

# A Biographical Sketch of General Robert Melville of Strathkinness

WRITTEN BY HIS SECRETARY

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GENERAL ROBERT MELVILLE was descended from the Melvilles of Carnbee,<sup>1</sup> in the county of Fife, in Scotland, a branch of the antient and noble family of the same name, of which the chief is the Earl of Leven and Melville.<sup>2</sup> The ancestor of the family is held to have been the first Norman who passed into Scotland. He was a person of distinction of Normandy, named De Malville or De Melville, who accompanied William the Conqueror into England, in the autumn of 1066. Meeting, however, with some cause of disgust from William, he, before the close of that year, secretly withdrew to the court of Malcolm Canmore, King of Scotland.<sup>3</sup> By Malcolm he was courteously received and early put in possession of lands, thence constituting the barony of Melville Castle in Mid-Lothian.

<sup>1</sup> General Robert Melville was the great-great-grandson of Sir John Melville of Carnbee. Sir John, having acquired the barony of Granton in Mid-Lothian in 1580, sold Carnbee in 1598. He was knighted by James VI. and died in the reign of Charles I. (*Baronage of Scotland*).

<sup>2</sup> John de Melville (*floruit* 1260 A.D.; cf. *Rymer*, ii. 471), grandson of Walter (*v. post*), had two sons, of whom the elder, Sir John de Melville (*fl.* 1290-1296 A.D.; cf. *Rymer*, iii. 651), was ancestor of the Earls of Leven and Melville, and the younger, Sir Robert Melville, was ancestor of the Carnbee line (*Douglas' Peerage*). General Melville was also connected with Lord Leven through his mother, whose paternal grandmother was Jean, daughter of Thomas Melville of Murdocairnie, second son of John Melville of Raith (d. 1626) and brother of John, Lord Melville, father of the first Earl of Melville. The second was much the closer connection.

<sup>3</sup> A note in General Melville's handwriting, probably made in 1770, gives a different version, viz. 'The founder of the Melvills in Scotland is said to have been a person of considerable rank, who attended from Hungary Margaret, wife of King Malcolm Canmore.' This tradition is mentioned in *Douglas's Peerage*.

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Galfridus de Melville appears as a witness in many charters of Malcolm the 4th of Scotland, who died in 1165. He even made himself a donation of the church of Melville, in Lothian, to the monastery of Dunfermline, in Fife, in the year 1187.<sup>4</sup> From three sons of Galfridus, namely, Sir Gregory, Philip, and Walter, are respectively descended the Melvilles of Lothian, Angus<sup>5</sup> and Fife.

The parents<sup>6</sup> of General Melville dying when he was very young, the care of his education devolved on his guardians.<sup>7</sup> Placed by them at the Grammar School of Leven, in Fife, he early distinguished himself by a quick and lively apprehension, united to a singularly capacious and retentive memory. From this seminary his rapid progress in his education enabled him to be early removed to the Universities of Glasgow<sup>8</sup> and Edinburgh, where his application was crowned with the happiest success. His fortune being but moderate, he, in compliance with the wishes of his friends that he should follow one of the learned professions, turned his attention to the study of medicine.<sup>9</sup> His genius, however, strongly prompting him to adopt the military life, and the war then carrying on in Flanders<sup>10</sup> presenting a favourable

<sup>4</sup> Douglas's *Peerage of Scotland, and Caledonia*, i. 524, ii. 806.

<sup>5</sup> The male line of Philip became extinct in 1468.

<sup>6</sup> His father was the Rev. Andrew Melville, minister of Monimail, in Fife, from 1705 till his death in 1736. His mother was Helen, daughter of Robert Whytt of Bennoch, Fife, advocate, and Jean, daughter of Anthony Murray of Woodend, Perthshire. The Monimail register of baptisms gives five other children, born between 1720 and 1729, of whom one daughter, Jean, born in 1721, married in 1749 the Rev. Robert Preston, minister of the parish of Arbirlot.

<sup>7</sup> A pencil note gives these as 'Lord Edgefield, one of the Senators of the College of Justice in Scotland, and Dr. Robert Whytt, his maternal uncle.' Of Lord Edgefield the lists of judges give no trace: it may perhaps have been Lord Elchies. Dr. Robert Whytt (1714-1766) was professor of Medicine in the University of Edinburgh, president of Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh, and a fellow of the Royal Society. In 1761 he was appointed First Physician to the King in Scotland, 'in the room of Dr. Andrew Sinclair deceased' (*Diploma*); the office was not, as the *Dictionary of National Biography* states, specially created for Dr. Whytt. In 1743 he married, as his second wife, Louisa, daughter of James Balfour of Pilrig, by whom he had fourteen children.

<sup>8</sup> He matriculated at Glasgow University in 1737, the same year as Adam Smith and William Dalrymple, the 'Dalrymple mild' of Burns's *Kirk's Alarm*, all three being then fourteen years of age.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to his uncle and guardian, Dr. Robert Whytt, others of his maternal relatives had studied for the medical profession.

<sup>10</sup> War of the Austrian Succession.



opportunity for gratifying his natural and decided tendencies, young Melville was unable to resist the temptation. Concealing his project from his friends, he privately withdrew from Edinburgh to London; and there, after a proper communication of his views and motives, he was furnished with the requisite means of carrying his scheme into effect.

Repairing without loss of time to the Netherlands, he obtained, by purchase, early in 1744,<sup>1</sup> an ensigncy in the twenty-fifth regiment of foot,<sup>2</sup> commanded by the Earl of Rothes,<sup>3</sup> and then encamped at Anderlecht, near Brussels.<sup>4</sup> That campaign he served under Field-Marshal Wade,<sup>5</sup> and all the following, until the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748, under H.R.H. the Duke of Cumberland, in the Low Countries; with the exception of part of the years 1745 and 1746, when, on account of the political troubles in the kingdom, the twenty-fifth regiment was employed in Britain.<sup>6</sup>

During this last service a detachment of the regiment, under Ensign Melville, formed a part of the garrison<sup>7</sup> of Blair Castle, in the county of Perth, the antient seat of the Duke of Athol,

<sup>1</sup> The commission is dated 26th March, 1744.

<sup>2</sup> Now the King's Own Scottish Borderers.

<sup>3</sup> John, 8th Earl of Rothes, K.T., P.C., b. 1698, was in command of the 25th Regiment from 1732 till 1745, and was subsequently commander-in-chief of the forces in Ireland. He died in 1767.

<sup>4</sup> This base was chosen in deference to the political anxieties of the Austrians, and in defiance of the military advice of the British commanders. The 25th Regiment formed part of the reinforcements sent to Flanders in 1744. General Melville seems to have begun his service with an ill-requited act of kindness, for at the foot of a list of 'old and desperate debts' which he drew up in 1770 appears this note: 'N.B. Due me since y<sup>e</sup> beginning of 1744 by M<sup>r</sup> James Johnston on his note then a Quarter Mr in the Grey Dragoons (lent him at Ghent) with Interest since—£ Sterl<sup>r</sup> 15-0-0.'

<sup>5</sup> Wade was appointed to the command in Flanders in December, 1743, on the resignation of the Earl of Stair, but himself resigned in October, 1744, principally from disgust at the failure of Dutch and Austrians to consent to any vigorous measures.

<sup>6</sup> The 25th Regiment, of which Lord Sempill became commander on April 24th, 1745, took part in the Battle of Fontenoy on April 30th (O.S.), advancing in the second line, and was recalled to Britain in the following autumn to deal with the Jacobite rebellion. Landing at 'Grays in Essex' in November, it proceeded with Cumberland's army to Carlisle, whence it marched across England to Durham, and reached Edinburgh on January 17th, 1746, rejoining the Duke of Cumberland at Linlithgow in February. Thence it advanced to Perth by way of Stirling and Ardoch.

<sup>7</sup> The garrison consisted of detachments from seven regiments, amounting in all to 300 men, and including a 'subaltern's command' from the 25th under Ensign Robert Melville.

commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Andrew Agnew, Bart.<sup>8</sup> This antique edifice was closely invested and besieged by the enemy for a fortnight together: but by the steady resistance of the small party within the castle, they were compelled to raise the siege.<sup>9</sup> During the whole of the attack Ensign Melville was able to maintain his post, with a small guard, on the flooring of an unfinished part of the castle, then in a state of reparation, and so close to the enemy as to overhear their conversation.

In the course of this service, of itself of little importance, Ensign Melville found exercise for a talent with which he was richly endowed; that of drawing valuable inferences from ordinary occurrences. Red hot shot were thrown from two pieces of artillery through the windows into the castle. This attack, formidable indeed in appearance, he soon discovered to be comparatively innocent in its effects. The hot shot rebounded from the rafters of the roof or from the walls of the apartment it entered, just as a cold shot would have done. Even after it fell on the boarded floor, it only reduced to charcoal the spot on which it lay, but produced no inflammation, and means were soon discovered of extinguishing the shot in vessels of water provided for the purpose. Observing and reflecting on these facts, he was led to the contrivance of various improvements in the construction and application of artillery in similar circumstances, afterwards brought to a high degree of perfection.

