

A MYTH OF WATERLOO.

BY ARCHIBALD FORBES.



AFTER his defeat at Ligny, on the evening of June 16, Blücher issued the order for the concentration of his army at Wavre, a position from which coöperation might be rendered to Wellington if the British commander should accept battle at Waterloo.

The staff-officer whom he had sent overnight from the battle to give intimation of his intentions had been wounded on the way; and when Wellington, who had slept at Genappe, returned to the front at Quatre Bras in the early morning of the 17th, he had as yet no tidings of the issue of the battle of Ligny. The detachment of cavalry which he sent to obtain information brought him intelligence of Blücher's defeat, and that the Prussian army was in retreat on Wavre. An hour later came Lieutenant Massow with detailed communications from Blücher; and Wellington sent back word by the lieutenant that he was about to fall back into the Waterloo position, where he would stand and fight next day if he were supported from Wavre by one Prussian corps. Massow reached Wavre at noon, carrying to Blücher the Duke's answer. A long delay occurred before it was possible to send Wellington decided assurance of support. The whereabouts of Thielmann's and Bülow's corps was not accurately known, and the reserve ammunition had not arrived. According to Ollech, the latest Prussian authority, it was not until after 11 P. M. that Blücher was finally able to despatch the definite intimation that Bülow would march at daylight on the enemy's right, that Pirch would follow in support, and that the two other corps would be in readiness in case of need. It must have been between 1 and 2 A. M. of the 18th before this communication was in Wellington's hands.

Siborne's narrative varies in its details. His version is that Massow took back from Wellington to Blücher a letter «proposing to accept a battle on the following day in the position in front of Waterloo, provided the Prince would detach two corps to his assist-

ance»; and that Blücher's response, received by the Duke in the course of the evening, was in the following terms: «I shall not come with two corps only, but with my whole army; upon this understanding, however: that should the French not attack us on the 18th, we shall attack them on the 19th.» The discrepancy between the statements of Siborne and Ollech as to the precise time when Wellington received specific assurance of Prussian coöperation on the 18th would be of little importance were it not for the circumstance that whereas he had taken up his position for the morrow's battle in the afternoon and early evening of the 17th, it was not until later in the evening, if Siborne is correct,—according to Ollech, not until nearly two o'clock on the morning of the 18th,—that he was in possession of definite assurance of Prussian support. Notwithstanding the full mutual confidence between Blücher and the British commander, the latter may well be imagined to have experienced an interval of anxiety—that interval shorter if Siborne's statement is accurate, considerably longer if Ollech's testimony is accepted, in regard to the near-midnight despatch from Wavre of Blücher's letter conveying assurance of support.

It seems impossible to ascertain on whom rests the original responsibility for the story which has been obscurely current for many years, that the Duke, after having brought his army into the position in which he intended to fight next day, rode over to Wavre, in the evening of the 17th, to ascertain definitely what support he was to expect from Blücher in the impending battle. This story has been investigated by Colonel Maurice, who has brought together a considerable amount of evidence which he regards as going far to establish the truth of it. That evidence I purpose to sift, point by point, in the belief that close investigation will render it valueless.

Colonel Maurice cites, as the earliest appearance of the story in print, the following extract from the third edition of John Gibson Lockhart's «History of Napoleon Bonaparte,» published in 1835:

All his arrangements having been effected early in the evening of the 17th, the Duke of Wellington rode across country to Blücher, to inform him personally that he had thus far effected the plan agreed on at Brye, and express his hope to be supported on the morrow by two Prussian divisions. The veteran replied that he would leave a single corps to hold Grouchy at bay as well as it could, and march himself with the rest of his army upon Waterloo; and Wellington immediately returned to his post.

To this is appended the following footnote:

The fact of Wellington and Blücher having met between the battles of Ligny and Waterloo is well known to many of the superior officers in the Netherlands; but the writer of this compendium has never happened to see it mentioned in print.

