening to prove immediately fatal to his own influence and ascendency, as well as to the best interests of England."[29] Here we are plunged into the vortex of political intrigues, – the principal actors being Harley and St John and Mrs Masham on the one side, and on the other the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, whose ascendency over the Queen and the country, and even their own party the Whigs, is evidently beginning to give way, and rapidly. Mr Alison here shows his dispassionate character to great advantage, holding the balance evenly between all parties. His candid and luminous statement is equally interesting and instructive; and one thing he brings out in a very striking manner, though not in so many words: we mean the retributive justice with which the duke's treachery to James II. was brought home to himself, and also to the duchess – the latter being utterly incredulous of the ingratitude and treachery of Mrs Masham towards her, and the former equally so in the case of Harley and St John. How often and how bitterly may such reflections have occurred to the duke and duchess! Their position at court had become exceedingly trying; but their treatment of the Queen was highly imprudent, the Duke being doubtless greatly influenced by his imperious and intractable duchess. Mr Alison regards her as the "faithful representative of the whole Whig party," whose "arrogant domination and grasping disposition were the real causes of their fall from power, and the total change in the foreign policy of England – results not attributable exclusively to female partiality, or a bed-chamber intrigue, which were, nevertheless, the ultimate *agents* in the change, and apparently its immediate precursors. The Whigs were haunted as incessantly by dread of a reaction as the Jacobins of France of a counter-revolution, and apprehended from a change of ministry not merely the usual subversion of their party, but serious personal consequences, in respect of the part which had been played to James II." Such is the general conclusion arrived at by Mr Alison – indicative, undoubtedly, of his candour and moderation. Early in 1708, and while Marlborough was placed in these critical

[28] *Ibid.* p. 287.

[29] *Ibid.* p. 330.

circumstances, occurred the attempt of Louis XIV. to imitate, in some respect, the example of his Allied opponents, by invading Great Britain, in order to place the Pretender on the throne. Louis's terrible antagonist, however, Marlborough, was here again to confront him. As commander-in-chief, the Duke crushed the attempt, and the ambitious Chevalier was forced to creep back to Dunkirk ridiculously – the result serving only suddenly to reinstate Marlborough at the summit of popularity, and to silence all slanderous imputations upon his fidelity to the cause of the Revolution.

The precarious position of political matters in England, at this crisis, was profoundly appreciated by Marlborough, who said that any considerable reverse on the Continent, or even a campaign as nugatory as the last, would, probably, not only dissolve the Grand Alliance, and undo all that had been done, but place a new administration in power, and possibly seat another dynasty on the throne. He also surveyed, with unerring sagacity and accuracy, the whole position of Louis XIV., and saw that he was preparing for yet one more grand demonstration of force. Marlborough took his plans accordingly; and on the 12th April 1708, in concert with the incomparable Eugene, arranged the plan of operations. Marlborough resolved to use the precious opportunity yet available, before the accession of the Tory ministry, for the purpose of striking a tremendous blow. And he did what he purposed; for this campaign was signalised by most resplendent results, glorious to Marlborough almost beyond parallel, and equally disastrous to Louis XIV. Bring what forces the latter might into the field – array them under what consummate generals he pleased, and let him select his site, and mature his plan of operations as he chose – all was, as usual, in vain! Vendôme was here the directing military genius of Louis; and he succeeded in surprising Ghent and Bruges into a surrender, greatly to the vexation of Marlborough. But the latter instantly resolved on a scheme as masterly as it proved successful. He resolved to throw himself on his opponent's communication, and, by interposing between him and the French frontier, compel him to fight with his face towards Paris, and his back to Antwerp. This manœuvre was executed with a rapidity commensurate with its importance – and Vendôme's skilful plans were entirely disconcerted. He moved of precipitately, followed by Marlborough, who resolved to force him to a decisive action; and succeeded – adding Oudenarde to his other laurels. This was indeed a fearful affair. Both parties fought with desperation – Vendôme with eighty-five thousand men, Marlborough with eighty thousand. Nothing could resist his generalship and valour; and Vendôme was defeated, with a loss, including deserters, of fully twenty thousand men. "If I had had two hours more of daylight," said Marlborough, "the French army would have been irretrievably routed, great part of it killed or taken, and the war terminated on that day." The results of this sanguinary but glorious battle were immense, entirely altering the character and fate of the campaign. By his admirable movement in interposing between Vendôme and France, Marlborough had gained the incalculable advantage of throwing his opponent, in the event of defeat, into a corner of Flanders, and so leaving exposed the French frontier, and all its great fortresses. Marlborough's eagle eye, perceiving the capabilities of his new position, resolved to discard all minor objects, pass the whole fortified towns on the frontier, and advance direct on the capital. This daring but prudent design, says Mr Alison, was precisely that of Wellington and Blucher a century afterwards; but Marlborough was overruled – Eugene for once concurring in regarding it as too hazardous; and it was resolved to commence the invasion of the territories of the Grand Monarque, by laying siege to the inestimably-important frontier fortress of Lille, the strongest place in French Flanders, and which could give the Allies a solid footing, a commanding position, in the territories of Louis. The undertaking, however, was most formidable – "for not only was the place itself, the masterpiece of Vauban, of great strength, but the citadel within its walls was still stronger; and, moreover, it was garrisoned by the celebrated Marshal Boufflers, with fifteen thousand choice troops, and every requisite for a vigorous defence."[30] Besides all this, Vendôme and the Duke of Berwick, at the head of more than a hundred thousand men, lay in an impregnable camp, covered by the canal of Bruges,

