

# ALFRED THAYER MAHAN

THE LIFE OF NELSON,  
VOLUME 2

**Alfred Thayer Mahan**  
**The Life of Nelson, Volume 2**

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*The Life of Nelson, Volume 2 / The Embodiment of the Sea Power of Great  
Britain:*

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**A. T. Mahan**  
**The Life of Nelson, Volume**  
**2 / The Embodiment of the**  
**Sea Power of Great Britain**

**CHAPTER XIV.**

**NELSON TEMPORARILY**  
**COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF IN THE**  
**MEDITERRANEAN.—RELIEVED**  
**BY LORD KEITH.—APPLIES**  
**TO RETURN TO ENGLAND ON**  
**ACCOUNT OF ILL HEALTH**

**AUGUST, August 1799—JUNE, 1800. AGE, 41**

Upon Keith's departure, the command in the Mediterranean devolved upon Nelson, who for some time remained in doubt of the fact, but with his usual promptitude acted as if all

depended upon himself. "I am venturing certainly out of my line of duty, but as the commander-in-chief may not even be on the station, I must do the best which my judgment points out during his temporary absence." Six sail-of-the-line, under Admiral Duckworth, were sufficient for service at Gibraltar and Cadiz, if the latter port was deserted. Four of the line were about Minorca, constantly, though inefficiently, threatened from the adjacent coasts of Spain. Three were blockading Malta, conjointly with the Portuguese vessels. Sidney Smith with his division remained in the Levant. Troubridge was operating with a few ships on the coast of Italy, against Civita Vecchia, still in the hands of the French. A small squadron was maintained on the Riviera of Genoa, disturbing the communications of the French, and keeping touch with the advance of the Austro-Russians; but it was expected that the Russian fleet, as was natural and proper, would soon assume the duty of co-operating with their general, Suwarrow. The smaller British cruisers were distributed among these various duties. The flagship "Foudroyant" was at Palermo, whither the King returned from Naples on the 8th of August, and there the headquarters of the squadron remained during Nelson's command. Soon after this arrival in Palermo the King conferred upon him the title of Duke of Bronté, with an estate of the same name in Sicily, valued at £3,000 per annum. After this the admiral for a time signed his papers as Bronté Nelson,[1] changed subsequently to Bronté Nelson of the Nile, and finally settled down to Nelson and Bronté, which was his

form of signature for the last four years of his life. He placed upon his new estate an annual charge of £500 in favor of his father for the term of the latter's life. "Receive this small tribute, my honoured father," he wrote, "as a mark of gratitude to the best of parents from his most dutiful son."

On the 20th of September he received letters from the Admiralty, investing him with the chief command, "till the return of Lord Keith or some other your superior officer." He was not, however, allowed the appointments of a commander-in-chief, and often complained of the inadequacy of his staff to the extent of his duties. Nelson naturally hoped that his long and eminent services in that particular field, and the conspicuous ability he had shown on so many occasions, would lead to the station remaining permanently in his hands, and that Lord Keith, who was now in England, would succeed in due course to the Channel Fleet, whose commander, Lord Bridport, soon after retired. The Mediterranean was naturally attributed to a vice-admiral, and one of some seniority; but Nelson was now a rear-admiral of the Red, the highest color, not far, therefore, from promotion, and it would not be an unreasonable conclusion that the same ministry which had been fortunate enough to choose him for the campaign of the Nile, might now prefer to entrust to such able and enterprising hands the great interests of the Mediterranean at large.

It was not, however, to be so. Whether moved only by routine considerations of rank, as afterwards at Copenhagen, or whether

his relations with the Sicilian Court, his conduct of affairs at Naples, and his collisions with Keith, had excited doubt of the normal balance of his mind, the Admiralty decided to send Keith back, and Nelson, greatly to his mortification, was kept in charge only till the end of the year. As St. Vincent had always left him practically independent, he had known no superior since he entered the Straits, except during Keith's brief period of succession, when leagues of sheltering distance left him free, as has been seen, to defy orders when not in accordance with his views; and he found it impossible now to bow his will to the second place on the very field of his glory. To this feeling, natural in any man, and doubly so to one of Nelson's quick susceptibilities, at once stimulated and soothed by the lavish adulation of the past year, was added personal dislike to his new superior, aggravated, if not originated, by the clash of judgment over the relative importance of Naples and Minorca. "I have serious thoughts of giving up active service," he wrote to Minto; "Greenwich Hospital seems a fit retreat for me after being *evidently* thought unfit to command in the Mediterranean." Complaints of Keith's lack of consideration then abound, nor does he seem to be conscious that there was anything in his mode of life, in current rumor, or in his past relations with his new commander-in-chief, which might make the latter unwilling to give him the loose rein St. Vincent had done.

From the time that Keith left the Mediterranean in July, 1799, to Nelson's own departure a year later, there was little to be

done in the naval way except to maintain and press existing advantages, and wait until the fruit was ready to drop. The absolute supremacy of the British squadrons, challenged for a moment by the incursion of Admiral Bruix, had reverted, in even greater degree than before, by the absence of the Spanish ships which had accompanied him to Brest. Impeded by their own numbers, and paralyzed by the insufficiency of the resources of the port, they remained there a huge, inert mass, whose impotence was only partially understood by the British; a fact which conduced to prolong Keith's presence in the Channel. The year under consideration was therefore devoid of stirring events at sea.

In the Mediterranean, it is true, Nelson's unwearying mental energy, and keen sense of the necessity of seizing opportunity, did not allow things to lapse into indolence. Whether or not he was well advised to settle himself at Palermo, aware as he must have been of the actual temptation, and of the serious injury that scandal was doing to his reputation, both professional and personal, may admit of doubt. With numerous detached and minor services carrying on at the same moment, there was much to be said for the commander-in-chief remaining in a fixed position, near the centre of affairs; and in his apprehension everything then revolved about the Kingdom of Naples. There can be no question, however, that all his faculties were constantly on the alert; and that his administration of the station until Keith's return was characterized by the same zeal, sagacity, and politic



tact that he had shown in earlier days. It is admirable to note the patience, courtesy, and adroit compliment, he brings into play, to kindle, in those over whom he has no direct control, the ardor for the general good, and the fearlessness of responsibility, which actuate himself; and at the same time to observe how severe the strain was upon his nervous and irritable temper, as betrayed in comments upon these very persons, made in private letters which he never expected would see the light.

The points of principal importance were the consolidation of the royal power in the continental territory of the Two Sicilies, the reduction of Malta, and the retention of the French army in Egypt in entire isolation from France. For the first, Nelson entirely failed in his efforts to induce the King to trust himself again in Naples, as the Hamiltons and he had expected when they came back to Palermo. "My situation here is indeed an uncomfortable one," he said to Earl Spencer; "for plain common sense points out that the King should return to Naples, but nothing can move him." "Our joint exertions have been used to get the King to go to Naples," he wrote to Troubridge, "but of no avail; the Austrians will be there before him." Although the French had been expelled from all the Neapolitan dominions, the presence of fifteen hundred in Rome and Civita Vecchia served then as an excuse. Nelson implored the commander of the British troops at Minorca to spare twelve hundred of his men, to aid Troubridge on the Roman coast. "Sir Charles Stuart," he tells him flatteringly, "by his timely exertion saved this Kingdom [Sicily]

from anarchy and confusion, and perhaps from rebellion. So it is now, my dear Sir, I trust, in your power (and I have assured the good King and Queen of your readiness to serve them and the good cause as much as Sir Charles) to send for the taking possession of Civita Vecchia and Rome; this done, and with my life, I will answer for the success of the expedition. All would be quiet and happy; and their Sicilian Majesties might return to their throne without any alarm from mobs.... I am sure I need not venture to say more on the subject. Your Excellency's judgment and heart will point out the necessity of the measure if it can be accomplished." "Our King would be much gratified that *Britain* not *Austria* should reinstate the Pope."

Sir James Erskine, thus importuned, did not see his way to sending the troops. Naturally, as a soldier, he did not rely as much upon the navy preventing a landing in his island, as upon his own powers of resistance after it was effected, and was therefore unwilling to spare from the latter. The point of view of a seaman was, and is, different. He complained, too, that Duckworth had taken a great many ships to Gibraltar. Nelson admits the mistake, and expresses his regret, but no word of dissatisfaction with Erskine transpires through his evident disappointment. He only says, "Pardon what I am going to repeat, that either in Malta or on the Continent, a field of glory is open." "Minorca," he wrote to Spencer, "I have never yet considered in the smallest danger, but it has been a misfortune that others have thought differently from me on that point." Towards the end of September, Troubridge,

without the aid of British troops, but supported by the arrival of a division sent by Suwarrow, reported the evacuation of Rome and Civita Vecchia. "How happy you have made us!" wrote Nelson to him. "My pen will not say what I feel." The King, however, would not return to Naples, now that this obstacle was withdrawn. "The Queen has a noble generous disposition," said Nelson two months later. "Unfortunately the King and her Majesty do not at this moment draw exactly the same way; therefore, his Majesty will not go at this moment to Naples, where his presence is much wanted." "We do but waste our breath," he avowed afterwards.

In the beginning of October, a visit which he had intended making to Minorca was hastened by a report that thirteen hostile ships-of-the-line had been seen off Cape Finisterre, and it was thought they might be destined for the Mediterranean. Nelson hoped to assemble ten to meet them; but the news proved to be false. He left Palermo for this trip on the 5th of October, and returned again on the 22d, having remained five days in Port Mahon. The arrangements for the naval force, depending entirely upon himself, were soon settled; but he was disappointed in obtaining, as he had hoped to do from a personal interview with Erskine, a detachment of two thousand troops for Malta. About that island he was, to use his own words, almost in despair. For over a year La Valetta had been blockaded by land and sea. For the latter he could with difficulty find ships; for the former he could obtain no men to aid the islanders, who, half starving, dependent for food chiefly upon Sicily, were sustained

in their resistance mainly by hatred of the invaders, and by the tactful appeals and encouragement of Captain Ball, who lived ashore among them. The Barbary pirates, by virtue of their war with Naples, captured many of the vessels laden with supplies, despite Nelson's passports; while the Sicilian Court, though well disposed, lacked the energy and the propelling force necessary to compel the collection and despatch of the needed grain. On one occasion Troubridge or Ball, desperate at the sight of the famine around them, sent a ship of war into Girgenti, a Sicilian port, seized, and brought away two corn-laden vessels. "The measure was strong," said Nelson, but he refrained from censuring; and, while apologizing to the Government, added he hoped it "would not again force officers to so unpleasant an alternative." He feared that in their misery the Maltese would abandon the struggle, particularly if they got wind of the purpose of Great Britain to restore the hated Order of Knights, in deference to the wishes of the Czar. "The moment the French flag is struck," he had been obliged to write to Ball, "the colours of the Order must be hoisted and no other; when it was settled otherwise, the orders from England were not so strong."

About this time came information that several ships were fitting out at Toulon, with supplies for the besieged. This increased Nelson's anxieties, and at the same time emphasized the necessity which he had always urged of using speedier and surer means to reduce the place, while the undisputed mastery of the sea gave the opportunity. "What might not Bruix have done,

had he done his duty?" was his own comment upon that recent incursion; and who could tell how soon as great a force might appear again under an abler man? He turned in every direction, and was instant in his appeals for aid. He wrote to Acton that he had positive information that seven ships were loaded in Toulon. "I therefore beg leave to propose to your Excellency, whether under our present circumstances, it would not be right for his Sicilian Majesty to desire that the English garrison at Messina should instantly go to Malta, for I am clear, that if Malta is relieved, that our forces got together could not take it, and the commencement of a new blockade would be useless. All the Barbary cruisers would there have their rendezvous, and not a vessel of his Sicilian Majesty's could put to sea." He exhorts the minister also to apply to the Russians for immediate help at Malta.

At the same time, to augment his embarrassments, orders came from Lisbon recalling the Portuguese squadron, which formed the larger part of the sea blockade. Nelson forgot how often he had abused them as useless, and grappled with that part of the difficulty with characteristic boldness. He peremptorily forbade the admiral to obey his orders. "As the reduction of the Island of Malta is of the greatest consequence to the interests of the allied Powers at war with France, and the withdrawing of the squadron under your command, at this time, from the blockade of that island, will be of the most ruinous consequences to their interests ... you are hereby required and directed, in

consideration of the above circumstances, and notwithstanding the orders you may have received from your Court to return to Lisbon, not on any consideration whatsoever to withdraw one man from that island, which may have been landed from the squadron under your Excellency's command, or detach one ship down the Mediterranean, until further orders from me for that purpose." Your orders, he tells Niza in a private letter, were founded upon the belief that your presence was no longer necessary; "but the contrary is the fact—for your services were never more wanted than at this moment, when every exertion is wanting to get more troops of English and Russians to Malta." He is evidently thinking of his difference with Keith; but now he is within the limits of his commission as Commander-in-chief. Doubting, however, whether his official authority will prevail with Niza to disobey his recall, he plies him skilfully with appeals to those sentiments of honor which had received such illustration in his own noble career. "If you quit your most important station till I can get" reliefs for you, "depend upon it, your illustrious Prince will disapprove of (in this instance) your punctilious execution of orders." "We shall soon get more troops from Messina and Minorca; and I am not a little anxious for the honour of Portugal and your Excellency, that you should be present at the surrender. I hold myself responsible." "You was the first at the blockade. Your Excellency's conduct has gained you the love and esteem of Governor Ball, all the British officers and men, and the whole Maltese people; and give me leave to

add the name of Nelson as one of your warmest admirers, as an officer and a friend."

As he dealt with the Portuguese admiral, so, in due measure, he conducted his intercourse with all others who came within the scope of his widely ranging activities. Already more Neapolitan than the King, to the Russian he became as a Russian, to the Turk as a Turk, all things to all men, if he could by any means promote the interest of the Allied cause and save Malta. Amid the diverse and conflicting motives of a coalition, Nelson played a steady hand, his attention unified, and his sight cleared, by an unwavering regard to the single object which he compressed into the words, "Down, down, with the French!" In that sense, he asserts truthfully enough to each and all of his correspondents that the advantage of their country and their monarch is as dear to him as that of Great Britain. He touches with artful skill upon the evident interests of each nation, appeals to the officer's sense of the cherished desires of his sovereign, and, while frankly setting forth the truths necessary to be spoken, as to the comparative claims upon himself of the various portions of the field, he insinuates, rather than suggests, what the person immediately addressed ought to be doing in furtherance of the one great aim. Withal, despite the uneasiness to which he is constantly a prey on account of the failures of others, no lack of confidence in the one to whom he is writing is suffered to appear. Each is not only exhorted and cheered, but patted on the back with an implied approbation, which in his own service constituted much

of his well-deserved influence. He is as hearty and generous in his praises to Sir Sidney Smith, whom he never fully trusted, for his services at Acre, as he is to the valued friend, and pattern of all naval efficiency, Troubridge. To the Emperor of Russia he paid the politic attention of sending a detailed report of all that had been done about Malta, made to him as Grand Master of the Order,—a delicate and adroit flattery at the moment, for the Czar then valued himself more as the restorer of an ancient order of chivalry than as the inheritor of a great Sovereignty; and his position was further recognized by asking of him the insignia of the Order for Captain Ball and Lady Hamilton.

This immense load of correspondence and anxiety was additional to the numerous unrecorded cares and interviews, relating to the routine work and maintenance of a great squadron, often left bare of resources from home, and to the support of the destitute population of Malta,—sixty thousand souls; and all was carried on amid the constant going and coming of the ambassador's house, kept open to naval officers and others. This public sort of life and excitement involved considerable expense, and was little to the taste of either Nelson or Hamilton, the latter of whom was now approaching his seventieth year; but in it Lady Hamilton was in all her glory, overwhelmed with compliments, the victor of the Nile at her feet, and "making a great figure in our political line," to use her husband's words. "Except to the Court," wrote Nelson, replying to a censure from the Admiralty for failing to send a letter by a certain channel, when he had



sent duplicates by two other conveyances,—“except to the Court, till after eight o'clock at night I never relax from business. I have had hitherto, the Board knows, no one emolument—no one advantage of a Commander-in-chief.” It was in reference to this captious rebuff, received when immersed in cares, that he wrote to Spencer: “Do not, my dear Lord, let the Admiralty write harshly to me—my generous soul cannot bear it, being conscious it is entirely unmerited.”

While he was striving to gain assistance for the Maltese, he does not forget to sustain them with hopes, not always too well founded. He tells Ball he trusts the Messina troops will soon be with him. “You may depend, in October, I will get 2,000 men on shore at Malta. Niza is ordered to Lisbon, but I have directed his stay off Malta.” He appeals personally to the British commander at Messina, and to the Russian minister at Palermo, reminding the latter how dear Malta and its Order were to his sovereign. “Malta, my dear Sir, is in my thoughts sleeping or waking.” The Portuguese, he tells him, are ordered home; but, wishing Russian assistance, he does not say that he has stopped them,—as to which, indeed, he could not feel sure.

The same object pressed upon him while in Port Mahon, and he succeeded, by his personal enthusiasm, in arousing Erskine's interest in the matter; but the latter was loaded to the muzzle with objections. “Sir James,” said Nelson to Troubridge, with the amusing professional prejudice they both entertained, “enters upon the difficulty of the undertaking in a true soldier way.”

"I am just come from Sir James," he wrote to Hamilton on the 13th of October. "He sees all the difficulty of taking Malta in the clearest point of views, and therefore it became an arduous task to make him think that with God's blessing the thing was possible." He has, however, consented to prepare fifteen hundred men with stores and equipments, but only on condition that the Russians will also give a thousand,—a further draft on Nelson's diplomacy,—and a thousand be landed from the squadron, etc. Besides, there is the further difficulty that a superior officer is expected from England, and what will he say? And will Erskine be justified in sending men before his entirely uncertain arrival? It may be imagined what such proceedings were to Nelson's nervous, ardent, unhesitating temperament, and they elicited the characteristic comment, "This has been my first conference. It has cost me four hours hard labour, and may be upset by a fool." "My heart is, I assure you, almost broke with this and other things," he wrote to Spencer. "If the enemy gets supplies in, we may bid adieu to Malta. This would complete my misery; for I am afraid I take all services too much to heart. The accomplishing of them is my study, night and day."

"My dear Sir James," he writes to Erskine after returning to Palermo, "I am in desperation about Malta—we shall lose it, I am afraid, past redemption. I send you copies of Niza's and Ball's letters, also General Acton's, so you will see I have not been idle." As it is, Ball can hardly keep the inhabitants in hope of relief; what then will it be if the Portuguese withdraw? "If

the islanders are forced again to join the French, we may not find even landing a very easy task, much less to get again our present advantageous position. I therefore entreat for the honour of our King, that whether General Fox is arrived or not, at least the garrison of Messina may be ordered to hold post in Malta until a sufficient force can be collected to attack it.... I know well enough of what officers in your situation can do; the delicacy of your feelings on the near approach of General Fox I can readily conceive; but the time you know nothing about; this is a great and important moment, and the only thing to be considered, *is his Majesty's service to stand still for an instant?* ... Was the call for these troops known at home, would they not order them to proceed when the service near at hand loudly calls for them? *this is the only thing in my opinion for consideration.* If we lose this opportunity it will be impossible to recall it." From this desperate appeal he turns to Ball, with words of encouragement for his islanders. "We shall soon hear to a certainty of at least 5,000 Russian troops for the service of Malta. Within a month I hope to see 10,000 men in arms against La Valetta. I have sent for Troubridge and Martin, that I may get a force to relieve Niza. I trust he will not go till I can get not only a proper force to relieve his ships, but those of his people who are on shore." "The great order of all," he writes Erskine three weeks later, "is to destroy the power of the French. Two regiments for two months would probably, with the assistance of the Russians, give us Malta, liberate us from an enemy close to our doors, gratify

the Emperor of Russia, protect our Levant trade, relieve a large squadron of ships from this service, and enable me the better to afford naval protection to the island of Minorca, and assist our allies on the northern coast of Italy, and to annoy the enemy on the coast of France."

