III.

NOTES IN CONNEXION WITH TWELVE AUTOGRAPH LETTERS, BY MAJOR-GENERAL JAMES WOLFE, WHO FELL AT THE CAPTURE OF QUEBEC, ON 13TH SEPTEMBER 1759, ADDRESSED TO CAPTAIN AFTERWARDS LIEUT.-COLONEL WILLIAM RICKSON, QUARTER-MASTER-GENERAL OF NORTH BRITAIN. BY JOHN BUCHANAN, ESQ., GLASGOW, CORR. MEM. S.A. SCOT.

The capture of Quebec, more than one hundred years ago, has always been regarded as an achievement of great national importance, conferring as it did on Britain the key to the French possessions in Canada, and which ultimately led to the transference of that important province to the British Crown. With that event the name of General James Wolfe is inseparably connected, as the young hero who commanded the expedition, and who, after surmounting difficulties almost unexampled, by a daring feat succeeded in the object of the enterprise, and fell in the arms of victory.

Wolfe was one of the youngest generals ever intrusted with the command of a British army. When appointed by the elder Pitt to undertake the expedition against Quebec, Wolfe was only thirty-three. But what he lacked in years was amply compensated by admirable military qualities. One writer thus portrays his character:[1]—"Wolfe was assiduously and conscientiously attentive to his profession, and constitutionally and steadily daring; his mind clear and active, his temper lively and almost impetuous; independent without pride, and generous to profusion. Exact in discipline himself, he was always punctual to obey. His judgment was acute, his memory quick and retentive, and his disposition candid, constant, and sincere. His courage never quailed before danger, nor shrank from responsibility. His letters breathe a spirit of gentleness and tenderness over which ambition could not triumph."

Yet of Wolfe's personal history little is known. He fell in the bloom of youth, the last of a warlike race, and the blaze of triumph amidst which his country lost one of her most gallant sons, seems to have

[1] Warburton's Conquest of Canada. 1850.

obscured by its very effulgence the minor incidents of his short but glorious career. No Life of Wolfe has ever appeared. What is known of him is fragmentary, and scattered in notes, letters, and other transitory memoranda, which mere chance has presented. No one has yet gathered up the stray leaves. Lord Mahon (now Earl Stanhope), in his fascinating English history, and Gleig, have published selections of some of the more interesting portions of Wolfe's letters. But there are good grounds for believing that many more exist in the possession of private individuals as yet unedited;[1] and it would be a just tribute to the long-departed soldier were these made public, in the hope that such an accumulation of authentic materials may induce some one competent to the task to undertake a full and comprehensive life of this excellent officer, who rendered his country signal service at a critical juncture.

The twelve autograph letters by Wolfe now presented to the Society of the Antiquaries of Scotland come within this category. They contain much curious and interesting matter, affording also some fine glimpses into his innermost feelings and character. The discovery of these letters was entirely accidental. It happened that an elderly Glasgow gentleman died a few years ago, in whose possession an antique military-chest had remained more than half a century quite uncared for. It was known to have belonged to a relative long dead, a colonel in the army, but supposed to contain only useless papers. The key had been broken in the rusty lock, and thus the contents were fortunately preserved from dispersion and loss. After the gentleman's death, the long locked chest was broken open by his representatives, and found to be full of antique military reports and papers, besides bundles of old letters. In a corner, carefully tied up by themselves, a small group of letters was discovered, signed "*James Wolfe.*" By the courtesy of the owner (an old college companion) these letters were placed in my possession, and my curiosity having been excited by their perusal, I caused them to be printed in a publication then coming out under the auspices of a few Glasgow gentlemen, titled "Glasgow: Past

[1] One instance may be cited. In March 1856 seven letters by Wolfe to his uncle, dated in 1757–8–9, were sold publicly, at large prices, by the eminent firm of Messrs Sotheby and Wilkinson, London. I have preserved the names of the purchasers, so that they might perhaps be traced.

