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978-1-108-02218-7 - The Life and Services of Horatio Viscount Nelson, Volume 3

James Stanier Clarke and John McArthur

Excerpt

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LIFE AND SERVICES
OF
ADMIRAL LORD NELSON.

CHAP. X.

CAUTION AGAINST FRENCH INFLUENCE AT CONSTANTINOPLE—AN “OLD AGAMEMNON” PROMOTED—DOUBTFUL CONDUCT OF SPAIN—IMPORTANCE OF POSSESSING SARDINIA—CONTINUED COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE DEY OF ALGIERS—LORD HUGH SEYMOUR—ADMIRAL DUCKWORTH—LORD NELSON’S DISPUTES WITH THE ARTILLERY-OFFICERS IN HIS FLEET—FRENCH ADMIRAL’S BOAST OF HAVING CHASED THE BRITISH FLEET—BUONAPARTE ASCENDS THE THRONE OF FRANCE—EXPEDIENTS FOR ALLURING THE FRENCH OUT OF TOULON—CHARACTER OF ELFI BEY—SHIP OF WAR ORDERED TO SURVEY THE BLACK SEA—WANT OF FRIGATES—BOAT-ATTACK ON THE ENEMY’S SHIPS IN THE BAY OF HIERES—LIEUTENANT WOODMAN RETURNS FROM THE BLACK SEA—STATE OF SARDINIA—SPAIN DECLARES WAR.—1803—1804.

EVER intent on his country’s greatness, and sensitively jealous of French influence over neutral powers, the mind of Lord Nelson did not allow the important business, of watering and victualling his fleet at the Madelena islands, to absorb the whole of his attention, but wrote to Mr. Drummond, our ambassador at Constantinople, as follows.—“The particular situation of our country at this moment, prevents the Admiralty from furnishing me with frigates and smaller vessels; therefore I must equally regret with your excellency the not being able to send any directly to Constantinople. I feel very happy that my conduct is still satisfactory to the Sublime Porte, my zeal and activity they may fully rely upon; but it may be possible, that, notwithstanding all my care and attention, the French fleet will escape me, and get to Egypt or the Morea before I can come up with them: I would therefore strongly recommend the Turkish government to be upon its guard; being at peace with so treacherous a people as the French, is no security against an attack. The last report was, 26th of October, eight sail of the line ready for sea, six frigates, and five or six cor-

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vettes : they had been pressing in every part to get men, and 5000 troops are ready for embarkation. Every hour I expect to hear of their sailing."

During Lord Nelson's continuance at the Madelena islands, the following note was entered in his diary : "7th of November. *I had the comfort of making an old Agamemnon, George Jones, a gunner into the Cameleon brig.*" The fleet soon afterwards unmoored, and proceeded to its station off Toulon. On the 7th, he had sent the following letter to General Villettes, respecting a war with Spain. "My dear general : I certainly think that the navy ought to have had a regular hospital at Malta, and not to have thrown the trouble of attending our seamen on the medical skill of the army ; and whenever Sir Richard Bickerton and Dr. Snipe go to Malta, I intend they should examine the large house on the opposite side to you, which will be a very fit place for a marine hospital. I am very much obliged to you for the 100 shells, I have no doubt we shall have occasion to use them ; if the enemy run into port, I shall not be very delicate where the place is. Your kindness, my dear general, I have experienced on every occasion, and your readiness to serve us is acknowledged by all the fleet. . . I agree with you, that unless Buonaparte is absolutely mad, and that the people about him are so likewise, he will not wish to throw Sicily entirely into our hands, in order to revenge himself of the king of Naples, much less force Spain into a war which must so much injure the French cause : to us it matters not being at war with Spain. We may be forced to go to war with her for her complaisance to the French ; but I never can believe, that Buonaparte's counsellors are such fools as to force Spain to begin, and of course give us all her riches and commerce. The war would not cost us one farthing more than at present. I intend to leave this anchorage on Wednesday, and get *home* again : although I have two good frigates watching them, yet I like to be at hand in case of need." In writing on the same day to Captain Ball, he adds, "What ! does Buonaparte begin to find excuses necessary ? I thought he would invade England *in the face*

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of the sun, now he wants a three days' fog: that never yet happened, and, if it should, how are his craft to be kept together? He will find more excuses. I expect the enemy every hour to put to sea, and with troops; the event, with God's blessing on our exertions, we ought not to doubt. I really believe that we shall make *a strong pull, and a pull all together!*"

