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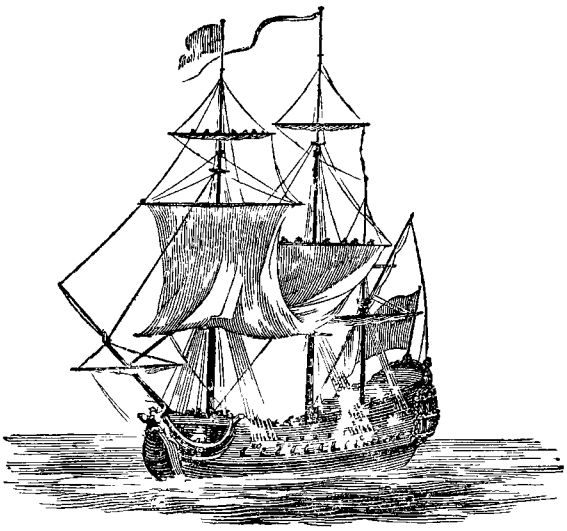

If it happens that a Ship is to be brought up in a place where there is not sufficient room to tend her, reduce her headway as much as possible before she comes to her anchoring birth, so that a less scope of cable will bring her up.—Steel's *Practice of Working Ships*

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS OF

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

JOHN JERVIS, EARL OF ST. VINCENT,

KNIGHT OF THE MOST HONOURABLE ORDER OF THE BATH, AND ADMIRAL OF THE WHITE SQUADRON.

——Then you fill'd
The air with shouts of joy, and did proclaim,
When Hope had left them, and grim-look'd Despair
Hover'd with sail-stretch'd wings over their heads,
To me, as to the Neptune of the Sea,
They ow'd the restitution of their goods,
Their lives and liberties. MASSINGER.

IT is difficult to pourtray with truth the characters of living persons. They may be compared to pictures drawn from the life, in which every feature must be somewhat heightened to obtain the reputation of similitude. The exaggeration of beauties and of deformities are, it is true, equally and alternately censured by friends and enemies; but if the likeness were exactly correct, it would be admired by none. The artist prefers, therefore, the approbation of half the world to the censure, or at least the cold neglect, of the whole; and sacrifices the fidelity of his portrait to the incorrigible

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passions and inveterate prejudices of partial spectators. Time, however, the great corrector of all faults, softens down those asperities which the pencil had left; spreads a sober tint over the brilliant lights, and mellows the shadows to a milder hue. A cool recollection of the original, and the comparison with other representations of the same object, aid us still further in the discovery of the truth, and the whole is at length exhibited to posterity with a degree of correctness which is almost always denied to contemporaries.

The noble person of whom we are to speak is a striking instance, perhaps, of the justice of these remarks. As an officer, he has been charged with too strict an adherence to that steady discipline which the wisdom of our forefathers, attentive to the public good, ordained in naval regulations, and from which a mistaken spirit of kindness in our time has, on some occasions, unseasonably relaxed: as a senator, he has been censured for what is called an uncertainty of political conduct; in other words, for asserting, in his parliamentary life, an upright and dignified independence, equally unbending to Ministry and Opposition, equally inaccessible by interest or adulation: as a man, he has been said to maintain a gravity of deportment bordering on reserve and severity, because he has too much feeling, and too much sincerity to waste on knaves and fools those honest smiles, and that freedom of conversation, to which his friends, to whom he never denies them, have an exclusive right. Time will place these circumstances of character in a proper point of view; while he who justly experiences the love and esteem of all who know him, joined to the gratitude of a nation, need not complain that he has not his share of this world's charities.