[30] Alison, i. 406.

completely fortified, between Ghent and Bruges, ready to interrupt or raise the siege. But of what avail? Marlborough sate down before Lille, and it fell. To avert that event, Vendôme and Berwick led forth their magnificent army, a hundred and ten thousand men, preceded by two hundred pieces of cannon, in the finest order, to within a quarter of a league of Marlborough – "everybody expecting the greatest battle, on the morrow, which Europe had ever seen."[31] Thus grandly they advanced; but as ridiculously retired without firing a shot! Marlborough, however, was of a different humour, and resolved to follow and fight them; and the Duke of Berwick himself has told us what the issue would have been – that Marlborough would have utterly routed his enemy, and probably finished the war that day." But – the Dutch deputies again! They interposed, and Marlborough's heart nearly burst as he beheld the foe retire unmolested. "If Cæsar or Alexander," said Eugene, "had had the Dutch deputies by their side, their conquests would have been less rapid.[32] The siege went on – a ball striking Eugene on the head, and wounding him severely, whereby the whole burthen of directing and sustaining the vast operations fell on Marlborough alone, till Eugene's recovery. After sixty days' siege, Boufflers was compelled to capitulate, being treated very nobly by his captors. Still the citadel remained – but that also fell; and so fell the strongest frontier fortress of France, under the eyes of its best generals and most powerful army! A siege perhaps the most memorable, and also one of the most bloody, in modern Europe, – standing forth, as Mr Alison elsewhere remarks, in solitary and unapproachable grandeur in European warfare. The Allies were now within reach of the very heart of France; and Louis XIV. was trembling in his halls at Versailles.[33] Before Marlborough could close his campaign, however, he recovered Ghent and Bruges. Such was the campaign of 1708, one of the most glorious in the military annals of England, and one in which the extraordinary capacity of the English general shone forth with perhaps the brightest lustre. The strife of opinion, the war of independence, was alike brought to an issue in that memorable contest, and, as far as military success could do it, to a glorious termination. "But at this moment," says Mr Alison, with a sigh, "faction stepped in to thwart the efforts of patriotism; and his subsequent life is but a record of the efforts of selfish ambition to wrest from the hero the laurels, from the nation the fruits, of victory."[34]

When the laurelled victor returned to England, he received no favour from the Queen, and was treated with studied coldness at court. Faction and intrigue had been and were then busy at their foul work. This was doubtless hard to bear; but what was the situation of the great Louis? His fortunes were desperate; his exchequer was beggared; the land was filled with lamentation; and the horrors of famine were superadded. Then Louis supplicated for peace to those whom he had so long striven to crush and annihilate: a bitter humiliation! And in his extremity he bethought himself of bribing his great conqueror; offering him, directly, no less a sum than nearly a quarter of a million sterling, as the price of his influence for the purpose of obtaining terms advantageous to France. It need not be said that the attempt was scornfully repulsed. The triumphant Allies insisted on terms of compromise which Marlborough himself, with noble disinterestedness, condemned, and Louis could do nothing but repudiate. Once again, therefore, he took the field, with an enormous army of 112,000 men, under his renowned marshal, Villars; and all France was animated, at this momentous crisis, by the conviction that then "it behoved every Frenchman to conquer or die." Marlborough commenced the campaign with 110,000 men; and great results were looked for, from "the contest of two armies of such magnitude, headed by such leaders, and when the patriotic ardour of the French nation, now raised to the uttermost, was matched against the military strength of the Confederates, matured by a series of victories so long and brilliant." So confident was Villars in the strength of his army, and his intrenched position, that he sent a trumpeter to the Allies' headquarters, to announce that "they would

[31] *Ibid.* p. 419.

[32] *Ibid.* p. 423.

[33] *Ibid.* p. 448.

[34] Alison, i. 448.

find him behind his lines; or, if they were afraid to attack, he would level them, to give entrance!" With consummate prudence Marlborough declined the invitation, and besieged Tournay – which he took, after a siege of almost unequalled horrors; but he gained by it a fertile and valuable province in French Flanders. Then he determined to take Mons, the next great fortress on the direct road to Paris; but for this it would be necessary to break through Villars' long lines of defence. By a dexterous movement, he succeeded in turning these formidable lines, thirty leagues in length, the results of two months' severe labour, and the subject of such vainglorious boasting by their constructor. They were now rendered utterly useless; and this great feat had been accomplished easily, and without bloodshed. Then came another terrible battle – that of Malplaquet, in which Marlborough, with 93,000 men, after the most bloody and obstinately contested contest that had occurred in the war, defeated an army of 95,000, – the noblest which the French monarchy had ever sent forth – strongly posted between two woods – trebly intrenched! "It was," says Mr Alison, "a desperate duel between France and England, in which the whole strength of each nation was put forth. Nothing like it had occurred since Agincourt, nor afterwards occurred till Waterloo." Both Villars and Boufflers performed prodigies of strategy and valour; but of what avail against Marlborough? Then he laid siege to, and took Mons: after which there remained only two more fortresses between the Allies and Paris! These prodigious operations, however, formed the subject of vexatious insults, paltry and presumptuous criticism, to his malignant enemies in England, with a view to lower his overwhelming influence at home. He was disgusted and disheartened, and went so far as to say to the Queen, with natural but imprudent indignation – "After all I have done, it has not been able to protect me against the malice of a bed-chamber woman!"