The character of this renowned admiral appears still more interesting, when it occasionally descends from the elevation of a commander-in-chief, and of a great statesman, watching the progress of French influence throughout the Mediterranean, to soothe the feelings, and to assist the judgment of subordinate officers in his fleet by parental advice. During the month of November, a lieutenant on board one of the frigates had ventured to write to his admiral, and to express dissatisfaction against the captain of that frigate. The reply of Lord Nelson displays a thorough knowledge of the human heart, and that subduing tenderness by which he won the affection of all who served under him—"I have just received your letter, and I am truly sorry that any difference should arise between your captain, who has the reputation of being one of the bright officers of the service, and yourself, a very young man and a very young officer, who must naturally have much to learn; therefore the chance is that you are perfectly wrong in the disagreement. However, as your present situation must be very disagreeable, I will certainly take an early opportunity of removing you, provided your conduct to your present captain be such, that another may not refuse to receive you."

To Sir John Acton, Nov. 24th, off Toulon.—“On the 9th I sailed from the Madelena Islands. We have had a very bad passage and much blowing weather, but our ships have not suffered any material damage. The French fleet yesterday at two o'clock, was in appearance in high feather, and as fine as paint could make them; eight sail of the line, eight frigates, and several corvettes were ready for sea. One ship of the line was fitting in the arsenal, her top-masts an end; this is their state, but when they may sail, or where they will go, I am very sorry to say is a secret I am not acquainted with. Our weather-

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beaten ships, I have no fears, will make their sides like a plum - pudding. Lord Hobart says, as they increase in force at home, which is doing rapidly, that they will not forget an additional one for the Mediterranean. The general orders to support the king of Naples are repeated, and I shall only assure your excellency, that the defence of their majesties and their kingdoms is always nearest my heart. The Excellent, 74, Captain Sotheron, has joined me from England."

To Mr. Spiridion Foresti, Nov. 25th off Toulon.—“ I should wish to know whether * * * has the power to grant us any particular privileges in trade, and if so, what they are. I am told he has the finest forests for building ships of the line, and that vast quantities of hemp may be grown in his government; and I should be glad to know what of our manufactures he could take, and to what amount. I have desired Captain * * * to look at the port, and ascertain whether it be capable of holding the fleet under my command, and of supplying all our wants. I am really much interested for * *, he has always been a staunch friend to the English, and most particularly kind to me; and if I should ever go to Corfu, I shall certainly, if he be within a few days' reach, go to see him. As I have done before, so I have again written to Mr. Hammond, and desired him a second time to speak to Lord Hawkesbury on the subject of at least making good your losses, and that in my opinion you ought to be rewarded for considerable sufferings, and for your unshaken attachment to Great Britain. Your attention to every part of your duty, leaves me nothing to recommend."

To Mr. Frere, at Madrid, Nov. 28th.—“ I have the honour to send, for your excellency's information, two letters which will mark the conduct of the Spaniards towards us, and of which I doubt not but you will seriously complain. I trust that we shall be received in the Spanish ports in the same manner as the French. I am ready to make large allowances for the miserable situation Spain has placed herself in; but there is a certain line beyond which I cannot submit to be treated with disrespect. We have given up French vessels

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taken within gun-shot of the Spanish shore, and yet French vessels are permitted to attack our ships from the Spanish shore. Your excellency may assure the Spanish government, that in whatever place the Spaniards allow the French to attack us, in that place I shall order the French to be attacked. The old order of 1771, now put in force against us, is infamous; and I trust your excellency will take proper steps, that the present mode of enforcing it be done away — it is gross partiality, and not neutrality.” Notwithstanding these aggressions on the part of Spain, the conduct of the British government was worthy of its national character, and the regard which the two kingdoms had always possessed for each other: even so late as the month of November in the ensuing year, Lord Nelson continued to receive these instructions from the Admiralty. “You are not to detain, in the first instance, any ship belonging to his Catholic majesty, sailing from a port of Spain; but you are to require the commander of such ship to return directly to the port whence she came; and only in the event of his refusing to comply with such requisition, you are to detain and send her to Gibraltar, or to England. I am further commanded to signify their lordships’ direction to you, not to detain any Spanish homeward-bound ship of war, unless she shall have treasure on board, nor merchant-ships on any account whatever.”

To the Duke of Clarence, off Toulon, Dec. 7th. “The French fleet keep us waiting for them during a long and severe winter’s cruise; and such a place as all the Gulf of Lyons, for gales of wind from the N. W. to N. E., I never saw; but by always going away large, we generally lose much of their force and the heavy sea of the gulf. However, by the great care and attention of every captain, we have suffered much less than could have been expected. I hope now to be allowed to call Keats my friend. He is very much recovered, and cheerful; he is a treasure to the service. By the French papers which we have to Nov. 19th, we are in momentary expectation of Buonaparte’s descent upon England. And although I can have no fears for the event, yet there is, I hope, a natural anxiety to hear what is passing at so critical a moment, when every thing we hold dear in this world is at

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stake. I trust in God, Buonaparte will be destroyed, and that then the French may be brought, if the powers of Europe have either spirit or honour, to reasonable terms of peace: that this may be soon, and with honour to our country, is my fervent prayer, and shall ever be my most ardent endeavour."

