NELSON'S FLAGSHIP

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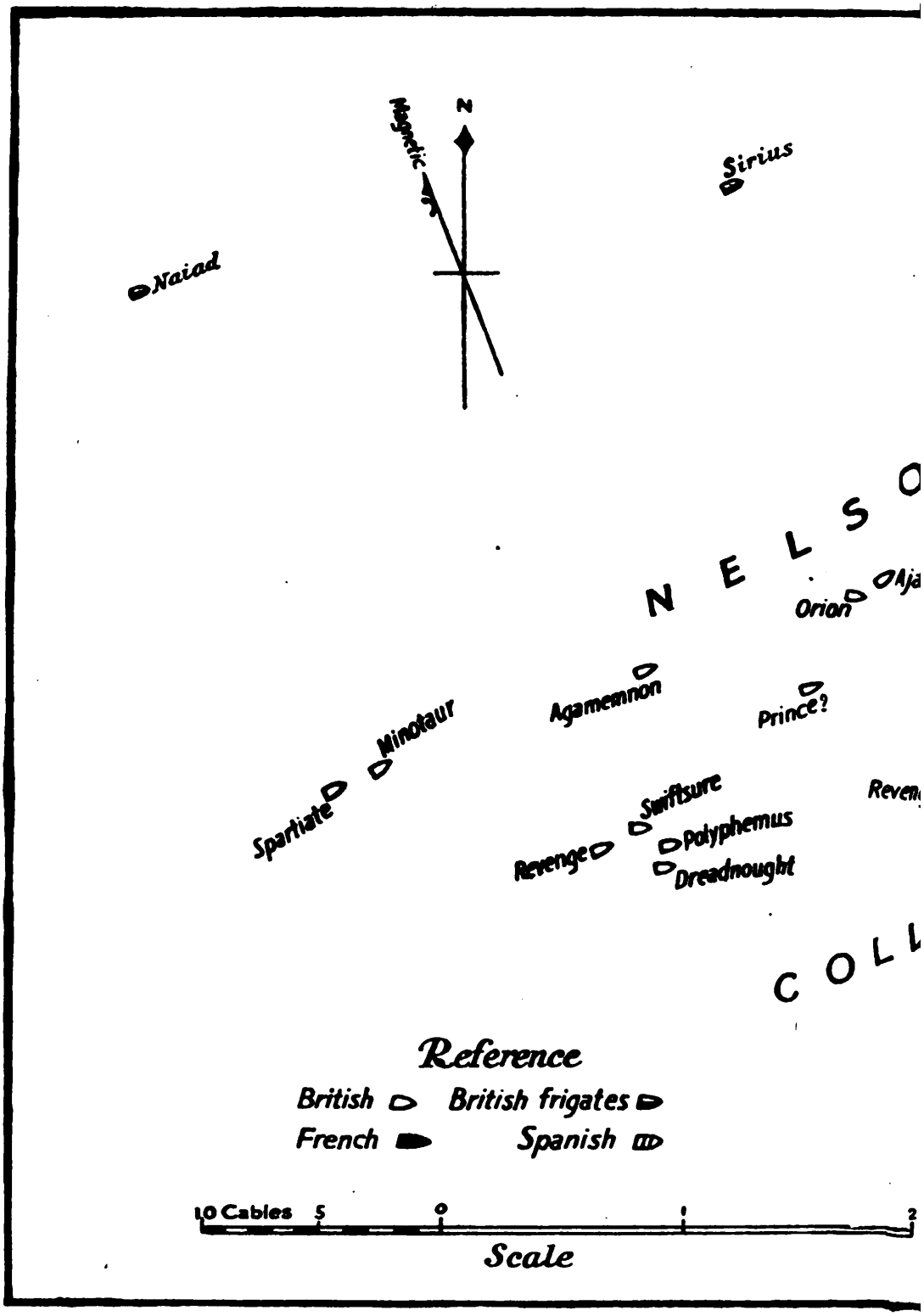

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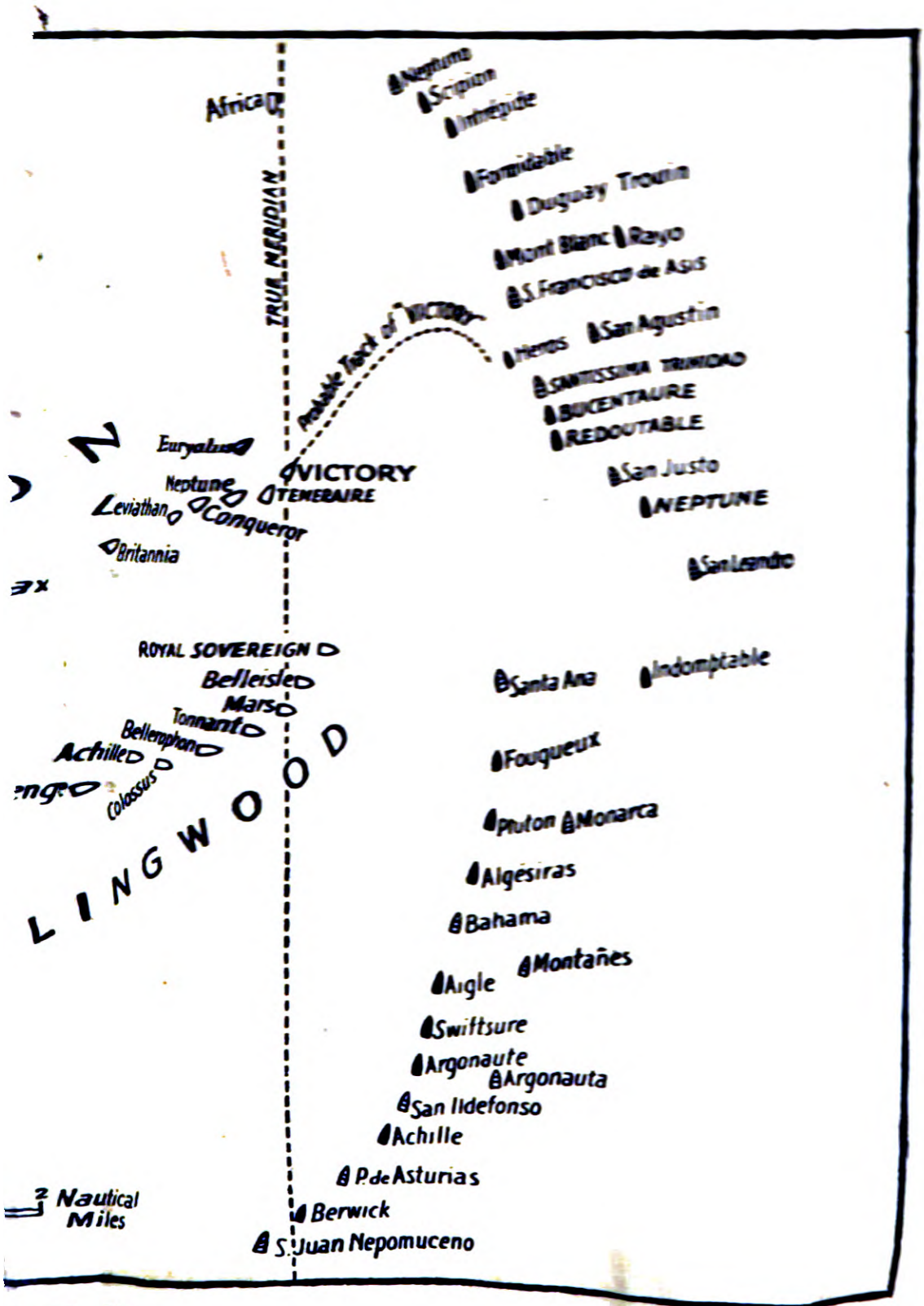

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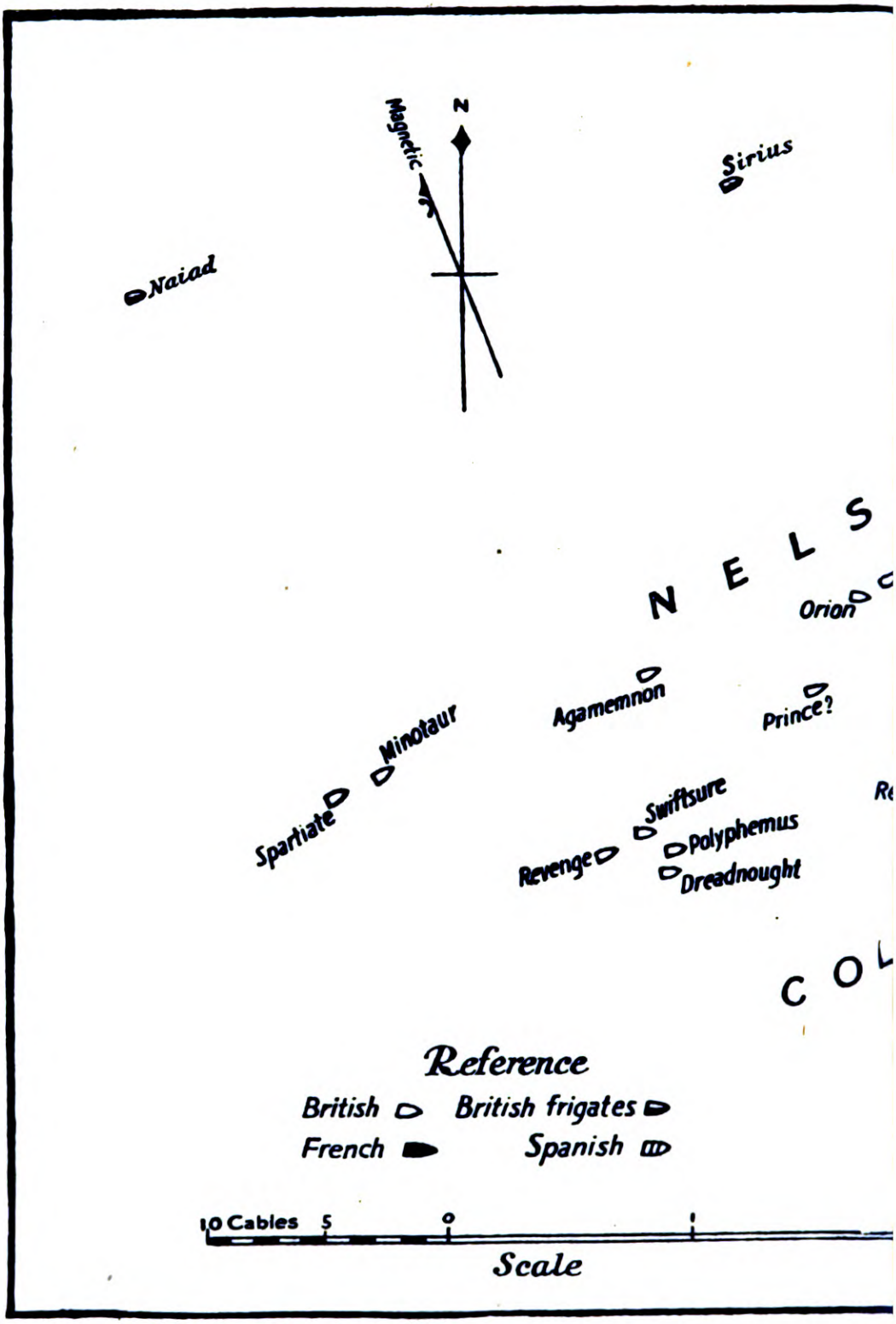

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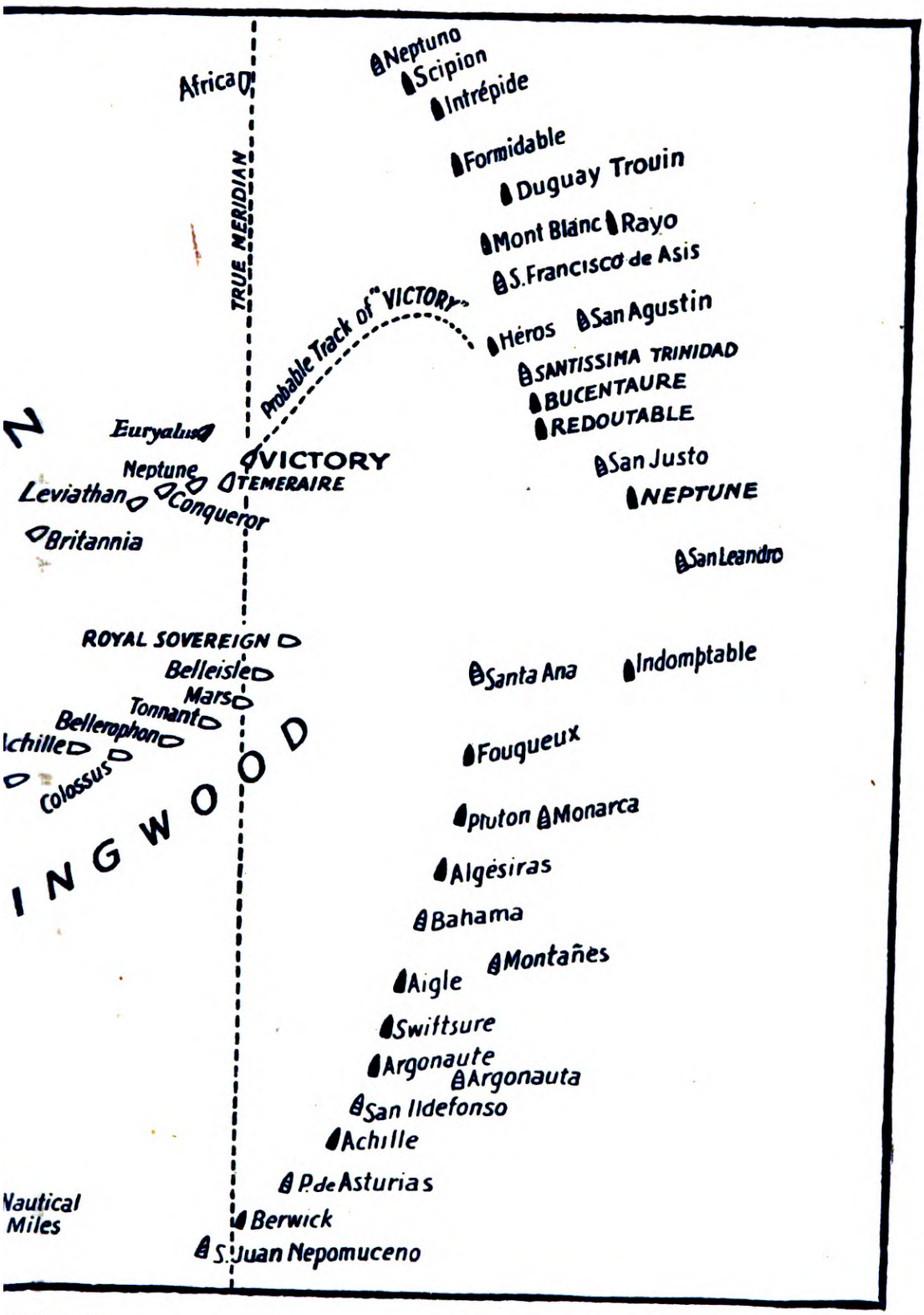

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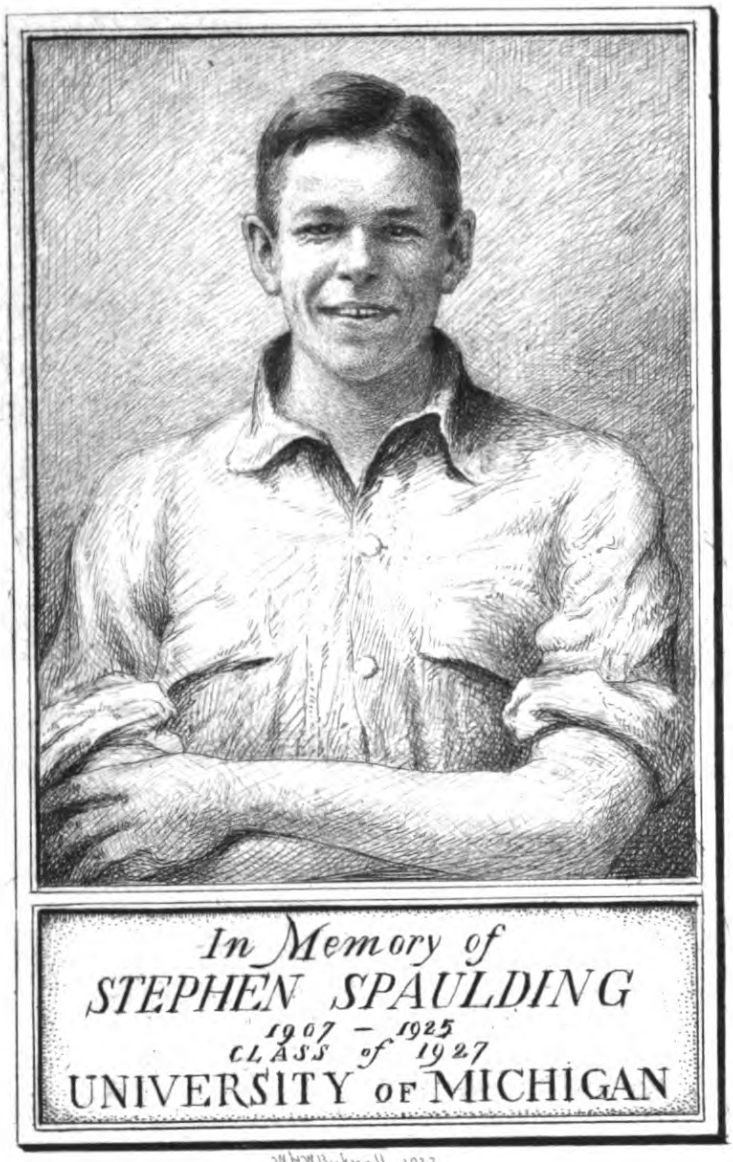

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NELSON'S FLAGSHIP

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE STORY OF H.M.S. "VICTORY."
SPINDRIFT.
THE LIFE OF NELSON.
REALMS OF MELODY.
SEA KINGS OF BRITAIN.

The "Victory" at anchor in Portsmouth Harbour.

Photo by G. West & Co.

NELSON'S FLAGSHIP

ABRIDGED FROM

THE STORY OF H.M.S. "VICTORY"

BY

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Over Time's misty tide-stream sailing,
Stirring the heart like the throbbing of drums,
Banners of conquest and bravery trailing,
Out of the past she comes.
How shall we honour her? How shall we name her?
What shall her blazon be?

FLAGSHIP OF NELSON,
FLAGSHIP OF ENGLAND,
VICTORY'S "VICTORY."

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NELSON'S FLAGSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE "VICTORY" WAS BUILT.

THE story of the *Victory* carries us back more than a century and a half. In December, 1758, King George II.'s ministers decided to ask the sanction of the House of Commons for an ambitious shipbuilding programme in the following year. In all there were to be twelve ships of the line, "battleships" they would be called to-day. Of these twelve vessels, nine were to be put in hand at once; and at the head of the list stood a first-rate of a hundred guns. Her name was not at that moment decided upon; but she was to be fashioned after the model of the *Royal George*, then the most celebrated battleship afloat. The dockyard where she was to be constructed was Chatham.

As architect of a vessel so important the Admiralty made choice of Mr. Thomas Slade, afterwards Sir Thomas. He was at the time Senior Surveyor of the Navy; that is, the principal officer charged with the building and repairing of the royal ships. From early years he had studied the theory and practice of shipbuilding, not only in the text-books, but, like Peter the Great of Russia, in the dockyard itself. He was at the very head of his profession; and as the designer of the most famous ship that ever sailed the seas, he deserves to be remembered and honoured. His portrait hangs in the Anson Ward at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich.

Notice of what was required was given to him at once. The new first-rate, he was informed, was to be the finest engine of naval warfare ever constructed; a nobler vessel even than the *Royal George*, her predecessor. She was also to be so shaped that she would be able to carry in her hold water and provisions for at least four months; and she was to be so constructed that she would carry herself with the port sills of her gun deck at least six feet from the water.

Mr. Slade set to work with a will. His task was congenial, and he put his very soul into it.

In little more than six months his plans and designs were completed, and in June, 1759, they received the approval of the Admiralty. From Whitehall they were conveyed by trusty messengers to Chatham and handed to Mr. Allen, Master Shipwright of his Majesty's Dockyard.

Ordinary ships of the line in King George's day spent their early days in a cradle, and when sufficiently grown to move by themselves, were released from leading strings, and slid stern foremost down the ways. Why stern foremost it is difficult to say. Perhaps because from the time of Noah men have drawn their boats from the flood bows first, and launched them again without turning them round; perhaps because the impetus of a ship upon the ways called for a speedy check, and the breadth of the stern offered most resistance to the water.

But Mr. Slade's new vessel was to be no ordinary ship; on the contrary, a mammoth of the fighting line. For her the everyday devices would not serve. Her birthright entitled her to be built in a dry dock, so that, when she was finished, the waves might come at her bidding, and submissively offer their homage to a ruler of the sea. The berth chosen by Mr. Allen, Master Shipwright to the King, was "Old Single Dock," near the house of the Admiral

Superintendent, and opposite the dockyard clock.

It was on the 23rd of July, 1759, that the keel of the ship was laid. Stout oaken blocks were placed on the floor of the dock at intervals of four or five feet from one another, and upon these the great backbone of the vessel was laid down. In size the keel was one hundred and fifty feet long and twenty inches square. As less liable than any other kind of wood to splinter or split or shrink, teak was used for this vital part of the ship. The separate pieces were carefully shaped and fitted and scarfed and welded and hammered and bolted together, until they assumed the indivisible unity essential for perfect strength. To safeguard the under side from injury, a false keel of elm four or five inches thick was applied and fixed to the teak. And now the air was full of the sound of sawing, and filing, and hammering, and clinching, and grinding. Mallets and hatchets and axes and adzes were busy from morn till night. And as the great limbs of the vessel were made, "Old Single Dock" took to itself the appearance of a monstrous house; for a roof was built overhead to shelter the workmen and to shield the vessel's timbers from the rain.

After the keel, the next parts of the vessel to

be constructed were the stem and stern posts. The stem-post was built, like the keel, of separate pieces scarfed together. But the stern-post was made of a single tree. To it the rudder was fixed by huge iron hooks and eyes, and the strain of a constant plunging motion was best withstood by a solid block.

Next, from either side of the keel rose the shapely ribs of the ship. These were more difficult to frame, perhaps, than any other part of the vessel. They had to be stout and strong and firm, for like the keel and posts their function was to uphold and support. But in addition they had to assume gracefully rounded curves; for it was also part of their business to mould the vessel's shape. Trees of a particular form were required, and, if they had to be looked for, work might be delayed for months before the natural bend was discovered. But the requirements of Mr. Slade's ship being known long before, oak at least a hundred years old had been waiting a twelvemonth beforehand.

When stem-post and stern-post and keel and ribs were finished, the skeleton of the vessel was complete. Up to this point the work had consumed one year and a little over. For the second year it was usual to cease work alto-

gether, in order that the framework might for a long period be open to all the winds that blow, to wet weather and dry, to storm and sun, until it was thoroughly seasoned. The Admiralty indeed, with respect to this particular ship, had ordained unusual haste. The vessel, they said, must be ready for sea in thirty-three months at the outside. Now a ship of the line, as a general rule, required from five to ten years in the building; five years if everything went well, and more than five years if the seasoning were prolonged or general progress delayed by shortage of material. The thirty-three months of the Admiralty's ordaining would have meant incessant labour; one gang working while daylight lasted, and another at night relieving them and toiling under naphtha flares. Some satisfaction was therefore felt when the surveyor, coming down to inspect the finished frame, announced to the dockyard that the need for haste had happily been removed. Work on the ship in consequence slackened; and hands for a time were discharged.

In building a wooden wall of Old England, the master shipwright made use of oak, almost to the exclusion of all other trees. No other kind of wood had the rugged quality that was requisite. No other kind of wood had a tithe

of the oak tree's durability. The quantity of material consumed in the construction of a single ship was astonishing. Thousands of trees were cut down and acres of woodland disforested. For the oak tree, if tough, is stumpy compared with the beech or pine, and the logs that were sent to the dockyard were short for the purpose they served. Innumerable cartloads were in consequence necessary; for a first-rate ship of the line required three hundred thousand cubic feet of timber.

This would have been well enough if there had been all the forests of the world to draw upon. But, unfortunately, there was no oak in creation like British oak; and towards the close of the eighteenth century the supply was diminishing so appreciably as to cause alarm in the minds of those best able to gauge the Navy's requirements. Admiral Collingwood, in his brief spells ashore, never went a walk through the glades and brakes without a pocketful of acorns. But the shipbuilders required oak-trees a century old, and long before Collingwood's seedlings could have offered very much shade the country's supply of suitable trees must have been exhausted. The perfecting of the steam-engine and the need of protection against great guns compelled shipbuilders to

resort to a new material. But even if sails had been retained, and wood had served as sufficient shield against big breech-loading ordnance, iron must inevitably have been used in the absence of oak for the hulls of English ships.

When the framework of the *Victory* had been duly seasoned, the workmen returned to their labours. The next thing to add was the planking. If the keel gave the vessel her backbone and the curving timbers her ribs, then the planking provided her skin. This skin was double: there was an outer coating and an inner. The outer consisted of oaken planks no less than eight inches thick. They were sawn a year before they were required, and piled up in the yard with battens placed between, so that the air might freely pass through the stack and complete the process of seasoning that had begun in the forest. The planks on removal from the pile were fastened to the stem and ribs by stout oaken pins called tree-nails (pronounced *trennels*). The inner coating of a wooden wall was not so thick as the outer, but it supplied five inches of solid oak; and these, with the outer planking and ribs, gave the gunner on board a ship of the line a wooden wall of twenty-four inches to protect him from the missiles of the enemy.

Integral parts of the ship's structure, not yet mentioned, were the beams. These were stout timbers that stretched from one wall of a ship to the other, from port to starboard, from starboard to port. They defined the breadth of the vessel, and in so doing gave their name to its measurement. For the "beam" of a vessel is a vessel's breadth, and a broad-bottomed ship is described as "beamy." The beams were connected with either side of the vessel, and were kept in position by strong brackets of oak and iron, which from their shape were known as "knees." The function of the beams was to support the deck, whose planks were laid athwart them.

The wooden wall of a battleship's side resembled a wall of brick or stone in one particular. The various blocks or pieces of which it was composed presented little gaps or clefts through which the searching water might find an entrance. To prevent this the shipwrights caulked the seams with oakum; that is to say, they pushed and hammered into the crevices the untwisted strands of old rope, which they afterwards soaked with a preparation of hot pitch and tar. From time to time the caulking required renewal, just as the wall of a house occasionally requires to be re-pointed and re-

dressed. When need arose, the caulkers were slung over the bulwarks astride of their boxes to ply again their beetles and caulking-irons and pay the vessel's seams, even as now they paid those of the *Victory*, still busily building in Old Single Dock of his Majesty's yard at Chatham.

CHAPTER II.

HOW SHE WAS LAUNCHED.

THE seventh of May, 1765, was the day appointed for the *Victory's* launch. By that time much had been done, though much remained to do. Before any water was admitted to the dock, before the stands were filled with fashionable crowds, before the bottle of champagne was sent crashing against the vessel's bows, before the band struck up "Rule, Britannia!" —before, in short, the christening name could be properly bestowed—the hull of the vessel was complete. As yet there was no rigging; as yet there were no sails or spars. And three flagstaffs, filling for a time the positions of the masts, made a somewhat vain struggle to remove the unfinished appearance of the ship above the level of the bulwarks. But at least the flags made a brave show. At the fore staff flew the Admiralty flag, with its golden anchor

on a red ground; at the main staff flew the Royal Standard with its quarterings, and at the mizzen flew the Union flag of Britain.

Thus decked, the *Victory* first felt the waves lift her up and curdle into cream about her bows.

Six years had passed since the First Lord's building order had arrived at Chatham, and work upon her keel had been begun. Since then much water had flowed under Rochester Bridge. The Seven Years' War, which in 1759 was at its height, had been brought to an end. The old king, who had won the hearts of his adopted people by his bravery at Dettingen, had gone the way of all flesh. His grandson, King George III., endowed with youth, a handsome face, and a regal bearing, had already scattered the popularity which had acclaimed his accession.

Six years! A visitor to Chatham on the 7th of May would have been obliged to admit that the time had been well spent. For the ship presented a truly formidable appearance. A mass of material so vast and yet so shapely. It seemed incredible that human brain could ever have dared to conceive her or human hands have brought her to the birth. And she was not merely vast but beautiful as well.

It is not possible to say with absolute precision how her walls and sides were painted. In after days Nelson evolved his own pattern, and his hold upon men's hearts popularized it in the service. But at the time of the *Victory's* launch Nelson was only six years old, and indifferent to such matters. There was as yet no uniformity of colour scheme for men of war. Captains were left to their own devices, and their tastes were only restricted by the expensiveness of paint and the difficulty of procuring other shades and colours than those which the dockyard approved. Restriction did, however, tend to standardize matters, and we may feel pretty sure that the *Victory* was painted very much like other ships. Below the water-line her belly was white, like the belly of a fish. A copper sheathing at a later date covered her under-water timbers; but no efficacious antidote to barnacles and worms had been discovered in 1765. Above the white, and in the region of the water-line, came a broad belt of black. Above this the vessel's sides wore a dull yellow tinge, occasioned by coats of varnish. The upper works and bulwarks were more gaudily decorated. Blue was used, especially in the stern works, and [redacted] was added by way of relief. Touches

were very popular with the ship's painters, and were freely added, when obtainable. Fawn colour was employed for the cabins, and for the ward room and the gun room. White with gold moulding was considered appropriate for the upper deck. The masts, like the sides of the ship, were yellow with varnish. But the spars that crossed them were black to match the standing rigging and dead-eyes. Below the upper deck, one colour only was employed, and that was scarlet. Its use is said to have originated with Admiral Robert Blake. The wisdom of his choice is clear enough. Accustomed every day of their lives to have the colour round them, the seamen noticed nothing on the walls to appal them in the carnage of battle. Against a background of fawn or grey the splashes of blood would have been only too evident, and might in all but veteran crews have taken the heart from the fight.