It was not likely that he should, since he was the first to commit the statement to print. In Lockhart's two earlier editions (1826 and 1829) there is no mention of any "ride across country"; the statement, on the contrary, is that "the Duke sent to Blücher"—the rest of the sentence being identical, save for the absence of the word "personally," with the wording of the quotation made above. Clearly, in the interval between 1829 and 1835 some one had misinformed Lockhart to the effect that the Duke had not "sent," but had himself ridden "across country to Blücher"; and, naturally enough, Lockhart embodied the latter statement in his edition of 1835, adding from misleading information the matter in the foot-note quoted. The passages alike in text and foot-note seem to have passed unnoticed, save for the brusque contradiction, "The author and his informants, however superior, are mistaken," given to them in an article in the "Quarterly Review" which appeared in 1842, written by Lord Francis Egerton, afterward Lord Ellesmere, who confessedly wrote under the inspiration of the Duke, and in this instance directly from a memorandum drawn up by his Grace. Lockhart was a man of character and honor; and accepting the "Quarterly's" contradiction as emanating virtually from the Duke, in the edition of his history published in New York in 1843 he expunged the passage as to the ride, and reverted to the original statement that "the Duke sent to Blücher." Thus Lockhart's last word is against the story of the ride to Wavre; for, being dead many years before its publication, he had no responsibility for the reprint, in 1867, of the third edition of his history—a

reprint in which the story of the ride was retained.

Colonel Maurice's second piece of evidence in favor of the ride to Wavre has a verisimilitude that on the surface appears absolutely convincing. In 1871 there was published a book entitled, "A Memoir of Charles Mayne Young, Tragedian; with Extracts from his Son's Journal, by Julian Charles Young, M. A., Rector of Ilmington." The story of the ride to Wavre is told with most plausible circumstantiality in the journal of the clerical gentleman, and must be quoted entire, for it is too picturesque and realistic for compression:

In the year 1833, while living in Hampshire [so chronicled Mr. Young], no one showed my wife and myself more constant hospitality than the late Right Honorable Henry Pierrepont, father of the present Lady Charles Wellesley.¹ . . . On one of our many delightful visits to Conholt, Mr. Pierrepont had just returned from Strathfieldsaye when we arrived. He had been there to meet the judges, whom the Duke was accustomed to receive annually, previously to the opening of the spring assizes. After dinner, Mr. Pierrepont was asked if he had had an agreeable visit. "Particularly so," was the answer. "The Duke was in great force, and, for him, unusually communicative. The two judges and myself having arrived before the rest of the guests, who lived nearer Strathfieldsaye than we did, the Duke asked us if we were disposed to take a walk, see the paddocks, and get an appetite for dinner. We all three gladly assented to the proposal. As we were stumping along, one of the judges asked the Duke if we might see Copenhagen, his celebrated charger. (God bless you!) replied the Duke, (he has been long dead, and half the fine ladies of my acquaintance have got bracelets or lockets made from his mane or tail.) (Pray, Duke, apart from his being so closely associated with your Grace in the glories of Waterloo, was he a very remarkable—I mean a particularly clever horse?)

"Duke: (Many faster horses, no doubt; many handsomer; but for bottom and endurance I never saw his fellow. I'll give you a proof of it. On the 17th, early in the day, I had a horse shot under me. Few know it, but it was so. Before 10 A. M. I got on Copenhagen's back. There was so much to do and to see to that neither he nor I was still for many minutes together. I never drew bit, and he never had a morsel in his mouth, till 8 P. M., when Fitzroy Somerset came to tell me dinner was ready in the little neighboring village of Waterloo. The poor beast I saw myself stabled and fed. I told my groom to give him no hay, but, after a few go-downs of chilled water, as much corn and beans as he had a mind for, impressing on him the necessity of strewing them well over the manger first. Somerset and I despatched a hasty meal, and as soon as we had

¹ Lady Charles Wellesley died in 1893.

done so I sent Somerset off on an errand. This I did, I confess, on purpose that I might get him out of my way; for I knew that if he had the slightest inkling of what I was up to, he would have done his best to dissuade me from my purpose, and want to accompany me.