Returning with the regiment<sup>10</sup> from Scotland to Flanders in the autumn of 1746, he joined the Allied army just in time to be present at the battle of Rocoux.<sup>1</sup> In the action of Lafeldt<sup>2</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Sir Andrew Agnew (1687-1771), 5th baronet of Lochnaw, had taken part in the battles of Ramillies, Oudenarde, and Malplaquet as a cornet in the Scots Greys, had also been in action at Dettingen, and was at this time Lt.-Colonel of the 21st Regiment (Royal Scots Fusiliers). He was known as the Peerless Knight of Galloway. General Melville in a memorandum, dated 20th June, 1801, describes him as 'very old . . . almost blind yet very robust; passionate and obstinate in temper, who despised and hated the rebels; seemed neither desirous to procure any intelligence nor listen to any advice. . . . He had a perfect confidence in his own good fortune . . . with a very good stock of natural courage.'

<sup>9</sup> The siege began on March 17th and was raised by Lord George Murray's force on April 1st.

<sup>10</sup> The regiment was present at Culloden, where it was stationed on the left wing in the second line, its colonel, Lord Sempill, commanding the brigade. In autumn it embarked at Burntisland for Williamstadt, whence it proceeded to join the army at Maestricht.

<sup>1</sup> September 30th, 1746 (O.S.). The 25th spent the winter at Bois-le-duc.

<sup>2</sup> June 21st, 1747 (O.S.).



his conduct procured for him the privilege of delivering to the Duke of Cumberland the colours of the regiment of Monaco in the French service, which had been taken by the twenty-fifth regiment. On this occasion he was appointed a Lieutenant.<sup>3</sup>

In consequence of the battle of Fontenoy<sup>4</sup> the regiment was thrown into Ath, then garrisoned by only two battalions of Austrians and Dutch. On the retreat of the Allies to Wilworden, Ath was invested by a large body of the French army, under the Comte de Clermont-Gallerande. The town was compelled to surrender; the slender garrison marched out with all military honours; and the British corps received not only the approbation of the Austrian Commandant of the place, but the public thanks of H.R.H. the Commander-in-chief.

During the siege of Ath Lieutenant Melville narrowly escaped destruction. The enemy at first threw their shells at the works alone, but one from an overcharged mortar, passing over the ramparts, in the middle of the night, fell within the town, and actually pierced through his field-bed, while he was absent upon duty in one of the outworks.

Towards the end of the year 1748<sup>5</sup> the twenty-fifth regiment was ordered to Ireland: but from a succession of adverse events, it was upwards of five months on the passage. One delay was produced by the loss of the transport in which Lieutenant Melville, with the principal officers, was embarked. By some inconceivable blunder of the master, as well as by the severity of the weather, the vessel ran in upon the coast of Normandy, bent over the Calvados rocks, and was completely wrecked on the shore to the westward of Caen. Being treated with singular humanity by the people of the country, the troops were received into Caen, and even allowed to mount guard in the quarters allotted to them: an indulgence refused to French troops themselves on a march and in a town occupied by another garrison: an indulgence obtained principally by the private negotiation of Lieutenant Melville with the Commandant: for the indulgence was of such a nature that the British Commander could not with propriety solicit it.

<sup>3</sup> The commission is dated from the Headquarters at Heer, June 25th, 1747 (O.S.). It is not signed by the King, merely by the Duke of Cumberland as Captain-General.

<sup>4</sup> This paragraph and the next are chronologically out of place.

<sup>5</sup> Preliminaries were signed on 19th April, 1748 (O.S.) and the definitive peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in October.

From the spring of 1749 to the summer of 1755 Lieutenant Melville continued with the regiment in different parts of Ireland, with the exception of two periods<sup>6</sup> in which he was employed on the recruiting service in Scotland, having been appointed a Captain in the same regiment in August, 1751.<sup>7</sup>

While on duty at the Cove fort in Cork harbour, applying to certain principles he had previously adopted on the subject of artillery the result of his observation and enquiries concerning the comparative advantages of batteries on land and afloat, Captain Melville was led to project guns, shot, and shells of a nature up to that time unknown to practice. His gun was to be much shorter, therefore much lighter, and consequently much more manageable than any then in use. His shot was so far to partake of the nature of a shell, as to be cast with a hollow in the centre, to receive inflammable substances, while it would be so strong as to answer at a proper distance the purpose of a solid shot. His shot, in fact, was to combine the properties of the shot, the shell and the carcase. Of this species of gun those called CARRONADES,<sup>8</sup> from the great establishment at Carron, in Scotland, where they were first cast, have long been universally adopted. The larger sort, however, the MELVILLADES, have hitherto been seldom employed.

The twenty-fifth regiment having been moved from Ireland to Scotland in 1755, Captain Melville was engaged, while quartered at Glasgow, by his Colonel, the Earl of Home,<sup>9</sup> although out of his turn of duty, to undertake the recruiting service of the regiment, then very low in numbers. By his exertions in this service, on a plan equally new and unexceptionable, he was so fortunate as, within a very short period, to raise one hundred and

<sup>6</sup> One of these was in the autumn of 1751, when, in November, he attended and became a member of the old Revolution Club in Edinburgh; the other was in 1754, the year of his antiquarian discoveries (*v. post*).

<sup>7</sup> The commission is dated 20th August, 1751, and endorsed 'captain in Lord Panmure's regiment in Ireland.' William, Earl of Panmure in the Peerage of Ireland, was M.P. for Forfarshire from 1734 till his death in 1782. He was in command of the K.O.S.B. from 1747 to 1752 and afterwards of the Royal Scots Fusiliers.

<sup>8</sup> Carronades were designed by General Melville in 1759 and were at first called 'smashers.' They were adopted in the British navy in 1779 and their use was extended to other navies also. Somewhat similar in shape to a mortar, they were destructive at close quarters, especially against wooden ships. They were used with effect in the Battle of the Saints in 1782.

<sup>9</sup> William, 8th Earl of Home, became colonel of the 25th Regiment in April 1752. He was governor of Gibraltar from 1757 to 1761.



fifty men, being forty more than could be raised by any other officer in the same time. Such were the maxims pursued by Captain Melville in the course of this service and such was the conduct of all persons acting in it under him, particularly in the capital of Scotland, that his parties were indulged by the magistrates of that city with peculiar privileges, and that the twenty-fifth acquired a fresh title to its original appellation, *the Royal Edinburgh Regiment*.

His services on this occasion procured for him a strong recommendation from General Bland,<sup>10</sup> Commander-in-chief in Scotland, to Mr. Fox,<sup>1</sup> Secretary at War. From this resulted his speedy appointment to be aide-de-camp of General the Earl of Panmure, and to be Major of the thirty-eighth regiment of foot, then lying in Antigua, whither he repaired in spring, 1756.

During his visits to Scotland on public duty, while his regiment remained in Ireland, Captain Melville gave further proofs of the versatility as well as of the extent of his genius. It has been assigned as one reason why military antiquities have been less satisfactorily explained than the other branches of antiquarian research, that scholars and antiquaries have seldom been military men: and that military men have seldom been scholars and antiquaries. Polybius' treatise on Tacitus has unfortunately disappeared; and the other ancient writers who have noticed military affairs have mentioned the legionary arrangement in battle only in a cursory way. . . . Among the enquirers on this point was, and had early been, Captain Melville. In the autumn of 1751, what was considered to be a Roman *gladius* or legionary sword was shown to him in Scotland;<sup>2</sup> he at once discarded his systematic knowledge and, wielding the weapon, asked himself in what

<sup>10</sup> General Humphrey Bland (1686-1763) was appointed governor of Edinburgh Castle in 1752 and commander-in-chief in Scotland in 1753.

<sup>1</sup> Henry Fox, 1st Viscount Holland.

<sup>2</sup> This was at Penicuik House, the so-called *gladius* forming part of Sir John Clerk's collection (Gough's *Camden*, ed. 1790, iii. 414\*). In 1785 the Rev. James Douglas submitted to General Melville a recently discovered Roman *gladius* which the latter believed to be genuine. Their correspondence is published in *Archaeologia*, vol. vii. In his later years General Melville experimented with various weapons modelled upon the Roman sword. Particularly he evolved a type to which he gave the name of 'dashers.' During the French Revolution wars he repeatedly urged their adoption upon the military authorities. Letters are extant from the Duke of York, Sir John Moore, and others, politely refusing to comply. In 1810, the year after General Melville's death, Juan Fernandez in a letter to Mr. John Whyte-Melville announced that four hundred Spaniards were to be armed with 'dashers' 'as a trial.'

manner men armed with such a sword in the right hand, and with the legionary shield on the left, ought to be arranged in order to make the best use of their arms offensive and defensive. He immediately saw that they ought to be placed, not in deep and dense bodies, as had been generally supposed, but in shallow lines of two, or at most three, ranks of men. He discovered also that the men ought to stand not in files or one directly behind another, but those of the second rank opposite to and covering the intervals between the men in the front rank. Those in the third rank would, in the same way, be placed opposite to and covering the intervals of the second rank, and consequently directly behind the men of the front rank. In other words, he found that the legionary soldiers must have been placed in the *alternate* or *quincunx* order of *individuals*, and not of *dense bodies*.<sup>3</sup> . . .

