

The Tarbert Fencibles were soon afterwards sent to England to do garrison duty in the room of the regulars required in Holland.

Before leaving home reiterated promises were extorted, both from the boy and his captain, that he should not, on any account, be induced or permitted to enlist for active service abroad. His mother's fears, prompted by the boy's well-known bias, took this precaution to ensure his return before she would consent to his departure. Much, however, as the lad loved soldiering, there was a stronger deterrent to his taking the Queen's shilling than even his mother's fears or his captain's promise to bring him back in safety to his native village.

Corporal punishment was at that time inflicted in the army for the most trifling offences, and the reports of the sufferings of the men under it had so excited his indignation that FitzGibbon believed no persuasions could ever induce him to put himself voluntarily in a position to run the risk of incurring such degradation.

## CHAPTER II.

ON the 9th of June, 1799, Major-General White-lock arrived at Poole, in Dorsetshire, where the Tarbert Fencibles were then quartered, authorized to recruit non-commissioned officers and men from its ranks for active service in the army awaiting embarkation for the invasion of Holland.

Before leaving his quarters, FitzGibbon received a hasty visit from Captain Creagh. He came to remind him once more of the many promises he had made to bring him back to Ireland, and added, " If you are firm in your refusal to volunteer for active service, I'll take you with me to Ireland, where I hear I'm to be sent shortly on recruiting duty."

FitzGibbon assured him he had no intention or desire to volunteer, so he might make his mind easy on that score.

An hour afterwards the sergeants were paraded in the barrack-yard to be addressed by the general. He spoke at considerable length, saying, among other things, that " as the enemy would not come to fight us, it was determined by the Government that we should go and fight them ;" that he " was quite confident we would rather go and fight for our king and country than remain at home walking the streets of Poole with powdered heads ;" and, in short, that he

"expected to see us in a few months' time up to our knees in French blood."

Little as he knew of the world, this speech sounded an extravagant one to FitzGibbon. His position placed him directly opposite to where the general stood. His evident interest attracted that officer's attention, and he repeatedly addressed him directly, asking if he understood what he said ?

The sergeants were then dismissed to join their companies.

After parade the regiment was formed into a hollow square, when the general addressed the men, much in the same strain as he had used with the sergeants, desiring those who wished to volunteer to step out of their ranks into the centre ; and going from company to company he urged the men individually to do so. Upon reaching FitzGibbon's, he expressed surprise at seeing him still in the ranks.

" I thought you would be one of the first to volunteer."

" I am determined not to volunteer, sir," replied the soldier.

" And why should a young man of your appearance not seize so glorious an opportunity of pushing his fortunes in the service of his king and country ?"

" Because, sir, I am not willing to spend all my life as a private soldier, nor as a non-commissioned officer, and from the little I have seen of the army, I have no hope of obtaining a commission without money or friends."

" Can you write ? " asked the general.

" Certainly he can, very well," answered Captain Creagh for him, and added some kindly expressions commending the lad's diligence and knowledge of his drill.

" Why, then," said the general, " I will be the first to recommend you."

" You will not, sir," replied the boy, with youthful conviction as well as priggishness, " venture to recommend me until you know if I be qualified to hold a commission, which I am now convinced I am not."

" All this," replied the general, " only tends to convince me that you are, or very soon will be."

But FitzGibbon was still determined. The general turned and went along the ranks, urging the men. At length, in answer to his representations of the many advantages to be derived from active service, a number replied that if FitzGibbon would volunteer they would.

" What was I to do?" FitzGibbon often asked when telling the story in after years. "I must either forget my promises, my fears, silence my doubts, or brand myself forever a coward, not only in the eyes of my comrades but in my own."

He assented, and carried forty men with him into the ranks of the English army.

The step was taken and could not be retraced, but with a mentally registered vow that if it should ever be his fate to incur a sentence to the infliction of the

lash, justly or unjustly, he would take his own life rather than suffer such degradation.

FitzGibbon joined the army under Sir Ralph Abercrombie, then encamped on Bareham Downs, and on August 6th, 1799, he was draughted into the 49th, with the rank of sergeant. On the following morning, they were marched to the coast, and embarked at the neighboring seaport.