«(The fact was, I wanted to see Blücher, that I might learn from his own lips at what hour it was probable he would be able to join forces with us the next day. Therefore, the moment Fitzroy's back was turned, I ordered Copenhagen to be re-saddled, and told my man to get his own horse, and accompany me to Wavre, where I had reason to believe old «Forwards»¹ was encamped. Now, Wavre being some twelve miles from Waterloo, I was not a little disgusted, on getting there, to find that the old fellow's quarters were still two miles further off. However, I saw him, got the information I wanted from him, and made the best of my way homewards. Bad, however, was the best; for, by Jove! it was so dark that I fell into a deepish dike by the roadside, and if it had not been for my orderly's assistance, I doubt if I ever should have got out. Thank God, there was no harm done either to horse or man!

«(Well, on reaching headquarters, and thinking how bravely my old horse had carried me all day, I could not help going up to his head to tell him so by a few caresses. But hang me if, when I was giving him a slap of approbation on his hind quarters, he did not fling out one of his hind legs with as much vigour as if he had been in the stable for a couple of days! Remember, gentlemen, he had been out with me on his back for upwards of ten hours, and had carried me eight and twenty miles besides. I call that bottom, eh?)»

By his own confession, Mr. Young was one of the most untrustworthy of writers. He was frank enough as to his own weaknesses. «Except,» he says in his preface, «in instances in which I speak of occurrences as having happened to myself, or with my own knowledge, I will not vouch for the truth of one of them. I have only repeated what I have been told by others, and will not even pledge myself to have done that faithfully; for my memory, never very strong, has been greatly impaired by time.» He was, in fact, a *gobe-mouches* of the first water, and almost every page of his book testifies to his skill in building up and padding out a telling and specious story from the merest fragment of a casual *on dit*. He it was who invented, with all its graphic details of verisimilitude, the absurd story of a Birmingham bagman acting as volunteer galloper to the Duke in the hottest period of the battle of Waterloo,

when all his staff were dispersed on various errands. He described John Wilson Croker in 1832 as having filled for forty years a prominent position in the world of letters, Croker having been born in 1780! A characteristic instance of Young's untrustworthiness may be worth citation. He maintains that the story of the ride, derived from such an unexceptionable source, and repeated almost immediately after it had been told, must carry its own confirmation. «If, however,» he continues, «any sceptic should still have doubts on the subject, I would refer him to the review of Siborne's (Waterloo) in the (Quarterly Review,)² where he will find, in a note at the foot of one of the pages, a distinct allusion to the meeting between the chiefs of the Allied and Prussian armies on the night of the 17th.» But, unfortunately for Mr. Young's accuracy, there is no such footnote in the article to which he refers, nor does that article contain any allusion, direct or remote, to the meeting on which he insists so triumphantly. In fine, Young's journal is, for the most part, a tissue of garrulous galimatias.

Young is characteristically indefinite as to the year in the spring of which he tells of Mr. Pierrepont having met the assize judges at Strathfieldsaye, and of his having brought home to Conholt the gist of the story which, we may be very sure, owed its graphic touches and characteristic embellishments to the ingenuity and industry of the clerical compiler of narratives. It may safely be assumed that Mr. Pierrepont's contribution was a mere halfpennyworth of bread compared with the intolerable deal of sack which Young, at his leisure, poured into the story which has just been quoted. Although it was during their Hampshire sojourn in 1833 that Mr. and Mrs. Young first experienced Mr. Pierrepont's hospitality, the sense of the passage seems to point to «many delightful visits to Conholt» in subsequent years, during one of which visits Young seized and elaborated the historic *trouaille* which he describes Mr. Pierrepont as having brought from Strathfieldsaye. This could not have occurred until after 1836, the year in which Wellington's famous charger Copenhagen died, since Young's account makes the Duke speak of that gallant animal as «long dead.»

But apart altogether from Young and the detailed story which his journal contains, there undoubtedly is a certain amount of evidence that at least on one occasion the Duke did unwittingly say something which

¹ Blücher was familiarly known as «Marshal Forwards» («Vorwärts»), in which stirring shout was chiefly condensed his simple strategy and tactics.

