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Edited by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur

Excerpt

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BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR
OF
SIR PHILIP BOWES VERE BROKE, BART.

CAPTAIN IN THE ROYAL NAVY.

————— Or do the gods inspire
This warmth, or make we gods of our desire ?
A gen'rous ardour boils within my breast,
Eager of action, enemy to rest :
This urges me to fight, and fires my mind,
To leave a memorable name behind."

DRYDEN'S VIRGIL. *Æneid.* lib. ix.

ALTHOUGH ancestry alone, in the eye of the philosopher, can never dignify the man ; as the concomitant of noble actions it does certainly add to the lustre they confer on the character of the individual that achieves them. Indeed, the contemplation of a long line of ancestry, rendered originally conspicuous, as it must have been, by qualities superlatively eminent in the parent stock, might be alone sufficient to induce in the various members of its dignified descent, an emulation worthy of the honours thus inherited. We shall, therefore, in our memoir of this gentleman, briefly state the antiquity of his family, as noticed in Sir PETER LEYCESTER'S *History of Cheshire* :—

“ This ancient family is descended from the Brookes of Leighton, in Nantwich hundred, in Cheshire, of which family I find one Adam, Dominus de Leighton, sub Henrico tertio, whose son was stiled William de la Brooke, of Leighton, (probably the William noticed by Camden, as master of Leighton, in 1249, being the 33d year of King Henry III.) and his son, Richard, stiled Ricardus de Doito, in an old deed in the 5th year of King Edward I. that is, *Of the Brook, for Doet*, in French, is a Brook in England ; and under the said manor-house, in Leighton, a brook runneth, from whence their posterity assumed the surname of Del Brook. Thomas Brook, of Leighton, gentleman, the last of that family, in the direct line, died about 1652, very aged, having issue four daughters: but he sold away the reversion of his lands to the Lady Mary Cholmondely, 6 Jacobi, 1608 ; which, afterwards, came to Francis Cholmondely, third son of Thomas Cholmondely, of Vale Royal, Esq. who now enjoyeth the same, 1666.”

From the above-mentioned Willielmus de Doyto del Brooke, descended Sir Richard Brooke, of London, Knight, Chief Baron of the Exchequer in the reign of King Henry VIII. the lineal

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ancestor of Sir Philip—and it appears that about this time the family were seated at Nacton, in Suffolk.

Sir Philip, the distinguished subject of this memoir, is the eldest son of the late Philip Bowes Broke, of Nacton, in the county of Suffolk, Esq. and of Elizabeth, daughter of the Rev. Charles Beaumont, of Witlesham, in the same county, M.A. He was born at Nacton, on the 9th of September, 1776.

The bent of genius, or that marked propensity to a particular pursuit, so often evinced in the early years of eminent men, is not easily diverted by contingent obstacles—we do not find, however, that to that of Sir Philip any such were presented. His attachment in his boyhood to the river's side—the banks of the Orwell—the delight he felt in contemplating there the fishing-boats and other vessels—his dexterity in cutting them in paper, and forming them in wood, were the first indications of his naval inclination—and in which he was not discouraged; but being one day found upon a plank, pushing off to reach some boats at a distance, he was reprimanded, and told of his danger; to which, in the high spirit of boyish confidence, he replied, “depend upon it I could have managed it.” Such was the germ of that ardent spirit that was at a future period to maintain the honour of his country on hostile shores.

But though thus destined to be terrible to his country's foes, as an instance of his sensibility of heart to the distresses of humanity, he, one day, when returning from school with his servant, and with a solitary shilling in his pocket, was accosted by a sailor, who, at the conclusion of a tale of woe, solicited his charity; the shilling was immediately brought forth to his relief: the servant told him he should not be so lavish of his money, without a better knowledge of the object he bestowed it on. “Is he not an English sailor in distress?” he replied, “I only wish I had more, he should have it:” he was then between seven and eight years of age.

At Cheam school, under the care of Dr. Gilpin, his education commenced; but, at twelve years of age, his father not being satisfied with his progress in the classics, deliberated on his removal to another seminary. Philip desired rather to be sent to sea; but on Mr. Broke observing to him, that a liberal education was as essentially necessary in the naval profession as in any other, he

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promised to devote himself assiduously to his studies, if he might be allowed to commence his future career in the royal navy; this was assented to, and his scholastic progress was accordingly satisfactory.