The affairs of the Allies becoming exceedingly critical, Marlborough, after strenuous but futile efforts at negotiation, was forced again to take the field; and projected operations on a grander scale than ever, with a view to promptly closing the war. Again he succeeded in passing immensely strong lines of defence without shot or bloodshed, and sat down before Douai, another fortress of the utmost importance, in every way, to France. Villars received imperative instructions, from the alarmed court at Versailles, to raise the siege at all hazards; and, at the head of a splendid army of upwards of 90,000 men, most ably generalled, approached, "with all the pomp and circumstance of war," to within musket-shot of Marlborough's position – around whose bayonets, however, played the lustre of Blenheim and Ramilies. Villars advanced – to retire without firing a shot, though his army greatly outnumbered that of Marlborough! *Of course*, he took Douai, after a bloody siege; and then Bethune, after thirty days of open trenches; where, says the *French* annalist, "Vauban beat the *chamade*– the sad signal which terminated all the sieges undertaken by Marlborough!"[35] It had to sound twice more in that campaign – on the fall of St Venant, and of Aire, after severe sieges; and the trembling Louis, disarrayed of four great frontier fortresses in one campaign, now placed all his hopes on the result of base intrigues in England against Marlborough and the war ministry. "What we lose in Flanders," said his triumphant minister, Torcy, "we shall gain in England!" And there, indeed, his enemies were doing their work with the utmost skill and determination, in order to secure his speedy downfall, and the advent of a ministry which should surrender all that had been gained in the war, humble England before France, and seal the fate of Protestantism and the Succession which upheld it. Their scandalous doings almost wore out Marlborough, making him, as he said, "every minute wish to be a hermit." He nobly resolved, however, harassed and thwarted as he was, to retain his command, "as affording the only security for a good power, and the Protestant succession to the throne." His enemies in England were this time successful – the Whig ministry fell; and thus ended Marlborough's career as a statesman. And to such a deplorable depth could national meanness sink, that attempts were, made to inveigle him into *personal* liability for the expense of prosecuting the works at Blenheim, till then carried on by the Treasury! He was received enthusiastically by the people; but neither the Queen

[35] Alison, ii. 125.

nor the Parliament thanked him for his services and sacrifices. Mr Alison at this point presents us with a dazzling summary of these services: —

> "This, therefore, is a convenient period for casting the eyes back on what he had done during the ten years that he had been the real head of the Alliance; and marvellous beyond all example is the retrospect! He began the war on the Waal and the Meuse, with the French standards waving in sight of the Dutch frontier, and the government of the Hague trembling for the fate of their frontier fortress, Nimeguen. He had now brought the Allied ensigns to the Scarpe, conquered Flanders, subdued all its fortresses, and nearly worked through the iron frontier of France itself. Nothing was wanting but the subjugation of its *last* fortress, Arras, to enable the Allies to march to Paris, and dictate a glorious peace in the halls of Versailles. He had defeated the French in four pitched battles and as many combats; he had taken every town to which he had laid siege; he had held together, when often about to separate, the discordant elements of the Grand Alliance. By his daring march to Bavaria, and victory of Blenheim, he had delivered Germany when in the utmost danger; by the succours he sent to Eugene, he had conquered Italy at Turin; by his prudent dispositions he had saved Spain, after the battle of Almanza. He had broken the power of Louis XIV. when at the zenith of his fame; he had been only prevented by faction at home from completing his overthrow by the capture of his capital. He had never suffered a reverse; he had never alienated a friend; he had conquered by his mildness many enemies. Such deeds require no comment; they are without a parallel in European history, and justly place Marlborough in the place assigned him by Napoleon – at the head of European captains."

The overthrow of Marlborough effected an object quite unlooked for by his eager and shortsighted enemies. The efforts of faction, aided by a palace intrigue, showed what had been due to the greatness of one man. Instantly, as if by enchantment, the fabric of victory raised by his all-potent arm was dissolved. Spain was lost, Flanders reconquered, Germany threatened! The arch of the Grand Alliance fell to pieces. These show in brighter colours than ever the greatness and patriotism of Marlborough. Again he took the command of the Hague, though no longer possessing the confidence of the government, and intrusted with no control over diplomatic measures; and again dazzled Europe and petrified his enemies by the splendour of his first achievement. Louis, in order to prevent the irruption of his foes into France, now that almost all his fortresses had been broken through, resolved on the construction of a line of defence on a scale so stupendous as to attract universal wonder – lines subsequently paralleled only by the prodigious lines of Torres Vedras. They were supplied with abundance of cannon, and manned by ninety thousand choice troops of infantry and cavalry under the command of Villars, who at length seemed both impregnable and unconquerable. Marlborough was then in his sixty-second year, and almost worn out by long service, and intense anxieties, and incessant mortifications. "I find myself decay so very fast," he wrote to his Duchess, "that from my heart and soul I wish the Queen and my country a peace, by which I might have the advantage of having a little quiet, which is my greatest ambition."[36] But his mighty powers addressed themselves once more to a commensurate object – the devising an enterprise which should at a stroke deprive his enemy of all his huge defences, and drive him to fight a decisive battle or lose his last frontier fortress. Shortly afterwards, he was confounded by Prince Eugene being withdrawn from him, together with a large section of the army, to repair disasters in a distant part of the Continent. This rendered Villars suddenly anxious for an encounter; but Louis, his eyes intently fixed on the progress of intrigues in London, had peremptorily prohibited him from fighting. Villars vaingloriously styled his lines