His Lordship is the descendant of an ancient and truly respectable family, settled in the county of Stafford: being the second and youngest son of Swynfen Jervis, Esq. Barrister at Law, some time Counsel to the Board of Admiralty, and Auditor of Greenwich Hospital. He was sent at a very early age to a celebrated school at Burton-upon-Trent, which he quitted, when ten years old, in consequence of his father having, in conformity to his own inclination, determined to

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educate him for the sea service. The infancy of his naval life received the first rudiments of instruction under that truly amiable man, and gallant officer, the late Lord Hawke; and, having been rated a Midshipman about the year 1748-9, he served in that capacity on board the Gloucester, of 50 guns, the commanding Ship on the Jamaica station *. After an almost uninterrupted series of service, which, owing to the peaceable situation of public affairs, affords not sufficient interest to render a particular detail of it either necessary or amusing, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant †, and, not long afterward, selected by that admirable officer the late Sir Charles Saunders to serve on board his Ship.

He accompanied, accordingly, Sir Charles in the expedition sent against Quebec: an expedition which, though successful in its termination, displayed, for a considerable time, nothing but a series of disappointments, and difficulties, that, had they not been combated by the utmost exertion of human ability, gallantry, and perseverance, might have proved insurmountable. Soon after the reduction of the town, he was most deservedly advanced to the rank of Commander; and having returned to Europe, he proceeded, not long afterward, to the Mediterranean, as Captain, we believe, of the Albany sloop. His former Commander ‡, who had become intimately acquainted with the many excellent qualities he possessed, and which peculiarly fitted him to fill, with the highest honour to himself, and advantage to his country, the station of a Naval Commander, appointed him acting Captain of the Experiment, a post Ship, mounting 20 guns, during the indisposition of Sir John Strachan. This temporary promotion was extremely fortunate to Mr. Jervis, who, having been ordered out on a Mediterranean cruise, had the fortune to fall in with a very large xebec trader, Moorish colours, though it was very evident the whole of her crew was French.

* Bearing the broad pendant of the Honourable George Townshend.

† On the 19th of February 1755.

‡ Sir C. Saunders, who proceeded to the Mediterranean at the commencement of the year 1760, as Commander in Chief on that station.

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The superiority possessed by the enemy in point of natural force was so great, that the event of the contest would at best have been doubtful, had not that enemy been resisted, on the part of the English, by the most consummate ability, joined to the most active intrepidity. The xebec, exclusive of the advantage she derived from her low construction, particularly in smooth water and those light winds, which prevailed at the time of the attack, mounted 26 guns of very heavy calibre, besides a considerable number of large swivels or patararoes. The crew, which was nearly three times as numerous as that of the Experiment, consisted of men selected from the hardiest class of society, on whom the appellation of desperadoes might be very aptly and justly bestowed. The grand objects of their ferocious minds were rapine and plunder. Lawless in their pursuits, insatiable in their avarice, and most intemperate in what they considered their pleasures, they attempted (instead of displaying that cool and dignified conduct which, when he contends on honourable terms, excites our admiration even of an enemy,) to dart on their prey with the savage spirit of vultures, thirsting to satiate their voracious appetites.

The conflict, though furious, was short; determinate bravery prevailed over fury; and the assailants considered themselves extremely fortunate in not being so disabled as to prevent them from taking the advantage of a light and favourable breeze of wind, which in all probability preserved them from a discomfiture much more serious, if not a capture. Captain Jervis, having returned to England, continued to command the Albany sloop till the thirteenth of October 1760, when he was promoted to the rank of Post Captain by commission appointing him to the Gosport, of 40 guns. He continued in this ship till the end of the war, very uninterestingly employed on the home service, where the lassitude with which hostilities were permitted to linger, through the want of the power of offence on the part of the foe, and the generosity of Britain in disdaining to take advantage of that fallen state, afforded no opportunity for the exertion of

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the spirit of enterprize, however naturally it might wish to display itself in the service of its country. After having remained some time on the home station, Captain Jervis was ordered to the Mediterranean, whence he did not return till the conclusion of the war, and, being then paid off, held no subsequent command till the year 1769; when being appointed to the Alarm frigate, of 32 guns, he was again ordered to the Mediterranean.

