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LIFE AND NAVAL CAREER OF ADMIRAL
SIR RICHARD J. STRACHAN, BARONET, G.C.B.

BY THOMAS A. WISE, M.D., F.S.A. Scot., Fellow of the
Royal Historical Society.

THE duties required of a captain of the navy during the Continental war, at the beginning of the present century, were peculiarly difficult. They often involved questions of great national importance, which required intelligence, judgment, and energy, not always united in the same person. On the possessors of such qualities we look back with pride and satisfaction, as to them we owe our high position among the nations. Similar occasions may not again occur for developing such qualities. International and maritime law is now more correctly defined, and the same scope is not given to commanders of iron-clads, as to those who commanded wooden ships. The latter depended on their sailing qualities and power of manœuvring; the former have only to find out the weak parts of their antagonists, and by the weight of artillery to send their opponents to the bottom. But while these changes in ships have taken place, the race of seamen continues the same. The like courage remains, ready to fight the country's battles and to gain victories, as in former days, when the sailor was prepared to undergo every hardship, and with calmness and sagacity to take advantage of every passing event for maintaining the national glory.

On the east coast of Scotland, from the Border northwards, the able seaman of the last century was often to be found. From his Scandinavian ancestors he inherited that love of adventure, whose lullaby was the murmur of the deep. Over a wide district inland the rebellious spirit in the nursery was subdued by a threat "to send for the French," or by announcing the approach of Paul Jones; and in the tem-

pestuous night the creaking of the forest and the roaring of the ocean drew forth the ejaculation, "An awful night for those at sea!" to be met by the consoling answer, "It may be fine where they are." The thoughts of the race turned naturally to the ocean.

Where hard work was to be done, Scottish seamen were to be found: they were among the boarders of the *Shannon*; and when the stately Duncan quelled the mutiny at the Nore, he was supported by gallant men from his native county. On the Scottish coast were to be found not brave sailors only, but true and honest men, who could always be relied upon. What might not such accomplish, when a Duncan led, or a Strachan dared! The achievements of Admiral Strachan have hitherto been related only in naval journals, and in a disconnected form. In the latest compendium of the "Battles of the British Navy," by Captain Allen, there are seven concise notices of actions in which he was engaged; but he has not been considered worthy of a portrait in the gallery at Greenwich, nor of a monument at Westminster or St Paul's.

The party feelings which caused injustice to a brave admiral have passed away, and we can now, without prejudice, investigate his career. His skill and daring led the Government to consider him as the most worthy successor to the brave and dashing Sir Sidney Smith; but the gallant deeds of Sir Richard in the *Diamond* were eclipsed by the long, romantic career of his predecessor. Even the important victory which Sir Richard achieved off Cape Ortegal, which at any other period would have excited the most lively satisfaction, was hardly noticed amidst the transports of joy at the stupendous victory of Trafalgar, which had occurred only a few days before: it was looked upon merely as the taking of the four line of battle ships which had escaped, to complete the most glorious naval victory ever achieved by Britain. His last public employment, the command of the fleet sent on the Walcheren expedition, proved the culminating point of his bad fortune; and although a Parliamentary investigation

proved that the failure of the expedition was solely due to the incapacity of the general, who commanded the land forces, the admiral has still been associated with the disaster. He died nearly half a century ago, and a kinsman now seeks to render justice to his memory.

The Strachans of Thornton were long distinguished in the navy. Captain John Strachan had a son who entered the navy, and who, when on leave, gave such a favourable account of a sea life to his school-fellow, John Jervis, afterwards Earl St Vincent, that he quitted school. The two boys concealed themselves on board a ship at Woolwich. After three days young Jervis returned home, but persisted in not returning to school, and soon after entered upon his naval career. Strachan also proved an able officer. On the 19th July 1757, when in command of H.M.'s privateer of 20 guns and 144 men, he attacked the *Télémaque*, a French privateer, of 20 guns and 416 men. After a gallant action, the French vessel was taken, with the loss of 110 killed and 156 wounded, there being only 14 killed and 27 wounded on the English side.

Captain Strachan died on the 28th December 1777. His nephew, Richard J. Strachan, son of Lieut. Patrick Strachan, also a distinguished naval officer, succeeded to the baronetcy of Thornton. Born in Devonshire on the 27th October 1745, he entered the navy early in life, and was at once remarked for his steadiness and intelligence. His first appointment was to the *Actæon*. After the usual period of service he became third lieutenant of the *Hero*, 74 guns, one of Commodore Johnston's squadron, which sailed from England to protect the outward-bound Indiamen. On board the fleet were 3000 troops, destined for an attack upon the Dutch settlements at the Cape. The squadron consisted of the *Hero*, and three 50-gun ships, with three frigates, and eight small vessels. Sailing from Spithead on the 14th of March 1781, they were, when some time at sea, pursued by a powerful French fleet under the command of Admiral de Suffrein, but escaped to the Cape Verd Islands. When in Porto Praya, the French fleet unexpectedly entered the bay, and commenced an attack,