At the Royal Academy, Portsmouth, he prosecuted his nautical studies till the age of fifteen; and knowing his time to be limited, so desirous was he of making the most of it, that he trespassed clandestinely on the hours designed for rest.

On the 25th of June, he commenced his naval career as midshipman on board the Bull-Dog, commanded by Captain (now Rear-admiral) George Hope, appointed to the Mediterranean station. In this ship, Mr. Broke continued till August, 1793, when, with Captain Hope, and part of the crew, he was removed into L'Eclair, a French prize corvette, in which vessel he remained under Captain Hope, and subsequently under Captain George Towry, until the 25th of May, 1794, when he removed into the Romulus frigate, and joined his old commander.

In L'Eclair, the services in which he took part were more active than brilliant; and most so at the blockade and siege of Bastia, under Lord Hood.*

In the Romulus, he was chiefly employed in cruising off Gourjean bay and Toulon, under Admirals Lord Hotham, and Goodall, and in Lord Hotham's action with the French fleet off Toulon, on the 14th March, 1795, † when the Romulus served as

* For a portrait of Lord Hood, see N. C. Vol. XI. p. 400. For memoir, vide Vol. II. p. 1.

† It was in this action, that *la Ca Ira*, of 80 guns, and *le Censeur*, of 74, were taken. The French fleet consisted of one ship of 120 guns, three of 80, eleven of 74, two of 40, two of 32, one of 20, and one of 18. The English had one of 110 guns, three of 98, eight of 74, two of 64, two of 36, three of 32, and one of 26. The French had 1356 guns, the English 1318. The number of men on board the English line was 8,896; that of the whole of the French fleet, 18,240. The loss sustained by the English amounted to 75 killed, and 280 wounded. In the English squadron were two Neapolitan frigates; the *Minerva*, and the *Tancredi*. To the commander of the former (Captain Joseph Almago), the French republican General, La Harpe, shortly afterwards addressed a letter, of which the following is a translation. It must be considered as a curious specimen of epistolary literature.

“ *On board the Sans Culotte, at Genoa, the first of Germinal, in the Third year of the Republic.* ”

“ LIBERTY !—Perish the Tyrants and their Slaves.—EQUALITY ! ”

“ I have received, Sir, a copy of the letter which you have written to the Neapolitan Consul, at Leghorn, dated March 18th, and recognised in it the

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repeating frigate to the rear squadron under Admiral Sir Hyde Parker.*

After the action, the *Romulus* proceeded with the fleet to Minorca; and on the 8th of June, Mr. Broke was removed to the *Britannia*, flag-ship of Lord Hotham, commander-in-chief, and consequently in the action with the French fleet off Frejus, on the 14th July.

Mr. Broke was shortly after appointed third lieutenant of the Southampton frigate, Captain William Shield. In this ship we find him employed in the squadron under Commodore Nelson, harassing the enemy's coasting trade, under the western shores of the Gulf of Genoa, and in co-operation with the German army encamped at Savona.

The Southampton, in the month of September, 1795, returned to Leghorn, when Captain Shield resigned the command of her to Captain James Macnamara, † who proceeded with her off Genoa, to blockade the French frigate *la Vestale*, which, with the corvette *la Brune*, of 28 guns, two brigs of war, of 16 guns each, and several gun-boats, was there watching for an opportunity to convoy, to Toulon, a fleet of vessels laden with corn. Nor was her vigilance unsuccessful; for, observing the Southampton alone, the French squadron, under cover of the night, sailed with their convoy. They were, however, not unobserved by the Southampton, who attacked *La Vestale*, and was strenuously opposed,

bravado and dastardliness of your nation. Bravado, because it contains false statements, speaking of a battle gained by the slaves of Albion and Naples, while they required five of their ships to combat two of ours, and while out of their five, four have been as badly treated as our two. Dastardly, because I have known it ever since the siege of Toulon, and your troops are so despicable to my sight, that were I to fall in at the head of a Republican detachment, with a corps of your countrymen, I would regret wasting powder and ball to kill them, and order them to be knocked on the head with the butt end of the musket. A freeman who abhors slavery, tells the slaves what he thinks, and what he would do. In consequence, I declare to you, that if I ever fall in with you, I will compel you to own, that what I think of your nation is real truth, and that none but a coxcomb can send in such an account as your's.