Comparing the relation given by Tacitus of the last campaign of Agricola in Scotland with the features of the country, he was led, from reasons of war, to conclude that the decisive action between the Caledonians and the Romans had taken place in a position very remote from that generally pointed out. The general opinion was that Galgacus sustained that signal overthrow by Agricola in the western parts of the vale of Strathern. Captain Melville, on the contrary, was persuaded that memorable defeat must have happened towards the eastern extremity of what is called the Grampian mountains, near the point where they abut on the German Ocean. With the view of ascertaining this point, in the autumn of 1754 he made a tour through the country he had selected, and had the good fortune to discover in it no fewer than four camps,<sup>4</sup> unquestionably of Roman construction, and corresponding in other circumstances very accurately with the facts stated by the historian of Agricola.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>This theory is not generally accepted. It relates only to the position of individual soldiers within the maniples, not to the quincunx arrangement of the maniples themselves, which was not disputed.

<sup>4</sup>These were Lintrose, Battledykes, Kirkbuddo, and Keithock—all in Forfarshire. In the same year General Melville also sketched the 'Roman Camp at Dalginross (Comrie) and the post of Innerpeffry' (near Muthill)—both in 'the western parts of the vale of' Strathearn. In the summer he had carefully examined the Antonine Wall and its forts (*v. Gough's Camden*, ed. 1790, iii. 414\*).

<sup>5</sup>Dr. George Macdonald tells me that General Melville was undoubtedly the first to discover the four Forfarshire camps, although he did not publish anything about them till 1790, when he contributed some account of his discoveries to Gough's *Camden* (iii. pp. 414\* ff.); that Maitland, whose book was published in 1757, was thus really indebted to General Melville for the facts upon which he



The thirty-eighth regiment,<sup>6</sup> of which Mr. Melville was appointed to be Major in the spring of 1756,<sup>7</sup> had been stationed in Antigua ever since its removal from Gibraltar in the beginning of that century.<sup>8</sup> That island had often been made a receptacle for offenders from regiments at home: its military force was of course composed of the most disorderly troops. Excesses of every sort prevailed in the corps, in spite of the laudable exertions of many preceding field-officers to repress them.<sup>9</sup> By the indefatigable zeal of the new Major, who in the summer of 1758 was the only field-officer with the regiment,<sup>10</sup> and from the entire conviction he was able to infuse into the troops that he had their welfare and that alone at heart, Major Melville, with the hearty concurrence of most of the officers, succeeded in rendering the thirty-eighth regiment one of the most orderly in the service, and in restoring it to a state of discipline and spirit requisite for actual duty in the field.<sup>1</sup>

An armament under General (?) Hodson<sup>2</sup> (*sic*) arriving at Barbadoes<sup>3</sup> in December, 1758, for the purpose of attacking the French islands in the West Indies, the governor of Antigua was ordered to detach two hundred men of the thirty-eighth regiment to assist in an expedition against Martinique. In consequence of

based his own theory and his attack on Gordon's Strathearn hypothesis; and that the discovery of the four camps was certainly the basis of Roy's theory that the battle was fought in Kincardineshire or Aberdeenshire.

<sup>6</sup> The 38th Regiment (now 1st Bn., South Staffordshire Regiment) was at that time commanded by Colonel Alexander Duroure.

<sup>7</sup> The commission is dated 8th January, 1756.

<sup>8</sup> The 38th Regiment was sent to Antigua from Gibraltar before the death of Queen Anne.

<sup>9</sup> 'At St. Kitts, again, [a detachment of] the Thirty-eighth Foot, which for years had formed the garrison, was in a miserable condition; not forty per cent. of the men were fit for service; their clothing was in rags; they had neither hats nor shoes nor cartridge-boxes nor swords' (Fortescue, *H.B.A.* ii. 565).

<sup>10</sup> Colonel Sir James Lockhart and Lt.-Colonel Talbot were at home on leave.

<sup>1</sup> In the spring of 1757 General Melville was sent to organise the defence of St. Kitts. Early in 1758 he was instructed to examine the condition of the French prisoners in Antigua, and in doing so he formed friendships to which he attributed an important influence on subsequent events in the French islands.

<sup>2</sup> Major-General Peregrine Hopson commanded the land forces and Commodore Moore the naval forces. Hopson, who had been governor of Nova Scotia before the war, died during this expedition, on 27th February, 1759.

<sup>3</sup> Barbados was the recognised starting-point of British enterprises in the West Indies.

Major Melville's earnest solicitation, the governor<sup>4</sup> permitted him, although the commanding officer of the regiment, to proceed on the expedition with the detachment, leaving the command of the corps in the island in the hands of the senior Captain.

On his arrival at Martinique Major Melville found that the attack had failed,<sup>5</sup> and that the troops were re-embarked to proceed for Guadaloupe. During the attack on this island<sup>6</sup> Major Melville commanded at the advanced posts with the light infantry, in which the detachment from the thirty-eighth regiment was included, and was completely successful in all the partial actions in which his troops were engaged. In one of these, after a night march and the surprise of a post very near the enemy's camp, Major Melville, leading on his men, was entering a house just left by the enemy. Precisely at that instant the building exploded, by which he was blown to some distance, and conceived to be killed. From the immediate effects of this accident he soon recovered: but to it must be attributed the decay of his sight, with which in his latter years he was afflicted, and which at last ended in total irremediable blindness.<sup>7</sup>

In recompense for his various services in Guadaloupe,<sup>8</sup> Major Melville was appointed by the Commander of the Forces, General Barrington,<sup>9</sup> to succeed Lieutenant-Colonel Debrisey,<sup>10</sup> unfortunately blown up, as Commandant of Fort Royal.<sup>1</sup> In this

<sup>4</sup> Sir George Thomas, Bart.

<sup>5</sup> The attack took place on January 16th-18th, 1759.

<sup>6</sup> The attack on Guadaloupe began on 24th January, 1759: the whole island had capitulated by May 1st.

<sup>7</sup> In a memorandum drawn up for the Treasury in 1806, General Melville says: 'In consequence of that accident G. M. was confined at the time for some weeks but entirely recovered from its effects except that of a weakness of vision which gradually increased baffling all attempts towards cure and ultimately terminating about 17 years ago in the total loss of sight of that once active now veteran officer.'

<sup>8</sup> His services, in addition to those mentioned above, consisted chiefly of cutting off enemy communications between the two halves of Guadaloupe and defending Fort Royal against attempts at recapture.

<sup>9</sup> John Barrington, second in command under Hopson and commander-in-chief after his death, conducted the expedition with great skill. He was a brother of William, 2nd Viscount Barrington, who was Secretary at War from 1755 to 1761 and again 1765-78.

<sup>10</sup> Lt.-Colonel Desbrisey received a salary of £1 per diem as governor of Fort Royal (*Calendar of Home Office Papers*, 1760-5, No. 59).

<sup>1</sup> His commission as Commandant of Fort Royal, signed by John Barrington only, is dated 24th March, 1759.



situation he remained until the final reduction of the island, when, besides being continued in the command of Fort Royal,<sup>2</sup> he was made Lieutenant-Governor of the island of Guadaloupe<sup>3</sup> and its dependencies, and was promoted to be Lieutenant-Colonel of the sixty-third regiment.<sup>4</sup>

On the departure of the army under General Barrington for Britain,<sup>5</sup> Lieutenant-Governor Melville remained as second in command in Guadaloupe under Brigadier-General Crump, then appointed Governor-in-chief, until early in 1760, when, by the sudden death of that officer, the government of the island, with the chief command of the troops, devolved on Governor Melville.<sup>6</sup>

In this situation he exerted himself to the utmost, and that at very considerable expense, to impress the new French subjects of the British Crown with favourable notions of the justice and liberality of the British Government. In this attempt he was so successful, not only in the colony immediately under his care, but in Martinique and some other French islands, that a correspondence was established with various individuals among the enemy, by which the surrender of those colonies to the British arms was greatly accelerated.

A Governor-in-chief<sup>7</sup> arrived from England in Guadaloupe in the beginning of 1761, and Lieutenant-Governor Melville, whose

<sup>2</sup> Commission dated 15th September, 1759, and signed by the King.

<sup>3</sup> Commission dated 20th June, 1759. The salary attached to this post was ten shillings per diem (*Calendar of Home Office Papers, ibid.*).

