

A Hundred Years Ago (1799).

By ALFRED WHITMAN.

[With Illustrations from Old Prints.]



THE year 1799 was so crowded with incident that, if we desire in any way to traverse the ground, brevity must be the watchword for each item, and the music must be marked

staccato.

Though in the British Isles comparative calm succeeded the storm of the Irish Rebellion of '98, war clouds were bursting forth over the Continent of Europe, Asia Minor, and India. The task of George III.'s Ministers was extremely difficult, for while holding the reins of affairs at home, the Government had to control war operations thousands of miles away. To keep in touch with the seats of war was almost impossible, and even the news of the two most important victories of the year—Acre and Seringapatam—took three and four months, respectively, to reach this country.

News papers formed a far less potent factor in national affairs then than now. The circulation of the *Times* would seem to us ridiculously small; the certificate of issue on January 1st modestly stated that "the number printed for the last two months has never been on any one day below 3,000, and has fluctuated from that number to 3,350." Now, a newspaper is dressed like a shop-window, that its most attractive features may quickly catch the eye; but then

there was very little display of news, and, consequently, events of importance might easily escape attention. The most sensational heading was in the same type as that of a theatrical performance or a meeting of the Common Council, and even for such a momentous event as the fall of Seringapatam, it was simply—

CAPTURE OF SERINGAPATAM, AND DEATH OF TIPPOO.

The *Times* of 1799 was a four-page sheet, with four columns to a page. Two of the pages were devoted to advertisements, and the other two chiefly contained foreign intelligence (especially French), Parliamentary reports, and news on the progress of the war on sea and land. The price of the paper was sixpence.

The first few days of January were bitterly cold. Then followed a brief spell of mild weather about the 12th, followed by a return to frost at the end of the month. At the Queen's Drawing Room on the 31st, "owing to the severity of the weather very few of the nobility were present"; and at the Masquerade at the Opera House there were scarcely five hundred present, while "the house was most insufferably cold." So general and heavy was the snow that mail coaches were two days late in reaching the Metropolis. The first illustration shows us Elizabeth Woodcock in



ELIZABETH WOODCOCK, AS SEEN WHEN DUG OUT OF THE SNOW—
FEBRUARY 10TH, 1799.

the attitude in which she was discovered when dug out of the snow on February 10th. She had lost her way in returning home from market to Impington, near Cambridge, on Saturday, February 2nd, and so for eight days had been buried in snow, which was 7ft. deep. She, however, retained her senses during this time, and for sustenance had eaten of the snow. As a ballad of the period says, with a strange mixture of the ludicrous and the pathetic :

For she was all froze in with frost,
Eight days and nights, poor soul !
But when they gave her up for lost,
They found her down the hole.
Ah, well-a-day !

She recovered from the immediate effects of this adventure, but died about five months later.

Though no soul-stirring victory was achieved on the high seas, there were many instances of single combats, resulting in the ships falling sometimes into the hands of the English, and at others into those of the French.

guns and seventy men. A fierce struggle ensued for nearly two hours, during which the English captain (Mortlock) lashed his vessel to one of the French, and the Frenchmen boarded the English boat and were beaten off again ; and eventually the French boats sheered off and sought shelter in their own ports. But not before Captain Mortlock had received wounds from which he died at Portsmouth on the 11th, "a few minutes after receiving a letter of thanks, sent him by the Lords of the Admiralty, for his very gallant conduct."

A few words must suffice for the doings of Parliament. It was in 1799 that the first debates occurred on the subject of a legislative union with Ireland, as a means of drawing the two peoples more closely together, and of preventing a recurrence of the deplorable events of the previous summer ; and it was in this year that members came to be called Unionists and Separatists.