² «Quarterly Review,» Vol. lxxvi, June, 1845; article, «Marmont, Siborne, and Alison.»

might have given color to the belief on the part of the listeners that he actually did ride to Wavre on the evening of June 17. Mr. W. B. Coltman, a barrister of high standing, now alive, and a son of the late Mr. Justice Coltman of the Common Pleas, has testified in writing to his distinct recollection of having heard his father tell the story substantially as recorded by Young, although not in so great detail, the justice explaining that he had heard it from the Duke's own mouth during a visit which he made to Strathfieldsaye when on the spring circuit in the year 1840. The only material discrepancy between Young's account and that of Mr. Justice Coltman, as remembered by his son, is that whereas Young describes Copenhagen's lashing out as having occurred after the Wavre ride, Mr. Justice Coltman's account made the horse kick out when his rider dismounted on returning from the pursuit after the victory of Waterloo. It is obvious that the testimony contributed by Mr. Coltman, in common with that which Young's narrative furnishes, has its weight impaired by being hearsay and second-hand evidence — Young's coming through the channel of Mr. Pierrepont, that of Mr. Coltman emanating from his father. Mr. Coltman has kindly communicated an extract from his father's journal, dated May 12, 1841, in which, however, there is no reference to the subject of the ride to Wavre. The extract is as follows:

In the spring of 1840 I went the circuit with Rolfe, and in the course of it dined and slept at Strathfieldsaye with the great man of the age. He was simple and unaffected as possible, talked a great deal, and was exceedingly polite and agreeable. I have somewhere a few memoranda of what he said, but cannot now lay my hands on them. Some time I will enter them on the opposite page.

But this, adds his son, he never did.

It seems fairly probable that Mr. Pierrepont, Young's informant, was a fellow-guest at Strathfieldsaye with Mr. Justice Coltman in the course of the spring circuit of 1840, and that both misunderstood some of Wellington's possibly casual and rambling observations, and took away with them the erroneous belief that the Duke had actually stated that he had visited Blücher at Wavre on the evening before the day of Waterloo. It must in fairness be acknowledged that testimony to the effect that the Duke told the story of his having made a night ride to Wavre on Copenhagen comes to us through two distinct channels, between which there

could have been no collusion; for Young gives no token of ever having heard of Mr. Justice Coltman, while Mr. W. B. Coltman had never heard of Young's book until Colonel Maurice called his attention to it four years ago.

To the present writer, analyzing some eighteen months ago the evidence which has been carefully marshaled above, it did not appear that the existing testimony warranted a belief in the story of the ride to Wavre. This, however, was not the impression of the most recent and, it may be added, perhaps the most critical writer on the Waterloo campaign. In the first edition of his valuable work¹ Mr. Ropes considered that the ride to Wavre «rests on testimony which it is impossible to disregard.» In his view, the fact that the matter was intentionally kept very quiet accounted for there being no mention of it in the histories. «It seems,» he wrote, «at first sight very remarkable that there is no mention of the Duke's visit by any Prussian writer; but it must be remembered that there was every reason why the public should not know at that time that there had existed, prior to the battle, anything but complete confidence in the intention and ability of his ally to support him.» And Mr. Ropes thus concluded: «That the Duke did ride over to Wavre and see Blücher, and satisfy himself that the necessary support would be forthcoming the next day, we must believe.» In the third edition of his admirable «Campaign of Waterloo» Mr. Ropes has abandoned that belief; and he has stated his conviction, formed on evidence which has recently come to light, that Wellington did not make the ride.

The writer conceives that the results of his closer study of the subject than had been made by those who had previously given it attention, and the very recent coming to light of a document which cannot but be held decisive, carry the final dissipation of the «ride to Wavre» myth, and this notwithstanding Young's narrative and Mr. Coltman's testimony to his father's reminiscences. Some of the reasoning has already been set forth in the earlier part of this article; strong negative evidence is furnished in the following account of an interview between the Duke and Sir John Malcolm; and finally, there is fresh and conclusive evidence in the very interesting conversations of the late Mr. Justice Gurney with the Duke.

Between the Duke of Wellington and Sir

¹ «The Campaign of Waterloo: A Military History.» By John Codman Ropes.