Nelson's entreaties and efforts met with success, sufficient at least to stay the ebbing tide. General Fox arrived in Minorca, gave permission for the garrison of Messina to go to Malta, and on the 25th of November Troubridge, bringing this news, arrived off Palermo. Nelson's haste did not permit the "Culloden" to anchor. Shifting his flag to a transport, he sent out the "Foudroyant" to meet her, with orders for both to go to Messina, embark the garrison, and get off Malta as soon as possible. The "Northumberland," seventy-four, was also to join off Malta, forming a division to replace the Portuguese squadron. The latter quitted the blockade in December, Nelson notifying Niza on the 18th of the month that he no longer considered him under his command. The Messina troops landed at Malta on the 10th. The British then had fifteen hundred men on the island, supported by two thousand Maltese, well disciplined and armed, besides a number of native irregulars upon whom only partial dependence could be placed. The Russians never came to take part. They got as far as Messina, but there received orders to go to Corfu, both ships and men. This was in pursuance of a change of policy in the Czar, who, being enraged at the conduct of his allies, particularly of the Austrians, in the late campaign, intended

withdrawing from the Coalition, and was concentrating troops at Corfu. This revived Nelson's fears for Malta. "I trust Graham will not think of giving the island to the French by withdrawing, till he receives orders from General Fox." The troops remained, but in numbers too small to admit active operations. The result was left perforce to the slow pressure of blockade; and final success, insured mainly by Nelson's untiring efforts, was not attained until after he had left the Mediterranean.

The six months of his independent command, though unmarked by striking incidents at sea, were crowded with events, important in themselves, but far more important as pregnant of great and portentous changes in the political and military conditions of Europe. When Keith passed the Straits in pursuit of the Franco-Spanish fleet, on the 30th of July, the forces of the Coalition in Upper Italy were in the full tide of repeated victories and unchecked success. On that same day the fortress of Mantua, the siege of which in 1796 had stayed for nine months the triumphal progress of Bonaparte, was surrendered by the French, whose armies in the field, driven far to the westward, were maintaining a difficult position on the crests of the Apennines. Seeking to descend from there into the fields of Piedmont, they were met by Suwarrow, and on the 15th of August, at Novi, received once more a ruinous defeat, in which their commander-in-chief was slain.

At this moment of success, instead of pressing onward to drive the enemy out of Italy, and possibly to pursue him into France,

it was decided that the Russians should be sent across the Alps into Switzerland, to take the place of a number of Austrians. The latter, in turn, were to move farther north, on the lower Rhine, to favor by a diversion an intended invasion of Holland by a combined force of Russians and British. This gigantic flank movement and change of plan resulted most disastrously. In the midst of it the French general Masséna, commanding in Switzerland, the centre of the great hostile front which extended from the Mediterranean to the North Sea, made a vehement and sustained attack upon the Austro-Russians at Zurich, on the 25th of September. Gaining a complete victory, he drove the enemy back beyond the point where Suwarrow expected to make his junction. The veteran marshal, who had left Italy on the 11th of September, arrived two days after the Battle of Zurich was fought. Isolated in insufficient numbers from the friends he expected to meet, it was only after severe hardships and superhuman efforts, extending over ten days, that he at length, on the 9th of October, reached a place of safety at Ilanz. Declining further co-operation with the Austrians, and alleging the need of rest for his troops after their frightful exposure in the mountains, he withdrew into winter quarters in Bavaria at the end of the month. Thus Switzerland remained in possession of the French, inactivity continued in Italy, and the Czar, furious at the turn events had taken, was rapidly passing into hatred of both Austria and Great Britain.

On the 9th of October, also, Bonaparte landed in France,

after a six weeks' voyage from Alexandria. The immense consequences involved in this single event could not then be foreseen; but it none the less caused mortification and regret to Nelson. It was a cardinal principle with him, vehemently and frequently uttered, that not a single Frenchman should be allowed to return from Egypt; and here their commander-in-chief had passed successfully from end to end of the station, unseen by any British cruiser. He did not, however, consider himself at fault, and his judgment may be allowed, although in his own case. "If I could have had any cruisers, as was my plan, off Cape Bon, in Africa, and between Corsica and Toulon, Mr. Buonaparte could not probably have got to France." This he said to Earl Spencer. Elsewhere he wrote: "I have regretted sincerely the escape of Buonaparte; but those ships which were destined by me for the two places where he would certainly have been intercepted, were, from the Admiralty thinking, doubtless, that the Russians would do something at sea, obliged to be at Malta, and other services which I thought the Russian Admiral would have assisted me in—therefore, no blame lies at my door." He took some comfort in contrasting the stealthy return of the French general, with the great armada that accompanied his departure. "No Crusader ever returned with more humility—contrast his going in L'Orient, &c. &c."

A report that Bonaparte had passed Corsica reached Nelson on October 24th. The same day came despatches from Sir Sidney Smith, narrating a disastrous defeat sustained by the Turks on the

shores of Aboukir Bay. Smith's period of command in the Levant had been chiefly, and brilliantly, distinguished by the successful defence of Acre against Bonaparte. The latter, threatened by simultaneous attacks by the Turks from Syria and from the sea, had determined to anticipate such a combination by going himself against the enemy on the land side, before the weather conditions made it possible to disembark any formidable body of men on the shores of Egypt. Starting with this purpose in February, he had proceeded with slight resistance until the 18th of March, when his army appeared before Acre. Smith was then lying in the roads with two ships-of-the-line. The siege which ensued lasted for sixty-two days, so great was Bonaparte's pertinacity, and anxiety to possess the place; and in its course Smith displayed, not only courage and activity, which had never been doubted, but a degree of conduct and sound judgment that few expected of him. His division was fortunate enough to capture the French siege train, which had to be sent by water, and he very much disturbed the enemy's coastwise communications, besides contributing materially to the direction of the defence, to which the Turks, though brave enough, were not adequate. After several desperate assaults the siege was raised on the 20th of May, and Bonaparte retreated to Egypt, regaining Cairo on the 14th of June.

Following up the success at Acre, a Turkish fleet of thirteen ships-of-the-line anchored in Aboukir Bay on the 11th of July, attended by a body of transports carrying troops, variously



estimated at from ten to thirty thousand. Smith with his ships accompanied the expedition. The Turks landed, and stormed the castle of Aboukir; but on the 25th Bonaparte, having concentrated his forces rapidly, fell upon them and totally defeated them. All who had landed were either killed, driven into the sea and drowned, or taken prisoners; the commander-in-chief being among the latter. Four weeks later, as is already known, Bonaparte embarked for France.

It was thus conclusively demonstrated that for the present at least, and until the French numbers were further diminished by the inevitable losses of disease and battle, the Turks could not regain control of Egypt. On the other hand, it was equally evident, and was admitted by both Bonaparte and his able successor, Kleber, that without reinforcements, which could not be sent while the British controlled the sea, the end of the French occupation was only a question of time. After Bonaparte's departure, Kleber wrote home strongly to this effect. His letters, being addressed to the Government, fell upon arrival into Bonaparte's hands; but, with these convictions, he was ready to enter into an arrangement for the evacuation of the country, upon condition of being allowed to return freely to Europe.

Such also appears to have been the disposition of the British representatives in the East. Immediately after taking over the command in the Levant from Troubridge, Smith gave him, among other papers, a form of passport which he intended to use, permitting individual Frenchmen to go to Europe by sea.

This Troubridge handed to Nelson, telling him also that it was Smith's intention to send word into Alexandria, that all French ships might pass to France. This passport, adopted after Smith had been to Constantinople, had doubtless the sanction of the joint minister, his brother, and was signed by himself both as plenipotentiary and naval officer. Nelson had by this time been instructed that Smith was under his command, and he at once sent him an order, couched in the most explicit, positive, and peremptory terms, which merit especial attention because Smith disobeyed them. "*As this is in direct opposition to my opinion, which is, never to suffer any one individual Frenchman to quit Egypt—I must therefore strictly charge and command you,*<sup>1</sup> never to give any French ship or man leave to quit Egypt. And I must also desire that *you will oppose by every means in your power, any permission which may be attempted to be given by any foreigner, Admiral, General, or other person; and you will acquaint those persons, that I shall not pay the smallest attention to any such passport after your notification; and you are to put my orders in force, not on any pretence to permit a single Frenchman to leave Egypt.*" It seems clear from these expressions that Nelson had gathered, through Troubridge, that it was the policy of the Sultan and of the British representatives to get the French out of Egypt at any cost,—to look, in short, to local interests rather than to the general policy of the Allies. This he was determined to prevent by instructions so comprehensive, yet so precise, as to leave no

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<sup>1</sup> The italics to this point are Nelson's; afterwards the author's.

loophole for evasion.

Here matters seem to have rested for a time. Smith could scarcely dare to disregard such orders at once, and Bonaparte was not yet disposed openly to confess failure by seeking terms. In the autumn of 1799, however, the Earl of Elgin went to Constantinople as ambassador, Spencer Smith dropping to secretary of embassy, and his brother remaining on the Egyptian coast. Elgin was far from being in accord with Smith's general line of conduct, which was marked with presumption and self-sufficiency, and in the end he greatly deplored the terms "granted to the French, so far beyond our expectation;" but he shared the belief that to rid Egypt of the French was an end for which considerable sacrifices should be made, and his correspondence with Smith expressed this conviction. When prepossessions such as this exist among a number of men associated with one another, they are apt, as in the case of Admiral Man consulting with his captains, to result in some ill-advised step, bearing commonly the stamp of concern for local interests, and forgetfulness of general considerations. The upshot in this particular instance was the conclusion of a Convention, known as that of El Arish, between the Turks and the French, signed on board Smith's ship on the 24th of January, 1800, by which this army of veterans was to be permitted to return to France unmolested, and free at once to take the field against the allies of Turkey and Great Britain, at the moment when Bonaparte's unrivalled powers of administration were straining every nerve, to restore the French forces from the

disorganization into which they had fallen, and to prepare for the spring campaign.

Smith, though present, did not sign this precious paper, which, in a letter to Hamilton, he called "the gratifying termination of his labours;" but he had in his hand the orders of his immediate superior, and temporary commander-in-chief, to notify any "foreigner, general, or admiral," that the execution of such an agreement would not be permitted by the British Navy, and it would have been his own duty to stop any ships attempting to carry it out, until other orders were received. His powers as joint plenipotentiary having ceased, he was now simply the naval officer. As it happened, Keith, who by this time had relieved Nelson, brought out from England clear directions from the Government not to allow any transaction of this kind; and although he personally favored the policy of evacuation, feeling perhaps the inconvenience of detaching ships so far from his centre of operations, he was not a man to trifle with orders. Rumors of what was going on had evidently reached him, for on the 8th of January, a fortnight before the convention was signed, he wrote to Kleber a letter, which he directed Smith to deliver, thus placing it out of the power of that very independent officer to leave any mistake as to actual conditions in the mind of the French general. To the latter he said: "I have positive orders not to consent to any capitulation with the French troops, at least unless they lay down their arms, surrender themselves prisoners of war, and deliver up all the ships and stores of the port of

Alexandria to the Allied Powers." Even in such case they would not be allowed to leave Egypt until exchanged. Any persons that attempted to return, pursuant to an arrangement with one of the Allies, exclusive of the others, as the El-Arish Convention was, would be made prisoners of war.

Nelson's opinions in this matter had never wavered. As rumors of what was brewing got about, he wrote to the Earl of Elgin, on the 21st of December, 1800: "I own my hope yet is, that the Sublime Porte will never permit a single Frenchman to quit Egypt; and I own myself wicked enough to wish them all to die in that country they chose to invade. We have scoundrels of French enough in Europe without them." "I never would consent to one of them returning to the Continent of Europe during the war," he tells Spencer Smith. "I wish them to *perish* in Egypt, and give a great lesson to the world of the justice of the Almighty." When Elgin, thinking him still commander-in-chief, sent him the Convention, he replied formally: "I shall forward the papers to Lord Keith, who will answer your Excellency. But I cannot help most sincerely regretting that ever any countenance was given to the Turks to enter into such a treaty with the French; for I ever held it to be impossible to permit that army to return to Europe, but as prisoners of war, and in that case, not to France. And was I commander-in-chief, even when the thing was done, I should have refused to ratify any consent or approbation of Sir Sidney Smith, and have wrote to both the Grand Vizir and the French General, the impossibility of permitting a vanquished army to

be placed by one Ally in a position to attack another Ally." The last phrase put the facts in a nutshell, and illustrates well Nelson's power of going straight to the root of a matter, disregarding of confusing side-issues, of policy or timidity. To Hamilton he wrote passionately concerning the manifold difficulties caused to all, except the Turks and the Smiths. "If all the wise heads had left them to God Almighty, after the bridge was broke, all would have ended well. For I differ entirely with my commander-in-chief, in wishing they were permitted to return to France; and, likewise, with Lord Elgin on the great importance of removing them from Egypt."

"I have wrote to Lord Keith, and home," said Nelson to Sir Sidney Smith on the 15th of January, "that I did not give credit that it was possible for you to give any passport for a single Frenchman, much less the Army, after my positive order of March 18th, 1799." The words show what reports had already got about of the general trend of policy, on the part of the Porte and the British representatives; but the irony of the matter as regards Nelson is, that Smith disobeyed his orders, as he himself, six months before, had disobeyed Keith's; and for the same reason, that he on the spot was a better judge of local conditions and recent developments than one at a distance. To one, Naples was more important than Minorca, more important than a half-dozen ships in a possible fleet action; to the other, Egypt was more important than the presence of sixteen thousand veterans, more or less, on a European battle-field. It is impossible and

bootless, to weigh the comparative degree of culpability involved in breaches of orders which cannot be justified. It is perhaps safe to say that while a subordinate has necessarily a large amount of discretion in the particular matter intrusted to him, the burden of proof rests wholly upon him when he presumes to depart from orders affecting the general field of war, which is the attribute of the commander-in-chief. What in the former case may be simply an error of judgment, in the latter becomes a military crime.

On the 16th of January, 1800, Nelson, who some days before had been notified by Keith of his approach, and directed to place himself under his command, left Palermo for Leghorn, arriving on the 20th. The commander-in-chief was already there in the "Queen Charlotte." On the 25th they sailed together for Palermo, and after nine days' stay in that port went on again for Malta, which they reached on the 15th of February. No incident of particular interest occurred during these three weeks, but Nelson's letters to the Hamiltons show that he was chafing under any act in his superior which could be construed into a slight. "I feel all, and notwithstanding my desire to be as humble as the lowest midshipman, perhaps, I cannot submit to be much lower, I am used to have attention paid me from his superiors." "To say how I miss your house and company would be saying little; but in truth you and Sir William have so spoiled me, that I am not happy anywhere else but with you, nor have I an idea that I ever can be." Keith's comment—the other point of view—is worth quoting. "Anything absurd coming from the quarter you

mention does not surprise me," he wrote to Paget, who succeeded Hamilton as minister. "The whole was a scene of fulsome vanity and absurdity all the *long* eight days I was at Palermo."<sup>2</sup>

When Keith returned, the capture of Malta, and of the two ships-of-the-line which had escaped from the Battle of the Nile, were, by common consent, all that remained to do, in order to round off and bring to a triumphant conclusion Nelson's Mediterranean career. Fortune strove hard against his own weakness to add all these jewels to his crown, but she strove in vain. "We may truly call him a *heaven*-born Admiral, upon whom fortune smiles wherever he goes." So wrote Ball to Lady Hamilton, alluding to the first of the favors flung at his head. "We have been carrying on the blockade of Malta sixteen months, during which time the enemy never attempted to throw in great succours. His Lordship arrived off here the day they were within a few leagues of the island, captured the principal ships, and dispersed the rest, so that not one has reached the port." It was indeed a marvellous piece of what men call luck. Nelson had never gone near Malta since October, 1798, till Keith took him there on the 15th of February, 1800. The division had no sooner arrived at the island, than a frigate brought word of a French squadron having been seen off the west end of Sicily. It was then blowing strong from southeast, and raining. Keith took his own station off the mouth of the harbor, placed other ships where he thought best, and signalled Nelson to chase to windward

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<sup>2</sup> The Paget Papers, London, 1896, vol. i. p. 200.



with three ships-of-the-line, which were afterwards joined by a fourth, then cruising on the southeast of the island. The next day the wind shifted to northwest, but it was not until the morning of the 18th that the enemy were discovered. Guns were then heard to the northward, by those on board the "Foudroyant," which made all sail in pursuit, and soon sighted the "Alexander" chasing four French sail. "Pray God we may get alongside of them," wrote Nelson in his journal; "the event I leave to Providence. I think if I can take one 74 by myself, I would retire, and give the staff to more able hands." "I feel anxious to get up with these ships," he wrote to Lady Hamilton, "and shall be unhappy not to take them myself, for first my greatest happiness is to serve my gracious King and Country, and I am envious only of glory; for if it be a sin to covet glory, I am the most offending soul alive. *But here I am* in a heavy sea and thick fog—Oh, God! the wind subsided—but I trust to Providence I shall have them. 18th in the evening, I have got her—Le Généreux—thank God! 12 out of 13, only the Guillaume Telle remaining; I am after the others." The enemy's division had consisted of this seventy-four, a large transport, also captured, and three corvettes which escaped.

An account of Nelson on the quarter-deck on this occasion has been transmitted by an eye-witness, whose recollections, committed to paper nearly forty years later, are in many points evidently faulty, but in the present instance reflect a frame of mind in the great admiral in perfect keeping with the words last quoted from his own letter. The writer was then a midshipman

of the "Foudroyant;" and the scene as described opens with a hail from a lieutenant at the masthead, with his telescope on the chase.

"Deck there! the stranger is evidently a man of war—she is a line-of-battle-ship, my lord, and going large on the starboard tack.'

"Ah! an enemy, Mr. Stains. I pray God it may be Le Généreux. The signal for a general chase, Sir Ed'ard, (the Nelsonian pronunciation of Edward,) make the Foudroyant fly!'

"Thus spoke the heroic Nelson; and every exertion that emulation could inspire was used to crowd the squadron with canvas, the Northumberland taking the lead, with the flag-ship close on her quarter.

"This will not do, Sir Ed'ard; it is certainly Le Généreux, and to my flag-ship she can alone surrender. Sir Ed'ard, we must and shall beat the Northumberland.'

"I will do the utmost, my lord; get the engine to work on the sails—hang butts of water to the stays—pipe the hammocks down, and each man place shot in them—slack the stays, knock up the wedges, and give the masts play—start off the water, Mr. James, and pump the ship.' The Foudroyant is drawing a-head, and at last takes the lead in the chase. 'The admiral is working his fin, (the stump of his right arm,) do not cross his hawse, I advise you.'

"The advice was good, for at that moment Nelson opened furiously on the quarter-master at the conn. 'I'll knock you off

your perch, you rascal, if you are so inattentive.—Sir Ed'ard, send your best quarter-master to the weather wheel.'

"A strange sail a-head of the chase!" called the look-out man.

"Youngster, to the mast-head. What! going without your glass, and be d-d to you? Let me know what she is immediately.'

"A sloop of war, or frigate, my lord," shouted the young signal-midshipman.

"Demand her number.'

"The Success, my lord.'

"Captain Peard; signal to cut off the flying enemy—great odds, though—thirty-two small guns to eighty large ones.'

"The Success has hove-to athwart-hawse of the *Généreux*, and is firing her larboard broadside. The Frenchman has hoisted his tri-colour, with a rear-admiral's flag.'

"Bravo—Success, at her again!"

"She has wore round, my lord, and firing her starboard broadside. It has winged her, my lord—her flying kites are flying away all together.' The enemy is close on the Success, who must receive her tremendous broadside. The *Généreux* opens her fire on her little enemy, and every person stands aghast, afraid of the consequences. The smoke clears away, and there is the Success, crippled, it is true, but, bull-dog like, bearing up after the enemy.

"The signal for the Success to discontinue the action, and come under my stern,' said Lord Nelson; 'she has done well, for her size. Try a shot from the lower-deck at her, Sir Ed'ard.'

"It goes over her.'