“ The Republican General,

(Signed) “ LA HARPE.”

* For a portrait and memoir of this officer, see N. C. Vol. XX. p. 337.

† This was the officer, who, in April, 1803, had the misfortune to kill Colonel Montgomery in a duel. Vide N. C. Vol. IX. p. 317.

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while the other vessels of the squadron bore away with the convoy, and was shortly after followed by *La Vestale*, who, by her superior sailing, effected her escape. During the chase, *La Vestale's* colours came down, but were re-hoisted—she had eight men killed, and nine wounded; the *Southampton* had not a man hurt: with her rigging much cut, and the subsequent loss of her mizen-mast, she chased and continued the chase till the enemy had nearly got into *Villa Franca*.

The *Southampton* having refitted at Ajaccio, went up the Adriatic for the protection of the trade, and on her return joined the fleet under Admiral Sir John Jervis (afterwards Earl St. Vincent*), and was employed in cruising off Toulon and Marseilles for the annoyance of the enemy's coasting trade.

In the evening of the 9th of June, 1796, a French cruiser was observed working up to Hieres bay. The commander of the *Southampton* was called on board the *Victory*, the ship was pointed out to him by the admiral, and he was directed to make a dash at her through the Grand Pass. The enterprise was most daring and difficult: the *Southampton* immediately got under weigh, and her commander, with verbal orders, only, pushed through the Grand Pass, and hoping to be mistaken for a neutral, or French frigate, hauled up under the batteries on the N. E. end of Porquerole, under easy sail, and by this manœuvre got within pistol-shot of the enemy undiscovered. The French captain was cautioned by Captain Macnamara not to attempt a resistance that must be fruitless, who answered him by the fire of his pistol, and a broadside from his ship. The *Southampton* now laid the enemy's ship on board, and she was entered and carried by Lieutenant Lydiard, at the head of the boarders, in about ten minutes, † although desperately resisted by the captain (who fell) and a hundred men under arms prepared to receive him. The two ships were now lashed together, when Captain Macnamara finding a difficulty in getting from under the battery of Fort Breganson, which poured a heavy and incessant fire, Lieutenant Lydiard suspecting the cause, searched, in darkness, from

* *Vide N. C. Vol. IV. p. 1*, for a portrait and memoir of Earl St. Vincent.

† The similarity of the two captures of *L'Utile* and *Chesapeake*, might warrant the supposition, that Captain Broke had, in the latter instance, availed himself of a recollection of the former.

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stem to stern, for the hawser, which he found connected the ship with the shore ; with repeated blows of his sword the hawser was cut, and the ship released. The Southampton and her prize, which proved to be L'Utile corvette, commanded by Citoyen François Veza, with 130 men, joined the fleet about half-past one o'clock. The enemy had 25 killed and wounded, but several escaped on shore in the launch.

Captain Macnamara, his officers, and crew, were deservedly complimented on the achievement of so arduous an undertaking ; and Lieutenant Lydiard, whose gallantry had so greatly contributed to effect it, was promoted to the command of the prize.*

The services next performed by the Southampton were, as a part of the squadron under Commodore Nelson, in occupying Ferrajo, † evacuating Caprea and Corsica, ‡ in the expedition against Piombino, and in the siege of Castiglione.

In a cruise off Cape del Mel, in the month of December, the Southampton captured the Corso, Spanish man of war brig, and soon afterwards joined the fleet under Sir John Jervis, off Cape St. Vincent, having passed near the Spanish fleet, which three days afterwards brought on the memorable action of the 14th of February, 1797.§ In the month of June following, the Southampton returned to England, and was paid off, and Mr. Broke terminated his first career of service.

It was not long that he remained unnoticed ; and he was accordingly appointed third lieutenant in the *Amelia*, under the command of the Hon. Captain Charles Herbert, || which ship was

* *Vide N. C. Vol. XIX. p. 445.*

† Commodore Nelson and Major Duncan took possession of the town and port of Ferrajo, without resistance, on the 10th of July, 1796.

‡ The evacuation of Corsica was in consequence of the aversion of the Corsicans to British sovereignty in that island, who having effected a formidable confederacy with the French, Sir Gilbert Elliot, the vice-roy, informed them, that he should leave them to their former masters, and the island was accordingly evacuated by the British on the 15th October, 1796.