[36] Alison, vol. ii. p. 185, note.

"Marlborough's *ne plus ultra*," a subject on which he was abundantly jocular. But Marlborough, having carefully studied them, devised a plan which very soon banished his boasts, and plunged him into consternation. We must refer our readers to Mr Alison's exciting description of this feat of strategy, by which Marlborough passed the imaginary "*ne plus ultra*" without having fired a shot, without having lost one man – frustrating by a sudden march nine months' labour, and suddenly exhibiting to Marshal Villars the palsying spectacle of Marlborough's whole army drawn up in battle array on the *inner* side of the impregnable lines! All this was the work of Marlborough alone. The military critics of the Continent were at a loss for words adequately expressing their admiration of this great exploit: —

> "Marlborough's manœuvre," says Rousset, "covered him with glory: it was a duel in which the English beat the French general; the armies on either side were present only to render the spectacle more magnificent. In battles and sieges, fortune and the valour of soldiers have often a great share in success; but here everything was the work of the Duke of Marlborough. To gain the lines, they would willingly have compounded for the loss of several thousand lives: thanks to the Duke, they were won without the loss of one; that bloodless victory was entirely owing to his wisdom."[37]

Marlborough instantly besieged Bouchain, another great fortress, having prevented Villars, by brilliant manœuvring, from coming to its assistance. "The works effecting that purpose," said a Hanoverian officer engaged on the occasion, "were worthy of Julius Cæsar or Alexander Farnese, and the siege one of the prodigies of war. You could not fire a cannon-shot from the trenches without Villars seeing its smoke. He omitted nothing which could suspend or interrupt the works. Vain hope! Our general, invincible on all sides, has foreseen and frustrated all his enterprises."[38] Marlborough was then pressing on the siege of Quesnoy, the capture of which would have completely broken through the French barrier, when he suddenly found himself undermined by the intrigues secretly carrying on between the Tories and Louis XIV.; preliminaries of peace were signed between them, afterwards embodied in the execrable Treaty of Utrecht – abandoning the main object of the long, glorious, and successful war – the exclusion of the Bourbon family from the throne of Spain. And what, thinks the reader, was done by Marlborough's enemies, in order to anticipate and frustrate his opposition to these base proceedings? He was ridiculed and libelled everywhere in the bitterest terms; accused of avarice, fraud, extortion; of indolence, cruelty, ambition, and misconduct: even his courage was questioned; and he was denounced as the lowest of mankind! His magnificent passage of the French lines was ridiculed as "the crossing of the kennel;" and the siege of Bouchain stigmatised as an inexorable sacrifice of sixteen thousand men for "the capture of a dovecot!"[39] He was charged with having embezzled £63,319 of the public money during the war in Flanders, and Parliamentary commissioners were employed to investigate the charge, which the indignant warrior in one moment blew into the air. Then he was charged with having prolonged the war for his own pecuniary interests; and finally, he was charged with other pecuniary peculations to an immense amount; and the Queen, on the advice of her infamous ministers, dismissed her illustrious servant from all his employments, in order that the atrocious calumnies might be investigated. The intelligence was received with transport by the enemies of England abroad; and Louis XIV. exclaimed, rapturously, "*The dismission of Marlborough will do all we can desire*."[40] At that moment the fallen warrior-statesman's resplendent services had reduced Louis to a state of desperation, and he, with his whole kingdom, lay at the mercy of Marlborough. Louis had announced his resolve to lead the last army he could muster in person, and conquer or die; but the measures of the ministry averted the alternative, and saved his

[37] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 194.

[38] Alison, ii. 199, 200.

[39] *Ibid.* p. 203.

[40] *Ibid.* p. 213.

throne at the instant of its having become defenceless. The perfidious desertion of England from the Grand Alliance paralysed it. England consummated her treachery and dishonour by the peace of Utrecht, which Mr Pitt justly stigmatised as "the indelible reproach of the age," and which has entailed on her long-continuing disaster. As for Marlborough, almost every conceivable kind of insult and provocation was heaped upon him; scurrilous mercenaries haunted him with libel and ridicule; and to complete the climax of national meanness, the Treasury payments for the works at Blenheim were discontinued, and the contractors and workmen stimulated to sue the Duke for the arrears due to them, to the extent of £30,000; while a peer, in his place in Parliament, actually charged the veteran hero – John Duke of Marlborough – in his presence, with "having led his troops to certain destruction, in order *to profit by the sale of the officers' commissions*!"[41] The Duke deigned no reply, but on leaving the house sent his slanderer a challenge, which the terrified peer communicated to the proper quarter, and the Queen's interference saved him from standing at twelve paces distance from John Duke of Marlborough. To escape the torturing indignities and outrages to which he was exposed, Marlborough obtained passports and went abroad.