"Beat to quarters, and fire coolly and deliberately at her masts and yards.'

"Le Généreux at this moment opened her fire on us; and, as a shot passed through the mizen stay-sail, Lord Nelson, patting one of the youngsters on the head, asked him jocularly how he relished the music; and observing something like alarm depicted on his countenance, consoled him with the information, that Charles XII. ran away from the first shot he heard, though afterwards he was called 'The Great,' and deservedly, from his bravery. 'I, therefore,' said Lord Nelson, 'hope much from you in future.'

"Here the Northumberland opened her fire, and down came the tri-colored ensign, amidst the thunder of our united cannon."<sup>3</sup>

According to Keith, Nelson "on this occasion, as on all others, conducted himself with skill, and great address, in comprehending my signals, which the state of the weather led me greatly to suspect." Nelson's account to Hamilton was, "By leaving my admiral without signal, for which *I may be broke*, I took these French villains." "I have wrote to Lord Spencer," he tells his eldest brother, "and have sent him my journal, to show that the Généreux was taken by me, and my plan—that my quitting Lord Keith was at my own risk, and for which, if I

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<sup>3</sup> Nelsonian Reminiscences, by Lieutenant G.S. Parsons. The author has been able to test Parsons' stories sufficiently to assure himself that they cannot be quoted to establish historical fact; but such scenes as here given, or how many glasses of wine Nelson drank at dinner, or that the writer himself was out of clean shirts, when asked to dine at the admiral's table, are trivialities which memory retains.

had not succeeded, I might have been broke. The way he went, the *Généreux* never could have been taken." In a letter to Lord Minto he attributed his success to his knowledge of all the local conditions, acquired by seven years' experience. In his anxiety to make this instance prove his case, in the previous disobedience to Keith, for which the Admiralty had censured him, Nelson overreached himself and certainly fell into an ungenerous action. His vaunt of success by the road of disobedience rested only on the fact that he had failed to see Keith's signal. This the latter did not know, and evidently considered he had complied with its spirit. The signal to chase to windward was not strained to disobedience in being construed to search a fairly wide area for the enemy, keeping the rendezvous, which was also the enemy's destination, to leeward, so as to be readily regained. The "*Queen Charlotte*," Keith's flagship, covered the inner line, and, being a first-rate, was competent to handle any force that could come out of Toulon. There is a good deal of human nature in this captious unofficial attack on a superior, whose chief fault, as towards himself, was that he had been the victim of disobedience; but it is not pleasant to see in a man so truly great.

The "*Généreux*" carried the flag of a rear-admiral, who was killed in the action. Nelson seized the opportunity of further conciliating the Czar, by sending the sword of this officer to him, as Grand Master of the Order of Malta. Upon rejoining Keith, he reported in person, as custom demands. "Lord Keith received my account and myself like a philosopher (but very unlike you),"

he wrote to Hamilton; "it did not, that I could perceive, cause a pleasing muscle in his face." "Had you seen the Peer receive me," he wrote to Lady Hamilton the same day, "I know not what you would have done; but I can guess. But never mind. I told him that I had made a vow, if I took the *Généreux* by myself, it was my intention to strike my flag. To which he made no answer." What could he very well say, if a man chose to throw away his chances, especially when that man was a subordinate who a short time before had flatly refused to obey his orders. Soreness and testiness had full swing in Nelson at this time; at some fancied neglect, he wrote Troubridge a letter which reduced that gallant officer to tears.

Between Palermo and Malta Keith had received letters from General Mélas, commanding the Austrian army in Piedmont, giving the plan of the approaching campaign, in which, as the Austrians were to besiege Genoa, and advance to the Riviera, much depended upon naval co-operation. Rightly judging that to be the quarter calling for the naval commander-in-chief, he was anxious to get away. On the 24th of February he issued an order to Nelson to take charge of the blockade, and "to adopt and prosecute the necessary measures for contributing to the complete reduction of Malta." Short of the chief command, which he coveted and grudged, Nelson himself could not have contrived a position better fitted to crown his work in the Mediterranean. Within the harbor of La Valetta, concentrating there the two objects that yet remained to be attained,— Valetta

itself being one,—was the "Guillaume Tell," the thirteenth ship, which alone was lacking now to complete the tale of the trophies of the Nile. Yet the fair prospect of success, inevitable since the capture of the "Généreux" had destroyed the French hopes of relief, brought to Nelson nothing but dismay. "My Lord," he replied the same day, "my state of health is such, that it is impossible I can much longer remain here. Without some rest, I am gone. I must, therefore, whenever I find the service will admit of it, request your permission to go to my friends, at Palermo, for a few weeks, and leave the command here to Commodore Troubridge. Nothing but absolute necessity obliges me to write this letter." "I could no more stay fourteen days longer here, than fourteen years," he said in a private letter to Keith of the same date.

By the next day he had recognized that even he could not leave at once the task appointed him, without discredit. "My situation," he then wrote to Hamilton, "is to me very irksome, but how at this moment to get rid of it is a great difficulty. The French ships here ["Guillaume Tell" and others] are preparing for sea; the Brest fleet, Lord Keith says, may be daily expected, and with all this I am very unwell.... The first moment which offers with credit to myself I shall assuredly give you my company. ... Lord Keith is commander-in-chief, and I have not been kindly treated." His tried friends, Troubridge and Ball, realized the false step he was about to take, but they could not change his purpose. "Remember, my Lord," wrote the former, "the prospects are

rather good at present of reducing this place, and that William Tell, Diane,<sup>4</sup> and Justice,<sup>5</sup> are the only three ships left from the Nile fleet. I beseech you hear the entreaties of a sincere friend, and do not go to Sicily for the present. Cruizing may be unpleasant. Leave the Foudroyant outside, and hoist your flag in the Culloden, to carry on operations with the General. Everything shall be done to make it comfortable and pleasing to you: a month will do all. If you comply with my request, I shall be happy, as I shall then be convinced I have not forfeited your friendship." "I dined with his Lordship yesterday, who is apparently in good health," wrote Ball to Lady Hamilton, "but he complains of indisposition and the necessity of repose. I do not think a short stay here will hurt his health, particularly as his ship is at anchor, and his mind not harassed. Troubridge and I are extremely anxious that the French ships, and the French garrison of La Valetta, shall surrender to him. I would not urge it if I were not convinced that it will ultimately add both to his honour and happiness."

The fear of his friends that he would lose honor, by not resisting inclination, is evident—undisguised; but they could not prevail. On the 4th of March he wrote to Lady Hamilton: "My health is in such a state, and to say the truth, an uneasy mind at being taught my lesson like a school boy, that my

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<sup>4</sup> The title of Bronté was assumed in Sicily only, until he received the consent of George III. to accept it.

<sup>5</sup> Frigates.



DETERMINATION is made to leave Malta on the 15th morning of this month, on the first moment after the wind comes favourable; unless I am SURE that I shall get hold of the French ships." Keith's directions had been full and explicit on details, and this Nelson seems to have resented. Among the particular orders was one that Palermo, being so distant from Malta, should be discontinued as the rendezvous, and Syracuse substituted for it; Nelson was, however, at liberty to use Messina or Augusta, both also on the west coast of Sicily, if he preferred. It will be remembered that Nelson himself, before he fell under the influence of Naples, had expressed his intention to make Syracuse the base of his operations. Coming as this change did, as one of the first acts of a new commander-in-chief, coinciding with his own former judgment, it readily took the color of an implied censure upon his prolonged stay at Palermo—an echo of the increasing scandal that attended it.

On the 10th of March he left Malta for Palermo in the "Foudroyant," sending the ship back, however, to take her place in the blockade, and hoisting his own flag on board a transport. His mind was now rapidly turning towards a final retirement from the station, a decision which was accelerated by the capture of the "Guillaume Tell." This eighty-gun ship started on the night of March 29th to run out from La Valetta, to relieve the famished garrison from feeding the twelve hundred men she carried. Fortunately, the "Foudroyant" had resumed her station off the island; and it was a singular illustration of the good fortune

of the "heaven-born" admiral, to repeat Ball's expression, that she arrived barely in time, only a few hours before the event, her absence from which might have resulted in the escape of the enemy, and a just censure upon Nelson. The French ship was sighted first by a frigate, the "Penelope," Captain Blackwood, which hung gallantly upon her quarters, as Nelson in former days had dogged the "Ça Ira" with the "Agamemnon," until the heavier ships could gather round the quarry. The "Guillaume Tell," necessarily intent only on escape from overpowering numbers, could not turn aside to crush the small antagonist, which one of her broadsides might have swept out of existence; yet even so, the frigate decided the issue, for she shot away the main and mizzen topmasts of the French vessel, permitting the remainder of the British to come up. No ship was ever more gallantly fought than the "Guillaume Tell;" the scene would have been well worthy even of Nelson's presence. More could not be said, but Nelson was not there. She had shaken off the "Penelope" and the "Lion," sixty-four, when the "Foudroyant" drew up at six in the morning. "At half-past six," says the latter's log, "shot away the [French] main and mizen-masts: saw a man nail the French ensign to the stump of the mizen-mast. Five minutes past eight, shot away the enemy's foremast. Ten minutes past eight, all her masts being gone by the board, the enemy struck his colours, and ceased firing." The last of the fleet in Aboukir Bay had surrendered to Nelson's ship, but not to Nelson's flag.

"I am sensible," he wrote from Palermo to Sir Edward Berry,

the captain of the "Foudroyant," "of your kindness in wishing my presence at the finish of the Egyptian fleet, but I have no cause for sorrow. The thing could not be better done, and I would not for all the world rob you of one particle of your well-earned laurels." In the matter of glory Nelson might well yield much to another, nor miss what he gave; but there is a fitness in things, and it was not fitting that the commander of the division should have been away from his post when such an event was likely to happen. "My task is done, my health is lost, and the orders of the great Earl St. Vincent are completely fulfilled." "I have wrote to Lord Keith," he tells Spencer, "for permission to return to England, when you will see a broken-hearted man. My spirit cannot submit patiently." But by this time, if the forbearance of the First Lord was not exhausted, his patience very nearly was, and a letter had already been sent, which, while couched in terms of delicate consideration, nevertheless betrayed the profound disappointment that had succeeded to admiration for services so eminent, and for a spirit once so indomitable: "To your letter of the 20th of March, all I shall say is, to express my extreme regret that your health should be such as to oblige you to quit your station off Malta, at a time when I should suppose there must be the finest prospect of its reduction. I should be very sorry that you did not accomplish that business in person, as the Guillaume Tell is your due, and that ship ought not to strike to any other. If the enemy should come into the Mediterranean, and whenever they do, it will be suddenly, I should be much concerned to hear

that you learnt of their arrival in that sea, either on shore or in a transport at Palermo."

A nearer approach to censure was soon to follow. On the 9th of May, apparently before Nelson's application for leave to return to England had been received, the Admiralty sent orders to Keith, that if his health rendered him incapable of doing his duty, he was to be permitted to return home by sea when opportunity offered, or by land if he preferred. Earl Spencer wrote him at the same time a private letter, in which disapprobation was too thinly masked by carefully chosen words to escape attention: "It is by no means my wish or intention to call you away from service, but having observed that you have been under the necessity of quitting your station off Malta, on account of your health, which I am persuaded you could not have thought of doing without such necessity, it appeared to me much more advisable for you to come home at once, than to be obliged to remain inactive at Palermo, while active service was going on in other parts of the station. I should still much prefer your remaining to complete the reduction of Malta, which I flatter myself cannot be very far distant, and I still look with anxious expectation to the Guillaume Tell striking to your flag. But if, unfortunately, these agreeable events are to be prevented, by your having too much exhausted yourself in the service to be equal to follow them up, I am quite clear, and I believe I am joined in opinion by all your friends here, that you will be more likely to recover your health and strength in England than in an inactive situation at a Foreign Court, however

pleasing the respect and gratitude shown to you for your services may be, and no testimonies of respect and gratitude from that Court to you can be, I am convinced, too great for the very essential services you have rendered it. I trust that you will take in good part what I have taken the liberty to write to you as a friend."

Both these letters reached Nelson in June, at Leghorn, on his way home. The underlying censure did not escape him,—"your two letters gave me much pain," he replied,—but he showed no traces of self-condemnation, or of regret for the past. Lord Minto, who was now ambassador at Vienna, wrote thence in March of this year, before the question of going home was decided: "I have letters from Nelson and Lady Hamilton. It does not seem clear whether he will go home. I hope he will not for his own sake, and he will at least, I hope, take Malta first. He does not seem at all conscious of the sort of discredit he has fallen into, or the cause of it, for he still writes, not wisely, about Lady H. and all that. But it is hard to condemn and use ill a hero, as he is in his own element, for being foolish about a woman who has art enough to make fools of many wiser than an admiral." Many years later, immediately after the parting which he did not then know was the last, Minto said of him, "He is in many points a really great man, in others a baby." Nelson himself, conscious of the diligence which he had used in the administration of his wide command and its varied interests, put out of court all other considerations of propriety. "I trust you and all my friends will

believe," he told Spencer, "that mine cannot be an inactive life, although it may not carry all the outward parade of *much ado about nothing*."

Had the Hamiltons remained in Palermo, Nelson would have been forced to a choice between leaving her and the Mediterranean, or yielding a submission to orders which to the last he never gave, when fairly out of signal distance. But the Foreign Office had decided that Sir William should not return after the leave for which he had applied; and in the beginning of March it was known at Palermo that his successor had been appointed. This Nelson also learned, at the latest, when he came back there on the 16th. To one correspondent he wrote, on the 28th, "Most probably my health will force me to retire in April, for I am worn out with fatigue of body and mind," and his application was sent in on the 6th of the latter month, after news of the "Guillaume Tell's" capture. On the 22d Hamilton presented his letters of recall, and on the 24th he and Lady Hamilton, with a party, embarked on board the "Foudroyant" for a trip to Syracuse and Malta, from which they all returned to Palermo on the first of June. Against this renewed departure Troubridge again remonstrated, in words which showed that he and others saw, in Nelson's determination to abandon the field, the results of infatuation rather than of illness. "Your friends, my Lord, absolutely, as far as they dare, insist on your staying to sign the capitulation. Be on your guard." Keith also wrote him in generous and unexceptionable terms: "I am very sorry, my dear

Nelson, for the contents of your letter, and I hope you will not be obliged to go: strictly speaking, I ought to write to the Admiralty before I let a flag-officer go off the station; particularly as I am directed to send you, if you like it, to Egypt; but when a man's health is concerned, there is an end of all, and I will send you the first frigate I can lay hold of."

**CHAPTER XV.  
NELSON LEAVES THE  
MEDITERRANEAN.—THE  
JOURNEY OVERLAND THROUGH  
GERMANY.—ARRIVAL IN  
ENGLAND.—SEPARATION FROM  
LADY NELSON.—HOISTS HIS  
FLAG IN THE CHANNEL FLEET,  
UNDER LORD ST. VINCENT**

**JUNE, 1800—JANUARY, 1801. AGE, 42**

At the time Nelson and the Hamiltons returned to Palermo, the Queen of Naples was wishing, for political reasons, to visit Vienna. To meet this wish Nelson took the "Foudroyant" and "Alexander" off the blockade of Malta, that they might carry herself and suite to Leghorn, together with the Hamiltons. He clung also to the hope that Keith would give him his powerful flagship to return to England, in which case the Hamiltons would



go with him. "I go with our dear friends Sir William and Lady Hamilton," he wrote to Lord Minto; "but whether by water or land depends on the will of Lord Keith. May all orders be as punctually obeyed," alluding to the completion of the destruction of the Nile fleet by the capture of the "Guillaume Tell," "but never again an officer at the close of what I must, without being thought vain (for such I am represented by enemies), call a glorious career, be so treated!"

Keith's opinion of Nelson's obedience was probably somewhat different. The latter had written him on the 12th of May, that, being under an old promise to carry the Queen to the Continent, he proposed to take the two ships-of-the-line for that purpose, and Keith sent him a letter forbidding him to do so, and directing them to be sent back at once to Malta. Nelson, it is true, did not receive this; but it is impossible to reconcile with attention to orders the diversion of two ships of their force from the singularly important station appointed them by the commander-in-chief, without reference to him, and using them to carry about foreign sovereigns. On arriving in Leghorn, on the 14th of June, Nelson announced the fact to Keith, with apparent perfect unconsciousness that the latter could be other than charmed. "I was obliged to bring the Alexander, or the party never could have been accommodated: I therefore trust you will approve of it." "I was so displeased by the withdrawing of the ships from before Malta," wrote Keith to Paget, "and with other proceedings, that her Majesty did not take any notice of me latterly." It would

seem also that some harm had come of it. "What a clamour, too, letting in the ships to Malta will occasion. I assure you nothing has given me more real concern, it was so near exhausted." "Had not Nelson quitted the blockade," he wrote a week later, "and taken the ships off the station, it might have fallen about this time."<sup>6</sup>

Lord Keith had been engaged for six weeks past in the famous blockade and siege of Genoa, the garrison of which, spent with famine and disease, marched out on the 5th of June, 1800. On the 14th—the day Nelson reached Leghorn—was fought the Battle of Marengo, in which the Austrians were totally defeated, the French army under Bonaparte remaining victorious across their line of retreat to Mantua. The next day Mélas signed a convention, abandoning Northern Italy, as far as the Mincio, to the French, to whom were given up all the fortified places, Genoa included. At midnight of June 18, Nelson received an order from Keith to take all the ships at Leghorn to Spezia, for certain minor military purposes. Nelson sent the "Alexander" and a frigate, but remained himself in Leghorn with the "Foudroyant," ready, he wrote the admiral, "to receive the queen and royal family, should such an event be necessary." Keith rejoined with a peremptory order that no ships-of-the-line should be used for such purpose; the Queen, he said, had better get to Vienna as fast as she could, and not think of going back to Palermo. "If the French fleet gets the start of ours a day, Sicily cannot hold out even that one day."

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<sup>6</sup> The Paget Papers, vol. i. pp. 253, 257.

"Lord Keith," commented Nelson, "believes reports of the Brest fleet, which I give not the smallest credit to." "I own I do not believe the Brest fleet will return to sea," he told Keith; "and if they do, the Lord have mercy on them, for our fleet will not, I am sure." It was not the least of his conspicuous merits that he was blind to imaginative or exaggerated alarms. Keith saw too vividly all that might happen in consequence of recent reverses—much more than could happen.

On the 24th of June the latter reached Leghorn in person. "I must go to Leghorn," he complained, "to land the fugitives, and to be bored by Lord Nelson for permission to take the Queen to Palermo, and princes and princesses to all parts of the globe." The Queen was in a panic, and besought him with tears to give her the "Foudroyant," but Keith was obdurate. "Mr. Wyndham<sup>7</sup> arrived here yesterday from Florence," wrote Lady Minto on the 6th of July to her sister. "He left the Queen of Naples, Sir William and Lady Hamilton, and Nelson, at Leghorn. The Queen has given up all thoughts of coming here. She asked Lord Keith in her own proper person for the Foudroyant to take her back. He refused positively giving her such a ship. The Queen wept, concluding that royal tears were irresistible; but he remained unmoved, and would grant nothing but a frigate to convoy her own frigates<sup>8</sup> to Trieste. He told her Lady Hamilton had had

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<sup>7</sup> British minister to Tuscany.

<sup>8</sup> There were some Neapolitan frigates in Leghorn, but the royal family were never willing to trust them.

command of the fleet long enough. The Queen is very ill with a sort of convulsive fit, and Nelson is staying there to nurse her; he does not intend going home till he has escorted her back to Palermo. His zeal for the public service seems entirely lost in his love and vanity, and they all sit and flatter each other all day long." It is only fair to say that there are indications, in the correspondence, of bad terms between the Hamiltons and Wyndham, who, therefore, was probably not a sympathetic observer. He had also before this written unpleasantly to Nelson, insinuating, apparently, a lack of attention to duty; for the latter in a letter to Troubridge says, "I send you an extract of Mr. Wyndham's unhandsome mode of expressing himself towards me." Towards Keith her Majesty manifested her displeasure by omitting him in the public leave she took of all the officials.