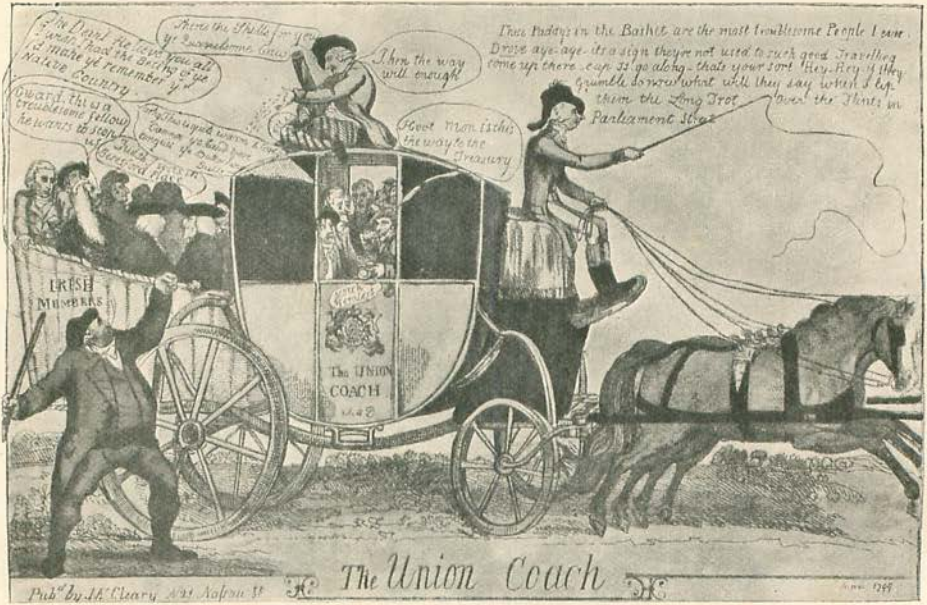
On January 22nd George III. sent a



ENGAGEMENT OF THE "WOLVERENE" GUN-VESSEL WITH TWO FRENCH LUGGERS—
JANUARY 4TH, 1799.

In March we read of ships captured by the French ; and "during the months of August, September, and October, sixty-six vessels, mostly British, were carried into Calais and Boulogne by privateers belonging to those towns." Against these reverses we have the brilliant capture of the Dutch squadron, in August, by Admiral Mitchell, and the second illustration portrays the encounter on January 4th between the *Wolverene* gun-vessel (which had left the Downs on January 2nd for a cruise off the French coast), and two French luggers. The combined strength of the French was thirty guns and two hundred and eighty men, while on our side were twelve

message to Parliament recommending the Union, and, shortly after, favourable resolutions proposed by Pitt were carried by large majorities. Sheridan stoutly opposed the motions, and was replied to in an eloquent speech by Canning. In the Irish House of Commons a spirited debate occurred on January 22nd, when there was a majority of two in favour of the Union ; but two days later an adverse majority of five was obtained, and Dublin was illuminated to celebrate the result. The discussion then changed its *venue* from Parliament to the Irish public platform, and as time went on the opposition became less severe. The next illustra-



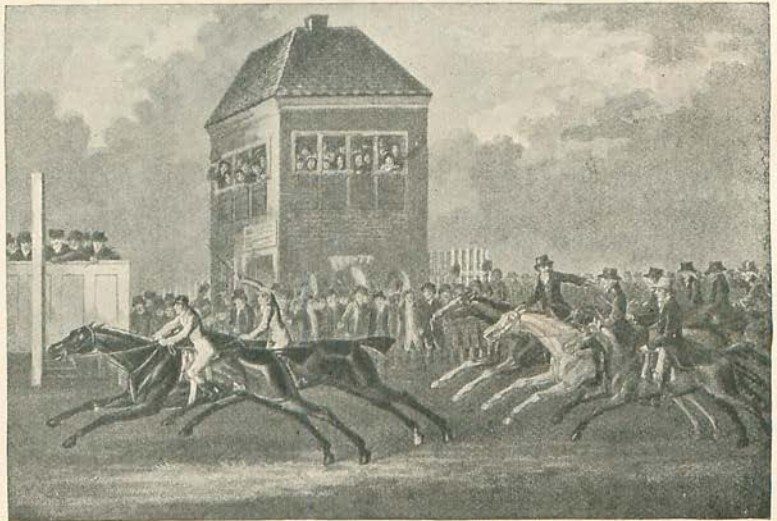
CARICATURE OF THE UNION OF GREAT BRITAIN WITH IRELAND—1799.

tion gives us one of the many caricatures that were issued in connection with this proposed change in the Constitution.

One other event in Parliament must not be omitted. A few months ago the public mind was much agitated upon the question of the suppression of Sunday newspapers. A counterpart to this agitation was to be found in the House of Commons in 1799. On 29th May, Lord Belgrave "brought in a Bill for prohibiting the sale and circulation of papers on the Lord's Day," and it was read a first time; but when the measure came up for second reading on June 11th it was thrown out by forty votes against twenty-six.

In the field of sport there were many wagers and matches, but the event *par excellence* of the year, and the one that was being continually referred to, was the horse-race on Easter Monday between Hambletonian and Diamond for three thousand

guineas. The event drew together the greatest concourse of people ever seen at Newmarket. "The company occupied not only every bed to be procured in that place, but Cambridge and every town and village within twelve or fifteen miles was also thronged with visitors." The race was an even and a fair one, and Hambletonian, the winner, was the better horse of the two. The course (more than four miles) was almost straight, and the race was won in eight minutes and a half. We give a view of the race at the finishing post.