The Duke of Marlborough was received on the Continent with almost the honours due to a crowned head. At Antwerp his arrival and departure were signalised by triple discharges of artillery; the governor received him outside the walls with obsequious respect; deafening acclamations resounded from the multitude as he passed through the streets, every one struggling to catch a glimpse of dishonoured greatness. "All," says Mr Alison, "were struck with his noble air and demeanour, softened, though not weakened, by the approach of age. They declared that his appearance was not less overpowering than his sword. Many burst into tears when they recollected what he had been, and what he was, and how unaccountably the great nation to which he belonged had fallen from the height of glory to such degradation." What pangs must have wrung the heart of the illustrious veteran at such a moment! "Yet was his manner so courteous, and yet animated, his conversation so simple, and yet cheerful, that it was commonly said at the time, 'that the only things he had forgotten were his own deeds, and the only things he remembered were the misfortunes of others!'"

During his absence, his shameless traducers redoubled their efforts to secure his ruin. The terror of his name, the shadow of his distant greatness, must, however, frequently have made themselves felt, if only with the effect of blinding them to the folly of their own machinations. Their calumnious charges were annihilated by him from abroad the moment they reached him; and those who had prepared such charges, ignominiously silenced by his clear and decisive representations. But Blenheim was within the power of a magnanimous people, and they caused the erection of it at the public cost to be suspended! The principal creditors sued the Duke personally for what was due to them; and ultimately Blenheim, "this noble pile, this proud monument of a nation's gratitude," would have remained a ruin to this day, but for the Duke's own private contribution of no less a sum than £60,000! One's cheek tingles with shame at the recital; but there is the humiliating fact —

> "Pudet hæc opprobria nobis,
> Et dici potuisse, et non potuisse repelli."

The Duke of Marlborough spent nearly two years on the Continent. Having quitted England on the 30th October 1712, he returned on the 4th August 1714; but under what circumstances? In the full splendour of the romance of history. In contact with Marlborough, every event seems to swell into great porportions, as if owning the presence and power of greatness.

While abroad, his commanding intellect engaged itself in the noblest of causes – upholding the interests of civil and religious liberty, which were bound up indissolubly with the Hanoverian succession. He might have retired for ever from the world, in stern disgust at the treatment which he

[41] *Parl. Hist.* vi. p. 1137.

had experienced; but his magnanimity would not suffer him. He knew that civil despotism, and the triumph of the Romish faith, were identified with the success of the Louis of his day, as they appear to be with a Louis of our day – the Louis, at this moment, of France. The restoration of the Stuart line was the symbol of the triumph of Popery; and Marlborough continued anxiously to watch the progress of public events, with reference to that "consummation" so "devoutly" to be deprecated. The two years referred to were those of an immeasurably momentous crisis, big with the ultimate destinies of this country. Marlborough was, throughout that crisis, as clear-sighted, resolute, energetic, and skilful in securing the Protestant succession, as he had ever been in the conduct of his wars, every one of which had direct reference to that high and glorious object. He continued the very life and soul of the good cause, which he advanced by incessant watchfulness and discreet and energetic action, carrying on a constant correspondence with his friends both at home and abroad. At length Bolingbroke reached the summit of advancement, and became virtually prime minister. Bent upon the restoration of the Stuarts, in two days' time he had organised a thoroughly Jacobite cabinet, which would unquestionably have proceeded to seat the Stuarts on the throne. But the awful hand of God appeared suddenly in the ordering of events: "The angel of death," to use Mr Alison's words, "defeated the whole objects for which the ministers were labouring so anxiously, and for which they had sacrificed the security and glory of their country." Civil war was almost in the act of breaking out, when the Queen died; having at the last moment taken a step, in nominating the Duke of Shrewsbury to be Lord-Treasurer, which annihilated the guilty hopes of Bolingbroke and his party. This was the last act of her life; and on her death the Protestant party took prompt and vigorous measures. George I. was instantly proclaimed king, and in three days' time the great Marlborough reappeared on the scene, the very guardian angel of the newly-proclaimed king. His enemies were struck with consternation. "*We are all frightened out of our wits upon the Duke of Marlborough's going to England*,"[42] wrote one of them to Bolingbroke. The illustrious personage was welcomed with enthusiasm similar to that with which he had been formerly familiar; an immense concourse of citizens attended him into the city, shouting – "Long live George I.! Long live the Duke of Marlborough!" He was at once sworn in of the Privy Council, and visited by the foreign ministers and all the nobility and gentry within reach, and in the evening appeared in the House of Lords, and took the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, his old companions in arms, the Grenadier Guards, firing a *feu-de-joie* on the auspicious occasion. "That day effaced the traces of years of injustice. The death of a single individual" – the weak, ungrateful, vacillating Anne – "had restored the patriotic hero to the position in which he stood after the battle of Blenheim!" Though he had resolved to take part no more in the conduct of affairs, he was prevailed upon to resume his post of commander-in-chief, in which great capacity his new sovereign received him with extraordinary demonstrations of satisfaction, "proud to do honour to the chief *under whom he himself had gained his first honours on the field of Oudenarde*!"[43] The discomfited Jacobites, Bolingbroke, Ormond, and Oxford, were impeached for high treason, for their conduct in seeking to overturn the Act of Settlement, and restore the Stuarts. The former two fled to France, but Oxford remained, and was prosecuted, but acquitted. Here again the character of Marlborough has been malefied, by the charge of having done all in his power to thwart the prosecution, for fear of Lord Oxford's revealing the correspondence of the Duke in early life, after the Revolution. This slander, however, is decisively refuted by two facts – that the Duke *voted in every stage of the prosecution*! and by the still more decisive fact, that he was found to have been specially exempted from the proffered amnesty published by the Pretender when he landed in Scotland.[44] This last event – the Rebellion in Scotland – must have been indeed, as Mr Alison remarks, a sore trial to Marlborough – "more severe than any he had experienced since James II. had been precipitated from the throne; for here was the