The Queen finally resolved to continue her journey, but the victories of the French introduced into the political future an element of uncertainty, which caused her to delay a month in Leghorn, undecided whether to go by sea or land; and Nelson had vowed not to forsake her. Keith, after some days, relented so far as to authorize the "Alexander" taking the royal family to Trieste, but many of the party were averse to the sea voyage. There had been for some time living with the Hamiltons a Miss Knight, an English lady already in middle life, whose journal gives the chief particulars that have been preserved of this period. "The Queen," she wrote, "wishes, if possible, to prosecute her journey. Lady Hamilton cannot bear the thought of going by sea; and therefore

nothing but impracticability will prevent our going to Vienna." When it was at last fixed, after many vacillations, that they should go to Ancona, and there take small Austrian vessels for Trieste, she exclaims, "to avoid the danger of being on board an English man-of-war, where everything is commodious, and equally well arranged for defence and comfort! But the die is cast, and go we must." She mentions that Lord Nelson was well, and kept up his spirits amazingly, but Sir William appeared broken, distressed, and harassed.

On the 11th the travellers started for Florence, passing within two miles of the French advanced posts. At Ancona they embarked on board some Russian frigates, and in them reached Trieste safely on the 2d of August. Nelson was received with acclamations in all the towns of the Pope's states. A party in which were not only the queen of a reigning sovereign, but an English minister and his wife, was sure of receiving attention wherever it passed or stopped; but in the present case it was the naval officer who carried off the lion's share of homage, so widely had his fame spread throughout the Continent. At Trieste, says Miss Knight, "he is followed by thousands when he goes out, and for the illumination which is to take place this evening, there are many *Viva Nelsons* prepared."

The same enthusiasm was shown at Vienna, where they arrived on the 21st or 22d of August. "You can have no notion of the anxiety and curiosity to see him," wrote Lady Minto.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Life of Lord Minto, vol. iii. pp. 147-150.

"The door of his house is always crowded with people, and even the street when his carriage is at the door; and when he went to the play he was applauded, a thing which rarely happens here." "Whenever he appeared in public," records Miss Knight, "a crowd was collected, and his portrait was hung up as a sign over many shops—even the milliners giving his name to particular dresses, but it did not appear to me that the English nation was at all popular." At a dinner at Prince Esterhazy's, where he spent some days, his health was drunk with a flourish of trumpets and firing of cannon. "I don't think him altered in the least," continued Lady Minto, who remembered him from the old days in Corsica. "He has the same shock head and the same honest simple manners; but he is devoted to *Emma*, he thinks her quite an *angel*, and talks of her as such to her face and behind her back, and she leads him about like a keeper with a bear. She must sit by him at dinner to cut his meat, and he carries her pocket-handkerchief. He is a gig from ribands, orders and stars, but he is just the same with us as ever he was;" and she mentions his outspoken gratitude to Minto for the substantial service he had done him, and the guidance he had imparted to his political thought,—an acknowledgment he frequently renewed up to the last days of his life.

Lady Minto's nephew, Lord Fitzharris, the son of the Earl of Malmesbury, was then in Vienna, apparently as an attaché. He speaks in the same way of Nelson himself, but with less forbearance for Lady Hamilton; and he confirms the impression

that Nelson at this time had lost interest in the service. Writing to his father, he says: "Nelson personally is not changed; open and honest, not the least vanity about him. He looks very well, but seems to be in no hurry to sail again. He told me he had no thoughts of serving again." "Lord Nelson and the Hamiltons dined here the other day; it is really disgusting to see her with him." A few days later there was a ball at Prince Esterhazy's, where Fitzharris was present. "Lady Hamilton is without exception the most coarse, ill-mannered, disagreeable woman I ever met with. The Princess had with great kindness got a number of musicians, and the famous Haydn, who is in their service, to play, knowing Lady Hamilton was fond of music. Instead of attending to them she sat down to the Faro table, played Nelson's cards for him, and won between £300 and £400. In short, I could not disguise my feeling, and joined in the general abuse of her."<sup>10</sup> The impression that Nelson would decline further service had been conveyed to other friends. Troubridge, who had meanwhile returned to England, wrote two months later to a young lieutenant who wished to get on board the admiral's next ship: "Lord Nelson is not yet arrived in England, and between ourselves I do not think he will serve again."

Both Lady Minto and Fitzharris have recorded an account given them by Nelson, of his motives for action at the Battle of the Nile. "He speaks in the highest terms of all the captains he had with him off the coast of Egypt," writes the former,

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<sup>10</sup> Malmesbury's Memoirs, vol. ii. p. 24.

"adding that without knowing the men he had to trust to, he would not have hazarded the attack, that there was little room, but he was sure each would find a hole to creep in at." In place of this summary, her nephew gives words evidently quite fresh from the speaker's lips. "He says, 'When I saw them, I could not help popping my head every now and then out of the window, (although I had a d—d toothache), and once as I was observing their position I heard two seamen quartered at a gun near me, talking, and one said to the other, 'D—n them, look at them, there they are, Jack, if we don't beat them, they will beat us.' He says, 'I knew what stuff I had under me, so I went into the attack with only a few ships, perfectly sure the others would follow me, although it was nearly dark and they might have had every excuse for not doing it, yet they all in the course of two hours found a hole to poke in at. If,' he added, 'I had taken a fleet of the same force from Spithead, I would sooner have thought of flying than attacking the French in their position, but I knew my captains, nor could I say which distinguished himself most.'" Yet to Lady Minto he revealed the spirit he was of. "I told him I wished he had the command of the Emperor's army. He said, 'I'll tell you what. If I had, I would only use one word—*advance*, and never say *retreat*.'"

After a month's stop at Vienna, during which Sir William Hamilton's health continued to cause anxiety, the party started north for Prague, Dresden, and Hamburg, following the course of the Elbe. On the 28th of September, Prague was reached,



and there Nelson was met by arrangement by the Archduke Charles, the first in ability of the Austrian generals, approved as no unworthy antagonist by Bonaparte himself, but rarely employed, except in moments of emergency, because of his pronounced opposition to the Court policy. The next day, September 29th, was Nelson's birthday, and the Archduke gave a grand entertainment in his honor. Continuing thence, the travellers on October 2d reached Dresden, to which Court the British minister was Hugh Elliot, the brother of Lord Minto. It was here that they came under the eye of Mrs. St. George, a young Irish widow, who by a second marriage, some years later, became Mrs. Trench, and the mother of the late Archbishop of Dublin. Her description and comments have been considered severe, and even prejudiced; but they do not differ essentially from those of the Mintos and Fitzharris, except in saying that on one occasion, after dinner, Nelson took too much champagne, and showed the effects. Such a thing has happened on isolated occasions to many a good man and true, and, however much to be deplored, is not so impossible an occurrence, even in a man of Nelson's well-established habitual abstemiousness, which indeed his health necessitated, as to invalidate the testimony of an eye-witness.

Mrs. St. George's journal was not written for publication, and did not see the light till thirty-odd years after her death. "October 3d. Dined at Mr. Elliot's with only the Nelson party. It is plain

that Lord Nelson thinks of nothing but Lady Hamilton,<sup>11</sup> who is totally occupied by the same object. Lord Nelson is a little man, without any dignity; who, I suppose, must resemble what Suwarrow was in his youth, as he is like all the pictures I have seen of that General. Lady Hamilton takes possession of him, and he is a willing captive, the most submissive and devoted I have ever seen. Sir William is old, infirm, all admiration of his wife, and never spoke to-day but to applaud her. Miss Cornelia Knight seems the decided flatterer of the two, and never opens her mouth but to show forth their praise; and Mrs. Cadogan, Lady Hamilton's mother, is—what one might expect. After dinner we had several songs in honour of Lord Nelson, written by Miss Knight, and sung by Lady Hamilton.<sup>12</sup> She puffs the incense full in his face; but he receives it with pleasure, and snuffs it up very cordially." Lord Minto, whose friendship for Nelson was of proof, wrote eighteen months after this to his wife: "She goes on cramming Nelson with trowelfuls of flattery, which he goes on taking as quietly as a child does pap."<sup>13</sup>

"Lady Hamilton," wrote Mrs. St. George on succeeding days, "paid me those kinds of compliments which prove she thinks mere exterior alone of any consequence ... She loads me with all marks of friendship at first sight, which I always think

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<sup>11</sup> Mrs. St. George's description of Lady Hamilton has already been given, *ante*, vol. i. p. 380.

<sup>12</sup> Miss Knight mentions the same ceremony occurring in Vienna.

<sup>13</sup> Life of Lord Minto, vol. iii. pp. 242-243.

more extraordinary than love of the same kind, pays me many compliments both when I am absent and present, and said many fine things about my accompanying her at sight. Still she does not gain upon me ... Mr. Elliot says, 'She will captivate the Prince of Wales, whose mind is as vulgar as her own, and play a great part in England,'"—a remark which showed shrewd judgment of character, as Nelson afterwards found to his intense disturbance. At Vienna the whole party had been presented at Court, but at Dresden the Electress refused to receive Lady Hamilton, on account of her former dissolute life. "She wished to go to Court," says Mrs. St. George, "on which a pretext was made to avoid receiving company last Sunday, and I understand there will be no Court while she stays." Nelson felt resentment at this exclusion, though powerless, of course, to express it; but he declined an invitation to a private house which had not been extended to her. This incident naturally raised the question, what prospect there was of the lady being accepted at the Court of her own sovereign. "She talked to me a great deal of her doubts whether the Queen would receive her, adding, 'I care little about it. I had much rather she would settle half Sir William's pension on me,'"—a remark which showed more philosophy than self-esteem.

A week's visit in Dresden ended by the party taking boats for Hamburg, which they reached on the 21st of October, the journey being prolonged by stopping every night. They there remained ten days, of which no very noteworthy incidents have been recorded, although the general interest of all classes of

people in the renowned warrior, of whom they had heard so much, continued to be manifested, sometimes in quaint and touching expression. On the 31st of October they embarked on board the mail-packet for England, and after a stormy passage landed at Yarmouth on the 6th of November, 1800. Two years and eight months had passed since Nelson sailed from Spithead, on a cruise destined to have so marked an influence on his professional reputation and private happiness. He was received on his landing with every evidence of popular enthusiasm, and of official respect from all authorities, civil and military. With the unvarying devout spirit which characterized him in all the greater events of his life, he asked that public service might be held, to enable him to give thanks in church for his safe return to his native country, and for the many blessings which he had experienced. The whole party then went on to town, arriving on the 8th.

From those who welcomed Nelson when he first put his foot on shore there was one conspicuously missing. Lady Nelson had not thought well to go to Yarmouth to await her husband. Under ordinary conditions there would have been little to challenge remark, in the decision not to leave the feeble old man, her husband's father, who depended much upon her, for the period of uncertain duration during which she might have to wait at Yarmouth, in those days of sailing-vessels and head winds. Coining as her husband did, hand in hand with the woman whose name had been scandalously linked with his for nearly two years,

the absence easily took on the appearance of cold and reserved censure. Unquestionably, if Lady Nelson wished above all things to win her husband back, and cared more for that than for her own humiliation, more or less, the best fighting chance would have been to meet him at once, with a smile on her face and words of love on her lips. Considering the flagrancy of the affair throughout Europe, and the antecedents of Lady Hamilton, it may be permitted to doubt whether, regarded as a struggle for possession, many women would have thought the game worth the candle; although Lady Nelson did not then know that her husband expected soon to be a father, by the woman whom he at once brought to her apartments and presented to her.

In the scanty details that have been transmitted to us concerning Lady Nelson, there is little to appeal to the imagination, or to impress one strongly with her attractions; but candor to her surely compels the admission that, to await her husband in their own home, to greet him alone, without the observation even of beloved outsiders, was no singular impulse in a tender and reserved woman. A seaside hotel and the inevitable clamor of the multitude do not fit in well with the emotions that would naturally stir her, and a very little tact, a very little sympathy, would have induced Nelson to let the Hamiltons go their way for one evening, while he went directly and alone to her and his father. She had been sorely tried, and as far as is known had restrained herself patiently in her letters. The latest one that is now accessible is dated the 29th of March, 1800, seven months

therefore before they now met, and is lacking neither in dignity, affection, nor pathos.

"I have this instant received a note from Admiral Young, who tells me if I can send him a letter for you in an hour, he will send it, therefore, I have only time to say I have at last had the pleasure of receiving two letters from you, dated January 20th and 25th. I rejoice exceedingly I did not follow the advice of the physician and our good father to change the climate, and I hope my health will be established by hot sea-bathing and the warmth of the summer.

"I can with safety put my hand on my heart and say it has been my study to please and make you happy, and I still flatter myself we shall meet before very long. I feel most sensibly all your kindnesses to my dear son, and I hope he will add much to our comfort. Our good father has been in good spirits ever since we heard from you; indeed, my spirits were quite worn out, the time had been so long. I thank God for the preservation of my dear husband, and your recent success off Malta. The taking of the *Généreux* seems to give great spirits to all. God bless you, my dear husband, and grant us a happy meeting, and believe me," etc.<sup>14</sup>

From the difficulties attendant upon the mails in those days, this letter would not be likely to reach Nelson till towards the end of May, when he was on the point of leaving Palermo finally;

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<sup>14</sup> This letter, with another, appears in the Alfred Morrison "Collection of Autograph Letters" (Nos. 472, 473). It is purposely given entire, except immaterial postscripts.

and, having regard to the uncertainties of his movements before quitting Leghorn, it is not improbable that it was among the last, if not the very last, he received before landing in England. If so, it represented fairly the attitude of Lady Nelson, as far as known to him,—free from reproach, affectionate, yet evidently saddened by a silence on his part, which tended to corroborate the rumors rife, not only in society but in the press. It is possible that, like many men, though it would not be in the least characteristic of himself, he, during his journey home, simply put aside all consideration of the evil day when the two women would be in the same city, and trusted to the chapter of accidents to settle the terms on which they might live; but, from his actions, he seems to have entertained the idea that he could still maintain in London, with the cheerful acquiescence of his wife, the public relations towards Lady Hamilton which were tolerated by the easy tone of Neapolitan society. Miss Knight relates that, while at Leghorn, he said he hoped Lady Nelson and himself would be much with Sir William and Lady Hamilton, that they all would dine together very often, and that when the latter went to their musical parties, he and Lady Nelson would go to bed. In accordance with this programme, he took his two friends to dine with his wife and father, immediately upon his arrival in town. Miss Knight went to another hotel with Lady Hamilton's mother, and was that evening visited by Troubridge. He advised her to go and stop with a friend; and, although no reason is given, it is probable that he, who knew as much as any one of the past, saw that the position of

residence with the Hamiltons would be socially untenable for a woman. Miss Knight accordingly went to live with Mrs. Nepean, the wife of the Secretary to the Admiralty.

A few days later there was again a dinner at the house taken by the Hamiltons in Grosvenor Square. The Nelsons were there, as was Miss Knight. The next day several of the party attended the theatre, and Lady Nelson, it is said, fainted in the box, overcome by feeling, many thought, at her husband's marked attentions to Lady Hamilton. The latter being in her way a character as well known as Nelson himself, the affair necessarily became more than usually a matter of comment, especially as the scene now provided for London gossipers was a re-presentation of that so long enacted at Palermo, and notorious throughout Europe; but it was received with little toleration. "Most of my friends," wrote Miss Knight, "were urgent with me to drop the acquaintance, but, circumstanced as I had been, I feared the charge of ingratitude, though greatly embarrassed as to what to do, for things became very unpleasant." Had it been a new development, it would have presented little difficulty; but as she had quietly lived many months in the minister's house under the same conditions, only in the more congenial atmosphere of Palermo, it was not easy now to join in the disapproval shown by much of London society.

Lady Hamilton, of course, could not have any social acceptance, but even towards Nelson himself, in all his glory, a marked coldness was shown in significant quarters. "The Lady of the Admiralty," wrote he to his friend Davison, "never had



any just cause for being cool to me;" an allusion probably to Lady Spencer, the wife of the First Lord. Coldness from her must have been the more marked, for after the Nile she had written him a wildly enthusiastic letter, recognizing with gratitude the distinction conferred upon her husband's administration by the lustre of that battle. "Either as a public or private man," he continued, "I wish nothing undone which I have done,"—a remark entirely ambiguous and misleading as regards his actual relations to Lady Hamilton. He told Collingwood, at this same time, that he had not been well received by the King. "He gave me an account of his reception at Court," his old comrade writes, "which was not very flattering, after having been the adoration of that of Naples. His Majesty merely asked him if he had recovered his health; and then, without waiting for an answer, turned to General—, and talked to him near half an hour in great good humour. It could not be about his successes." This slight was not a revival of the old prejudice entertained by the King before the war, which had been wholly removed by the distinguished services Nelson had rendered afterwards. Eighteen months before this Davison had written to him: "I waited upon the King early last Sunday morning, and was *alone* with him a full hour, when much of the conversation was about you. It is impossible to express how warmly he spoke of you, and asked me a thousand questions about you ... I have been again at the Queen's house, and have given the King a copy of your last letter to me, giving an account of your health, which he read twice

over, with great attention, and with apparent emotion of concern. His Majesty speaks of you with the tenderness of a father." Samuel Rogers has an incidental mention of the effect produced upon Nelson by the treatment now experienced. "I heard him once during dinner utter many bitter complaints (which Lady Hamilton vainly attempted to check) of the way he had been treated at Court that forenoon: the Queen had not condescended to take the slightest notice of him. In truth, Nelson was hated at Court; they were jealous of his fame."<sup>15</sup> People, however, are rarely jealous of those who are not rivals.

The position which Nelson had proposed to himself to establish was of course impossible. The world was no more disposed to worry about any private immoralities of his than it did about those of other men, but it was not prepared to have them brandished in its face, and it would have none of Lady Hamilton,—nor would Lady Nelson. The general public opinion at the time receives, probably, accurate expression from Sir William Hotham, a man then in London society. "His vanity, excusable as such a foible is in such a man, led him to unpardonable excesses, and blinded him to the advantages of being respected in society ... His conduct to Lady Nelson was the very extreme of unjustifiable weakness, for he should at least have attempted to conceal his infirmities, without publicly wounding the feelings of a woman whose own conduct he well

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<sup>15</sup> Table-Talk of Samuel Rogers.

knew was irreproachable."<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, Nelson could not forget the kindnesses he had accepted from Lady Hamilton, nor was he either able or willing to lessen an intimacy which, unless diminished, left the scandal unabated. He was not able, for a man of his temperament could not recede before opposition, or slight a woman now compromised by his name; and he was not willing, for he was madly in love. Being daily with her for seven months after leaving Palermo, there occurs a break in their correspondence; but when it was resumed in the latter part of January, 1801, every particle of the reticence which a possible struggle with conscience had imposed disappears. He has accepted the new situation, cast aside all restraints, and his language at times falls little short of frenzy, while belying the respect for her which he asserts continually and aggressively, as though against his convictions.

The breach with Lady Nelson had in this short time become final. We have not the means—happily—to trace through its successive stages a rapid process of estrangement, of which Nelson said a few months afterwards: "Sooner than live the unhappy life I did when last I came to England, I would stay abroad forever." A highly colored account is given in Harrison's *Life of Nelson*, emanating apparently from Lady Hamilton, of the wretchedness the hero experienced from the temper of his wife; while in the "*Memoirs of Lady Hamilton*," published

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<sup>16</sup> The author is indebted to Prof. J. Knox Laughton for some extracts from Hotham's diary.

shortly after her death, another side of the case is brought forward, and Lady Nelson appears as rebutting with quiet dignity the reproaches of her husband for heartlessness, displayed in her unsympathetic attitude towards her rival, when suffering from indisposition. Into these recriminations it is needless to enter; those who wish can read for themselves in the works mentioned. A marked symptom of growing alienation was afforded by his leaving her on the 19th of December, in company with the Hamiltons, to spend the Christmas holidays at Fonthill, the seat of William Beckford.

