

THE
LIFE OF NELSON.

CHAPTER VI.

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NELSON'S health had suffered greatly while he was in the *Agamemnon*. "My complaint," he said, "is as if a girth were buckled taut over my breast; and my endeavour in the night is to get it loose." After the battle of Cape St. Vincent he felt a little rest to be so essential to his recovery, that he declared he could not continue to

serve longer than the ensuing summer, unless it should be absolutely necessary : for, in his own strong language, he had then been four years and nine months without one moment's repose for body or mind. A few months' intermission of labour he had obtained—not of rest, for it was purchased with the loss of a limb ; and the greater part of the time had been a season of constant pain. As soon as his shattered frame had sufficiently recovered for him to resume his duties, he was called to services of greater importance than any on which he had hitherto been employed, and they brought with them commensurate fatigue and care. The anxiety which he endured during his long pursuit of the enemy, was rather changed in its direction, than abated by their defeat : and this constant wakefulness of thought, added to the effect of his wound, and the exertions from which it was not possible for one of so ardent and wide-reaching a mind to spare himself, nearly proved fatal. On his way back to Italy he was seized with fever. For eighteen hours

his life was despaired of; and even when the disorder took a favourable turn, and he was so far recovered as again to appear on deck, he himself thought that his end was approaching,—such was the weakness to which the fever and cough had reduced him. Writing to Earl St. Vincent on the passage, he said to him, “ I never expect, my dear lord, to see your face again. It may please God that this will be the finish to that fever of anxiety which I have endured from the middle of June: but be that as it pleases his goodness. I am resigned to his will.”

The kindest attentions of the warmest friendship were awaiting him at Naples. “ Come here,” said Sir William Hamilton, “ for God’s sake, my dear friend, as soon as the service will permit you. A pleasant apartment is ready for you in my house, and Emma is looking out for the softest pillows, to repose the few wearied limbs you have left.” Happy would it have been for Nelson if warm and careful friendship had been all that awaited him there !

He himself saw at that time the character of the Neapolitan court, as it first struck an Englishman, in its true light: and when he was on the way, he declared that he detested the voyage to Naples, and that nothing but necessity could have forced him to it. But never was any hero, on his return from victory, welcomed with more heartfelt joy. Before the battle of Aboukir the court of Naples had been trembling for its existence. The language which the directory held towards it was well described by Sir William Hamilton, as being exactly the language of a highwayman. The Neapolitans were told, that Benevento might be added to their dominions, provided they would pay a large sum, sufficient to satisfy the directory; and they were warned, that if the proposal were refused, or even if there were any delay in accepting it, the French would revolutionize all Italy. The joy, therefore, of the court at Nelson's success, was in proportion to the dismay from which that success relieved them. The queen was a daughter of Maria Theresa, and sister of Marie

Antoinette. Had she been the wisest and gentlest of her sex, it would not have been possible for her to have regarded the French without hatred and horror: and the progress of revolutionary opinions, while it perpetually reminded her of her sister's fate, excited no unreasonable apprehensions for her own. Her feelings, naturally ardent, and little accustomed to restraint, were excited to the highest pitch when the news of the victory arrived. Lady Hamilton, her constant friend and favourite, who was present, says, "It is not possible to describe her transports: she wept, she kissed her husband, her children, walked frantically about the room, burst into tears again, and again kissed and embraced every person near her; exclaiming, 'O brave Nelson! O God! bless and protect our brave deliverer! O Nelson! Nelson! what do we not owe you! O conqueror—saviour of Italy! O that my swollen heart could now tell him personally what we owe to him!'" She herself wrote to the Neapolitan ambassador at London upon the

occasion, in terms which show the fulness of her joy, and the height of the hopes which it had excited. “ I wish I could give wings,” said she, “ to the bearer of the news, and, at the same time, to our most sincere gratitude. The whole of the sea-coast of Italy is saved ; and this is owing alone to the generous English. This battle, or to speak more correctly, this total defeat of the regicide squadron, was obtained by the valour of this brave admiral, seconded by a navy which is the terror of its enemies. The victory is so complete, that I can still scarcely believe it : and if it were not the brave English nation, which is accustomed to perform prodigies by sea, I could not persuade myself that it had happened. It would have moved you to have seen all my children, boys and girls, hanging on my neck, and crying for joy at the happy news.—Recommend the hero to his master : he has filled the whole of Italy with admiration of the English. Great hopes were entertained of some advantages being gained