The inner sides of the port-lids or gun-port shutters, forming part of the gun-deck walls, were painted, of course, like the rest of the interior. The lids themselves, opening outwards, were raised — to admit of the guns being fired—by ropes, which were fitted to their lower rim and drawn inboard through leaden pipes. And when they were raised, the

drab of the sides was diversified by scarlet patches.

However straitly extravagance may have been curbed in the matter of paint as a general rule, no expense was spared with the figurehead. The figurehead was to a wooden wall what his wig is to a judge, what his sword is to an officer, what his crown is to a king—the symbol and emblem of station, the silent witness of dignity, the badge and ornament of rank. In this manner it was always regarded by the common seamen, insistent sticklers for ceremonial. On one occasion, to be described below, the Channel Fleet was forced to retire before superior numbers. The movement was wise, but universally unpopular. On board the *Royal George* two men were discovered by the boatswain in the act of tying a scarf round the figurehead. The officer demanded explanations, and the seamen replied, " We're just taking a turn round his peepers, sir. We may be obliged to run away, but 'twere best, d'ye see, to keep HIM ignorant." They meant to say that the heart of oak was ashamed of the men who sailed aboard of her.

The figurehead of a ship was made of British elm. It was not constructed of a single piece, but of several sections fitted toget

the general shape was roughly hewn, the services of a figurehead sculptor were required. This gentleman was a specialist. He spent his whole time in carving figureheads, and this branch of imaginative art reached a high pitch of excellence under his chisel. The *Sovereign of the Seas*, England's first three-decker, had a group intended to represent King Edgar the Peaceful trampling seven monarchs under foot. Anson's *Centurion* had a lion rampant, sixteen feet in height, red in colour, and crowned with a golden diadem. The *Royal Sovereign*, that carried Collingwood's flag at Trafalgar, had a life-size statue of King George III. The fighting *Temeraire* had a full-length figure of Mars, god of war, arrayed in all his shining panoply, with helmet, shield, and sword. As for the *Royal George*, she must indeed have looked most impressive. She had two white horses, one on either side of the bowsprit—creatures of mettle, rearing, prancing, and plunging in despite of bridle and rein.

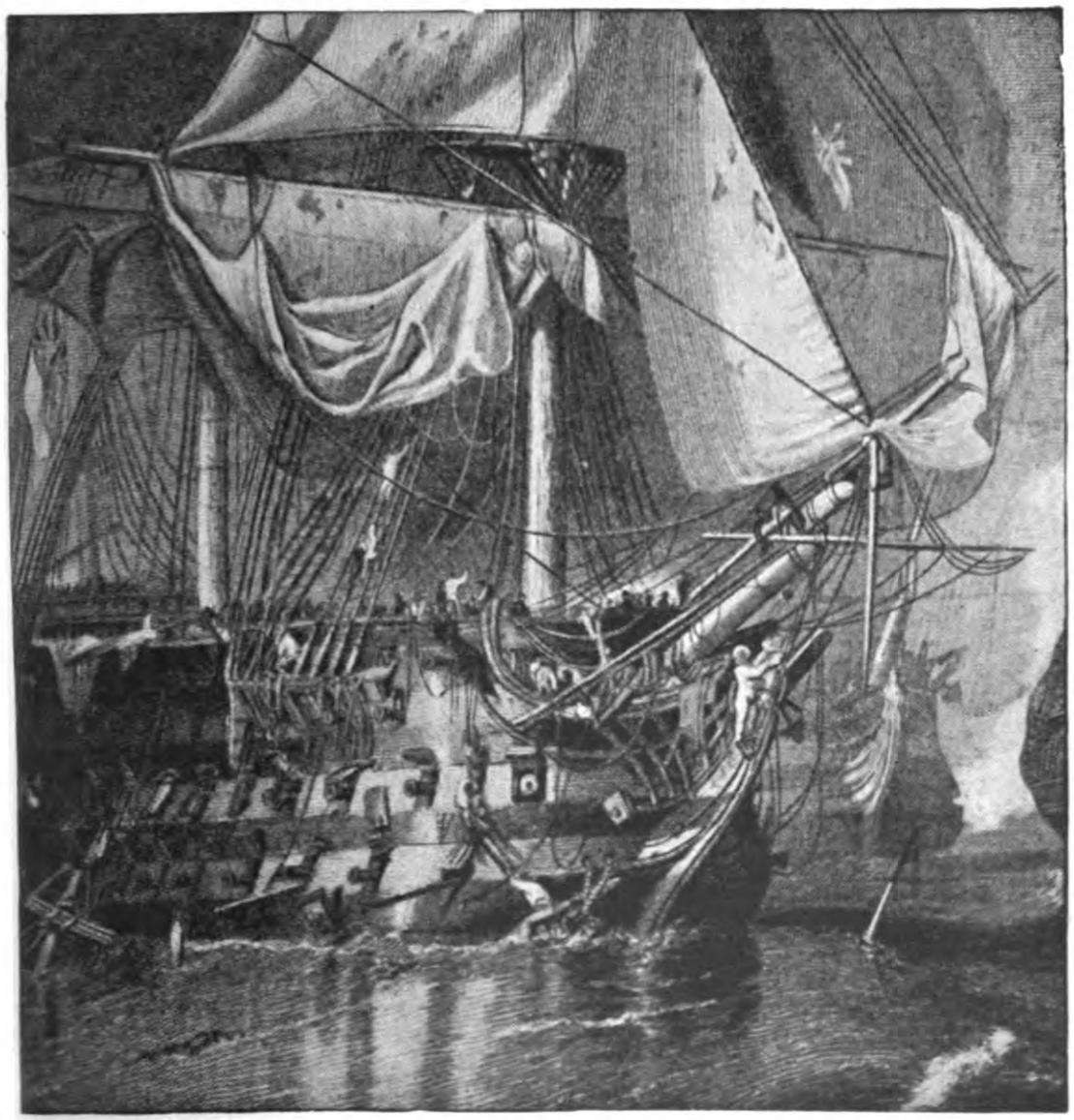
It might be thought that the figurehead would have been peculiarly liable to breakages in battle. As a matter of fact it was not entirely free from accidents in time of peace, and on more occasions than one served as a kind of collision fender. For example, the story is

told of the *Warrior*, Britain's earliest ironclad, that she once ran on board a sister ship, and left a mail-clad warrior in the *Royal Oak's* gun-room as evidence of the nature and extent of her guilt. But in battle damage was anticipated, and the figurehead was the subject of the tar's solicitude. Everything humanly possible was done to guard and protect it. And with this end in view the limbs and extremities were always made in detachable pieces, to be unscrewed when occasion required. Accidents, however, must sometimes happen. At the "Glorious First of June" his royal highness the grand ducal figurehead of the *Brunswick* lost his cocked hat. Whereupon the seamen borrowed from their captain's wardrobe, and repaired the damage before continuing the fight. So motherly indeed were the attentions of a ship's company to the personified spirit of their ship that a figurehead sometimes found itself clad in foul weather garments from head to foot. These vestments, it must be admitted, not infrequently bore a strong resemblance to a canvas bag, and when this was the case, though the figurehead remained silent, the captain often raised an objection. He argued that the rubbing and chafing of the canvas spoiled the paint underneath. How gorgeous this was

how vivid its colour, may be seen from the picture in the Painted Hall at Greenwich of the combat between the *Queen Charlotte* and the *Mountain* on the " Glorious First of June."

The figurehead of the *Victory* was by no means characteristic of figureheads in general. It was less ambitious, less stately. The name of the vessel might have inspired the sculptor to model his carving on one of the great winged statues of Greece. But if the idea presented itself, it was at once dismissed. The trophy when complete comprised an oval shield with the royal arms of England very richly emblazoned. Above this was the royal crown, and below it the scroll and motto, " Dieu et mon droit." For supporters the shield had on either side not the familiar lion and unicorn, but two graceful little Cupids painted ivory white.

Those who have examined a wooden ship, especially an old one, will perhaps suppose that this coat of arms was fastened directly to the curve of the *Victory's* stem. But this was not the case. Between the shield and the bows of the ship spread a structure, which the seamen called the beakhead and which was not unlike the cow-catcher in front of an American locomotive.



The Bows of the "Victory."

Those who eventually abolished this characteristic feature argued that it was more ornamental than useful. And they were perfectly right. The beakhead tended to scatter advancing seas and occasionally offered a bridge for boarders when they stormed an enemy's ship. But there was no real stoutness of defence in it, or protection from the enemy's fire.

On the other hand, the beakhead made up in beauty whatever it may have lacked in solidity. The beams of which it was composed were bent into subtle plastic curves, and laced and twisted and intertwined. Here carven mermaids made their home, stretching their limbs in their dainty way, or toying with scallop shells and seaweed; here dolphins writhed in many a sinuous twirl; and knights and apostles all did their share in lending support to the fabric. The general effect was one of trellis or basket work, giving a canopy to the figurehead, for which it served as a shrine.

Certainly no part of the ship excited more interest or admiration among the crowd of sightseers who assembled at Chatham to see the *Victory's* launch.

CHAPTER III.

HOW SHE WAS FITTED FOR SEA.

As soon as the *Victory* had been tugged out of Old Single Dock into the wider world of the harbour, she was taken alongside of a sheer hulk. A sheer hulk was a dockyard vessel fitted with powerful derricks and cranes. These were required for the formidable task of lifting into the vessel her lower masts. The lower masts, unlike the topmasts, top-gallants and royals which rose in tapering gradation above them, were part and parcel of a vessel's structure. They were not detachable. They were not easily handled by a small gang of men. The top-gallant masts might be made of single trees. But the lower masts were as stoutly and solidly built as the keel itself. Seven pieces went to the making of each spar. Their inner sides were shaped like the jointed facets of a Chinese puzzle. Their outer sides were smooth

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and rounded. They were carefully bolted and dovetailed together, and girt about with iron hoops. A lower mast might measure more than six feet in circumference. It was specially fashioned at the lower end into the shape of a heel, and this was stepped in a clamp or mortise that rested on the keelson. At the uppermost end of a lower mast was fitted the *cap*, a bulky bracelet of wood that wedded the topmast to the lower. Many feet below this came the *top*, properly so called, a commodious platform used for various purposes, to which fuller reference will be made on a later page.

The lower masts in all their massive bulk were supported by the standing rigging—the stays and the shrouds. The stays, always double, led forward. The shrouds, varying in number, led to either side of the ship. They were set up by blocks or "dead-eyes" to narrow wooden platforms outboard of the bulwarks, where a man could stand to heave the lead. These platforms, known at one time as chain-wales, because they were fettered to the planking of the sides, were referred to in brief as chains. The shrouds were traversed horizontally by cross-ropes or ratlines, that formed a convenient ladder to the top.

When the *Victory* had received her lower

masts and standing rigging she was free at last from dockyard hands. She was, in fact, a living being, and began to have a separate existence. And now came her captain to take possession. Arriving at Chatham, he first visited the Admiral Superintendent of the Dockyard, and paid his respects. From the admiral he received a narrow pennant, the streamer that denoted his rank. Then he entered a boat and was rowed out to the ship. Causing his pennant at once to be hoisted, he took his stand upon the quarter deck, and unfolding his papers, cleared his throat and read aloud his commission.

The audience who gathered round him and listened to his words were the standing officers. These, like the captain, were expressly appointed to the ship. They were not, however, his equals in any way, for a vessel can have but one master. They were appointed, not by commission, but by warrant. They were warrant officers. Their presence was essential to the completion of the vessel, and her fitting and equipment for sea. They were the master, the gunner, the boatswain, the carpenter, the surgeon, and the purser. The captain made himself known to each in turn, shook hands, and said a few kindly words of greeting. Then,

followed by his retinue, he commenced his first inspection of the vessel which it was his pride and privilege to command.

The *Victory* was a three-decker. This does not mean that she had three decks and three decks only; but three decks specially prepared for the mounting and fighting of guns. The uppermost was known as the main deck, the second was known as the middle deck, and the third as the lower or gun deck. None of these decks presented a wide open space like a ball-room, or drill-shed, or place of assembly. The run of a deck was interrupted amidships by a series of impediments—the bodies of the stout-girthed, round-waisted masts; the fore, the main, and the after hatchways; capstans, shot-racks, and stanchions supporting the beams above. Rather it may be said that on every gun deck there were two long avenues. These, however, were roomy enough, and gave ample accommodation for the working of the guns.

Immediately below the lower deck was another deck, called the orlop. This deck differed from all above it in having no port-holes. In fact, as the deck itself was below the water-line, it was impossible without danger to pierce its sides. Its gloomy recesses were lit by candles in horn lanterns hung from the beams.

The orlop had a maximum height of five feet seven inches, so that many of its occupants had to stoop. But dark and confined though it was, and stuffy from want of air, the orlop had two compensations: it was dry; and it was safe from the enemy's shot. Ladders led from it into the hold.

The lower deck and the middle deck were both completely roofed by the deck immediately above them. But with the main deck this was not the case. The foremost quarter of the main deck was covered by the forecastle, and the aftermost half was also covered. But from the main mast to the break of the forecastle the main deck was open to the sky.

The after portion of the main deck's roof, extending from the main mast to the stern of the ship, might appropriately have been called the half deck—if it had been clear of encumbrances. But over the after portion, from the mizzen mast to the taffrail, rose the poop, the highest pitched and most elevated position on board. Thus from the flagstaff, where the Navy's ensign fluttered over her stern, the *Victory* descended in wide sweeping wooden terraces: first the poop, then the quarter deck, and then the waist or unroofed portion of the uppermost gun deck.

To reach the forecastle from the quarter deck it was not necessary to descend to the main deck by one staircase and reascend by another. Narrow platforms called gangways bridged the chasm on either side of the ship.

After going his rounds the captain returned to the quarter deck. Here he dismissed his followers, who without a moment's loss of time dispersed to their respective quarters, each keenly intent on having his department ready in every essential at the earliest possible moment.

The master was primarily responsible, under the captain, for the sailing of the ship. All that is included in the word " navigation " was his province. It was his duty to conduct the *Victory* wherever the captain might direct; from Spithead to Plymouth, from China to Peru, or into the line of battle. By the aid of his charts and his leadline, he could feel his way up the English Channel in daylight or in dark. In an unknown part of the limitless ocean he could determine longitude by his chronometer and latitude by his sextant, and so resolve his vessel's whereabouts. If he had not a map he made one. And all his observations and calculations were recorded in the log-book with neatness and precision. He had

mates to assist him, called quarter-masters. One of them always represented him under the break of the poop to direct the two seamen at the wheel. The master's technical knowledge was amazing, even to the sailor men. They made believe that he could not go ashore without an interpreter; for how would a dentist know what to do if he were told to haul away on the aftmost grinder aloft on the starboard quarter!

The gunner was responsible for the armament of the ship. His first duties were to have the wooden gun-carriages slung on board and set in order along the gun decks; to procure the guns themselves from the arsenal and see them mounted on their carriages; to supply each gun with all its requisites: rammers and sponges to load and clean, gun tackles to move the carriages forward, and breechings to stay their recoil. When the guns were all bestowed to his liking, the gunner turned his attention to the powder and shot. There were in all more than a hundred tons' weight of solid iron balls. Most of these found their way into the hold. But lest anything should be wanting when occasion arose, a certain number of them were placed near the guns and in racks round the hatchways. Not too many: for being

exposed to the air they quickly grew rusty, and then had to be laboriously scraped before they would enter a gun.

The powder was a much more important consideration, and constituted always an element of danger to the very existence of the ship. There were two magazines. Both were situated far below the water-line, in the very bowels of the ship. At this depth they were safe at least from the fire of the enemy. They were approached by their own companion ways covered by copper-covered hatches that were fastened down and locked. No one but the gunner was allowed to enter; and to make security doubly sure, the gunner himself was obliged to approach the captain in order to obtain the keys. The magazines were lined throughout with thick felt, and the gunner put on thick felt shoes whenever he entered. Light was admitted through an iron-barred scuttle that led into a little cabin which contained a guarded lantern, and was called the lighting-room. A reservoir and stop-cock allowed the entire chamber to be flooded in a sudden emergency. The after magazine was much the smaller. It contained a quantity of cartridges made up ready for immediate use. The fore magazine was the more important. It contained

the bulk of the powder in strongly-coopered casks.

But the gunner's headquarters in the *Victory* were in the armoury, or, as it was more usually called, the gun room. This was situated at the end of the lower gun deck, nearest to the stern. Here were kept all the small arms and small-arm ammunition. Here were muskets and pikes and blunderbusses and pistols and cutlasses and tomahawks: in lockers, upon the floor, in stacks round the mizzen mast, in rows along the walls. It was one man's duty from morn till night to keep the weapons clean.

The bos'n was responsible for the motion of the ship, and, what was equally important, for the repose of the ship. No man was busier than he when the *Victory* was fitting. He had to overhaul all the running rigging with its multiplicity of details, its ropes, its cordage, its tackles, its pulleys and blocks. He had to examine all the yards, and see that they were ready to be hoisted into position and slung across the masts. He had to inspect all the canvas supplied, and make sure that the sails were all in proper order. It was his duty also to supervise the everyday work up aloft. No amount of sails and rigging could benefit the *Victory* unless at a moment's notice canvas could be increased or

shortened or taken in altogether. When the advice of the master had been converted into an order by the officer of the watch, the bos'n was responsible for reefing and furling. His whistle, the badge of his authority, would pipe all hands on deck or make his directions clearly understood, even amid the shrieking of the gale.

At least as heavy a burden to the bos'n as the sails and spars and rigging was the "ground tackle." The *Victory* had several anchors, but three at least had always to be in working order. They were stowed by the bos'n and his mates upon the port and starboard bows of the ship, ready to be dropped at a moment's emergency. The forecastle was the bos'n's peculiar demesne. From either side of it projected over the sea massive beams, called "catheads" because of the carvings which embellished them. These were fitted with specially strong pulleys for raising the anchor from the sea without injury to the sides of the ship. The anchor was fitted with a large round ring which could be easily hooked and drawn up to the cathead before the anchor was tucked into its bed.

To the ring of the anchor the cable was attached. The cable perhaps gave the bos'n more anxiety than anything under his charge.

It was like an overgrown child. It was delicate. It was always getting into difficulties and calling for help. You must understand that it was made of hempen rope. Now, a hempen rope capable of holding such a ship as the *Victory*, and stoutly withstanding all her plunges and twistings, was of itself almost unmanageable. An iron chain would have been docile in comparison. But conceive a cable twenty-five inches round the waist! It was as if the great dragon of the deep had come aboard every time the anchor was raised. A ship of the line did not expect to anchor in water much deeper than forty fathoms (240 feet). But she rode more easily on a loose rein—that is, with double the length of cable that the depth of the anchorage demanded. It would not do for the *Victory* to be immediately over her ground tackle, for the strain might prove a breaking one. A cable was therefore one hundred fathoms long, and its safe stowage was a matter of no mean difficulty. Nor were the bos'n's anxieties at an end when the cable was brought home and snugly berthed. Wet through and through by its immersion, it tended to rot as it lay in the hold. And this was very serious; not only because the *Victory's* cables cost £400 apiece, and the bos'n was held to blame for all mishaps

to them; but because the life of the *Victory* and the lives of all on board depended on their soundness and security.

The carpenter was responsible to the captain for the fabric of the ship. He was, perhaps more than anyone else on board, the man for emergencies. He had, of course, much work to do before the *Victory* left harbour. He had to examine all her timbers, her ribs, her beams, and her knees. If any part were rotten he had to remedy the defect. For this part of his labours an intimate knowledge of shipbuilding was requisite. Then he had to examine all the caulking of the seams and inspect the spare yards and top masts. The boats, too, were his peculiar care. But it was the storm and the battle that tried him. He could save the ship when no one else on board could do anything. He could carry her into port under jury rig when all her masts had gone by the board. He could repair the damage done by the enemy in a fashion little short of miraculous. He always knew exactly how much water there was in the hold, and sometimes was obliged to counsel the captain to order all hands to the pumps.

The surgeon was responsible for the health of the ship. The narrow limits of the *Victory*, the swarms of men who inhabited her decks,

the difficulty of obtaining fresh food and water while afloat, the enforced herding together of frail and healthy in narrow cribs and cabined spaces, the difficulty of conducting fresh air to the lower decks—all these, and many other causes, filled the surgeon's hands very full. When the captain went his rounds, the surgeon accompanied him, and called his attention to conditions which were prejudicial to health. He would persuade the captain, when need arose, to wash the entire ship with vinegar, and the entire ship's company with soap and water. He had power to issue more palatable rations to the sickly, and to have this man or that excused from duty on the score of ill-health. The principal disease he had to treat was scurvy, and his most frequent remedy was lime juice. His hospital or sick-bay was situated on the main deck, and was roofed in by the forecastle above. Here he was aided in his duties by two assistant-surgeons and numerous attendants called " lob-lolly boys."

The purser was an officer appointed to take charge of the provisions of the ship. He was almost always a man of means and a person of wealth. In order to obtain his warrant he had to find sureties for considerable sums. Much was entrusted to his keeping, and much that

was easily disposed of and turned into money. He had under his immediate care all the cotton, flannel, and linen required for the clothing of the entire ship's company. He had charge of all the food, the beef and pork, the butter and cheese, the flour, the sugar, the treacle, the cocoa, and oatmeal. He had charge of all the spirits, the rum, the brandy, and grog. He was a chandler and wine-merchant in a large way of business. He was a wholesale tailor and provision merchant. It was within his power to make a mint of money, and the Admiralty in consequence insisted that he should deposit with them a large sum as security against fraud.

It was not this, however, that made the purser the most unpopular officer in the ship. The food that was carried by a man-of-war was poor in quality, and the men were always grumbling. It was not the purser's fault that the butter was rancid or the pork unduly salt, but it was he who issued the rations. Then again: whenever a seaman was ill, the time spent in sick-bay was not reckoned as part of his service, but simply as time lost. The purser was in no sense responsible. But it was he who made the deductions from the unhappy seaman's pay-sheet.

There were other odious duties which he was called on to perform. The more efficiently he carried them out, the more thoroughly was he disliked. In reality he was a person more deserving of pity than of hate. He was as capable in his way as the master. He was as efficient in his work as the bos'n. He was a thoroughly sound business man, and gave his advice to all who sought it. But the seamen could not conquer their repulsion for him. They regarded him as an unmitigated scoundrel and a pitiless extortioner. "Old Nipcheese" was the kindest of the epithets which they heaped ungenerously upon him.

As a consequence his title to-day is extinct. For when in the nineteenth century many of the seamen's grievances were remedied, the purser obtained permission to cut his connection with the past and change his name to "paymaster."

From the mere narration of their duties, it will be seen how large a part the warrant or standing officers took in preparing the *Victory* for sea. In the privacy of their cabins they compiled lists of all their requirements, and took these lists to the captain for his signature. When this had been affixed, they went ashore and resorted to the various provinces of the dock-

yard—the anchor-walk, the rope-walk, the rigging-loft, and the victualling establishment. Every list was overhauled by the Admiral Superintendent, who would part with nothing, unless the proper routine was observed in its minutest particular. The first articles brought on board were hammocks for the standing officers and their assistants, food and drink sufficient for their needs, and boats to enable them to visit the yard and bring off the necessary stores.

No one on board the *Victory* in these early days had more calls made upon his time than the captain. The laws of the service not only demanded his presence afloat, but positively forbade him on any excuse whatsoever even to think of sleeping ashore. His state room was immediately under the poop. It was roomy and commodious, stretching from side to side of the ship, and having a row of windows in the stern, and a balcony outside them which enabled him to take the air. But the furniture was meagre to the last degree: a table and chairs, of course; a rack for sword and telescope and pistols; a locker under the windows for portable property; but little more. The curtains gave a note of colour, and the carpet an appearance of homely comfort. Along the top of

the lockers ran a leather mattress, on which he could recline and take his ease with a book if he happened to have one. But there was little enough time for anything but work. The warrant officers, dockyard officials, and other visitors were in and out of the state-room from morning till night. And in between times the captain had to expend his energies in devising expedients for what, after all, was his most important business—the manning of the ship.

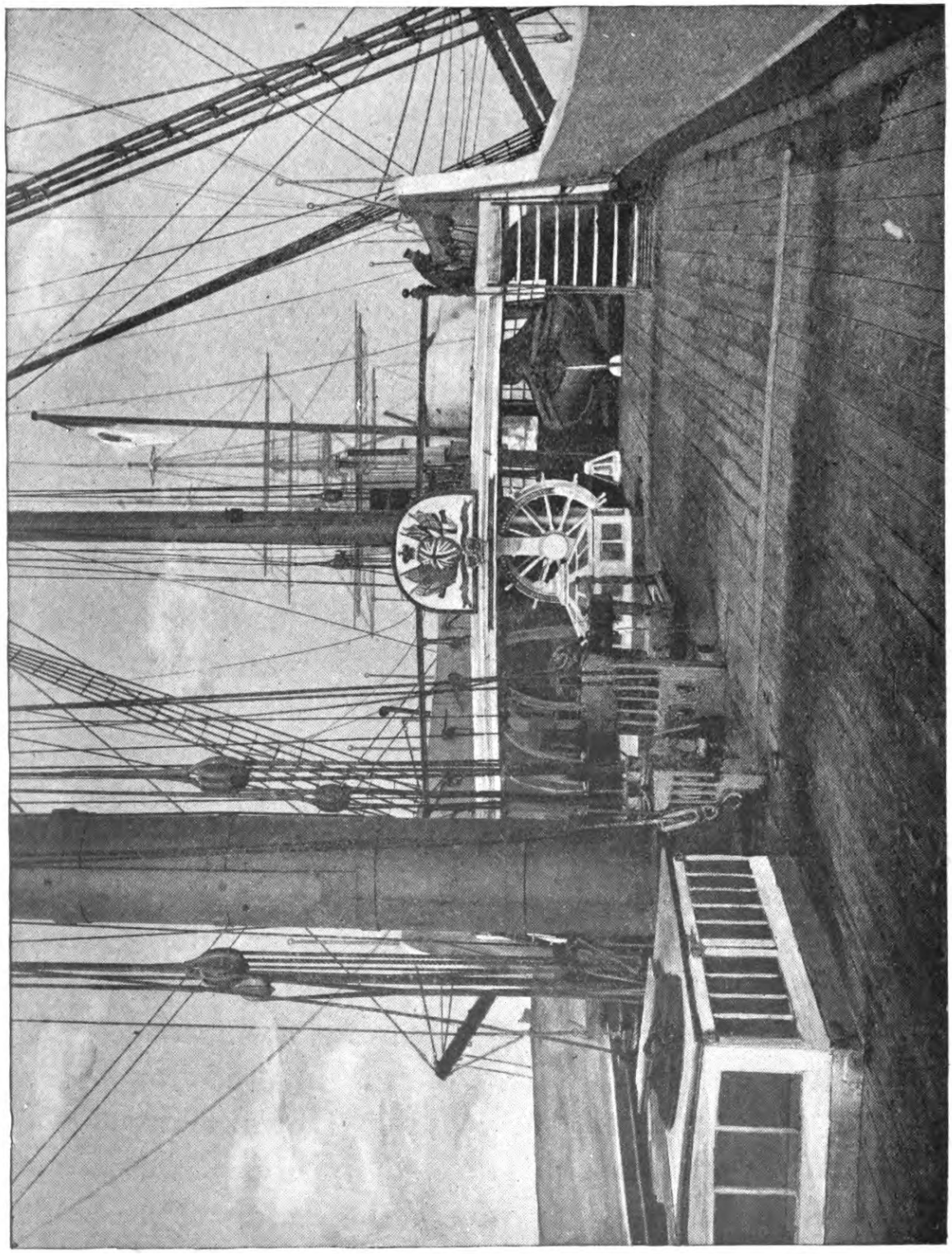
As in twos and threes the men came on board, and as in tens and twenties they multiplied, the warrant officers divided them among the various departments and set them to work in gangs under petty officers. Some became sailmakers, and sewed away at bags and fire-screens, at drawbuckets and cabin partitions. Some became carpenters, and made and fitted capstan bars and mess tables, or put the finishing touches to the more ornamental portions of the upper deck. Some became painters, and numbered the hammocks or varnished the boats and oars. Some became armourer's assistants, and made metal plates and eyes and eyelet holes for hammocks. Some became riggers, and stropped the blocks, reeved ropes, or turned in dead-eyes. All were kept active. The *Victory*,

which a few weeks previously had been devoid of all but a nucleus crew, was now as busy as a hive. To the eye of an unpractised observer hundreds of men may have appeared to run this way and that, climbing up ropes, only to descend again, disappearing down hatchways one moment, to re-emerge the next, running into one another, tumbling over one another, bustling, hurrying, confusing one another, and getting into one another's way. In reality each had his assorted task, and though none of the workers may have known what his fellow was attempting or how he was spending his time, yet the *Victory*, a world in itself, in this respect did but resemble the wider world outside. Labour was organized, and order evolved from chaos, as quickly and efficiently as in an overturned ants' nest.

When the last of the rigging had been set up, when the end of the last rope had been pointed, when the last handspike had been put in its place, then the decks were sanded, tarpaulins were thrown over the painted work, and all hands were called to black the rigging. Stays were blacked, and backstays, yards and shrouds, to render them waterproof. Things liable to rust were also blacked. And when the turn of the guns came, the tar was put on thinly under

a warm sun, and the guns were afterwards polished with a well-oiled cloth. While the tar on the standing rigging dried, the last of the provisions were brought and checked, and the drinking-water stowed in the tanks. The master and gunner, the bos'n and purser, paid their last visit to the dockyard, and approaching the captain, informed him that all had been brought on board. The running rigging was then rove, the sails bent to the yards, and the "Blue Peter" hoisted in order to show that the *Victory* was ready for sea.