<sup>4</sup> His commission, dated 14th May, 1759, appoints him Lieutenant-Colonel in the 38th Regiment, in which he had served since 1756. His new commission on the accession of George III., dated 27th October, 1760, also appoints him Lieutenant-Colonel in the 38th Regiment, 'commanded by David Watson Esq., Major-General.' General Watson, who had been in the 25th Foot when General Melville was an ensign in it, was appointed Colonel of the 38th Regiment on October 23rd, 1760. On the other hand, a memorandum drawn up in General Melville's old age refers, as does this passage, to his appointment being to the lieutenant-colonelcy of the 63rd (the Manchester Regiment): Fortescue (*H.B.A.* ii. 356) states that the 63rd remained with Crump in Guadaloupe—which General Melville did, though not in a regimental capacity—while the 38th returned to Antigua.

<sup>5</sup> Only three out of the seven regiments actually returned with Barrington to Britain: three others remained in Guadaloupe and one returned to Antigua.

<sup>6</sup> This was only intended as a temporary arrangement. 'The King is persuaded that till the proper arrangements shall be taken with regard to the government of Guadaloupe, you will exert your utmost zeal and abilities for the safety and peace of that part of His Majesty's dominions which is, for the present, devolved to your care' (W. Pitt to Lieut.-Governor Melville, May 2nd, 1760).

<sup>7</sup> Colonel Campbell Dalrymple.

health was then seriously impaired, was naturally desirous to return to his native climate: he had also received an additional testimony of His Majesty's approbation of his conduct by being advanced to the rank of a Colonel in the army.<sup>8</sup> Anxious, however, for the completion of the scheme he had long had in agitation respecting the conquest of the French islands, to this object he sacrificed every consideration of interest and convenience. The understanding he had established in the neighbouring French islands might be entirely cut off by his absence; nor was it of such a nature as that the management of it could possibly be transferred to other hands.

With such views Colonel Melville as second in command, with a part of the garrison of Fort Royal,<sup>9</sup> joined the armament arrived at Guadaloupe from North America under Lord Rollo.<sup>10</sup> The object of the expedition was the island of Dominica, which was surprised and taken, with very little loss on the part of the victors.<sup>1</sup> The hill and battery commanding Roseau were taken by Colonel Melville at the head of the grenadiers of the army.

With such caution and skill was this attack concerted and conducted that Dominica had surrendered before the French governor of Martinique, although the islands are within sight the one of the other, was informed of the attempt. The importance of Colonel Melville's services in the attack,<sup>2</sup> and particularly in the previous arrangements with persons in Dominica, was publicly acknowledged by Admiral Sir James Douglas<sup>3</sup> and Brigadier-General Lord Rollo, the two commanders of the expedition.

In the beginning of 1762 Colonel Melville commanded a division under (?) General Monckton<sup>4</sup> at the reduction of

<sup>8</sup> 'To be Colonel of Foot in America only,' 18th February, 1761.

<sup>9</sup> Three hundred of the garrison of Guadaloupe (Fortescue, *H.B.A.* ii. 538 note).

<sup>10</sup> Andrew, 5th Lord Rollo, had distinguished himself at Dettingen. In the Seven Years' War he had already served in North America under Lord Amherst who now appointed him to the command of this expedition (Fortescue, *H.B.A.* ii. 537). Lord Rollo arrived on June 3rd and sailed on June 4th, 1761.

<sup>1</sup> On June 7th, 1761.

<sup>2</sup> He commanded the front division.

<sup>3</sup> Admiral Sir James Douglas (1703-1787) served at Quebec in 1759 and in the West Indies, 1756-62. He was Commander-in-chief in the West Indies, 1763-1770.

<sup>4</sup> Monckton had served under Braddock in 1755, capturing Fort Beauséjour. At Quebec he was Wolfe's second-in-command.



Martinique ; and notwithstanding severe illness from the climate, was present at the successful assault on the hill and battery of Tortenson. This success was speedily followed by the fall of Fort Royal.<sup>5</sup> But a very small portion, however, of Martinique was yet in the power of the British ; by far the greater portion, with the capital, St. Pierre, a number of important fortifications, all the strong natural fastnesses in the interior of the island, still remained in the hands of the French commander. No sooner, however, did a party of the British arrive at a certain point within the island, one of three previously marked out by Colonel Melville's intelligence with the colonists,<sup>6</sup> than a general defection among them took place, accompanied with a demand for an immediate surrender. In such circumstances the French Commander was compelled to accede to a capitulation,<sup>7</sup> and a great waste of British blood was prevented : for such was the strength, natural and artificial, of the island, and such were the qualifications of the Commander of the island and his means of defence, that the reduction of Martinique, if at all practicable by the British armament employed, must have been purchased by a very heavy loss of the troops. This rapid conquest was the more important and precious that, within a few days after the surrender, a French squadron, filled with troops, appeared off Martinique : but on learning of the fall of the colony, the Commander, without any attempt for its recovery, immediately returned to St. Domingo. In the fate of Martinique were speedily involved the other French islands, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Grenada and Tobago,<sup>8</sup> yielded up on terms equally liberal and encouraging with those granted to Martinique.

The conquest of Martinique being thus effected, Colonel Melville returned to his post in Guadeloupe, chiefly that he might

<sup>5</sup> The army landed at Martinique on 16th January, 1762. Morne Tortenson was captured on January 24th, and Morne Grenier on the 28th. Fort Royal surrendered on February 3rd.

<sup>6</sup> 'Before the end of the year 1760 three persons of note from Martinico came to Guadeloupe in a vessel of truce with passports and recommendations from Mons<sup>r</sup> de Boharnois on different ostensible grounds of private business, but in fact to settle a confidential Plan with G<sup>r</sup> M. under the strictest engagements to inviolable secrecy between the parties, in order to effect a surrender of Martinico by a general defection in the case of its being attacked by British troops' (Memo. by General Melville).

<sup>7</sup> On 12th February, 1762.

<sup>8</sup> Of these islands only Grenada was strictly French ; the three others, with Dominica, had been declared 'neutral islands' at the Peace of 1748.

avoid the chance of intercourse with the persons in the island, by whose means the defection of the inhabitants and the prompt surrender of the island had been brought about. With such skill and caution had this defection been projected and conducted as to defeat every enquiry into the persons concerned in it. On the restoration of Martinique and some other of the islands to France,<sup>9</sup> the most rigid inquisition was made respecting the leaders of the correspondence with the British. That such a correspondence and intelligence did exist it was impossible, from the clamour for a capitulation, to doubt. It is nevertheless remarkable that of the number of persons in the island suspected and even punished on the occasion, not even a hint was ever directed against any one of those with whom Colonel Melville had been connected. Nor indeed could any disclosure of this sort have taken place, for the whole understanding was maintained by verbal communication: not a word upon the subject was ever committed to writing: the inhabitants of Martinique themselves conducted the whole business by confidential members of their own number who, under various pretexts, both avowedly and clandestinely, found their way to Guadaloupe and to convey to Colonel Melville the information and resolutions with which they were charged.

Many years afterwards, when General Melville was employed on a mission to the court of Versailles, application was made to him, but in the manner the most delicate, from different quarters, to know whether certain persons, whose names were laid before him, had been in any way connected with him in the West Indies. To General Melville it gave no small satisfaction to be able to assure the applicants that, of the persons so pointed out, not one had been in any shape or measure concerned in his schemes, nor even by accident personally known to him. By his solemn testimony to this effect, the persons on whose account application had been made to him, or at least the descendants of some of them, were soon relieved from the obloquy and losses they had long endured, from suspicions entertained concerning them, by the Government of France.

To convey some notion of the spirit by which General Melville was actuated in the conduct of affairs, civil and military, during his command in Guadaloupe, the following specimen may suffice.

By the capitulation granted to the island the French Royal Council was preserved in the full enjoyment of all its functions and privileges; and the French laws, civil and criminal, remained

<sup>9</sup> Martinique and Guadeloupe were restored to France at the Peace of 1763.



in their original obligation and force. Of the Royal Council the Governor was *ex officio* the president: and he was the only British subject in that powerful body. A meeting of this Council was held, in the capital of the island, in 1760, in which Governor Melville presided.<sup>10</sup> The board was complete, all members present, and the Crown lawyers were engaged in conducting the business of the day. In the midst of this business the Governor's ears were assailed by a horrid shriek from a human being, proceeding from an inclosed area under a window of the Council Chamber. Springing instinctively from his seat to the window, the Governor beheld a miserable being fast bound to a post fixed upright in the ground. One leg of the sufferer was violently strained back towards the thigh by means of an iron hoop passed over the bended knee and inclosing both the leg and the thigh at some distance from the joint. Within this hoop and along the front of the leg was an iron wedge driven in by the executioner with a sledge hammer. Near the tortured man at a small table sat a person habited like a judge or a magistrate, with a secretary or clerk, to mark down upon paper the declarations or confessions of the wretch in agony.