[42] Alison, ii. 263, note.

[43] *Ibid.* p. 266.

[44] *Ibid.* p. 303.

son of his early patron and benefactor asserting, in arms, his right to the throne of his fathers!" But the Duke was here true as steel to his principles; and his energy and sagacity extinguished the formidable insurrection, and with it the hopes of the Stuarts. The Pretender returned humbled and ruined to the Continent, in time to witness the death of the monarch Louis XIV., whose guilty ambition had lighted the terrible conflagration, of which a spark had been thus kindled in this country, and which he had lived to see extinguished by such torrents of blood. He was then seventy-seven years of age, miserable in contemplating the wide-spread misery and ruin which he had prostituted all his greatness in order to effect, and shuddering at the recollection of his share in the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. His death-bed reflections and injunctions to his successor we have already laid before the reader.[45]

Only a few months previously, Louis's great conqueror had received two startling messages, telling him, in heart-breaking tones, of the transient nothingness of life. His two lovely daughters, the Countess of Bridgewater and the Countess of Sunderland, were cut off in the flower of their beauty, by almost sudden deaths, within a few days of each other. These events pierced him to the heart. Two years afterwards, having, during the interval, experienced various warnings, he was struck with palsy, which deprived him for a time of both speech and resolution. He recovered sufficiently, in a few months' time, to be capable of removal to the country, for the benefit of change of air and of scene. He visited Blenheim; and on going through such of the rooms as were finished, was shown a picture of himself at the battle of Blenheim. He turned away with a mournful air, saying only – but in memorable and significant words – "Something *then*! – but *now*!"[46]

He continued, on earnest solicitation, to hold his high military office and discharge its duties for five years, living also in the tranquil enjoyment of domestic happiness, superintending the education of his grandchildren, and taking special delight in the rising architectural grandeur of Blenheim, down even to the period of his death. He made his last appearance in the House of Lords on the 27th November 1721, but in June following had a severe and fatal attack of paralysis. It at once prostrated his physical without impairing his mental powers. To a question of his Duchess, whether he heard the prayers which were being read as usual at night in his apartment, he replied, "Yes; and I joined in them!" These were the last words of this great man, who expired calmly a few hours subsequently, in the seventy-second year of his age. He who thus joined in prayers[47] on his deathbed had, with solemn reverence, joined in them on the eves of Blenheim and of Malplaquet with his whole army; and, amidst all the bloody horrors of war, had, in like manner, remembered his God on every occasion, joining precept with example in a noble spirit of piety. Let us hope that the prayers of the dying warrior were heard and accepted by Him who heareth prayer, and that he quitted life in a spirit different from that of Peter the Great, who said on his death-bed, "I trust that, *in respect of the good I have striven to do my people*, God will pardon my sins!"[48] Mr Alison "charitably hopes that these words have been realised" – he might have lamented the fallaciousness of Peter's reliance.

Marlborough's funeral obsequies were celebrated with extraordinary magnificence, and all ranks and all parties joined in doing him honour. On the sides of the car bearing the coffin, shields were affixed containing emblematic representations of his battles and sieges. Blenheim was there, and the Schellemberg, Ramilies, Oudenarde, and Malplaquet; Ruremonde and Liege, Menin and Dendermonde, Antwerp and Brussels, Ostend and Ghent, Tournay and Lille, Mons and Bouchain, Bethune, St Venant, and Aire. "The number, and the recollections with which they were fraught,

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[45] *Ante*, p. 146.

[46] Alison, ii. p. 305.

[47] Marlborough had received the sacrament with great solemnity at the midnight preceding the day of the battle of Blenheim; and shortly before, divine service had been performed at the head of every regiment and squadron in the Allied army. After the battle he said, that "he had prayed to God more frequently during its continuance than all the chaplains of both armies put together which served under his orders." —*Ibid.* vol. i. p. 166.