The command of a frigate on a foreign station for three years, during a time of profound peace, cannot be supposed, according to the general course of events, to afford any materials sufficiently interesting to attract the notice of a biographer. Captain Jervis was not, however, a perfect example of the truth of this general observation. In the month of August 1770, being at Villa-Franca, he had the honour of entertaining on board his Ship the Duc de Chablais, brother to the King of Sardinia, who expressed himself most highly gratified at his reception *, having found, not improbably with surprise, that elegance of manners, and the most polished behaviour, were not incompatible with the character of a Naval Officer.

Not long after the return of Captain Jervis to England, where he arrived in 1774, he was promoted to the Foudroyant, of 84 guns: a Ship originally belonging to the French, and captured from them in the year 1758, by the Monmouth, of 64 guns. This appointment was a very convincing proof of the established and high reputation he had acquired in the service: for the Foudroyant was, with very great truth, considered the finest two-decked Ship belonging

* His Royal Highness showed the greatest curiosity to be informed of the use of every thing he saw. He desired the chain-pumps to be worked, and a gun to be exercised, and between the several motions made the most pertinent remarks. Having satisfied his curiosity, he testified his gratification by the magnificent presents he made on that occasion. To the Captain he gave a diamond ring, enclosed in a large gold snuff-box; to the two Lieutenants a gold box each; to the Lieutenant of Marines who mounted the guard, the Midshipman who steered his Royal Highness, and those who assisted him up and down the Ship's side, a gold watch each, one of which was a Paris repeater, and another set with sparks, together with a large sum of money to the Ship's company. His Royal Highness stayed about two hours, and was saluted on his going aboard and coming ashore with one and twenty guns.

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to the British Navy. His occupation from the time of his having first received his commission for this Ship was by no means suited to the dignity of his character and the abilities he confessedly possesses: for, owing to the multitude of frigates and sloops of war which the dispute with the American colonies rendered it expedient should be kept on their coast, it had become necessary to employ Ships of the line as cruisers in the Bay of Biscay, in order to prevent, as much as possible, all intercourse between the revolted States and France: as on French assistance the colonists placed their principal dependence for support, and for those stores, without a supply of which they could not possibly have carried on the contest.

Fortune, as if she had frowned indignant at the degradation both of the Commander and of the Ship itself, employed on a service that was much better suited to a sloop of war or a privateer, appears to have afforded him only one opportunity of making a capture; and even that was * as ignoble as would be the destruction of a mouse by the fangs of a lion: but the unwarrantable interference of the court of France in a dispute which was of a peculiar nature, and which demanded their neutrality beyond every other case that could possibly have been framed, raised Captain Jervis, though at the expence of his country's welfare, into a situation better suited to both his talents and (waving the cause which gave birth to the effect) his inclination.

The Foudroyant being ordered to join the fleet equipped for Channel service, under the command of Admiral Keppel, Captain Jervis was selected by that gentleman to be one of his seconds; and it were almost a needless piece of information, considering those subsequent occurrences in his life with which the whole world is intimately acquainted, to say that he distinguished himself to the utmost extent the existing circumstances of the action permitted: his gallantry not only reflected honour on himself, but may be considered as having

* The Finch, an inconsiderable vessel, bound from Nantz to Boston, with a cargo of arms and clothing, taken in the month of May 1777.

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been in no small degree instrumental to the preservation of many lives from among his people *, which must have been lost had the force of his attack been less animated. The enemy shrunk from him in dismay, and left him, in more instances than one, disabled as he was, to enjoy the empty honour of defeating him; while the situation in which he was placed (as one of a community in which all the members were to regard the advantage of each other, and not seize, at the expence of irregularity, any opportunity of adding to their own peculiar fame,) prevented him from pursuing the blow he had struck, and completing his triumph by that unequivocal conquest—the surrender of his enemy. The evidence that he gave during the subsequent trial was spirited, and impartial. It proved him animated only by the strictest attention to what he considered that duty which he owed to his country, without conforming to the opinion, or entering into the views of any party whatever †. He continued uninterestingly employed

* The Foudroyant had five men only killed, and eighteen wounded.