During this visit occurred a curious incident, which shows that the exultant delight unquestionably felt by Nelson in battle did not indicate insensibility to danger, or to its customary effects upon men, but resulted from the pleasurable predominance of other emotions, which accepted danger and the startling tokens of its presence as the accompaniments, that only enhanced the majesty of the part he was called upon to play. Beckford tells the story as follows: "I offered to show him what had been done by planting in the course of years. Nelson mounted by my side in a phaeton, drawn by four well-trained horses, which I drove. There was not the least danger, the horses being perfectly under my command, long driven by myself. Singular to say, we had not gone far before I observed a peculiar anxiety in his countenance, and presently he said: 'This is too much for me, you must set me down.' I assured him that the horses were continually driven by me, and that they were perfectly under command. All would not do. He

would descend, and I walked the vehicle back again."<sup>17</sup> Nelson, of course, never claimed for himself the blind ignorance of fear which has been asserted of him; on the contrary, the son of his old friend Locker tells us, "The bravest man (so we have heard Lord Nelson himself declare) feels an anxiety '*circa præcordia*' as he enters the battle; but he dreads disgrace yet more."<sup>18</sup> In battle, like a great actor in a great drama, he knew himself the master of an invisible concourse, whose homage he commanded, whose plaudits he craved, and whom, by the sight of deeds raised above the common ground of earth, he drew to sympathy with heroism and self-devotion. There, too, he rejoiced in the noblest exercise of power, in the sensation of energies and faculties roused to full exertion, contending with mighty obstacles, and acting amid surroundings worthy of their grandeur; like Masséna, of whom it was said that he only found his greatest self when the balls flew thick about him, and things began to look their worst.

After his return from Fonthill Lady Nelson and himself lived together again for a time in their London lodgings, in Arlington Street, and there, according to the story told forty-five years afterwards by Mr. William Haslewood, Nelson's solicitor, the crisis of their troubles was reached. "In the winter of 1800, 1801, I was breakfasting with Lord and Lady Nelson, at their lodgings in Arlington Street, and a cheerful conversation was passing on indifferent subjects, when Lord Nelson spoke of

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<sup>17</sup> Beckford's Memoirs, London, 1859, vol. ii. p. 127.

<sup>18</sup> Locker's Greenwich Gallery, article "Torrington."

something which had been done or said by 'dear Lady Hamilton;' upon which Lady Nelson rose from her chair, and exclaimed, with much vehemence, 'I am sick of hearing of dear Lady Hamilton, and am resolved that you shall give up either her or me.' Lord Nelson, with perfect calmness, said: 'Take care, Fanny, what you say. I love you sincerely; but I cannot forget my obligations to Lady Hamilton, or speak of her otherwise than with affection and admiration.' Without one soothing word or gesture, but muttering something about her mind being made up, Lady Nelson left the room, and shortly after drove from the house. They never lived together afterwards." Though committed to paper so many years later, the incident is just one of those that sticks to the memory, and probably occurred substantially as told. Lady Nelson's ultimatum will probably be differently regarded by different persons; it shows that she was at least living human flesh and blood. In later life, we are told by Hotham, who was in the habit of frequently seeing her, up to her death, in 1831, "she continually talked of him, and always attempted to palliate his conduct towards her, was warm and enthusiastic in her praises of his public achievements, and bowed down with dignified submission to the errors of his domestic life."

The same testimony is borne by a lady, of whom Nicolas speaks as "the personal and intimate friend both of Lord and Lady Nelson, and the widow of one of his most distinguished followers," but whose name he does not give.<sup>19</sup> "I am aware of

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<sup>19</sup> Nicolas, vol. ii. p. 353. The present writer believes this lady to have been Lady

your intention not to touch upon this delicate subject: I only allude to it in order to assure you, from my personal knowledge, in a long and intimate acquaintance, that Lady Nelson's conduct was not only affectionate, wise, and prudent, but admirable, throughout her married life, and that she had not a single reproach to make herself. I say not this to cast unnecessary blame upon *one* whose memory I delight to honour, but only in justice to that truly good and amiable woman ... If mildness, forbearance, and indulgence to the weaknesses of human nature could have availed, her fate would have been very different. No reproach ever passed her lips; and when she parted from her Lord, on his hoisting his flag again, it was without the most distant suspicion that he meant it to be final, and that in this life they were never to meet again. I am desirous that you should know the worth of her who has so often been misrepresented, from the wish of many to cast the blame anywhere, but on him who was so deservedly dear to the Nation."

The latter years of Lady Nelson's life were passed partly in Paris, where she lived with her son and his family. Her eldest grandchild, a girl, was eight or ten years old at the time of her death. She remembers the great sweetness of her grandmother's temper, and tells that she often saw her take from a casket a miniature of Nelson, look at it affectionately, kiss it, and then replace it gently; after which she would turn to her and say, "When you are older, little Fan, you too may know what it is

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Berry, wife of Nelson's flag-captain, who gave Nicolas much of his information.

to have a broken heart." This trifling incident, transpiring as it now does for the first time, after nearly seventy years, from the intimate privacies of family life, bears its mute evidence to the truth of the last two witnesses, that Lady Nelson neither reproached her husband, nor was towards him unforgiving.<sup>20</sup> Nelson's early friend, the Duke of Clarence, who had given her away at the wedding, maintained his kindly relations with her to the end, and continued his interest to her descendants after his accession to the throne.

Thus abruptly and sadly ended an attachment which, if never ardent, had for many years run undisturbed its tender course, and apparently had satisfied Nelson's heart, until the wave of a great passion swept him off his feet. "I remember," writes Miss Knight, "that, shortly after the Battle of the Nile, when my mother said to him that no doubt he considered the day of that victory as the happiest in his life, he answered, 'No; the happiest was that on which I married Lady Nelson.'" On the 13th of January, 1801, Nelson took formal and final leave of her before hoisting his flag at Torbay. "I call God to witness," he then said, "there is nothing in you, or your conduct, that I wish otherwise." His alienation from her was shared by most of his family, except his father, who said to him frankly, that gratitude required he should spend part of his time with Lady Nelson. Two years before, he had written of her: "During the whole war [since 1793] I have been with

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<sup>20</sup> The author is indebted for this anecdote to Mrs. F.H.B. Eccles, of Sherwell House, Plymouth, the daughter of the "little Fan" who told it.



Lady Nelson, a good woman, and attentive to an infirm old man," and they had continued to live together. The old man persuaded himself that there was nothing criminal in relations, the result of which, as regarded his son and daughter-in-law, he could not but deplore; but his letters to Lady Hamilton go little beyond the civility that was necessary to avoid giving offence to Nelson. Nelson's two married sisters, Mrs. Bolton and Mrs. Matcham, evidently shared their father's belief. They and their children maintained with Lady Hamilton a friendly and even affectionate correspondence, long after Trafalgar, and until the death of the parties put an end to it.

Immediately upon landing at Yarmouth, Nelson had written to the Admiralty that his health was perfectly restored, and that he wished to resume service immediately. He was soon designated to a command in the Channel fleet, under Earl St. Vincent, who had been commander-in-chief since the spring of 1800. The "San Josef," the three-decker boarded by him at Cape St. Vincent, was named to receive his flag, and on the 17th of January it was hoisted on board her, at Plymouth,—blue at the fore, he having been promoted Vice-Admiral of the Blue on New Year's Day. An arrangement, however, had already been made, that, if the impending difficulties with Denmark threatened to lead to hostilities, he should accompany the fleet sent to the Baltic, as second to Sir Hyde Parker, selected for the chief command. While he was officially reporting to St. Vincent, on the 16th, at Torbay, preparatory to hoisting his flag, a letter from

Parker informed him that the armament was decided upon. This he showed at once to St. Vincent, who acquiesced of course in the disappointment, but expressed a hope that after a brief absence he would rejoin him.

By the first of February the "San Josef" had gone round to Torbay, the rendezvous of the Channel fleet under St. Vincent's command, and there it was that Nelson received the news of the birth, on the 29th or 30th of January, of the child Horatia, whose parentage for a long time gave rise to much discussion, and is even yet considered by some a matter of doubt. Fortunately, that question requires no investigation here; as regards the Life of Nelson, and his character as involved in this matter, the fact is beyond dispute that he believed himself the father, and Lady Hamilton the mother, of the girl, whose origin he sought to conceal by an elaborate though clumsy system of mystification. This might possibly have left the subject covered with clouds, though not greatly in doubt, had not Lady Hamilton, after wildly unnecessary lying on her own part, recklessly preserved her holdings of a correspondence which Nelson scrupulously destroyed, and enjoined her to destroy.

The sedulous care on his side to conceal the nature of their relations, and the reckless disregard of his wishes shown by her, is singularly illustrated by the method he took to bring the child into her charge, from that of the nurse to whom it had been intrusted. When it was somewhat over three years old, on the 13th of August, 1804, he wrote Lady Hamilton a letter, evidently

to be used, where necessary, to account for its presence under his roof. "I am now going to state a thing to you and to request your kind assistance, which, from my dear Emma's goodness of heart, I am sure of her acquiescence in. Before we left Italy I told you of the extraordinary circumstance of a child being left to my care and protection. On your first coming to England I presented you the child, dear Horatia. You became, to my comfort, attached to it, so did Sir William, thinking her the finest child he had ever seen. She is become of that age when it is necessary to remove her from a mere nurse and to think of educating her.... I shall tell you, my dear Emma, more of this matter when I come to England, but I am now anxious for the child's being placed under your protecting wing." With this letter (or, possibly, with another written the same day) was found an enclosure, undated and unsigned, but in Nelson's handwriting. "My beloved, how I feel for your situation and that of our dear Horatia, our dear child

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The indifference to incidental consequences which was shown by Nelson, when once he had decided upon a course of action, was part of his natural, as well as of his more distinctively military character; but in this connection with Lady Hamilton he must have felt intuitively that not only her reputation—which probably was his first care—was involved, but his own also. The hospitality, the attention, the friendship, extended to him at Naples and Palermo, were not from Lady Hamilton only but

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<sup>21</sup> Morrison. The Hamilton and Nelson Papers, Nos. 777, 778, 779.

from her husband also, in whose house he lived, and who to the end, so far as the records show, professed for him unbounded esteem and confidence. This confidence had been betrayed, and the strongest line of argument formerly advanced, by those who disputed Lady Hamilton's being the mother of the child, has become now Nelson's severest condemnation.

"However great was Nelson's infatuation," says Sir Harris Nicolas, "his nice sense of honour, his feelings of propriety, and his love of truth, were unquestionable. Hence, though during a long separation from his wife on the public service in the Mediterranean, he so far yielded to temptation as to become the father of a child, it is nevertheless difficult to believe that he should for years have had a criminal intercourse with the wife of a man of his own rank, whom he considered as his dearest friend, who placed the greatest confidence in his honour and virtue, and in whose house he was living. Still more difficult is it to believe, even if this had been the case, that he should not only have permitted every one of his relations, male and female,—his wife, his father, his brothers, his brothers-in-law, his two sisters, and all their daughters,—to visit and correspond with her, but even have allowed three of his nieces to live for a considerable time with her; have ostentatiously and frequently written and spoken of her 'virtuous and religious' character,—holding her up as an example to his family; have appointed her the sole guardian of his child; have avowedly intended to make her his wife; have acted upon every occasion as if the purity of their intimacy was altogether

free from suspicion; and in the last written act of his life have solemnly called upon his country to reward and support her. An honourable and conscientious man rarely acts thus towards his mistress ... Moreover, Nelson's most intimate friends, including the Earl of St. Vincent, who called them 'a pair of sentimental fools,' Dr. Scott, his Chaplain, and Mr. Haslewood, were of the same opinion; and Southey says, 'there is no reason to believe that this most unfortunate attachment was criminal.'"

This complicated and difficult path of deception had to be trod, because the offence was not one of common error, readily pardoned if discovered, but because the man betrayed, whatever his faults otherwise, had shown both the culprits unbounded confidence and kindness, and upon the woman, at least, had been led by his love to confer a benefit which neither should have forgotten.

## **FOOTNOTES:**

**CHAPTER XVI.**  
**THE EXPEDITION TO THE**  
**BALTIC AND BATTLE OF**  
**COPENHAGEN.—NELSON**  
**RETURNS TO ENGLAND**



**FEBRUARY—JUNE, 1801. AGE, 42**

The trouble between Great Britain and Denmark, which now called Nelson again to the front, leading to the most difficult of his undertakings, and, consequently, to the most distinguished of his achievements, arose about the maritime rights of neutrals and belligerents. The contention was not new. In 1780 the Baltic States, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark, being neutrals in the war then raging, had combined to assert, by arms, if necessary, certain claims advanced by them to immunity from practices which international law had hitherto sanctioned, or concerning which it had spoken ambiguously. These claims Great Britain had rejected, as contrary to her rights and interests; but, being then greatly outnumbered, she temporized until the end of the war, which left her in possession of the principles at stake, although she had forborne to enforce them offensively. The coalition of the Baltic States, at that time, received the name of the Armed Neutrality.

From 1793 to 1800 Sweden and Denmark had again succeeded in maintaining their neutrality, and, as most other maritime states were at war, their freedom of navigation had thrown into their hands a large carrying trade. But, while their profit was thus great, it would be much greater, if their ships

could be saved the interruptions to their voyages arising from the right of belligerents to stop, to search, and, if necessary, to send into port, a vessel on board which were found enemy's goods, or articles considered "contraband of war." The uncertainty hanging round the definitions of the latter phrase greatly increased the annoyance to neutrals; and serious disputes existed on certain points, as, for example, whether materials for shipbuilding, going to an enemy's port, were liable to capture. Great Britain maintained that they were, the neutrals that they were not; and, as the Baltic was one of the chief regions from which such supplies came, a principal line of trade for the Northern States was much curtailed.

Sweden and Denmark were too weak to support their contention against the sea-power of Great Britain. Where there is lack of force, there will always be found the tendency to resort to evasion to accomplish an end; and Denmark, in 1799, endeavored to secure for her merchant ships immunity from search by belligerent cruisers—which International Law has always conceded, and still concedes, to be within the rights of a belligerent—by sending them on their voyages in large convoys, protected by ships of war. It was claimed that the statement of the senior naval officer, that there were not in the convoy any articles subject to capture, was sufficient; and that the belligerent would in that case have no right to search. Great Britain replied that the right of search rested upon longstanding common consent, and precedent, and that it could not be taken from her against her



will by any process instituted by another state. The Danish ships of war being instructed to use force against search, two hostile collisions followed, in one of which several men were killed and wounded, and the Danish frigate was taken into a British port—though afterwards released.

The latter of these conflicts occurred in July, 1800. Great Britain then sent an ambassador to Denmark, backing him with a fleet of nine ships-of-the-line, with bomb-vessels; and at the end of August a convention was signed, by which the general subject was referred to future discussion, but Denmark agreed for the time to discontinue her convoys. The importance of the subject to Great Britain was twofold. First, by having the right to seize enemy's property in neutral ships, she suppressed a great part of the commerce which France could carry on, thus crippling her financially; and, second, by capturing articles of shipbuilding as contraband of war, she kept from the French materials essential to the maintenance of their navy, which their own country did not produce. British statesmen of all parties maintained that in these contentions there was at stake, not an empty and offensive privilege, but a right vital to self-defence, to the effective maintenance of which the power to search was fundamentally necessary.

In 1800 the Czar Paul I. had become bitterly hostile to Austria and Great Britain. This feeling had its origin in the disasters of the campaign of 1799, and was brought to a climax by the refusal of Great Britain to yield Malta to him, as Grand Master of the

Order, after its capture from the French in September, 1800. It had been the full purpose of the British ministry to surrender it, and Nelson, much to his distaste, had received specific orders to that effect; but, besides the fact that the Russians had contributed nothing directly to the reduction of the island, the attitude of the Czar had become so doubtful, that common prudence forbade putting into the hands of a probable future enemy the prize so hardly won from a present foe. Paul had already announced his intention of reviving the Armed Neutrality of 1780; and when, in November, he learned the fall of Malta, he seized three hundred British vessels lying in Russian ports, marched their crews into the interior, and at the same time placed seals on all British warehoused property,—a measure intended to support his demand for the restitution of the island to him.

On the 16th of December a treaty was signed at St. Petersburg by Russia and Sweden, to which Denmark and Prussia promptly adhered, renewing the Armed Neutrality, for the support of their various claims. The consenting states bound themselves to maintain their demands by force, if necessary; but no declaration of war was issued. Great Britain, in accepting the challenge, equally abstained from acts which would constitute a state of war; but she armed at once to shatter the coalition, before it attained coherence in aught but words. From first to last, until the Armed Neutrality again dissolved, though there was hard fighting, there was not formal war.

The relation of these occurrences to the life of Nelson

will not be fully understood, unless the general state of Europe be recalled, and the master hand of Bonaparte be recognized, underlying and controlling previous changes and present conditions. After the Battle of the Nile, and up to a year before this, Austria, Russia, and Great Britain had been united in arms against France; and, in addition to the undisputed control of the sea by the British Navy, they were pressing in overpowering numbers upon her eastern frontiers, from the North Sea to the Mediterranean. Blunders of their own had arrested the full tide of success, and the return of Bonaparte from Egypt reversed the current. Russia withdrew in anger, and Austria, beaten upon field after field, in Italy and Germany, by Bonaparte and Moreau, had finally consented to peace after the disastrous defeat of Hohenlinden, on the 3d of December, 1800. Great Britain was left without an ally; and Russia was added to the list of her active enemies by the skilful political manipulation of Bonaparte, who played upon the impulses and weaknesses of the half-mad Czar, releasing with distinguished marks of respect all Russian prisoners, and offering the vain gift of Malta, the French garrison of which was even then clutched by the throat in the iron grip of the British sea-power.

The renewal of the Armed Neutrality was thus, primarily, the work of Bonaparte. He alone had the keenness to see all the possibilities in favor of France that were to be found in the immense combination, and he alone possessed the skill and the power to touch the various chords, whose concert was necessary

to its harmonious action. Although it was true, as Nelson said, that Paul was the trunk of the many-limbed tree, it was yet more true that Bonaparte's deft cajoling of the Czar, and the inducements astutely suggested by him to Prussia, were the vitalizing forces which animated the two principal parties in the coalition, in whose wake the weaker states were dragged. Through the former he hoped to effect a combination of the Baltic navies against the British; through the latter he looked to exclude Great Britain from her important commerce with the Continent, which was carried on mainly by the ports of Prussia, or by those of North Germany, which she could control. Thus, by the concerted and simultaneous action of direct weight of arms on the one hand, and of commercial embarrassment on the other, Bonaparte hoped to overbear the power of his chief enemy; and here, as on other occasions, both before and after, Nelson was at once the quickening spirit of the enterprise, and the direct agent of the blow, which brought down his plans, in ruins, about his ears.

Relaxing none of her efforts in other quarters of the world, Great Britain drew together, to confront the new danger, everything in the home waters that could float, till she had gathered a fleet of twenty sail-of-the-line, with smaller cruisers in due proportion. "Under the present impending storm from the north of Europe," wrote St. Vincent, from his perch above the waters of Torbay, "to enable us to meet such a host of foes, no ship under my command must have anything done to her at

Plymouth or Portsmouth that can be done at this anchorage." "We are now arrived at that period," wrote Nelson, "what we have often heard of, but must now execute—that of fighting for our dear Country; and I trust that, although we may not be able to subdue our host of enemies, yet we may make them ashamed of themselves, and prove that they cannot injure us." "I have only to say," he wrote to Earl Spencer, who must have rejoiced to see the old spirit flaming again in undiminished vigor, "what you, my dear Lord, are fully satisfied of, that the service of my King and Country is the object nearest my heart; and that a first-rate, or sloop of war, is a matter of perfect indifference to your most faithful and obliged Nelson."

