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Edited by James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur

Excerpt

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BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR
OF THE LATE
WILLIAM BUDGE, Esq.

" Nought can his firmness shake; nothing seduce
His zeal, still active for the common weal;
Nor stormy tyrants, nor Corruption's tools—
To virtue so determined, public zeal,
And honour of such adamantine proof
As even Corruption, hopeless and o'er-aw'd,
Durst not have tempted."———THOMSON.

THOSE who have lived any time in this world, who have had opportunities of observing the vicissitudes attendant on the life of man, and who, at the same time, have not been indifferent spectators, must have been forcibly struck with the elevation of some men, and of others remaining in a state of comparative obscurity, although possessed of equal abilities and zeal in their profession.

The abilities of some men are not indeed easily to be discovered, even by those of considerable penetration, much less by superficial observers; they hide themselves from the eyes of vain curiosity and prying censoriousness; while some, from elevation in rank, assume to themselves a degree of wisdom and judgment to which they have no real title; and may domineer over, and hold in apparent contempt, others, who excel them in these qualities, as much as the lucid orb of the sun excels that of the moon, reflecting a borrowed light.

Shallow streams make a great noise, while those of depth move on silently in their course.

It has justly been observed in the impartial pages of the *NAVAL CHRONICLE*, that a degrading spirit of subserviency is too often necessary, and practised, to work up hill in the naval service; and those who cannot bring themselves to stoop, have often many chances against them, and therefore are generally outstripped in the race by their more supple brethren, unless where interest takes them by the hand.

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But are not such things to be found in other situations of life—
in other departments of the state ?

The subject of the present memoir entered into the navy during what has been called the American war ; and being under the patronage of Captain Hamond (now Sir Andrew Snape), he was put by him on board of the *Chatham*, then commanded by the late Sir Andrew Snape Douglas, his nephew, a young enterprising officer, both being at that time on the coast of America.

In 1784 he was on board of the *Goliath*, a guard-ship in Portsmouth harbour, commanded by the late Sir Hyde Parker ; and in the same year went on board of the *Europa*, bearing the flag of the late Rear-admiral Innes, appointed to the command on the Jamaica station. Hope held out the prospect of meeting that in a foreign clime, against which the door had been shut at home by peace.

Admiral Innes dying soon after, he returned to England in the *Bull-dog* sloop of war, seeing no prospect of realizing his hopes ; and his patron, the late Earl of Liverpool, seeing as little, at that time, of getting him promoted in the naval service, and being at the head of the foreign plantation office, persuaded him to accept of a situation in the same, with which he reluctantly complied ; but never was the profession in which he first set out in life forgotten ; never were his companions lost sight of.

Mr. Budge rose by gradation, as is usual ; and in 1794, was removed to the secretary of state's office for the home department, being a new establishment, and was also appointed private secretary to Mr. Dundas (the late Lord Melville), then at the head of the department.

It has been observed, that his partiality for the navy never left him. He cultivated a correspondence with many officers whom he had known while serving at sea ; and also with others with whom he afterwards became acquainted. He ever manifested a strong desire for obtaining information respecting the state of the different ships of war, and distribution of the naval force of Great Britain ; and also on the same points, respecting that of the different maritime powers ; and to such a length had his indefatigable exertions carried his inquiries, and crowned them with success, that perhaps no individual, in any country, possessed a more accurate knowledge of the state of the different navies in Europe.

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However enigmatical it may appear, it has been asserted from good authority, that he was the first who intimated to government the unexpected strength and number of ships of war that Buonaparté had despatched to St. Domingo. In the preliminaries of the peace of Amiens, it has been said, there was a secret article,* permitting a certain number of French ships of war to carry troops to St. Domingo; that this number was limited to sixteen; and in order that the force might proceed unmolested, it is said, the British ships of war were directed to retire from the coast of France.

Buonaparté paid as much attention to this article, as to any in his numerous treaties with different powers, where it suited his views to act contrary to the spirit and meaning; he therefore augmented the armament to *forty* sail of the line, French, Spanish, and Dutch; with about *fifty* frigates and corvettes, having on board a formidable army,

Lord Hobart, who at that time presided at the head of the department in which Mr. Budge was employed, asked him how he came by his information? He was answered in a suitable manner, but which could not be very gratifying to any one high in office, who ought to have been able to give information, not to seek it from such a source; he therefore made no reply.

This unexpected information caused about fifty ships and vessels of war to be sent to Jamaica, from Great Britain, Ireland, and the Mediterranean, between the signing of the preliminaries and the definitive treaty.

It will be readily imagined, that a mind so ardent and patriotic was not idle in observing the storms that agitated Europe; and in conceiving plans for the most favourable distribution of the British naval force, so as to counteract the plans of her numerous and formidable enemies.