† Indeed it is impossible to convey a better idea of his Lordship's character and opinion relative to that engagement than by the following extracts from the clear, consistent, and pointed testimony, which he gave upon the court martial called upon Admiral Keppel.

Upon the following questions being put by the Admiral:

Question. Your station being nearest me during the pursuit of the enemy, and after the action, which gave you an opportunity of observing my conduct, and of seeing objects nearly in the same point of view with myself, I desire you will state to the Court any instance, if you saw or knew of any such, in which I negligently performed my duty on the twenty-seventh or twenty-eighth of July.

Ans. With great respect to you, Sir, and deference to the Court, I hope I shall be indulged with having that question put by the Court.

The Judge Advocate, *mutatis mutandis*, then put the question.

Ans. I feel myself bound to answer that question; I believe it to be consonant to the general practice of sea courts martial.—I cannot boast of a long acquaintance with Admiral Keppel; I never had the honour of serving under him before; but I am happy in this opportunity to declare to this Court, and to the whole world, that during the whole time that the English fleet was in sight of the French fleet, he displayed *the greatest naval skill and ability, and the boldest enterprize, upon the twenty-seventh of July, which, with the promptitude of Sir Robert Harland, will be subjects of my admiration and imitation as long as I live.*

From the evidence given upon this trial it appears, that the Foudroyant, which had got into her station about three, and never left it till four the next morning, was very closely engaged, and in a most disabled state. Her main mast had

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on the various services allotted to the home or Channel fleet, commanded in succession, after the resignation of Mr. Keppel, by Sir Charles Hardy, Admirals Geary and Darby. The absence of an enemy precluded a possibility of contest; and the events of war, so far as they regarded this consequential armament, were confined merely to a dull monotony of carrying into execution every service on which it was ordered, without ever beholding a foe, at least any one that merited so dignified an appellation.

In the month of April 1782, a slight interruption was given to this long continued scene of tedious inactivity. Intelligence having been received, that a French armament, consisting of four or five Ships of war and several transports, were ready for sea at Brest, destined for the East Indies, a squadron, consisting of several Ships of the line, was ordered out, under the command of Vice-Admiral Barrington, for the purpose of intercepting them. The experiment proved in a great measure successful; and the most brilliant part of that success was attributable to the activity and spirit of Captain Jervis. The part he so honourably bore in this affair will be best explained by the account given by his Commanding Officer of the transaction, and that singular method he adopted of doing honour to his gallantry, in declining to give any other account of the transaction than what had been, in such modest terms, transmitted to him by Captain Jervis himself.

received a shot very near through the head, which lodged in the cheek, and passed through the heart of the mast, and several other shot in different places; her foremast had also received several shot; a large excavation had been made in her bowsprit near the centre, the fore-top mast was so disabled, that it was totally useless; every rope of her running rigging cut, and her shrouds demolished; no braces or bow-lines left, and scarcely any haulyards, forestay, spring-stay, and top sail ties, and the foot rope of the fore-top-sail shot away: her sails also were very much shattered.

In this shattered state, the Foudroyant was not in a condition to chase; but she kept her station next the Victory as far to windward as possible: "*I was covetous of wind*," said this brave officer; "*because, disabled as I then was, I conceived the advantage of the wind could carry me again into action*"

Being asked some questions relative to the position of the Vice-Admiral and his division, his Lordship pointedly replied: "he was not a *competent judge of that part of the fleet; he was very attentive to the Admiral.*

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Extract of a Letter from the Honourable Vice-Admiral BARRINGTON *to Mr.* STEPHENS, *dated on board the* Britannia, *at* St. Helens, *the 25th of* April 1782.