The "San Josef" being considered too heavy a ship for the Baltic service, Nelson's flag was shifted on the 12th of February to the "St. George," a three-decker of lighter draft. Hardy accompanied him as captain, and on the 17th Nelson received orders to place himself under the command of Sir Hyde Parker. A few days afterwards, the "St. George" went to Spithead, where she received on board six hundred troops, under the command of Colonel William Stewart, to whom we owe the fullest and most interesting account of the expedition in general, and of the Battle of Copenhagen in particular, that has been transmitted by an eye-witness. The ship sailed again on the 2d of March for Yarmouth, where she arrived on the 6th. The next day Nelson went to call on the commander-in-chief, who was living on shore, his flag flying on board a vessel in the roads. "I remember," says Colonel

Stewart, "that Lord Nelson regretted Sir Hyde being on shore. We breakfasted that morning as usual, soon after six o'clock, for we were always up before daylight. We went on shore, so as to be at Sir Hyde's door at eight o'clock, Lord Nelson choosing to be amusingly exact to that hour, which he considered as a very late one for business."

At this, his first official visit, the commander-in-chief, it is said, scarcely noticed him, and Nelson, as will be seen, complained freely of the treatment he at the beginning received. Parker was now verging on old age, but he had recently married a young wife, who was in Yarmouth with him, and the two had arranged to give a great ball on the 13th of March; altogether a bad combination for a military undertaking. Nelson, who was in haste to get away,—chiefly because of his sound martial instinct that this was peculiarly a case for celerity, but partly, also, because of anxiety to get the thing over and done, and to return to his home comforts,—appears to have represented matters unofficially to the Admiralty, a step for which his personal intimacy with St. Vincent and Troubridge afforded easy opportunity; and an express quickly arrived, ordering the fleet to sea at once.<sup>22</sup> "The signal is made to prepare to unmoor at twelve o'clock," wrote Nelson to Troubridge on the 11th. "Now we can have no desire for staying, for her ladyship is gone, and the *Ball* for Friday knocked up by yours and the Earl's unpoliteness, to send gentlemen to sea instead of dancing with white gloves. I will

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<sup>22</sup> Naval Chronicle, vol. xxxvii. p. 445.

only say," he continues, "as yet I know not that we are even going to the Baltic, except from the newspapers, and at sea I cannot go out of my ship but with serious inconvenience,"—owing to the loss of his arm. What was not told him before starting, therefore, could not be told by mouth till after arrival.

It will be remembered that Sir Hyde Parker had succeeded Hotham in the chief command of the Mediterranean, for a brief but critical month in 1795,<sup>23</sup> and that Nelson had then complained of his action as regards the general conduct of the campaign, and specifically for having reduced to the point of inefficiency the small squadron under Nelson's own direction, upon which the most important issues hinged. Possibly Parker had heard this, possibly the notorious disregard of Keith's orders a few months before influenced him to keep his renowned, but independent, subordinate at a distance in official matters. It was not well advised; though probably the great blunderers were the Admiralty, in sending as second a man who had shown himself so exceptionally and uniquely capable of supreme command, and so apt to make trouble for mediocre superiors. If Lord St. Vincent's surmise was correct, Parker, who was a very respectable officer, had been chosen for his present place because in possession of all the information acquired during the last preparation for a Russian war; while Nelson fancied that St. Vincent himself, as commander of the Channel fleet, had recommended him, in order to get rid of a second in command who did not carry out

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<sup>23</sup> *Ante*, vol. i. pp. 199-202.

satisfactorily the methods of his superior. If that were so, the mistake recoiled upon his own head; for, while the appointment was made by Earl Spencer, St. Vincent succeeded him as First Lord before the expedition sailed, and the old seaman would much have preferred to see Nelson at the helm. He was quite sure of the latter, he said, and should have been in no apprehension if he had been of rank to take the chief command; but he could not feel so sure about Sir Hyde, as he had never been tried. Whatever the truth, Lady Malmesbury's comment after the event was indisputable: "I feel very sorry for Sir Hyde; but no wise man would ever have gone with Nelson, or over him, as he was sure to be in the background in every case."

"I declare solemnly," wrote Nelson to Davison four days after reporting, "that I do not know"—officially, of course—"that I am going to the Baltic, and much worse than that I could tell you. Sir Hyde is on board sulky. Stewart tells me, his treatment of me is now noticed. Dickson came on board to-day to say all were scandalized at his gross neglect. Burn this letter: then it can never appear, and you can speak as if your knowledge came from another quarter." That day the orders came from the Admiralty to go to sea; and the next, March 12, the ships then present sailed,—fifteen ships-of-the-line and two fifties, besides frigates, sloops of war, brigs, cutters, fireships, and seven bomb-vessels,—for, if the Danes were obstinate, Copenhagen was to be bombarded. On the 16th of March Nelson wrote both to Davison and Lady Hamilton that he as yet knew nothing, except



by common report. "Sir Hyde has not told me officially a thing. I am sorry enough to be sent on such an expedition, but nothing can, I trust, degrade, do what they will." His mind was in a condition to see the worst motives in what befell him. "I know, I see, that I am not to be supported in the way I ought, but the St. George is beginning to prepare this day for battle, and she shall be true to herself.... Captain Murray sees, as do every one, what is meant to disgrace me, but that is impossible. Even the Captain of the Fleet [Parker's Chief of Staff] sent me word that it was not his doing, for that Sir Hyde Parker had run his pen through all that could do me credit, or give me support; but never mind, Nelson will be first if he lives, and you shall partake of all his glory. So it shall be my study to distinguish myself, that your heart shall leap for joy when my name is mentioned."<sup>24</sup>

Enough reached his ears to draw forth unqualified expressions of dissent from the plans proposed, and equally clear statements as to what should be done,—all stamped unmistakably with the "Nelson touch," to use an apt phrase of his own. "Reports say," he tells Lady Hamilton, "we are to anchor before we get to Cronenburg Castle, that our minister at Copenhagen may negotiate. What nonsense! How much better could we negotiate was our fleet off Copenhagen, and the Danish minister would seriously reflect how he brought the fire of England on his Master's fleet and capital; but to keep us out of sight is to seduce Denmark into a war.... If they are the plans of Ministers,

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<sup>24</sup> Nelson to Lady Hamilton. Pettigrew, vol. i. pp. 442-444.

they are weak in the extreme, and very different to what I understood from Mr. Pitt.<sup>25</sup> If they originate with Sir Hyde, it makes him, in my mind, as—but never mind, your Nelson's plans are bold and decisive—all on the great scale. I hate your pen and ink men; a fleet of British ships of war are the best negotiators in Europe." While the greatness and decision of his character remain unimpaired, perhaps even heightened, it will be noticed that self-reliance, never in any man more justified, has tended to degenerate into boastfulness, and restlessness under displeasing orders to become suspicion of the motives prompting them. "They all hate me and treat me ill," he says, speaking of Spencer's and St. Vincent's administrations. "I cannot, my dear friend, recall to mind any one real act of kindness, but all of unkindness." It must, of course, be remembered that, while such expressions portray faithfully the working of the inner spirit, and serve, by contrast, to measure the Nelson of 1801 against the Nelson of 1796, they were addressed to the most intimate of friends, and do not necessarily imply a corresponding bearing before the eyes of the world.

An amusing story is told of a shrewd stratagem resorted to by Nelson, on the passage to the Baltic, to thaw the barrier of frigidity in his superior, which not only was unpleasant to him personally, as well as injurious to the interests of the state, but threatened also to prevent his due share in the planning and execution of the enterprise in hand, thus diminishing the glory

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<sup>25</sup> Pitt had resigned from office since then.

he ever coveted. The narrator, Lieutenant Layman, was serving on board the "St. George," and happened to mention, in Nelson's presence, that some years before he had seen caught a very fine turbot on the Dogger Bank, over which the fleet must pass on its way.

"This being a mere casual remark, nothing more would have been thought of it, had not Nelson, after showing great anxiety in his inquiries when they should be on the Dogger Bank, significantly said to Mr. Layman, 'Do you think we could catch a turbot?' After a try or two, a small turbot was caught. Lord Nelson appeared delighted, and called out, 'Send it to Sir Hyde.' Something being said about the risk of sending a boat, from the great sea, lowering weather, and its being dark, his Lordship said with much meaning, 'I know the Chief is fond of good living, and he shall have the turbot.' That his Lordship was right appeared by the result, as the boat returned with a note of compliment and thanks from Parker. The turbot having opened a communication, the effect was wonderful. At Merton Mr. Layman told Lord Nelson that a man eminent in the naval profession had said to him, 'Do tell me how Parker came to take the laurel from his own brow, and place it on Nelson's?' 'What did you say?' asked Nelson. 'That it was not a gift,' replied Layman, 'as your Lordship had gained the victory by a turbot.' 'A turbot!' 'Yes, my lord, I well recollect your great desire to catch a turbot, and your astonishing many, by insisting upon its being immediately sent to Sir Hyde, who condescended to return a civil note; without

which opening your Lordship would not have been consulted in the Cattegat, and without such intercourse your Lordship would not have got the detached squadron; without which there would not have been any engagement, and consequently no victory.' Lord Nelson smilingly said, 'You are right.'"<sup>26</sup>

On the 19th of March the fleet was collected off the northern point of Denmark, known as the Skaw. From there the broad channel, called the Kattegat, extends southward, between Sweden and the northern part of the Danish peninsula, until it reaches the large Island of Zealand, upon the eastern shore of which Copenhagen lies. The two principal entrances into the Baltic are on either side of Zealand. The eastern one, separating it from Sweden, is called the Sound, that to the west is known as the Great Belt; each, from the military point of view, possessed its particular advantages and particular drawbacks. "We are slow in our motions as ever," wrote Nelson, whose impatient and decided character would have used the fair wind that was blowing to enter the Kattegat, and to proceed at once to Copenhagen, "but I hope all for the best. I have not yet seen Sir Hyde, but I purpose going this morning; for no attention shall be wanting on my part." The next day he reports the result of the interview to his friend Davison: "I staid an hour, and ground out something, but there was not that degree of openness which I should have shown to my second in command." The fleet advanced deliberately, a frigate being sent ahead to land the British envoy, Mr. Vansittart,

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<sup>26</sup> Naval Chronicle, vol. xxxvii. p. 446.

whose instructions were that only forty-eight hours were to be allowed the Danes to accept the demands of Great Britain, and to withdraw from the coalition. The slowness here, like every other delay, chafed Nelson, whose wish from the beginning was to proceed at the utmost speed, not merely from the Skaw, but from England, with whatever ships could be collected; for he reasoned perfectly accurately upon the safe general principle that delay favors the defence more than the offence. "I only now long to be gone," he wrote before leaving Yarmouth; "time is precious, and every hour makes more resistance; strike quick, and home." It was particularly true in this case, for Denmark, long used to peace, had not thought war possible, and every day was precious to her in restoring and increasing the neglected protection of Copenhagen.

On the evening of March 20 the fleet anchored in the Kattegat, eighteen miles from Cronenburg Castle and the town of Elsinore, at which the Sound narrows to three miles. Both shores being hostile, Parker would not attempt to force the passage until he learned the result of the British mission to Copenhagen; meanwhile the Danes were working busily at the blockships and batteries of the city. On the 23d Mr. Vansittart returned with the terms rejected; and he brought, also, alarming reports of the state of the batteries at Elsinore and Copenhagen, which were much stronger than the previous information of the British Cabinet had shown, proving, as Nelson urged, that each day's delay increased the enemy's relative power. Sir Hyde called a council. "Now

we are sure of fighting," wrote Nelson to Lady Hamilton. "I am sent for. When it was a joke I was kept in the background; to-morrow will I hope be a proud day for England—to have it so, no exertion shall be wanting from your most attached and affectionate friend."

He was accompanied to Parker's flagship by Lieutenant Layman, who went in the boat to steer for him. "On board the London," according to Layman, "the heads appeared very gloomy. Mr. Vansittart, who arrived at the same moment Nelson did, said that if the fleet proceeded to attack, it would be beaten, and the attempt was in danger of being relinquished. The Captain of the Fleet said to Layman that the Danes were too strong to attack, and a torpor verging to despondency prevailed in the councils. While others were dismayed, however, Lord Nelson questioned those just arrived from Copenhagen not only as to the force, but as to the position of the enemy. Such interrogatories he called 'bringing people to the post.' Having learned that the great strength of the enemy was at the head of the line, supported by the Crown Battery, his Lordship emphatically observed that to begin the attack there would be like taking a bull by the horns, and he therefore suggested the attempt by the tail."<sup>27</sup> In order to avoid the formidable works at Cronenburg, and yet come up in rear of Copenhagen, according to this proposition of Nelson's, it was proposed in the council to go by the Great Belt. That passage is more intricate, and therefore, from the pilot's point of view,

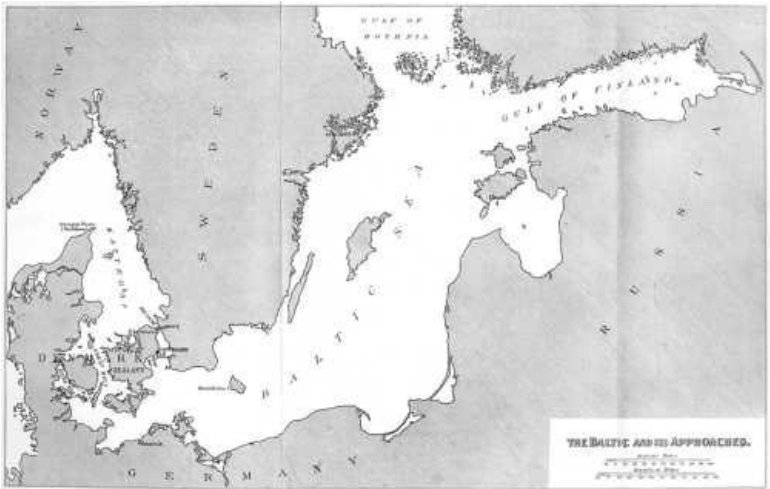
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<sup>27</sup> Naval Chronicle, vol. xxxvii., art. "Layman."

more hazardous than the Sound. Nelson was not much deterred by the alarming reports. "Go by the Sound, or by the Belt, or anyhow," he said, "only lose not an hour."

The minutes of the council have not been transmitted, but it is evident from Nelson's own letter of the following day, soon to be quoted in full, and also from one written to him by Mr. Vansittart, after the latter reached London, that he urged upon Parker, and prevailed with him, to throw aside the instructions of the Government, under the changed conditions, and to adopt boldly the plan which, according to his present knowledge, should seem most certain to crush Denmark at once. After that, he would shatter the coalition by immediate steps against Russia. Only such a bold spirit, with the prestige of a Nelson, can dominate a council of war, or extort decisive action from a commander-in-chief who calls one. "The difficulty," wrote Nelson some time afterwards, "was to get our commander-in-chief to either go past Cronenburg or through the Belt [that is, by any passage], because, what Sir Hyde thought best, and what I believe was settled before I came on board the *London*, was to stay in the Cattegat, and there wait the time when the whole naval force of the Baltic might choose to come out and fight—a measure, in my opinion, disgraceful to our Country. I wanted to get at an enemy as soon as possible to strike a *home* stroke, and Paul was the enemy most vulnerable, and of the greatest consequence for us to humble." So pressing, daring, and outspoken were his counsels, so freely did he now, as at former times, advocate setting aside the orders of

distant superiors, that he thought advisable to ask Vansittart, who was to sail immediately for England, to explain to the Admiralty all the conditions and reasons, which Vansittart did. St. Vincent, as First Lord, gave unhesitating approval to what his former lieutenant had advised.



## Map of the Baltic and its Approaches

Full-resolution image

Nelson's understanding of the situation was, in truth, acute, profound, and decisive. In the northern combination against Great Britain, Paul was the trunk, Denmark and Sweden the branches. Could he get at the trunk and hew it down, the branches



fell with it; but should time and strength first be spent lopping off the branches, the trunk would remain, and "my power must be weaker when its greatest strength is required." As things then were, the Russian Navy was divided, part being in Cronstadt, and a large fraction, twelve ships-of-the-line, in Revel, an advanced and exposed port, where it was detained fettered by the winter's ice. Get at that and smite it, and the Russian Navy is disabled; all falls together. This would be his own course, if independent. As Parker, however, was obstinately resolved not to leave Denmark hostile in his rear, Nelson had to bend to the will of his superior. He did so, without forsaking his own purpose. As in the diverse objects of his care in the Mediterranean, where he could not compel, he sought diligently to compass his object by persuasion, by clear and full explanation of his lofty views, by stirring appeals to duty and opportunity, striving to impart to another his own insight, and to arouse in him his own single-minded and dauntless activity. Conceding, perforce, that Denmark was not to be left hostile in the rear,—although he indicates that this object might be attained by masking her power with a detachment, while the main effort was immediately directed against Revel,—his suggestions to Parker for reducing Denmark speedily are dominated by the same conception. Strategic and tactical considerations unite to dictate, that the fleet, whether it go by the Sound or the Belt, must quickly reach and hold a position beyond—and therefore in the rear of—Copenhagen. There it interposed between Denmark and Russia; from there

it approached Copenhagen where its defences were weakest. This comprehensive exposition went, with Nelson's customary directness, straight to the root of the matter.

Next day, after returning to his own ship, Nelson drew up the following paper, which is at once so characteristic of his temperament and genius, and so lucid and masterly a review of the political and military conditions, that, contrary to the author's usual practice, it is given entire. Being devoted to a single subject, and inspired by the spirit of the writer when in a state of more than usual exaltation, it possesses a unity of purpose and demonstration, necessarily absent from most of his letters, in which many and diverse matters have to be treated.

24th March, 1801.

MY DEAR SIR HYDE,—The conversation we had yesterday has naturally, from its importance, been the subject of my thoughts; and the more I have reflected, the more I am confirmed in opinion, that not a moment should be lost in attacking the enemy: they will every day and hour be stronger; we never shall be so good a match for them as at this moment. The only consideration in my mind is, how to get at them with the least risk to our ships. By Mr. Vansittart's account, the Danes have taken every means in their power to prevent our getting to attack Copenhagen by the passage of the Sound. Cronenburg has been strengthened, the Crown Islands fortified, on the outermost of which are twenty guns, pointing mostly downwards, and only eight hundred yards

from very formidable batteries placed under the Citadel, supported by five Sail of the Line, seven Floating batteries of fifty guns each, besides Small-craft, Gun-boats, &c. &c.; and that the Revel Squadron of twelve or fourteen Sail of the Line are soon expected, as also five Sail of Swedes. It would appear by what you have told me of your instructions, that Government took for granted you would find no difficulty in getting off Copenhagen, and in the event of a failure of negotiation, you might instantly attack; and that there would be scarcely a doubt but the Danish Fleet would be destroyed, and the Capital made so hot that Denmark would listen to reason and its true interest. By Mr. Vansittart's account, their state of preparation exceeds what he conceives our Government thought possible, and that the Danish Government is hostile to us in the greatest possible degree. Therefore here you are, with almost the safety, certainly with the honour of England more intrusted to you, than ever yet fell to the lot of any British Officer. On your decision depends, whether our Country shall be degraded in the eyes of Europe, or whether she shall rear her head higher than ever; again do I repeat, never did our Country depend so much on the success of any Fleet as on this. How best to honour our Country and abate the pride of her Enemies, by defeating their schemes, must be the subject of your deepest consideration as Commander-in-Chief; and if what I have to offer can be the least useful in forming your decision, you are most heartily welcome.