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“ by his bravery, but no one could look
“ for so total a destruction. All here are
“ drunk with joy.”

Such being the feelings of the royal family, it may well be supposed with what delight, and with what honours, Nelson would be welcomed. Early on the 22d of September, the poor wretched Vanguard, as he called his shattered vessel, appeared in sight of Naples. The Culloden and Alexander had preceded her by some days, and given notice of her approach. Many hundred boats and barges were ready to go forth and meet him, with music and streamers, and every demonstration of joy and triumph. Sir William and Lady Hamilton led the way in their state barge. They had seen Nelson only for a few days four years ago, but they then perceived in him that heroic spirit which was now so fully and gloriously manifested to the world. Emma Lady Hamilton, who from this time so greatly influenced his future life, was a woman whose personal accomplishments have seldom been equalled, and whose powers of mind were

not less fascinating than her person. She was passionately attached to the queen; and by her influence the British fleet had obtained those supplies at Syracuse, without which, Nelson always asserted, the battle of Aboukir could not have been fought. During the long interval which passed before any tidings were received, her anxiety had been hardly less than that of Nelson himself, while pursuing an enemy of whom he could obtain no information: and when the tidings were brought her by a joyful bearer open-mouthed, its effect was such, that she fell like one who had been shot. She and Sir William had literally been made ill by their hopes and fears, and joy at a catastrophe so far exceeding all that they had dared to hope for. Their admiration for the hero necessarily produced a degree of proportionate gratitude and affection; and when their barge came alongside the Vanguard, at the sight of Nelson Lady Hamilton sprang up the ship's side, and exclaiming, O God! is it possible! fell into his arms,—more, he says, like one dead than alive. He

described the meeting as “terribly affecting.” These friends had scarcely recovered from their tears, when the king, who went out to meet him three leagues in the royal barge, came on board and took him by the hand, calling him his deliverer and preserver; from all the boats around he was saluted with the same appellations; the multitude who surrounded him when he landed, repeated the same enthusiastic cries; and the lazzaroni displayed their joy by holding up birds in cages, and giving them their liberty as he passed.

His birth-day, which occurred a week after his arrival, was celebrated with one of the most splendid fêtes ever beheld at Naples. But, notwithstanding the splendour with which he was encircled, and the flattering honours with which all ranks welcomed him, Nelson was fully sensible of the depravity, as well as weakness, of those by whom he was surrounded. “What precious moments,” said he, “the courts of Naples and Vienna are losing! Three months would liberate Italy; but this

“ court is so enervated, that the happy moment will be lost. I am very unwell ; and their miserable conduct is not likely to cool my irritable temper. It is a country of fiddlers and poets, whores and scoundrels.” This sense of their ruinous weakness he always retained ; nor was he ever blind to the mingled folly and treachery of the Neapolitan ministers, and the complication of iniquities under which the country groaned : but he insensibly, under the influence of *Lady Hamilton*, formed an affection for the court, to whose misgovernment the miserable condition of the country was so greatly to be imputed.

The state of Naples may be described in few words. The king was one of the Spanish Bourbons. As the Cæsars have shown us to what wickedness the moral nature of princes may be perverted, so in this family, the degradation to which their intellectual nature can be reduced, has been not less conspicuously evinced. Ferdinand, like the rest of his race, was passionately fond of field sports, and cared for nothing else. His