and from their great superiority of force they might have destroyed the entire squadron. Fortunately, they advanced without order, firing at random among the English ships. The fire from the English men-of-war was so much better directed that Admiral de Suffrein was obliged to cut his cable and stand out to sea, followed by the rest of his fleet, taking with them the *Fortunate* and *Hinchinbrook* Indiamen. These were recaptured next day. The *Infernal* having put to sea was captured by the enemy, but on the approach of the squadron was abandoned. The *Hannibal*, one of the enemy's ships, of 74 guns, remained longer than the others in the bay, and being exposed to the fire of the entire British fleet, was reduced to a complete wreck. In this state her cable was cut, and she was allowed to drift out of the bay. Next day Commodore Johnston pursued the enemy until the evening, when, fearing his being drawn too far to the leeward, he returned to Porto Praya. There he appears to have remained so long, that on his arrival at the Cape he found the French admiral had reached False Bay before him, and had landed a body of troops, which, in the commodore's opinion, placed the colony in a state of security, defeating the object of the expedition. He learned that several Dutch East Indiamen were in Saldanha Bay. On the appearance of the British squadron, the enemy ran their vessels on shore, and set fire to them; yet by the activity of their assailants, four ships from 1000 to 1100 tons each were saved from the flames. The commodore, with part of his squadron, returned to England, leaving the remainder to protect the merchantmen proceeding to India.

Richard Strachan became first lieutenant of the *Magnanime*, of 64 guns, from which he removed to the *Superb*, 74 guns, bearing the flag of Sir Richard Hughes, by whom he was in 1782 made a commander in the *Lizard* cutter at Bombay. In 1783 he was promoted to the *Naiade* frigate, captured from the French. At the close of the American war, he obtained the command of the *Vesta*, 28 guns, on board of which he received the brother of the tenth Baron Cathcart, bound on

an embassy to the Emperor of China. The ambassador was in a feeble state of health when he embarked at Portsmouth, and continued to get worse until the ship arrived in the Straits of Banca, when he died. Commander Strachan afterwards conveyed General Meadows with reinforcements to Bombay. In command of the *Phoenix*, 36-gun frigate, he distinguished himself by his activity in protecting British trade, which otherwise would have suffered from interlopers under neutral flags. This duty became more arduous when we were at peace with France, and at war with their ally, the powerful Tippoo Sultan, who received from the French important aid.

In November 1792, the British commodore detached the *Phoenix* and *Perseverance* to search the vessels for contraband of war. Off Malabar, Strachan fell in with the *Résolue*, a French 36-gun frigate, in company with two country coasting-vessels, proceeding to Mangalore, the principal seaport of Tippoo Sultan. The French captain would not allow Strachan to examine the vessels, but he persisted. An action ensued, which was obstinately maintained on both sides, until the *Phoenix* had 6 men killed and 11 wounded, and the *Résolue* 25 killed and 40 wounded. The French vessel then struck her colours, and Sir Richard performed his original intention of examining the vessels; the result, however, did not justify their detention. The commander of the *Résolue* insisted on his ship being taken possession of, which was refused. He then towed her into the French settlement of Mahé. Mons. St Felix, commodore of the French squadron in the east, wrote to the British commodore in the Indian seas regarding the right of searching neutral vessels, and the correspondence was submitted to the French Government, but the disturbed state of the French nation induced them to drop the subject.

Soon afterwards, Captain Strachan returned to England; and on war breaking out with the French Republic, he was appointed to the *Concord*, 42 guns, in which he joined a squadron employed on the coast of France, under command of Sir John Warren. The squadron consisted of

the *Flora*, *Arethusa*, *Concord*, *Melampus*, and *Nymphe*. Being to the westward of Guernsey, on the morning of the 23d April, four sail were observed standing out to sea, which were soon found to be French ships of war. The *Flora* and the *Arethusa* attacked the *Pomone* of 44 guns and 341 men, and the *Babel* of 22 guns and 178 men. Both the French ships struck, after a battle waged for three hours. The other English frigates pursued the remainder of the French squadron. Strachan, in the *Concord*, succeeded in coming up with a retreating frigate, which he endeavoured to disable, with the intention of leaving her to be picked up by the *Melampus* and *Nymphe*. In his intention he was disappointed, for his old antagonist the *Résolue* gallantly bore down to support her consort; and having taken up a position across the *Concord's* bow, severely damaged her rigging and sails. Strachan fought both vessels with his usual gallantry, but finding the day advancing, and his main-topmast being badly injured, he resolved to secure the ship which was nearest him. To accomplish this, he backed his sails, and in the smoke dropping astern, led his antagonists unwittingly to fire into each other. He then ranged upon the starboard side. The *Résolue* was unable to assist her consort; made sail and escaped. The engagement continued from noon till nearly two o'clock, when the French frigate ceased firing, and being unmanageable, hailed a surrender. The prize was the *Engageante*, 38 guns, with 300 men, of whom forty were killed or wounded. The *Concord* had only one man killed, and twelve wounded. It is pleasing to remark the cordiality with which Captain Strachan celebrates the meritorious conduct of the officers and ship's company. "I had an opportunity," he writes, "of observing the spirit of enterprise of my first lieutenant, and have pleasure in acknowledging his great assistance to me during the engagement; also in remarking the good conduct of the two lieutenants who commanded on the main deck, and of the crew in general."