Filled with horror at such a spectacle, careless as to the consequences to himself of his act, forgetful even of the assembly around him, the Governor, throwing open the window, ordered a serjeant upon duty to rush forward to prevent a repetition of the stroke upon the wedge, and to release the sufferer from his torture.

While this was doing the members of the Council had drawn round the Governor at the window, and the Attorney-General of the colony respectfully but firmly remonstrated against the interruption given to the customary course of justice. This he styled an infraction of the capitulation, which, in every other point and circumstance, he acknowledged had been most religiously observed and fulfilled by the Governor, to whose humanity the whole assembly could bear ample testimony, and whose conduct in the colony had given universal satisfaction.

To this representation Governor Melville answered that he had always been, and would always be, most solicitous, by the conscientious discharge of his duties, to merit the esteem and approbation of the colony, but that neither from his natural feelings as a man, nor from his education as a Briton, could he be reconciled to the practice of torture. He added that whether

<sup>10</sup> The incident occurred during the interregnum between the governorships of Crump and Dalrymple, when General Melville was acting-governor.

the employment of torture in judicial proceedings were or were not authorised by the French laws, a point which he did not presume to determine, such a practice, where he commanded, he never would endure. He concluded by declaring that if his interference on that occasion were really an infraction of the capitulation, it would be the only kind of infraction of which it would ever be in their power to complain.

Perfect harmony was instantly restored ; the whole members of the Council dined that day with the Governor : and the business was never more brought into discussion. The object of his clemency was reported to be singularly undeserving of favour ; and the members of the Council, as gentlemen of liberal and humane minds and habits, were secretly well pleased with this temporary abrogation of a practice so hostile to every sentiment of nature and to every principle of justice. The effect produced on the minds of the inhabitants at large of Guadaloupe and the neighbouring French colonies by this singular incident was precisely what it ought to have been ; to increase to the highest degree the popularity of their new British Governor. It deserves also to be stated that during the whole time of General Melville's residence in the West Indies he never once learned that the French governments there had ever again resorted to the practice of torture, neither in Guadaloupe after its restoration to France at the peace of 1763, nor in any other of their colonies.

The conquest of the French islands in the West Indies, an object lying near the heart of Colonel Melville, being at last happily accomplished, he returned to England,<sup>1</sup> where his services were highly approved. The measures, however, which he had previously taken to secure the success of the British arms, imperfectly known, could neither be duly appreciated nor openly acknowledged. The whole had been conducted with profound secrecy ; nor was the secret ever divulged.

The favourable impression made on the minds of His Majesty's ministers by the conduct of Colonel Melville was speedily and abundantly manifested. He was in 1763 promoted to the rank of a Brigadier-General.<sup>2</sup> But the most unequivocal testimony of the confidence placed in his zeal and ability was his appointment to be Captain-General and Governor-in-chief [of] all the islands in the West Indies ceded by France to Britain by the peace of

<sup>1</sup> He arrived in England before the end of September, 1762.

<sup>2</sup> This is inaccurate. His commission as Brigadier-General is dated '26th September 1761 in the first year of our reign.'



1763. His commission under the Great Seal was dated on the 9th of April, 1764. For this appointment he always believed himself to have been principally indebted to the good opinion of the Earl of Egremont,<sup>3</sup> then Secretary of State for the Colonies. In that capacity his Lordship had the best means of penetrating into the views and character of Brigadier-General Melville, and upon the observations he there made (for they were not ever personally acquainted) was his recommendation to His Majesty alone founded.

The islands comprehended within General Melville's government were Grenada and the Grenadines, Dominica, St. Vincent and Tobago,<sup>4</sup> and to the particularly important and arduous duties of the government of so many separate colonies and islands, inhabited by a people from education, institutions and habits either hostile or at best aliens to the British government and nation:—colonies which, after the termination of General Melville's charge, were conceived to require each a separate governor and establishment:—to all these duties were added those attached to the appointment of the Commander-in-chief of the Forces within the bounds of his government.

So many and so important were the interests and objects, public and private, to be combined in forming the arrangements for the new government, that it was not until the close of October, 1764,<sup>5</sup> that Governor Melville arrived in the islands entrusted to his administration. He was attended by storeships loaded with articles requisite for forming or improving settlements in the West Indies.<sup>6</sup> Tobago was then uninhabited by Europeans, and generally covered with wood. Thither, therefore, Governor

<sup>3</sup> Secretary of State for the Southern Department from October, 1761, till his death in August, 1763.

<sup>4</sup> Of these islands only Grenada and the Grenadines had strictly been ceded by France; Dominica, St. Vincent, and Tobago had been 'neutral' islands since 1748, the fourth neutral island, St. Lucia, being annexed by France in 1763. The Earl of Cardigan had a claim to St. Vincent which caused some discussion as to the form of General Melville's commission (*Cal. Home Office Papers*, 1760-65, No. 1057).

<sup>5</sup> He was thus at home for almost exactly two years.

<sup>6</sup> His request for ordnance for the islands was granted in April, 1764; the original estimate of the expense was £23,319 18s. 1d., but this was reduced to £9295 12s. 11d. (*C.H.O.P.* 1760-5, No. 1279). In 1763 he proposed the erection of barracks in the Ceded Islands and was granted a warrant in April, 1765, for the erection of barracks for 500 men at St. Vincent (*C.H.O.P.* 1760-1765, Nos. 678, 1005, 1219).

Melville first repaired, after a short stay at Barbadoes, from which island he was accompanied by some colonists, resolved to make the experiment of a settlement in that new establishment. Dispatching with the due expedition the business in Tobago, he proceeded to Grenada, the seat of his government, there to enter on the great objects of his mission; carrying into effect His Majesty's instructions respecting the introduction and establishment of the British government, followed by legislatures in each colony, similar to those in other British colonies.<sup>7</sup>

During the whole of his government, which lasted no less than seven years, General Melville only once quitted his post, and that was in 1769, when he returned to England,<sup>8</sup> by the direction of government at home, to be consulted on business of the highest importance to the prosperity and even the security of the colonies under his charge. The difficulties he had to encounter and to surmount, in a government so extensive and so complicated, were numberless and perplexing. He had the satisfaction, however, to perceive that his administration was always the most approved when it was the most understood.<sup>9</sup> Some partial complaints, by a few disappointed persons who had formed extravagant expectations under his government, were preferred, while he was in London in January, 1770, nominally and *pro forma*, against him as Governor, but really against His Majesty's Council in Grenada. The grounds of these complaints, however, were found by government at home to be utterly frivolous and vexatious, and as such were entirely disregarded.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> There was a separate council for each island and a house of representatives for Grenada, Dominica, and St. Vincent (*Acts of the Privy Council (Colonial)*, 1766-83, p. 7).

<sup>8</sup> He was away from the West Indies from July, 1768, till April, 1770.

<sup>9</sup> The Lords of the Admiralty, writing to Shelburne on 1st June, 1768, enclose a letter from Pye to the following effect: 'The Ceded Islands are in a most flourishing condition. The activity and vigilance of General Melvill, their Governor, does not a little contribute to it. The French are very quiet' (*C.H.O.P.* 1766-1769, p. 345). In his leisure hours, General Melville took considerable interest in various societies. As an English freemason, he was appointed Provincial Grand Master of the Ceded Islands and in this capacity founded the Britannick Lodge in 1766. He was also appointed in 1760 'Grand Master within the tropics' or the 'Beggars Bannison and Merryland'—a society which he had joined at Anstruther in 1755. In 1764 he became 'Patron of all the Hob or Nob Societies' within his government. A 'Hob or Nob society or School of Temperance' was pledged to drink seven toasts in bumpers at each of its meetings.

<sup>10</sup> He was accused of unconstitutionally permitting the Council to exercise legislative powers after he had prorogued the Assembly, of unfairly shielding



On the subject of a charge not the least uncommon against persons in his position, *peculation*, not even a hint was ever insinuated to the prejudice of Governor Melville. It was, on the contrary, well known, at home as well as abroad, that with opportunities of amassing wealth in the sale, the settlement and the administration of so many newly-acquired colonies, such as had never fallen to the lot of any other governor, he practised an honest and honourable abstinence. He firmly withstood the frequent and pressing proposals made to him by speculators to enter into their schemes of acquisition at the sales of the lands; although in these schemes he was at liberty, with perfect propriety, to embark. He even retired from his long and laborious administration, as a civil and a military commander, much poorer than many persons under his government, who had acquired extensive property on no other original foundation than credit and speculation. Even in the small purchases of land which he chose to make, in some of the islands under his command, Governor Melville was swayed much more by considerations of public advantage than by those of private emolument. Tobago almost a desert, and Dominica situated between and within view of the great French islands, Martinique and Guadeloupe, presented so few attractions to new colonists that unless the Governor, by selecting plantations in them, had evinced his confidence in their security as British possessions, few or no adventurers would have hazarded their property in establishments on either of those unpromising colonies.<sup>1</sup>

It is but justice to add that although his annual salary from home, as Governor of so many colonies, scarcely exceeded one thousand pounds,<sup>2</sup> yet he not only refused to accept the usual

'Augustine, a negroe man slave,' from punishment, and of permitting the use of torture for extracting confessions from negroes (*Acts of the Privy Council (Colonial)*, 1766-83, pp. 221-8).