It remained to welcome the admiral. His state room, immediately under the captain's, which it resembled in almost every particular, was swept and garnished. The captain, attended by his retinue, took a last look round. The sweepers removed the last speck of dust. The midshipmen smartened themselves up. The marines stood at attention on the poop. The great moment arrived. The officer of the watch approached the captain and gravely saluted. "Admiral's barge coming alongside, sir," he reported. The captain fingered his sword and returned the salute. Down came the narrow pennant. The bos'n, lifting the whistle to his mouth, piped the side. The marines presented arms. There was a ruffle of



The Upper Deck of the "Victory," looking aft.

Photo by G. West & Co.

drums. The ship's band played "Rule, Britannia!" Every head was uncovered. The admiral's flag was hoisted to the masthead, and the *Victory* submitted herself and her fortunes into the hands of her lord

CHAPTER IV.

HOW SHE SCHOOLED THE YOUNGER GENERATION.

As soon as she put to sea, and so long as she remained at sea, in storm and in calm, through months of peace and hours of battle, the *Victory* served as a training establishment for the leaders of the next generation. At Trafalgar the junior officers serving on board were thirty-one in number. There were seldom less than twenty-four at any time.

These young fellows joined the *Victory* not many hours before she weighed anchor. Some of them were transferred from other ships. Some came from the Royal Naval College at Portsmouth. Others came at the bidding or invitation of the captain. The captain was allowed to take to sea four servants for every hundred of his company, and as the *Victory* carried nine hundred men, the captain could claim a retinue of thirty-six. Out of this num-

ber he had to furnish himself with a coxswain and barge's crew. But when these had been provided there were still vacancies to be filled, and he summoned the sons of his old friends or his younger cousins and nephews to go to sea and learn to serve their king. In this manner Nelson and Collingwood joined their first ships a few years after the *Victory* was finished. In this manner the great Lord Hood went to sea some twenty years before her keel was laid down. All alike figured on the books as "servants." But none at any time had any menial duties.

There were no precise regulations governing the age at which a "captain's servant" joined the Navy. It was the exception for a boy to leave home before he was eight years of age. But it is quite certain that many went to sea before they were ten. On the other hand, young officers who had not yet received a commission, and were transferred to the *Victory* from other ships, might have been serving for years and years. There was no equitable system of promotion as there is in the service to-day. The ages of the juniors might, therefore, range from eight to thirty-five. There are even cases reported of midshipmen over forty.

The most boyish members of this family would to-day be known as cadets. On board the *Victory* they were properly styled "volunteers," but by their elders were more often referred to as "youngsters." They were not considered old enough to look after themselves, and were confided to the care of the gunner. The gunner provided for their wants, saw that they were not bullied, spoke to them on occasion like a father, sent their linen to be washed and their boots to be mended, yarned to them of old sea fights, and taught them to box the compass and know the ropes. They made their home in his headquarters, the gun room, with its stacks of half-pikes and rows of muskets. The tops of the lockers which contained the pistols were covered with cushions that offered a comfortable couch; and overhead, between the beams, were other lockers, in which the youngsters might stow their treasured belongings. Further cupboards on either side of the stern ports accommodated their sextants and telescopes, their books and almanacs.

The young gentlemen who had reached the mature age of fifteen were entitled to call themselves midshipmen. Officers of this exalted rank were free from leading strings, and heartily despised the kiddies of the gun room. Them-

selves they messed aft of the orlop in the midshipmen's berth or tier. This room they regarded as the very hub of the ship. And in this opinion they received some support from the famous Sir Robert Calder. When captain of the *Victory* he always used to take important visitors to the midshipmen's berth and introduce them to it in the following words: "This is the place where all the admirals and captains in the service are tried from day to day, and where no one, however exalted his rank, escapes being hauled over the coals."

The "berth," it must be clearly understood, was neither luxurious nor palatial. It was not a separate part of the ship. It was simply a temporary structure made of canvas screens and sea-chests. The screens gave a semblance of privacy, and the sea-chests made a rampart, and provided seats. The entire space at the disposal of its occupants may have measured some six or eight feet square. The beams above bore rows of hooks, and these served to support quadrant cases, cocked hats, dirks, and belts. Sundry holes, which would certainly have escaped the notice of the occasional visitor, formed hiding-places for pipes and other gear.

Its inmates, comprising a motley group of all ages (let us say) from fifteen to twenty-six, would

be found at any moment very differently occupied. Some would be playing musical instruments; others would be playing backgammon. Some would be debating a knotty point of seamanship, others settling their differences by resort to the boxing-gloves. Here would be an industrious young fellow studying a manual of seamanship; and there a much less studious elder mixing a stiff glass of grog.

There may have been lack of space in the berth, there may have been deficiency of wholesome food, but at least there was always a fine superfluity of noise. Argument was incessant, and debates were conducted in the most vociferous manner. Those who had a mind to sing did not wait for a pause in the conversation. And the clamour was aggravated by the angry expostulations of those who were interrupted in their enjoyment of a game of cards by an avalanche of beer down their necks.

One unfailing topic of interest with the seniors was the possibility of promotion. Every midshipman longed for the time when he should earn his commission. Not till then could he escape from the midshipmen's berth to the more seemly decorum of the ward room. Not till then, whatever his age might be, could he count himself a man.

Every "young gentleman," therefore, devoted himself with more or less keenness to the pursuit of professional knowledge. There were certain things that had to be done. All midshipmen were expected to keep a journal of the cruise, and their day's work went to the captain for inspection. In harbour they took charge of the boats. At night they mustered the watch. At noon they attended the master on the quarter deck, and took the altitude of the sun. They qualified as able seamen by reefing and furling the main topsail, heaving the lead, and taking their trick at the wheel. They used to pull an oar from time to time, and listen attentively to the bos'n's instructions as he taught them to knot and splice.

But, however hard a midshipman might toil, his labours bore the same relation to his life's work as those of a university student. At their best they were a little out of touch with reality. A reefer, like an undergraduate, might slave from early morn to dewy eve; he might accomplish as much as or more than a full-blown lieutenant. But for all that he was a student. He was not independent; he was under tutelage. And therefore, like his fellow-students all the world over, he loved mad romps and wild escapades. Skylarking was as the breath

of life to him. Ragging alone made existence tolerable. His spirits were ever bubbling. His pranks were boyish. He was irrepressible.

When dinner was served in the ward room; when the lieutenants, the captain of marines, the master, the purser, the surgeon, and the chaplain sat round their table enjoying perhaps a brace of roast fowl, and dallying over their wine, then was the joyous time for midshipmen. The first lieutenant was their ogre and their bugbear. He set down on the tablets of his memory all their shortcomings. But fortunately he was president of the officers' mess. And the ward room was situated aft of the middle deck, immediately under the admiral's cabin, and immediately over the gun room. In other words, it was well removed from the upper deck and the orlop. The midshipmen did not linger over their meal. There was little reason perhaps for doing so. Salt junk, lob's couse, dog's body, sea pie, pea coffee, hurry hush, and chowder were the standing dishes. By these you are to understand various messes and hashes made up in equal parts of meat, fish, biscuit, dried peas, potatoes, and onions. They were washed down with water that tasted strongly of gunpowder.

The table being cleared, the fun began.

Sometimes resort was had to the poop, which served as an admirable castle. Sides were picked. One side defended and one attacked. Crows and pike-staffs formed splendid weapons of offence. Mops and brooms served to repel them. Sometimes the game was "follow-my-leader," up the lee mizzen shrouds, over the futtocks, down the weather shrouds, up the main, down the backstay, into the waist—a breathless dance. Sometimes a sleeper was discovered, and molasses were gently poured under him, that his form might be glued to the deck. But if the victim was a reveller who had been drinking too much rum, then the tormentors painted his face with red ochre, added black eyebrows and a fierce moustache, dressed him in a flaxen wig made from the fag ends of the tiller rope, crammed a cocked hat over his head, and completed the picture by removing his shirt and painting him blue like an ancient Briton.

Unpopular members of the midshipmen's berth had often enough a terrible time. One night the gay young sparks of the *Victory* caught the purser's steward, against whom they bore a grudge. Some cattle had recently been slaughtered, and they sewed him up in a bullock's skin. A bull-fight after the true Spanish

pattern then followed. The toreadors flung cloaks over his head, and brought him to the ground. The picadors prodded him with marlingspikes, and the matador put him out of his misery by knocking him over the head with a wooden sword.

Sometimes considerable diversion was obtained by personating ghosts and goblins. The darkness of the hold and the superstition of seamen afforded ample opportunity, and the midshipmen gave rein to their fantasy. Dear, too, were the joys obtained in moments stolen from duty. In the middle watch, when the night was as dark as pitch, when the wind was blowing half a gale, and the rain descending in torrents, the mids on duty would steal down to their berth to stew beef-steaks. This was done by lighting several pieces of candle in the bottom of a lantern and sticking forks into the table round it, with a plate resting on them over the flame, the head of the lantern being off. The mess thus concocted was always voted delicious. But the sauce that gave such a tasty seasoning was, doubtless, the knowledge that the first lieutenant imagined them at the post of duty on the upper deck.

Play-acting was a favourite amusement with the young people. They would compose the

play, make the dresses and wigs, rig up a stage and scene, and act with remarkable vigour and success. The great Napoleon himself when a prisoner on board the *Bellerophon* condescended to be present at such a performance, and to judge by the smile on his face, must have enjoyed himself immensely. When forced to stay below in the berth the midshipmen preferred before other games either backgammon or "able whackets." This last was a game with cards, wherein the loser was beaten over the palms with a handkerchief tightly twisted like a rope. "Bait the bear" was a recreation of which no one grew tired except the unfortunate actor who was cast for the bear.

But to tell the truth, the happiest and merriest hours were spent in teasing a really gullible greenhorn. If this was unkind or undeserved, it is to be feared that all the midshipmen alike were to blame. They gave Johnny Raw or Johnny Newcome a terrible time. No sooner was he in his hammock than they cut the clew and let him down with a bump. Or they fixed a fish-hook in the rim of his mattress, and dragged it from under him; or they reefed his blanket—that is, they made the ends fast, and by numerous turns formed the blanket itself into a ring like a horse's collar, which

an hour's work would not undo. While the wretched gulpin was asleep they stole his uniform, and, hiding it in the cook's oven, left him no alternative but to perambulate the ship in his blanket, making polite inquiries from whomsoever he met. When he yielded to the rigours of sea-sickness, they dosed him with a quart of sea water, or persuaded him that the symptoms would yield at once if he would swallow a piece of salt pork attached to a string, and drew it backwards and forwards. When he expressed inability even to move, they performed the kind office themselves.

Occasionally, however, the tables were turned. Occasionally the tormentors were tormented. Occasionally the mischief-making midshipman was brought before a judge equally merciless. Then it was his turn to " buy goose " or suffer punishment. The commonest award meted out by the first lieutenant was one of banishment. The wretched delinquent was sent to the main topmast cross-trees. At this dizzy eminence above the deck he was condemned to cool his heels sometimes for one hour, sometimes for two, sometimes for four, and sometimes for eight.

If he was very unruly and insubordinate, he might be " spread-eagled "—that is, lashed to

the weather shrouds with arms and legs drawn in opposite directions. And if he really failed to behave himself and displayed no desire or ambition to reform, then he was voted a bad character, and, being brought before the captain, was dismissed his ship.

Happily such cases were very rare. The midshipmen, alike in the *Victory* and in other ships, were keen and alert to a sense of duty, anxious above all to rise in their profession, and most amenable to discipline. High spirits might lead them for occasional airings to the cross-trees, but no one thought the worse of them for that. They were the life and soul of the ship. However freely the bos'n may have cursed them, however soundly the master may have rated them, there was no one aboard who did not relish their pranks so long as they were not directed against himself. It is enough that Nelson loved his "children" dearly, took them about with him when he went ashore, introduced them to his friends, and tried to make the ship a happier place for them. They repaid, of course, his indulgence with idolatry, and a midshipman it was that avenged his death.

CHAPTER V.

HOW SHE WAS MANNED.

In no respect did the *Victory* differ more widely from a battleship of to-day than in the methods by which she was manned. When the captain came aboard for the first time, he found her practically uninhabited. There were the standing officers and their gangs. That was all. It was the captain's first duty therefore to provide his ship with a company. This was no easy task. The *Victory* required between eight hundred and nine hundred men. Whence were they to be obtained?

The captain first busied himself with the preparation of placards, posters, and handbills. In these he called for volunteers. In these he described with becoming enthusiasm the peculiar merits of his ship and the probable advantages to be expected from a cruise in her. In speed, he said, the vessel was a flyer; in sea-

worthy qualities just the bark that a sailor would love. Special attention was paid to provisioning, and the company might expect to feed on fresh meat and plenty of it. Pay might be no higher than usual; but out of prize-money fortunes might be made that would rouse the envy of kings.

With such allurements and arts the snare was set in the sight of the birds. And not wholly in vain. Some of the birds hopped in. They were blinded to the discomfort of life on board ship by the thought of prize-money, battle, and rum. These were crumbs of comfort sufficient to tempt a certain class of men. And others who had dreamed of life at sea, and endowed it with a glamour of their own imagining, only needed a little coaxing to draw them into the net. The number of volunteers depended, of course, very largely on the captain of the ship or the admiral whose flag she flew. A commander whose name was a guarantee for booty and battle, or a popular hero who was idolized for his own sake, would always enliven the rate of recruiting. It cannot be stated with certainty how many volunteers there were on board the *Victory* when first she put to sea, but at Trafalgar there were no less than 181. This number must not, however, be regarded as

representative or characteristic. Men would come forward to fight with Nelson when all other inducements failed. Besides, the point that needs emphasizing here is not that the lure of Nelson's name brought nearly two hundred men to his ship, but rather that, even when his flag was at the masthead, more than six hundred of the requisite number failed altogether to put in an appearance.

The truth is, that the voluntary process was utterly powerless of itself to fill a ship, even when that ship was the *Victory*. Government might offer bounties—did, in fact, very frequently offer bounties—thirty shillings or a couple of pounds for a willing hand, and, upon occasions, as much as twelve guineas for a really competent seaman; but money was not really more successful than fair words and promises. It brought the men in driblets, not in multitudes.

Resort was therefore had to the system of impressment.

According to the laws of the realm, the whole of the seafaring population of the British Isles were liable to serve his Majesty afloat. Their welfare was bound up with the welfare of the country. When the country was menaced, their welfare was menaced; and it was their duty to drive away the invader. Let but an

accredited agent of the king clap into the hand of a mariner an imprest or advance payment of one shilling, and that mariner's services were lawfully at the disposal of the State.

At first sight it might be supposed that this method of impressment did not vary greatly from the method of recruiting his Majesty's army. But the resplendent sergeant and his dapper drummer boy made no use whatsoever of compulsion. Whereas compulsion was the very essence of impressment, and it was of compulsion that the merchant seamen complained.

The press-gang did most of its recruiting at sea. In time of war there were some forty-three depots round the coast with an establishment which kept twenty-seven captains and sixty-three lieutenants always hard at work. From the depots the gangs set forth in pursuit of prey. Coming alongside in a tender, they would board a merchantman, and the officer in command would request the skipper to pipe all hands on deck. The men were duly marshalled and the recruiting officer inspected them, and picked out the best for the king's service. It was an odious business, and it is not to be supposed that anybody enjoyed it.

The merchantmen were usually assailed as they reached harbour, or as they cruised in the

narrow seas. On November 25, 1796, an East Indiaman picked up her moorings in Long Reach. That same evening the boats of H.M.S. *Britannia* boarded her, and carried off all her men but twenty-three. These armed themselves to the teeth, and barricading themselves in the bread-room, determined to sell their lives dearly. But the next day their hearts failed them. They surrendered, and were carried to the flagship. In this manner the entire ship's company was drafted from the merchantman into his Majesty's service. The journey to India and back was a long one in those days. There was no short cut through the Suez Canal. The merchant seamen for days had been looking forward to a happy reunion with their families. Yet without being allowed to put a foot on dry land, they were hunted like animals and carried off, perhaps to be maimed for life, perhaps to die, in the service of a country that felt no pity, no qualms of conscience, no commiseration.

There can be little cause for wonder if the merchant seaman of the *Victory's* day thought himself ill used. He was ill used. He was abominably ill used. Sometimes he endeavoured to show his resentment ; though this, of course, could do him little good. Sir John Alexander

Gordon, the last Governor of Greenwich, tells a fine story in illustration of this. Sir John fought at the Battle of the Nile, and lived to be an Admiral of the Fleet. He had a rough exterior that was almost as dear to the tars as the kind heart within. He usually dressed in a Flushing jacket and a sou'-wester, and in this disguise was once employed by a midshipman to carry luggage up to an hotel.

A certain victim impressed by Sir John pleaded very hard indeed to be excused. He looked a fine fellow and a thorough seaman, and Sir John would not let him off. The man swore with an oath that in one arm he was paralysed. But this would not do either. Sir John handed him over to the surgeon. The surgeon examined the arm, and reported that in no way was it different from its fellow. Yet that it dropped when unsupported was evident enough, and its owner seemed powerless to raise it. Sir John thought the man was shamming, and, to break his spirit, reduced him to the lowest position in the ship. The degradation, however, was quite without effect. As sweeper, the paralytic attended strictly to business; cleared up the refuse, and made all straight, with one arm hugging the handle of his broom, and the other glued to his side.

So things continued until a certain day in November, when a French ship, the *Pomone*, was sighted, and Sir John gave the order to clear his decks for battle. The sweeper's place was at one of the quarter-deck guns, and as he came to his station, Sir John recognized him. Would the man reveal himself in the heat of battle? No. However often the gun was loaded and reloaded, the same routine was always observed. The suspect hauled on the gun-tackle fall with a single hand. There was a sulky look in the fellow's face. But that, of course, might betoken something quite different from resentment. Perhaps the paralytic was disappointed that he could take so feeble a share in the battle. Sir John himself, you see, was beginning to doubt. And as he doubted a round shot from the enemy skimmed over the bulwarks and smashed his leg. He dropped. But before he could reach the deck, two strong arms went round him; and the limb, which had been watched for months and never been seen to move, now held up the idol of the lower deck as if he had been a baby.

If it was at sea that the press-gang gathered its richest harvest, it was ashore that its activities excited the most interest and discussion; for it was only on shore that the proceedings of

the gang came under the observation of the public. As soon as night fell, the lieutenant in charge selected his men, and armed them with clubs, handspikes, truncheons, and broom-handles. Wooden implements alone were used. The gang went forth in search of recruits, and was expected to bring back men in sound condition. A broken head would heal. But there was no sense in carrying fire-arms. These could only occasion a real battle which would reduce the slums and by-streets to a butcher's shambles. Cutlasses were sometimes carried by members of the party, but more to prove to the enemy the fruitlessness of resistance than to be used in real earnest.

It was only, of course, in seaport towns that these nocturnal raids were made. It was not that the press-gang were powerless to strike elsewhere. It was not that the expenses of conducting inland operations were bound to prove excessive. The press-gang were out after merchant seamen, and hunted where these might be found. Legally they were not allowed to impress any other person. Actually they were glad to take any fish that came into their net. The pressed men who were not merchant seamen were about as helpless in the clutches of the gang as the mackerel in a Brix-

ham trawler. On one occasion the great John Wesley himself was impressed. He was so obviously not a fish that they were obliged to let him go. But numberless others with equal right to be excused were less fortunate in making their escape.

The "gang," after landing from their boat, moved quietly through the darkness. They passed along unfrequented alleys until they reached the haunts of the sailormen—the common lodging houses, the gin-shops, and the low-class inns. A pause was made in some dark corner that all might assemble and have their weapons ready. Then a descent was made on the "Blue Boar" or the "Admiral Benbow." One or two ran to the back of the house to guard the exit; the rest rushed through the front door, and plunging into the bar parlour, caused utter consternation among the company assembled there. Tables and benches were overthrown, mugs were broken, and the beer trickled down upon the sanded floor. Someone made haste to extinguish the lamp. But the press-men were too clever. Their experience told them exactly what to do. The anxious movements of those attempting to escape betrayed them even in the darkness. Cudgels were used freely against those who showed fight.

Sometimes news of the press got abroad in good time, and the victims made haste to escape. On these occasions their wives would assemble in squadrons and belabour the seamen as in duty bound they moved to the assault of some grog-shop. The seamen would put them aside, laughing, and saying, "Be quiet, Poll!" "Don't be foolish, Molly!" "Out of the light, Sue!"—exercising always an admirable mixture of gentle firmness and incurable good-nature, although the blood might be streaming down their faces.

When the press-gang swept the ports, all the shipowners leagued together to thwart it. The merchant seamen were required to man the merchantmen, and if enough were not forthcoming, trade would be spoiled. So hiding-places were devised, and havens of refuge. One such is still extant in the "Star and Garter" at Portsmouth. It is a room ten feet by six. Once inside, the refugees were safe enough; for though the chamber has four walls, it has nothing resembling a door.

Even when the press-gang had done its best, or perhaps we should say, its worst; even when all the sweepings had been brought on board, the *Victory* was still not fully manned. She was obliged—very much against her will—to

make use of certain classes of undesirables. A law of Queen Elizabeth's reign, a law that was still unrepealed when the *Victory* first made up her complement, was worded as follows: "Rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars shall be, and are hereby directed to be taken up, sent, conducted, and conveyed into H.M. service at sea." Rogues, of course, were not murderers, robbers, forgers, and coiners. They were not felons and miscreants, but merely what we should call to-day "unemployed." Still, they were not very much more welcome on that account; for the unemployed are often unemployable.

When the new hands were brought on board the *Victory*, they were passed in review by the surgeon, the purser, and the bos'n. The surgeon conducted a careful examination. There was clearly no use in carrying to sea the germs of disease; for in the confined space sickness spread rapidly. Still the great majority came through the ordeal. Not infrequently the surgeon gave orders that plenty of hot water should be prepared, together with soap and scrubbing-brushes, so that the new-comers might be adequately cleansed, or in the language of the foc's'le—"soused from clue to earing." A visit to the ship's barber was then the only

thing necessary to effect a complete transformation.

When the recruits came before the purser he opened his book and entered details about each in turn. The information which he received he tabulated in five columns. In the first he inserted the man's name, in the second his age, in the third the length of his service, in the fourth the nature of his service, and in the last his qualifications. All this, of course, was extremely important; for from such a methodical compilation the captain could gather in a moment what sort of a company he had. He could elevate one man to be captain of the maintop, and put down another to be "old lady of the gun room." The purser's book constituted a standing record of any given cruise. In it were entered all particulars of service and of character. It was a book of destiny. It recorded punishments inflicted. It totted up the amount of prize-money due. It might be the seaman's greatest friend; too often it was his most formidable enemy.

Dismissed by the purser, the newly raised men came under the inspection of the bos'n. The bos'n was a judge in the first instance of presentability. The question he had to settle was this: were the clothes or slops in which a

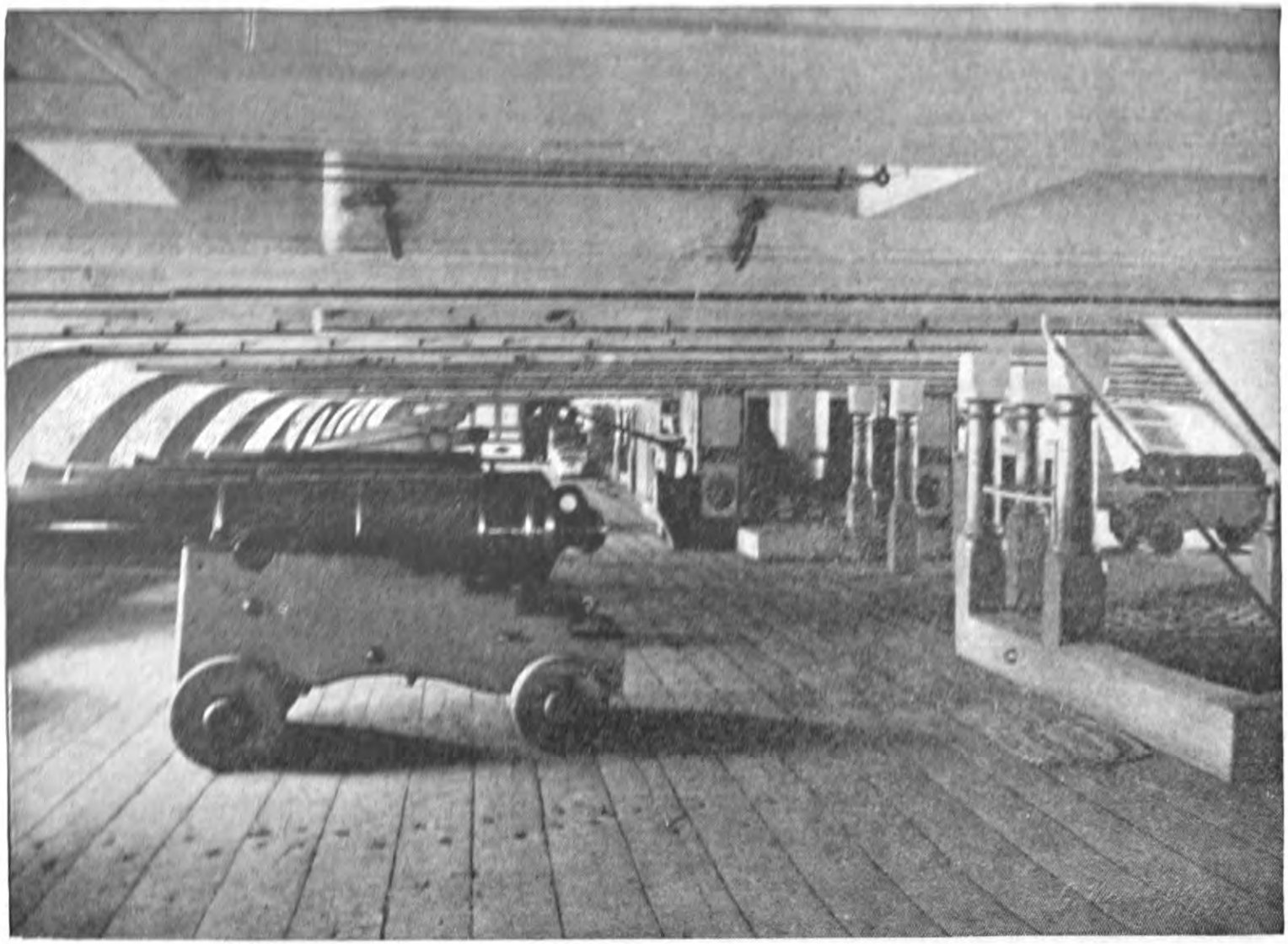
man came aboard fit to be worn on board his Majesty's ship? The garments in question might have been already condemned as insanitary by the surgeon; in which case there was no room for doubt. If, however, they were decently presentable, the bos'n was willing to pass them because new slops were obtainable at the expense of the wearer, and it seemed hard to tax those who had as yet earned nothing. The new-comers were generally referred to by the seamen as "Long Toggies" because of the length of their coats. If these were approved as to quality, a bos'n's mate drew his clasp knife and converted the "Long Toggie" into a seaman by the simple process of cutting off his tails.

It is strange to think that the *Victory's* men, at any rate during Nelson's lifetime, were allowed to dress as they liked. One would imagine that this license would produce a motley effect that was neither smart nor becoming. But as a matter of fact there was a real approach to uniformity. The men had their own idea of what was correct, and tried to realize it. The latest comers endeavoured to ape their betters, partly because it is human nature to do so, and partly because by discarding their old clothes they were more likely to

be mistaken for able seamen. Moreover, when new slops were needed, they could only be obtained at the purser's store; and the purser's store contained no variety. Everything conformed to stock and standard patterns.

The men of the *Victory* were dressed something after the following mode.

They wore check shirts, and white or buff trousers of canvas, duck, or jean. The trousers were short in the leg and loose at the ankle in order to show coloured stockings. These were set off to the best possible advantage by low-cut shoes or pumps with neat buckles or very large bows. The favourite colour for the waistcoat was red. But buff was accepted as a substitute, and some preferred a flowered design or a stripe. Over the waistcoat came a blue jacket cut very short in the waist, with two or three rows of buttons, and narrow strips of white canvas along the seams of the back and sleeves. The coat had no collar, but a handkerchief was worn round the neck and knotted. The really smart thing in neck-wear was a kerchief of black silk. The object of this was to protect the tunic from the pigtail. The pigtail, which became fashionable shortly after the *Victory* was laid down, tended each year to increase in size. Its occasional dressing was a tremendous business. One



The Lower Deck of the "Victory."

tar waited on another, and horse-hair and various other additions were used to give the queue its proper length and rigidity. Over it was worn a straw hat that was painted with black enamel, or japanned to render it waterproof. It was low in the crown and broad in the brim. The brim was sometimes turned up at the side to show a coloured lining. A ribbon was fastened round it with a very large knot at the side. The name *Victory* was painted on the ribbon or engraved on a little copper plate attached to it.

The world of men aboard the *Victory* were divided into two watches, so that half the company might always be at work. Each watch worked by spells of four hours apiece, except between four in the afternoon and eight o'clock at night. This period was divided into dog-watches of two hours, so that the routine might daily alternate. In times of stress the cry "All hands on deck!" summoned both watches, starboard and port, to struggle against the wiles of the French or the fury of a snoring gale.

The men messed on the gun and middle decks. One deck alone would not accommodate them. They slung their mess tables from hooks in the beams, and made merry between the guns. The salt meat was often as hard as boards; in fact, it was sometimes carved by the

tars into curios which are said to have taken a high polish. When thoroughly boiled it was not altogether unlike old rope, and in consequence was christened "junk." The biscuit was often maggoty. But the grog flowed freely and atoned for everything. At nightfall those off duty, humorously described as "the watch below," carried down their hammocks from the hammock-nettings. The hammock-nettings were wooden troughs surmounting the bulwarks. When the hammocks were stowed in them and netted over, the men on the upper deck had a breastwork against the small-arm fire of the enemy. When they were slung at night on the lower and middle decks, there was not an inch of elbow-room anywhere—and this, although only half the ship's company turned in. The bodies of the men, in fact, were practically touching; and both decks in consequence suffered greatly in the matter of ventilation.