The fleet with the transports put to sea on the 12th. Bad weather prevented the vessels approaching the coast of Holland until the 26th, when they anchored near the Helder. The troops were landed on the 27th, but here we may quote FitzGibbon's own words :

"The flat boats in which we were sent from the transports moved off for the shore in the grey light of early day. Our mortar ships had been throwing bombs to the shore for a short time before. The distance, however, was so considerable that I did not think they could do much execution. My early studies in Greek and Roman history had given me an exaggerated idea of heroism, bravery and battle, and I fully expected to find the French battalions drawn up in battle array upon the beach, ready to greet us with a volley the moment we were within range, and, as our boats touched the shore, to oppose our landing in a fierce hand-to-hand conflict.

"As we approached, and the light increased, I could see five dark lines to our right, moving down upon us, as I expected, to oppose our landing, but upon

nearer approach I could distinguish their scarlet uniforms. They were in fact the five British regiments landed some distance to our right, and which as yet had met with no resistance. Were the French so deficient in courage, I wondered, as not to make the most of such evident advantages ?

"The low line of sand-hills opposite our landing place was lined with troops. A volley was fired upon us as we jumped ashore. The regiments already landed charged up the hill and drove the enemy back at the point of the bayonet, while we landed without further molestation.

"After fifty years of life, and having had some experience of warfare, I am convinced my boyish opinion was the correct one. Had the enemy realized my expectation and opposed our landing in earnest, the boats must have been destroyed or captured. To know the value or force of fear upon the human mind is one of the most important qualifications for a commander to possess, second only to the power of banishing fear from his own ranks and driving it before him into the ranks of the enemy. The officer who has not this power will never be distinguished from the herd of ordinary men, and should never be entrusted with a separate command.

"The brigade to which I belonged, Sir John Moore's, was marched to the left, towards the Helder, where we found no enemy-. All the fighting was on our right, where our men drove the enemy back into the country."

There is a gap here in FitzGibbon's narrative from August 27th to October 2nd. During that period the Duke of York had joined the army and assumed the command.

" Long before day on the morning of the 2nd of October, the Russian and British forces advanced to attack the French posted in the sand-hills on the coast near Egmont-op-Zee. The column to which the 49th belonged advanced along the beach, having the sand-hills to the right, the rolling sea in close proximity on our left. About eight o'clock the advance commenced skirmishing, and the column was halted. Several of the officers ran up a few paces on the sides of the hills to snatch a view of our troops on the level beach. I followed their example. Eighteen thousand men were on the plain before me. The long lines of cavalry and artillery deploying to their several positions, the life and stir of coming battle surprised and filled me with delight. I had dreamed of deeds of bravery, of fierce single combats, but now that the battle was imminent, I was surprised to find that I was not nearly so brave as I had imagined myself.

" The first man I saw killed was a fine handsome young ensign, a lieutenant of grenadiers, who had volunteered from the South Middlesex militia to the line, still wearing the uniform of his late regiment. He carried one of the regimental colors, and was one of the finest-looking men I had ever seen. I stood for a moment to look upon him as he fell, and thought

sadly of the young wife he had left to mourn his untimely end. It was but a moment. I had to run on to keep pace with my company and find myself in the midst of a great battle. I was a supernumerary sergeant ; I had no definite duties or position, nothing to do but look about me. My preconceived ideas of the discipline of the regular army were soon dissipated. The nature of the ground, the confusion and apparent hastiness of the officers served to cause disorder, and I thought, ' Surely the French must be better soldiers than we are.' "

FitzGibbon had evidently mentioned Colonel Brock in the missing leaf of his reminiscences, as the following paragraph indicates :

" After the deployment of the 49th on the sand-hills, I saw no more of Lieut.-Colonel Brock, being separated from him with that part of the regiment detached under Lieut.-Colonel Sheaffe. Soon after we commenced firing upon the enemy, and at intervals rushing from one line of sand-hills to another—behind which the soldiers were made to shelter themselves and fire over their summits—I saw, at some distance to my right, Savery Brock, the paymaster, passing from the top of one sand-hill to another, directing and encouraging the men. He alone kept continually on the tops of the hills during the firing, and at every advance from one range to another he led the men, and again was seen above the others. Not doubting but that great numbers of the French soldiers would be continually firing at him—a

large man so exposed—I. watched from moment to moment to see him fall, but for about two hours while in my view he remained untouched.

"After witnessing Savery Brock's conduct, I determined to be the first to advance every time at the head of those around me, and I soon saw that of those who were most prompt to follow me, fewer fell by the enemy's fire than I witnessed falling of those more in our rear.