<sup>1</sup> General Melville's Dominica estate, known as Melville Hall, was valued in 1770 at £33,190 16s. od. (currency), and consisted of 1037 acres, with buildings, and 128 slaves. In Tobago, his estate of Carnbee consisted of 200 acres, valued at £4200 sterling. In Grenada, he also possessed in 1770 property in land, houses, and slaves, valued at £7770 4s. od. current money. This 'appraisment was reckoned very moderate' (*v.* General Melville's note-book). Referring to the Tobago settlement, General Melville's cousin, John Whyte Melville, wrote on his behalf in 1806: 'From the influence he had with his countrymen of N. Britain he saw it assume a most flattering appearance . . . and left it in a high state of improvement.'

<sup>2</sup> A Privy Seal dated 6th July, 1764, gave him a salary of £1200 from the 4½ per cents. His salary was brought up to £3000 by the addition of £1200

and proffered additional salaries from each colony under his charge, but also freely relinquished many customary fees and perquisites, when he conceived such a step conducive to the benefit of the new colonists.

The duties of a Major-General, a rank to which he was raised in 1766,<sup>3</sup> he punctually discharged over the whole extent of his command, without any pay, allowance or remuneration whatever from the public on that account.

Overcome by the earnest and repeated solicitations of Mr. George Grenville, then First Lord of the Treasury, Governor Melville, before he left England,<sup>4</sup> undertook the inspection of all receipts and expenditure of public money belonging to the department of the Treasury within his government. The opportunity of enriching himself, by even the fair and legitimate advantages, arising from the disposal of monies requisite for the service of so many colonies:—this opportunity for him possessed no charms. It seemed besides singularly incongruous that the inspection and controul of services and expenditures should be lodged in that very person upon whose opinion and recommendation the incurring of such expenditures would chiefly depend. For these and other reasons the urgent requests of the Minister he resisted until resistance seemed to verge into obstinacy. Carrying into this branch of his administration the same zeal for the public service and the same hostility to private peculation, which pervaded every other, he was able to confine the expenses of his government within a very moderate sum. It will hardly be believed that, for four separate colonies, during a period of seven years—in which too considerable extraordinary charges were necessarily incurred in the apprehension of a rupture with Spain<sup>5</sup>—the whole expenditures came short by some thousands of *fifty thousand pounds*.

For undertaking and executing the extraneous duties of a paymaster in his government General Melville, relying with implicit

from the local capitation tax and £600 from fees, etc. When the capitation tax was remitted by the King, the amount lost to the governor was made up from home (*C.H.O.P.* 1771, No. 687).

<sup>3</sup> His commission 'to be major-general in the West Indies only' is dated 7th August, 1766.

<sup>4</sup> *i.e.* before he left England to assume his command in 1764. George Grenville was First Lord of Treasury from 10th April, 1763, to 10th July, 1765. He was not in office during General Melville's leave of 1768-1770.

<sup>5</sup> Over the Falkland Islands, 1766-1770. In 1769 General Melville and Captain Bennet offended the Spanish government, which was asked if it would be satisfied with the dismissal of the latter (*C.H.O.P.* 1770, No. 47).



confidence on the honour of the Minister, neither asked nor ever received any written permanent authority.<sup>6</sup> When his accounts came to be examined and passed at home Mr. Grenville was no more.<sup>7</sup> The existing Administration formally and publicly recognised the characteristic purity and the distinguished merits of General Melville's government in all its parts, and their entire conviction of the correctness of his statement respecting the verbal understanding and arrangement with Mr. Grenville. General Melville, however, had no regular written document of that arrangement to produce: other gentlemen under Mr. Grenville, acquainted with the transaction, who could have established the fact, had likewise quitted the world. By the *retroactive* application of an *ex multo post facto* regulation of the Board of Treasury,<sup>8</sup> General Melville's demand, merely to be indemnified for the expenses he had unavoidably incurred for clerks, books, etc., requisite for conducting the business of the paymaster, was declared to be inadmissible. He had therefore the consolation to know that, in addition to all his former sacrifices of private to public advantage, the whole pecuniary concerns of his widely extended and intricately complicated government had been satisfactorily conducted, at his own personal risk and charge, without the public being called upon for one farthing of the expence of the management of these concerns.<sup>9</sup>

In another case where to personal exertions he united considerable pecuniary risk, General Melville's motives and services were more adequately appreciated. In an early period of his government he conceived the public service might derive important benefit from the establishment of a Botanic Garden in one at least of the islands committed to his care. With this view a portion of the Crown lands in the island of St. Vincent was set apart for the purpose. The establishment was formed, conducted and maintained at his own personal charge: at last, however, it was

<sup>6</sup> The agreement was to the effect that General Melville should be allowed the difference of exchange on all bills drawn by him, as indemnification for his trouble and expenses. In the event, this amounted to the sum of £4427 1s. 4½d.

<sup>7</sup> George Grenville died on 13th November, 1770. The audit of General Melville's accounts for his governorship (1764-1771) began in 1785, but was not completed till about 1800.

<sup>8</sup> The regulation was made in September, 1790—nineteen years after the close of General Melville's governorship.

<sup>9</sup> General Melville estimated that he had suffered the loss at least of £13,784 by being 'a servant of the public.'

taken under the special protection of His Majesty; and the expenses of its support are now defrayed out of the public purse. Richly stored with the most useful and ornamental vegetable productions, under the able management of Dr. Anderson, the Botanic Garden of St. Vincent has long enjoyed a very distinguished reputation.

From the day on which he retired from the islands of his government in the summer of 1771,<sup>10</sup> General Melville, adhering to his favourite maxim of *taking nothing for doing nothing*, never received nor courted nor wished for any provision, salary, pension, or emolument whatever out of the public purse. His eminently useful and disinterested services, his much impaired health, his total loss of sight, originated by the exercise of his military duties, might, however, have abundantly warranted claims on his part, such as in similar circumstances are so commonly preferred and so usually admitted and gratified.

It was on his voyage home to Britain from his government that General Melville had the fortune to discover the solution of the embarrassing problem respecting the manner of distributing the oars and the rowers in the ships of the antients. To the theory of navigation, as founded on the principles of Geometry and Astronomy, his repeated courses across the Atlantic, aided by his frequent consultations with some of the most distinguished officers of the British Navy, had enabled him to join much more extended practical knowledge than commonly falls to the lot of a landsman. With the antient authorities and the modern comments on the subject, he had been long intimately acquainted. . . .

Laying the different theories entirely aside, General Melville proposed to himself two questions. . . . The first objects of enquiry were the purposes contemplated by the antients in the arrangement of their oars and rowers. To this question the evident answer was that their purposes were to obtain celerity and impetus in their movements. The next question, springing out of the first, was how this celerity and impetus were best to be obtained: and the answer seemed to be that the greatest possible quantity of motive power should be introduced into the smallest possible space. . . .

It occurred to General Melville that by adopting a double obliquity every possible advantage might be obtained. He therefore supposed the side of the ship, instead of rising vertically

<sup>10</sup> General Melville's departure took place on 17th July, 1771. He was succeeded by Governor Leyborne.



or nearly so from the water, as in modern construction, to have spread outwards, at the distance of a few feet above the surface, diverging from the perpendicular with an angle of perhaps forty-five degrees. Upon this inclined side the seats for the rowers, each rower having his own short seat, were to be placed, in a diagonal alternate order, forming an equal angle of forty-five degrees with the base line of the inclined side. The effects produced by this double obliquity would be, that one row or tier of oars and rowers would be elevated only from fifteen to eighteen inches above the inferior tier, instead of four or five times that distance, as would have happened according to some other schemes; that each individual rower would be able to sit and ply his oar without impeding or being impeded by others in his labour; and that the uppermost tier of oars, even in a quinquereme, would not be of an unmanageable length or weight.

By this theory . . . multitudes of passages in antient authors were rendered intelligible. In it was discovered a perfect uniformity with the figures of ships preserved on antient coins and sculptures, and in the paintings discovered in the subterraneous ruins of Herculaneum.

The relations between General Melville and the Ceded Islands of America as a Governor and a Commander-in-chief of the forces were now finally closed. His conduct in these capacities had secured to him the approbation not only of his own heart, but of all persons with whom he was concerned, both at home and abroad. That this should be the case, in the management of affairs coming more directly within his competency, as a military man of genius and experience, it will not be difficult to believe. That he should be equally successful in the administration of civil and particularly of legal affairs, must be considered as his peculiar felicity. That he was singularly successful in these branches of his duties is nevertheless placed beyond all controversy by the remarkable fact that, from his decisions in the quality of Chancellor, within the bounds of his government, not a single appeal was ever made to His Majesty in Council, the ultimate resource in such cases, according to the constitution of the British Colonies.