In a warfare so complicated and extended, those in possession of much information might be deceived in some points; and plans may have been submitted to government, by different individuals, of the accuracy of which perhaps no just judgment could be

* Secret articles in treaties with the faithless revolutionary government of France do not appear ever to have favoured the power that was so unguarded as to make them.

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formed, unless put in execution by those capable of giving them effect; and in all human affairs, there will always be a diversity of opinion; even in those supported on one side by undeniable facts and evidence.

To an incessant thirst for naval knowledge,* Mr. Budge joined a scrupulous attention to the duties of his office; and this being joined to an inflexible integrity, he might not be viewed in the most favourable light by any who were looking with longing eyes and itching fingers on the loaves and fishes; on sinecures and pensions; and who could not endure the thought of an observer of this stamp being at hand, with penetrating eyes and discriminating judgment, weighing in the balance of justice the abilities and pretensions of those who got such things in possession.

To this may be attributed the neglect he experienced at the change of ministry: when Mr. Dundas (the late Lord Melville) went out of office with Mr. Pitt, previous to the conclusion of the truce of Amiens, the zealous, the faithful, the well-informed Mr. Budge, was left as when he first went into the secretary's office.

This would have been galling to a mind that could not produce half the pretensions to notice, when it beheld so many advanced who had no greater claims, or so great as itself; how wounding must it then have been to the soul actuated by conscious rectitude and unwearied zeal in the public service? This drew from him a severe rebuke, in which he asked, if it were because he had served so faithfully (in the capacity of private secretary), that he had been treated with such unmerited neglect? The remonstrance was so unexpected, spirited, and so strongly supported by justice, that notwithstanding the known abilities of the late Lord M. the force of truth threw him into apparent confusion, while he endeavoured to exculpate himself from the charge. Yet Mr. B. did not attribute the treatment he experienced to any dislike on the part of Mr. Dundas, or insensibility of the value of his services; but to *busy bodies*, of whom there are enough in every situation of life; particularly one, who had secured "cheese parings and can-

* It would be well, if those whose situations could render general knowledge effective in national affairs, were ever under the influence of a spirit equally desirous of intelligence in all maritime affairs.

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dle ends" to himself and relations; and who, though a superior in office, was, perhaps, not pleased with the stiff erectness of Mr. Budge's superiority of intellect and information. Yet sometimes such men may appear great financiers and calculators; and may even please the ears of John Bull, when appearing all zeal in behalf of his purse.

It certainly raises deep regret and indignation in every mind, where the sense of justice is predominant, when the faithful and zealous servants of the country are unworthily treated, through the secret intrigues and suggestions of parasites, who are endeavouring to grasp all they can under cover; while in public they appear the flaming patriot, and talk loudly of savings, and curtailment in the public expenditure, in those things from which they can derive no personal advantage, or no longer have an opportunity of touching, or when satiated with previous acquisitions. And then, O how penurious of the public purse; what eagle eyes in perceiving afar the carrion of which they cannot partake; how loudly they declaim against wasteful expenditure, that the nation may hear and admire their vigilance and patriotism. As a proof that Lord Melville was fully satisfied with the abilities and faithfulness of Mr. Budge (and it must be allowed that few could be more competent to judge), and that the latter ascribed little part of the neglect he had experienced to his Lordship's real sentiments; when that nobleman was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty, at the persuasion of Sir Andrew Snape Hamond, Mr. B. offered his services as private secretary, observing to his Lordship, that he must be well qualified for judging how far he was capable of discharging the duties of the office. Of this his Lordship was so fully satisfied, that he immediately accepted the offer; and it will be allowed by those who knew the man, that his Lordship could not have made a more happy choice, for fidelity and naval knowledge.

Here it will be proper to leave Mr. Budge for a time, and take a retrospective view for some years, that the reader may be more intimately acquainted with the bent of his mind, and his attention to naval affairs; and this will be done by extracting some passages from his letters.

Passing by those during the Spanish and Russian armaments, in 1790 and 1791, and also for various information respecting the

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dock-yards, &c. &c. the first that shall be noticed is in November 1793, wherein he says :—

“ Let me know what ships have been commissioned at Portsmouth since the commencement of the present year, including all classes : also, when the Portuguese fleet arrived and sailed ; and any foreign ships that may have been, or are now at Spithead.”

After noticing the failure of the expedition sent against the French West India Islands in 1793, and the number of vessels left at St. Pierre, he adds :—

“ I should think, if a squadron were to be sent out, it is very probable many of those vessels which went to America would be met with ; though I am rather inclined to think more of them will attempt to run home than come under convoy.