I shall begin with supposing you are determined to enter by the Passage of the Sound, as there are those who think,

if you leave that passage open, that the Danish Fleet may sail from Copenhagen, and join the Dutch or French. I own I have no fears on that subject; for it is not likely that whilst their Capital is menaced with an attack, 9,000 of her best men should be sent out of the Kingdom. I suppose that some damage may arise amongst our masts and yards; yet perhaps there will not be one of them but could be made serviceable again. You are now about Cronenburg: if the wind be fair, and you determine to attack the Ships and Crown Islands, you must expect the natural issue of such a battle—Ships crippled, and perhaps one or two lost; for the wind which carries you in, will most probably not bring out a crippled Ship. This mode I call taking the bull by the horns. It, however, will not prevent the Revel Ships, or Swedes, from joining the Danes; and to prevent this from taking effect, is, in my humble opinion, a measure absolutely necessary—and still to attack Copenhagen. Two modes are in my view; one to pass Cronenburg, taking the risk of damage, and to pass up<sup>28</sup> the deepest and straightest Channel above the Middle Grounds; and coming down the Garbar or King's Channel, to attack their Floating batteries, &c. &c, as we find it convenient. It must have the effect of preventing a junction between the Russians, Swedes, and Danes, and may give us an opportunity of bombarding Copenhagen. I am also pretty certain that a passage could be found to the northward of Southolm for all our Ships; perhaps it might be necessary to warp a short distance in the very narrow

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<sup>28</sup> That is, from north to south. It may be well to notice that to go from the Kattegat to the Baltic is *up*, although from north to south.

part. Should this mode of attack be ineligible, the passage of the Belt, I have no doubt, would be accomplished in four or five days, and then the attack by Draco could be carried into effect, and the junction of the Russians prevented, with every probability of success against the Danish Floating batteries. What effect a bombardment might have, I am not called upon to give an opinion; but think the way would be cleared for the trial. Supposing us through the Belt with the wind first westerly, would it not be possible to either go with the Fleet, or detach ten Ships of three and two decks, with one Bomb and two Fire-ships, to Revel, to destroy the Russian Squadron at that place? I do not see the great risk of such a detachment, and with the remainder to attempt the business at Copenhagen. The measure may be thought bold, but I am of opinion the boldest measures are the safest; and our Country demands a most vigorous exertion of her force, directed with judgment. In supporting you, my dear Sir Hyde, through the arduous and important task you have undertaken, no exertion of head or heart shall be wanting from your most obedient and faithful servant,

*NELSON AND BRONTE.*

On the 25th the wind was too strong to allow the ships to lift their anchors. On the 26th the fleet weighed, and proceeded for a few hours in the direction of the Great Belt, which Parker had decided to follow. Captain Otway of the "London," Sir Hyde's flagship, chanced to have local knowledge of that passage, which had not come before the council, because he was not a member. When he ascertained the intention, he explained the difficulties

and risks to the admiral, upon which the latter concluded that the batteries of Cronenburg and Elsinore presented fewer dangers. He accordingly directed the fleet to return toward the Sound, and sent Otway to tell Nelson he should take that route. "I don't care a d—n by which passage we go," replied the latter, "so that we fight them." "Sir Hyde Parker," he wrote the same day to Lady Hamilton, "has by this time found out the worth of your Nelson, and that he is a useful sort of man on a pinch; therefore, if he ever has thought unkindly of me, I freely forgive him. Nelson must stand among the first, or he must fall." Side by side with such expressions of dauntless resolve and unfailing self-confidence stand words of deepest tenderness, their union under one cover typifying aptly the twin emotions of heroic aspiration and passionate devotion, which at this time held within him alternate, yet not conflicting, sway. In the same letter he tells her fondly, "You know I am more bigoted to your picture—the faithful representation of you I have with me—than ever a Neapolitan was to St. Januarius, and look upon you as my guardian angel, and God, I trust, will make you so to me. His will be done." From the time of leaving he wrote to her practically every day. "Mr. S. is quite right," he says to her on one occasion, "that through the medium of your influence is the surest way to get my interest. It is true, and it will ever be, whilst you hold your present conduct, for you never ask anything that does not do honour to your feelings, as the best woman, as far as my knowledge goes, that ever lived, and it must do me honour the

complying with them."

The fleet anchored again on the evening of the 26th of March, six miles from Cronenburg, and was there detained three days by head winds and calms. In this interval, Nelson's general plan of operations having been adopted, he shifted his flag to a lighter ship, the "Elephant," seventy-four, commanded by Captain Foley, the same who had led the fleet inside the French line in Aboukir Bay. On the 30th, the wind coming fair from northwest, the ships weighed and passed Cronenburg Castle. It had been expected that the Swedish batteries would open upon them, but, finding they remained silent, the column inclined to that side, thus going clear of the Danish guns. "More powder and shot, I believe, never were thrown away," wrote Nelson, "for not one shot struck a single ship of the British fleet. Some of our ships fired; but the Elephant did not return a single shot. I hope to reserve them for a better occasion."

That afternoon they anchored again, about five miles below Copenhagen. Parker and Nelson, accompanied by several senior officers, went at once in a schooner to view the defences of the town. "We soon perceived," wrote Stewart, "that our delay had been of important advantage to the enemy, who had lined the northern edge of the shoals near the Crown batteries, and the front of the harbour and arsenal, with a formidable flotilla. The Trekroner (Three Crowns) Battery"—a strong work established on piles, whose position will be given—"appeared, in particular, to have been strengthened, and all the buoys of

the Northern, and of the King's Channels had been removed." Nelson, however, was, or feigned to be, less impressed. "I have just been reconnoitring the Danish line of defence," he wrote to Lady Hamilton. "It looks formidable to those who are children at war, but to my judgment, with ten sail-of-the-line I think I can annihilate them; at all events, I hope to be allowed to try." This is again the same spirit of the seaman "determined to attack" at Aboukir; the same resolution as before Bastia, where he kept shut in his own breast the knowledge of the odds, feeling that to do nothing was as bad as failure—and worse. A like eagerness does not seem to have prevailed on board the flagship. Parker had allowed himself to be stiffened to the fighting-point by the junior he had before disregarded, but that he looked to the issue with more than doubt may be inferred from the words of his private secretary, the Rev. Mr. Scott, who afterwards held the same relation to Nelson. "I fear," he wrote on the day of the council, "there is a great deal of Quixotism in this business; there is no getting any positive information of their strength."



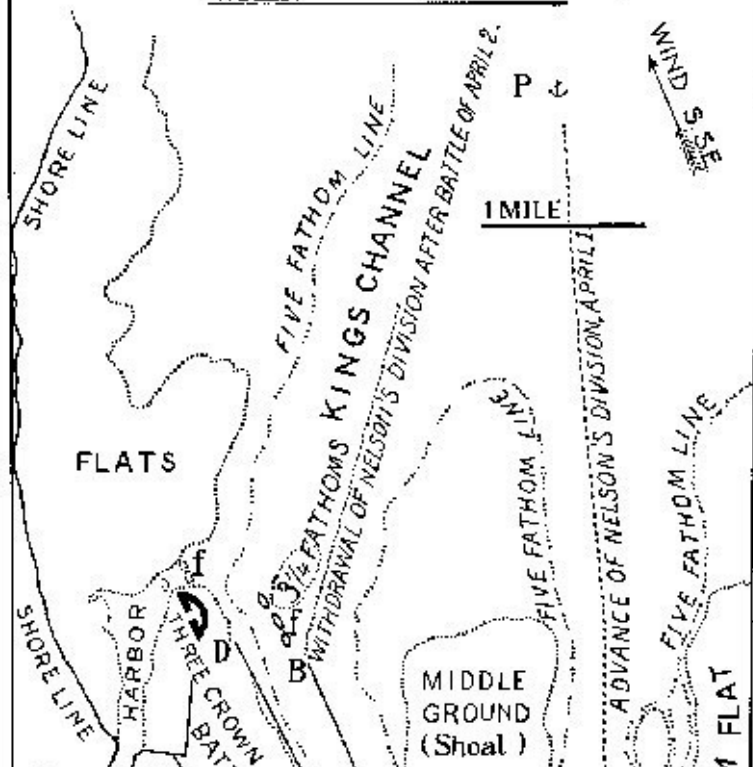
# BATTLE OF COPENHAGEN

APRIL 2, 1801.

## References:

*A*-Agamemnon, at Anchor.  
*B.B.*-British Line of Battle.  
*C.C.*-British Ships Aground.  
*f.f.*-British Frigates.

*D.D.*-Danish Line of Hulks.  
*N*-Anchorage of Nelson's Division, April 1-2.  
*P*-Anchorage of British Main Fleet, under Sir H. Parker.



## Battle of Copenhagen, Plan Number 1

Nelson's general plan of attack is set forth in main outlines in the letter already given, but it is desirable to give a somewhat more detailed description. It will be seen, by the annexed chart, that there are before Copenhagen two channels by which the city can be passed. Between the two lies a shoal, called the Middle Ground. The inner, known as the King's Channel, lay under the guns of the defences which had been hurriedly improvised for the present emergency. These consisted of a line of hulks, mostly mastless, ranged along the inner side of the King's Channel, close to the flats which bordered it, flanked at the northern end by the permanent work, called the Trekroner<sup>29</sup> Battery. Westward of the latter lay, across the mouth of the harbor proper, two more hulks, and a small squadron consisting of two ships-of-the-line and a frigate, masted, and in commission. This division was not seriously engaged, and, as a factor in the battle, may be disregarded.

The northern part of this defence was decisively the stronger. To attack there, Nelson called "taking the bull by the horns." The southern wing was much more exposed. Nor was this all. An advance from the north must be made with a northerly wind. If unsuccessful, or even, in case of success, if ships were badly crippled, they could not return to the north, where the fleet was.

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<sup>29</sup> Trekroner, which was then a favorite military name in Denmark, refers to the three Crowns of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, once united.

On the other hand, attack from the south presupposed a southerly wind, with which, after an action, the engaged ships could rejoin the fleet, if they threaded safely the difficult navigation. In any event there was risk, but none knew better than Nelson that without risks war is not made. To the considerations above given he added that, when south of the city, the British would be interposed between the other Baltic navies and Denmark. The latter, in that case, could not receive reinforcements, unless the English squadron were first defeated. He therefore proposed that ten ships-of-the-line, of the lighter draughts, which he offered himself to lead, should pass through the outer, or northern channel, gain the southern flank of the defence, and thence make the principal attack, while the rest of the fleet supported them by a demonstration against the northern end. The sagacity of this scheme is best attested from the enemy himself. "We have been deceived in the plan of attack," wrote the historian Niebuhr, then residing in the city; "and," now that the right wing of the defence is destroyed, "all is at stake." The nights of the 30th and 31st were employed in surveying the waters, laying down buoys to replace those removed by the Danes, and in further reconnoissance of the enemy's position. The artillery officers who were to supervise the bombardment satisfied themselves that, if the floating defences south of the Trekroner were destroyed, the bomb-vessels could be placed in such a position as to shell the city, without being themselves exposed to undue peril.

Parker gave Nelson twelve ships-of-the-line, two more than

he had asked; a judicious addition, for the main part of the fighting was to fall to him, and the difficulties of pilotage might, and actually did, deprive him of several ships. Moreover, while it was proposed that the vessels remaining with Parker should approach and engage the northern defences, yet the time of attack depended upon a fair wind for Nelson; and as that would necessarily be foul for the other body, the diversion made by it might be, and proved to be, ineffective. Sound judgment dictated giving Nelson all that could be spared.

On the afternoon of the 31st another council was held, in which Nelson's plan was finally ratified; he again volunteered his services, which were accepted and his force detailed. As usual, the council was prolific in suggestions of danger. Stewart, who seems to have been present, writes: "During this Council of War, the energy of Lord Nelson's character was remarked: certain difficulties had been started by some of the members, relative to each of the three Powers we should either have to engage, in succession or united, in those seas. The number of the Russians was, in particular, represented as formidable. Lord Nelson kept pacing the cabin, mortified at everything that savoured either of alarm or irresolution. When the above remark was applied to the Swedes, he sharply observed, 'The more numerous the better;' and when to the Russians, he repeatedly said, 'So much the better, I wish they were twice as many, the easier the victory, depend on it.' He alluded, as he afterwards explained in private, to the total want of tactique among the Northern fleets; and

to his intention, whenever he should bring either the Swedes or Russians to action, of attacking the head of their line, and confusing their movements as much as possible. He used to say, 'Close with a Frenchman, but out-manoeuve a Russian.'

Nelson gave personal supervision to the general work of buoying the Northern Channel. On the morning of April 1st he made a final examination of the ground in the frigate "Amazon," commanded by Captain Riou, who fell in the next day's battle. Returning at about one in the afternoon, he signalled his division to weigh, and, the wind favoring, the whole passed without accident, the "Amazon" leading. By nightfall they were again anchored, south of the Middle Ground, not over two miles from that end of the Danish line. As the anchor dropped, Nelson called out emphatically, "I will fight them the moment I have a fair wind." As there were in all thirty-three ships of war, they were crowded together, and, being within shelling distance of the mortars on Amag Island, might have received much harm; but the Danes were too preoccupied with their yet incomplete defences to note that the few shells thrown dropped among their enemies.

"On board the Elephant," writes Stewart, who with his soldiers had followed Nelson from the "St. George," "the night of the 1st of April was an important one. As soon as the fleet was at anchor, the gallant Nelson sat down to table with a large party of his comrades in arms. He was in the highest spirits, and drank to a leading wind and to the success of the ensuing

day. Captains Foley, Hardy, Freemantle, Riou, Inman, Admiral Graves, his Lordship's second in command, and a few others to whom he was particularly attached, were of this interesting party; from which every man separated with feelings of admiration for their great leader, and with anxious impatience to follow him to the approaching battle. The signal to prepare for action had been made early in the evening. All the captains retired to their respective ships, Riou excepted, who with Lord Nelson and Foley arranged the Order of Battle, and those instructions that were to be issued to each ship on the succeeding day. These three officers retired between nine and ten to the after-cabin, and drew up those Orders that have been generally published, and which ought to be referred to as the best proof of the arduous nature of the enterprise in which the fleet was about to be engaged.

"From the previous fatigue of this day, and of the two preceding, Lord Nelson was so much exhausted while dictating his instructions, that it was recommended to him by us all, and, indeed, insisted upon by his old servant, Allen, who assumed much command on these occasions, that he should go to his cot. It was placed on the floor, but from it he still continued to dictate. Captain Hardy returned about eleven. He had rowed as far as the leading ship of the enemy; sounding round her, and using a pole when he was apprehensive of being heard. He reported the practicability of the Channel, and the depth of water up to the ships of the enemy's line. Had we abided by this report, in lieu of confiding in our Masters and Pilots, we should have acted better.

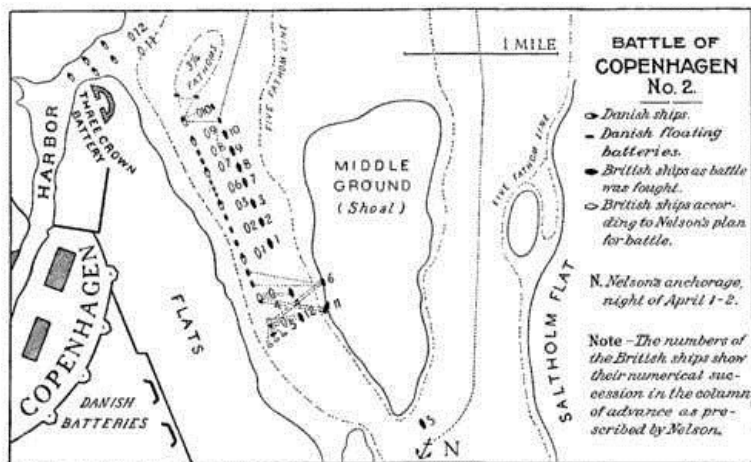
The Orders were completed about one o'clock, when half a dozen clerks in the foremost cabin proceeded to transcribe them. Lord Nelson's impatience again showed itself; for instead of sleeping undisturbedly, as he might have done, he was every half hour calling from his cot to these clerks to hasten their work, for that the wind was becoming fair: he was constantly receiving a report of this during the night." It was characteristic of the fortune of the "heaven-born" admiral, that the wind which had been fair the day before to take him south, changed by the hour of battle to fair to take him north; but it is only just to notice also that he himself never trifled with a fair wind, nor with time.

The Orders for Battle, the process of framing which Stewart narrates, have been preserved in full;<sup>30</sup> but they require a little study and analysis to detect Nelson's thought, and their tactical merit, which in matters of detail is unique among his works. At the Nile and Trafalgar he contented himself with general plans, to meet cases which he could only foresee in broad outlines; the method of application he reserved to the moment of battle, when again he signified the general direction of the attack, and left the details to his subordinates. Here at Copenhagen he had been able to study the hostile dispositions. Consequently, although he could not mark with precision the situations of the smaller floating batteries, those of the principal blockships were known, and upon that knowledge lie based very particular instructions

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<sup>30</sup> They are to be found in Nicolas's "Despatches and Letters of Lord Nelson," vol. iv. p. 304.

for the position each ship-of-the-line was to occupy. The smaller British vessels also had specific orders.



## Battle of Copenhagen, Plan Number 2

Taking the Trekroner as a point of reference for the Danish order, there were north of it, on the Danish left flank, two blockships. South of it were seven blockships, with a number of miscellaneous floating batteries, which raised that wing of the defence to eighteen—the grand total being therefore twenty. This was also Nelson's count, except that he put one small vessel on the north wing, reducing the southern to seventeen—an immaterial difference. South of the Trekroner, the Danes had disposed their seven blockships—which were mastless ships-of-



the-line—as follows. Two were on the right flank, supporting each other, two on the left, the three others spaced between these extremes; the distance from the Trekroner to the southernmost ship being about a mile and a half. The intervals were filled with the floating batteries. It will be recognized that the Danes treated this southern wing as an entity by itself, of which they strengthened the flanks, relying for the protection of the centre upon the nearness to shoal water, which would prevent the line being pierced.

As thus described, the southern wing covered the front of the city against bombardment. The two northern blockships and the Trekroner did not conduce materially to that; they protected chiefly the entrance of the harbor. It was therefore only necessary to reduce the southern wing; but Nelson preferred to engage at once the whole line of vessels and the Trekroner. It is difficult entirely to approve this refusal to concentrate upon a part of the enemy's order,—an advantage to which Nelson was fully alive,—but it was probably due to underestimating the value of the Danish gunnery, knowing as he did how long they had been at peace. He may, also, have hoped something from Parker's division. Be this as it may, he spread his ships-of-the-line, in the arrangement he prescribed, from one end to the other of the enemy's order.

Having done this, however, he adopted measures well calculated to crush the southern flank speedily, and then to accumulate superior numbers on the northern. The British were

arranged in a column of attack, and the directions were that the three leading ships should pass along the hostile line, engaging as they went, until the headmost reached the fifth Dane, a blockship inferior to itself, abreast which it was to anchor by the stern, as all the British ships were to do. Numbers two and three were then to pass number one, and anchor successively ahead of her, supporting her there against the other enemy's batteries, while four and five were to anchor astern of her, engaging the two flank blockships, which would have received already the full broadsides of the three leading vessels. Nelson hoped that the two southern Danes, by this concentration of fire upon them, would be speedily silenced; and their immediate antagonists had orders, when that was done, to cut their cables and go north, to reinforce the fight in that quarter. The sooner to attain this end, a frigate and some smaller vessels were told off to take position across the bows of the two blockships, and to keep a raking fire upon them.

The dispositions for the other British vessels were more simple. They were to follow along the outer side of their own engaged ships, each one anchoring as it cleared the headmost ship already in action,—number six ahead of number five, number seven of number six,—so that the twelfth would be abreast the twentieth Dane. One ship-of-the-line was of course thought equivalent to two or three floating batteries, if opposed to them in an interval. By this arrangement, each of the British was covered in its advance, until it reached its prescribed antagonist as nearly fresh as possible, and the order of the British column was

reversed from end to end.<sup>31</sup> A division of frigates and fireships, under Captain Riou, was held ready for any special service. The bomb-vessels were to anchor in the King's Channel, but well outside the line of battle, from which position they threw some bombs. Alongside each ship-of-the-line was towed a flat-boat, intended to carry soldiers in an attempt to storm the Trekroner, if circumstances favored; and other boats were sent for that purpose from Parker's division.