To qualify him for the discharge of the difficult and delicate duties of a Chancellor, General Melville possessed a head clearly discriminating, a heart liberal and humane, a spirit far removed beyond even the suspicion of possible perversion, by motives of interested advantage, of hostility or of friendship. He was him-

self in the habit of accounting for much of his expedition and success in conducting the business of the Court of Chancery by his ignorance of the technical practice of that court. A stranger to the formalities and nicely balanced distinctions, which length of time and multiplied and various business had introduced into the courts at home, his constant object and aim were to distribute sound, substantial justice between man and man. His suitors were, in general, plain men of business: and that no measures were ever taken to obtain a reversal or even a revision of his decisions is the most unequivocal proof of their conviction, that his decisions were founded on the genuine principles of equity and integrity.

In discussions involving questions of technical import, General Melville availed himself of the knowledge possessed by the established lawyers of the Crown in the different colonies. Of these gentlemen Mr. Piggott,<sup>1</sup> His Majesty's Attorney-General in Grenada, father of Sir Arthur Piggott, who, a few years ago, filled the corresponding high and arduous office in England, enjoyed the Governor's peculiar esteem and confidence.

The three years of General Melville's life subsequent to his return from his government were occupied in arrangements necessary on the termination of his extended and complicated relations with the public. His own private affairs, much neglected during his long residence abroad, required no small portion of his time and attention.<sup>2</sup> When all these matters were placed in a state permitting him to turn his mind to other subjects, his attention was powerfully engaged by what had always been his favourite occupation—the study of military history and antiquities.

Paris, Spa, Flanders, Holland he had already visited: but the years 1774, 1775, and 1776 were devoted to a more complete tour through France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, the Low Countries, etc. In this tour the subjects of the fine arts, in which he professed a very delicate taste, with great sensibility of their beauties and defects, were particularly examined. His leading

<sup>1</sup> John Piggott, 'of Barbadoes.' His son, Sir A. Piggott, was Attorney-General, February, 1806–May, 1807, and in that capacity conducted the impeachment of Lord Melville; he commenced practice in Grenada, and, like his father, became Attorney-General there.

<sup>2</sup> His 'attornies' for Scotland 'appointed under a full power of factory dated August 12th,' 1770, had been '1<sup>st</sup> Samuel Charters Esq', Solicitor to his Majesty's Customs, at Edinburgh; 2<sup>nd</sup>, Major John Melvill of Cairny at Cupar; 3<sup>rd</sup>, Dr James Simson Physician at St Andrews; 4<sup>th</sup> Robt Whytt of Bennoch, at Edinburgh.' The last was the son and successor of Dr. Whytt.



object, however, which drew him aside into many a wandering from the customary tract of travellers, was to visit and verify the scenes of the most memorable battles, sieges or other military exploits recorded in antient or in modern history. Of these objects of his curiosity it may be sufficient just to say that, from the *Portus Itius* of Caesar, on the margin of the British Channel, to the *Cannae* of Polybius, on the remote shore of the Adriatic; from the field of Ramilies, on the (sic), to that of Blenheim, on the Danube, no scene of interest to the military scholar escaped at least a cursory view. With Polybius and Caesar in his hand, and referring to the most authentic relations of later warfare, he traced upon the ground the dispositions and operations of the most distinguished commanders of various periods. Noting the circumstances in which their judgment, skill and presence of mind were the most conspicuous, he treasured up, for future use, the evidences of the mistakes and errors, from which even the most eminent among them were not exempted.

By a careful personal examination of the shores of Britain and France, he satisfied himself respecting the points where Caesar embarked, and where he landed, in his expeditions to Britain. The former he fixed at and in the vicinity of the harbour of Boulogne, and the latter at and in the vicinity of Deale.<sup>3</sup>

Another point of military antiquity which strongly attracted the attention of General Melville was the course pursued by Annibal, from Gaule across the Alps into Italy. . . . That he might trace the route of the Carthaginian hero, in circumstances as similar as possible, General Melville chose for his researches a period of the year as near as prudence could allow to that in which Annibal traversed the Alps. He passed over the Little St. Bernard on the twenty-fourth day of September, when the approaches of an Alpine winter were already sufficiently manifest: and Annibal must have followed the same course only a few weeks later in the season. By this management the general face of nature and of the country, the distances and situations of the rivers, rocks and mountains, were found most accurately to tally with the relation of Polybius.

Not satisfied, however, with all these striking coincidences, General Melville crossed and recrossed the Alps, in various other directions, pointed out for the track of Annibal. Of these he

<sup>3</sup> These places are probably correct for the first, but not for the second landing of Caesar. Cf. Oman, *England before the Norman Conquest*, and Rice-Holmes, *Caesar's Conquest of Gaul*, 2nd edition, on 'Portus Itius.'

found that not one could, without doing great violence indeed to the text of the Greek historian, be brought, in any rational way, to correspond with his authentic narrative.

As an important branch of the military art of the antients, their warlike machines occupied no small share of the curiosity and attention of General Melville. His ideas on the construction of those implements of war led to the explanation of various passages in antient authors, which had baffled the penetration of the ablest commentators.

When the contest between the British Colonies and the Mother Country began to assume a serious aspect, General Melville found it proper to return to England rather earlier than he had purposed. In consequence of the recognition, on the part of France, of the independence of the British American Colonies, hostilities with that kingdom seemed to be unavoidable. General Melville was early consulted by Administration,<sup>4</sup> on the means and the measures to be employed for protecting our own settlements in the West Indies, and for the conquest of those belonging to France. The impression on the minds of individuals connected with Administration, respecting his conduct in preparing the way for the conquest of the latter and in the government of a number of the former, was sufficiently recent and powerful to secure to his opinions a favourable reception. Had these opinions accorded with the views entertained by leading persons in His Majesty's counsels<sup>5</sup> General Melville's local and military knowledge would again have been applied in his country's service, in an important command beyond the Atlantic. With the nature of that service, and with the qualifications of the distinguished officer at the head of the French force in the West Indies, he was too well acquainted to embark in projects of which it was impossible for him to augur a favourable issue. By personal intercourse with the Marquis de Bouillé during his government, as well as by public report, General Melville had formed too just an estimate of the talents and dispositions of the commander to whom he would be opposed to engage in the contest unless accompanied by a force far more respectable than that which it seemed to be in contemplation to place at his disposal.

To the opinions of a man who had filled the stations General Melville had filled, who had acted as General Melville had acted,

<sup>4</sup> On August 29th, 1777, he was promoted to be 'Lieutenant-General in the West Indies only.'

<sup>5</sup> Principally Lord George Germaine.



some attention, it may be thought, would have been due. When honoured with an offer of employment in the service of his country, it was his duty, it may on the other hand be thought, implicitly to accede to the terms on which that employment was to be conferred. Rank, influence and emolument were the sure companions of his service: his conduct, whatever might have been the result, would probably have ensured to him the approbation of all competent judges: popular applause he might in such a case have disregarded. For even total failure in the objects of his employment, he might perhaps have consoled himself with the consciousness that, engaging in it solely by the authority of his superiors, he had in it discharged his duty to the full extent of his powers. Considerations of this sort were of no importance in his judgment. The interests, the reputation of his country could never, he was confident, be promoted, they could not even be preserved, by the projects in agitation at home: in those projects he therefore declined being in any shape concerned. A system very discordant with his ideas was adopted: the result is well known: in a short time M. de Bouillé became the master of many a valuable British American island.<sup>6</sup>

The resemblance between General Melville and the Marquis de Bouillé was striking. Both men of approved valour and military skill; both distinguished by a high sense of honour; both actuated by motives the most disinterested, generous and humane; both accustomed to service in the probable scene of action; both inflamed with zeal in the cause of their respective countries; and each with a determination to recommend himself to his antagonist by a faithful discharge of his duties. A contest on proper terms between two such commanders must have furnished ample materials for the instruction of the politician as well as of the soldier.

The last service rendered to his country by General Melville, in a public capacity, related to Tobago, a colony originally planted by him at the commencement of his government, and long fostered by his peculiar care. This island, in the course of the conquests of M. de Bouillé, fell into his hands. In the defence the inhabitants, with the civil governor, George Ferguson, Esq., at their head, by their patriotic conduct merited and obtained

<sup>6</sup> The French captured Dominica in 1778, St. Vincent and Grenada in 1779, Tobago in 1781, and St. Kitts in 1782, while the Spaniards took the Bahamas in 1782. On the other hand, a small British force, sent on the advice of Rodney, captured St. Lucia with its excellent harbour in 1778.



from a generous victor a most liberal capitulation. By the intercepted dispatches of the French general it was known that, because the Governor and colonists had distinguished themselves in their own defence, he felt it to be his duty, as the representative of a beneficent sovereign, to grant every possible indulgence to the new subjects. Of his opinion concerning the professional defence of the island, some notion may perhaps be formed from his silence.<sup>7</sup>

By the preliminary articles of peace, arranged in the beginning of 1783, Tobago was ceded by Britain to France,<sup>8</sup> without the customary stipulations securing the rights of the British settlers, proprietors, and traders, connected with the island. To remove as much as possible the alarm excited by this circumstance, equally unexpected and apparently unmerited by colonists who had so zealously exposed themselves in their country's cause, measures were taken by their friends at home for obtaining from the court of France some amelioration of their condition.