§ *Vide N. C. Vol. IV. p. 35.*

|| This gentleman was unfortunately drowned on the 12th September, 1803, at Gijon. He was the second son of the Earl of Carnarvon, and with a friend, the son of Mr. Creed, the navy agent, had gone over to see the country. They had quitted the *Swallow*, Captain Milner, and were going on shore in the boat, when a violent surf broke over her, filled her with water, and plunged all within her into the sea. Captain Herbert and his friend sunk, before any assistance could be obtained. He had published a volume of poems a short time before his death, which evince him to have possessed no small share of literary talent.

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attached to the Channel fleet, under Lord Bridport, as repeating frigate.

In the month of September, 1798, the *Amelia* was appointed, in conjunction with the *Ethalion* and *Sylph*, to watch a French squadron, consisting of an 80-gun ship (*la Hoche*), eight frigates, and a tender, proceeding with troops from Brest to Ireland, under the command of M. Bompert, for the rebel forces. The three frigates being afterwards joined by the *Anson*, the *Sylph* was detached; and from the 17th September to the 10th October, the enemy was closely watched. The *Amelia* then joined Commodore Sir John Borlase Warren,* who was cruising off Achill Head, on the look-out for Bompert's squadron, of whose sailing from Brest he had been informed. On the 11th the enemy was discovered; and, having been joined by the *Ethalion*, *Anson*, and *Sylph*, Sir John gave the signal for a general chase. The weather was very boisterous, but at five o'clock on the morning of the 12th, the enemy was seen at a little distance to windward, the line-of-battle ship, *La Hoche*, having her main-top-mast gone. The French squadron bore down, and formed their line in close order on the starboard tack. The British squadron having been much spread by the weather and length of chase, it was seven o'clock before Sir John had his ships in a sufficiently collected state to engage the enemy, when the signal being made, at half-past seven, Captain Thornborough, in the *Robust*, commenced the action, and being ably supported by Captain De Courcy, in the *Magnanime*, at eleven, *La Hoche* struck, after having made a most gallant defence. The frigates then bore away, closely pursued, and after a five hours' running fight, *La Bellone*, and *La Coquille*, of 40 guns each, and *L'Ambuscade*, of 36 guns, surrendered. At midnight on the 13th, *La Resolue*, of 40 guns, and 500 seamen and soldiers, struck, after a contest of twenty-five minutes, to the *Melampus*, Captain Moore, who had parted company in the chase. The loss of the enemy in this action, amounted to 68 killed, and 118 wounded; the English had 3 killed, and 35 wounded.

In January, 1799, Mr. Broke was raised to the rank of com-

* For a portrait and memoir of Sir John Borlase Warren, see N. C. Vol. III. p. 333.

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mander, and appointed to the *Falcon* fire-brig, at Sheerness; but as the vessel was not manned, she remained at her moorings in the Medway.

We are now arrived at that period of Captain Broke's professional life, in which he will appear as a principal—his services will henceforth bear a more prominent character, and we shall find that he has never failed to avail himself of every opportunity that occurred, to render them, to the utmost of his power, beneficial to his country, and finally with a brilliancy of character, that will equal the brightest of our naval exploits.

Captain Broke was, in the autumn of 1799, appointed to the *Shark* sloop of war, and ordered to join the North Sea fleet under Lord Duncan. In this ship, his services consisted in convoying to the Elbe or Baltic, and in cruising on the Dutch coast; but the *Shark* being a bad sailer, his captures were too trifling for remark.

On the 14th of February, 1801, the fourth anniversary of Earl St. Vincent's victory, Captain Broke obtained post rank, and retired for a time on half-pay. On the renewal of the war, his applications for a ship were not successful; but as inactivity was no part of the character of Captain Broke, he employed himself in training the peasantry to arms, to oppose the threatened invasion from France.

In the month of April, 1805, Captain Broke was appointed to the *Druid*, of 32 guns; but the scarcity of hands being so great, that many ships were lying idle in consequence of it, Captain Broke offered to proceed to sea with scarcely a sufficient number to work the ship, and his offer being accepted, he sailed on a cruise for men off the Land's End, and in the Bristol Channel. Having made up his complement, the *Druid* was attached to the squadron under Lord Gardner, on the Irish station.

