

THE ROYAL IRISH REGIMENT.

BY CHARLES WINTER.

THE Royal Irish Regiment was raised in April, 1684, by Charles II, when he reorganised the military forces of Ireland. Its first colonel was Arthur Forbes, Earl of Granard, eldest son of Sir Arthur Forbes, Baronet, of Castle Forbes, County Longford. He was born in 1623, and, as a cavalry officer, fought under the Royal banner during the Civil War. He attained the rank of colonel in 1646, and held a command in Scotland under the Duke of Montrose, afterwards suffering two years' imprisonment in Edinburgh. Having faithfully adhered to the royal cause, he was, on the Restoration, sworn a Member of the Privy Council and appointed Marshal of the Army of Ireland. In 1675 he was raised to the peerage of Ireland as Baron Clanehugh and Viscount Granard, afterwards promoted to the rank of lieutenant-general and created Earl of Granard. James II removed him from his command and he, having protested against the acts of that monarch's parliament, was besieged by the Irish at Castle Forbes, but succeeded in reducing Sligo for William III.

After serving with distinction under William III in Ireland, the Eighteenth won fresh laurels in 1695 at the Siege of Namur. For its magnificent courage displayed on this occasion the king conferred upon it the title of the Royal Regiment of Foot of Ireland, with the badge of the Lion of Nassau and the motto, *Virtutis Namurcensis Praemium*.

In 1701 the Eighteenth formed part of the Allied troops sent to Holland under Marlborough, and shared in many of the sieges and desperate fights of that period, including the great battles of

Blenheim, Ramillies, Oudenarde, and Malplaquet. In 1727 a detachment shared in the second siege of Gibraltar.

For medallic records of these exploits we must resort to the cabinet of the commemorative medal collector, as no medals are known to have been conferred either upon officers or men for these campaigns. The two medals commemorative of the battle of Blenheim and one for Ramillies, each bearing a portrait of the great Marlborough, have been exhibited to the Society. After serving at the siege of Toulon in 1793, the reduction of Corsica in 1794, Elba 1796, and Tuscany 1797, the Eighteenth formed part of the Army, sent to Egypt under Abercromby, which ultimately forced the French out of that country. For this service the Sultan of Turkey conferred upon the officers gold medals of the Order of the Crescent of the Imperial Ottoman Empire. These were issued in four sizes, and sometimes they were presented set with jewels and enamelled red as a special mark of favour. The rank and file were not awarded a medal for this service until the belated issue of the Military General Service medal, with the bar for Egypt, in 1850, when only nine men of the Eighteenth survived to receive it.

Obverse.—Head of Queen, to left. VICTORIA REGINA,
1848.

Reverse.—Queen Victoria crowning the Duke of Wellington,
who kneels before her.

Exergue.—1793-1814. Name, rank, and regiment impressed on
edge.

Riband.—Red, with blue edge.

After serving in Egypt the Royal Irish were ordered to the West Indies and other parts of the world, until their services were required in China, where they bore a prominent and distinguished part in the first Chinese War of 1840-42. The medal issued for this was without bar.

Obverse.—Head of Queen, to left. VICTORIA REGINA.

Reverse.—Trophy of naval and military arms, with a shield of
the royal arms, in the centre ARMIS EXPOSCERE PACEM.

Exergue.—China, 1842.

Riband.—Red, with yellow edge.

Burma was the next field of action, and the regiment served through the First Burmese War of 1851-2. For this campaign the India General Service Medal with bar Pegu was granted.

Obverse.—Head of Queen, to left. VICTORIA REGINA.

Reverse.—Victory crowning a seated warrior.

Exergue.—The lotus flower. Name, rank, and regiment impressed on edge.

Riband.—Red, with blue stripes.

Returning home on the outbreak of the Russian War, the Eighteenth speedily arrived in the Crimea, and was present at the siege of Sebastopol, including the attack on the cemetery on June 18th, 1855. Queen Victoria granted a silver medal with from one to four bars—Alma, Balaklava, Inkermann, and Sebastopol. The Royal Irish received the medal with bar Sebastopol.

Obverse.—Head of Queen, to left. VICTORIA REGINA.

Reverse.—Victory crowning a Roman warrior; in the field, CRIMEA. Name, rank, and regiment impressed on edge.

Riband.—Light blue, with yellow edges.

The Sultan of Turkey issued a silver medal to the British troops who took part in the war.

Obverse.—A map of the Crimea spread out on a cannon, which rests on the Russian flag. At the back of the cannon and other arms are the four flags of the Allies.

Exergue.—Crimea, 1855.

Reverse.—The Sultan's cypher and date within a laurel wreath.

The Emperor Napoleon III also presented a few picked men of each regiment with the French Military War Medal, and seven non-commissioned officers and men of the Eighteenth Royal Irish received the decoration for "gallantry," "constant and good

service," and "unwearied zeal in the trenches." This medal is in the form of a silver gilt badge composed of a laurel wreath surmounted by an eagle. In the centre of the obverse is a bust of the Emperor, within a blue enamelled band inscribed LOUIS NAPOLEON. Reverse, VALEUR ET DISCIPLINE, within a blue enamelled band. Riband, yellow, with green edges.