In prosecuting this design the first step was to select a proper negotiator. In such a case men whose personal interests are deeply involved seldom make an improper choice: favour and fancy give place to judgement. The attention of all interested in Tobago was turned towards General Melville, who was requested to repair to Versailles, there to solicit for the unfortunate colonists of Tobago indulgences to which, by the terms of the cession, they could form no claim. In acceding to this request, that the application from the new subjects to their new master might be the more decorous, General Melville himself suggested that a coadjutor should be given to him; and Mr. Young (afterwards Sir William Young<sup>9</sup>) was joined with him in the mission.

Of the application to the court of France the success surpassed the most sanguine expectation: and to the benevolent magnanimity of the ill-fated Lewis the Sixteenth, on the liberal suggestions of his enlightened Minister of the Marine and Colonies, the Marshal Duke de Castries, that success was by General

<sup>7</sup> There were barely 200 British troops against 1200 French. Fortescue (*H.B.A.* iii. 350) attributes the surrender to the pusillanimity of the colonial militia, which was 'unable to endure the trial of seeing their houses in flames.'

<sup>8</sup> The Peace of Versailles restored the *status quo ante bellum* in the West Indies, with the sole exception of Tobago, which was ceded to France, but which finally passed into British hands during the Napoleonic wars.

<sup>9</sup> Sir William Young, 2nd Bart., was the son of Sir William Young, 1st Bart. (d. 1788), governor of Dominica, and the grandson of Brook Taylor. He was governor of Tobago from 1807 till his death in 1815.



Melville uniformly attributed. Let another circumstance, however, be added by one, the writer of these pages, who as secretary of General Melville on that mission, had unquestionable evidence of the fact. The representations of the minister, and the consequent decisions of the sovereign, were very materially influenced by esteem for the character of General Melville, and by confidence in the manly, candid and honourable conduct he displayed in every part of the negotiation. The humanity, liberality and disinterestedness which had marked the whole of his administration in Guadaloupe, while it remained under the British flag, and the whole of his general government of the French ceded islands had, in the persons of many individuals and in the connections of others of distinction in France, prepared for him a cordial, a confidential reception, such as it may have been the happiness of few negotiators to possess. At his last interview with M. de Castries, the minister expressed his royal master's entire satisfaction with the manner in which General Melville had conducted a very delicate negotiation. He concluded with declaring that His Majesty was convinced the General had, throughout the whole business, performed the part not only of a genuine friend of Tobago, but of an impartial umpire between that colony and France: *vous avez agi en vrai tiers* was the expression.

However extraordinary it may appear, it is yet unquestionably true that in disquisitions into the nature of the human mind and into the foundations and principles of moral science, General Melville found peculiar delight. His inherent and fearless love of truth, his natural acuteness and talent for discrimination, found in these researches ample occupation. He had remained at the University just long enough to acquire a relish for such exercises of the understanding; but not so long as to contract an overweening fondness for any particular system of reasoning and inquiry respecting such exercises. From the twentieth to the sixtieth year of his age he had been, in public and in private life, entirely devoted to pursuits of a very different nature. '*Naturam expellas furca tamen usque recurrit.*' . . .

The unfortunate decay and loss of his sight seemed peculiarly favourable to the pursuit of metaphysical researches. His internal vision gained every day more and more strength in proportion as his external vision tended to extinction. In this it was his peculiar happiness that the moments of solitude, which usually lie heavy on the hands of the blind, were by him employed in

exercises at once delightful to himself and instructive to his fellowmen. . . .<sup>10</sup>

To close these imperfect outlines of the life, character and pursuits of General Melville it must be sufficient just to add that, while in private he was the friend 'of the widow, of the orphan and of those who have no helper,' in public he was a ready and a liberal contributor to the support of many of the most valuable charitable establishments.<sup>1</sup> The *Scotch Corporation* in London, by its management as well as by its constitution perhaps the least susceptible of abuse in the multitude of similar benevolent institutions in the capital, will long remember the services and regret the loss of its venerable recruiting General.<sup>2</sup>

The patron of unassuming merit, the encourager of ingenuous youth, his stores of knowledge were ever open to the candid enquirer. A genuine and ardent lover of truth in every pursuit in which mankind can be interested, and from whatever it proceeded, truth was by him ever most cordially welcomed. The conscientious and unshaken friend of the radical principles of liberty, religious and civil, General Melville evinced himself to be, in the fullest sense of the terms, the true friend and lover of his country and of his kind.

General Melville was a member of the Royal and Antiquarian Societies of London and of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. By the University of the latter city, his *alma mater*, he was honoured with the title of a Doctor of Laws.<sup>3</sup> He was also an honorary member of the British Board of Agriculture, and an active associate of the London Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.<sup>4</sup>

Although he never had a regiment, a home government, or any other military employment whatever, after he quitted the West Indies, he was appointed a full General on the 12th of

<sup>10</sup> Twelve pages of the MS. follow explaining General Melville's system of philosophy; they are not of sufficient interest to be reproduced here.

<sup>1</sup> He was appointed a governor of the Magdalen Hospital in June, 1764.

<sup>2</sup> General Melville was 'a zealous supporter of the institution and founder of its spring meeting' (*Extract from Minutes of the Court of Governors*, 2nd January, 1811). The same minute records the acceptance of General Melville's portrait, 'to be put up in the Hall.' It was destroyed in the fire of 1877.

<sup>3</sup> On February 6th, 1798. The diploma describes him as 'inter duces copiarum Regiae Majestatis Britannicae insignem, doctrinaeque elegantioris, et praesertim Antiquitatis Romanae scientissimum.'

<sup>4</sup> He was made a burgess of Kirkcaldy (August 6th, 1754), of Edinburgh (July 6th, 1763) and of Dundee (October 14th, 1780).



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October, 1793<sup>5</sup>; and at his decease he was, with one exception, the oldest general in the British Army.<sup>6</sup>

General Melville, when his infirmities began to encrease, retired from London,<sup>7</sup> where he had long resided, to Edinburgh, on the 6th of August, 1807, there to have the society of his nearest relatives. He died at Edinburgh at his house in George Street in the New Town, after a short illness, with little apparent pain, on ———<sup>8</sup> the 29th day of August, 1809. He had nearly completed the eighty-sixth year of his age, having been born on the 12th of October, 1723, at Monimail, in the county of Fife, of which parish his father was minister. His mother was a daughter of Robert Whyte of Bennoch, near Kirkcaldy, in the same county, Esquire, and a sister of the late celebrated Dr. Robert Whyte (Whytt), one of His Majesty's physicians for Scotland, and Professor of Medicine in the University of Edinburgh.

Dying a bachelor, General Melville is succeeded in his name<sup>9</sup> and estate by his cousin, John Whyte Melville of Bennoch, Esquire.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> His commission is dated as above. Surely the promotion of a totally blind septuagenarian to be general in time of war is an unsurpassed example of eighteenth-century methods in the British Army.

<sup>6</sup> This is repeated in Mr. Whyte-Melville's letter to the Scottish Hospital of 14th December, 1810. The *Dictionary of National Biography* wrongly describes him as the oldest general.

<sup>7</sup> His London houses were in Brewer Street, Golden Square. On August 26th, 1797, he wrote that he was 'moving furniture, &c., into the next house No. 32, which I believe I had informed you of my having hired for one year.'

<sup>8</sup> Tuesday.

<sup>9</sup> His cousin John Whyte, only surviving son of Dr. R. Whytt, had in point of fact assumed the name of Melville, out of compliment to the General, on 1st September, 1797. The General had in his early years spelt his name Melvil; during his public life, Melvill; and during his later years, Melville.

<sup>10</sup> The estate of Strathkinness, as it existed at the death of General Melville, had been partly bequeathed to him by Janet Tennant, widow of Andrew Melvill, Doctor of Medicine, 'of the family of Pittachope,' partly acquired by the purchase of neighbouring lands. It was left by General Melville to John Whyte Melville of Bennoch and his heirs male, failing whom to the male heirs of John Whyte Melville's three sisters—Louisa, Jean, and Martha—in the order of their seniority. On the death of John Whyte Melville's youngest son, without surviving male issue, in 1883, the estate accordingly reverted to James Mackintosh Balfour, grandson of Jean Whytt, who in 1773 had married her cousin, James Balfour of Pilrig.