The judicious and enterprising character of Captain Sir Richard Strachan being now appreciated, he was selected for

a separate command on the coast of France in the *Melampus*, 42 guns; Sir Sidney Smith being employed in similar duties. Both Commanders were on the alert, and ready to attack the enemy; and whenever a hostile ship was bold enough to put to sea, she was pursued.

On the 9th of May 1795, while at anchor in Yournville Bay, Isle of Jersey, the two British commanders descried thirteen of the enemy's vessels laden with ship timber, gunpowder, cordage, and other naval stores, escorted by an armed brig and lugger running along shore. The British squadron weighed and gave chase. A small battery was soon silenced, and twelve vessels, abandoned by their crews, were captured. One escaped round Cape Cateret. In performing this service, the *Melampus* had eight men wounded. The loss on board the other British ships amounted to two killed and nine wounded.

On the 3d of July, the *Melampus*, in company with the *Hebe*, captured off St Maloes six, of thirteen French vessels laden with stores, convoyed by a ship of 26 guns, two brigs, and a lugger. Another brig of four 24-pounders and sixty men was also taken.

Sir Richard Strachan and Sir Sidney Smith continued together until April 1796, when the latter, being on a reconnoitering expedition off Havre with the boats of his frigate, captured a French lugger, which, by the strong setting of the tide into the harbour, was drawn a considerable way up the Seine above the forts. In this situation, Sir Sidney remained during the night. At dawn, the lugger being discovered in tow of English boats, a signal was given. Several gun-boats, and other armed vessels, attacked the boats. Another lugger of superior force was warped out against that which Sir Sidney had captured, so as to render further resistance impossible. With four men killed and seven wounded, Sir Sidney was obliged to surrender himself a prisoner of war, with nineteen others. He was confined in the Tower of the Temple at Paris, from which, after two years, he effected his escape.

Sir Richard, as successor to Sir Sidney, was appointed

to the command of the *Diamond* frigate, in which he continued for nearly three years, evincing great intrepidity and promptitude in destroying and capturing coasters. In 1799, he was promoted to the *Captain*, 74 guns. In this ship he distinguished himself in the squadron under the command of Admiral Markham in capturing five French men-of-war, —*La Junon*, bearing the flag of Rear-Admiral Perée, with 40 guns and 400 men; *l'Alceste*, 36 guns and 300 men; *le Courageux*, 22 guns and 300 men; *la Salammun*, 18 guns, and *l'Alerte*, 14 guns, each carrying 120 men.

In 1800 the *Captain* formed one of the squadron under Sir Edward Pellew, consisting of seven ships of the line—one of 50 guns—nine frigates, a sloop of war, and a cutter, having on board a detachment of troops under the command of Major-General Maitland. These were intended to co-operate with the French Royalists and Chouans in Quiberon Bay and the Morbihan. The Royalists were found to be less numerous than had been represented. The forts in the south-west end of Quiberon were soon silenced and destroyed, and several vessels were cut off and captured.

In July of the same year a secret expedition was fitted out under the command of Sir James Pulteney. It consisted of 8,000 men, escorted by the squadron of Sir J. B. Warren, including the *Captain*, commanded by Sir Richard. They first appeared off Belleisle, but were prevented landing by the strength of the works. They sailed to Ferrol, and after silencing the batteries, landed in the neighbourhood, defeated the Spaniards in two skirmishes, and took possession of the heights which overlooked the harbour. Every step indicated the speedy reduction of the fortress, with the fleet which it protected, when the General was intimidated by a rumour that the enemy had received large reinforcements, and retired from his position. By the admirable arrangements of Sir Richard, the troops were re-embarked with order before daybreak, and joined General Abercromby in his descent on Alexandria, while the squadron proceeded to Gibraltar. Sir Richard received the thanks of the Commander-in-Chief, with an

expression of entire approbation of his conduct during the expedition.

Sir Richard was afterwards employed in command of a small squadron on the west coast of France, where he distinguished himself by crippling the enemy's trade, cutting off their supplies, and keeping in check their small armed vessels, which had inflicted much injury on English commerce.

