

ADMIRAL SIR RICHARD ONSLOW, BART.,
G.C.B.

BY

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE EARL OF ONSLOW,
P.C., F.S.A.,

President of the Society.

RICHARD ONSLOW was the second son of Lieut.-General Richard Onslow, a younger brother of Speaker Arthur Onslow. He served as Adjutant-General to the forces from 1733 to 1739, and was afterwards General Officer Commanding, or "Governor" as it was then called, first at Fort William and then at Plymouth. He served with distinction at the battle of Dettingen, and was for many years M.P. for Guildford.

His son Richard entered the Navy in 1751, when he was only ten years old. At the age of seventeen he was on the East India Station with Vice-Admiral George Pocock, and was given his commission as Lieutenant on the *Sunderland*; in 1759 he was transferred to the *Grafton*, and in March 1760 to Pocock's flagship, the *Yarmouth*, on board of which he returned to England. When he was nineteen he was promoted Commander, and given the command of the *Martin*, which he held for a year. He was posted on April 14th, 1762, and given command of H.M.S. *Humber* of 40 guns, in which he convoyed the Baltic Trade. Richard, of course, enjoyed very powerful interest at home to have gained such rapid promotion as to be a Post Captain before coming of age, but such promotions were not uncommon in the eighteenth century. Early promotion was justified in Richard, but he nearly lost his life in his first command as a Post Captain, for in September 1762, when returning from the Baltic, on board off Flamborough Head, by some error on the part of the pilot whom he had taken, the *Humber* and many of the convoy were wrecked. A court martial was held, at which Richard was acquitted of

all blame, and on November 29th, 1762, he was appointed to command the *Phœnix*. This was followed by the command of the *Aquilon* in 1766, and for the next three years he was with her in the Mediterranean.

In 1770 he commissioned the *Diana*, and in her went to Jamaica under the orders of Sir George Rodney, and in 1776 he took over the command of the *St. Albans* of 64 guns and 500 men, and was employed in taking out a convoy to join Admiral Lord Howe at New York. The American War had broken out in 1775, and during the operations of 1776-8 Richard fought under Howe, his ship being employed in keeping guard over the camp at Long Island, at the mouth of the Hudson. Later his ship formed part of the reinforcements sent to the West Indies to the assistance of the British Admiral commanding, the Hon. Samuel Barrington, when war broke out with the French as a consequence of their support of the Colonies.

In the early summer of 1779 Richard was sent in charge of a convoy to England, where he paid off the *St. Albans* and for a short time was without a ship. In 1780, however, he was appointed Captain of the *Bellona*, which was a 74, and on December 30th, in company with the *Marlborough* under Captain Taylor Penry, she overtook and captured the Dutch 54-gun ship *Prinses* in the Channel. In 1781 the *Bellona* accompanied Darby to the Mediterranean, as the Spaniards were making strenuous efforts to take Gibraltar, and the garrison were in urgent need of supplies. The Channel Squadron under Darby was sent out with a convoy, and the relief was accomplished on April 12th, 1781. In 1782 Richard and the *Bellona* again formed part of the relieving force at Gibraltar. The Spaniards were making desperate efforts to take the fortress, assisted by a French army on the land side of 40,000 men. Lord Howe, Richard's old Admiral in America, had taken over the command of the Channel Fleet from Darby. The relief was effected with admirable skill, but the siege of Gibraltar was not raised until 1783, when the war ceased. Meanwhile Richard's ship was detached from the Channel Fleet after her return from Gibraltar, and Richard was sent to the West Indies again with Sir Richard Hughes, but returned to England on the conclusion of peace.

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SIR RICHARD ONSLOW, BART., G.C.B.,
ADMIRAL OF THE RED.