[48] *Ibid.* ii. 100.

made the English ashamed of the manner in which they had used the hero who had filled the world with his renown."[49]

Thus lived, and thus died, and thus was buried, John Duke of Marlborough, of whom Lord Mahon[50] takes leave in a strain of solemnity and dignity befitting the occasion: —

> "England lost one of her noblest worthies in John Duke of Marlborough. His achievements do not fall within my limits, and his character seems rather to belong to the historians of another period. Let them endeavour to delineate his vast and various abilities – that genius which saw humbled before it the proudest mareschals of France – that serenity of temper which enabled him patiently to bear, and bearing to overcome, all the obstinacy of the Dutch deputies, all the slowness of the German generals – those powers of combination so provident of failure, and so careful of details, that it might almost be said of him, that before he gave any battle he had already won it! Let them describe him in council as in arms, not always righteous in his end, but ever mighty in his means!"

There was grandeur in the words with which the Garter-King-at-Arms closed the ceremonial at the tomb: – "Thus it has pleased Almighty God to take out of this transitory world, into his mercy, the most high, mighty, noble prince, John Duke of Marlborough." He has passed to his great account, and must stand hereafter before the Searcher of Hearts, to give an account of the deeds done in the body, and be judged accordingly. It becomes us, shortsighted and fallible as we are, to deal cautiously and tenderly with the memory of the illustrious departed. There may have been many palliating circumstances in the case of Marlborough's desertion of James which have never yet been taken into account, and which now, probably, never will. Could we hear his own explanation of his conduct towards James, that explanation might greatly change our estimate of his fault, and mitigate the asperity of our censures. No one can venture to justify Marlborough's conduct towards James, in remaining in his service, apparently devoted to his interests – then one of the most confiding masters whom man ever had – after he had irrevocably committed himself to that master's enemy, and effectually secured the downfall and destruction of one who had actually saved the life of his treacherous servant, and showered upon him every possible mark of affection and distinction. That Marlborough was conscientiously attached to the cause of Protestantism while he thus acted, we have no doubt whatever; nor that he cherished that attachment to the last moment of his life, and respected it as the star by which he steered throughout his career. We must remember that he had done everything in his power to divert James from his purpose of re-establishing Popery. "My places, and the King's favour," said he, in 1687, "I set at nought, in comparison of being true to my religion. In all things but this the King may command me; and I call God to witness that even with joy I should expose my life in his service, so sensible am I of his favours – I being resolved, though I cannot live the life of a saint, if there be occasion for it, to live the life of a martyr." This he said to William, then Prince of Orange. And during the same year he had thus sternly addressed James himself, when remonstrating with him for "paving the way for the introduction of Popery." He spoke with great warmth, and thus – "What I spoke, sir, proceeded from my zeal for your Majesty's service, which I prefer above all things, next to that of God; and I humbly beseech your Majesty to believe that no subject in the three kingdoms will venture farther than I will to purchase your favour and good liking. But as I have been bred a Protestant, and intend to live and die in that communion, and as above nine out of ten in England are of that persuasion, I fear, from the genius of the people, and their natural aversion to the Roman Catholic worship, some consequences which I dare not so much as name, and which I cannot contemplate without horror."[51] That he said this to his infatuated master is indisputable; but it was his

[49] *Ibid.* p. 307.

[50] *History of England*, ii. 41, 42.

[51] Alison, i. 14, 15, note.

duty to have at once quitted the service of that master, on finding that he could not conscientiously continue in it. "Had he done so," says Mr Alison, "and then either taken no part in the Revolution, or never appeared in arms against him, the most scrupulous moralist could have discovered nothing reprehensible in his conduct." That course Marlborough did not take; and that which he did must have entailed upon his sensitive mind unspeakable misery and mortification throughout life. He must also have foreseen the blot which that conduct would fix for ever on his fair fame – a reflection which must have dimmed the splendour of his greatest triumphs, and wrung his heart in its proudest moments of justifiable exultation. When we reflect upon his long and illustrious course of public service, the spotless purity of his private conduct in all the relations of life, as husband, father, friend; his uniform piety, his humanity, generosity, magnanimity, under the most trying circumstances in which man can be placed, we are filled with as much wonder as lamentation at this instance of treachery, this temporary oblivion of all sense of honour and loyalty. But has it not been heavily punished, and has it not been atoned for?