During the suspension of hostilities that followed the treaty of Amiens, Sir Richard was advanced to the command of the *Donegal*, eighty guns; and on the renewal of the war, being employed off Cadiz, he chased the *Amphitrite*, a Spanish ship of war, which he overtook. He acquainted the Spanish captain that in consequence of the attitude which Spain had assumed, he was under the necessity of conducting the *Amphitrite* back to Cadiz, allowing him three minutes to determine whether he would comply. After waiting six minutes, Sir Richard gave orders to fire. He was answered by a broadside; but the engagement lasted only eight minutes, when the *Amphitrite* struck her colours. The Spanish commander was killed. Soon after the *Donegal* captured another Spanish ship with a cargo worth £200,000.

In March 1802, Sir Richard's affairs required his presence in England, and he exchanged into the *Renown*, which, on account of her bad condition, had to be sent home. Soon after he was nominated a Colonel of Marines, and in July 1805, was appointed to the *Cæsar*, of eighty guns, and intrusted with the command of a detached squadron, consisting of the *Hero*, *Namur*, and *Courageux*, 74's, the *Santa Margarita*, 36, and the *Æolus*, 32 gun frigates. On the evening of the 2d November, being off Ferrol, he fell in with four of the French line-of-battle ships that had escaped from the battle of Trafalgar, and immediately bore down upon them. They were the *Formidable*, 80 guns, bearing the flag of Rear-Admiral Dumanoir le Pelley, and the *Duguay-Trouin*, *Mont Blanc*, and *Scorpion* of 70 guns. These four ships, with a fifth, had formed the van of the combined fleet which met with such

a signal defeat off Trafalgar, but had borne no part in the action in consequence of the English fleet having attacked the centre of their line. Towards the afternoon this squadron succeeded in hauling to the light air of wind on the starboard tack; and at three o'clock exchanged broadsides with the *Orion*, *Ajax*, *Britannia*, and *Agamemnon*, as they were advancing into action. But the French commander saw that the battle was against him, and so made way to the south, opening fire on the British ships and their prizes indiscriminately.

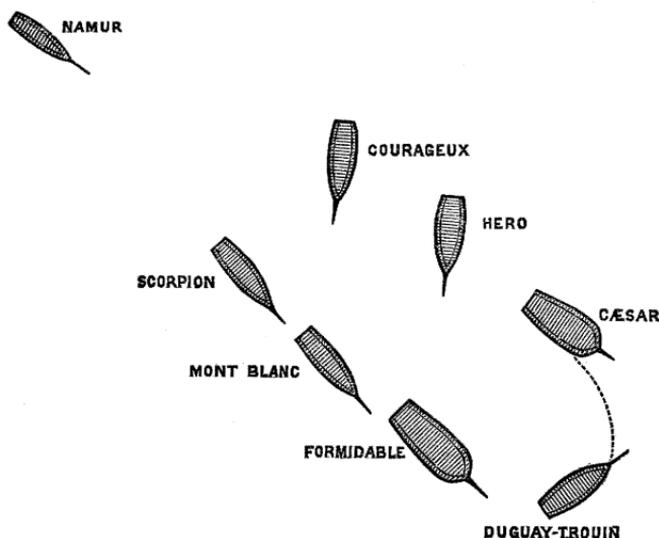
The French ships, little damaged, steered to the south-west, and during the night hauled to the north, intending to seek safety in the harbours of Rochefort or Brest. On the 2d November, being off Cape Finisterre, the squadron discovered and chased the *Phoenix*, a British 36 gun-frigate. She bore up, steering for Ferrol, and fell in with the British squadron, commanded by Sir Richard Strachan. He gave chase, and on the morning of the fourth day, came up with the hostile armament. Finding an action inevitable, the French squadron took in their small sails, and hauled up together on the starboard tack, under topsails and topgallant sails, courses clewed up, with their heads to the NE. and E.; the wind being about south-west by south.

The *Cæsar* attacked the *Formidable*, assisted by the *Duguay-Trouin*; the *Hero* and *Courageux* attacked the *Mont Blanc* and the *Scorpion*; while the *Namur* was ten miles astern. A spirited action ensued.

At 12.50, when Sir Richard made signal for close action, the *Duguay-Trouin* luffed up to rake the *Cæsar* a-head. Perceiving the movement, Sir Richard luffed up also, and the *Duguay-Trouin* passed to leeward, within musket shot of the *Cæsar* and *Hero*, from each of which she received a destructive fire. At 1.40, the *Cæsar* made the signal for the *Namur* to engage the enemy's van; but though endeavouring under all sail to get into action, her progress was extremely slow. This period of the action is illustrated by the following diagram. The *Hero* was now ordered from her position to lead on the port tack, followed at