I have the pleasure to acquaint you, for the information of my Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, that on the twentieth instant, Ushant bearing N. E. half E. twenty-three leagues, at one P. M. I perceived the Artois, Captain Macbride, with a signal out for discovering an enemy's fleet, but at such a distance, that it was with the utmost difficulty I could distinguish the colour of the flag. It was then calm; but a breeze soon springing up, I made the signal for a general chase, the enemy at such a distance, that I could but just discover them from the Britannia's mast-head at three o'clock. At the close of the evening seven of our Ships had got a good distance ahead of me, the Foudroyant, Captain Jervis, the foremost; and in the night, it coming to blow strong with hazy weather, after having lost sight of his companions, at forty-seven minutes after twelve brought the Pegase, of 74 guns and 700 men, to a close action, which continued three quarters of an hour, when the Foudroyant having laid her on board on the larboard quarter, the Frenchman struck. My pen is not equal to the praise that is due to the good conduct, bravery, and discipline of Captain Jervis, his officers and seamen, on this occasion; let his own modest narrative, which I herewith inclose, speak for itself.

The next morning soon after day break, the wind then at south, blowing strong, it shifted in an instant to the west, and with such violence, that it was with difficulty I could carry my courses to clear Ushant, and get the Channel open; which being accomplished by noon, I brought to, and remained so until the evening of the twenty-second, to collect the squadron.

By the accounts of the prisoners, there were eighteen sail laden with stores, provisions, and ammunition, under the convoy of the Protecteur of 74 guns, Pegase 74, L'Andromache 32, together with L'Actionaire, a two-decker, armed *en flute*, all bound for L'Isle de France. They left Brest the nineteenth instant.

I cannot pretend to give their Lordships a particular account of the number of prizes taken, but must refer them to that which they may receive as they arrive in port, though I believe there are ten at least.

Proceedings of his Majesty's Ship under my Command from the 20th instant.

Near sun-set on the twentieth, I was near enough to discover, that the enemy consisted of three or four Ships of war, two of them at least of the line, with seventeen or eighteen sail under their convoy, and that the latter dispersed by signal. At half past nine, I observed the

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smallest of the Ships of war to speak with the headmost, and then bear away. At a quarter past ten, the sternmost line of battle Ship perceiving we came up with her very fast, bore up also. I pursued her, and at forty-seven minutes after twelve brought her to close action, which continued three quarters of an hour, when having laid her on board on the larboard quarter, the French Ship of war Le Pegase, of 74 guns and 700 men, commanded by the Chevalier de Cillart, surrendered.

The discipline and good conduct of the officers and men under my command will best appear by the state of the killed and wounded, and of the damages sustained in each Ship.

I am happy to inform you, that only two or three people, with myself, are slightly wounded; but I learn from the Chevalier de Cillart, that Le Pegase suffered a great carnage, and was materially damaged in her masts and yards, the mizen-mast and foretop-mast having gone away soon after the action ceased.

It blew so strong yesterday morning, that I with difficulty put eighty men on board the prize, but received only forty prisoners in return; in performing which I fear two of our boats were lost. The disabled state of the prize, together with the strong wind and heavy sea, induced me to make the signal for immediate assistance, which Commodore Elliot supplied, by making the Queen's signal to assist the disabled Ship.

At eight o'clock last night, they bore S. S. W. four miles distant from us. We lay to till ten in hopes of their joining; but not perceiving them we bore up, and ran N. E. twenty three miles till day-light; when seeing nothing of them, we brought to, and at half past eight, made sail to join the squadron.

By all I can learn from the prisoners, this small squadron, composed of Le Protecteur, Monsieur de Soulange, Commodore, Le Pegase, and L'Andromaque frigate, was making a second attempt to proceed on an expedition to the East Indies. Some of the troops having been before captured under that destination by the squadron under the command of Rear-Admiral Kempenfelt, in the presence of the above mentioned Ships of war.

Foudroyant, *April* 23, 1782. J. JERVIS.

The wound of which Captain Jervis makes such trivial mention in his preceding narrative was occasioned by a splinter, which struck him on the temple, and so severely affected him as to endanger his eye sight: nor have the consequences ever been completely removed since that time. His gallantry did not pass unnoticed or unrewarded by his Sovereign, who,

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