During the next seven years he was unemployed and passed his time on shore, but in 1789 he commissioned the *Magnificent* of 74 guns at Portsmouth. She was the last ship Richard commanded as Captain, for on February 1st, 1793, he was promoted to be Rear-Admiral of the White; on April 12th, 1794, Rear-Admiral of the Red; Vice-Admiral of the White on July 4th of the same year, and Vice-Admiral of the Red on June 1st, 1795; but he had no command as a Rear-Admiral or as Vice-Admiral of the White, and it was not until 1796 that he hoisted his flag at Portsmouth. His fleet was active in the Channel, and during the spring of 1796 captured the *Zeeland*, a Dutch 64; the *Braakel*, 54 guns; the *Spolen*, 40 guns; and the *Meermin* and *Pijl* of 16 guns each. All these ships were added to the Royal Navy.

On November 19th, 1796, he was appointed second in command to Admiral Duncan in the North Sea, in succession to Vice-Admiral Macbride, whose health had given way, and hoisted his flag on board the *Nassau*.

The year 1797 produced an epidemic of mutinies in England. Strikes and disorders took place at Portsmouth, mutinies broke out at Spithead and Plymouth, and the marines in the Channel Fleet sent a curious letter to Howe complaining of their uniform.

The mutiny at Yarmouth began on board Duncan's flagship the *Venerable* on April 30th. The Admiral was able to re-establish order, but not without some trouble. The *Nassau* followed the example of her sister flagship, but the outbreak seems to have been less serious than on the *Venerable*. A petition was addressed to Richard, asking that the ship should be ordered to a King's port so that nineteen months' wages which were due should be paid. On receipt of this document Richard reported his opinion that if ordered to weigh anchor the crew would refuse to do so until they received their wages. In a letter dated May 27th Duncan wrote to Spencer: "Onslow . . . used every argument with the *Nassau* . . . and acted with great propriety, but to no purpose." Therefore to prevent difficulty Richard hoisted his flag on board the *Adamant*, 50 guns, the one ship in the Fleet besides the *Venerable* on board of which no disorder then appeared.

On May 27th Duncan issued orders for the Fleet to go

to sea, but the *Nassau* refused to weigh anchor. On the following day the *Standard* and *Belliqueux* returned to Yarmouth Roads. On the 29th, at noon, the two flagships were left alone with the *Agamemnon* and the *Glatton*, but an hour later both of these mutinied, and the *Venerable* and the *Adamant* were the only two ships of the line which could be depended upon against the whole enemy Fleet. On June 1st the *Garland* frigate, sloop *Stork* and *Trent* frigate joined the two Admirals, and the little Fleet looked into the Texel and saw in the Roads 14 ships of the line, 8 frigates, and 73 other craft. Duncan and Onslow held a Council of War, at which the Captains were also present. Two courses were open—the first was to keep the Texel blockaded by a bluff, or to retreat to some place of security where an attack could be faced from the Dutch without the danger of a possible attack from the rebel Fleet at the Nore.

Both Richard and Duncan came to the conclusion that their duty was to keep the Texel closed, and this they set to work to do, with or without ships. On June 1st the *Venerable* and the *Adamant* were off the Texel, the crews being at their quarters for three days and three nights. During the whole of the time the two Admirals were manœuvring and signalling as though a whole Fleet lay in the offing. On the first day the *Venerable* passed in sight of the Dutch Fleet accompanied by the *Adamant* with a Red Flag Rear-Admiral at the mizen; this was the First Squadron of two sail of the line. The next day the two Admirals appeared as private ships (i.e. without a flag officer), pennants only flying. On June 5th the little Fleet was joined by the *Russell* and *Sanspareil*, and the four ships then appeared as the Third British Squadron, the Admiral flying his proper blue flag at the main; they lay in the mouth of the Texel signalling and communicating with an imaginary Fleet in the offing. On June 10th the situation was relieved by the arrival of Sir Roger Curtis with H.M.S. *Prince*, *Formidable*, *Caesar*, *Bedford* and *Glatton*, and on June 13th the Russian Squadron of 12 ships of the line and 7 frigates arrived also, but the Russians, however, only remained for ten days. On June 17th the news reached the Fleet that the mutiny was over; the imminent peril with which the country had been threatened was now removed, and the Board of Admiralty

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THE ADMIRALS AND CAPTAINS WHO COMMANDED
AT THE BATTLE OF CAMPERDOWN.