The King of Sardinia, following the example of the French monarch, also granted a small silver medal to a limited number of officers, non-commissioned officers, and men as a special mark of favour. Three officers and one private of the Eighteenth received the Sardinian War Medal, among them Lieutenant Thomas Durand Baker, for great gallantry on June 18th, 1855, and Private J. Weir, for gallant conduct during the assault of the same date.

Returning home in July 1855, the regiment next served in India during the Sepoy Mutiny, but, having the bad luck to be sent on to Poona and other parts, they never came in touch with their treacherous foes.

In 1858 a second battalion was formed, mainly of volunteers from the Irish Militia, and, sent to New Zealand in 1863, they went through the Maori Wars of 1863-66. The medals issued for this service involved the preparation of a series of reverse dies recording the year or years in which the recipient served.

Obverse.—Bust of the Queen, veiled, to left. VICTORIA D.G.
BRITT. REG. F.D.

Reverse.—1863 to 1866, within a laurel wreath; above, NEW-ZEALAND; below, VIRTUTIS HONOR.

Edge.—Stamped incuse.

Riband.—Red, with two blue stripes.

Returning home in 1871, the second battalion was not further engaged until 1882, when it was sent out to Egypt and fought at the battle of Tel-el-Kebir, and was granted the Egyptian medal with bar.

Obverse.—Veiled bust of the Queen. VICTORIA REGINA ET
IMPERATRIX.

Reverse.—The Sphinx ; above, EGYPT.

Bars.—Tel-el-Kebir, The Nile, 1884.

Riband.—Blue, with two white stripes.

The first battalion followed the second to Egypt, and had the good fortune to win the Wolseley prize of £100, offered to the non-commissioned officers and men of the battalion which made the fastest run with the fewest accidents from Sarras to Debbah, and promising that the winning corps should be selected for the post of honour in the farther advance towards Khartoum. In forwarding his cheque for £100, Lord Wolseley wrote as follows :—

Camp Korti, The Soudan,
11th March, 1885.

Dear Colonel Shaw,

It is with the greatest pleasure that I send you the enclosed cheque for £100, the prize won by your splendid battalion by having come up the Nile to Debbah in boats in less time than any other regiment. Being an Irishman myself it is very gratifying to feel that my small prize has been carried off by my own countrymen.

Believe me to be, dear Colonel Shaw, very truly yours,

WOLSELEY.

Before going up the Nile the first battalion had been employed on the Khyber line during the Afghan Campaign of 1879-80, and received the medal without bar.

Obverse.—Crowned bust of the Queen, to left. VICTORIA
REGINA ET IMPERATRIX.

Reverse.—Army on the march. AFGHANISTAN.

Exergue.—1878-79-80.

Riband.—Green, with red border.

The second battalion went from Egypt to Malta and subsequently to India, where it took part in the Hazara Campaign of

1888. The medal issued was of the same design as that granted for services in Burma.

In 1897 it took part in the trying operations on the North-west Frontier under Sir William Lockhart, and received the New India medal of 1895 with bars.

Obverse.—Bust of the Queen, to left. VICTORIA REGINA
ET IMPERATRIX.

Reverse.—A British and native Indian soldier holding the Royal Standard between them. INDIA 1895.

Bars.—Punjab Frontier 1897–98, Samana 1897.

Riband.—Red, with two green stripes.

On January 12th, 1900, the Royal Irish landed in South Africa at Port Elizabeth and were ordered up country to reinforce General French. After serving in Cape Colony, Orange Free State, and Transvaal, they finally assisted in the pursuit of De Wet and his guerilla bands. Two medals were issued for the South African War, commonly called the Queen's and King's medals. Twenty-six different bars were issued with the former, but only two with the latter.

QUEEN'S MEDAL.

Obverse.—Bust of the Queen, to left. VICTORIA REGINA
ET IMPERATRIX.

Reverse.—Britannia, with the Union Jack resting on her left shoulder, holds out a laurel wreath to the British troops marching before her; in the background, men-of-war.
SOUTH AFRICA.

KING'S MEDAL.

Obverse.—Bust of the King, to left. EDWARDVS VII. REX.
IMPERATOR.

Reverse.—Same as the Queen's.

Lieutenant-Colonel Gretton, in his *Campaigns and History of the Royal Irish Regiment*, says: "During the two hundred and twenty-

seven years of its existence the Eighteenth regiment has served in nearly all the important wars in which England has been engaged, and has earned undying laurels whenever it has had an opportunity of distinguishing itself. The roll of battle honours, long as it is, by no means commemorates all the achievements of the regiment: in the Low Countries the Royal Irish took a leading part in the storming, not only of Namur, but of many other fortresses; in the capture of the Schellenberg, in the engagement at Bunker's Hill, in the defence of Toulon, and in the fighting in Corsica the regiment won great praise, but the names of none of these operations are emblazoned on its colours. Early in its career the regiment earned the reputation of being second to none in the British Army. This reputation it has maintained to the present day; and the author is convinced that when, in years to come, his successor writes the continuation of this history, it will be seen that the future generations of officers and men of the Royal Irish regiment have carried on the glorious traditions of the Eighteenth, and have rivalled, though they could not surpass, the brilliant feats of arms which have been described."