So long as they were afloat the seamen of old were as fine a body of men as this or any other country ever produced—as simple and affectionate as children, as bold as lions, as generous and as versatile as none but themselves could be. Only in one respect were they inferior to the seamen of to-day. "They worked like

horses afloat and they behaved like asses ashore." It was not entirely their own fault. They were encouraged to spin impossible yarns. They were expected to behave in a mad, capricious fashion. The salt of the sea was supposed to have affected their brain, and every form of mad extravagance was indulged in. They received no wages during their cruise, but drew their money when the ship was paid off. They came ashore with pockets full of gold, determined to spend it while they had the chance. They bought watches and fried them in frying pans. They ate bank notes between bread and butter. No prank was too childish, no antic amiss. Above all, they loved to hire coaches and career madly through town and country. The vehicle was always treated like a ship. The interior was laden with provisions; flags were hoisted; and the shouting, bawling, hilarious crew took their station on deck—that is to say, on the roof. One man was set to keep a good look-out, and the rest performed high jinks on their unstable platform with a fiddler in their midst. When the good ship rolled over lumpy roads they carolled and crowed with delight; and at last dropped anchor in some tavern yard, where they sang of battle, love, and wine while the merry can went round.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW SHE BORE HERSELF IN PURSUIT AND RETREAT.

Most of the larger wooden vessels that fought for England in the eighteenth century mounted seventy-four heavy guns. But there were in addition a few ships whose privilege it was to carry an admiral; and, in order to guard his person from undue risks, they were made of special strength. They mounted a hundred guns or more; and their broadside was so murderous that they were sometimes known to keep at bay five ordinary antagonists. But these big flagships laboured under two disadvantages. They were so expensive that even the richest country could not afford to build many of them; and their bulk and towering sides made them clumsy sailers and slow compared with the "seventy-fours."

The *Victory*, as a previous page has shown, was designed and built as an admiral's ship. Indeed, before she was complete, she cost the Treasury nearly one hundred thousand pounds. But by some happy chance, which even the experts were never able to explain, she did not share the fault of other vessels of her class. She was not only the strongest and biggest ship of her time, but she was also one of the swiftest. She sped through the water with a frigate's grace and much of a frigate's speed. And these unusual qualities, throughout her career, made her prime favourite with Commanders-in-Chief.

The first admiral to secure her services was Admiral Keppel. The occasion was the interference of the French in King George III.'s quarrel with his subjects in North America. Keppel put to sea with some thirty ships, and in July, 1778, sighted the enemy off Ushant. The wind was blowing from the west, and the enemy were to windward. They had heard that British convoys were expected from the Indies, and with hopes running high had sallied forth for a foray. At sight of Keppel's fleet they would have been glad to return to Brest. But Keppel's position prevented them from doing so. They therefore made off into the

Atlantic, and Keppel gave chase. As the wind was foul, both fleets were obliged to wriggle along, twisting alternately from one tack to the other. Though the French could generally show a clean pair of heels to any one, such was Keppel's impetuosity that he began to overhaul them. But in the ardour of pursuit he sacrificed some of the symmetry of his fleet, and his line began to lose its order and cohesion.

The French commander, who had kept his fleet perfectly aligned, saw that his adversary was making battle unavoidable at the expense of his array. His own retreat was not dictated by motives of fear. If battle was inevitable, he resolved to engage before his opponent expected him to do so.

He suddenly turned to fight. His ships ran off the wind—that is to say, they turned their backs to it, swinging round, not one by one, but the entire fleet together, each vessel independently and all simultaneously. The manœuvre was an exceedingly difficult one, but was magnificently performed.

Before the manœuvre the French had been sailing southwards. Now mile beyond mile of stately ships, moving at the volition of a single will, turned and made sail to the north. And as they did so they reduced the interval that

separated them from the English to a range that enabled them to open fire.

As the English were still proceeding southwards, the two fleets passed one another on opposite courses: the English on the starboard tack, for they still had the breeze to the right of them; and the French on the larboard, with the wind to their left. This method of engagement suited the French commander. He had received instructions not to fight, and had been forced to engage. The fleets were already drawing away from each other like an "up" train and a "down" on parallel railway lines.

The first battle in which the *Victory* took part was thus a half-hearted affair. Yet it serves well enough to show the different ideas prevailing in the French and English fleets as to the manner in which a sea-fight should be conducted. The English made war on MEN; the French on SHIPS.

This seems hardly credible at first. For the English fired at their enemies' hulls, and the French at sails and rigging. These targets, however, were selected for other reasons than are immediately apparent.

The English, fiercely jealous of any rival sea-power, never sighted a hostile fleet without making some attempt to destroy it. But a

fleet of itself is merely a collection of inanimate objects. It is the men inside her that make a ship what she is. Destroy the men, reduce them to a state of panic, and the ship is yours. Remove the men from the fleet or reduce its manhood to impotence, and the mightiest squadron that ever put to sea becomes so much helpless weight of mere material.

The English, therefore, fired at their enemies' hulls, at the walls behind which their opponents strove to shield themselves. Their particular aim was at the gun-ports, where the gun-crews were bound to expose themselves. They fired on the downward roll of their ship in order to batter the hull. And the practice made skilful gunners of them; for, if they mistimed a discharge, their broadside was wasted in the sea.

The French saw no purpose in what they regarded as fighting for fighting's sake. Among them there was a tradition that sea-battles were only justifiable when there was a definite stake to be fought for—an island to be taken, a town relieved, troopships to be safeguarded, or merchantmen protected. On the present occasion there was no definite issue. No French interests were involved; nothing vital was put to the hazard. A cruise that promised satisfactory results had been interrupted, and must

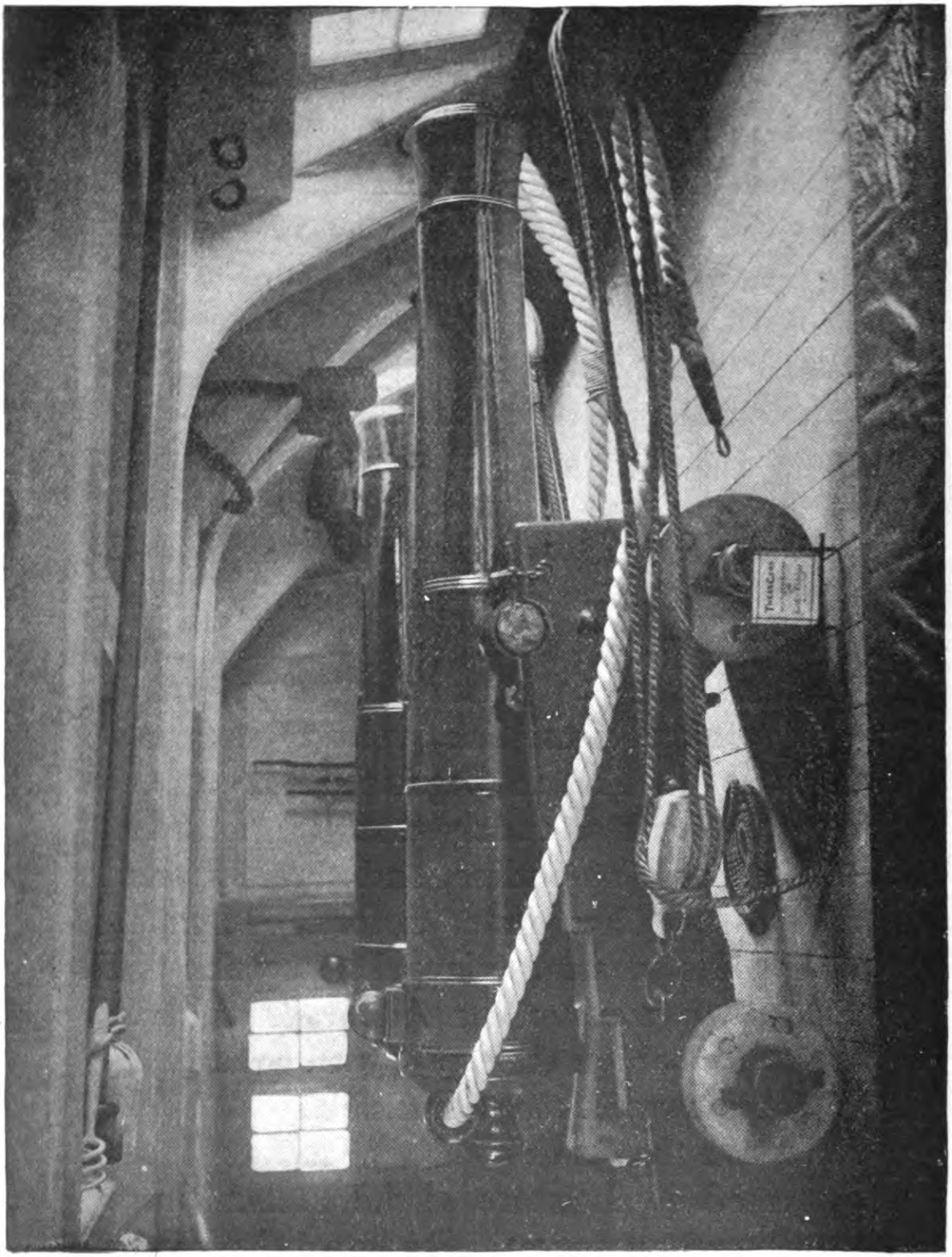
be abandoned. That was all. The main thing now was to clear the way home, so that the fleet might be spared to serve its turn when a real occasion arose.

As usual, therefore, they fired at sails and rigging. Their endeavour was to paralyse their foes by ham-stringing their ships. They loaded with scrap iron which tore canvas to shreds. They fired on the upward roll; for if the shots reached their mark some part of the enemy's rigging was injured; and the masts, robbed of their supports, rolled their bodies about, till they shook themselves out of their sockets, or fell with a tangled skein of wreckage over the vessel's side.

At this Battle of Ushant the *Victory* was in the very centre of the line, and matching herself with the French flagship, buffeted her opponent's flank so rudely that gun-ports lost their sharpness of outline, and three of them crumbled away like tinder to form one gaping and horrible chasm. Keppel's captains did their best to emulate the Admiral's example. And the French on their part with equal keenness blazed away at masts and sails.

What was the result?

The ineffectual nature of the French fire is proved by actual figures. On board the *Victory*

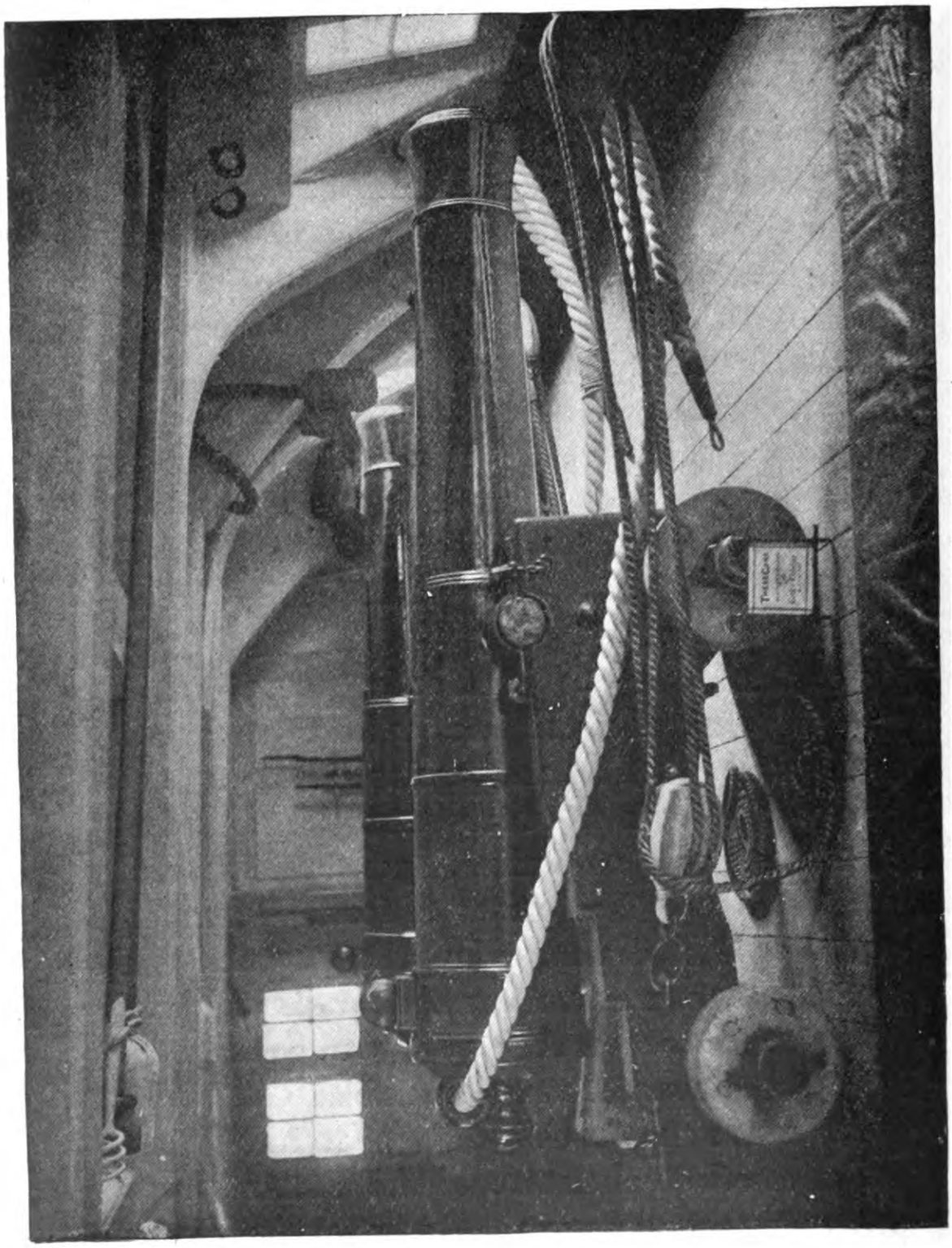


Middle Deck Guns of the "Victory."

there were eleven killed and twenty-four men wounded; and the casualty list of the *Victory* was the heaviest but one in the whole fleet. In many ships the casualties numbered one or two, and in some cases none at all. But on the other hand, many vessels suffered so severely aloft that they lost all power of further manœuvring; and in certain cases the damage was so extensive that, until repairs had been undertaken, the ships in question were powerless to tack.

Meanwhile the French streamed away from the battlefield. Their ships were as fresh as they could be, ready to twist and turn, to double and bend, to wear all together or tack in succession. Down below, it is true, the decks re-echoed with the cries of the wounded and the groans of the dying. Gangs of seamen in the hold gave hundreds of dead men burial in the ballast. But the sun-kissed sails gave no hint of this. And the battle had not been sufficiently prolonged for the sustained horror of the British fire to demoralize their opponents. There were, in consequence, no surrenders.

In England the battle was succeeded by an unseemly dispute and trial at law. The friends of Keppel endeavoured to fasten the responsi-



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bility for want of success on the shoulders of the Ministry. They argued that the fleet had been badly equipped, ill found, and retarded by avoidable delays. The supporters of the Government retaliated by charging Keppel with failure to follow up the first round of the fight with a second round more conclusive. On his own showing the French had run away. What on earth was there to prevent him from pursuing them?

Both sides to the dispute, consciously or unconsciously, adopted a similar line of reasoning. Save for some untoward event, the English are bound to be victorious in a sea battle. On this occasion the English were not victorious. Therefore there must have been an untoward event.

There is no need here to quarrel with the argument. Both sides, however, were entirely wrong in the "untoward event" upon which they fixed. If the fleet had been so miserably ill-found as to preclude it from winning a victory, Keppel had no business to take it to sea; and if its departure was unduly delayed, how did he manage to catch the French? On the other hand, Keppel could not renew the fight, because the enemy had disappeared. This was in no sense his fault.

The French did everything in their power to make him believe that they were waiting a resumption of hostilities, and then slipped away under cover of night.

The untoward event, if such there was, was the skilful manœuvring of the French. Nobody in England at the time would have accepted this judgment except a few unprejudiced critics in naval circles; and their opinion would not have been listened to, even if it had been given.

But if it was untrue that the laxness of the Government had prevented Keppel from destroying the French, it was certainly true that the Government had been lax—the Admiralty especially. Therefore, to avoid a public enquiry into their own misdeeds, the Ministry carried the war into the enemy's camp, and brought Keppel to trial by court martial. Extraordinary interest was taken in the case, and the recollection of Byng put the brave Admiral in dread of a humiliating death upon the scaffold.

The Court, however, after hearing all the evidence, gave a verdict entirely favourable to the prisoner; and Keppel's acquittal was hailed by a burst of popular applause. The Portsmouth vestry books show that a sum of five shillings was spent on beer for the bell-ringers. And

when staid churchwardens went as far as five shillings, imagination may well shudder at the excesses of less sober folk. The *Victory*, when she heard the good news, fired salvos of artillery. But she was destined never again to carry Keppel into battle. The Government had subjected him to the indignity of a trial because his work had not been completely successful. The same test, if universally applied, would bring to justice all generals who fell short of the Duke of Marlborough, and all poets who suffered in comparison with Shakespeare. Keppel had no heart to work under such taskmasters, and stepped aside to make room for somebody else.

The *Victory's* new master was Sir Charles Hardy. He came of a good old Dorset family that gave the fleet three famous admirals—Sir Thomas, Rooke's captain at Vigo Bay; Sir Charles himself; and Sir Thomas Masterman Hardy, Nelson's captain at Trafalgar. Sir Charles had served for a time as Governor of New York, and in 1759 had enjoyed the supreme honour of serving as Hawke's second at Quiberon. But at the time of Keppel's court martial he was acting as Governor of Greenwich Hospital.

Keppel, although at the head of his profes-

sion and not so young as he had been, was not old. But Sir Charles was his senior by ten years. Indeed it is not altogether unfair to surmise that he hoped to be left undisturbed at Greenwich for the short remainder of his life. But at the call of his country he came to her assistance. He asked, of course, for the *Victory*, and hoisted his flag on board of her at Portsmouth.

He needed all his experience in the coming campaign; for there was now an additional power in arms against his country. Coaxed by France, nerved by Keppel's want of success at Ushant, and encouraged by British preoccupation in America, Spain was now resolved to wipe off old scores and avenge herself for injuries inflicted by Drake, Blake, Rooke, and Anson. Once more she sent her ships to sea, and threw in her lot with France.

Keppel had had a fleet of thirty ships, and been opposed by a similar number. Sir Charles Hardy's fleet was no larger then Keppel's. But the allies had seventy ships. Seventy ships against thirty. The odds were overwhelming. Who could cope with them? How should England be delivered?

The answer to these questions depended in chief on the ambition of the French. It has

been said that they did not approve of a pitched battle unless there was something definite to be gained. What was their fleet of seventy for? What did they intend to do?

They intended an invasion of England, and had assembled fifty thousand horse and foot on the coast of Normandy. The fleet of seventy sail was to do the ferrying. Napoleon vowed at a later day that if only the allied fleet of France and Spain arrived in the English Channel, the British Islands were as good as occupied. He may have been right or he may have been wrong. But the allied fleet in 1805 did not succeed in reaching the Channel.

In 1779, on the other hand, the allied fleet did succeed in reaching the Channel; reached it in such overwhelming strength that braggarts at Boulogne might be forgiven for boasting. In England, "Where would the enemy land?" was the question on every man's lips. All that could be done was to organize transport for the removal inland of coast-dwellers, and to dispose of farm produce and live stock so that their capture might not help the invader. The train-bands were called out; bodies of horsemen rode along the coast; beacons were piled up ready for lighting; and watchmen were stationed on every church-tower over-

looking the Channel. A crisis had come in England's fate, and the crisis found her wholly unprepared. Under similar circumstances, the Romans would have appointed a dictator, and thrust all their responsibilities on the shoulders of a single man. The Ministry subconsciously had done the same thing. Between England and the fifty thousand foemen with their escort of seventy ships was the admiral in the *Victory*, with his white flag at the main.

What would the " dictator " do ?

There were captains serving under Hardy whose names are household words—names redolent of conquest, names like the breath of daring—John Jervis of the *Foudroyant* and Adam Duncan of the *Monarch*. What advice would these men have given the admiral, if their advice had been asked ? When Luther was on his way to Worms, his best friends besought him to return. But he answered, " If there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles upon its roofs, yet would I on." Jervis and Duncan were cast in the same mould. " Die fighting ! Sell your life dearly ! At least, be game to the last ! " Such would have been their counsel. And there is no doubt that the advice would have commended itself to all the manhood of the fleet.

But Sir Charles Hardy was old, and personal ambition was dead within him. Though brave hearts on board the *Victory* urged him to fall upon the enemy and smite them hip and thigh, he turned a deaf ear and doggedly stuck to the method he preferred. When the enemy prepared to do their worst, he appeared opportunely to thwart them. As in duty bound, they made ready to close, and he instantly beat a retreat. What was to prevent the allied squadron from following as fast as they could? In theory, nothing; in practice, much. For example, when in the whole of its history had the British fleet run away? It was clean contrary to their principles. Impetuosity in tackling any odds was just that feature of England's sea-policy which the French persistently criticized. And hence the natural doubt in their minds as to whether the Britons were retreating at all. Was it not far more probable that they were trying to lure their invaders into a trap? No one could state with any certainty how many ships the English had at their disposal. How many were there behind the next headland? These thirty odd were clearly a detachment—a squadron of observation. They were hastening, perhaps, to join the main body, which was probably not far off. Caution! patience! It

would be necessary to discover what the enemy were up to.

Another alternative. As the English had temporarily disappeared, why not ferry across the Channel the army of fifty thousand men? Madness! midsummer madness! Sir Charles Hardy and his fleet might be gone. But how far? That was the problem. In headlong flight to the sandbanks of the Thames, or behind the deceptive slope of the horizon? Which was the likelier supposition? Who would send defenceless transports to sea, when the English, hidden like crouching panthers, only waited the moment to reveal their hiding-place and pounce upon their prey?

There was only one thing that could render invasion possible: the invaders must secure command of the sea. And command of the sea can only be gained by ridding yourself of competitors. Fight them, or dispose of them in some other manner equally efficacious. If the English in 1779 had stayed in harbour as the Russians did in their war with Japan, the allies could then have blockaded them and carried their policy into effect.

But the English did not stay in harbour. They stayed nowhere. They moved about to the discomfiture of their foes. Here to-day,

gone to-morrow ; too weak to fight, too strong to be ignored. An enigma to their enemies. The French could do nothing, absolutely nothing. They tried for a season to look busy and feel busy. Then they hurried disconsolately homewards. And one of the gravest crises through which England has ever passed ended like a summer thunderstorm.

It is astonishing how quickly the ordinary man recovers from a terrible scare. At one moment his limbs quake, the marrow melts in his bones, and he hastens to confess his sins. The very next minute he is full of assurance, wishes all men were as brave as himself, ridicules his neighbour, and puffs out his chest. So it was in 1779. The moment the allies were really gone all England was brave and lion-hearted. People began to discuss the late campaign and the mode in which it was conducted. There was, of course, a considerable amount of windy talk. But all were agreed on one point—Sir Charles Hardy had botched things hopelessly. The part he had chosen to play was the part of a poltroon. Here were a swarm of alien ships defiling English waters, and crying aloud for punishment. And Sir Charles Hardy had neither the wit nor the pluck to chastise them. What a disgrace!

How lowering to the repute of British sailors, who up till now had always been famous for pluck and hardihood! The merchants of London and meaner cities shook the dust off their feet upon the Admiral. They were sorry that truth should compel them to acknowledge him as any countryman of theirs.

Sir Charles Hardy accordingly came ashore and struck his flag. He was worn out by his exertions; and, being followed into retirement by the abuse of those he had served and saved, he took to his bed and soon afterwards died.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW BY CUNNING SHE OUTWITTED HER FOES.

THE next great admiral who flew his flag in the *Victory* was Richard Kempenfelt, a man of modest and unassuming disposition, but of reputation quite unexampled in service circles and clubs. There was not an officer who did not envy him his consummate grasp of everything relating to his profession. He was called by his admirers the "brain of the navy"; and by general admission he could write and talk as brilliantly as he could weather a gale. But though he died with a pen in his hand, he could wield the sword when he chose; and it was while his flag was flying at her masthead that the *Victory* passed one of the most joyful and exhilarating days in her career.

The circumstances were as follows. The French, in return for their help to the Ameri-

cans, were laying hands as fast as they could on the British possessions in the West Indies. On December 13, 1781, they were hastening westward with a great expedition to capture another island or two. They had a score of battleships and innumerable transports. In fact, they were actually doing on this occasion what they had not dared to do in the Channel. They were conducting ships full of soldiers over an uncommanded sea. Kempenfelt, who had a little squadron of observation, amounting to twelve ships, discovered this expedition to the south of Ushant, and swept it out of existence. He did not touch the French battleships. His inferiority was so marked that the success which he was determined to achieve would by direct assault have been hazarded. He had a method incomparably superior. For fortune had come to his assistance, as she often does when men are bold and woo her roughly enough. Kempenfelt had the "weather gage." This term, which really means nothing more than "nearer the wind than the enemy," will be easily understood if it be thought of as superior speed. Kempenfelt, using his superior speed, flung himself not upon the French fleet, but upon their convoy, the lumbering, slow-gaited, helpless troopships. Prize after prize was

taken. Hundreds and thousands of soldiers were captured. And those that had the good fortune to escape were purposely left untouched in order to serve as a rampart or wall to shield Kempenfelt's force from the enemy's battleships. They, poor fools, could not fire a gun without hurting those, and only those, whom they had been sent to sea to protect. For England the affair was a brilliant exploit, purchased at trifling cost. Fifteen prizes were lugged into Plymouth. Two French vessels only reached America. The remnant, with drooping colours, slunk back into Brest like dogs that have been well whipped.

In a war that had been going unexpectedly ill, the achievement was certainly something to be proud of. It was also the first real victory that the *Victory* had won. But it was not sufficient of itself to bring hostilities to a close.

Not only in West Indian seas, but on this side of the Atlantic also, the allies of America were doing their utmost to capture the possessions of England.

Gibraltar had been besieged since the beginning of the war, and was still besieged. Years of endurance had diminished its resources. Its strength was momently ebbing. To rescue the plucky garrison before it was too late was a first

claim upon the national honour. The Government, therefore, hastened the preparations for a relief expedition, and appointed as Commander-in-Chief Admiral Lord Howe.

His task was described by the best-informed critics as next to impossible. For he was expected to perform what the French had twice attempted and twice failed to accomplish. He was asked to conduct troopships and cornships to a definite destination, with the enemy's fleet at sea. To a definite destination! When the French left Brest for the West Indies they had the whole of the Atlantic to screen them, and all the fogs of December. And no one knew out of fifty islands which they were going to. It required a man of Kempenfelt's talents to discover them at all. When they invaded the Channel, they had the whole of the southern coast of England in which to choose a landing-place. Lord Howe was far less happily circumstanced. He had no choice of destination. No other place but Gibraltar would serve his turn. The French and Spanish forces were already there. They surrounded Gibraltar by land and sea. All they had to do was to wait. And then, when the mad expedition arrived, disperse it after the manner of Kempenfelt.

The project indeed appeared impossible. Yet

Lord Howe never dreamed of declining it. He was a man who required a desperate situation to work him up to his best effort. So cool, so calm, so collected, he was most dangerous at the particular point where other brave men are defeated. A man of deep integrity and high ideals, he was respected by his officers and worshipped by his men. On the present occasion he had one request to present—a request that was immediately granted. He asked to be allowed to hoist his flag on board of the *Victory*.

The outward journey passed without incident. When the strait was reached, Lord Howe put all his helpless ships in front of his array, so that, if the foe tried to spring on them as Kempenfelt had sprung, he himself might spring on the springers. For himself, he prayed that at least they would move, even if it was to attack him: for until they came out of Gibraltar Bay, he could not possibly go in; and so long as they stayed in Gibraltar Bay, he could not force them out. The French and Spaniards, however, were ably led, and refused to move an inch.

What next? The wind and tide ran eastward through the strait, and Howe, with his immense retinue, swept through, swept on, swept past, and disappeared. The towering

mass of rock shut him out from view. He was simply not to be seen. He might have gone to Naples, or Athens, or Genoa, or Constantinople. There was not a port in the Mediterranean which he might not reasonably be visiting. But why should he go past at all? Did he think to make a counter-attack on Toulon or Barcelona? The allies were only able to guess; and as they guessed, their own situation began to grow uncomfortable. The English, perhaps, had gone no farther than the back of the rock. Perhaps they were plotting even now their latest devilry. Fireships! They were fond of fireships. It was certainly impossible to sit still doing nothing. Besides, to stay cooped up in port with the enemy at sea was, by general admission, the height of folly.

So the allies ventured out of Gibraltar Bay. The moment they did so they were caught by the wind and clutched by the tide. Incapable of offering resistance to such powers as these, they were carried ignominiously past Lord Howe, and past his convoy of troopships. What chuckling there must have been in the English ships as they watched the spectacle, and realized how completely Lord Howe's clever ruse had succeeded! The *Victory* now led her consorts into Gibraltar Bay, and the worst was over.

The storeships unloaded their stock of provisions. The besieged regaled themselves on bread and meat, which for months they had tasted only in their dreams. And lest they should be disturbed, the *Victory* and the rest of the battle-fleet drew themselves up in serried phalanx across the mouth of the bay. When the last barrel of flour had been landed and the last soldier disembarked, it was Lord Howe's business to guide his cavalcade, in the face of the enemy, back through the narrows.

The Strait of Gibraltar is an irregular quadrilateral, contracting at its eastern end to nine miles between Gibraltar and Ceuta, and widening at its western end to thirty miles between Cape Trafalgar and Cape Spartel. Lord Howe, with his battleships, moved along the African side, and hove to off Cape Spartel. He thus issued a challenge to the allied fleet, who outnumbered him by forty-six to thirty-four; and he left a clear road round Cape Trafalgar for his non-combatant vessels to retreat. Scarcely were these dispositions made, when the wind, which till now had been favourable, played him false and deserted to the enemy. He had chosen the southern side of the strait. The wind swung round to the north.