D

some distance by the *Courageux*, and at a still greater distance by the *Cæsar*, which was much cut up in her sails and rigging by her two antagonists. As the ships edged away towards the French squadron, at two o'clock, the *Héro* fired her starboard guns at the *Scorpion*, which having lost her main-topmast, fell to the port, and became engaged with the *Courageux*, assisted by the *Phænix* and *Révolutionnaire* frigates. The *Héro*, making sail, gained a position on the weather bow of the *Formidable*, and had occasionally an



opportunity of raking the *Mont Blanc* and the *Duguay-Trouin*. At this time (2.45), the *Namur* reached the *Formidable*, when the *Héro* made sail after the *Mont Blanc*, and at 3.5 the *Cæsar*, having repaired her damage, was in the act of reopening her fire on the *Formidable*, when that ship, having lost her mizen-topmast, her mainmast, and fore-topmast, hauled down her colours. At 3.10, the *Duguay-Trouin* and the *Mont Blanc* bore up, and endeavoured to form a line a-head of the *Scorpion*, but this ship, by the united fire of the *Courageux* and the frigates, lost her main and mizen-mast, and fore-topmast, hauled down

her colours, and surrendered. The *Duguay-Trouin* and *Mont Blanc* endeavoured to escape, but were overtaken by the *Cæsar* and *Hero*, and after a close and well-maintained cannonade of twenty minutes, surrendered at 3.35 P.M. The loss on board the British ships was slight, considering the length and closeness of the action. There were 24 killed and 111 wounded; while on board the French ships were 730 killed and wounded.*

Sir Richard conducted his four well-earned prizes to Plymouth, and they were added to the British navy. Five days afterwards he was advanced to the post of Rear-Admiral, and with his officers and men received the thanks of Parliament. Gold medals were given to the captains, and the first lieutenants of the line-of-battle ships were made commanders. The Patriotic Fund presented to each of the seven commanders a sword of the value of one hundred guineas, and gave Sir Richard a vase which cost three hundred guineas. He was voted a sword and the freedom of the city, by the Corporation of London. On the 29th January 1806, he was nominated G.C.B.

Soon after the battle of Ortegál, Sir Richard hoisted his flag on board the *Cæsar*, and the squadron proceeded to the coast of America, in pursuit of a French squadron commanded by Admiral Villeneuve. One of the French ships, the *Castor*, 74 guns, foundered in a hurricane, and another, the *Impétueux*, of the same force, when standing in for the Chesapeake was discovered, driven on shore and burnt, and the crew made prisoners. Two other 74's were destroyed on the same day. Sir Richard was afterwards employed in the blockade of Rochefort until the summer of 1809, when he returned home.

The great naval expedition to the Scheldt was entrusted to Sir Richard Strachan; and the military force, to the surprise of every one, was placed under the command of the Earl of Chatham. The conduct of this expedition so deeply concerns the professional reputation of the admiral, that it is necessary to enter into details.

At Antwerp, and on the noble river which passes it, Napoleon

* *Victoires et Conquêtes*, tome xvi. p. 195.

had expended £2,640,000 in constructing immense arsenals and dockyards, with the object of invading England and destroying its supremacy on the ocean; and he afterwards informed Les Cases, that he contemplated a much larger expenditure. He intended it as a point from whence fleets were to be launched against the enemy, and by land, as a place of refuge in case of disaster. A military town and docks were to have been erected on the opposite bank of the Scheldt, and land was already purchased for their construction. There three-deckers were to have been repaired with all their guns on board, during the winter months, under the shelter of large sheds.

At the commencement of the contest of France and Germany, the Cabinet of Vienna made the most urgent representations to the British Government on the subject of aiding them by landing an army on the North of Germany or Holland; and successive administrations had deliberated on making an attempt to destroy the naval stations on the Scheldt. Lord Nelson had it in contemplation, and other experienced naval and military officers had been consulted on its practicability and policy. It was felt that England should make a sudden attack on Antwerp, in order to destroy the dockyards and fortifications before they were completed. Half the bastions were known to be unarmed, the ditches were dry, and in some places filled up; two old breaches were unrepaired, and the garrison consisted only of 2500 invalids and coastguards. The island of Walcheren was imperfectly defended, and Flushing had a garrison of 3000 troops, quite inadequate for its defence. At Antwerp there were ten sail of the line, four frigates, and forty or fifty gunboats, in different stages of construction, with means to secure, at no distant period, an extension in the number of ships, and a solidity in point of defence, which would render it, as a maritime power, not only extremely formidable, but almost invulnerable.

Austria, the faithful ally of England, having declared war against France in November 1808, several experienced naval and military officers were consulted on the propriety of a

British expedition to the Scheldt. Sir Richard Strachan's opinion was not favourable. Other experienced officers were more hopeful of the result. To understand the reason of the discrepancy of sentiment, it is necessary to consider the political condition of Europe at the end of the year 1809, Napoleon being then master of the Continent, which he ruled with an authority almost resistless.