“ What are you doing with so many frigates and sloops at Spithead ? Would they not be better on the coast of America, protecting our trade ? Or on the coast of France, interrupting theirs ?—The surrender of Toulon is a great event. My humble opinion on the matter is, that it would be far greater, were the whole of the ships and arsenal destroyed.”

How justly this opinion was formed, a short time evinced.

In a letter dated the 3d January, 1794, he says :—

“ I was much disappointed at not receiving some account of the chase of the French squadron ; * particularly as you know it would have been a great feast to me.

“ Will you explain exactly the meaning of the signal, for a ship, when in chase, to come into the admiral's wake in starboard line of bearing ?—Do also learn whether any signal was made for a general chase ; and what is the meaning of the signal for the fleet to close round the admiral, when at the same time the signal is made for battle, and to engage as you come up ? What reason is assigned for calling in the ships on the following morning, when part of the enemy's squadron was in sight ? And why did not the fleet return off Brest ?”

In a letter dated the 4th of January, 1794, when making observations on the successes attending the arms of France, he observes—

“ Some now begin to shew the same symptoms that I have been so long infected with ; and to perceive, that the disposition of our naval force has been too lamentably neglected. The change in our marine minister, is, in my humble opinion, a very favourable event ; and will, if things are not gone too far, in the ensuing campaign, rescue Great Britain to the sovereignty of the ocean.

“ This you will most likely say she has been hitherto. However, if you do, I think it is more than you can support ; though I most readily admit

* The squadron chased by that under Lord Howe.

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the great superiority of skill which our officers and men possess over the enemy; and which, whenever they have an opportunity, they most gloriously display; but taking the subject in the point of view in which it ought to be considered, under the present circumstances, we really cannot say that we are truly so. For, instead of our having shut up the ports of France, and kept the commerce of this country protected against her cruisers, our losses are not preceded in the annals of our naval history. These last three months we have, upon an average, lost *fifty* sail in each; and upon an average of the last year, from *thirty-five* to *forty* sail monthly.

“When we consider the means which are pursued in France to carry on the war, and the means which must be adopted in this country, I take the balance to be decidedly in favour of the enemy. And as long as they can maintain the good fortune they have hitherto experienced, it will not be material whether they have any trade or not, farther than what is carried on in neutral bottoms, and the supplies which they receive by the numerous captures made from the allies.

“As to their coasting trade and their victuallers, which pass to and from Brest, Havre, Cherbourg, &c. it is, and has been, carried on all the war without interruption, in fleets from *twenty* to *fifty* sail.

“I have heard of at least *twenty* of these convoys; but I hope I shall hear of no more of them in future, till their arrival be announced at some of our ports.” &c. &c.

In this Mr. Budge was disappointed; for although they have been sometimes interrupted, the coasting trade of France was carried on much in the same manner, until the termination of the war in 1814. For this there may be assigned various reasons. Notwithstanding the immense naval force of Great Britain, it does not appear that it has ever contained a description of vessels properly adapted for cutting off and destroying the coasting trade of France; and the formidable appearance of *Proctor's bills* has tended much to damp the ardour of such hazardous service, under the fire of batteries and such numerous musketry, where the fruit of danger, blood, and wounds, has gone to enrich those in office on shore.

But it is certainly high time that the nation should look seriously into this subject, and place before her eyes the immense incomes which individuals have derived from the toils of the British navy; and set bounds to the expense of condemnation. One per cent out of the whole captures during a war would be immense; but when we hear of men receiving thirty thousands per annum, it must be allowed to be a shameful violation of justice. Do they talk of their duties? What are they to those of men who are

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continually in the midst of dangers and death? who are upon an enemy's lee shore, amidst the horrors of the tempest, and the blackness of night? who are continually exposed to all the dangers inseparable from warfare carried on upon the enemy's coast, where the combatants are exhausting the vigour of youth, many of them to close their eyes for ever, many to return maimed and mutilated, and many to be pierced to the quick, at finding all their prospects blasted by the paralyzing and fleecing effects of a *Proctor's bill*. No wonder such a stand is made against the officers of the navy choosing their own Proctors: but is justice at the bottom of this objection?—So those may tell us who reap the fruits of the present oppressive system of gain. The condemnation of every vessel ought to be limited in expense to a certain per centage, and this only to amount to a certain value on vessels that may be richly laden. The system by which the enemies of Great Britain have found so great a protection to their commerce in neutral bottoms, ought to be probed to the quick; and no perjured person allowed to appear the second time in court; no firm covering a fraud of millions; an extent of wealth which no firm ever has possessed, or ever will possess; the nursery of perjury and deception.—Nothing in the nation calls louder for investigation and reform than the subjects mentioned. It is sincerely to be wished, that this Augean stable may be cleansed before it becomes more intolerable.*

But to return to Mr. Budge—In a letter of the 9th of February, 1794, he inquires:—

“Have the goodness to inform me when the troops arrived in the West Indies from Halifax, and with what convoy; when the troops, &c. arrived from Gibraltar, and with what convoy; when the *Vengeance* arrived, what ships were with her, and what convoy; and when the respective convoys sailed for Europe, and under what protection; as well as the naval force left in the Leeward Islands, and at Jamaica, on your return to Europe.”