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THE BATTLE OF CAMPERDOWN.
11th October 1797.

very rightly sent a message of thanks to the officers and crews of H.M.S. *Venerable* and *Adamant*, saying that " Their Lordships have seen with the greatest satisfaction their good conduct during the late outrageous mutiny."

But although the mutiny was over, the cruise off Texel was prolonged for nineteen weeks. On July 25th Richard shifted his flag from the *Adamant* to the *Monarch*, and Sir Roger Curtis was withdrawn with his squadron to reinforce the Mediterranean Fleet. On August 7th the blockade of the Texel was declared, and all neutral vessels were prevented from entering or leaving, but in the first days of October the Naval Committee at The Hague changed their policy, and it was decided that the Fleet should put to sea and engage the British Fleet. On October 7th de Winter left the Texel; the British cruisers observed his Fleet as soon as the ships began to make sail, and the *Speculator* lugger, the first to give the alarm, was sent to Yarmouth to warn the Fleet.

On the morning of October 11th, 1797, the squadron sighted the Dutch Fleet; and the *Venerable* made the general sign for close action. The two divisions were each led by their flagships, and the *Monarch* was the first to engage the enemy. In Duncan's words, " Vice-Admiral Onslow in the *Monarch* bore down on the enemy's rear in the most gallant manner, and the action commenced about forty minutes past 12 o'clock."

The wind was blowing straight in shore, and it was clear that if the attack was not made promptly the Dutch would speedily get into shoal water, when no attack would be possible. Duncan realized the necessity of cutting off their retreat by getting between them and the land, so without waiting to form line of battle, and with the Fleet in very irregular order of sailing, in two groups led by the *Venerable* and *Monarch*, he made the signal to pass through the enemy's line and engage to leeward. As Richard's division, headed by the flagship, bore down on the Dutch line, his Captain, O'Bryen, said to him that he could find no passage through the enemy. " The *Monarch* will make a passage," said the Admiral.¹

Forty minutes after Richard had broken the line with his division Duncan's division did the same, and thereafter the battle became a series of duels between ships. The Battle

¹ Stanhope, *Pitt*, Vol. II.

of Camperdown was one of the severest actions fought by the British Navy—"A more bloody conflict than this is not recorded in the naval history of Great Britain since the famous Dutch Wars," says Schomberg.

The *Monarch* greatly distinguished herself, and had a prolonged duel with the flagship of Vice-Admiral Reyntjes and Rear-Admiral Meurer. The Dutch flagship fought with the utmost gallantry, but was eventually obliged to strike to the *Monarch*. A picture of Richard receiving the surrender of the Dutch Vice-Admiral, presented by Russell the Mayor, hangs in the Guildhall at Guildford (Plate III). Admiral Duncan, in his despatch of October 13th, reported: "It is with the greatest pleasure and satisfaction I make known to their Lordships the very gallant behaviour of Vice-Admiral Onslow, the Captains, Officers, Seamen and Marines of the Squadron, who all appeared actuated with the truly British spirit." He also writes in a private letter to Spencer, dated October 15th, "Onslow behaved with great spirit."

On October 19th the Court of Common Council of London resolved to present an address of congratulation to the King, and the Freedom of the City and Sword of Honour to Admirals Duncan and Onslow for their services, as well as the thanks of the Corporation to the Captains, Officers and Seamen of the North Sea Fleet, and £500 to the Lloyds Fund for the Widows and Orphans.