These orders were copied, and ready for distribution, by six in the morning. Nelson, who was already up and had breakfasted, signalled at seven for all captains, and by eight these had their instructions. The wind had become so fair that ships anchoring by the stern would lie perfectly well for using their broadsides at once. At this instant indecision appeared among the pilots, who were mostly men of only a little local experience, and that gained in vessels much smaller than those they were now to conduct. Nelson, reverting afterwards to these moments, said: "I experienced in the Sound the misery of having the honour of our Country intrusted to pilots, who have no other thought than to keep the ship clear of danger, and their own silly heads clear of shot. At eight in the morning of the 2d of April, not one pilot would take charge of a ship." There is in these words scarcely fair allowance for the men's ignorance. At length one of the Masters of the fleet, a Mr. Brierley, undertook to lead

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<sup>31</sup> Except numbers 4 and 5, whose stations, as has been said, were abreast the two southernmost Danes.

the column, and the signal to weigh in succession was made. The leading ship got off handsomely, but difficulties soon arose. Nelson's old "Agamemnon" was so anchored that she could not weather the Middle Ground; she consequently did not get into action at all. Two other ships, the "Bellona" and "Russell," seventy-fours, grounded on the east side of the Middle Ground, where they remained fast. Although they could use their guns, and did use them against those southern ships which Nelson particularly wanted crushed, the disadvantages of distance, of position, and of general helplessness, detracted exceedingly from their usefulness. The valid British force was thus reduced by one-fourth,—to nine vessels.

Nelson's ship, the "Elephant," was following the "Bellona" and "Russell," and he saw them ground. "His agitation during these moments was extreme," says an eye-witness. "I shall never forget the impression it made on me. It was not, however, the agitation of indecision, but of ardent, animated patriotism panting for glory, which had appeared within his reach, and was vanishing from his grasp." He doubtless well knew the thinly veiled reproaches of rashness, cast by timid counsels upon the daring, which even under these disadvantages was to cover with confusion their prophecies of disaster; but, as on many another day, and in that more famous incident, a few hours later, in this same battle, his tenacious purpose harbored no side-thought of retreat. "Before you receive this," he had written to Lady Hamilton, "all will be over with Denmark,—either your Nelson

will be safe, and Sir Hyde Parker a victor, or he, your own Nelson, will be laid low." The signal to advance was kept flying, but new dispositions had to be made to meet the new and adverse conditions.<sup>32</sup> The remaining ships were made to close to the rear, as they anchored. The "Elephant" had been originally assigned as antagonist to the biggest Danish ship, the "Sjaelland," seventy-four; but, the "Bellona" having grounded, she now dropped into the latter's berth immediately ahead of the "Glatton;" and Nelson hailed the "Ganges," as she was passing, to place herself as close as possible ahead of the "Elephant." This movement was imitated by the "Monarch," which thus got the "Elephant's" position abreast the "Sjaelland." Here, according to Danish accounts, the contest stood for some time, until the "Defiance," Graves's flagship, arriving, anchored ahead of the "Monarch," completing the line of nine British ships. Captain Riou with his light division engaged the *Trekroner*, and the Danish blockship next south of it, which was by him terribly battered. From this moment, and for some time, to use subsequent words of Nelson, "Here was no manoeuvring: it was downright fighting."

Meanwhile Parker's division, which had weighed as agreed, was some four miles off, beating up against Nelson's fair wind. It had not yet come into action, and the anxious chief, ever doubtful of the result of a step into which he had been persuaded, contrary,

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<sup>32</sup> The following is the order of the ships in the column of attack, as originally prescribed:—1. Edgar, 74.2. Ardent, 64.3. Glatton, 54.4. Isis, 50.5. Agamemnon, 64.6. Bellona, 74.7. Elephant, 74.8. Ganges, 74.9. Monarch, 74.10. Defiance, 74.11. Russell, 74.12. Polyphemus, 64.

not, perhaps, to his will, but certainly to his bent, watched the indecisive progress of the strife with a mind unoccupied by any fighting of his own. Two things were evident: that Nelson had met with some mishaps, and that the Danish resistance was more prolonged and sturdier than he had argued in the Council that it would be. Parker began to talk about making the signal to leave off action, and the matter was discussed between himself, his fleet-captain, and Otway, the captain of the ship. The latter opposed the idea strongly, and at last, as a stay, obtained the admiral's authority to go on board the "Elephant" and learn how things were. He shoved off accordingly, but before he reached Nelson the signal was made.



## Vice Admiral, Sir Hyde Parker

Nelson at the moment was walking the quarter-deck of the "Elephant," which was anchored on the bow of the Danish flagship "Dannebroke," engaging her and some floating batteries ahead of her. At this time, Stewart says, "Few, if any, of the enemy's heavy ships and praams had ceased to fire;" and, after mentioning various disappointments that had befallen the smaller British vessels, besides the failure of three heavy ships to reach their stations, he continues: "The contest, in general, although from the relaxed state of the enemy's fire, it might not have given much room for apprehension as to the result, had certainly not declared itself in favour of either side. Nelson was sometimes much animated, and at others heroically fine in his observations. A shot through the mainmast knocked a few splinters about us. He observed to me, with a smile, 'It is warm work, and this day may be the last to any of us at a moment;' and then, stopping short at the gangway, he used an expression never to be erased from my memory, and said with emotion, 'but mark you, I would not be elsewhere for thousands.'

"When the signal, No. 39, was made, the Signal Lieutenant reported it to him. He continued his walk, and did not appear to take notice of it. The lieutenant meeting his Lordship at the next turn asked, 'whether he should repeat it?' Lord Nelson answered, 'No, acknowledge it.'<sup>33</sup> On the officer returning to the poop,

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<sup>33</sup> To acknowledge a signal is simply to hoist a flag, showing that it has been seen and



his Lordship called after him, 'Is No. 16 [For Close Action] still hoisted?' The lieutenant answering in the affirmative, Lord Nelson said, 'Mind you keep it so.' He now walked the deck considerably agitated, which was always known by his moving the stump of his right arm. After a turn or two, he said to me, in a quick manner, 'Do you know what's shown on board the Commander-in-Chief, No. 39?' On asking him what that meant, he answered, 'Why, to leave off action.' 'Leave off action!' he repeated, and then added, with a shrug, 'Now damn me if I do.' He also observed, I believe, to Captain Foley, 'You know, Foley, I have only one eye—I have a right to be blind sometimes;' and then with an archness peculiar to his character, putting the glass to his blind eye, he exclaimed, 'I really do not see the signal.' This remarkable signal was, therefore, only acknowledged on board the Elephant, not repeated. Admiral Graves did the latter, not being able to distinguish the Elephant's conduct: either by a fortunate accident, or intentionally, No. 16 was not displaced.

"The squadron of frigates obeyed the signal, and hauled off. That brave officer, Captain Riou, was killed by a raking shot, when the Amazon showed her stern to the Trekroner. He was sitting on a gun, was encouraging his men, and had been wounded in the head by a splinter. He had expressed himself grieved at being thus obliged to retreat, and nobly observed, 'What will Nelson think of us?' His clerk was killed by his side; and by

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understood. To repeat is to hoist the signal yourself, thus transmitting it as an order to those concerned.

another shot, several of the marines, while hauling on the main-brace, shared the same fate. Riou then exclaimed, 'Come then, my boys, let us all die together!' The words were scarcely uttered, when the fatal shot severed him in two. Thus, and in an instant, was the British service deprived of one of its greatest ornaments, and society of a character of singular worth, resembling the heroes of romance." Fortunately for the British, not a ship-of-the-line budged. Graves had indeed transmitted the order by repeating it, but as he kept that for close action also flying, and did not move himself, the line remained entire throughout a period when the departure of a single ship would have ruined all, and probably caused its own destruction.

This incident of refusing to see the signal has become as hackneyed as a popular ballad, and in its superficial aspect, showing Nelson as the mere fighting man, who, like a plucky dog, could not be dragged off his antagonist, might well now have been dismissed with the shortest and most summary mention. Of late years doubt has been cast over the reality of Nelson's disobedience, for the reason that Otway, whose mission has already been noted, carried a verbal message that the order was to be understood as permissive, leaving Nelson the liberty to obey or not. From Otway's biography, however, it appears that the signal was hoisted before he reached the "Elephant." Parker's Secretary, Mr. Scott, has also stated distinctly, that "it was arranged between the admirals, that, should it appear the ships which were engaged were suffering too severely, the signal

for retreat would be made, to give Lord Nelson the option of retiring, if he thought fit."<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, without affirming positively, it should be said that Nelson's own impressions do not seem to have agreed with Scott's. Not only did he say, some hours after the fight, "Well, I have fought contrary to orders, and I shall perhaps be hanged; never mind, let them,"—which might pass as a continuation of the quarter-deck drama, if such it was,—but his account of the matter to Lord Minto is not consistent with any clear understanding, on his part, that he had such liberty of action. Nearly a year later, in March, 1802, Minto writes: "Lord Nelson explained to me a little, on Saturday last, the sort of blame which had been imputed to Sir Hyde Parker for Copenhagen; in the first place, for not commanding the attack in person, and in the next place for making signals to recall the fleet during the action; and everything would have been lost if these signals had been obeyed." If Nelson understood that the signal was to be construed as permissive only, it was extremely ungenerous, and most unlike Nelson, to have withheld an explanation which extenuated, if it did not excuse, one of the most dangerous and ill-judged orders that ever was conveyed by flags; nor is it probable that Parker, if the understanding had been explicit, would not have insisted with the Admiralty upon the fact, when he was smarting under the general censure, which had led to talk of an inquiry. It seems, also, unlikely that Nelson,

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<sup>34</sup> Life of Rev. Dr. A.J. Scott, p. 70

having such a contingency in view, would have failed to give explicit instructions that his ships should not withdraw (as Riou's frigates did) unless he repeated; nor is it easy to reconcile the agitation noted by Stewart with a previous arrangement of the kind asserted.

What Parker said was, probably, simply one of those by-remarks, with which an apprehensive man consoles himself that he reserves a chance to change his mind. Such provision rarely entered Nelson's head when embarking upon an enterprise in which "do or die" was the only order for success. The man who went into the Copenhagen fight with an eye upon withdrawing from action would have been beaten before he began. It is upon the clear perception of this truth, and his tenacious grip of it, that the vast merit of Nelson in this incident depends, and not upon the disobedience; though never was disobedience more justified, more imperative, more glorious. To retire, with crippled ships and mangled crews, through difficult channels, under the guns of the half-beaten foe, who would renew his strength when he saw the movement, would be to court destruction,—to convert probable victory into certain, and perhaps overwhelming, disaster. It was not, however, only in superiority of judgment or of fighting quality that Nelson in this one act towered like a giant above his superior; it was in that supreme moral characteristic which enabled him to shut his eyes to the perils and doubts surrounding the only path by which he could achieve success, and save his command from a defeat

verging on annihilation. The pantomime of putting the glass to his blind eye was, however unintentionally, a profound allegory. There is a time to be blind as well as a time to see. And if in it there was a little bit of conscious drama, it was one of those touches that not only provoke the plaudits of the spectators, but stir and raise their hearts, giving them both an example of heroic steadfastness, and also the assurance that there is one standing by upon whom their confidence can repose to the bitter end,—no small thing in the hour of hard and doubtful battle. It had its counterpart in the rebuke addressed by him on this very occasion to a lieutenant, who uttered some desponding words on the same quarter-deck: "At such a moment, the delivery of a desponding opinion, unasked, was highly reprehensible, and deserved much more censure than Captain Foley gave you."

At two o'clock, an hour after the signal was made, the resistance of the Danes had perceptibly slackened; the greater part of their line, Stewart says, had ceased to reply. The flagship "Dannebrog" had been on fire as early as half-past eleven, and the commander-in-chief, Commodore Fischer, had felt necessary to shift his broad pendant to the "Holstein," the second ship from the north flank. The "Dannebrog" continued to fight bravely, losing two hundred and seventy killed and wounded out of a total of three hundred and thirty-six, but at length she was driven out of the line in flames, and grounded near the Trekroner, where she blew up after the action. The "Sjaelland," seventy-four, next north of her, was likewise carried out of the line by her

cables being cut; while the "Holstein," and the northernmost ship of all, the "Indfödsretten," were so shattered, the latter mainly by Riou's frigates, that Fischer again shifted his flag, this time to the Trekroner. The two southern flank ships, upon whom the most concentrated attack was made, had also met with tremendous losses. Their flags were shot away many times, till at the last, by a Danish account, no one had time to raise them again, whence the impression arose amongst the British that these vessels, as well as some others, fought after having surrendered.

This incident, occurring in several cases, was the immediate cause of Nelson's taking a step which both then and since has been blamed as an unjustifiable stratagem. So much of the Danish fire south of the Trekroner had ceased, that that wing could be looked upon as subdued; some vessels were helpless, some had their flags down. Between himself and the Trekroner, Nelson alleged, there was a group of four Danes, unresisting and unmanageable, across and through which the battery was firing, and the British replying. Ships which had struck repelled boats sent to board them, and the batteries on Amag Island also fired upon those boats, and over the surrendered Danes. That there was some ground for the complaints made by him appears from the Danish admission just quoted, as well as from several British statements; Stewart's being explicit. Nelson accordingly sent a message ashore, under a flag of truce, to the Crown Prince, who was in general command, saying that if he were not allowed to take possession of his prizes, he would have to burn them. The

message ran:—

TO THE BROTHERS OF ENGLISHMEN, THE  
DANES.

Lord Nelson has directions to spare Denmark, when no longer resisting; but if the firing is continued on the part of Denmark, Lord Nelson will be obliged to set on fire all the floating batteries he has taken, without having the power of saving the brave Danes who have defended them.

*NELSON AND BRONTE.*

It was in the preparation and despatch of this note that Nelson gave another illustration, often quoted, of his cool consideration of all the circumstances surrounding him, and of the politic regard to effect which he ever observed in his official intercourse with men. It was written by his own hand, a secretary copying as he wrote. When finished, the original was put into an envelope, which the secretary was about to seal with a wafer; but this Nelson would not permit, directing that taper and wax should be brought. The man sent was killed before he could return. When this was reported to the admiral, his only reply was, "Send another messenger;" and he waited until the wax came, and then saw that particular care was exercised to make a full and perfect impression of the seal, which bore his own arms. Stewart said to him, "May I take the liberty of asking why, under so hot a fire, and after so lamentable an accident, you have attached so much importance to a circumstance apparently so trifling?" Nelson replied, "Had I made use of the wafer, it would still have been

wet when presented to the Crown Prince; he would have inferred that the letter was sent off in a hurry, and that we had some very pressing reasons for being in a hurry. The wax told no tales."

A flag of truce in a boat asks no cessation of hostilities, except so far as the boat itself is concerned. As for the message sent, it simply insisted that the Danes should cease firing; failing which, Nelson would resort to the perfectly regular, warlike measure of burning their ships. As the ships were beaten, this might not be humane; but between it and leaving them under the guns of both parties, the question of humanity was only one of degree. If Nelson could extort from the Danes a cessation of hostilities by such a threat, he had a perfect right to do it, and his claim that what he demanded was required by humanity, is at least colorable. It must be observed, however, that he makes no suggestion of truce or armistice,—he demands that firing shall be discontinued, or he will resort to certain steps.

The Crown Prince at once sent back his principal aid-de-camp, with a verbal message, which the latter reduced to writing, as follows:—

"His Royal Highness, the Prince Royal of Denmark, has sent me, General Adjutant Lindholm, on board to his Britannic Majesty's Vice-Admiral, the Right Honourable Lord Nelson, to ask the particular object of sending the flag of truce."

To this Nelson replied in writing:—

"Lord Nelson's object in sending on shore a flag of truce



is humanity; he, therefore, consents that hostilities shall cease till Lord Nelson can take his prisoners out of the prizes, and he consents to land all the wounded Danes, and to burn or remove his prizes."

This message concluded with a complimentary expression of hope that good relations would be restored between the two nations, whom Nelson always carefully spoke of as natural friends. It will be observed that he again alludes only to the flag of truce sent by the boat, and, as at first he demanded, so now he consents to a cessation of hostilities, until he can secure his prisoners and remove his prizes. If he could rightly remove his prizes, which he avowed as part of his demand, then still more he could his own ships. This part of the negotiation he took upon himself to settle; for discussion of any further matters he referred Lindholm to Sir Hyde Parker, and the Danish officer started for the "London" at the same time that the English officer pushed off to carry Nelson's second message to the Crown Prince. The latter had already sent orders to the batteries to cease firing. The battle then ended, and both sides hoisted flags of truce.

Nelson at once began to remove his ships, which had suffered more than in any other battle he had ever fought. That he was fully aware of the imminent necessity for some of them to withdraw, and of the advantage the Danes had yielded him by accepting his terms, is indisputable, and his own opinion was confirmed by that of two of his leading captains, whom he consulted. This he never denied; but he did deny that he had used

a *ruse de guerre*, or taken unfair advantage of a truce. On the score of humanity he had consented to a cessation of hostilities, conditional upon his freedom to take out of the surrendered ships the unwounded prisoners, and to remove the prizes. If the bargain was more to his advantage than to that of the Danes—which is a matter of opinion—it was none the less a bargain, of which he had full right to reap the benefit. The Danes did not then charge him with taking an unfair advantage. On the contrary, Lindholm, who was closely cognizant of all that passed in relation to these negotiations, wrote to him: "Your Lordship's motives for sending a flag of truce to our Government can never be misconstrued, and your subsequent conduct has sufficiently shown that humanity is always the companion of true valour." The truce that then began was prolonged from day to day till April 9th. During it both parties went on with their preparations for war. "These few days," wrote Niebuhr, on the 6th, "have certainly been employed in repairing the evil [of faulty preparation] as far as possible." It is clear that the Danes understood, what Nelson's message specified, a cessation of direct hostilities, not of other movements. The British during the same days were putting bomb-vessels in place, a perfectly overt act.

Nelson's success at Copenhagen was secured by address, as it had been won by force. But it had been thoroughly won. "We cannot deny it," wrote Niebuhr, "we are quite beaten. Our line of defence is destroyed. We cannot do much injury to the enemy, as long as he contents himself with bombarding the city, docks,

and fleet. The worst is the Crown Batteries can be held no longer." Two or three days later he says again: "The truce has been prolonged. The remaining half of our defences are useless, now that the right wing is broken,—a defect over which I have meditated uselessly many a time since last summer." The result was due to Nelson's sagacious and emphatic advice as to the direction and manner of the attack, by which the strong points of the Danish positions were completely and unexpectedly turned. This plan, it is credibly stated, he had formed before leaving England, although he was not formally consulted by Parker until the 23d of March.

Having regard to the general political conditions, and especially to the great combination of the North at this time directed against Great Britain, the victory of Copenhagen was second in importance to none that Nelson ever gained; while in the severity of the resistance, and in the attendant difficulties to be overcome, the battle itself was the most critical of all in which he was engaged. So conspicuous were the energy and sagacity shown by him, that most seamen will agree in the opinion of Jurien de la Gravière: "They will always be in the eyes of seamen his fairest title to glory. He alone was capable of displaying such boldness and perseverance; he alone could confront the immense difficulties of that enterprise and overcome them." Notwithstanding this, and notwithstanding that the valor of the squadron, as manifested in its losses, was never excelled, no medals were ever issued for the battle, nor were

any individual rewards bestowed, except upon Nelson himself, who was advanced in the peerage to be a Viscount, and upon his immediate second, Rear-Admiral Graves, who was made a Knight of the Bath. The cause for this action—it was not a case of oversight—has never been explained; nor did Nelson consider the reasons for it, which the Prime Minister advanced to him in a private interview, at all satisfactory. If it was because a formal state of war did not exist between Great Britain and Denmark, the obvious reply of those engaged would be that they had hazarded their lives, and won an exceptionally hard-fought fight, in obedience to the orders of their Government. If, on the other hand, the Ministry felt the difficulty of making an invidious distinction between ships engaged and those not engaged, as between Nelson's detachment and the main body under Parker, it can only be said that that was shirking the duty of a government to reward the deserving, for fear lest those who had been less fortunate should cry out. The last administration had not hesitated to draw a line at the Battle of the Nile, even though the mishap of so great an officer as Troubridge left him on the wrong side. St. Vincent, positive as he was, had shrunk from distinguishing by name even Nelson at the battle which had won for himself his title. This naturally suggests the speculation whether the joint presence of St. Vincent and Troubridge at the Admiralty was not the cause of this futility; but nothing can be affirmed.

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