John Malcolm, the Indian soldier and administrator, there existed a lifelong and intimate friendship. Malcolm was in England at the time of the battle of Waterloo, and a few days after the arrival of the Duke in Paris he hurried across the Channel to congratulate his friend on the last and greatest of his many victories. When Malcolm presented himself, the Duke left the party with which he had been dining, and shaking Malcolm cordially by the hand, retired with him to one end of the room, where he briefly recounted the occurrences of the eventful month. Malcolm said that he could not discover any great strength in the Waterloo position. The Duke replied that he had no previous intention of fighting a battle there. «The fact is,» he said, «I should have fought at Quatre Bras on the 17th if the Prussians had held their ground. My retiring to Waterloo was a matter of necessity, not of choice.» Malcolm asked him if Blücher had cooperated well. «Nothing could be better,» replied the Duke. «I sent him word that I knew I should be attacked at Waterloo. He said he would be ready on the 19th. That would not answer, I replied, as I was assured I should be attacked on the 18th, and that I would be satisfied with Bülow's corps. Blücher then wrote or sent word that he would send Bülow's corps and another, and came himself with his whole army to my support.»¹ It cannot be doubted, having regard to the unreserved intimacy between the two men, that Wellington would have mentioned the circumstance if he had made the night ride to Wavre.

It is a singularly interesting circumstance that the written memoranda of conversations with the Duke of Wellington, listened to and partaken in by one judge while on a visit to Strathfieldsaye during circuit, should have remained extant for more than half a century, to become now of value in virtual opposition, as regards the truth or the reverse of the story of the Duke's ride to Wavre, to the verbal and unrecorded reminiscences of a brother judge, who was a subsequent guest of the same illustrious host on a similar occasion. The notes which follow are copied from the original documents in the possession of the Rev. Frederick Gurney, grandson of Mr. Justice Gurney, who, along with his brother circuit-judge, Mr. Justice Williams, was a guest at Strathfieldsaye of the Duke of Wellington in the course of the spring circuit of 1837. The manuscript memoranda, recorded by Mr. Justice Gurney, of the

¹ Kaye's «Lives of Indian Officers: Sir John Malcolm,» Vol. I, p. 194.

somewhat desultory talk between the Duke, himself, and his brother judge, from which only extracts can here be made, owing to restrictions of space, are headed

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON
AT STRATHFIELDSAYE.

February 24, 1837.

... The Duke arrived at Quatre Bras after the first action. When he saw the Prince of Orange, he asked, «Well, what is doing?» «We have had a smart skirmish,» replied the Prince; «but I do not think the French will attack us again to-day.» «I put up my glass,» said the Duke, «and saw some French troops. At the same time I heard in the wood near us cries of (*Vive l'Empereur!*) (Why, I exclaimed, (you will be attacked in five minutes!) and within that time the attack commenced.»

The conversation had commenced by my inquiring of his Grace whether a story I had heard was true, of his having ridden over to Blücher the night before the battle of Waterloo, and returned, on the same horse. He said: «No; that was not so. I did not see Blücher the day before Waterloo. I saw him the day before—the day of Quatre Bras. I saw him after Waterloo, and he kissed me. He embraced me on horseback. I had communicated with him the day before Waterloo.» He added that «Blücher brought only half of his army to Waterloo; the other half was left to watch Grouchy. The distance [from Wavre to Waterloo] was only twelve miles, but there was an intervening defile, the passage of which was very tedious. One division (the cavalry) had passed the defile pretty early in the morning, but they did not venture to attack till they could be supported.» («I find no fault with this,» he said.) «They therefore kept out of sight.»

We talked of Napoleon's manœuvre by which he decided many battles. The Duke said: «He commenced with a pretty general firing, so that you might not know whence the attack was to proceed, then he brought forward a battery of one hundred or one hundred and fifty cannon; and when its fire had swept away the troops opposed to it, he pushed a large force into the chasm. This,» the Duke said, «he [Napoleon] had practised with success against every other nation. It did not succeed with us,» he said. «At Waterloo he played off his hundred pieces of artillery. We did not care for his hundred pieces of cannon; we did not return a shot; we showed no troops. No persons appeared in view but myself and a few officers. I kept my men behind the crest of the hill, most of them lying down. When the French had cannonaded for some time, their troops marched up the hill. Then my men showed themselves. The French found no chasm. We repulsed them, and so again and again. At last, when our squares had repulsed their cavalry, and they got into some disorder, we brought forward our cavalry, charged, and drove them.»

