

cannon ball takes off his head, he will at least be provided for." A midshipman in those days did indeed have to rough it, for in the Royal navy the food was bad and the discipline harsh, even cruel. From his uncle's ship, the "Raisonné," Horatio was transferred to the "Triumph," and was sent from there on a voyage to the West Indies in a merchant ship. "From this voyage," he says, "I returned a practical seaman, with a horror of the Royal navy upon me. * * * It was many weeks before I got the least reconciled to a man-of-war, so deep was the prejudice rooted. However, as my ambition was to be a seaman, it was always held out as a reward, that if I attended well to my navigation, I should go in the cutter and decked long-boat, which was attached to the commanding officer's ship at Chatham. Thus by degrees I became a good pilot, and confident of myself among rocks and sands, which has many times been of great comfort to me."

In April, 1773, he was allowed, at his own earnest entreaty, to go as captain's coxswain on an expedition to the North Pole, and on his return, in October, he was appointed to the frigate "Seahorse." In 1776 he passed his examination and was made lieutenant; in 1778, when only just twenty, he was promoted to be commander, and in six months was appointed captain, of the "Hinchinbroke," a French prize. Meantime he had served two years in the East Indies, and also at Gibraltar and Jamaica. As captain of the "Hinchinbroke," he had command of an expedition against Fort San Juan, in Nicaragua, where he distinguished himself by his zeal and courage. "He was the first on every service whether by day or night." But his health, already injured in the East Indies, now broke down, and he was invalided home. The next year he was well enough to take command of the "Albemarle," a twenty-eight gun frigate, and in her he made voyages to the Baltic, and to Newfoundland and Quebec. From the latter place he wrote: "Health, that greatest of blessings, is what I never truly enjoyed until I saw fair Canada." From Quebec he went to New York, where he met Lord Hood, who was then in command of the West Indian fleet. Lord Hood has a very high opinion of the young captain, and introduced him to Prince William, afterwards William IV, with words of commendation. The Prince said many years later of this meeting:

He (Nelson) appeared to be the merest boy of a captain I ever beheld; and his dress was worthy of attention. He

had on a full-laced uniform; his lank, unpowdered hair was tied in a stiff Hessian tail, of an extraordinary length; the old-fashioned flaps of his waistcoat added to the general quaintness of his figure, and produced an appearance which particularly attracted my notice; for I had never seen anything like it before. There was something irresistibly pleasing in his address and conversation, and an enthusiasm in speaking on professional subjects that showed he was no common being. . . . He had the honour of the King's service and the independence of the British navy particularly at heart; and his mind glowed with this idea as much when he was simply captain of the "Albemarle," and had obtained none of the honours of his country, as when he was afterwards decorated with so much well-earned distinction.

After this Nelson served in the West Indies in command of the "Boreas," and was married at Nevis. In 1787 his ship was paid off, and for nearly five years he and his wife lived at Burnham Thorpe. There he read and studied and improved his education, but constantly wishing for active employment, and at last, in 1793, when war with France was threatening, he was given the command of the "Agamemnon," a sixty-four gun ship.

The time of apprenticeship of small commands and of forced inactivity was over, and now, at thirty-four, Nelson was entering upon his real war service, where all his devotion to his country, his zeal and ability, and all that he had learned in persevering practice in his profession, were to be called upon and put to the test.

The first great battle in which Nelson took part was the action fought off Capt St. Vincent, on St. Valentine's Day, 1797, when fifteen British ships, under Sir John Jervis, defeated the Spanish fleet of twenty-seven. Nelson, to quote the Admiral's words, "contributed very much to the honour of the day." He did this in two ways; by planning the manner of attack, and by conspicuous valour. During the action his ship, the "Captain," a seventy-four-gun ship, had so much of her rigging shot away that she was practically disabled; she was alongside the "San Nicolas," an eighty-four-gun Spanish ship, on whose other side lay the "San Josef," carrying 112 guns. Both the Spanish ships had suffered severely; Nelson boarded the "San Nicolas" and received her surrender; the "San Josef" opened a small-arm fire upon the boarders, but shortly a Spanish officer put his head over the rail and said they surrendered. "And on the quarter-deck of a Spanish first-rate," wrote Nelson, "extravagant as the story may seem, did I receive the swords of vanquished Spaniards, which as I received I gave to William Tearney, one of my