But though fortune gave the allies the wind-

ward position, they did not altogether appreciate the gift. The windward position gave its possessor certain powers over his adversary—power to attack when and how he pleased, power to torment the fleet to leeward as a cat torments a mouse. But to bring about the actual conflict, it was necessary to approach the foe; and to do this a fleet in line ahead was obliged for a while to abandon its formation and "bear up" or run off the wind. While doing so, the whole array of ships changed from line of column, their fighting formation, to "line abreast," with broadside to broadside. And in this position, by firing their guns they could only injure themselves. The leeward fleet, retaining the line ahead, was free meanwhile to give all its attention to gunnery, and hammer its opponents, or even blow them out of the water, if there was time to do so before they reached a position agreeable to themselves, and shifted once more into line ahead, to take their part in the battle.

The English preferred the windward berth, in spite of its obvious drawbacks. But the French preferred the leeward position. They liked to await the approach of their foes, and open at farthest possible range their assault upon sails and rigging. These were their

targets, whatever the conditions of battle. At long range they were the only parts of a ship that were really vulnerable. The damage inflicted on the approaching windward fleet by the more or less stationary leeward was sometimes sufficient of itself to put a period to the strife.

It was on October 20 that the Battle of Cape Spartel was fought. The two fleets were advancing on the starboard tack—that is, in a westerly direction. Seen from a distance, the vessels looked like model craft that some human hand had placed upon a sheet. They were separated one from another by intervals so regular and exact that none more accurate could have been measured by a two-foot rule. And the opposing lines were planted as straight as rows of tulips in a Dutch garden.

Lord Howe always declared that he liked a battle to begin early in the morning—say immediately after breakfast—so as to make sure of seeing it finished. The allied fleet, however, did not bear up until nearly sunset. Even so, with the wind in their favour, and superior strength, they had a magnificent opportunity. They resolved to push home their attack not all along the line, but on the British rear squadron or right wing. And while they selected this

point on which to rain their blows, their own van was to distract attention by a feint on the British left.

As the enemy came down to the attack, Lord Howe gave the *Victory* her orders. Not a shot was to be fired, not a blow delivered, until the buttons on the Frenchmen's coats could be seen. So the gunners stood by their pieces, waiting and watching. But they waited and watched in vain. The allies might come to close quarters in the rear, and at least make a similar pretence in the van. But in the centre, opposite Lord Howe himself, they contented themselves with a game of long bowls. The Frenchmen's buttons would not reveal themselves, and on the *Victory's* lower deck but one gun was fired, and that by accident.

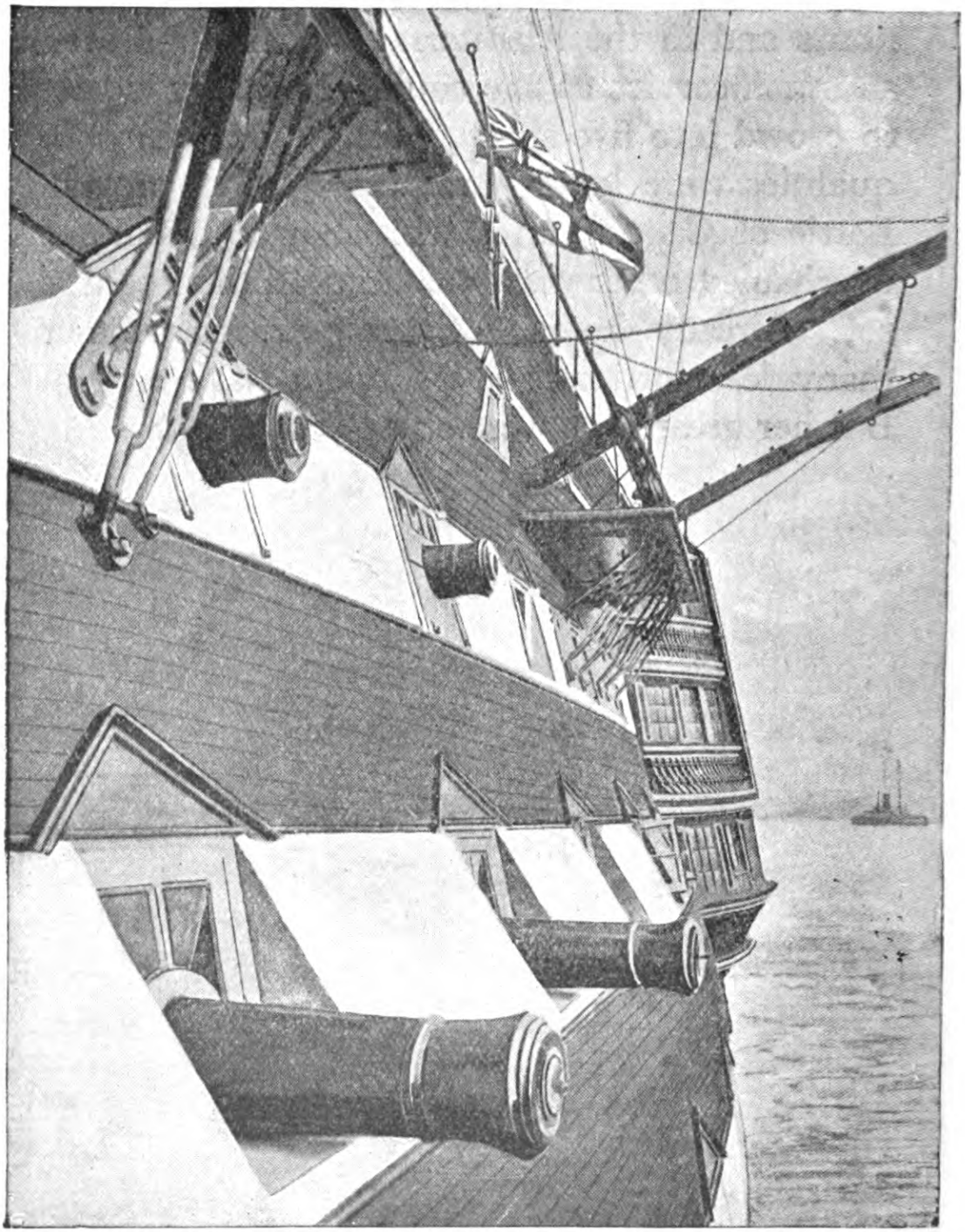
In his heart of hearts Lord Howe would have preferred to turn upon his assailants and belabour them. Though it was extremely difficult to assume the offensive from the leeward berth, he, if any one, could have managed it. It is said that when the enemy attacked his right and held off from his centre, he proposed to fling his disengaged squadron on the other tack, and gaining the wind of the enemy's rear, discomfit them by an assault upon both sides. It was the British game and in his methods

Lord Howe was typically British. But from the *Victory's* poop he saw that his own right wing could take care of itself. And after all, his work was accomplished when Gibraltar was relieved. With a fleet so much inferior to the foe, it would have been foolish to risk by tactics what he had won by strategy.

So the battle proceeded in the French mode with a partial or rearguard action. But as the fleets drew side by side into the darkening west, the sun dropped into the waves, and put an end to the conflict. Throughout the night Lord Howe was careful to maintain his position. But the French made no effort to keep their place, and by daylight had dropped astern. To them a naval battle was still only justifiable if there was something tangible to be gained. And what was there to be gained now that Gibraltar was relieved? Clearly, nothing. Very good; then why fight? They had stood up to the English and exchanged shots. Honour was satisfied.

The relief of Gibraltar was the last affair in which the *Victory* participated during the war of American Independence. She might have seen bloodier work if it had been her lot to cross the Atlantic and carry Lord Rodney's flag. As leader of England's main fleet, at

home and in the Mediterranean, she had seen as much service as she could reasonably expect to crowd into five short years. By all men her qualities were loudly praised. Just before the Battle of Cape Spartel, with shortened sail she overhauled other ships that had all their canvas set. Already she had a fighting experience that many less fortunate ships might have envied. But her great days were still to come.



The Wooden Wall of the "Victory."

Photo by Rock Bros.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW SHE FOUGHT THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

TEN years after the relief of Gibraltar the war of the French Revolution broke out; and the *Victory* was called to play her part in saving Europe from bloodshed and oppression.

She now carried the flag of Admiral Lord Hood, a commander of sound judgment and ripe experience, who left England for the Mediterranean in May, 1793. With the *Victory* went a fleet of twenty-one ships, most notable among them (though men knew it not) the *Agamemnon* of sixty-four guns. The *Agamemnon* carried the pennant of Horatio Nelson, hitherto a frigate captain, now in his first battleship; the adoring disciple of Admiral Lord Hood, whose conduct he intended to make the model of his own. Early in June he rowed across to pay his respects to the commander-in-chief. The *Victory* was already

known to him. She had been lying in the river at Chatham when first he went to sea. But the present visit was his first formal introduction. As he came aboard and recognized the strength and beauty of her lines, he whispered a prayer that the day should come when he too might hope to hoist his flag in her.

Lord Hood arrived in the Mediterranean at a propitious moment, when thousands of Frenchmen, sickened by Revolutionary excesses, reawakened their loyalty to the tottering throne of France. And in no town were such men so numerous as in Toulon, after Brest the greatest naval base in the country. By the loyal Toulonese, negotiations were opened with Lord Hood, who agreed to furnish help if the town and port were handed over to him. The conditions were exacting; but the opposition of the Republican minority was overcome, and the *Victory* entered the harbour, followed not only by the English sail of the line, but by seventeen Spanish men-of-war, and numerous frigates and sloops.

The British occupation was not allowed to go very long unchallenged. The revolutionary armies gathered from all sides in daily increasing hordes. They were fired by enthusiasm. The rescue of the violated land of France was a

rallying cry that any general might have envied. But the commander-in-chief was by profession an artist; and the majority of his officers had received no better training than their chief. Behind the walls they were opposed by a medley of all nations whom the untiring industry of Lord Hood had with difficulty collected. These were hardly sufficient to garrison the forts or man the battlements. But they were stiffened with a stiffening of Englishmen, and were led by English officers. The days and weeks slipped slowly by; but the revolutionary armies made no sort of progress in their efforts to reduce the town.

And then among new arrivals came the Man of Destiny to lay the foundation of his fame, his fortune, and his boundless military renown. At this time Napoleon was a young man of twenty-four, eleven years Nelson's junior. He was short and slight. His clothes were threadbare. His hair was lank. There were black rings round his eyes. He was thin. He was poor. He was unkempt. But there was nothing in all this to belittle him in the eyes of his fellows. And from the very first he proved himself a power to be reckoned with. He surveyed the place, and quickly formed an opinion. The English fleet, he decided, must be ejected.

Then, and not till then, would the city be taken. The place was too strong to be carried by assault; and with British ships at the harbour's mouth starvation was out of the question. Storeships could come and go without challenge. Bread could be brought, and meat and wine; powder and guns and shot. Toulon, with the British Navy within, was impregnable from without. But once the Navy of England were expelled, the walls of the town would fall flat.

No special genius, perhaps, was required to grasp all this. What Napoleon said had already been said days before he arrived: it was patent to all who had eyes to see. But the others wrung their hands, and Napoleon racked his brain. The English must be expelled. How was the thing to be done? Only by artillery. He himself was an artillery officer. Therefore the expulsion of the English was a task specially reserved by Providence for himself. He began at the beginning. He inspected the guns, and set them in order. The supply being insufficient, he collected others. Presently he had a regular park of artillery. Then he took the same pains with his powder, ammunition, and all other accessories. And meanwhile he trained his gunners and inspired them with his own enthusiasm. He was never out of the batteries.

He slept on the parapet, with a cloak rolled under his head. A born organizer, he left nothing to others, and toiled without intermission. "I have known the limits of my legs," he said. "I have known the limits of my eyes. I have never known the limits of my work."

Toulon is composed of two harbours, an outer and an inner. The outer is approached from the Mediterranean. It is much the larger of the two, and has an entrance nearly three miles in width. From this great basin the inner haven is approached through an opening only half a mile wide. This narrow passage is flanked by a promontory on either hand. As the *Victory* entered the inner harbour, she had the greater promontory on her left, and the lesser on her right. Behind the lesser lay Toulon itself. Behind the greater the haven proper spread out in an ample fold, capable of accommodating a fleet twice as large as that which Lord Hood had brought. The big promontory by the sailors was christened "Little Gibraltar." They were quick to see its importance, and threw up such defences as they could.

It was on "Little Gibraltar" that the eye of Napoleon settled. "Little Gibraltar" was the key to the situation. Give him that, and his guns would make the harbour uninhabitable.

He began to erect a bastion. The English opened fire, and slew his gunners to the last man. Napoleon christened his bastion "The Battery of the Fearless," and went on with his work. The chivalry of Frenchmen mounted on higher wings as they saw their little leader expose himself with such matchless intrepidity. Let the English fire as they might, the "Battery" never wanted brave men; and, as the French works grew, the hasty arrangements of the English proved less and less equal to the demands that were made upon them. So at last "Little Gibraltar" was gained, and the guns of Napoleon's artillery park were turned upon the harbour.

For the English this was the end. It was impossible to retain their position any longer. Not the greatest vessel afloat could deal with heavy garrison artillery. Once Toulon harbour was controlled from the land, it was no place for English ships. Lord Hood gave instant orders for its abandonment.

Unfortunately, at this critical hour he had overmuch to do. If he had simply been making war upon France he would have destroyed every ship in the harbour. But his task was not quite so straightforward as that. He had to rescue the loyal Toulonese from the packs of

human wolves that barked and bayed for blood. To this humane work he devoted nearly all his energies; and what he accomplished falls little short of the miraculous. He carried off no less than 14,877 souls. But even this figure fell short of the total. Many were left to pay with their lives the penalty of being loyal to the crown. And in the hands of the victorious regicides Lord Hood was obliged to leave a part of the fleet, which under luckier stars might have been accounted for completely.

But the destruction he wrought was tremendous. When he entered Toulon he had found thirty-one ships of the line, and he disposed of no less than thirteen. Nine of these he destroyed by fire, and the sight of the conflagration was long remembered by those who saw it. Napoleon referred to it at St. Helena, and described vividly his own feelings as he watched the destruction of ship after ship. The flames, he said, leapt from the ports and blazed along the bulwarks. They ran up the shrouds, outlining the masts and yards and stays, painting in living crimson, against a background of smoke and inky sky, the picture of man's noblest handiwork.

In addition to those he burned, and in addition to a dozen frigates, Lord Hood carried off

four battleships as prizes. One of these, the *Commerce de Marseilles*, was the largest ship afloat. When she reached home there was no dock at Portsmouth that would hold her. Nelson wrote in a letter home, "The *Commerce de Marseilles* has seventeen ports on each deck. The *Victory* looks nothing to her." But to Lord Hood the result was unsatisfactory. If he had been a free agent, he would on his first arrival at Toulon have removed the entire French fleet to a place of safety; but that was not the way to ingratiate himself with those whom he had come to befriend. He was obliged to postpone the destruction until he was certain that failure to burn the ships would place them in the hands of those who were hostile not only to himself, but to the loyalists as well. And when the moment came, it was all too short, and compelled him to relinquish eighteen sail of the line, a fleet quite formidable enough to compete with him for dominion over the Mediterranean.

The *Victory* shared in all the subsequent successes of Lord Hood, and especially in the conquest of Corsica. But Lord Hood's tenure of office proved all too short. In November, 1794, within a twelvemonth of the evacuation of Toulon, he returned to England, and the

Victory went with him. His departure was lamented by all who had served under him. It was more to be regretted, perhaps, than the sincerest of them supposed.

A turning-point had been reached in the history of Europe. The star of Napoleon that with hazy twinkling had appeared above the horizon at Toulon was gradually mounting higher in the firmament and compelling the attention of men. The shores of the Mediterranean were to witness a new revelation. How important that Britain's fleet should be in safe hands! Lord Hood was gone. Who was to take his place? Nelson had not the requisite seniority. He was there. He was ready. We may well believe that, had the power been put into his hands, he would have ruined Napoleon's plans in 1795 as completely as he ruined them in 1798. But he was still in his first battleship. Eleven years older than the Corsican, he was not even a rear-admiral. There had been no upheaval in England that set an artist in the place of a field-marshal, and raised a petty officer to the command of a ship. Nelson's time was coming, but was not yet. And meanwhile the place of Lord Hood was temporarily filled by his second in command, Admiral Hotham.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW SHE SERVED A FEEBLE AND A FORCEFUL COMMANDER.

"THE management of a private ship and a fleet," wrote Kempenfelt in one of those wise letters of his, "are as different from each other as the exercising of a firelock and the conducting of an army." Hotham was an ideal captain. But he could not bring himself to accept for a squadron the risks which he cheerfully accepted for a single ship. He dared not "put it to the touch to win or lose it all." Now, round the shores of the Mediterranean were many powers who waited the event. If England looked like holding the Mediterranean, then they were prepared with their offers of help and their assurances of goodwill. If, on the other hand, England played a feeble or uncertain part, then they were ready enough to trans-

fer their affections, and hail the new ascendancy of France.

Everything, then, rested with Admiral Hotham. The eyes of the world were fastened on him to see what he would do.

His first meeting with the Toulon fleet took place in the *Victory's* absence. The encounter was in no sense epoch-making, and the *Victory* cannot be said to have missed very much. She was back again in May, 1795, bearing at her mizzen top mast the flag of Admiral Man. Her return was opportunely timed. Before Napoleon came upon the stage, fortune resolved in a magnanimous way to give Admiral Hotham another chance. Would he take it? Or would he let the opportunity fall from his grasp?

Hotham's second battle was fought not very far from Toulon. It is generally referred to as the Battle of Hyères, from the islands of that name in the neighbourhood. It was before four o'clock on a July morning when the French were sighted. The weather had been wild throughout the night, and one or two ships in the British array had split their topsails and had to bend new canvas. As morning dawned the gale abated somewhat, but the wind continued high, and there was considerable swell. The French were to leeward and running

north on the port tack. Hopes of a decisive battle animated the fighting spirit in the British fleet, and the possibilities of a great victory were discussed.

Hotham consumed a long time in dressing his line and amending it to his own satisfaction. But at last he gave the order to chase. The ships carried all the sail they were able to bear, the breeze remaining fresh. But as the day wore on and the sun broke through the clouds, the wind fell light. By noon the British fleet was in touch with the foe. In touch. No more. The French fleet, which numbered twenty-three ships, streamed away to the north towards its own coast. The British fleet, which almost exactly equalled it in numbers, stretched out in a line astern. And there was a slight overlap. The leading ships of the English were to windward of, and parallel to, the rear-most ships of the French. The French fleet may be thought of as a cobra twisting along and the English fleet as a mongoose biting the cobra's tail. Would the cobra turn and fight, or would it wrest its long sinuous body away, leaving the tip of its tail in its adversary's mouth?

The leading ship of the English line was the *Victory* herself. Close on her tracks came the

Culloden, Captain Troubridge, and the *Agamemnon*, Captain Nelson. The *Cumberland* and one or two other ships were also well to the fore. But the *Victory* was foremost. She ran out her guns to open the ball: and as she did so, there came a change of wind. The breeze, which till that moment had been constant from south-west, now swung round to the north, giving the enemy an initial advantage. For the ships paid off on the new tack, and as they did so the three sternmost vessels of the French line were enabled to bring all their broadsides to bear upon the leading ship of the English. Thus the fight began in real earnest, and the *Victory* found the odds against her. But her companions hastened to bring her relief, and a characteristic battle on a miniature scale ensued.

The French this time had not so much as the flimsiest pretext to justify a battle! As usual, they aimed at the sails and rigging of their opponents, with intent to put them temporarily out of action. The *Victory* soon received a shot that severed the bolt-rope on the weather leech of her fore topsail. This imperilled the life of the canvas, which threatened every minute to split. Mr. Midshipman Hoskins, however, with commendable zeal and bravery, swarmed along the yard, and lowering

himself by the reef-tackle, stoppered the bolt-rope and saved the sail. But the hail of scrap-iron continued. The *Culloden* lost her main topmast. The *Victory* had her rigging cut to pieces and her sails in time torn to shreds. Finally, like the *Culloden*, she also lost a limb. Her fore topsail-yard was shorn away.

But this was the measure of the French success.

The *Victory* and the *Culloden* may have been hurt up aloft, but they had played the game as they understood it; and the *Alcide*, the last ship in the French line, hauled her flag down and surrendered. Fired by the reality of this success, other British ships strained every sinew to get into the firing line. It was obvious that more than one of the French ships had suffered quite as severely as the *Alcide*. It remained to cling to the retreating foe in true British bull-dog fashion, and force the French commander for very shame to turn and fight to the death.

It was at this moment, a critical moment in the history of Europe, that Hotham hoisted a signal to his masthead.

"The whole fleet will now retire!"

Every one knows how Nelson treated a similar signal at the Battle of Copenhagen. But at Copenhagen he had a fleet at his disposal, an

independent fleet. It is impossible for captains singly to defy their commander-in-chief. The *Cumberland*, it is true, pretended not to see. But the *Victory* saw only too well and felt it her duty to hoist the *Cumberland's* distinguishing pennant and force her to obey commands.

So the affair ended.

" Had the British fleet," said an officer of the *Victory*, " only put their heads the same way as the enemy's, and stood inshore, the whole of the French line might have been cut off from the land, taken, or destroyed." " Thus," wrote Nelson, " has ended our second meeting with these gentry. In the forenoon we had every prospect of taking every ship in the fleet ; and at noon it was almost certain we should have had the six near ships. The French admiral, I am sure, is not a wise man, nor an officer ; he was undetermined whether to fight or run away : however, I must do him the justice to say he took the wisest step at last."

To turn from Hotham's little affair at Hyères to Napoleon's first Italian campaign is to turn from a candle to an arc-lamp, from a rattle to a brass band, from a daub to a masterpiece. The builder of the " Battery of the Fearless " had his head full of vaster plans. With a mind broad enough to grasp the whole of Europe in its pur-

view, with a faculty for instant decision and an iron will, with an imaginative eloquence to fire his soldiers' hearts, and with a knowledge of the elemental truths underlying the arts of war that would have done credit to the oldest field-marshal, this young general of twenty-six accomplished in twelve months more than all the legions of Louis XIV. accomplished in twelve years. The world was at his feet. The sceptre of sovereignty was his for the picking up.

It was Hotham, and Hotham alone, who could have thwarted him. Hotham and Napoleon—Napoleon and Hotham. The conjunction to-day seems fantastic. It was not fantastic then. First to destroy the Toulon fleet, and next to prevent the invasion of Italy. These were the things that Hotham might have done. These were the things that Hotham failed to do. Napoleon's occupation of the Italian peninsula was as fateful to England as his occupation of "Little Gibraltar." The one rendered Toulon harbour untenable. The other the Mediterranean. At Toulon the Spaniards had fought side by side with the English. Then came Hotham's battles: and they promptly deserted the British alliance. Then came Napoleon's successes: and they threw in their lot with France. At Hyères the forces were nicely

balanced. But the union of the French and Spanish fleets put the English in an inferiority of two to one.

In this way the Mediterranean was lost to them—lost, until Nelson made reoccupation possible by his victory at the Nile.

Hotham abandoned the Mediterranean fleet, just as the Mediterranean fleet abandoned the Mediterranean. In his place came Admiral Sir John Jervis, in all things the antithesis of his predecessor. Where Hotham was diffident, Jervis was confident. Where Hotham was kind, Jervis was cruel. Where Hotham was lenient, Jervis was obdurate. Where Hotham was wavering, Jervis was positive. Where Hotham would have hoisted the signal of recall, Jervis would have signalled for closer action. Where Hotham was contented with second best, Jervis instantly shifted his flag on board of the *Victory*.

It was Jervis's life-work to upset, break, subdue, and overthrow one of the mightiest combinations of naval power that history records. The new France of 1797, borne along on a tidal wave of republican zeal and military enthusiasm, controlled all the coast of Western Europe from Denmark to Italy. The armed host confronting England extended from the

Channel to the Mediterranean. Its northern limit was the Texel; its southern, Gibraltar. France formed the centre of the line, Holland the right wing, and Spain the left. Yet if Jervis with the Mediterranean fleet could crush the left wing, his country might still be saved. For before the new Armada could sweep the British seas, the several units that composed it had first to coalesce. The ships of France had to unite with the Dutch ships; and before that was done the Spanish ships had to join their friends at Brest. Prefidious Albion, the allies assured themselves, might separately resist the Spaniards, Dutch, and French. She could hardly hope to grapple with all three nations together. But first to join forces!

Knowing of this scheme for the discomfiture of his country, Jervis would have preferred to post a strong fleet in the sea-pass of Gibraltar, so that the combination which his opponents aimed at should be thwarted by blockade. But Jervis was not allowed to have his own way. His fleet, at its best, was wretchedly small: and the weather grew suddenly hostile. Boisterous storms reduced his little force still further; and, driving him headlong out of the Strait, opened the door of escape to his foes.

Thus the Spaniards, emerging into the wide

Atlantic on their way to the meeting-place at Brest, opened the campaign with a fine strategic stroke, though this preliminary advantage was not in any way due to their own skill, but to the inscrutable dictates of fortune.

At daybreak on the morning of 14th February, 1797, they were proceeding leisurely eastwards. They numbered twenty-seven sail of the line, and no less than six of these were larger than the *Victory*. The Spanish commander's flag was borne by the *Santissima Trinidad*, a more magnificent vessel even than the *Commerce de Marseilles*. The morning was dull and heavy and grey, and a fog clung thickly to the water. They moved along under easy sail, little dreaming that the English had discovered their whereabouts, and even now approached them. The last thing they expected was battle. They were not in close formation; their line straggled. They were bound, so they thought, on a long journey, and were becoming rather tired of it. The ships were not separated by regular intervals as the allied fleet had been at Cape Spartel. Some of them were sailing side by side in pairs. Some were grouped in little knots of three or four. In places there were gaping intervals that called loudly for redress.

Jervis's fleet presented a lively contrast. Under the magnificent handling of their chief the ships were like the several links of a chain, each strong as each, and each contributing to the strength of the whole. Troubridge led the van in the *Culloden*. Collingwood brought up the rear in the *Excellent*. And Jervis's flag in the *Victory* floated proudly in the centre of the line.

The hostile fleets, when the veil of mist lifted, found themselves off Cape St. Vincent. They were not, as usual, facing one another. The British were sailing in a southerly direction with the wind at west. The Spaniards, to the south of them, were sailing with the wind abaft, their bowsprits pointing to their own coast. Considerable adjustment was therefore necessary if the opposing sides were to be drawn up parallel to one another, as they had been in every other battle in which the *Victory* had had a share.

But Jervis was determined at all hazards to deny the Spaniards any chance of amending their array. Retaining his own formation he dashed upon them, not in line abreast but in line ahead. This method of attack might have been highly dangerous if the defending force had been ready. But by their total lack of

organization a well-timed temerity was justified. The British fleet, wielded like a rapier in Jervis's hand, did not blunt itself against a bar of steel, but deftly sliced through the Spanish line as if it had been a cucumber.

The battle, needless to say, was half won when this point had been reached. For the Spaniards were demoralized by their mishap. The disaster robbed them at once of all cohesion and all initiative. Their backbone was broken: they were cut in half. And the English line was drawn through their own, like a sword through a man's vitals. How was their mangled body to be healed? How were the halves to re-unite? These were the questions that the Spaniards asked themselves, leaving Jervis at liberty to take whatever steps he chose to complete their discomfiture.

The Spaniards originally had twenty-seven ships. By Jervis's pitiless gash they were reduced to two fragments, the one consisting of nine ships, the other of eighteen. Jervis had lunged through their line not at its exact centre but at the point where he judged it to be weakest. If his fleet had been equal to theirs, the relative strength of their dismembered portions would have mattered nothing at all. But Jervis's fleet was not equal to theirs. In fact,

it was very far from equal. It numbered in all only fifteen ships.

Jervis had struck one of the grandest strokes ever delivered at sea with a fleet only very little more than half the size of his opponent's !

For this reason, when once the rent was made, he would have preferred, if possible, to fling himself on the smaller Spanish squadron, over which he would have enjoyed a local superiority. But the smaller squadron lay nearer to the coast and farthest from the breeze. If Jervis attacked it he would lay himself open to a counter-attack from the larger squadron, which was nearer the wind than himself. To do this would have been to neutralize a hardly-won advantage. Necessity therefore obliged him to engage the larger detachment of the two.

Here the problem that faced the British admiral was not only one of preferring skill to skill. There was the additional difficulty of keeping back the ugly rush of a crowd. For the greater Spanish squadron, though only a detachment, was larger than the whole of Jervis's fleet. The eighteen ships that were brought up on one side of the British fence were determined, as soon as possible, to join their friends on the other side. The fence was too impenetrable for them to force a way through. They

had no resort left but to go round. If the English fleet had been sailing to the north, they would for that reason have turned to the south. And as the English were already committed to a southerly advance, they naturally turned to the north. The engaged fleets in consequence began to sidle past each other much as Keppel and his foes had done at the Battle of Ushant. But when the leading Spanish vessels, now well to the northward, began to draw clear of their opponents, they put before the wind again to double round the end of their adversary's line and fly from the stricken field.

Jervis, perched upon the *Victory's* poop, saw the movement. He himself was carefully shepherding his flock, so as to continue the fight without either losing touch with the Spaniards or allowing their two detachments any chance to re-form. His fleet at the moment was curved into the shape of the capital letter **J**, with himself at the bend, with Collingwood at the tip of the long right arm, and Troubridge at the tip of the shorter left. Troubridge was lustily barking at the heels of the Spanish rear, and Collingwood was still nicely placed for hounding the Spanish van. But though Troubridge's ship, the *Culloden*, was now on the port tack as the Spaniards were, Collingwood's ship, the

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Battle of St. Vincent ("Victory" second from the right).

Excellent, was still on the starboard tack, and his gradual withdrawal in a southerly direction gave the panic-stricken Spaniards their loop-hole of escape.