Mr. Justice Williams said to him: «I have heard that if you had had your old Peninsular army, you

would have finished the business much earlier in the day." "Certainly I should," said the Duke; "but if I had had them I should not have fought at Waterloo: I should have fought the battle at Quatre Bras."

Mr. Justice Williams told me that while on a former visit he had asked questions of his Grace regarding the characters of the French marshals. The Duke's answer was: "I don't know whether it was because my army was not so good in the earlier Peninsular days; but I was most uneasy when I had Masséna in front of me."

I asked him whether the imputation on Soult, that he knew of the events in Paris when he fought the battle of Toulouse, was true or not. The Duke said: "Soult certainly did not know of them. I was between him and Paris, and should have known, and did know, of them before he did. I communicated them to him. He either disbelieved or affected to disbelieve the information, and would not come into any terms. After trying in vain for two or three days to bring him into terms, I prepared to attack him. He saw the preparations I was making in the latter part of the day, and in the evening or night—I forget which—he came to terms. I said to him afterward: 'If you had not, I should have attacked you next morning.' 'I know that,' he said. 'I saw such a corps, and such a corps, and such a corps'—he knew every corps in my army as well as I did—'taking up this, that, and the other position, and I knew what I had to expect.' By that time," said the Duke, "Soult and I knew each other pretty well."

To sum up regarding the Duke's alleged ride to Wavre, none of Lockhart's "superior

officers" ever testified to a knowledge of it. It seems utterly impossible that Wellington should have evaded identification in the Prussian camp; yet neither in the copious Prussian military literature of the period, nor in the archives from Clausewitz to Ollech, is there any mention of the nocturnal visit. Hardinge, ever close to Blücher, and the recipient of his "*Ich stinke etwas!*" embrace, discussed over and over again with the Duke every occurrence in the Prussian headquarters throughout June 17, 1815; yet there was never mention by either of any visit by Wellington to Blücher on the evening of that day. Croker ruthlessly pumped the Duke at every opportunity; the late Lord Stanhope steadily Boswellized him for twenty years on end; and Mr. Latham Browne has gutted the Wellington literature: yet none of these industrious compilers has evinced any knowledge of the ride to Wavre. It has been shown in this article that the Duke contradicted the story with his own lips to Mr. Justice Gurney, in the presence of Mr. Justice Williams, in 1837, and again in 1842, vicariously, through Lord Francis Egerton, in the "Quarterly Review." Lord Tennyson has happily described Wellington as

Pure . . . from taint of . . . guile,

and as a man

Who never sold the truth to serve the hour.

THE COURTSHIP OF MR. PHILIP JOHNS.

BY ELIZABETH CARROLL SHIPMAN.

"I WILL not stand it any longer!" said Mr. Philip Johns, striding to and fro in deep indignation. "She's kept me dancing long enough. Here I am fifty-odd and mo', and trailing at the hem of a woman's frock!"

We withdrew cautiously into the shade of the table, that we might not attract the attention of our father, who did not consider it the province of children to listen to the outpourings of misplaced passion.

"It is hard indeed, Mr. Johns," answered my father, who was a model sympathizer and listener from long experience.

Mr. Philip Johns belonged to the class of country gentlemen of the earlier part of the century. He still contrived to wear his leather gaiters tightly buttoned to the knee, a coat of the slim, narrow-tailed variety, and a Daniel Webster hat—a hat fraught with

interest to us children, because in it, between the top of the crown and the silk bandana which rested on his head, was carried some little eatable for us; to-day it had been filberts. Mr. Johns was a bachelor, as may be inferred, with a certain remote and courteous fear of women and children when brought face to face with them.

He lived at Barclay Court-house, and came three or four times a year to visit his property, which lay opposite to us, back of the woods crowning the hills across the run bottom. To-day he had, as usual, broken his journey to take dinner with us; as usual, after a general conversation on Court-house news, the talk had settled upon Mrs. Judge Hatcher, though with somewhat of acrimony.

"Hard!" said Mr. Johns, taking up the sympathizing word. "Hard is no name for