After careful consideration, the British Cabinet resolved to send an expedition to Walcheren against the French on the Scheldt. Had this resolution been carried out promptly and energetically, its success would have weakened the attack of the French on Austria, destroyed the centre of the French maritime operations, and stopped the much dreaded crusade against Britain. Secret preparations were made to equip a fleet and an army, but their extent prevented their being ready in time to stop the French advance on Austria; and before the fleet sailed in the end of July, the Austrians had been defeated. By this delay the healthy months had passed and the sickly season had commenced before the army reached Walcheren—one of the most unhealthy of European climates.

From the time of his appointment, Sir Richard was not very hopeful, probably owing to the character of his colleague. He said to Lord Mulgrave, one of the ministers—"I think all we will do will be to take possession of Walcheren,"—a remark to which his lordship answered, that the country would not be satisfied with such an expensive armament doing nothing more. Sir Richard remarked—"I am fearful it will turn out so;" and added—"for my part, I know nothing of the navigation of the Scheldt; but I will do my best to accomplish all the objects of the expedition, and I shall be ready to serve under any officer the government has more confidence in than myself." Lord Mulgrave observed, "that he had the fullest confidence in him, and had reason to think he would do well." With such modest expectations of success, Sir Richard took command of the naval expedition, having the assistance of Admiral Popham, who knew the navigation of the Scheldt.

From great court influence, the Earl of Chatham was ap-

pointed to the command of the land forces. Old, indolent, and inexperienced, and without decision of character, he was entirely incompetent for the highly responsible duties with which he was entrusted. Besides, the expedition proceeded to a most unhealthy climate without attending to the precautions recommended by the medical department against the inroads of disease.

The fleet sailed on the 28th July 1809, and on reaching the coast of Holland was encountered by a violent gale and heavy sea, which prevented the landing at Cadsand. Taking shelter in the roadstead of Room Pop, 20,000 men were disembarked without opposition at Bree Sand in the Island of Walcheren, and took possession of Middleburg, where Lord Chatham established his residence. There the troops, at the commencement of the sickly season, were kept inactive while exposed to the unhealthy climate, and to the use of unwholesome food.

General Sir John Hope, in command of a division, obliged the governor of forts Fechterbeer and Goes to surrender, and in a couple of days the important forts of Bathz and Santoliet capitulated, and Flushing was invested.

Sir Richard, disregarding the fire of the Flushing batteries, passed the straits, and took possession of both branches of the Scheldt. Fort Bathz was the key of the inner channel, five leagues from Antwerp; and by proceeding along the left bank of the river Scheldt, and occupying the Tête de Flandre, opposite to Antwerp, scarcely any resistance would have been offered, and the object of the expedition would have been obtained. Lord Lowther was present at a meeting of council at which Sir Richard entreated Lord Chatham to mask Flushing with 10,000 men, and he would get round the island, either by the west or east branch of the Scheldt, and land the rest of the army, numbering 25,000 men, near Antwerp; but Lord Chatham said, drawlingly, "We had better wait."* It was afterwards proved that 20,000 men and 4000 horses might have been landed from Slough in forty-eight

* "Memoirs of R. P. Ward," by the Hon. Ed. Phipps, vol. i. p. 275.

hours, and that cavalry and ordnance horses might easily have performed the march from Slough to Bathz in thirty-six hours—the distance being about thirty-five miles.

As leader of the army, Lord Chatham had no comprehensive plan of procedure. Commissariat arrangements were entirely neglected; and though the heads of the medical department drew up an admirable code of hygienic rules that would have saved thousands of lives, no heed was paid to it by the General. The object was to march on to Antwerp, operating on both banks of the Scheldt; so as, with the assistance of the fleet, to capture the forts of Lillo and Lufkenshoesk, force the boom and chain which secured the river, and thereby open a field for future operations. In his letter to the Admiralty, dated the 27th of August, Sir Richard wrote, "we are desirous to go on." Subsequently, as he stated on the "Enquiry," when he saw his letter in the papers, it struck him that it might be the means of making a breach between the two services, and then he expressed his regret that he had worded the letter in that manner. At the same time, he observed to Lord Chatham, and to other officers, that his first communication was "only a statement of facts." He added, "I could not help regretting, and I do at this moment regret most sincerely, that having been wrought up as we were to the point of attack upon the enemy, and having worked our people up to the highest pitch of enthusiasm, we should have been under the necessity of retiring."