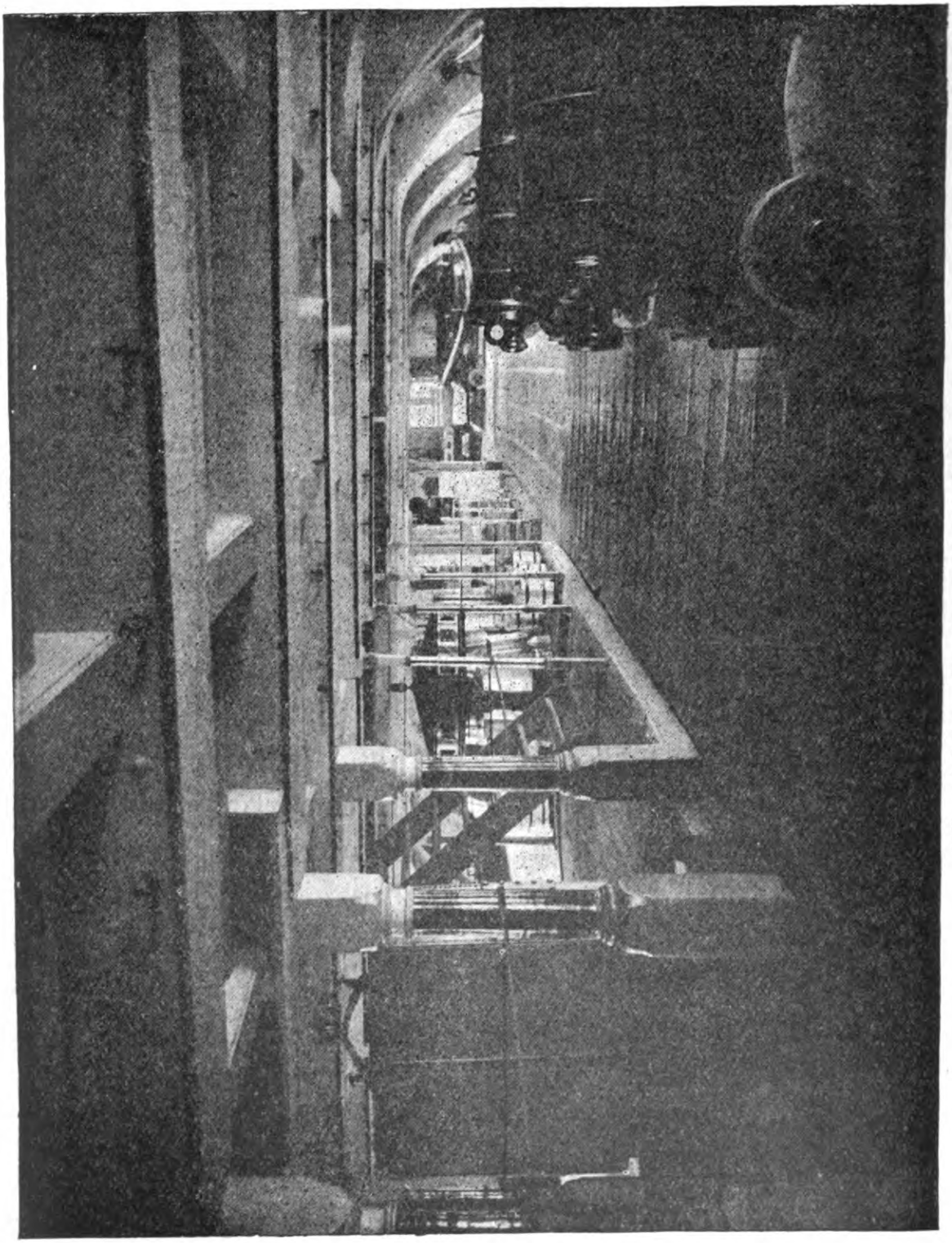
What was to be done? If the fugitive Spaniards had their own way, they might still reach home with numbers undiminished. They had been buffeted, humiliated, and held up to ignominy. Stalwart and strong, they had been made to look ridiculous. But that was not enough for Jervis. He desired his conquest to be absolute. In a battle ashore, if his had been infantry engaged, now was the moment when he would have rallied his horsemen and hurled them like a thunderbolt, to drive in his adversary's right. But this was not a battle ashore, and he had nothing to correspond with cavalry. What he wanted was an independent squadron, up there to the north of the field. That was what he wanted; that was what he deserved. And that was what Providence sent him.

Nelson's ship was just ahead of Collingwood's. Only a single vessel separated them: the *Captain* was third from the end of the line. Nelson had watched the development of the fight with the same discernment as Jervis. All that Jervis saw, he saw. All that Jervis knew, he knew. With instant decision he resolved himself into

the squadron that was needed. It is true that he had but a single ship, and there were at least seven Spanish ships to stop. But the need was great, if the means were small. It is true that the rules of the service forbade a ship singly to leave her place. But his death would atone for broken bye-laws. So, like Samson, blind to all but the great purpose in his brain, he put forth his strength and prayed that he might die—if, dying, he might overthrow the hated enemies of England.

And so the greatest of British sailors deliberately moved from the line to make his great sacrifice. He stood alone against seven ships, and held them back and stopped them; six others and the mighty *Trinidad* herself. But Troubridge came up to his help; and Jervis, in anguish for the man he loved, signalled the *Excellent* also to leave her place and hasten to the rescue. And the rest came up in time; the *Victory* too. The fight was renewed, and the Spaniards thrashed. And Nelson was not killed; but lived to take two prizes himself, as all the world knows. And Collingwood emulated him in friendly rivalry, and brought two other Spanish flags down. And the whole British fleet smote and harried and harassed and oppressed the Spaniards till the day de-

clined. And the *Victory* took a prize with her own hands—the *Salvador del Mundo*. And when a man was killed at Jervis's side and he was drenched with blood from his hat to his shoes, he took no more notice than you would take of a drop or two of rain. And the Spanish flight became a rout, and the rout an avalanche of terror. The little squadron of nine had long since fled, counting honour less than their lives. They had fled, and none taken note of them. They were powerless to help or hurt. But the greater squadron was pursued relentlessly, and bitten and stricken and mauled. And the *Trinidad's* flag came down at last, though it was dark by now, and when no one was looking she hauled it up again. Time was too short and the British ships too few to capture all of the Spaniards. But a great fight and a memorable had been fought: and Spain was vanquished and her ships shattered in a manner that would have made Sir Francis Drake chuckle had he been alive to see. And the coalition against England was overthrown: and Jervis was made an earl, and the king said that he must be called Lord St. Vincent. And Nelson wore the star of the Bath upon his breast and hoisted his flag as an admiral.



The Middle Deck of the "Victory"

CHAPTER X.

HOW SHE CLEARED HER DECKS FOR ACTION.

WHETHER at Ushant or Cape Spartel, Hyères or Cape St. Vincent, whenever the *Victory* broke the red flag for battle at the fore a breathless tumult of activity swept the decks. The drummer of marines with his drum slung over his shoulders beat a continuous tattoo that rolled from one end of the vessel to the other. And every man in hot haste hurried to execute the work assigned to him.

The first thing to do was to clear the decks. All the wooden bulkheads were removed, all the canvas screens taken down. All the partitions that in peace made for comfort and privacy were swept away like the scenery in stage-land. Tables, chairs, lockers, and chests were buried in the hold. Apart from the

danger of splinters which inflicted uglier wounds than lead and steel, the first need was to have a clear space, unhampered, unencumbered, absolutely free.

The hammocks were piped from below at the earliest possible moment. Neatly rolled and tightly corded, in parcels of exactly similar pattern, they were packed by pairs in the wooden troughs or hammock-nettings that ran along the tops of the bulwarks. Here they formed a breastwork and very real protection from musketry. And it was musketry to which the workers on the upper deck were particularly exposed.

Thus much being done, the galley fire was hastily extinguished, and the fighting decks were watered and dressed with a sprinkling of sand. The seamen fought with bare feet: and when the blood began to flow, they would have been unable to stand but for the foothold which this preparation afforded them.

If weather had been bad and the guns were secured with their muzzles triced up and lashed to housing-bolts above the port, the port-lids were raised and the guns cast loose. The tompions, or tallowed plugs in the mouths of the guns to keep the barrels dry, were withdrawn. Cheeses or bundles of wads were placed by

each gun, and a reserve store garnered by the main mast. Spare breechings were brought, and tackles and handspikes. The shot-racks were filled with round shot scraped free from rust. Along the deck behind the guns were placed casks about eighteen inches high with sunken heads perforated with holes. These were match-tubs. The match was made of a very loose rope steeped in a solution of nitre, and burned at the rate of about one inch an hour. The lighted end of the match, when not in use, was suspended through a hole in the match-tub, which was partially filled with moistened sand. Other tubs or buckets of water were freely disposed along the decks, with a hand swab beside or within them. These served a double purpose. They were useful in extinguishing sparks; and when the loathsome pungent smoke of burning gunpowder made the atmosphere of the gun decks unendurable, the seamen dipped their faces in the water and washed their mouths and sponged their chests.

While the guns' crews were busy above, the gunner and his mates were busy below. The lights were set burning in the lighting-rooms, and under this scant illumination the work of making fresh cartridges went forward as

quickly as possible. No one could tell in how short a time the existing stock would be exhausted.

The carpenter with his gang, after seeing that a fresh tiller was handy to come by in the event of a shot penetrating the walls of the gun room, repaired to the orlop. His first business was to see that the wings were clear—that is, that there was an unobstructed passage along the sides of the ship where the walls were submerged and yet near the surface. For the vessel as she rolled exposed her vitals, and shot-holes in the under-water parts were only too likely to prove mortal. It was the work of the carpenter in the hour of battle to see that they did not prove mortal. With this end in view he had ready for use a number of shot-plugs. These were made of wood. They were conical in shape to fit all sizes of hole, and the better to fulfil their purpose were covered with oakum and tallow. For gaping wounds, resort was had to sheet lead and salted hides, which were hammered over the breach by means of nails.

As soon as the roll of the drum was heard, the ship was put under battle-canvas. This meant that sail was shortened. It was necessary while fighting that the ship should move, but not necessary that the ship should move

quickly ; and every hand that could be spared was needed at the guns. For these reasons the vessel was put under something like storm-canvas. Not only were the courses clewed up, but every sail was taken in except the fore and main topsails and the fore-and-aft sail on the mizzen. The yards were a terrible menace during battle ; the lower yards in particular. The main yard was seven-eighths the length of the main mast. Its fall was a catastrophe too appalling to contemplate. The hempen slings that held it and other yards in position were replaced, ere the cannonade began, by strong top-chains. And to catch the splinters a stout netting was spread in a horizontal position from the main mast aft to the mizzen. This not only safeguarded the lives of the officers on the quarter deck, but more than once proved the salvation of wounded men falling from aloft.

The hatchways were a fruitful source of danger. Through their gaping mouths a fire-ball or burning ember might fall and explode the cartridges below, and even put an entire deck out of action. To prevent this, fire-screens were used. These were made of a thick felt call " fearnought." Special pains were taken with the passages leading to the

magazines. These were covered with a blanket of sodden flannel, through a rent in which the gunner handed his supplies to the powder-monkeys. The powder-monkeys carried the cartridges in cartridge-boxes, which were cylindrical in shape with a lid sliding upon a handle of small rope. These served a double purpose. They shielded the cartridges from premature explosion, and they acted as pass-ports to the hatchways. As they were issued only to powder-monkeys, there was no opportunity for the craven-hearted to slip below on pretence of visiting the magazines.

The surgeon and his assistants were as busy as every one else. The sick-bay, the scene of their labours during peace, was deserted. Their activities were transferred to the orlop, which, being below the water-line, was the safest place for the wounded. The after part, or cockpit, normally the home of the midshipmen, was cleared of all save the amputation table. Spare sails were disposed for the accommodation of those requiring surgical aid, and an extra supply of lanterns converted the murkiest abyss of the ship for once into a hall of light. The loblolly boys or dressers carried tourniquets or screw-bandages to the fighting-decks, so that the severely wounded might not die from loss of

blood before they could be brought below. This done, they set out a table with a horrifying assortment of instruments, prepared long strips of lint six inches wide, procured hot water, and set ready a large tub or two for the disposal of what the tars with plucky waggishness described as "legs and wings." The surgeon and his companions stripped off their coats and rolled up their shirt sleeves to the shoulders. Presently they were joined by the chaplain and purser. The one offered drink to dry lips and parched tongues; the other ministered consolation to the dying.

Innumerable as were the preparations for battle, the speed with which they were made was truly remarkable. Within six minutes of the time that the drummer lifted his sticks to sound the tattoo, the first lieutenant started on his rounds, and by that time all was done. Everything was in readiness. Such, at least, was always the case on board the *Victory*.

The men stood at quarters, with crows and handspikes in their hands. They were, as a rule, clad in their trousers and nothing more. The work before them was hot work, and in the event of accidents a scanty attire made the surgeon's work easier. The silk handkerchiefs

which smartened their appearance in full rig were now bound closely over the ears to save them from deafness. They spoke cheerfully as if battle and sudden death were matters of amusement; or they chalked a stinging challenge for the foe on the barrel of their gun.

The guns of the *Victory*, though spoken of as one hundred, at the time of her first battle reached a total of one hundred and four. There were thirty pieces on the gun deck and middle deck, fifteen on either broadside, and thirty-two guns on the main deck. In addition to these, she found room for twelve on her quarter deck and forecastle. The most important projectiles thrown by these guns were round shot made of solid iron. These differed in size according to the size of the cannon. The main-deck guns of the *Victory*, together with the guns on the quarter deck and forecastle, fired a shot weighing twelve pounds. The middle-deck guns fired a shot of twenty-four pounds, and the lower-deck guns a shot of thirty-two pounds. The upper and main-deck guns were often referred to as "bull-dogs," and the lower-deck guns as "barkers." The main deck showed its teeth and snarled; but the gun deck spoke like a pack of stag-hounds,

uttering rumbling thunder or howling through iron mouths.

The *Victory's* biggest guns had an extreme range of between a mile and a mile and a half. But this was reached only when they were considerably elevated. At close quarters the *Victory's* larger guns could pierce five feet of solid oak, and the smaller guns two and a half feet. At close quarters it was customary to double-shot the guns. This method of loading reduced the velocity and rendered the aim erratic; but there was this compensation: the two shots separated the moment they left the barrel, and the gun that fired them did the work of two. The practice, however, was dangerous, and not unattended by accidents.

There were many other missiles in addition to round shot. Case shot or canister was peculiarly adapted for close quarters. It consisted of a number of musket bullets packed in a cylindrical tin case exactly fitting the bore of the gun. When discharged, the bullets were sprinkled in every direction like water from the rose of a watering-can. Grape shot was intermediate between canister and round, with much of the destructive spread of the first and some of the range and penetration of the second. It consisted of three tiers of cast-iron balls weigh-

ing about two pounds apiece. There were generally three balls in each tier, and the tiers were kept apart by parallel discs of iron, connected by a central pin. The whole was enclosed in a canvas bag, bound tightly round with rope.

Then there was an extraordinary diversity of missiles, beloved by the French, and designed solely for the destruction of rigging. Chain shot was the commonest. The chain, which was usually a foot in length, sometimes linked together two solid iron balls; sometimes irregular objects, in shape like ninepins or soup-ladles or bowler-hats. An extremely neat and compact type in appearance resembled a round shot. But the round shot was hollow and divided in two, and the chain was packed away in the cavities. Faggot shot was a solid iron cylinder, sliced into pieces like a cake. The fragments were confined until the moment of discharge by belts of ordinary string in shallow grooves. Star shot was not like a star, but more like a crown or a lantern or a bird-cage. Bar shot affected various patterns. Sometimes it resembled a dumb-bell; sometimes a couple of iron saucers with a poker in between; sometimes three small iron spades slung together on a ring. Then there were numerous kinds of

elongating shot. Imagine a pair of iron pestles, each with a ring at the end of its shaft. Intertwine the shafts by means of the rings, and you have a missile which, as it emerged from the bore, just doubled itself in length.

Length was in a manner of speaking the quality most welcome in these rigging destroyers. Round after round of grape or solid shot might pass between ropes without hurting them, but there was no escaping these flying dumb-bells and plough-shares and elongating reaping-hooks. The stoutest stay was hacked in two, and the shrouds were torn to ribbons. And when once the standing rigging was gone, little hope remained for the masts.

All the hideous missiles that have been named could be fired from the ordinary guns. They could also be fired from four extraordinary guns which, when the *Victory* carried the flag of Lord Hood, were substituted for an equal number of 12-pounders on the upper deck. They were short little pieces, not unrelated to the mortar or bomb thrower. Their recoil was slight. They had next to no range. But at close quarters they were terrible in their destructiveness. Some called them "smashers." Some, because they were made at Carron near Falkirk, christened them carronades. The

word " smasher " is certainly descriptive. The long gun fought like a gentleman, but the carronade like a stage assassin. It had no skill. It could not aim straight. But it struck suddenly and unexpectedly, with a horrible upward jerk and thrust that spread consternation along the decks. For a while the 32-pound shot was the deadliest projectile that the carronade delivered. But just before the Battle of Trafalgar, the *Victory* rejected the 32-pounder carronades on her forecastle in favour of two fearsome instruments, each capable of swallowing and vomiting forth a charge more than twice the weight of anything fired before. And, as will be seen, at Trafalgar the 68-pounder carronade wrought a havoc that was truly appalling.

As soon as the roll of the drum sent every one to his station, a number of seamen manned the shrouds, and ran up the ratlines to the fighting-tops. From here a clear view was obtainable of the enemy's upper deck. And from here much damage could be done by clever and cool marksmen ; but only, of course, at close quarters. The fighting-tops, like the carronades, were useless at a distance. The principal weapons used by the topmen were muskets and hand grenades. The muskets had a range of

about 100 yards. They were smooth of bore. They were muzzle-loaders, and they had no sights. The hand grenades required in their management a double portion of coolness and promptitude. Weighing about two pounds, they contained a bursting charge which was exploded by a time fuse; and they therefore needed to be hurled not only with strength, but with judgment and precision.

However effective may have been the work of topmen, it was, except in single-ship actions, incapable of determining the issue. Not that single-ship actions were impossible even in a pitched battle: for the opposing fleets after the first shock fell naturally into little groups. Under such conditions, a pair of tough and dogged fighters might hammer one another with relentless fury. If neither would submit, and the ships, becoming more and more injured in their rigging, drifted down and collided with one another, the matter was decided by boarding. The captain at the outset of the battle picked out those who were destined for this desperate affray, and armed them with tomahawks, pistols, and cutlasses. The tomahawks were light, handy hatchets, a sharp blade on one side and a sharp pick on the other. The blade was valued for the clean effectiveness with

which it cut through hindering ropes and hostile shrouds; the pick for the purchase it gave to a boarder as he struggled over the bulwarks. The pistol was an exceedingly useful weapon; and as there was no time for re-loading, the boarder usually carried a brace. The cutlass was regarded by every jack-tar as the trustiest of friends. It had a broad, curving blade, about three feet long.

The best weapons for defence against boarding were muskets, blunderbusses, and pikes. The objection to the musket was the time consumed in loading. Yet many seamen did wonders with it, holding it in reverse by the barrel, and swinging it round their heads like a felling axe. The blunderbuss was a short fire-arm with a large bore and wide mouth. It scattered broadcast a handful of pistol-bullets or slugs. The pike, which on shore had been rendered obsolete by the coming of the bayonet, was still esteemed at sea. The defenders had only to grasp the staff in their hands and wait for their enemies to jump and impale themselves.

The admiral and the captain usually stood upon the quarter deck throughout the battle. The position was a dangerous one, and a safer place might easily have been found. But there was no part of the vessel from which a better

view of the battle could be gained, with the exception of the poop ; and the poop was more exposed than the quarter deck. Both admiral and captain had to watch the battle with untiring eyes. The admiral observed the contest as a whole from one end of the line to the other; the captain directed the progress of the fray as it concerned his ship alone. He carried a sword, but found his trumpet more useful. This was a kind of megaphone, through which he called words of direction and encouragement.

If the captain fell at his post, his place was taken by the first lieutenant. If the first lieutenant fell, his place was taken by the second lieutenant. And so the command devolved from one to another so long as there was an officer alive to fight the ship.

Some officers dressed for battle as they would have dressed for their wedding-day, with full uniform : cocked hat, stiffly starched shirt frill, and tightly tied black cravat. Others were not so particular. A brimless old beaver, the nap bleached by the sun and splashed and matted by the rain ; an old-fashioned uniform coat with a long waist and short skirts, a dingy white waistcoat, and ancient duck trousers ; were thought good enough apparel for the grimy work of a gun deck. All, however, agreed that

an orange or a lemon was the only possible form of refreshment. Jervis cried eagerly for an orange as he stood upon the *Victory's* poop at St. Vincent. And there is a story of the Battle of Hyères, that went the circuit of the ward-rooms, and may very well be true. A certain officer celebrated in the fleet for his cavernous mouth felt himself choking in the sulphur-laden atmosphere. He procured an orange, tore a piece of the skin off, and put it to his lips. As he did so a bullet smote him in the cheek, passed through his mouth, and out again without breaking a single tooth. The gentleman was of a somewhat sour disposition, and his unfeeling companions assured him that his dimples were not unbecoming.

A ship of the line proceeding into battle maintained a strict silence. This was unbroken except by the quartermaster at the wheel and the leadsman in the chains. And their remarks, chanted like cathedral responses, did but increase the solemnity of the scene. But when the fighting line was reached, every occasion was seized for a burst of British cheers. These were uttered not merely as tokens of defiance, not merely as plaudits of success. They served as something more. They served as a medium of communication between the

bows of the ship and the stern, between one deck and another. The gangs of fighters were so separated, that they knew how none were faring save themselves. They were so cooped up that they could see nothing but their own gun and the faces of their comrades through the smoke. The cheer was the audible voice of man. It rolled along the deck, and out of the ports. It was answered by cheery thunder in return. It went from heart to heart, and stirred up all that was noblest in the seaman's breast. It elevated his spirit and his courage. It told his fellow-fighters that all was well with him. Its answer assured him that above him and below Britons were standing to their guns. The shout of courage made it easier to triumph. The shout of triumph made it easier to die.

The casualties on board the *Victory* and other ships took the form of shattered arms and broken legs. Behind the bulwarks men were safe enough. The damage was done when they hauled on the gun-tackle or cleaned the barrel and rammed home the shot. In these several operations they exposed their limbs through the aperture of the gun-port. Death, of course, might be instantaneous; but more frequently one arm or both called for instant amputation. If there was any chance for a wounded man,

his comrades applied a tourniquet, and bore him below to the cockpit. Here he took his place upon the sail, and patiently waited his turn for the knife. Surgery was of a cruel, ruthless kind. There were no anæsthetics. The loblolly boys, as they helped the victim to the amputation table, gave him a liberal dose of rum and a piece of leather to bite in his agony.

That was all the help available, and the seamen knew it. They rose to the occasion with a fortitude that would have graced the annals of Sparta. It was a point of honour in crack ships not to cry when the knife made its horrible incision; not to shriek when the saw was laid to the bone; not to gasp and groan when the operation was finished, and the sickly pain set in. A certain Thomas Main, able seaman of the *Leviathan*, having an arm shattered, went below unattended. He sat down without uttering a sound, and waited his turn. But when he was laid upon the amputation table he sang "Rule Britannia" all through with a clear unwavering voice while the surgeons removed his limb.

A battle at sea in the olden days presented to one who took part in it a series of sounds rather than a succession of pictures. The roar of the

heavy artillery, the roll and thud of the gun-carriages, the smash of the well-placed broadside, the tearing shriek of splinters, the gathering swell as of an avalanche when the fore or main came down, the remonstrant sob of the sea, the thud of falling blocks, the rattle of musketry, high-pitched words of command, angry expostulations, curses, chirruping cries from the powder-monkeys, stifled groans from those in pain, moans from the dying, imploring calls for water, shouts of encouragement, shrieks of dismay and despair, unintelligible noises as of earthquakes, blizzards, cartloads of shingle dropped upon shingle, rumbling sounds that ended in explosions, burrowing sounds that ended in a long wail of agony, creaking sounds as of unoiled hinges, shrill-throated, ear-piercing clamour alternating with clanking, ringing din, discordant janglings, noise as of cannon balls rolled over vibrant sheets of iron, repeated claps of thunder, sudden blows as of loudly banging doors, reverberating echoes, and through all and in all and over all the ringing chime of human cheers from plucky human throats.

Looking through a gun-port, if he cared to take the risk, a seaman might observe the enemy's line, might see the damage it had suf-

fered, might see a flag come down. He might rest his bloodshot eyes for a minute on the tranquil blue of sky and sea, and extend his pity to those who struggled in the water or clambered upon some mighty fragment of wreckage, there to cling in hunger and wretchedness for hours and sometimes for days after the battle was fought and done.

But inboard there was little to be seen; and mercifully so. The pungent smoke hung about the deck in canopies and curtains. It veiled one gun's crew from another. It caressed the beams as with a coverlet. It shrouded the dead. It concealed the living. Little streams might filter across the deck, changing their course as the vessel rolled, and at length unite to form a dreadful pool that lurked in a corner and eddied into bubbles before it rushed in a red spout through the scuppers. But the smoke did its best to hide this too, and often enough succeeded.

It was not, then, a recollection of sickening sights that a sailor carried from a battle. Grateful that his own life had been spared, he spoke in the cheeriest way of his experiences. "To tell you the truth," wrote a seaman to his father, "when the game began I wished myself at Warnborough with my plough again; but

when they had given us one duster and I found myself snug and tight, I set to in good earnest, and thought no more about being killed than if I were at Murrell Green Fair."

But the deafness that set in after a hard fight lasted for three days, and sometimes for four.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW SHE HUNTED VILLENEUVE.

AFTER the Battle of St. Vincent, the *Victory* took a share in the blockade of the Spanish ships which had escaped into Cadiz Bay. But this was only for a time. At the approach of winter Jervis deemed it wise to send her home, and on 26th November she was paid off at Chatham. She had deserved well of her country. And her reward was to serve as a prison ship. Instead of being visited by royalty, she was packed with human outcasts. Instead of being decorated with laurel crowns, she was burdened with a load of unsightly structures which roofed her upper deck.

This period of degradation lasted throughout 1798, while Napoleon went to Egypt, and Nelson destroyed his fleet at the Nile. And it continued throughout 1799. But the *Victory's*

name and her fame were not forgotten. Her popularity in no measure declined, and her speed and sea qualities were often favourably contrasted with those of other vessels. And so one day the news reached Chatham that she was to undergo a complete repair. She was tugged into dry dock, and almost entirely rebuilt. So much new timber, indeed, was charged to her account that it seems doubtful whether there can possibly be any of the 1765 wood left at all. Of structural changes there were practically none, though an alteration in the figurehead must not go unrecorded. The royal arms received new supporters. In place of the graceful little Cupids, the sculptors of the dockyard substituted on one side a seaman all properly habited, and on the other side a marine.

The reconstruction of the *Victory* cost a fair round sum. It also took time. The whole of 1800 was consumed, and the spring of 1801. If the repairs had been less extensive, the *Victory* might have been finished in time for Copenhagen. But although she was denied a part in the first two of Nelson's great victories, she had renewed her youth and her strength and her beauty just in time for the greatest and last.

In 1803 England again declared war upon

France, in order to curb the world-wide ambitions of Napoleon and anticipate his designs against herself. Nelson was named for the Mediterranean command; and as if a return to the scene of his triumphal exploits was not satisfaction enough, his cup of joy was filled to overflowing, and his dream of younger days realized, when the *Victory* was chosen to carry his flag.

While other men thought, Nelson acted. No sooner was he appointed to the Mediterranean than he was gone. He waited for nothing. He flew to his station on the wings of duty, and arrived breathless in the *Amphion* frigate. The *Victory*, speedy though she was, could not keep pace with him. She followed, however, as quickly as she could at the more sober gait incumbent on a first-rate, and on the last day of July Nelson came aboard, and Hardy helped him to hang pictures in his cabin.

There was no chance of entering Toulon in 1803, as the *Victory* had entered ten years before. The fleet had to stand sentry outside, and maintain a rigid blockade. The work was exacting and monotonous. The only change was from the deep level blue of the summer sea to the creamy grey rollers of winter. The only variety was a cruise in search of provisions, the

only excitement a storm. If the enemy escaped, the work of the fleet was undone ; its vigilance was nullified. And so long as the enemy were securely imprisoned, there was not the faintest hope of a fight. So the dreary time went by. Hours turned into days, days into weeks, weeks into months, and months into years. And still Nelson's fleet was afloat outside Toulon, watchful as ever, patient and uncomplaining. The officers happy and studious, the men well fed and lusty. The ships as tidy as they could be without, as clean as new sixpences within. The health of the fleet was good, the doctors inactive. The wooden walls made a city afloat, a city better cared for, better governed, better ordered than the city based on granite foundations, which it daily kept in awe. Only one cause of uneasiness disturbed the British fleet, its admirals, its captains, its lieutenants, its warrant officers, its petty officers and men—the fear lest their ship in some respect should be found wanting and sent away home. Country lanes with the trees in full leaf, wayside inns, fields of golden corn and cosy firesides awaited them in England. But nobody craved for them. Men only asked to be with Nelson, afloat on the fathomless, featureless sea, with the closed door of Toulon to watch.

The blockade lasted a year and a half, from the middle of 1803 to the beginning of 1805. Two things conspired to bring it to a close—the completion of Napoleon's preparations for the conquest of England, and the smallness of Nelson's fleet.

Napoleon's plan of campaign for 1805 was so simple that a word or two will suffice for its description. An immense army with Napoleon at its head was to take up its position at Boulogne ready to cross the Channel. All details as to armament and transport Napoleon himself undertook. But more than this was required. What was absolutely essential to the success of the venture was an overwhelmingly strong escort of battleships, such as had occupied the Channel in 1779. This overwhelmingly strong fleet existed on paper, but nowhere else. To mobilize it, to materialize it, Napoleon needed to unite all the separate squadrons at his disposal in the harbours of France and Spain. Now, he knew perfectly well that the union of French and Spanish fleets was a matter of no ordinary difficulty. The great rally of 1797 had been frustrated at St. Vincent by Jervis. Was there any ground for hope that the rally of 1805 would prove any more successful? Napoleon certainly thought so. He explained, at

least to his own satisfaction, that the experiment of 1797 had been ruined by a silly and obvious mistake—the choice of Brest as a meeting-place. The meeting-place of the squadrons, he argued, must not be in European waters at all. Where, then, was it to be? That was the secret which all must strive to keep from the knowledge of the English. If they discovered it, the scheme was spoiled; but if the secret were well kept, and the squadrons, uniting, returned and occupied the English Channel, then London was doomed to the fate of Milan, Mantua, and Vienna.