THE RACE BETWEEN HAMBLETONIAN AND DIAMOND—EASTER MONDAY, 1799.

We must now turn to more serious matters. The grand object of Napoleon in his expedition to Egypt was to strike a blow at England's commerce in the East, and to further his end he opened negotiations with the disaffected Princes of India—Tippoo Sahib being the principal. Tippoo, on his side, was equally anxious to expel the British from Indian soil, and by February, 1799, events had reached the point where Earl Mornington (the Governor-General) had to abandon all

covered among the dead at the water gate. The next day he was buried, with military honours, in the Royal mausoleum. This vastly important victory, by which the English became masters of Mysore, is well shown in the accompanying print. As soon as the city was taken, Major Allen, accompanied by two other officers, entered Tippoo's palace with a flag of truce, and brought away Tippoo's two sons and took them at once to the English camp.



THE TAKING OF SERINGAPATAM.—MAY 4TH, 1799.

hope of an amicable settlement and push forward his forces. After several preliminary actions, Tippoo fell back upon Seringapatam, his capital, the siege of which began on April 5th. For the assault, which took place on May 4th, General Baird (who had previously been a prisoner in the city) was in command, and one o'clock was the time arranged for the attack. The troops crossed the River Cavery under a heavy fire, and lost many of the foremost party in the initial struggle of making a breach in the fortress; but in less than seven minutes the British colours were floating on the walls. Baird then divided his army into two divisions, and forcing the enemy back point by point eventually compelled them to turn and endeavour to escape. Tippoo himself could not be found until the evening, when, by torchlight, his body was dis-

But the severest blow to Napoleon, which altogether dissipated his Oriental dreams, fell a fortnight later at Acre. He had realized that neither the English nor the Turks would permit him an undisturbed possession of Egypt, so he moved his forces along the coast of Syria with the object of attacking the forts of Acre. Several towns fell into his hands *en route*, but, with the substantial aid rendered to the Turks by Sir Sidney Smith and his men, Acre offered a stubborn resistance. For sixty days the besieged city defied all the attempts of Napoleon—for with Smith's squadron in support, the Turks were able to repel all attacks; and at last, on May 20th, Napoleon was compelled to raise the siege and retreat, leaving all his heavy artillery behind him. Upon arriving once more in Egypt, Napoleon handed over the command



SIR SIDNEY SMITH DEFENDING THE BREACH AT ACRE—MAY 20TH, 1799.

of the army to General Kléber, and, by sailing close to the North African coast, managed to elude the vigilance of the English squadron and gain the shores of France. Sir Sidney Smith, defending the breach at Acre, is shown herewith.

Coming back again to England and to the City of London, we note that in the foreground of our illustration of the Royal Exchange and Bank of England, as it appeared in 1799, can be recognised the spot where in a little while will be the terminus of the City Electric Railway. Such an advance in the world's progress never entered the minds of the wisest men of 1799. In this year a deep well, centuries old, was discovered "while lowering the pavement opposite the front gate of the Royal Exchange."

In September, while "draining the basin in St. James's Square, the workmen found many curious articles which villainy, to conceal its guilt, had committed to that place. The most singular of these were the keys of Newgate, together with a quantity of chains and fetters, which it is well known were stolen at the time that prison was burnt down, during the Gordon Riots in 1780."



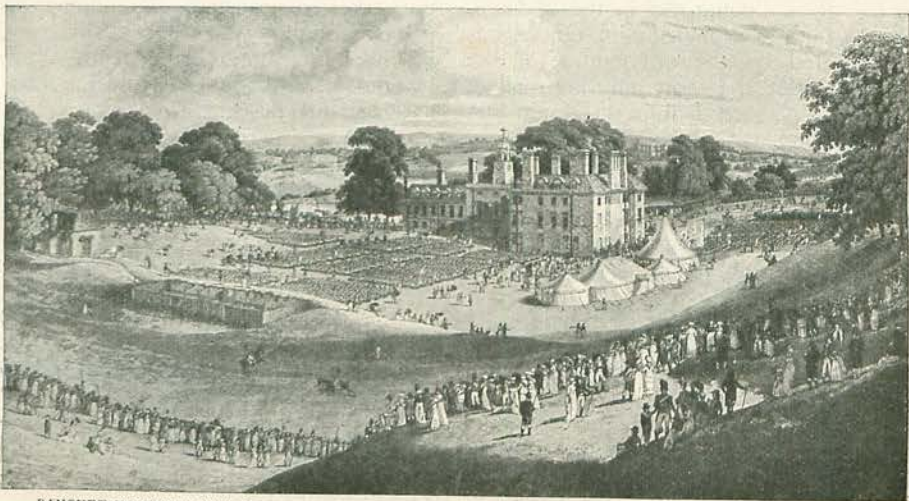
THE ROYAL EXCHANGE AND BANK OF ENGLAND—1799.