After consideration, Lord Chatham resolved to reduce Flushing before advancing on Antwerp, whereas, if he had reduced the latter in its defenceless state, the object of the expedition would have been accomplished. The fortifications of Flushing were strong, and defended by a garrison of three thousand soldiers. The siege was begun on the land side. The garrison were driven into their works with considerable loss, several sallies were repulsed, and trenches were dug. On the batteries being opened, Sir Richard led eight sail of the line, and bomb-vessels, against the fortifi-

cations, and kept up a vigorous cannonade. The enemy's guns were silenced, the sea defences wrecked, the town set on fire in different places, and a lodgment being made by the troops, the enemy capitulated. French officers, who had been present at Austerlitz and Jena, declared, after the surrender, "*que la cannonade*" in these battles was a mere "*jeu d'enfans*" in comparison to the terrible cannonade from the ships. The possession of this fortification was useless as an offensive position, and otherwise improper, as it defeated the great object of capturing the French ships of war, and destroying the arsenals and dockyards, which it had been proposed to accomplish before the enemy could concentrate their troops and place their fortifications in a state of defence.

Even after the taking of Flushing, the Admiral again offered to make an attempt upon Antwerp, but the General prohibited the enterprise. He resolved to form a depot at Fort Bathz. This absurd resolution, alike injurious to the health of the troops and otherwise embarrassing, called forth the remonstrance of the admiral, but without avail. Lord Chatham was obstinate, and Sir Richard, with infinite trouble and at a considerable delay, was obliged to convey all the material of the army in a fleet of 400 transports, besides frigates, sloops, and flotilla, through a long, intricate, and very difficult channel of the Scheldt, against often strong adverse winds that required warping. By great skill and arduous exertion, the transport was completed on the 25th of August.

At this time, 15,000 men were in the hospitals of Flushing and Middleburgh, labouring under the dreadful fever which, in the autumnal months, desolates the level and marshy flats. The insalubrity of the water, the dampness of the houses, the immoderate use of unripe fruit, and exposure to night air, united in producing remittent and typhoid fevers, which generally proved fatal, and always left the patient weak with fatal diseases of the internal organs. This sickness had been much increased by the inactivity of the troops, and their exposure in the unhealthy plains during the siege of Flushing.

The cause of this general sickness was sufficiently evident

from the island of Walcheren having been formed of the deposits from the Rhine and other rivers. It was flat and under the level of the sea at high water. Dikes surrounded the island, and prevented the invasion of the sea, but did not check the general and most unwholesome humidity. The rich and moist soil was divided into fields by large open ditches, which were filled with stagnant water, charged with brackish water and vegetable matter. To the diseases so engendered, foreigners were especially liable. The hospitals were soon filled, and these were so ill-ventilated, that fevers took on a contagious typhoid type, complicated with dysentery.

If proper precautions had been employed for cleaning the ditches and covering the drains, in housing the soldiers in floating barracks, or in healthy localities, and in affording the men more generous diet, with a moderate supply of tobacco and spirits, the mortality would have been much diminished. Such precautions were the more necessary, as it was proposed to keep possession of Walcheren for a time, in order to divert French troops from Austria; and as it was a strong position, commanding the navigation of the Scheldt.

Alarmed by the condition of the expedition, the Home Government dispatched Sir Gilbert Blane, an experienced physician, to ascertain the cause of the mortality. He arrived in Walcheren on the 30th September, and found two-thirds of the army unfit for duty, with a mortality averaging 250 per week.

A grave error had been committed by placing the fleet and the army under separate commands. The activity of the admiral was negated by the inveterate sloth and incapacity of the general. While the latter was contending with an unwholesome climate, and was wholly inactive, the naval part of the expedition remained healthy; and this explains the importance of Napoleon's directions, "to cut the dikes so as to lay the Island of Walcheren, and other places the enemy will occupy, under water; and with stagnant ditches and the unhealthy season, leave them. As our men are not soldiers,

avoid coming to blows." The authorities of France and Holland removed their ships of war above Antwerp, of which the fortifications were repaired and strengthened, and by the 27th August had assembled an army of 20,000 soldiers.

Lord Chatham now summoned a council of his generals, who agreed that nothing more could be done. The admiral, who was in favour of vigorous measures, was not consulted. The troops were withdrawn to the island of Walcheren, where 15,000 men were left; the remainder were embarked for England. The mortality increased from 250 to 300 a-week, till half the remaining garrison in Flushing was in hospital. In December, on the conclusion of peace between France and Austria, these troops were recalled. Nothing substantial had been accomplished, and 26,000 men were struck down with sickness, about a half of whom only recovered. The expedition involved an enormous expenditure.

The British Government did not call for any explanation regarding the conduct of the expedition. But Lord Chatham, was aroused from his apathy by the strong animadversions of the press, and resolved to justify himself. On the 15th October 1809, he prepared a statement in which he ascribed the failure of the enterprise to his naval colleague; and used the privilege of a Cabinet minister to present it privately to the King. In consequence of its glaring unfairness, the document was returned to him for rectification, and he was directed to place it, as a public document, in the hands of the Secretary of State. The memorial was published, and the admiral prepared a rejoinder. In this he properly remarked, that "to assume the privilege of conveying private insinuations to the prejudice of others, from whose knowledge they are studiously concealed, must prove utterly destructive of all mutual confidence in joint operations of the army and navy." The whole of these proceedings were without the knowledge of Lord Chatham's colleagues in the Cabinet.

