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and General of Marines

John Barrow

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The Life of Richard Earl Howe

Richard, Earl Howe (1726–99) participated in some of the Royal Navy's most significant conflicts. As captain of the *Dunkirk*, he fired the first shots of the Seven Years' War off the eastern coast of North America in 1755. After being forced to juggle the demands of the American Revolutionary War with the British government's reluctance to put the ships he needed at his disposal, he resigned his command of the North American Station, but later made a comeback, masterminding the battle against the French on the 'Glorious First of June' in 1794. Prolific author Sir John Barrow (1764–1848) drew on more than 400 of Howe's personal letters in preparing this substantial biography, first published in 1838. Several of Barrow's other works have also been reissued in this series, including his autobiography and accounts of the early years of polar exploration.

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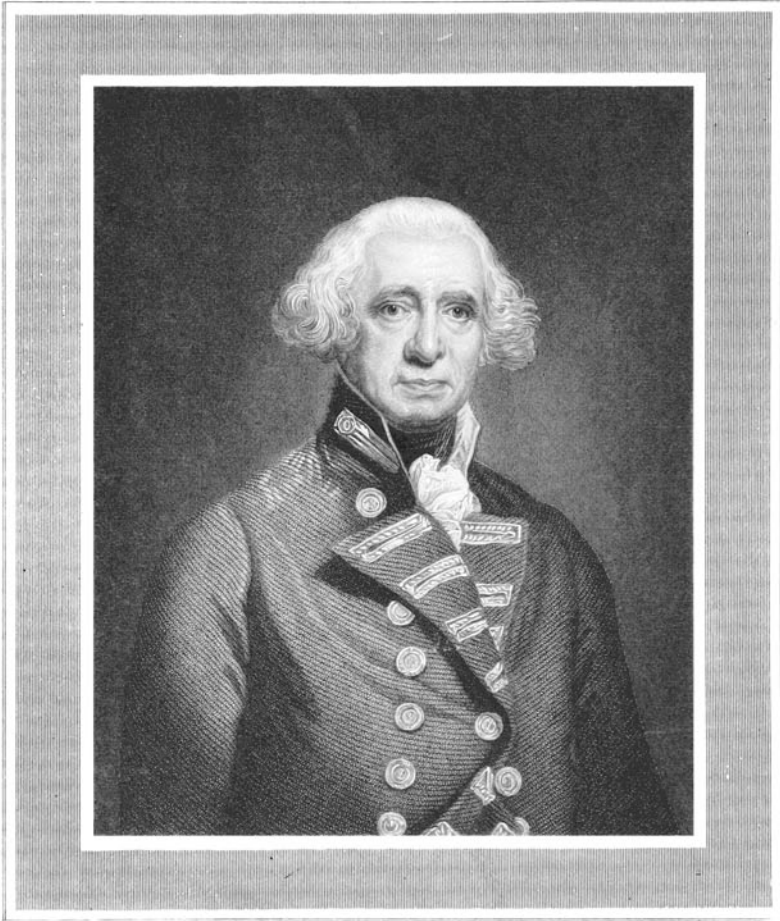
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THE LIFE

OF

RICHARD EARL HOWE, K.G.,

ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET, AND
GENERAL OF MARINES.

BY

SIR JOHN BARROW, BART., F.R.S.

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P R E F A C E.

It may appear remarkable enough that, amidst the profusion of publications which annually issue from the press, the biography of such a man as Lord Howe, whose whole life was devoted to the service of his country (civil and military), without interruption, for more than sixty years, should not have found a place among them. No Life, however, of Admiral Lord Howe has yet been published. We have Memoirs, and Sketches, and Scraps, in which many of his brilliant exploits and professional services have been briefly noticed, mostly from official documents, rarely from private sources, yet nothing whatever relating to his private character or opinions, either from himself or any part of his family: but these brief memoirs afford no record of his many acquirements, great virtues, and moral excellence as a member of society. No blame attaches to the writers of such desultory pieces for these omissions. They were in the same position as the Israelites in Egypt—unable to make bricks

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without straw—they had few materials for the task, beyond the dry narratives of the *Gazettes*, and not always them, and the equally dry official letters on service.

Under these circumstances it may not unreasonably be asked, what new materials are now put forward?—how happens it, considering the number of naval officers who write naval novels, and works on professional subjects (and many of whom write well), that a landsman should undertake the history of one of the most distinguished admirals of the British navy?—and lastly, what is the extent of his acquaintance with naval matters? Without demurring to the right of these, or any such questions, being put, which the perusal of the work itself would best satisfy, there can be no objection to answer them briefly at once.

To the first, and indeed the only question of importance, it is answered, that the fresh materials consist of something more than four hundred letters, all in the hand-writing of Earl Howe, and all addressed to one individual, long and high in his confidence, embracing a period between the years 1776 and 1799, on a great variety of subjects, professional and otherwise;—of several private letters to and from the Earl of Chatham;—of the

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Noble Admiral's private Journal during the time his flag was up, very full, and written entirely by himself;—of various communications received from several flag-officers and others, who served under him, and now living ;—and of a few very interesting letters from his Majesty George III., and George Prince of Wales, to a member of the Howe family.

With regard to the second question : if our naval writers of novels and romances, in humble imitation of a celebrated novelist of former days, when the navy no more resembled the navy now, than their humour does that of Smollett, had not been so wholly taken up in their works of fancy and imagination—some of them tending to degrade rather than exalt the naval character—instead of applying themselves to naval biography, in which there is ample scope, the landsman would in all probability have left the task to one of the profession.

