

Captain Thomas Williamson
Author of
“Oriental Field Sports.”

IN the first number of *Bengal: Past and Present* a short list was given of names which, in the Editor's opinion, might have been included in Mr. C. E. Buckland's “Dictionary of Indian Biography,” then but recently published. Surely the name of Captain Thomas Williamson should be added to the list, if only on account of his “Oriental Field Sports,” the first edition of which, with its forty coloured aquatint plates drawn by Samuel Howett and engraved under the direction of Edward Orme, is nowadays one of the most desirable of Anglo-Indian publications.

Williamson was a native of London, and was nineteen years of age in May, 1778, when he sailed for India on the *Stafford* Indiaman. Shortly after his arrival in Bengal he was posted to the 2nd Bn. of the 3rd Bengal European Regt.; in July, 1787, he was a Lieutenant in the 30th Bn. Sepoys. In January, 1791, two Companies of the 30th, with Williamson in command, were sent from Bengal to Prince of Wales' Island (Penang) which had been ceded six years earlier by the Rajah of Kedah in return for an annual payment by the Company. In the following April operations were carried out in the Kedah territory on the coast of Malacca against a body of Malays who, with 110 boats and a large land force, had assembled on the mainland in Province Wellesley and raised stockades at Point Pria.

The force employed on this occasion consisted of one Coy. of Bengal Artillery under the command of Captain John Glass, the Commandant of troops at Prince of Wales' I.; two Coys. of 30th Bn. under Williamson; and 20 Europeans. On April 12th, under cover of the fire of four gunboats, this small force was landed at Port Pria and attacked the enemy's fortified position. The Malays, taken more or less by surprise, put up but a feeble resistance and were soon defeated. On the 13th, and again on the 15th, the gunboats engaged the Malay prows, finally dispersing them on the latter date. Our total loss during these operations was small, amounting to only four men killed and twenty wounded. Amongst the latter was Williamson, who received his wound on the 12th.

On the reorganization of the Bengal Army in May, 1796, the existing six European Battalions were formed into three Regiments, and Williamson was posted to the 3rd. He was transferred later to 2/13th N. I., and in 1798 to 17th N. I.

Having by this time completed twenty years of active service, not without distinction, he might now reasonably look forward to a spell of furlough at home, followed by advancement to higher rank and more lucrative posts on his return to India. Instead of this, however, he was so unfortunate as to incur the severe displeasure of the Bengal Government, and his military career in consequence was brought to an abrupt termination. And the cause of his undoing was that pen which later was to bring him a certain measure of fame and, presumably, profit. Ignoring the official ban on communications to the press by serving officers, he wrote a letter criticizing the Government's military policy, signed it 'Mentor,' and sent it to the *Calcutta Telegraph*, in whose columns it duly appeared in the issue of March 17, 1798. This newspaper was then owned and edited by Lieutenant Henry McKenly, of the Bengal Invalid Establishment; and one can only suppose that the editor, breaking an established canon of the press, disclosed the identity of his correspondent under pressure from the authorities.

The Board in Calcutta took a serious view of this breach of discipline on Williamson's part—in fact, "they considered his conduct highly criminal and of a dangerous tendency"—and he was suspended and ordered home (Cons., 4 May 1798). Three years later the Court of Directors, though refusing to reinstate him, allowed him to retire on the half pay of his rank.

Before long Williamson turned his attention seriously to authorship, and between the years 1807 and 1813 six works appeared under his name. Three of these reached a second edition after his death in Paris in October, 1817, but only two are remembered today. At the time of publication none of the six would appear to have made much stir, and only that dealing with mathematics was reviewed, not unfavourably, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

The complete list of his books in the British Museum Library is as follows:—

Oriental Field Sports. London, 1807. folio.

2nd edn., 2 vols., London, 1819.

The East India Vade Mecum. 2 vols., London, 1810.

2nd edn. (improved), J. B. Gilchrist, London, 1825.

Complete Angler's Vade-mecum. London, 1808.

2nd edn., London, 1822.

Mathematics simplified, &c. London, 1808 (1).

The Dominions, a Romance. 3 vols. Longman, Hurst & Co., London, 1809.

Europeans in India—descriptions by T. W. 1813.

V.C.P.H.

(1) "Mathematics simplified, and practically illustrated, by the Adaptation of the principal Problems to the ordinary Purposes of Life, and by a progressive Arrangement, applied to the most familiar Objects, in the plainest Terms: together with a complete Essay on the Art of surveying Lands, &c., by such simple Inventions as may for ever banish the Necessity of costly and complex Instruments." By Captain Thomas Williamson, Author of "The Wild Sports of India." Longman & Co. 1808, 1 vol. 8vo.