It was natural that respect for the memory of Pitt, and a disinclination to abandon a colleague, should for a time render the Cabinet irresolute. Lord Lowther's opinion indeed was

so extremely adverse to Lord Chatham, that he refused to support him, even at the risk of retiring from office. A vote of censure on Chatham was in the House of Commons carried by a majority of 221 to 188, notwithstanding the moving of the previous question on the part of the Premier, Mr Perceval; who had the difficult task of defending a colleague against what must have been his own personal conviction. The vote would have been followed up by an address, praying his Majesty to remove Chatham from his councils, but the Earl avoided it by a timely resignation of all his appointments. In the course of the debate, Mr Perceval stated, "that it appeared to him perfectly clear that not the slightest blame attached to the gallant Admiral Sir Richard Strachan, and that the delay which had taken place was solely imputable to the weather and local difficulties." Strong and emphatic as this statement was, on the part of the Prime Minister, the admiral never fully recovered his reputation. Associated as he had been in an undertaking which had grievously failed through an incapable and indolent colleague, he shared in the disgrace of one whose policy he had condemned. After the lapse of so many years, it is right the unwarrantable stain should be wiped from the pennon of a gallant seaman, and that justice should be rendered to his memory.

The character of Sir Richard was indeed worthy of admiration. In the performance of his public duty, he was scrupulously exact; arranging his plans with care, and executing them with vigour and judgment. With the careless and the lukewarm, he had no patience. During the crisis of the battle of Ortegual, when his signals were not answered by his consort, he did not hesitate, in the hour of danger, to enforce his orders by firing at her as an enemy. His conduct in the Walcheren expedition was fully investigated by a Committee of the House of Commons, which confirmed the deliverance of the Prime Minister, that his honour was unsullied. In July 1810 he received the sword and freedom of the city of London voted to him by the Corporation in 1805. On the

31st July he was advanced to the rank of vice-admiral; he became admiral in 1821. He resided at Bryanston Square, London, where he died on the 3d February 1828, at the age of eighty-three.

The surname of Strachan is derived from a portion of territory in the county of Kincardine—a parish being so called. According to Nisbet, the lands of Strachan were erected into a county palatine. He found a “Walterus comes Palatinus de Strachan,” and considered it the only known instance in the kingdom. The family is of high antiquity. During the reign of Malcolm IV. (*circa* 1160) we find Walterus de Strachan “cum consensu Rodolphi de Strachan,” conveying lands to the canons of St Andrews; and a century afterwards, John, the son of Rudolphus, made over to the abbot of Dunfermline, the lands of Belheldie, “pro salute sua,”—an act confirmed by Alexander III. in 1278.

The admiral's more immediate ancestry may be stated shortly. Alexander Strachan of Thornton, a commissioner of Exchequer, on account of his meritorious services, was created a baronet of Nova Scotia on the 28th May 1625. He was one of the three who first received this honour; the two others, created at the same time, being Sir Robert Gordon of Gordonston, and William, Earl Marischal. He married Maude, daughter of Sir William Douglas of Glenbervie, and left two sons. James, who succeeded to the paternal honours, married Elizabeth, daughter of Forbes of Waterton, and died in 1649 without issue. A cousin of the same Christian name succeeded him; he married, first, Mary Henderson, and secondly, Anne, daughter of Captain Barclay. He left two sons, of whom the younger, David, became Bishop of Brechin. James, the elder, succeeded to the baronetcy, and had issue. The younger brother, David, was consecrated Bishop of Brechin at St Andrews on the 7th May 1662; he died in October 1671, aged 72. He was twice married, and left two sons, David, minister of Montrose, and James, commissary of Brechin; and two daughters, Beatrice, who married the Rev. John Strachan, minister of

Strachan, and Margaret, a spinster. Sir James Strachan of Thornton, elder brother of the Bishop of Brechin, had an only son, James, who, having studied for the ministry, was ordained minister of Keith in 1665. He was twice married, and had a numerous family. He was deprived of his living in November 1689 for not praying for King William and Queen Mary, and praying for the restoration of James VII. He succeeded to the family title, and died at Inverness in 1715, in his 75th year. His eldest son predeceased him, having fallen in the Rebellion of 1715. John, the second son, succeeded to the family honours. Dying without issue, he was succeeded in the baronetcy by a younger brother, Francis, who was a Jesuit in Paris; another brother succeeded to the baronetcy, who was also attached to the Jesuit College. Patrick, supposed to be a younger brother of the minister of Keith, practised as a physician in Greenwich. He was grandfather of the admiral, who succeeded as tenth baronet. On his death, the baronetcy, after a formal service at Edinburgh, was assumed by John Strachan of Teignmouth, Devonshire. The title is now dormant.