Captain Broke was now employed in cruising on the coast of Ireland, or in the Bay of Biscay; but fortune did not favour him with any opportunities of splendid service. He captured on the 2d February, 1806, the *Prince Murat*, French privateer, of 18 guns, and 127 men; and on the 1st of May following, fell in with *Le Paudour*, French brig corvette, of the same force; and after a run of 160 miles, he drove her into Admiral Stirling's squadron, where, by the admiral's permission, he took possession of her, and sent her to Plymouth. He took also some smaller

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vessels; and about the same time chased the French frigate *Topaze* into the Raz Passage, but could not come up with her; while the French captain declined the contest, mistaking a prize brig, in company with the *Druid*, for an English brig of war.

In June, 1806, Captain Broke was appointed to the *Shannon*, of 38 guns, the ship in which he was destined to establish his fame as a British captain in the first rank of naval renown.

But though appointed in June, being then at sea, it was not until the 14th of September that he joined her. She was then attached to Commodore Owen's squadron, off Boulogne, and her crew being completed, she was employed under that officer in the grand rocket expedition.

In April, 1807, the Greenland whale ships having been molested by a squadron of French frigates, in the preceding year, Captain Broke was ordered to proceed, with the *Meleagar*, Captain Broughton, to the Greenland seas, for their protection. On the 26th of April, the two frigates sailed from Yarmouth; and having received information from some whalers first spoken with, that the greater part of the ships were fishing on the coast of Spitzbergen, Captain Broke determined to proceed thither. On the 7th of May, they fell in with the ice; and after pushing through it with much perseverance and difficulty, they on the 17th June made the southern land of Spitzbergen. Thence they proceeded to Magdalena harbour, where they anchored on the 23d, in the 80th degree of north latitude, and nearer to the pole than any ships of war had reached before, excepting the discovery ships under the late Lord Mulgrave.

Here, while the frigates remained to water, Captain Broke, having observed that the charts by which the whalers were in general directed, were so erroneous as to lead to much danger, made a correct survey of the bay and harbour.

On the 4th of July, the *Shannon* and *Meleagar* sailed from Magdalena harbour, and stood to the northward, till their farther progress was prevented by the ice, in 80° 6' N.; not finding any of the whalers, they returned to the westward, and after speaking several vessels, made John Mayon's island on the 23d July, and thence returned homeward, through such a constant envelopment of fogs, that they saw no more of the fishers.

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On the 23d of August, they arrived in Leith Roads; whence, having completed their provisions, they sailed for Shetland, off which place they cruised till the 20th September, when, having separated from her companion, the Shannon, on the 25th, anchored at Yarmouth, and on the 28th arrived in the Downs, whence she proceeded to Spithead to fit for foreign service.

In consequence of the declaration of war against Great Britain by the Portuguese government, an expedition was projected for the reduction of Madeira, and a squadron, consisting of four sail of the line and three frigates, was accordingly placed under the command of Sir Samuel Hood.* This squadron, having been joined by the Shannon at Plymouth Sound, sailed on the 30th November, 1807, for Cork, where its strength was increased by the junction also of the *Alceste* and *Success* frigates, and seventeen sail of transports, with about 3,500 troops under the command of General Beresford; with this force, and 1,500 marines and seamen trained to the use of small arms, the squadron sailed; and having been joined by the *Comus* frigate on the 23d December, which had been detached to reconnoitre the island, on the 24th the squadron ran into Funchal roads, anchored close to the walls of the town, and brought the Governor to an unconditional surrender, by a mere display of its force.—Possession of the island being thus obtained, the Shannon was ordered to convoy the transports home. She sailed on the 14th January, 1808, and on the 7th of February, anchored in Plymouth Sound.

The comparatively unimportant series of services to which the activity of Captain Broke was now restricted, as attached in the Shannon to the Channel fleet under Lord Gambier, in blockades, and observations of the enemy's motions, would not justify us in trespassing on the patience of our readers, by entering into a detail of them. Toward the end of May, 1811, the Shannon was ordered home; and on the 1st of June, she arrived at Plymouth; where, having been docked and new coppered, she was ordered round to Portsmouth to complete for foreign service.

On the 30th of July, in company with the *Hyacinth*, Captain Broke sailed under sealed orders, with a large convoy to Lisbon and the Mediterranean. At Lisbon he opened his orders, and in

* For a portrait and memoir of Sir Samuel Hood, see N. C. Vol. XVII. p. 1.