And lastly, if traversing the Atlantic to the 80th degree of north latitude—to the 40th degree of south latitude ; and the Eastern Ocean to the 40th degree of north latitude ; crossing in these passages the Equinoctial line six times—may not have converted the landsman into a seaman, yet they may be assumed as having afforded him the means

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of knowing something of a ship and of what belongs to the naval service; added to which, a servitude of nearly thirty-three years in the Admiralty is not likely to have diminished that knowledge; but he has not troubled himself nor the reader much with naval tactics and naval discipline.

It was the possession of the materials above mentioned, together with the official documents to which I had access, and many of which are now for the first time made public, that induced me to undertake the "Life of Lord Howe," from whose distinguished and honourable character the rising officers of the British navy, and its future heroes, may take an useful example—a better they cannot follow—in all the branches of the naval service. I have made such free use of Lord Howe's letters and Journal, containing his own account of his acts, and his opinions and sentiments in his own words, on a variety of subjects, mostly professional, that a considerable portion of the latter part of the narrative may almost be considered as autobiographical; but unfortunately the younger part of his life affords no such valuable materials.

If I entertained doubts of engaging in the task, which I certainly did from the want of all private correspondence with or from the Noble Earl, that

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could throw any light on his moral character, his opinions or sentiments, previous to his arriving at his flag, those doubts at once gave way to the flattering approbation, and the expression of a desire on the part of his late Majesty, that I should undertake it. His commands on this occasion were personally conveyed to me only a few days before the commencement, or rather indication, of the fatal illness which deprived the nation of a Sovereign eagerly devoted to its honour and its interests—of a Prince punctual in the discharge of his public duties, easy of access, and always ready to oblige, and to do a good-natured act—of a Man kind-hearted, amiable, and affectionate in all the relations of private and domestic life.

His Majesty was pleased to say that, having understood I was about to employ myself in writing the Life of the late Lord Howe, he was glad to hear it was likely to fall into such safe hands, for the Admiral was a great favourite with his father, and indeed a sort of connexion of the family; that he knew the present Earl had for some time past been desirous of finding some one qualified to write the life of his grandfather, and ought to consider himself fortunate. The King then entered into the history of Lord Howe's life,

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went over the leading features and events that distinguished it, which an extraordinary memory enabled him to do with a degree of correctness quite surprising; he pointed out some passages in the Earl's life, not generally known, and which he said would require caution in touching upon, and that he was desirous of mentioning them to me. Though this interview, with which I was honoured, happened on the Sunday immediately preceding the last levee he ever held, I could not discover, on that day, any difference from his usual cheerfulness, manner, or appearance.

The great deficiency in the correspondence and papers of the Howe family is thus accounted for:—A chest of papers, after the death of the Earl, and another at the decease of his sister, Mrs. Howe, came into the possession of the youngest daughter, Louisa Catherine Marchioness of Sligo, as the executrix of both. The present Marquis had them sent to his seat at Westport, in Ireland, where, in consequence of a fire which broke out and destroyed many things in the library, it is supposed these papers shared the same fate. The Marquis has caused every search to be made for them, but without success. From the circumstance of Lord Howe having written so great a

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number of letters to one individual, commencing towards the latter part of his life, and from the character of the Honourable Mrs. Howe, universally known to the fashionable and literary portion of the society of London, there cannot be a doubt that a large mass of curious and valuable correspondence must have been destroyed; but it can be as little doubted that much still remains in the possession of individuals.

Biographers are generally found to be panegyrists; some there are, however, who undertake to write a life for the savage pleasure of tearing it in pieces. I have no motive nor influence whatever to sway me in either category. I have conscientiously praised Lord Howe; truth and justice demanded it at my hands—truth, after a careful revision of the record of his acts, and a fair estimate of his professional and moral character—and justice, that the memory of their spotless author and possessor should not altogether perish.

It remains only for me to express thus publicly my acknowledgments to those from whom I have received valuable assistance, and in an especial manner to Captain Lord Radstock, for the unwearied pains he kindly took in procuring, and endeavouring to procure, all the information and

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materials that could be had in the most likely quarters; and to Captain Sir Lucius Curtis for the full permission he liberally gave me to make use of the valuable collection of letters addressed by the Earl to his late father, Sir Roger Curtis. I wish also to acknowledge, with thanks, the obligation I feel myself under to Admiral Sir Robert Stopford and Admiral Sir Robert Barlow, who most readily (Sir R. Stopford voluntarily) gave me such information as, from their having commanded frigates in the battle of the 1st of June, and enjoyed the friendship of the Noble Earl, they were able to give. I received, also, communications from several other flag-officers who served as lieutenants in the same battle; of the flag-officers none remain; and of the captains who received medals not one is left. In conclusion, I cannot omit rendering the thanks that I feel to be due to Henry Bedford, Esq., Keeper of the Admiralty Records, by whose valuable assistance much time, and a great deal of the tedious labour of research, have been spared to me.

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DIRECTIONS FOR THE BINDER.

Portrait of Lord Howe to *face Title*.

Fac-simile of a letter of George III., p. 1.

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Windsor June 11. 1794.

Your Majesty's Zeal for the great cause in which this Country
 is engag'd adds to Her becoming ardour for the glory
 of Her family must make Her feel with redoubled
 joy the glorious news brought by Sir Roger Curtis, the
 will & hope be satisfi'd now that Earl Richard has
 with 25. sail of the line attack'd 26. of the Enemy
 taken six and sunk two; besides it is not improbable
 that some of the disabled Ships of the Enemy may
 not be able to reach their own Shore. I own I could
 not refrain from expressing my sentiments on the occasion
 but will not detain Her by adding more.

George III.

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