The Corporation of Dublin resolved to present a congratulatory address to the King, and the Freedom of the City in decorated oak boxes to the two Admirals. On October 17th the *London Gazette* announced that the King had been pleased to grant the dignity of a Viscount of the United Kingdom to Adam Duncan, Esq., Admiral of the Blue Squadron of H.M. Fleet, by the name style and title of Viscount Duncan of Camperdown, and also that His Majesty had been pleased to grant the dignity of a Baronet of the Kingdom of Great Britain to Richard Onslow, Esq., Vice-Admiral of the Red Squadron of H.M. Fleet.

On November 2nd the King opened Parliament in person and made reference to the victory of the North Sea Fleet. In both Houses of Parliament votes were passed "thanking Admiral Lord Viscount Duncan, Vice-Admiral Sir Richard

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VICE-ADMIRAL RICHARD ONSLOW RECEIVING THE DUTCH FLAG
AFTER THE BATTLE OF CAMPERDOWN, 1797.

Onslow, the Captains and Officers, and highly approving the services of the seamen and marines." On December 19th the officers and men of the Fleet went in solemn procession with the King to St. Paul's, where a service of thanksgiving was held, which was attended by the Admirals and Captains.

On November 6th the East India Company entertained them at a complimentary dinner at the London Tavern, at which Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson was also present. The rejoicings over, the two Admirals returned to their Fleet to continue supervision of the blockade of the Texel. Shortly after the New Year Lord Duncan became unwell, and Richard succeeded him as Commander-in-Chief as a temporary measure until August, when on the return of Lord Duncan he resumed his former post of Second-in-Command.

In the early days of August the French landed troops in north-west Ireland, and the Admiralty sent special instructions to the North Sea Fleet to prevent any squadron of frigates from sailing to the coast of Ireland. Sir Richard was despatched in command of the Squadron to watch the Texel, and to prevent the egress of enemy ships. Only one attempt was made. On October 24th Captain King of the *Sirius*, when reconnoitring off the Texel, chased and captured two Dutch frigates: the *Waaksamheid* of 26 guns was captured at noon, after firing but one gun, with 120 soldiers on board and a quantity of arms and ammunition destined for Ireland, and this was followed by the capture of a frigate of 36 guns, also with men and stores for Ireland. After this no further attempts were made by the Dutch to send relief to Ireland, and Sir Richard was ordered to bring his Squadron back to Yarmouth. The constant strain had told on his health and he applied for sick leave soon after his return: finding, however, no improvement, he resigned his command on December 10th and struck his flag. Vice-Admiral Dickson succeeded him and hoisted his flag in the *Monarch*.

On February 14th, 1799, both Admiral Duncan and Sir Richard were promoted: Duncan to be Admiral of the White and Onslow Admiral of the Blue. But little remains to be told, as Richard had no further employment afloat or on shore. He was promoted Admiral of the White on April 23rd, 1804, and Admiral of the Red on the creation of that rank on Novem-

ber 9th, 1805. He had already received the Camperdown Gold Medal, struck after the battle of 1797, and in 1815 he was nominated a G.C.B. : he was also given the rank of Lieut.-General of Marines.

Sir William Hotham, who served as his Captain on board the *Adamant* during the mutiny at the Nore, describes him as below the middle stature and of a florid countenance : his manner was abrupt and unprepossessing to strangers, but his ideas and disposition were generous, and he was an affectionate husband and an indulgent father. He suffered from occasional irritability of temper, caused in a great measure from a nautical predilection to conviviality without the necessary strength of constitution to support it. Hotham had a great affection for his old Admiral and a high regard for his "gallantry and seamanship."

In 1773 Sir Richard married Anne, daughter of Commodore Matthew Michell of Chilterne, Wilts, and on the death of his father-in-law in 1752 he and his wife inherited a considerable property, but there is no evidence that he made his home in Wiltshire. He lived for some time in Windsor Forest in a house lent to him by his cousin Thomas, Viscount Cranley, who was then outranger of Windsor Forest. He died in 1817 at Southampton, leaving a direction in his will that his funeral expenses should not exceed £20, remarking that "the funeral of a brave and honest sailor costs a much less sum."