" Still we advanced, and the French retreated from one range of sand-hills to the next. About five o'clock I was well on in advance, when, on the opposite side of a valley facing us, we saw dragoons in green advancing toward us. Believing them to be Russians who were moving against the enemy on the other side of the hills, a cry was raised to ' cease firing.' The moment the cry was obeyed, a body of French infantry issued from a copse in the valley and charged up the hill toward us. We opened fire instantly. but instead of retreating they advanced, their officers waving their hats and swords as if desirous of holding a parley with us. Upon this someone cried they were Dutch troops who wished to join us as three battalions had done a few days before. Again we ceased firing. Our officers advanced to meet theirs. While we waited I formed the men, about a hundred in all. Presently one of my men, without orders, presented his musket. I tossed it up with my pike, and declared I ' would shoot any man who dared to fire without orders ;'

then, turning to learn the cause of the man's action, I saw five of the enemy approaching. Believing they meant to surrender, I went to meet them ;— I disarmed two, throwing their muskets on the ground, but in a moment my pike was wrenched from my hold and I was seized by the collar. Struggling to free myself, I found two bayonets at my back. My men fired. The Frenchman at my right fell, but in an instant I was dragged over the hill. There they halted and searched me. One drew my sword and threw it far from me with an oath. Another took my sash and wound it around his own waist. Two contended for my great coat and nearly dislocated my shoulders in their struggle for it. Then my coat and waistcoat were pulled off in order that they might get at my shirts, a flannel and a linen one, for I never could endure the flannel next my skin. They had the flannel one when a dragoon galloped up, snatched my waistcoat from the infantry and drove them off. Possessing himself of what money was left in the pocket, he flung it back to me and bade me dress myself. He then gave me in charge of another dragoon, who seized my left wrist in his right hand and trotted down the hill to where the dragoons were drawn up.

" All this could not have occupied more than three or four minutes. While my captor trotted down the slope, we were met by another dragoon who, as he passed me, brought up the hilt of his sword to his ear and gave point at me. Fortunately I had learned

the sword exercise and was able to parry his thrust. He rode on as if indifferent whether he hit me or not. The man who held me swore roundly at him, and instead of ascending the hill turned sharply to the left, and followed the valley until we were quite in the rear of the French lines. He then released me from his hold.

" If I had had extravagant ideas of the glories to be won in battle, I had also of the fate of prisoners of war. I had recently read the memoirs of Baron Trenck, and expected nothing less than confinement in a dungeon with sixty pounds of iron about my neck and limbs.

" The approach of another prisoner, an old sergeant of the 49th, who had seen service in the West Indies, was a relief to my mind. We soon after entered a wood, where the dragoon ordered us to be searched. Alas, my fine linen shirt pleased him, and I was ordered to give it up. When I hesitated my fellow-prisoner advised me to obey, adding, "A soldier of the 92nd, who was taken with me, refused to give up his canteen and a murderous Frenchman shot him through the back."

" The dragoon gave me a shirt from his saddle-bag in exchange. It was coarse as a barrack sheet and nearly worn out. It was, however, clean from the wash, and had ruffles to the wristbands as well as the usual frill to the front. I remembered a song my grandfather used to sing for me of ' French ruffles

and rags.' Now was I possessed of some to my no small discomfort and mortification.

" While the exchange of garments was being made, Lieutenant Philpott and some grenadiers of the 35th were brought in. He stopped and asked me why they stripped me. Before I could reply, a French soldier struck him a blow from behind with the butt of his musket that made him stagger forward several paces before he could recover himself.

" We were marched into Alkmaar and put into a church, where I slept on the flags from six till eight o'clock, when we were awakened, hurried out into the street and marched off under an escort.

" I supposed we were to be lodged in some prison in the town, but to my surprise we soon left it behind us. Exhausted from fatigue, I dreaded a long night march. The dragoons of the escort frequently pushed their horses upon us. One of them plunged in among us, his horse dashing the man walking beside me to the ground, and striking me a violent blow in the side with his foot. To escape this danger I pushed on to the front and strained every nerve to keep in the advance. We were marched without halting to Beverwick, a distance of eighteen miles.

" This was the most distressing night of my life. I had already suffered so much from fatigue during our marches and countermarches since our landing at the Helder, as to make my life a burden to me. Fifteen days later we reached Valenciennes, five officers and one hundred and seven men." (See Appendix I.)

During this and the few weeks that intervened before the exchange of prisoners was effected, Fitz-Gibbon was not idle. He seized every opportunity within his reach of conversing with his French captors and learning as much of their language as possible.