and Present," accompanied by an elucidatory sketch of Wolfe's history, which I ventured to draw, so far as the meagre materials within my reach enabled me.[1] I had the honour of presenting a copy of the volume to the Society, through my friend Dr Daniel Wilson, the excellent Secretary at that time; and to that volume I beg respectfully to refer for the contents of the twelve letters, which there appear *ad longam.*

I shall only observe here that the letters embrace a period of nine years, viz., from 1749 till 1758. The officer to whom they are addressed was Captain afterwards Lieut.-Colonel William Rickson, a native of Pembroke, who had served along with Wolfe on the Continent, and more particularly in Flanders. Rickson was uncle to the afterwards celebrated Colonel Barré, one of the supposed authors of the letters by *Junius*, and an aide-de-camp to Wolfe. During the Continental war, Wolfe and Rickson appear to have contracted a very intimate and lasting friendship, which is evinced in every page of the letters. Wolfe unbosoms himself in that correspondence in the most unreserved manner. Perhaps, in this respect, these letters are the most interesting of any which have yet appeared in connection with Wolfe's name. Among other topics, Wolfe comments on the unskilful manner in which "the Scotch War" (meaning the Rebellion of 1745) was conducted on the royal side; his own views of the way in which the Highlands should be curbed, from his personal observation while quartered in the north; remarks on the condition of Halifax, then bordering on the French possessions; criticises the expedition against Louisbourg, and the failure of the attempt on Rochefort, in both of which he served; his opinion of the Glasgow people, &c., &c.

The following are the dates of the letters, to some of which Wolfe's seal is still adhering:—

No. 1. Glasgow, 2 April 1749.
2. [Place crumbled away] but date 1750.
3. Old Burlington Street [London], 19 March 1751.
4. Banff, 9 June 1751 (eleven pages in length).
5. Exeter, 9 December 1754.

[1] Vol. iii. pp. 741–792.—The very curious and interesting work here mentioned, "Glasgow: Past and Present," consists of three vols. in 8vo, printed "by private subscription," Glasgow, 1851–1856.

No. 6. Exeter, 7 March 1755.
7. Lymington, 19 July 1755.
8. London, 21 July 1757.
9. Blackheath [near London], 5 Novem. 1757.
10. Blackheath, 12 January 1758.
11. Portsmouth, 7 February 1758.
12. Salisbury, 1 December 1758.

Wolfe fell in action within nine months after the date of this last letter to Rickson; but no doubt, from their great intimacy, others would be written during this intervening time, though not now extant among the mass of old papers before referred to.

The house in which Wolfe resided while in Glasgow is still standing, in the antique suburb called Camlachie. In one of the letters (No. 1) he tells Rickson that he was then receiving instructions from a Glasgow teacher in Latin and Mathematics. This quaint-looking old house was built in 1720 by a then noted Jacobite, John Walkinshaw of Barrowfield, father of the mistress of Prince Charles; but at the time Wolfe was quartered there, the edifice belonged to William Orr, Esq., whose father had purchased the Barrowfield estate from the Walkinshaws.

Wolfe's military cloak is preserved under a glass-case in the Tower of London; his sword hangs in the United Service Museum; his spurs were during many years in the possession of a Glasgow gentleman, long dead, but are now unfortunately lost; a small book which Wolfe had in his pocket when he fell, titled "The Treasury of Fortification," with his opinion of it written on the fly-leaf, is in the library of the Royal Artillery, Woolwich; and the twelve letters now presented to the Society for preservation are perhaps not the least interesting memorials of this brave man.

I may finally remark, that Colonel Rickson, to whom the letters are addressed, survived Wolfe eleven years. He was an officer of much experience, excellent judgment, and great bravery; generous, friendly, and affectionate. He died at Edinburgh, 19th July 1770, in the fifty-first year of his age, and the thirty-first in the service of his country. His remains were interred at Restalrig, and a suitable inscription on his tomb records the excellence of his character. A fine miniature likeness of Rickson, in his antique regimentals, is preserved by his grand-niece at

Glasgow, who has gifted the letters to the Society, and it is interesting to scan the features of one who so fully shared the friendship and confidence of the conqueror of Quebec.