

Extract from William Ernest Henley: *Essays* (1921)

The biographical sketches, here entitled *Byron's World*, served as notes to an edition of Byron's letters, of which one volume only was published by Mr. W. Heinemann in 1897, [...]

WILLIAM POLE TYLNEY LONG WELLESLEY (1788-1857) was afterwards (1845) Fourth Earl of Mornington. The story of this 'most distinguished Briton' is one so full of insolence, adultery, thriftlessness, and the right Regency feeling for blackguardism and the Establishment, that I cannot choose but tell it with a certain particularity. In 1812, after a pursuit which itself was something of a scandal, he married Catherine, eldest daughter and co-heir of Sir James Tylney Long, Bart., of Draycot, Wilts, whose names he added to his own, and thus inspired a delicious line in *Rejected Addresses*:

Long may Long Tilney Wellesley Long Pole live!

The lady had some £40,000 a year (her pin-money ran to £13,000) and Wellesley had nothing; but 'the ancient and approved servants' of the Tylney family were dismissed at once, and in the March of 1813 there was tried at Chelmsford the case of 'The King v. Wellesley Pole Tylney Long Wellesley.' This was an action to try the right of the public to a way through Wanstead Park, and in the course of it Mr. Serjeant Shepherd, who was briefed for the defence, protested strongly against the right of common people to 'offend his (Pole's) princely mansion with the passage of unseemly vehicles.' In truth, the man was born magnificent; his life was of a piece throughout; he kept open house and a sumptuous table, had the finest hounds and horses on the country-side, retained an hundred and fifty servitors in Lincoln green, would have nothing but guineas in his pockets, and all the rest of it; and by 1821 he was in such straits that in 1822 he had to take his wife abroad (tradition says that he dodged the traps in a boat, and boarded the packet far out at sea). They were living at Naples when (in 1823) they met a certain Captain Bligh, of the Coldstream Guards, and his wife Helena (nee Paterson), both of whom they had known in England. In the July of that year Mrs. Bligh left her husband's house in consequence of an intrigue with Long Wellesley; but Wellesley filed an affidavit of denial before the British Vice-Consul, and persuaded Mrs. Wellesley to offer the injured lady the protection of her roof. This she did, but at Florence she had to turn the injured lady out of the house. From Italy the Wellesleys went to Paris (1824), whither Mrs. Bligh had preceded them; and from Paris Mrs. Wellesley wrote to her father-in-law (Lord Maryborough, a most respectable man: elder brother to the Duke of Wellington, Master of the Mint in 1815, Master of the Buckhounds in 1828), that, if Wellesley would have done with Mrs. Bligh, she would forgive the man 'his profligate and unprincipled conduct,' and provide for the woman out of her own income. Lord and Lady Maryborough went to Paris and did their best; but it was to no purpose; so that Mrs. Wellesley took her children to England, and in the June of 1825 began to sue for a divorce in the Ecclesiastical Court. About that time, too, Wellesley and Mrs. Bligh, who had been playing at man and wife in divers *gîtes* in France and Holland, crossed to London; and on July 7 Wellesley drove Bligh to his wife's house in Clarges Street, for the purpose of getting hold of one or more of his children. He entered the house, when Bligh drove round to Mme. Vestris's, there to wait the event; but Mrs. Wellesley heard his voice, escaped (with her daughter) by the kitchen door, served him with a citation for divorce, and filed a bill in Chancery to make her children wards of the Court, after which the errant couple scuttled back to France. In the September of that year Mrs. Wellesley died, enjoining her sisters, the Misses Long, to resist to the utmost any attempt on Wellesley's part to remove the children; and in 1827 (in which year he had to pay swingeing damages to Captain Bligh, as defendant in a suit for crim. con.) Wellesley brought an action against their guardian, his uncle Wellington, to recover possession of them. In delivering judgment, the Chancellor (Eldon) remarked that they had it in evidence that in July 1824 Wellesley had 'a venereal tumour removed from his eye by Dr. Southcote'; that Southcote had sworn that, to his knowledge, Wellesley when in Paris got blackguard children to come to the back of the house to teach his children to blaspheme; that Mr. Pitman, the tutor of Wellesley's choice, testified that he had 'heard the eldest infant plaintiffs use some very disgusting expressions, and utter the most coarse and vulgar oaths in French,' and the boy William, being rebuked for his obscenities, had