Among some odd scraps of letters and manuscripts, I find the following anecdote :

" The exchanged prisoners of war were landed at Ramsgate from Flushing, in January, 1800. On the march to Beccles and Bungaye, where the 49th were then stationed, I was sent forward to have the billets ready for delivery to the men at the end of each day's march. On entering the inn at Witham, near Colchester, a gentleman standing at the door asked me if I did not belong to the 49th ? Upon my replying that I did he said :

" ' Why then are you in such a ragged and stained dress ?'

" I am returning from French prison, sir,' I replied.

" Come in, come in here,' he said, and immediately ordered the waiter to bring breakfast and a glass of brandy for me. He was surprised when I declined the latter, as I never drank it.

" ' What, a soldier and not drink brandy ? Well, well, I am very glad of it ; and now, where were you taken prisoner ?'

" At Egmont-op-Zee,' I replied. Then to my surprise he asked a number of questions as to the behaviour of certain of the officers in that battle.

" Ignorant of who my questioner might be, I could only reply faithfully as to what I had seen and knew, and unconsciously was able to remove the odium of cowardice from at least one to whom it had been imputed. I learned later that my interrogator was the surgeon of the 49th. He shook hands with me, and bade me take care of myself and I would rise to be a general officer. I was not very sanguine of that, but they were kindly words to cheer on the hopes and ambition of a lad who loved his profession."

In the summer of 1800 the regiment was sent to Jersey. During the senior Lieut.-Colonel's absence on leave, the second assumed the command. Of this officer's ability, FitzGibbon speaks highly.

" He was the best teacher I ever knew, but he was also a martinet and a great scold. His offensive language often marred his best efforts. The latitude taken at drill in those days was very great and very injurious to the service. The late Duke of York saw this, and by appropriate regulations greatly abated the use of offensive language.

"To such a state of feeling was the regiment worked up by this man's scolding, that upon the return of the senior officer,\* his first appearance on the parade was greeted by three hearty cheers from the men. This outbreak of welcome was promptly rebuked by the returned colonel and the men confined to barracks for a week."

FitzGibbon does not name either of these officers,

\* Colonel (afterwards Sir Isaac) I3rock.

adding only : " I might record the future career of the two men, but will only say that they were not on the same level. The history of the one officer who won the affection and respect of his men by kind though firm discipline bears the higher military reputation."

While the regiment was in Jersey, several recruiting parties were sent from it to England. With one of these FitzGibbon was ordered to Winchester. The party consisted of a captain, two sergeants, a corporal and drummer. The captain appointed, being on leave, was to join the party later from London.

Before embarking, and without FitzGibbon's knowledge, his fellow-sergeant drew the month's pay for the corporal and drummer, went out of barracks, and either gambled or, as he said, lost it, by having his pocket picked. FF this he was tried and sentenced to be put under stoppages as a private until the amount was refunded. Notwithstanding, before going on board the Rowcliffe sloop for Portsmouth, the man again drew the month's pay, and soon after their arrival in Winchester, lost or spent the money. The captain had not yet joined them, and upon payday FitzGibbon's duty would be to report the case to the regimental headquarters. This would inevitably result in the reduction of the sergeant to the ranks, or possibly the infliction and degradation, of the lash. The man was of respectable parentage, in education equal if not superior to FitzGibbon, and his pleasing, gentlemanly manner had won his fellow-

soldiers' affection. Having full confidence in his truthfulness, FitzGibbon out of his own month's pay, as yet untouched, gave the corporal and drummer their week's pay. Another week passed without the captain having joined the party, and again he paid the men. This was repeated until he had not a penny remaining.

" Twenty-four hours had elapsed since I had tasted food. We were walking down the high street of Winchester, poor as hungry and miserable as myself, neither of us knowing what to do nor where to turn for help. To sell any part of our regimentals was impossible. It was a military offence, and its commission would inevitably have brought the disgrace I dreaded. Walking slowly and in silence, weary with thinking and the vain effort to puzzle a way out of the difficulty, I had almost given way to despair, when, the light of a street lamp falling across my path, my eye caught the gleam of a coin lying on the wet pavement at my feet. I picked it up, and carrying it to a neighboring shop-window, saw it was a half-guinea. I rang it on the sill to be sure my eyes had not deceived me. I did not stay to enquire who had dropped it. The street had many passers-by ; its owner might have passed long since, but the thought that it had ever been owned by anyone else never crossed my mind. I was hungry through no fault of my own, and this half-guinea was to me a direct gift from Providence, and as such I used it and was grateful."