The French admirals, however, had first to escape from the English fleets blockading them. The word "escape" is used advisedly. Napoleon was very careful to show that he wanted nothing heroic till the meeting-place was reached. Admiral Villeneuve commanded in chief at Toulon. His was the task to elude the watch of Nelson. Now it is very doubtful whether he could have done this but for the smallness of Nelson's fleet. During the eighteen months that the blockade was maintained, the number of English ships averaged ten. Nelson, with his mind always bent upon the needs of battle, was convinced that his first and foremost duty was to keep these ten together.

He might have divided his contingent, and given one half a holiday, while he kept the other half before Toulon. But this he felt was to leave hostages with fortune. He therefore, as a general rule, kept the fleet entire before the town, and, when occasion for a visit to harbour became too urgent to be ignored, he carried his whole force away, leaving frigates to watch and report.

On January 19, 1805, the *Victory* and her sisters were putting themselves in trim at an anchorage between Sardinia and Corsica, when suddenly frigates came within speaking distance with tell-tale signals flying.

The Toulon fleet was at sea!

Nelson was in an agony! The *Victory* weighed with lightning speed. But where was she to go? Nelson urged her from this point to that, like a huntsman who has lost his prey. He put a ring round the Mediterranean; went to Alexandria and back again. But all to no purpose—the French were not to be found. One thing only was apparent. Egypt was not this time their destination. But what, then, were they after? One grain of information Nelson thought would have been cheap at a thousand pounds. A great game of chess between two master players. Napoleon

had made his move, a cunning move. What did it mean? There was really no saying. If Nelson was ignorant, who else should know?

Meanwhile the roughness of the weather drove Villeneuve back into harbour. And there he was when the *Victory*, on March 12, returned to her station. But there was little comfort in that. The *Victory*, after her journeyings, must once more visit port; and the moment her back was turned, Villeneuve would be out again. The problem stared Nelson in the face more impudently. That was all.

Villeneuve broke covert for the second time at the end of March. The *Phœbe* frigate spied him, and knowing where the *Victory* was, sped away to tell Nelson the news. Could she tell him where Villeneuve was gone? Alas! no. No one could tell him. Once more he posted from place to place, finding no news, finding no rest; hailing every vessel that passed, every brig, every barque, every coaster. No; Napoleon's secret was a secret still. Not a word from any one.

The Mediterranean traversed, Nelson set his face to Gibraltar. But the winds were dead foul, and held him back. Here was

"check" indeed. Was Napoleon winning the game?

Gibraltar at last! The fourth of May. And certain news. Villeneuve had passed the strait —passed through the strait and into the Atlantic —more than a month ago. "Disappointment," wrote Nelson on May 10, "has worn me to a skeleton."

And now where was the *Victory* to turn? To Brest? or Corunna? or Cadiz? or Rochefort?

Or should she stay where she was? The Mediterranean, after all, was Nelson's station. Had he any right to leave it because certain French ships were no longer there? "It is my duty to follow them to the Antipodes," he said, "should I believe that to be their destination."

What was their destination?

Where was the secret hiding-place chosen by Napoleon? Where was the new armada to mobilize? From what mysterious ocean isle were the ships to emerge? Was it in Asia or in Africa? In China or Peru?

Martinique. Fort Royal in Martinique. On the other side of the Atlantic.

It was a long way to go, certainly. Villeneuve thought so, and he was a good judge. But he reached his destination unmolested. He had a

reputation for good luck. He had escaped alive from the Battle of the Nile. That was a singular piece of good luck. He had slipped through Nelson's fingers twice. A double piece of good luck. He had passed Gibraltar unchallenged. Good luck again. Round his flag were gathered eighteen ships of the line. Presently, as the other squadrons came in, cautiously stealing to the meeting-place, his numbers would increase; eighteen, twenty-eight, thirty-eight, forty-eight, fifty-eight, sixty-eight. And then, with all the sail they could carry, eastward ho! to the camp at Boulogne. The days slipped by tranquilly. There was nothing to do. Nothing more could be done till other squadrons arrived.

On June 4 there came another squadron. It numbered ten ships of the line—ten ships of the line that steered their course not to Fort Royal but to the roadstead of Barbados. And the stately vessel, that led them in, carried a red cross flag at the fore topmast head, and on her breast the arms of England's king, with a seaman all properly habited on one side, and a red-coated marine on the other. Truly, one of the most triumphant days in the *Victory's* career. She had carried her master across the wide Atlantic, never stopping to take breath. She had run

the French to earth. She had ferreted out Napoleon's scheme. Nose down on the scent, she had followed his fleet. Without a thing to guide her, without a clue to help, she had found his secret hiding-place. It was a hiding-place no longer. The French ships had only just begun to assemble. And here was herself in the midst of them. Good cause for laughter, was there not? And Napoleon's plan was ruined now. Good cause for congratulation. His great project was all overturned. He could break up his camp and march from Boulogne. There would be no invasion of England, thank God, in 1805.

Of the remainder of this great hunting-piece there are two views, that of the huntsman and that of the spectators. And first, that of the huntsman. When Nelson arrived at Barbados he found news awaiting him. Word had come from General Brereton, Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in the Leeward Isles, that Villeneuve had been seen from St. Lucia passing southward with twenty-eight sail. Definite news! The huntsman is not bound to take notice of every piece of information, however keen the bearer of intelligence, however assertive and however disinterested. But the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces! An

unimpeachable authority. Nelson was off at once. Tobago, Trinidad. He searched the islands to the south of St. Lucia. He searched, and searched in vain. And as he did so, the French were sighted off Antigua, right away to the north. General Brereton's intelligence was false. The moment that Villeneuve heard of Nelson's arrival, he had set out for home again. He was hastening now to recross the Atlantic with 360 miles' start. "If either General Brereton could not have wrote, or his look-out had been blind, nothing could have prevented my fighting them on June 6." Such was Nelson's opinion, and there is little enough reason to question it.

There was no use in complaining. Villeneuve was gone and the chase must be continued. But hearts sank in the *Victory*, and spirits drooped. The little figure that daily walked the quarter deck and hourly asked if there was any sail in sight, was an object of compassion to every one on board. To cross the whole breadth of the wide Atlantic, to rout the fox from his lair and then by one's own friends to be prevented from killing him—it was too bad. It was too unkind. It was too cruel. "It has almost broke my heart," Nelson wrote on June 16. And we find five days later

the following pathetic entry in his private diary: "Midnight. Nearly calm. Saw three planks, which I think came from the French fleet. Very miserable — which is very foolish."

That is one picture—the huntsman's view. And then there is the other. The view of the spectators—the men of England, the Admiralty, the people, the Cabinet. Lookers-on, they say, see most of the game. What had they seen and heard? They had seen their country in the direst peril. They had seen the danger removed. They had seen Napoleon's ambitions mount up like flame. They had seen them dissolve in smoke. They had seen the Toulon fleet, obedient to the Emperor's behest, depart on some mission of mischief. They had watched it vanish behind a veil of mystery. They had watched and waited; and the veil had thickened and become impenetrable; while on the other side of the Channel the legions of France had exercised themselves in the daily routine of embarkation in the boats that were to bring them across. And then out of the mists of conjecture they had seen the fleet of Villeneuve re-emerge, flying for its life; eighteen strong in battleships alone, and flying as if the furies were behind it; panting, pallid, and

exhausted; a hunted thing, an object of pity. And they had also seen the faithful pack of Nelson, ten of them—no more—in breathless hot pursuit. They had seen in their dreams the eagles of Napoleon pushing their way along the Kentish roads. They had heard in their imaginings the cry, "Vive l'Empereur!" ring through the streets of London. But the nightmare was past, and with waking day they heard the retreat of the "Army of England" as it marched away from Boulogne.

What welcomes for the *Victory* when towards the end of August she dropped anchor at Spithead! She had sailed from England two years before, a vessel steeped in glorious traditions; rich in the names of those who had held command in her, rich in the names of battles she had fought. But when she returned, she was wreathed with the blessings of a grateful nation, she was garlanded with praise. Not Drake's *Revenge* that staggered the Armada and stood to bay at Flores; not Anson's *Centurion* that circled the globe and rifled the Spanish coffers; not Hawke's *Royal George* that fought amid rocks in the teeth of a winter gale; not one of these could match the ship that had saved England from Napoleon, that had wrestled a

bout with the master of strategy and floored him at his own game.

Victory !

Hitherto the name had been hers as a gift. Now she had made it her own.

The "Victory" with Nelson's Flag at the Fore.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW SHE SAILED FOR TRAFALGAR'S BAY.

FOR the first fortnight of September, for the first fortnight after Napoleon's departure from Boulogne, Nelson and the *Victory* rested—Nelson at his Surrey home, and the *Victory* at Spithead. But by degrees the admiral's view of the situation became the accepted one. His work was not finished—not finished, at least, in a thorough-going British fashion.

Villeneuve must be destroyed!

As soon as definite information was obtainable, as soon as it was known that Villeneuve was in Cadiz with a formidable fleet of French and Spanish ships, Nelson was summoned by the Admiralty to London. Their conference was of the briefest, and on the 13th September Nelson travelled post haste down the Portsmouth road. He left his chaise and slept a

few hours at the inn at Burford Bridge, then on again into Portsmouth on the morning of the 14th. He stopped at the "George" to breakfast, and as he did so the news of his coming got abroad. The people thronged into High Street till the roadway was packed with them. The *Victory* was lying out at St. Helens, and people expected the admiral to take boat at the stairs near the High Street Semaphore. But Nelson left his hotel at the back, and from Penny Street passed into Green Row and so to Southsea. The crowds got wind of this and raced to cut him off. They swarmed round him as he entered his boat; and as he pushed off, they swarmed into the water in order to say good-bye. "Had I two arms," he said to them, "I could shake hands with more of you."

And so again he came aboard the *Victory*, and again his flag was hoisted at the fore. He sailed the next day, the fifteenth of September, in company with the *Euryalus* frigate, Captain Henry Blackwood.

When the British fleet, already at Cadiz and busily blockading that port, heard that Nelson was approaching in the *Victory*, joy filled the hearts of all of them from Admiral Collingwood downwards. They resolved to greet him in a right royal fashion. But, as they did so, the

Euryalus arrived as courier. "Vice-Admiral Nelson's compliments and no salutes!" Disappointing, very. But a way was quickly found. As every commander was free to paint his ship in the mode he fancied best, Collingwood and his captains began painting their ships in the manner that Nelson preferred. And when on 28th September the *Victory* arrived, she found all her sister-ships gowned like herself. Chequerwise, it may be said. Not black and white as at present, and as so many pictures show, but black and yellow, black and varnish-colour; the black diversified by patches of red when gun-port lids were raised; the yellow always interrupted by darker squares—of shadow, if the ports were open, of paint, if they were shut.

When every one had come aboard the *Victory* to pay respects and when every one had gone again, Nelson set to work in deadly earnest to induce his enemies to come out of port. Admiral Villeneuve, he thought, might be persuaded to do so because he was not at his own home. At Cadiz he boarded in Spanish lodgings, and very expensive lodgings they were likely to prove with the whole coast under blockade. Sooner or later, if he were given an opportunity, he might be trusted to return to

Toulon. In March he had come out of harbour, taking advantage of the absence of the English fleet and ignoring the English frigates. He must be tempted to do so again. He must not really be allowed to escape. But he must be allowed to think himself free to escape. To turn his thoughts in the desired direction was Nelson's purpose. With this end in view he had forbidden salutes, to conceal his own arrival. And now, at his order, the bulk of his fleet retired, not ten or twenty or twenty-five miles, but fifty miles from shore. The frigates, under Blackwood's charge, were to stay near the harbour and watch the allied fleet as a cat watches a mouse. But between the frigates and the battle fleet, four of his swiftest sail of the line were set at intervals like telegraph posts, to pick up Blackwood's news from his signal flags and pass it on, like a lightning flash, to the *Victory* out at sea.

On Friday, 18th October, the wind which for some days had been westerly shifted round to the east. "The combined fleet," wrote Nelson in his private log, "cannot have better weather to come out of port."

The next day, Saturday, about half-past nine in the morning, the telegraph-post *Mars*, nearest member of the intelligence department,

sent to the *Victory* the joyful tidings, "Enemy coming out of harbour!" Nelson, acting on his conviction that Villeneuve would run for the Strait of Gibraltar, instantly signalled his whole fleet to chase to the south-east. Two hours after mid-day came a confirmatory message, "Enemy at sea!" But the wind, turning southward, made progress slow.

All through Saturday night the fleet struggled forward, and the *Victory* at daybreak on Sunday found herself midway between Cape Spartel and Cape Trafalgar, a battlefield well known to her of old. The weather seemed broken. There was a good deal of rain, and the wind was at south-south-west. As soon as it was light enough for signals to be read, Blackwood sent word that Villeneuve had struggled hard against the adverse wind, but had been successfully cut off. Disappointed in his object he had turned about, and at present was making northwards.

The English fleet flung itself on the same tack and followed with all speed. At noon the wind increased to a gale, and on board the *Victory* much apprehension was felt lest the combined fleet should return into harbour. But later the weather improved somewhat, and the deluges of rain ceased to descend. Nelson

came out for a walk on the poop, and seeing a knot of midshipmen eagerly discussing the situation, he turned towards them and said, "This day or to-morrow will be a fortunate one for you, young men," referring to the customary promotions after battle. At five o'clock in the afternoon Blackwood was near enough to the enemy to count them. Villeneuve's fleet was not yet actually visible from the *Victory*, but the frigates told her in what direction to steer.

This they continued to do with untiring skill throughout that Sunday night, using lanterns, rockets, and flares. Villeneuve might double and bend and twist—and he wriggled hard to escape—but they kept him in view with their cat-like eyes, and when he turned, they turned. And when they turned, up went the blue lights, and Nelson turned as well. And so when Monday morning broke, the twenty-first of October, there from the *Victory's* deck was to be seen a glorious thrilling sight, Villeneuve's fleet, easily discernible (though still twelve miles away), thirty-three sail of the line—no less—sailing south on the starboard tack.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW HER MASTER MADE A "MEMORANDUM."

IT has been seen on a previous page that in the majority of battles at sea the opposing vessels were drawn up in lines parallel to one another, that the ships nearer the wind bore up in line abreast (for otherwise the parallel lines would never have met) and hauled their wind—that is, turned again into line ahead when they came within gunshot of the foe. It has also been seen that at Cape St. Vincent the lines were not parallel, and the attacking ships did not bear up in line abreast or do any of the ordinary things. In short, though the majority of battles conformed more or less to a definite pattern, the exceptional battle was irregular and dispensed with ordinary rules. To which class of encounter did Nelson's masterpiece belong?

The Trafalgar battle plan conformed in part to rules, and in part dispensed with them. Its nature was two-fold. Elements apparently irreconcilable were combined by Nelson into a single scheme which he modestly termed his *Memorandum*. The original document in the admiral's own handwriting may be seen at the British Museum. Here for the moment it is necessary to dissociate the two ideas which it welds together.

The "regular" part of Nelson's plan was an assault upon the enemy's rear. For this purpose he designed a separate squadron, which he handed over to the independent management of Admiral Collingwood. The enemy had thirty-three ships. The rear might therefore be taken to comprise one-third of them—say twelve ships in all. To attack the twelve rearmost of the enemy's ships in the customary parallel formation, this was Collingwood's task. To make it complete, and the destruction of the enemy certain, Nelson gave his partner fifteen ships.

Now Collingwood, the hardest hitter in the fleet, with fifteen sail of the line might be trusted to dispose of an enemy who could count on no more than twelve. But the allies numbered thirty-three: what of the other twenty-one?

Was Villeneuve a fool? Was he not rather the chosen of Napoleon?—one of the ablest, one of the cleverest, flag-officers afloat? Could he not turn his fleet about, and bring his centre and van to deliver the ships that Collingwood threatened, and so stultify Collingwood's onslaught?

He could. But to prevent him from doing so was the business of the remaining twelve English ships which Nelson grouped into a squadron for himself. And how was a little squadron of twelve to contain the whole of the enemy's van and the whole of the enemy's centre? The answer to that question Nelson did not formulate beforehand. No ordinary rules would serve his purpose. He must deal with difficulties as difficulties arose, just as Jervis had done at St. Vincent. "The Commander-in-Chief," so read the Memorandum, "will endeavour to take care that the movements of the second in command are *as little interrupted as is possible*."

Such was the scheme. Nelson was to occupy the attention of the allied centre and van while Collingwood destroyed the allied rear.

In a letter home the author of the Memorandum wrote: "When I came to explain to them the 'Nelson Touch' it was like an electric

shock. Some shed tears; all approved. 'It was new—it was singular—it was simple!' And from admirals downwards it was repeated, 'It must succeed, if ever they will allow us to get at them!'"

Now the enemy's fleet on the day of battle was sighted about six in the morning. At that moment the English ships were not in any particular formation; and therefore Nelson lost no time in signalling to them what they should do. They were to group themselves at once in the two separate squadrons already arranged for, and at once to make sail in an easterly direction, forming themselves in line ahead as best they could. The wind being somewhat to the north of west put Nelson's squadron on the left of the advance, and Collingwood's on the right.

The Franco-Spanish ships were still busily occupied in an attempt to form their line which had been begun under cover of night. They were, as we have seen, advancing southward on the starboard tack. Their rearmost vessels were just drawing abreast of the entrance to Cadiz harbour. As the eastern sky brightened behind them, they had an excellent view of the British fleet. Villeneuve, watching from the deck of the *Bucentaure*, saw, as it seemed, a

Was Villeneuve a fool? Was
chosen of Napoleon?—one
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As he advanced to accomplish his fell purpose, Collingwood gave the necessary orders to bring his division parallel to the last twelve ships of the enemy. Owing to the curvature of the allies' array, it was not necessary for the British vessels to draw into line abreast. What they had to do was to form a line of bearing, each ship steering the same course as before, but increasing her speed until she had her next ahead bearing north-east of her. Even this modified form of deployment required that the leading vessels should " mark time " until those astern could draw up. But Collingwood, who led the attack himself, paused not even for a moment. He recalled the words of the Council of War as they listened to the plan of attack. " It must succeed, if ever they will allow us to get at them ! " To get at them ! That was the " Nelson Touch." Content with signalling this ship and that to hurry and make more sail, he sped away onwards without waiting. Therefore on an accurate plan of Trafalgar we must not expect to see the lee squadron engaging in

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By advancing into battle as Jervis had done at St. Vincent, he threatened what Jervis had threatened. He looked as if he meant to pierce the enemy's array, and the enemy braced their nerves and stiffened their sinews: in other words, made their line more rigidly linear—just as he meant them to do. They must not be allowed to use their limbs, for by using them they might interrupt Collingwood.

He threatened their van in preference to their centre, for a threatened centre might recall the van to its assistance, and that would be to interrupt Collingwood. But a threatened van

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ER XIV.

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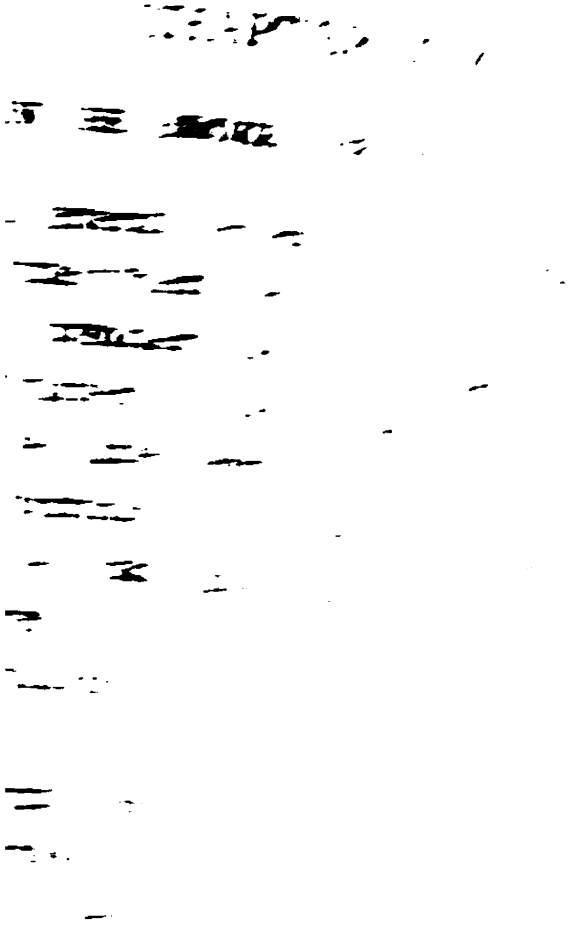
The "Victory" moving into action at Trafal



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confused medley of ships bearing down upon him. As he continued to watch, the medley resolved itself into two masses. The two masses in turn became two roughly-shaped wedges. The wedges transformed themselves at length into irregular columns. And the columns finally straightened themselves out into something like lines ahead. For him the question was: "What do these twin squadrons intend to do?" His soldierly instinct warned him that they intended to mass an attack on his rear, and at the same time cut him off from Cadiz. Now if his rear were assailed it would be a matter of grave difficulty in light airs for his centre and van to bring deliverance. Therefore he signalled his fleet to go about immediately so that his rear, being converted into his van, might have the original centre and the new rear astern of it for support.

The reversal of the order of the allied fleet was begun about eight o'clock and completed about ten or soon afterwards. The evolution was beset by difficulties, but, on the whole, was creditably performed. Some ships were bound to get out of place, and the wind, veering to the west, changed the whole array from a straight line to a bow-shaped curve. But these were details which time could rectify. Yet, although

the manœuvre reflects credit on Villeneuve, there can be no doubt that it materially aided Nelson's plan. Villeneuve's rear was now opposite Collingwood's squadron which had been created to destroy it.

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The "Victory" moving into action at Trafalgar.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW SHE BROKE THE ALLIED LINE.

AFTER this general review of the mode of attack up to the time when the first shot was fired, we are free to consider the individual part which the *Victory* played in the battle.

Nelson, we have seen, was at work by six o'clock. Mounting the poop, he had a good look at the foe, and gave the necessary orders already referred to. For a time he watched his own ships anxiously, noting their obedience to his signals. As he did so, the formation which he desired began slowly but surely to disclose itself. Collingwood's ship drew alongside of his own, and over the starboard bulwarks loomed large through the morning haze. The wind was light with flaws from the land, and there was a heavy ground swell. The enemy for the most part were under topsails and top-gallants. The *Victory* had been carrying her

fore course and topsails. But now she shook out all her reefs, and set royals and studding-sails. There being still twelve miles of sea to be crossed, Nelson retired to his cabin again, and occupied the short interval of leisure with business and private prayers.

Meanwhile the drums rolled, the bos'n and his mates piped the call at every hatchway, and all was quickly set in train. But the *Victory* moved slowly through the water. In pursuit of Villeneuve she had made on occasion her ten knots, but now the wind was so light that she made less than three. Such slow progress promised a heavy casualty-list when the enemy opened fire. At eight o'clock the weather looked dull and cloudy, and there were still nine miles to be gone. Presently Nelson came forth from his cabin again and went the rounds of the ship. He was accompanied by Captain Hardy, by Captain Blackwood of the *Euryalus* (who had come aboard for final orders), by Dr. Beatty (surgeon of the *Victory*), and by others. As he proceeded from gun-deck to gun-deck he often stopped and spoke, exhorting the gunners not to waste a shot, but to take careful aim, and make sure of hitting. He also expressed himself to the officers as highly pleased with all their arrangements.

Rounds finished, Nelson repaired again to the poop, where he kept a watchful eye upon the enemy. Villeneuve's ships on the horizon still looked no larger than a row of model yachts, but through a glass it was becoming increasingly possible to distinguish one from another. Nelson walked about the poop in company with Hardy and Blackwood. The marines stood on either side with small arms ready, while Pasco and his signalmen were busy with vocabulary and flags. Suddenly, in his eager way, Nelson turned to Blackwood with an exclamation. "Now," said he, "I'll amuse the fleet with a signal. Mr. Pasco, I wish to say to the fleet, 'England confides that every man will do his duty.'" The signal-lieutenant asked if he might substitute "expects" for "confides," because "confides" was not in the vocabulary. Nelson readily agreed, and at 11.40 the flags began to ascend. We have it on the authority of Captain Blackwood that as ship after ship of both squadrons received the *Victory's* message, the thunder of enthusiastic cheering rolled in echoes down the line.

Nelson next bade Pasco hoist signal No. 16, "Engage the enemy more closely." The *Victory*, it must be understood, was not yet in action. But this signal with Nelson was no

ordinary signal. It was to him a talisman; an exhortation to waverers. He liked to have it ready in good time, and gave Pasco strict orders to keep it flying. So the flags were lashed to the main top-gallant, and there they remained until the spar was shot away.

It was at ten minutes to twelve that the actual fighting began, the wind being light, the sea smooth, and the sun shining on the freshly painted sides of the combined fleet. The *Fougueux* fired the first shot, and the *Royal Sovereign* was not long in answering. As soon as Collingwood found his range, Nelson ordered all who were not on duty on the *Victory's* upper deck to leave the poop and forecastle, and repair to their proper quarters.

About ten minutes past twelve one of the ships of the combined fleet, in a favourable position for doing so, fired a single shot at the *Victory* to try the range. The *Victory* was just moving; no more; making, perhaps, one and a half knots, and the shot fell short. After two or three minutes the trial was repeated. The *Victory* was by this time a mile and a quarter distant, and the second shot fell alongside. The third flew over the ship. The fourth and fifth did the same. But the sixth shot made a gash in the main top-gallant sail, showing that the

range at last was found. There was a moment or two of intense silence, and then seven or eight of the enemies' ships opened fire, pouring in their broadsides. The *Victory*, ignoring them, still moved forward; solemn, stately, silent, and alone. A round shot, flying across the deck, killed Nelson's secretary, John Scott, as he conversed with Captain Hardy. Aided by a seaman, Captain Adair of the marines tried to move the body before Nelson could see it. But the admiral did not need to be told that a friend was gone. "Is that poor Scott?" he said.

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The enemy were no better able than before to gauge the depth of his cunning. Some flattered themselves their line was so closely knit that he despaired of breaking through the van, and was looking elsewhere for a gap. But Nelson's business was with the Franco-Spanish centre. And though he had concealed his purpose with masterly completeness, that had been his objective all along. After keeping the hostile van in a fever of suspense, he left them out of the battle altogether. That was one of his motives. By leaving them out of the battle altogether, he gained a local superiority, and matched his twenty-seven ships with twenty-three of the foe. He had other motives. By attacking the enemy's centre, he joined hands with Collingwood, seconding his endeavours, and receiving his support. And last, but not least, he struck his blow home where he hoped and expected to find Villeneuve himself.

Oddly enough, although less than half a mile separated him from the enemy's line, there was absolutely nothing to show which was Villeneuve's ship. Every glass on the *Victory's* quarter deck was busily employed, but in answer to Nelson's repeated questions there was no information forthcoming. It was clear, however, that the French and Spanish had

mixed their ships; not kept them separate. The Spaniards were distinguished not only by their ensigns, but by enormous wooden crosses that swung from the end of each spanker boom. Prominent among them, and easily identified by her four decks, was Nelson's old enemy of St. Vincent days, the *Santissima Trinidad*. She at least was bound to be a flagship. Astern of her there was a slight interval, and then came two French ships, the first large and the second something smaller. Towards the interval between the *Trinidad* and the two Frenchmen Nelson gave orders for the *Victory* to steer. The smaller French ship was the *Redoutable*, and the larger was Villeneuve's own *Bucentaure*, which Nelson by instinct was singling out in spite of her efforts to conceal herself. The *Trinidad*, the *Bucentaure*, and the *Redoutable* continued to pour in broadsides which the *Victory* sustained as she could. To have hauled her wind on the larboard tack would have brought her relief at once. But there was still much to be done before she could hope to engage on equal terms.

In spite of the enemy's heavy raking fire, Nelson and Hardy continued to walk the quarter deck, engaged in earnest conversation. The position was one of considerable danger. For

the Frenchmen, as usual, were firing at masts and rigging, and when their aim was too low their shot swept the *Victory's* upper deck from bowsprit to taffrail. Five hundred yards from the larboard beam of the *Bucentaure* a well-aimed broadside from that vessel brought down the *Victory's* mizzen topmast. This almost checked her career. A moment later a shot smashed the wheel to pieces. Without loss of a moment the tiller was manned and the ship steered from the gun room. Two minutes afterwards a bar shot killed eight marines on the poop, and wounded others. At this Nelson ordered the men to be taken from the poop and distributed about the ship. As he did so, a round shot, that had come through four hammocks in the nettings, passed between him and Hardy. A splinter brushed Hardy's left foot and tore the buckle from his shoe. Both instantly stopped and surveyed each other with enquiring looks, each supposing the other to be wounded. Then Nelson smiled and said to Hardy, " This is too warm work to last long."

The truth is—for Nelson did not state it in full—that the *Victory* was undergoing an ordeal for which it would be vain to seek a comparison. Never had vessel endured what she was enduring—the long-drawn agony of silent torture.

It was one thing to fight in the thick of foes, selling your life dearly, lashing out with all your batteries. But the *Victory* until now had been an almost stationary target, drawing the fire of all who could train their guns on her: and her sails were torn to tatters. The enemy were trying until the very last moment to stop her altogether. They wasted not a thought on the men within her. And the gunners below were happy enough; busy too, since the turn to starboard enabled them to work their guns. But on the forecastle and on the quarter deck, in the waist and on the poop, no less than fifty men had fallen: not in the heat of action, not with the flush of anger upon them; but by accident, by mischance, because the *Bucentaure*, or one of her consorts, had tried for a stay or a shroud, and aimed too low for the mark. Those who remained alive were sorely tried. Yet they rose heroically to the situation. Nelson declared that he had never asked seamen to endure so much, or seen them endure with such unflinching courage.