In a letter of the 2d April, 1794, he says:—

“The King of Prussia is unworthy of the name.

“As your squadrons are on the move, let me beg of you to keep an account, for me, of the ships which sail, the dates of their sailing and returning, as well as of the outward-bound convoys.

* See Mr. Brown's Letter to the King of Prussia, *D. C.* vol. xxxi. p. 238.

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“ Whether we shall attempt Concalle Bay or not, I cannot pretend to say; but if not, O shame !”

In another of the 26th of June, 1794, which savours of true and inflexible patriotism, he proceeds, as usual, to seek information :—

“ When the firing ceased, what number of H.M.’s ships were in a state to continue the action? and what number of the enemy’s? At what distance the van and rear ships of the British fleet from the commander-in-chief? and at what distance were the same ships in the enemy’s fleet from their commander-in-chief?—When the firing ceased, how far were the commanders-in-chief from each other? and what state was the French admiral in? What are the reasons assigned for suffering any of the French ships which were dismasted to escape? and what prevented the British fleet from following that of the enemy?

“ Were not more of the French ships which escaped, in a disabled state, than of British ships in a similar situation? Had the British or French the greatest number of frigates? and did the frigates of either fleet receive any damage during the action?

“ How were the disabled British ships disposed of? and how the prizes? Were they towed by frigates, or ships of the line? and were all the prizes totally dismasted? &c. &c.—Pray visit all the prizes, and give me an account of them.”

This mode of writing to different officers, men of observation, and who could give accurate information of various transactions which never appeared before the public eye, must have put Mr. Budge in possession of a mass of information highly interesting and important in writing the naval history of the late war, for which he was assiduously collecting materials; and it may certainly be justly regretted, if his death be the cause of his preparations being for ever lost to the country.—In a letter dated 12th January, 1795, he thus expresses himself :—

“ I wish to know what the navy think of the new first lord of the Admiralty? * I entertain the most favorable opinion, as he is a very assiduous, honest, and gentlemanly-like man, possessed of a sound understanding, and equal in his private and public character, to any nobleman of the realm.”

In one dated August, 1796, is as follows :—

“ The idea of invasion is prevalent, and the people, in general, in a state of lethargy. I yet, however, have full confidence in the navy; and really believe, that the united fleets of France, Spain, and Holland, would be

* Earl Spencer.

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sooner crushed, than the shattered remains of the French alone. For, when they are united, I have little doubt but they will meet you; and when they do, I have no doubt but they will be defeated. While the French remain unsupported, they will confine themselves to the annoyance of our trade.

In 1796, to a friend just arrived from the Mediterranean :—

“ Pray let me know when you come to town, as I shall insist upon a *tête-à-tête*. Should, however, your visit be deferred, tell me how you left our naval force in the Mediterranean; and whether the Spaniards are equal to Jarvis? The state of the French fleet at Toulon; and the disposition of the Neapolitan squadron? I am also anxious to know, whether the Venetians have equipped any of their ships, and what their sentiments are, if you have heard any thing on that head?”

On the Bantry Bay business, dated the 7th January, 1797 :—

“ I am very desirous to receive from you, a correct list of Lord Bridport's fleet, the hour of its sailing, and the reinforcements which have been sent to him. ———— conduct on the occasion appears to me worthy of the most positive and direct censure; though I am seriously afraid he will not meet his deserts.
Alas, public virtue and public spirit seem to be in a deep decline; and as far as they are affected in the naval world, I fear, we may attribute the same to the evil that arises from the immense wealth acquired by booty and prize-money, and the avarice of many individuals.—Be active, be vigilant.”

From the extracts that have been given, it will be perceived, that Mr. Budge's correspondence was of no trifling nature; that it entered deep into the naval department; and was desirous of beholding every transaction in its true colours, not through any false medium; and, that if his correspondents acted up to his wishes, they had no common task to perform; and, for obvious reasons, in some cases, highly hazardous.

Possessed of the most accurate information respecting the movements of the British fleets and squadrons, and also of those of France and Spain; with the effects of the prevailing winds in the Channel of England, upon her ships of war and expeditions attempting to gain the Atlantic Ocean, it need not be wondered at, that a mind so informed, and actuated by motives *purely patriotic*, should have examined with scrutinizing impartiality the south-west coast of England, for a situation (if such existed), where the difficulties of gaining the western ocean, during long successions of westerly winds, might be in a great measure obviated.