To Earl St. Vincent, off Palma, Dec. 12th. "I have received your kind letters by the Excellent, which joined me on the 24th of November. The station I chose to the westward of Sicily, was to answer two important purposes: one, to prevent the junction of a Spanish fleet to the westward; and the other, to be to windward, so as to enable me, if the north-easterly gale came on to the N. N. W. or N. N. E. to take shelter in a few hours either under the Hieres islands or Cape St. Sebastian; and I have hitherto found the advantage of that position. Spain having settled her neutrality, I am taking my winter's station under St. Sebastian, to avoid the heavy seas in the gulf, and shall keep frigates off Toulon. From September, we have experienced such a series of bad weather as is rarely met with; and I am sorry to say, that all the ships which have been from England in the late war have severely felt it. I had ordered the transports, with provisions, to meet me at St. Pierre's, but as yet they have not made their appearance; and although this day we average three months' provisions, yet I wish to keep them complete to near five months. The passage from Malta is hardly to be made with any ship; the Amazon, which I have not seen but heard of, was three weeks from Malta as far as Minorca. In short, my dear lord, if I were to allow this fleet to get into such a port as Malta, they had better be at Spithead. I know no way of watching the enemy but to be at sea, and therefore good ships are necessary. The Superb is in a very weak state; but Keats is so superior to any difficulties, that I hear but little from her. You may rely that all which can be done by ships and men shall be done; whilst it pleases God to give me the strength of health, all will do well; and when that fails, I shall give the cudgels up to some stouter man; but I wish to last till the battle is over, and if I do that, it is all I can hope for, or in reason expect. Sir Richard Bickerton is a very steady, good

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officer, and fully to be relied upon. George Campbell you know.”

One great excellency in Lord Nelson throughout the whole of his bright career, was the talent he so eminently possessed, of inspiring others with a portion of his own enterprising spirit. The attention which he paid in this respect, to some of the youngest officers, who had the honour of serving under him, may be seen from the following letters. The first is addressed to Mr. J. Dalton, on board the *Renown*, Dec. 14th.—“As Mrs. Lutwidge sends me word, that you have admired some of my naval battles, I think that you will like to receive from me a medal, which was struck by the partiality of my friends in remembrance of one of those actions: at least it will serve to remind you, that on the 13th Dec. 1803, I had first the pleasure of being known to you. A wish to imitate successful battles, is the sure road, by exertion, to surpass them, which that you may do, for your own honour and the advantage of your country, is my sincere wish.”—In another to Mr. Charles Connor, on his being rated midshipman on board the *Niger*, he wrote as follows. “Dear Charles: As Captain Hillyer has been so good as to say he would rate you mid, I sincerely hope that your conduct will ever continue to deserve his kind notice and protection, by a strict and very active attention to your duty. If you deserve well, you are sure of my assistance. Mr. Scott will furnish you with money to begin your mess, and I shall allow you thirty pounds a year, if it be necessary, which Captain Hillyer will supply you with. And as you from this day start in the world as a man, I trust that your future conduct in life will prove you both an officer and a gentleman. Recollect, that you must be a seaman to be an officer, and also that you cannot be a good officer without being a gentleman. I am always with most sincere good wishes, your true friend—Nelson and Bronte.”

To Sir T. Troubridge, 21st of Dec. off Corsica. “Were I, my dear Troubridge, to begin describing *all* the complaints and wants of this fleet, it would be exactly the same, I dare say, as you receive from all other stations; but as it can be attended

