

II.—MARLBOROUGH.

WHEN William Palmer founded his School in . November, 1706, John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, was already a famous man, due to his two great victories over the French, at Blenheim on the Danube and at Ramillies in the Low Countries. By these two overwhelming victories, he saved Germany and Vienna from French occupation and so seriously damaged the French Army that it never fully recovered during the rest of the war. These two victories were the outcome of Marlborough's burst of military genius when he was made a Duke and given the rank of Captain-General of all forces at home and abroad. Not much was heard of Marlborough before this. He had accompanied the Duke of Monmouth to Holland in 1672, and had distinguished himself at the siege of Maestricht, where he saved the Duke's life; Marlborough's great victories were achieved over a period of five years there were four in all, the other two being Oudenarde and Malplaquet.

During this period, his wife, Sarah, was a close friend of Queen Anne and exercised a considerable influence over her, so that between them Marlborough and his wife directed most affairs, both at home and abroad.

He was in many ways a remarkable man. His military career did not start until he was 52 years old, and when his opportunity came, he broke the power of the French Army in Europe, covered himself with the glory of conquest, and by his rapid movements and bold tactics in battle he completely revolutionised the art of war. He was a cool-headed man, but on several occasions he became so inflamed with the passion of war, and was so concerned that a particular phase of the battle should go in his favour, that he led cavalry charges himself. At Ramillies, for example, he led two charges of Dutch cavalry, the second against the *Maison du Roi*, a regiment comprising the flower of the French aristocracy of that time. He lost his horse in the scrimmage, but was rescued by one of his generals in company with two battalions of Swiss Guards, and after running a considerable distance regained the safety of his own lines and was able to resume command of the battle. The Allied left wing was reformed, with almost the whole of the Allied cavalry, by Marlborough, who then turned the French right and swept northwards, rolling up the line. He completely routed the French Army and the pursuit of the fugitives carried the victors far beyond the battlefield and left them in considerable confusion. All the enemy's baggage and 5,000 prisoners fell into his hands.

This ability to regain his dignity and to remain cool-headed was characteristic of Marlborough. Except for the short episode against the *Maison du Roi*, he had been on horseback for nineteen hours; and in common with many other allied soldiers, he spent the night lying on the ground with his cloak wrapped round him, knowing he had won what was probably the decisive battle of the war.

He was immensely popular, both with the people at home, and with his troops, whom he managed with tact and ability and to whose welfare he gave constant care and attention. His tactical and strategical successes were due to his mastery of detail both in the making and execution of his plans. But in spite of these intellectual qualities, his character was not above reproach. He loved riches and spent much time trying to gain them. He sometimes exploited his friends for his own self-advancement, and used his victories for political purposes. He tended to be both selfish and insincere. Nevertheless he was never beaten in war, and is regarded to-day as one of the greatest military geniuses of all time. After his victories, the world no longer thought of France as the pre-eminent military nation.

Marlborough was forced to retire in 1712 on account of political agitation and the reluctance of the government to continue the war. He lived for another ten years on his estate at Woodstock, near Oxford, which had been presented to him to commemorate his victory at Blenheim, and where his descendants live to this day. The great biographer of Marlborough is the Rt. Hon. Winston S. Churchill, P.C., M.P., our wartime Prime Minister, who bears the same illustrious name, and who is closely related to the present Duke of Marlborough, a descendant of the great Duke.

Boys of Marlborough House are drawn from the districts of Hornchurch, Upminster, Corbets Tey, Aveley, North and South Ockendon and North Stifford, and their House colour is red.
P.H.