At last! At last they reached the enemy's line. To Hardy it appeared an impenetrable wall. With disappointment for once in his cheery voice he informed Nelson that they could proceed no farther without collision.

But Nelson replied sharply, almost testily, "I can't help it. Doesn't signify which we run aboard of. Go on board which you please. Take your choice." He spoke rapidly. Yet the words were hardly out of his mouth when the *Victory*, responsive to his voice, shouldered a way for herself between the *Redoutable* and the *Bucentaure*. The *Redoutable* was to starboard, and the *Bucentaure* to larboard. So close was Villeneuve's ship that had there been wind enough to spread the *Bucentaure's* ensign, the *Victory's* men could have clutched it and torn it from the mizzen-peak.

It was a quarter to one. The moment had come that was to decide the fate of nations. The sixty-eight-pounder carronade on the larboard side of the *Victory's* forecastle had the honour of beginning. She was loaded with a single round shot and a keg of five hundred musket bullets, and these she delivered with unerring accuracy through the stern windows of the *Bucentaure*, where there was nothing to stop them, where there was nothing to shield the hundreds of men that crowded the long fighting decks. The carronade began it, and the big guns took up the refrain. There were fifty of them on the *Victory's* larboard side, and they were manned by those who until now had been

unmolested by the enemy's fire ; lusty fellows, and stout and strong, the pick of England's gunners, the pick of England's fleet, gunners who at all times were true of aim, and who had received the admiral's special injunctions to be steady, and not waste a shot. The fifty guns of the *Victory's* side were double-shotted or treble-shotted, and as the *Victory* passed slowly under the *Bucentaure's* stern, they poured their charges one by one into the Frenchman's vitals. The British crew were nearly choked by the clouds of black smoke that entered the port holes ; and Nelson and Hardy were covered with dust from the crumbling ruins of the rich giltwork that had adorned the *Bucentaure's* stern.

This was the crowning moment of Trafalgar ! This was the moment for which the *Victory* had been born ! This was the moment for which she had lived ! It was not so much that in a minute or two of time she had slain or wounded four hundred men and dismounted twenty guns, though this was a pitch of destructiveness without precedent, without example. It was not so much that she had broken the enemy's back, though that by itself might have conquered them : it was something more and something greater. The *Victory* had monopo-

lized Villeneuve's attention until it was too late. For an hour she had drawn upon herself the eyes of twenty-one ships, the allied centre and van. They had waited for Villeneuve's commands, and received none. They had looked for Villeneuve's signal flags, and he had hoisted none. He too had been watching the *Victory*, watching and waiting (though delay was dangerous) for the *Victory* to reveal her design. And the *Victory* had revealed no design; and he had striven with all his strength to hold her off and push her back. And failed in that too. He had seen nothing else. He had not looked at his own left wing which Collingwood had been shattering for nearly an hour past. He had not looked at his own right wing which was standing by inactive. His eyes were riveted on the *Victory*, until the *Victory* ran under his very stern and blotted him out of existence; or, still worse, reduced his vessel to a hulk, and left him in the wreckage, powerless now to say a thing to his fleet, powerless to rectify any mistake—the least or the most egregious.

When the *Victory* burst through the enemy's line, the Battle of Trafalgar was won. It remained to convert a signal conquest into the completest ever gained at sea.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW HER MASTER LAY IN THE COCKPIT WHILE THE BATTLE THUNDERED ABOVE.

IT has been said that when Villeneuve in the early morning turned his fleet on the northerly tack, he sacrificed some of the symmetry for which his line was justly famed. Here and there his ships were thrown out of place, and failed to get back again. Here and there a vessel, so displaced, proceeded alongside of the other ships on a parallel course to leeward. The *Neptune* of eighty guns was one of these. She was so placed that she exactly commanded the gap through which the *Victory* elbowed her way; and as the *Victory* elbowed her way, the *Neptune* opened a raking fire on her from a position which nothing could possibly have bettered. The *Victory's* flying jib-boom, and her spritsail yard and her sprit topsail yard were shot away. Her starboard cathead, in spite of

its strength, was shivered to splinters. Several shots penetrated her bows between wind and water. And her fore mast and bowsprit were gravely wounded. Such was the result of a short cannonade—short, for the *Neptune* would not keep her place. She feared that Nelson intended to run aboard her, and setting her jib in a great hurry, she pushed on out of reach.

Grievous though the harm may have been that she inflicted on the *Victory*, she might have done more for Napoleon if she had kept her original position astern of the *Bucentaure*. When she failed to do so, the duty of filling the breach devolved on the ship next astern, the *Redoutable*. The *Redoutable* was a ship of ordinary size—what in England would have been called a third-rate. But Lucas, her captain, was a man of ideas and a man of unquenchable courage. The dream of his life was to capture a British ship. He felt certain that it could be done, for which you may honour him or not as you like; and he felt equally certain that it could not be done by gunnery, which shows him to have been a man of sense. Boarding was the method he proposed to himself. By boarding he would capture a British ship, and win the approval of Napoleon. In this direction all his thoughts had been turned for weeks

past. He had given every man in his ship a canvas case holding two grenades. To every man's belt he had attached a tin tube of his own design for holding quick-match. His ship's company were constantly engaged hurling dummy grenades of cardboard—also his own invention. Those who excelled were encouraged, and some grenadiers became so expert that they could at the same moment throw accurately a bomb with either hand. Similar pains were taken with musketry, and no less than a hundred men won Lucas's favour for unerring markmanship. A picked band practised special exercises for grappling-irons; and those who showed no particular aptitude were subjected every day most vigorously to cutlass practice and pistol drill.

The *Redoutable*, it will be easily understood, was not exactly the ideal ship to second the *Bucentaure's* effort to save the allied line from being broken. Her eagerness, indeed, was a thing to be witnessed. She all but rested her bowsprit on the *Bucentaure's* taffrail; and more than once the *Bucentaure* shouted, "Hulloa! You will run me down!" But the *Victory* was not to be stopped by close packing. Concentration of artillery was the only effectual defence; and in artillery the *Redoutable* was

weak. When, however, hope was gone and the line beyond remedy broken, then the *Redoutable* found herself. The *Victory* filled her horizon. The Frenchmen were enthusiastic. Their captain had promised them an English prize. Was it really to be Nelson's, the British flagship? The decks of the *Redoutable* re-echoed with excited cries—"Long live the Emperor! Hurrah for Captain Lucas!"

When the *Victory's* attention had been distracted from the *Bucentaure* by the *Neptune*, and when the *Neptune* in turn had wriggled from her clutches, she was ready to welcome any antagonist. The *Redoutable* awaiting her to starboard, she put her helm hard a port; and about ten or twelve minutes past one, the two ships collided. The *Victory* fell away at the rebound. But her starboard fore topmast stun-sail boom-iron hooked itself into the larboard leech of the *Redoutable's* fore topsail; and the two ships paid off before the wind. Their advance was more or less easterly, and left the *Bucentaure* and *Trinidad* to northward and astern.

At the moment of impact the *Victory's* bos'n discharged the starboard sixty-eight-pounder carronade on the forecastle, loaded, as the larboard had been, with one round shot and five

hundred musket balls. This wrought havoc on the *Redoutable's* upper deck, and literally cleared her gangways. The heavier guns of the *Victory* joined eagerly in the fray, and joyful music they made to the seaman's ear. If the *Redoutable's* men had relied on gunnery, and been massed on the lower deck, their ship must soon have surrendered. But they did not rely on gunnery, and were not massed on the lower deck. In fact, their lower-deck ports were tightly shut, and had been since before the collision. This unusual procedure deceived their opponents, who thought that the *Redoutable* was about to surrender before she had really been hurt. But the *Redoutable* lowered her gun-deck ports to conceal the absence of men. Their absence might have tempted the *Victory* to board, before she was boarded herself: and then all their labour and pains had been lost. As a preliminary to boarding, the principal need was to clear the *Victory's* upper deck, and to this one end the *Redoutable* for the present devoted herself. The two-handed grenadiers set briskly about their business, and succeeded in delivering two hundred bombs. The musketeers clambered into the tops or lined the main-deck gun-ports. Some enterprising officers hauled a mortar into the foretop, and

with this they pumped grape shot on the *Victory's* forecastle with terrible effect. The actual boarders, with pistols, axes, and swords, took what cover they could till the moment came. And that moment, they thought, could not long be delayed. For about the *Victory* the deluge of projectiles fell almost as thickly as hailstones.

At the *Victory's* last refit Nelson had had the large skylight above his cabin removed, and the cavity boarded over, so as to afford him more room amidships. Here, in the centre of the quarter deck and clear of the ropes and guns, he had a walk twenty-one feet long from the wheel to the after-hatchway. And here, amid the *Redoutable's* fusillade, he paced backwards and forwards with Hardy. The *Redoutable* was a smaller ship than the *Victory*, and her mizzen mast rose midway between the *Victory's* mizzen and main. Thus Lucas's chosen musketeers in the *Redoutable's* mizzen top had the *Victory's* quarter deck forty-five feet distant, and immediately beneath them. They were grouped together in a crouching position, and rose breast high to fire.

At about thirty-five minutes past one Nelson and Hardy had turned again at the wheel, and were advancing towards the hatchway. Nelson was on the left, and Hardy on the right, Hardy's

immense bulk screening the admiral from the enemy's musketeers. They were so near to the companion that they had only one step more to take, when Nelson suddenly turned. Hardy took the last step, and, facing about, saw Nelson down. The admiral was on his knees, his left hand touching the deck. The next moment his arm relaxed, and he fell on his left side.

The captain bent lovingly over his friend and expressed a hope that the wound was slight. Nelson replied, "They have done for me at last, Hardy." "I hope not," said the captain. "Yes," said Nelson, "my backbone is shot through." Hardy beckoned to Secker the Sergeant of Marines, and he came at once with two seamen. These three bore Nelson tenderly in their arms from deck to deck down to the cockpit. As they did so, Nelson drew his handkerchief from his pocket and covered his face and the stars on his breast, lest the seamen should see who passed them. When the cockpit was reached, there were so many there already that the bearers had difficulty in threading their way. Dr. Beatty instructed them to go far forward on the port side. And there the admiral was placed on a bed, which was propped against a knee of the ship. His clothes were removed, and he was covered with

a sheet. Dr. Scott, the chaplain, supported him on one side, and Mr. Burke, the purser, on the other. The surgeon made an examination as gently as he could, and asked the admiral to describe his sensations. Himself he knew from the very first, though he concealed his knowledge, that Nelson's instinct had told him the truth, and that the wound unhappily was mortal.

There was little enough peace or repose in the cockpit; for the lumbering guns up above still continued to rumble and tumble and thunder. In addition there was the noise of lusty cheers and constant loud huzzas. For the twenty-four-pounders on the middle deck and the thirty-two-pounders on the lower deck were eating away the Frenchman's hull like an army of mice at a cheese. The gunners, strong-sinewed and loving their work, had only two grounds for anxiety. They feared lest they should fire right through the *Redoutable* and injure some British ship on her other side. To obviate this, they depressed their guns, loaded with three shots apiece, and fired with diminished charge. And since their muzzles touched the *Redoutable's* timbers when the carriages were run out, they feared lest the Frenchman should be destroyed by conflagration. So a

fireman was stationed by every gun, and as soon as ever a piece was discharged he dashed a pail of water through the gun-port into the hole which the round shot had made.

There was a moment, indeed, in the strife, when the *Victory's* gunners ceased firing. The *Redoutable's* surrender seemed so certainly imminent that their cannonade, to these simple souls, was like hitting a fallen man. They paused for some seconds, and as they did so, Lucas felt that his time had come. The *Victory's* upper deck was almost empty, for the few effectives were busily employed carrying the last of the wounded below. Captain Hardy, Captain Adair of the Marines, and one or two officers—these were all that were left. So Lucas gave the word, and his boarders assembled in the shrouds, and in the chains, and along the gangways, cutlasses dangling from their wrists, tomahawks in their hands, and pistols in their belts.

Certainly a crisis had come ; and, if boarding had been as easy as walking, the French would soon have been over the side. But for protective purposes the *Victory's* bulwarks sloped inwards, and the *Redoutable's* works did the same. The combatant ships were securely lashed together. Lucas's grappling party had

The Quarter Deck of the "Victory."

Photo by G. West & Co.

seen about that. But a wooden trench divided them, a gulf of fourteen feet or more, a yawning deep ravine. Lucas instantly gave orders to cut the supports of the main yard, and let that mighty limb serve as a bridge. It was done. But time was lost. There was a few minutes' delay; and in those few minutes Hardy had taken the necessary action. He had called his first reserves from below and distributed small arms.

The most savage of contests, however, took place. For the Frenchmen were ready to do and dare. They were to capture Nelson's flagship, were they not? Had they emptied her decks to be thwarted now? Were they to stop just short of the summit of their hopes? With cutlass and pistol and sword they fought, while the grenadiers continued to scatter their bombs and the main-deck guns their splinters. The gallant Captain Adair of the Marines was killed. He was standing on the gangway encouraging his men, when a musket bullet hit him in the neck. Lieutenant Ram took his place, and received such ghastly injuries that though they bound his wounds in the cockpit, he tore off his bandages and bled to death. Another lieutenant threw himself into the fray, and was wounded and carried below. Eighteen

men were killed and twenty injured, and still the French came on. But they met a courage as stout as their own. Still on the *Victory's* quarter deck stood Hardy, a giant in breadth, a giant in height; yet untouched by the hurricane of death. Trumpet in hand, he directed the fight. Slowly but surely he drove the Frenchmen back.

Ensign Yon of the *Redoutable* and four of his seamen by an anchor-stock reached the *Victory's* deck. By themselves they were helpless, these gallant five. And no reinforcements reached them.

And now after daring all and enduring all, and after daring and enduring alone, the *Victory* received assistance.

The *Temeraire*, the "Fighting" *Temeraire*, had followed the *Victory* closely into action. At first the *Victory* had screened her almost completely. But as they drew nearer to the allied line the *Temeraire* in her turn drew the converging fire of many raking broadsides. Her pace would have enabled her to draw up level with the *Victory*. But lest the enemy should thereby gain a hint as to the meaning of his plans, Nelson would not suffer her to do so; and obedient to an order to keep in his wake, the *Temeraire* shortened sail. When,

however, her leader ran under the *Bucentaure's* stern, the *Temeraire* was obliged to put her helm sharply over, in order to avoid a collision. For a while her course must have been directly south, parallel and opposite to the *Redoutable*. The *Redoutable* in passing brought down her mizzen topmast. But the *Temeraire*, nothing daunted, turned east again as soon as she could, and at last broke the enemy's line on her own account. But further misfortunes awaited her. The *Neptune*, since her assault upon the *Victory*, had wore and come to on the same tack. In other words she had described a circle. She was again in an admirable position for raking; and her guns were ready loaded. She loosed her bolts with terrible precision. Down came the *Temeraire's* fore yard, and down came her main topmast. She had already lost her mizzen topmast. Her fore mast was sprung, and her bowsprit wounded. She was now little more than a helpless cripple.

For a while she lay upon the water with her wings broken, eating her heart out with vexation. She had had no chance of showing her mettle, or proving her quality. Her guns were still cold, her batteries inactive. She knew not what to do. But suddenly two ships bore down on her—two ships locked in one another's

The appalling effect of the *Victory*'s ordnance was evidenced by the almost all the lower-deck guns, perilous number of shot-holes below water. The ship was on fire, wounded. Therefore Hardy's received. But the *Redoutable* hailing her now. The hand- tried to fasten on her The grip of the two and just as the *Victory* from all trammels, the and mizzen masts The main mast poop, smashing the along this bridge *meraire*'s men with forward to take

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was a question that he was living to have answered. "How goes the battle? How goes the day with us?" And no one but Hardy could answer it. No one had Hardy's knowledge and experience. No one on board like Hardy could throw a practised eye over the whole battlefield and estimate the result.

Hardy twice found release from his cares on deck and hurried below. His first visit was at a quarter to three, and his second at a quarter to four. On the first occasion he pledged himself that twelve of the enemy had been taken; on the second he had better news. He would not exaggerate: he would not multiply numbers even to soothe the death-bed of his friend. But with his own eyes and through his own glass he had counted fifteen prizes. He bade his last farewell to the admiral about four o'clock. But Nelson would not die. He was not satisfied with fifteen prizes. It was not even half of the enemy's fleet. Just before half past four the battle ended. Villeneuve was taken. And round about the *Victory* were the twenty prizes that Nelson had bargained for. They hurried below and knelt beside him, and whispered the news in his ear. The admiral opened his eyes and smiled; and smiling, closed them again.

embrace. One carried the white flag of England at the fore; the other—strangest sight yet seen—had her lower-deck gun-ports shut. These two were conscious apparently of nothing but the duel that they fought. Nearer and nearer they came. And the *Temeraire* looked to the priming of her guns. Nearer, and the *Temeraire's* gunners could hardly contain themselves. The French ship happily was nearest them, her blind side opposed to their eager sight. Another moment, and she was on them. Her bowsprit passed over their larboard gangway a little before the main rigging. It was the work of a moment to lash it fast, and the *Temeraire* having tucked her adversary's head securely under her arm, discharged every weapon she had on board with the noise of an avalanche splitting the rocks and devastating the forests.

The *Redoutable's* battle was over for ever. Two hundred men fell upon her decks.

The coming of the *Temeraire* to the help of the *Victory* is a classic example of combination. Nothing could have been timelier. Nothing could possibly have been more opportune. But some have magnified the extent of the *Temeraire's* assistance, implying that the *Victory* was at her last gasp—that she was lost unless help could reach her. This is a mistake. The

Redoutable's attack was formidable indeed. But the *Victory*, in spite of all that she had suffered, was still quite capable of looking after herself. The reserves, that Hardy called from below, came from the middle deck. On the lower deck there were more than two hundred men; and of these not a single man had been killed, and only two had been wounded. At the time when the *Temeraire* came up, Hardy was, it must be admitted, still very preoccupied. For the *Redoutable* with her grenades had set fire to herself, and he was busily fighting the flames—fighting the flames which leapt aboard in a manner no Frenchman could imitate.

Bucket after bucket of water was heaved across the trench that separated the *Redoutable* from the *Victory*. And for a time the fire was got under. But when it broke out afresh, Hardy instructed two midshipmen together with a sergeant-major of marines and eight or ten hands to board the enemy. Denied the usual channels of communication, they embarked from the *Victory's* stern ports in one of the boats that were towing there, and entered by the stern ports of the *Redoutable*. As they did so, their boat was knocked to pieces by the random shot of a distant ship.

Of the *Redoutable's* 643 men, 522 were dead

or wounded. The appalling effect of the *Victory's* heavy ordnance was evidenced by the overturning of almost all the lower-deck guns, and by the perilous number of shot-holes between wind and water. The ship was on fire, and the captain wounded. Therefore Hardy's embassy was well received. But the *Redoutable's* limbs were failing her now. The handcuffs which she had tried to fasten on her opponent's broke away. The grip of the two antagonists relaxed. And just as the *Victory* wrenched herself free from all trammels, the gallant Frenchman's main and mizzen masts went over the side together. The main mast fell upon the *Temeraire's* poop, smashing the poop rail to fragments, and along this bridge so conveniently placed the *Temeraire's* men with a shout of triumph plunged forward to take possession.

About an hour had passed since Nelson had left the deck, and repeated messages had come from the cockpit asking that Hardy would come to him. He greatly desired to see Hardy. No one but Hardy would do. It was not only that he wished to confide his last wishes into Hardy's ear. It was not only that he wished to exact from Hardy a promise not to throw his body overboard. There was something else. There

was a question that he was living to have answered. "How goes the battle? How goes the day with us?" And no one but Hardy could answer it. No one had Hardy's knowledge and experience. No one on board like Hardy could throw a practised eye over the whole battlefield and estimate the result.

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CHAPTER XVI.

HOW SHE SIGNALLED SAD NEWS TO THE FLEET.

On board the other ships of the fleet, as soon as the spoils were counted and the full extent of the conquest known, a festive jollity prevailed. All who were wounded felt certain now that they would recover and live to see their friends; and all who were unwounded rejoiced, and their joy was full. The midshipmen, of course, were the soul of things, and, under the magic of their spirits, the candles in the blacking-bottles gave the radiance of candelabra, the marsala sparkled like champagne, and even the French and Spanish officers, guests of the berth, forgot their woes, and joined in the merriment. But about 7.30 a whisper went round, a chilly rumour that set a seal upon men's lips. One asked his neighbour to repeat the news in case he had not

heard it aright. But every one was hurrying up the companion-ladder.

On the upper deck there was a lull, and a hush out of keeping with the crowd assembled there. The captain, in his rough-weather cloak, the officers, the seamen, the marines, all gazed fixedly and silently over the side into the still cold blackness of the night. All strove to find what all had failed to find. No need here to ask for news. The news declared itself unmistakably in the motionlessness of the midshipmen, the droop of the captain's hat, and other mute expressions of sorrow and dismay.

"No admiral's lights on board the *Victory!*"

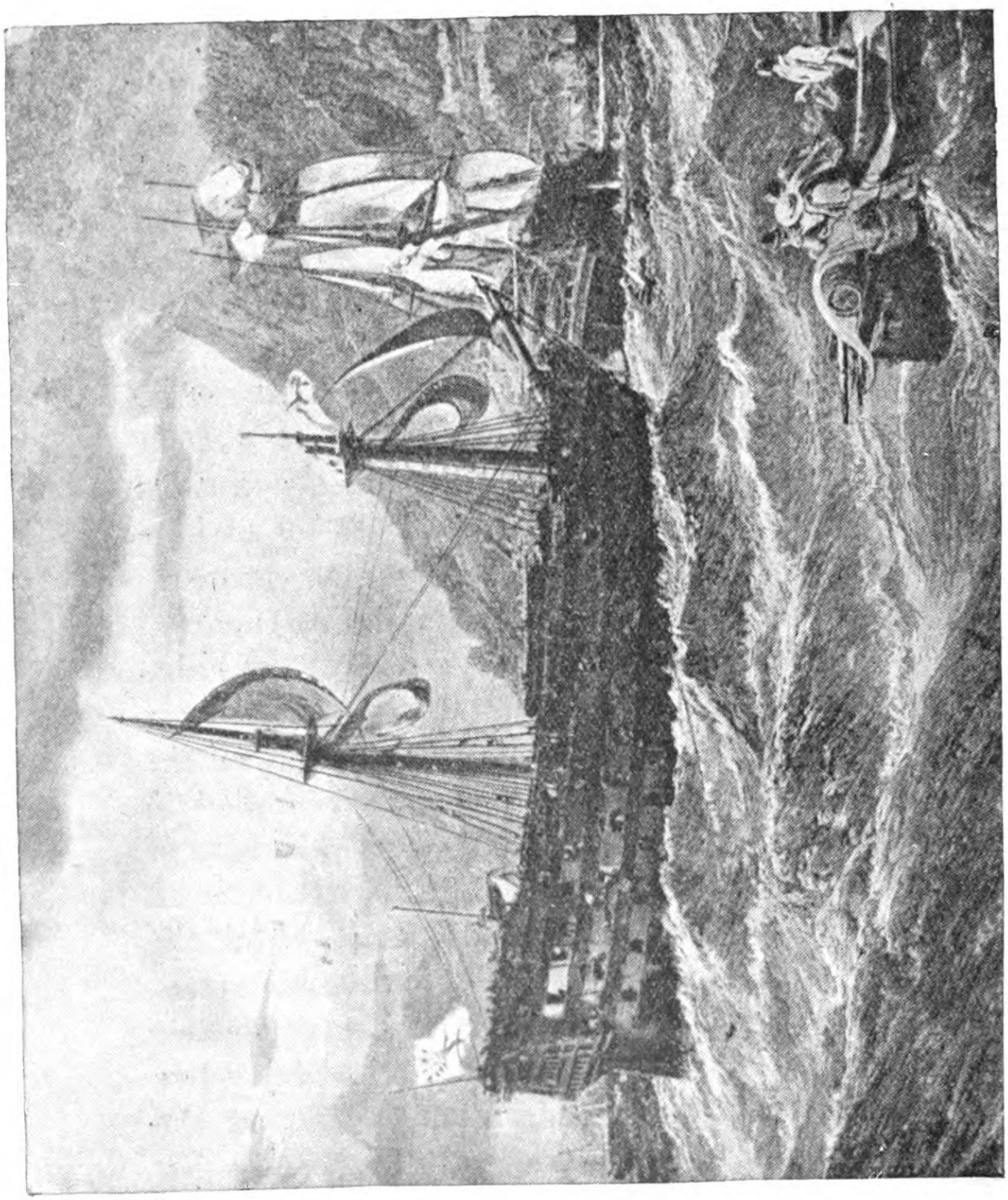
CHAPTER XVII.

HOW SHE WEATHERED THE STORMS AND REACHED HER LAST ANCHORAGE.

AFTER the battle came the storm—the storm that Nelson predicted. It tossed and tore friend and foe alike. It buried on the battle-field all but four of Nelson's prizes, lest his countrymen should forget the victor in contemplation of his spoils. It tried and tested British seamanship as British seamanship had never before been tried. And it tried the *Victory* to the uttermost. Roaring under her lee were the shoals of Trafalgar. To keep clear of them would have taxed her resources if she had been sound in wind and limb. And she was far from being that. Her mizzen topmast, we have seen, went at an early hour. No sooner was the battle ended than the mizzen mast itself went by the board, breaking short off

about two feet above the poop. The fore mast was so gravely damaged that to save it the fore topmast had to be struck. The main mast was badly wounded. So was the main yard, the bowsprit, the jib-boom, and the main top-mast. All the rigging was hacked to pieces, and hands were employed without rest in fishing and knotting and splicing.

There was another injury which must not go unmentioned. The figurehead of the *Victory* was damaged; not the coat of arms, but its supporters. The seaman in his jacket of blue lost an arm; and the marine, all properly habited, a leg. And it was commonly reported on board—with how much truth you must judge for yourself—that all the marines who were wounded were wounded in the leg, and all the seamen who were wounded were wounded in the arm. It is probable enough. The sum of the wounded was seventy-five, of whom seven were officers and sixty-eight men. And the dead numbered fifty-seven—Nelson, his secretary Scott, Captain Adair, Lieutenant Ram, two midshipmen, the captain's clerk, thirty-two seamen and eighteen marines. In all, on the official list, 132 casualties. But after the list was completed and sent in, twenty-seven more wounded reported themselves; among these



The "Victory" towed into Gibraltar after her greatest battle

Mr. Willmot, the bos'n, who receiving a painful gash in the thigh, bound it up and stuck to his quarters. The wounded, therefore, numbered 102, and of these ninety-seven recovered.

On the night of the battle the *Victory* sounded and found thirteen fathoms, and stood to the southward under what was left of the foresail and reefed main topsail. On the twenty-second the breeze freshened from the south-west, and she found serious difficulty in making an offing. Of the other vessels, those that were manageable were towing those that were not. On the 23rd the gale broke, and the *Victory*, with the little sail that she could carry, laboured deeply in the heavy seas. On the 24th she was taken in tow by the *Polyphemus*—"Polly Infamous" the seamen called her; and in the afternoon she managed to rig up some jury topmasts and a mizzen. This made her more comfortable. But on the 25th, at 5 p.m., the storm increasing, the towing-hawser parted. The main yard was carried away, and the sail torn to ribbons. The ship rolled dangerously, and an anxious night was spent. On the 26th the storm abated, and the *Neptune*, taking her in tow, in forty-eight hours brought her safely to Gibraltar, where they arrived on the 28th.

Nelson's body had been reverently placed

upon the main deck, where it was guarded day and night by marines. On the 3rd of November, after a hasty refit, the *Victory*, accompanied by the *Belleisle*, set out to carry her precious freight to England. She encountered boisterous weather, and was more than a month on the way. She arrived at Spithead on December 4, and for a week was the object of reverential attention. Her battered sides, her blood-stained decks, her jury masts, and knotted rigging spoke eloquently in a language which all could understand. On December 11 she left Spithead, arriving at Sheerness on the 22nd. Here the body of her beloved admiral was carried on board the commissioner's yacht, and the proudest flag she had ever flown was lowered for the last time.

The rest of the *Victory's* tale may be shortly told. She was paid off on January 16, 1806, and, after undergoing a thorough repair, was recommissioned in March 1808. For the next five years she was constantly employed, and twice went out to the Peninsular War. On the former visit she helped to bring home Sir John Moore's army from Corunna. But in chief she served as flagship to Admiral Saumarez, Nelson's second at the Nile. With him she journeyed backwards and forwards to the

Baltic, doing her work, as always, splendidly, but finding, of course, no laurels to compare with those she already had won. At the end of 1811 the British fleet returning from the Baltic encountered a gale the violence of which exceeded anything which even the *Victory* could remember. The *St. George* and *Defence* were lost off the coast of Denmark, and the *Hero* went down off the Texel. But the *Victory* was preserved. Once more she was repaired, and once more requisitioned. In 1815 she was named for a flag; and no less than six admirals instantly put in a claim for her. But Waterloo brought an end to the war, and with it an end to her fighting career.

With all her labours ended, with all her storms forgot, with all her battles over and done, with memories woven into her very sails and plaited into her rigging, with the glamour cast upon her storied timbers by her association with Nelson, it is permissible to imagine what a welcome awaited her, or what a welcome would have awaited her, had she been the *Argo* returning to Iolchos—the songs that would have been sung in her praise, the goblets that would have been raised in her honour, the roses that would have been hung about her bows. But the *Victory's* home was not Greece, but England,

Nothing more, the shipwrights said, could possibly be expected from her. It was, therefore, proposed to sell her for what her planks would fetch, and break her up in some Thames-side yard.

This impious sacrilege was averted by John Poole, the author of *Paul Pry*. His indignant article, first published in the *Brighton Gazette*, was copied and reprinted by most other newspapers. The British public thereupon for the customary nine days whipped itself into a fine frenzy, and the *Victory* was happily and mercifully saved from the fate that overtook the *Temeraire*.

In 1825 she was made flagship to the Admiral Commanding-in-Chief at Portsmouth. At Portsmouth she has slumbered and dreamed ever since, and at Portsmouth she rests to-day.

THE END.

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