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with no good effect, I shall save myself the trouble of writing, and you of reading them. The storekeeper has sent two ships to the Adriatic to land hemp, and therefore I hope that we shall in time get rope to supply our wants. Every bit of twice-laid stuff belonging to the *Canopus* is condemned, and all the running-rigging in the fleet, except the *Victory*'s. We have fitted the *Excellent* with new main and mizen rigging; it was shameful for the dock-yard to send a ship to sea with such rigging. The *Kent* is gone to Malta, fit only for a summer's passage. They are still under such alarm at Naples, that I cannot withdraw the *Gibraltar*. I have submitted to Sir Richard Strachan, whether the state of the French ships at Cadiz would allow of his coming to me for six weeks? for although I have no fears of the event of a battle with six to their eight, yet if I can have eight to their eight, I shall not despise the equality. We are not stoutly, or in any manner well manned in the *Victory*; but she is in very excellent order, thanks to Hardy, and I think *woe be to the Frenchman she gets alongside of*. I have just been to the southern end of Sardinia, having ordered the transports with provisions to meet me at St. Pierre's; but it blew such a tremendous storm, that we could not get in. It, however, turned out fortunate, for after the gale we got into the gulf of Palma, which is without exception the finest open roadstead I ever saw. I shall send you the plan of it, and soundings taken by the master of the *Victory*, an *élève* of Hallowell's; I have him here, to make him a lieutenant. Lemon-juice we are getting, and much better than we procure from England; but the difficulty is coming at the price; and at this distance it is not all our letters that can rectify incorrectness. I have directed Sir Richard Bickerton, who is gone in the *Kent*, to make inquiries into this department: there is no such thing as stopping the baking of bread, although I have accounts of abundance coming from England; but they like to buy, and so they may; I will, however, give no order. You will see the reports respecting a naval hospital at Malta. It is curious that in a place taken by the close blockade of the navy, and when the only reason

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for keeping it was to have a naval station, that no spot has been allotted for a naval hospital; and we are upon sufferance from day to day. Beguy is certainly the only proper place, as it stands insulated with grounds, and has every means of comfort; but to complete it for 150 men would cost, besides the purchase of house and grounds, 1000l., and 2000l. more to put it in order. Ball says 5000l. would do the whole; but I say for 5, read 10,000l. I have six frigates and sloops watching the French army in the Adriatic, and at the mouth of the archipelago.”

On leaving the Bay of Palma, the fleet being in want of water, Lord Nelson stood again for Agincourt Sound, Madelena Islands, and on the 21st of December sent Captain Ross Donnelly to ascertain whether the French fleet was still in Toulon.

The following letter to Lord Hobart, dated 22d of December, 1803, is the first of those interesting communications respecting the value of Sardinia to this country, which the admiral sedulously, but ineffectually, endeavoured to impress on the attention of government.

“My dear lord: In presuming to give my opinion on any subject, I venture not at infallibility, and more particular information may convince me that opinion is wrong. But as my observations on what I see are not unacceptable, I shall state them as they strike me at the moment of writing. God knows, if we could possess one island, Sardinia, we should want neither Malta nor any other: this, which is the finest island in the Mediterranean, possesses harbours fit for arsenals, and of a capacity to hold our navy, within twenty-four hours’ sail of Toulon. Bays to ride our fleets in, and to watch both Italy and Toulon, no fleet could pass to the eastward between Sicily and the coast of Barbary, nor through the Faro Messina: Malta in point of position is not to be named the same year with Sardinia. All the fine ports of Sicily are situated on the eastern side of the island, consequently of no use to watch any thing but the Faro of Messina. *And, my lord, I venture to predict, that if we do not, from delicacy, or commiseration of*

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the lot of the unfortunate king of Sardinia, the French will get possession of that island. Sardinia is very little known; it was the policy of Piedmont to keep it in the back ground, and whoever it has belonged to, it seems to have been their maxim to rule the inhabitants with severity, in loading its produce with such duties as prevented the growth. I will only mention one circumstance as a proof: half a cheese was seized, because the poor man was selling it to our boats, and it had not paid the duty. Fowls, eggs, beef, and every article, are most heavily taxed. The coast of Sardinia certainly wants every penny to maintain itself; and yet I am told, after the wretched establishment of the island is paid, that the king does not receive 5000l. sterling a year. The country is fruitful beyond idea, and abounds in cattle and sheep—and would in corn, wine, and oil. It has no manufactories. In the hands of a liberal government, and freed from the dread of the Barbary States, there is no telling what its produce would amount to. It is worth any money to obtain, and I pledge my existence it could be held for as little as Malta in its establishment, and produce a large revenue.—I have done; perhaps you will think it time: I will not venture to give an opinion on the state of the Turkish empire, although I have a strong one; but that would be too bad.”

During his stay at the Madelena Islands, he wrote on the 29th of December to our minister, Mr. Jackson:—“I anchored here to clear my transports with provisions, and was going to sea this morning, but I am prevented from a heavy gale of westerly wind. By letters from Mr. Elliot, of the 11th of December, received last night, I find apprehensions are renewed of the invasion of Sardinia from Corsica. The king may be assured, that as far as I am able I should be happy in preventing it; but a vessel cruising in the straits of Bonifaccio would not have the desired effect; for either a calm, a gale of wind, or even a night, would preclude any use from such a cruiser. I only hope that the king will not be alarmed. The Sardinians, generally speaking, are attached to us; yet there are French intriguers amongst them, and I understand they