THE GREAT VOLUNTEER REVIEW IN HYDE PARK—JUNE 4TH, 1799.

The Volunteer movement, inaugurated in 1798, showed no signs of abatement during 1799, but quite the opposite; and reviews and presentations of colours were of continual occurrence. The great review of 8,193 effective men in Hyde Park by George III. on his birthday (June 4th) was vividly recalled by the centenary celebration, under the Prince of Wales, last July, so we need not describe it here, but will simply give an illustration of the event, after a picture by Sir Robert Ker Porter, which is little known. Heavy rain fell in the early morning, and the

day was marred by an exceedingly high wind; but otherwise the function was the most brilliant success. On July 4th the King reviewed the Volunteer corps of Surrey, on Wimbledon Common, and on August 1st those of Kent at Lord Romney's seat near Maidstone. On this latter occasion the Royal Family left Kew at 5.30 a.m., and, reaching the review ground about midday, the manœuvres commenced. At the conclusion of the review the entire company, including 5,319 Volunteers, sat down to a sumptuous *al fresco* dinner, as



BANQUET TO THE KENTISH VOLUNTEERS AT LORD ROMNEY'S SEAT, NEAR MAIDSTONE—AUGUST 1ST, 1799.

represented in our illustration; and about six o'clock, "after being refreshed with coffee," the King and Royal Family set off for London.

The fashions of the day were frequently described in the newspapers, where minute descriptions were given of the dresses worn

there were occasions when scarcely any coal was to be obtained in the Port of London. On April 2nd the price per chaldron was 60s. in the Pool and 67s. delivered to householders; while on the 12th there was only one ship-load at market, which realized *five guineas a chaldron*. Whether the dearthness of

provisions meant large profits for the shopkeepers we do not know; but we find that "Mr. Newman, the grocer of Fenchurch Street, who died in March, bequeathed upwards of one hundred thousand pounds to each of his daughters."

May Day was celebrated in London with the usual festivities, and Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, the founder of the literary society of "Blue Stockings," gave her annual entertain-

ment of roast beef and plum-pudding to the chimney-sweepers in the court-yard of her house in Portman Square, in commemoration (so the apocryphal story ran) of her once having found a boy of her own, or that of a relative, among the fraternity. Unfortunately, from among the crowd, some pick-pockets were arrested. Ballooning had its place among the year's events, by the death of Stephen Montgolfier (August 17th), the inventor of air-balloons. Besides, there was a successful descent from a parachute at Paris by Garnerin, a celebrated aeronaut (June 22nd), and a Parisian lady named Labrosse (October) was equally successful with a descent at the garden of Tivoli. "The spectators were very numerous, and felt a great degree of anxiety for the success of this rash attempt."

One theatrical item must be mentioned. On September 23rd, at Weymouth, at the conclusion of his annual holiday, "the King went to the theatre to see the farce of 'The Liar,' after which he set off in his travelling coach for town." How irresistibly this calls to mind the famous modern play by Mr. Henry Arthur Jones!



SATIRE ON THE FASHIONS OF 1799.

at Royal functions, including the earrings, head-dresses, and buckles. We here show the fashions for both sexes, as seen through the exaggerated vision of the caricaturist.

Duels were of almost daily occurrence, and one contemplated between Sir John Orde and Earl St. Vincent, because the latter had given a command in the Mediterranean to Lord Nelson, a junior officer, was only frustrated by the interference of the authorities. But the most amusing duel of the year took place at Dublin on March 7th, when two gentlemen met in Phoenix Park. Principals, seconds, surgeons, and all the apparatus of combat were ready, "when a gang of unpolished rebels appeared, stripped the combatants of their arms, watches, cash, etc., and sent them home perfectly reconciled to each other."

The necessities of life were exceptionally dear, and this was particularly so with bread and coal. On January 1st bread was 8¼d. the quartern loaf, but as the year advanced so the price steadily rose, until on December 4th it reached 1s. 3¼d. Owing to the weather (it was inclement most of the year), and to the dangers of sea transport,