The charge, however, of a far more damning character than that of his conduct towards the Stuarts – that of having prolonged the war for his own selfish ends – is annihilated, after having been reiterated with almost fiendish malignity and perseverance. Mr Alison has placed this matter in the clearest possible light, and accumulated such an overwhelming mass of disproof that it seems perfectly monstrous that any such charge should have been for a moment entertained by even the most rancorous of his enemies. It now appears, from his correspondence throughout the war, that he pined and languished for its close, in order that he might cease to be the butt of malevolence and calumny, and escape from the crushing pressure of his thankless toils and responsibilities into the repose of private life. Out of a great number of similar passages which we had marked for quotation, here is one both eloquent and affecting. He is writing to the Duchess from Flanders in 1705, and alluding to the calumnies against himself, which were reported to him from England. "This vile enormous faction of theirs vexes me so much, that I hope the Queen will after this campaign *allow me to retire*, and end my days in praying for her prosperity and making my peace with God."[52] He repeatedly supplicated to be allowed to resign his command, and only the command of the sovereign, and the importunities of his friends and of the Allies, prevailed upon him to persevere. He made the most desperate efforts to bring the war to a speedy close, but also a *safe* one; for he never lost sight for a moment of the great objects with which it had been undertaken. He saw distinctly, from first to last, that there was no real peace for Europe, no guarantee for our own independence, and for our civil and religious liberties, but the complete prostration of the ambition and power of Louis XIV.; and if his own enlightened sagacity had not been repeatedly thwarted by the stupidity or faction of those with whom he had to deal, he would early have deprived his traducers of even the faintest pretext for their imputations upon him. "I have had to modify my opinion of Marlborough," said the late eloquent Professor Smyth,[53] "since considering the lately published 'Life' of Archdeacon Coxe. I can no longer consider him as so betrayed by a spirit of personal ambition as I had once suspected, and I have a still stronger impression of his amiable nature in domestic life. The *great* Duke of Marlborough has been always his proper appellation, and he is only made greater by being made more known by the publication of Mr Coxe; nor can it be doubted that he would appear greater still, the more the difficulties with which he was surrounded, on all occasions, could be appreciated." This is said in a candid and honourable spirit, by a professor whose sacred duty was to give true notions of history, and of the characters figuring in it, to the students of a great university. "These difficulties," continues the professor, "may now be partly estimated; the impetuous temper and consequent imprudence of a wife, whom for her beauty, her talents, and her affection, he naturally idolised; the low narrow mind and mulish nature of the Queen he served; the unreasonable wishes and strange prejudices of the men of influence in his own country;

[52] Alison, i. 211, note.

[53] *Lectures*, i. 143.

the discordant interests and passions of different states and princes on the Continent; the pertinacity of the field-deputies of Holland, whom he could not send over into the camp of the enemy, their more proper station, and to whose absurdities it gave him the headache to listen." This pithy paragraph well groups together the leading "difficulties" with which this amazing man had to contend; and in Mr Alison's volumes a flood of light is thrown upon them all. None of his readers can fail to feel the profoundest sympathy with harassed greatness. Without compromising his own sense of what is right, or attempting to conceal or disguise the failings of his hero, Mr Alison has painted a picture, at once noble and affecting, of the Duke of Marlborough, in every aspect of his character, in every position in which he was placed. In private and in public life – as a friend, as a father, as a husband – as a diplomatist, as a statesman, as a warrior – where is his equal to be found, and how can we be too grateful to one who has placed him, in all these characters, so vividly before us? "If the preceding pages," says Mr Alison, modestly, at the close of his biography, "shall contribute in any degree to the illustration of so great a character, and to shed the light of historic truth on the actions of one of the most illustrious men whom the world has ever produced, the author's labours will not have been incurred in vain." They have not; and we doubt not that these volumes will add greatly to the well-earned reputation of the historian of the French Revolution. We repeat that the knowledge gained by Mr Alison, in preparing that work, has given him peculiar qualifications for writing the present. We had marked a great number of instances in which the events in Marlborough's campaigns, and those events which led to them and followed them, are most plenteously and instructively compared and contrasted with those of the great compaigns of Wellington and Napoleon. The resemblance is sometimes startling; but the length to which this article has run compels us to rest satisfied with referring the reader to the present work. The last chapter consists of five deeply-interesting portraits, – Marlborough, Eugene, Frederick the Great, Napoleon, and Wellington – the five great generals of modern times. The distinctive features of each are given with fidelity and force. It is, however, in the full flow of his military narrative that the peculiar excellence of Mr Alison is to be found. His battles[54] are always dashed off boldly and brilliantly, as far as effect is concerned, and at the same time with the most exact attention to details.

We are not disposed to be critical with an author who has afforded us such great gratification —

> "Ubi plura nitent – uni ego paucis
> Offendar maculis, quas aut incuria fudit,
> Aut humana parum carit natura!"

There are, however, occasional traces of haste, involving repetitions and confused expressions, which, doubtless, will disappear in future editions. We doubt not that they will be called for; and are happy to have had this opportunity of calling attention to a new work proceeding from a gentleman standing so deservedly high with the public, and which, moreover, as we have more than once intimated, is very well timed. Let any one contemplate France at the present moment, and observe the attitude of the Romish and Protestant forms of faith throughout Europe, and in Great Britain, and he will think with no little anxiety of the days of another Louis, now on the scene of action; and perhaps inquire anxiously, with reference to the future, where is *our*

[54] A very happy idea is embodied in a work recently published, and which has quickly reached a second edition – Mr Creasy's *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World, from Marathon to Waterloo*. The idea was suggested by a remark of Mr Hallam, placed on the title-page by way of motto, "These few battles, of which a contrary event would have essentially varied the drama of the world in all its subsequent scenes." Mr Alison frequently puts such cases, in both *The Life of Marlborough* and his *History of Europe*. Mr Creasy, as a distinguished scholar and a professor of history, has acquitted himself very ably. His fifteen battles are well selected, as radiating centres of enduring influence upon human affairs in their greatest crises – as so many nuclei of historical knowledge.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.