replied that 'his father liked it'; that a letter of Wellesley's was before the Court (dated February 9, 1825) containing such phrases as 'If the fellow be a sportsman, . . . damn his infernal soul to hell'; that in another letter he bade his boys to 'study hard, but as soon as you have completed your tasks, go out in all weathers, and play hell and tommy - make as much riot as your tongues can admit - chase cats, dogs, and women, old and young, but spare my game'; and that Dr. Bulkeley, the physician who attended the Wellesleys at Naples, and who afterwards resided and travelled with them, had sworn that W. P. L. Wellesley said, in the presence of his children, 'Debauch all the women you meet with, young and old': For all which reasons he, Eldon, would 'deserve to be hunted out of society if he hesitated for one moment to say, that he would sooner forfeit his life than permit the girl Victoria to go in the company of such a woman, or into the care and protection of a man who had the slightest connexion with that woman.' With incredible magnificence the Plaintiff returned to the charge and published *Two Letters to the Right Hon. Earl Eldon, Lord Chancellor, etc. etc. etc., with official and other documents and additional notes.* 'By the Hon. W. L. Wellesley. Third Edition. London: John Miller, Pall Mall, 1827.' His defence - 'If shape that can be called which shape hath none' is monumental. His wife, he says, 'was a most amiable woman . . . but she had not profited by education to the degree that might have been expected,' and that her letters were mostly written by her lady's-maid. He throws the blame on her sisters, who 'entertain principles and doctrines hostile to the Established Church.' The real cause of dislike is revealed elsewhere: it is that 'a few years after my marriage I was called upon to pay the young ladies their portions' - £15,000 each, plus interest 'making the whole amount to nearly £40,000.' He further contends that during Mrs. Wellesley's minority, and afterwards, she gave 'very large sums of money' (a commodity he could properly appreciate) to Lady Catherine and the Misses Long. But it was understood that the Misses Long: - and be it remembered that 'sectarian troubles have operated upon the minds of the elder sister ... to such a degree that it can scarcely be called rational'; while 'the younger, to Wellesley, a temper the most violent, adds manners the least refined': should transfer their portions, charged on the Long estates, to himself and wife. The Longs, it would seem, were Methodists, and Wellesley, a pillar of the Establishment, hated Methodism, as Sir Andrew hated a Puritan. The ladies, in fact, had sat too sedulously at the feet of one Barry, sometime resident apothecary to Sir James Long: 'A man of sectarian principles, and a great collector of sectarian tracts (it was tracts of this nature which I was in the habit of burning after my marriage; not because they were religious, but because they were wild, fanatic, and not in accordance with the true spirit of Christianity) with which he supplied the different members of the family,' etc. etc. etc. Barry, by the way, had made himself still more obnoxious to this sound Churchman by proposing that the Long estates should, in the event of there being no male issue of the Wellesley-Long marriage, be re-settled on the Misses Long, the defender of the true faith to receive an annuity of £10,000.

In 1828 Wellesley married 'the daughter of Colonel Paterson and widow of Captain Bligh of the Coldstream Guards' (The Times, 4th July 1857). But, to quote the same authority, this second union 'would appear to have been no better assorted than the first, to judge from the fact that, since her husband's accession to the title, Lady Mornington has repeatedly appeared in our columns as an applicant for relief at the metropolitan police-courts in consequence of having been left destitute by her husband, and chargeable to the parish.' In the end the old blood died of heart disease; and on 4th July 1857 an inquest was held (by Mr. Wakely) at the Coachmakers' Arms, Bentinck Street, Manchester Square: 'Dr. Probert, the Earl's medical man, said the late Earl had been very badly off so far as pecuniary affairs were concerned, and until the last two years had wanted the necessaries of life. . . . Major W. J. Richardson, a friend of the Earl, said he did not consider that he [the Earl] had been lately in pecuniary want, for his cousin, the Duke of Wellington, allowed him £10 a week': which, to be sure, was little enough 'for a man who once had £100,000 a year.'