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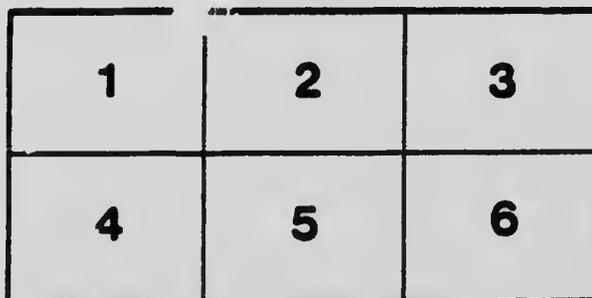
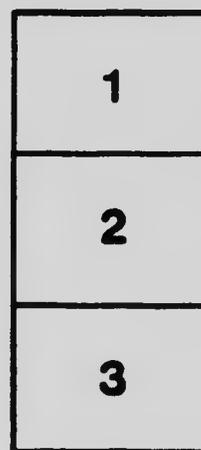
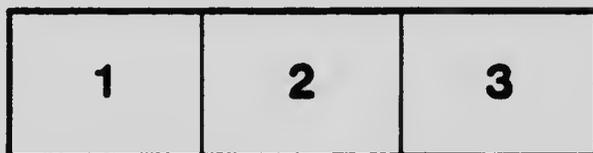
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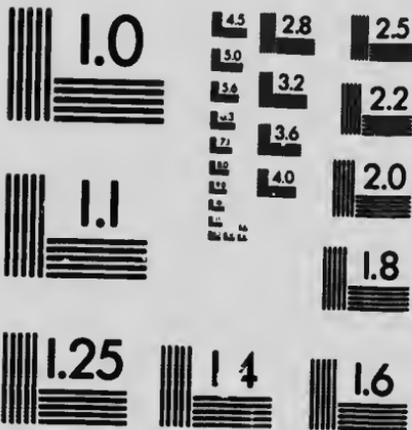
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I rushed forward to aid her.
But Nelson was quicker.—*Page 48.*

The
Vice Admiral of the Blue
A Biographical Romance

SUPPOSEDLY THE CHRONICLE LEFT BY LORD
NELSON'S FRIEND, THOMAS MASTERMAN
HARDY, VICE ADMIRAL AND BARONET

BY
ROLAND BURNHAM MOLINEUX
AUTHOR OF "THE ROOM WITH THE LITTLE DOOR"
ILLUSTRATIONS BY
TROY AND MARGARET KINNEY

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The Copp, Clark Press

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

In the dialogue of this biographical romance free use has been made of Lord Nelson's actual words as they appear in his published letters. For purposes of the story a few minor historical facts have been ignored. Out of a wealth of Nelsonian literature the author acknowledges his chief indebtedness to the following:

- Life of Nelson Capt. A. T. Mahan.
Life of Nelson Robert Southey.
Life of Nelson Clark and McArthur.
Life of Nelson Wm. Clark Russell.
Lady Hamilton and Lord Nelson John C. Jeaffreson.
The Queen of Naples and Lord Nelson . . . John C. Jeaffreson.
Memoirs of Lady Hamilton Anonymous.
Letters of Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton
Nelson's Letters and Despatches . . . Edited by Sir Harris Nichols.
Nelsonian Reminiscences Lieut. G. S. Parsons.
The Kingdom of Naples from 1734 to 1825 . . . Coletta.
The Journal of Mrs. St. George Edited by Her Son.
The Autobiography of Cornelia Knight
Illustrations of Fonthill Abbey Britton.
Drawings Copied from Nature (Lady Hamilton) . Frederick Rehberg.



CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Avant Courier of a Tragedy . . .	9
II.	The Making of a Queen of Hearts . . .	38
III.	Foreshadowings of the Inevitable . . .	45
IV.	A Threatened Throne	64
V.	The Secret Passageway	87
VI.	A Royal Flight	116
VII.	A Traitor to Land and Love	145
VIII.	The Goddess of Victory	166
IX.	As Another Saw It	186
X.	“All Your Love or None”	207
XI.	A Foggy Night at the Cheshire Cheese . . .	218
XII.	A Rout on Grosvenor Square	262
XIII.	A Christmas Fête	296
XIV.	And Another That Was Happier	312
XV.	An Obligatory Epilogue	341



ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
I rushed forward to aid her. But Nelson was quicker	48
“For my sake, see that he dies!”	156
“Nelson! You of all men thus to learn my shame!”	178
“They’ll cost you more than this before you die”	284



THE VICE ADMIRAL OF THE BLUE

Chapter I

The Avant-Courier of a Tragedy

HAVING outlived all those that were most-intimately associated with the events an account of which I have felt it in some sort a duty here to set down, to me it seems the time has come to fulfil the purpose I long have had in mind. It is now the year 1838. I am approaching my seventieth birthday, and in reason cannot hope for a much greater span of life. Nelson has been dead these thirty years, and Lady Hamilton but ten less. Nine years ago Davison—he that sold the prizes we captured at the Battle of the Nile—passed away. Cornelia Knight, whose mother, dying, left her to Lady Hamilton's protection while we were all together in the farther Sicily, died only last year. As she was twelve years my senior, I hope I may be pardoned for thinking her mother's death-bed anxiety as to a guardian was somewhat needless. Ferdi-

nand of Sicily, Queen Maria Caroline, Earl St. Vincent, Lord Hamilton, old Toby, Romney and many of the others are no more. Few remain even of that gay crowd we once were accustomed to meet at Lady Hamilton's house in Grosvenor Square, but who, in addition to these meetings, had little to do with the great events through which the rest of us had passed. Brummell—forgotten now, poor, poverty-stricken fop, leads but a living death at Calais; and at St. Cloud died long ago beautiful and nectar-voiced Mrs. Jordan. Scott, too, is gone, crowned with honour. Campbell, Southey and Tom Moore are left—but they were boys in their twenties in those days. As to myself, I shall be content to pass what remains to me of life here at Greenwich, doing what I can for the brave lads that fought for the flag on sea.

Only since commencing this chronicle have I realized that I am old. But it is true that at the time I begged Nelson to give up the Hamilton, George III. was yet for twenty years to reign over us, and since then the Fourth George has reigned and died: the Duke of Clarence, who, with Mrs. Jordan, was with us that night, has been King William IV., and has ceased to be anything—on earth; and now for near two years we have been blessed by the rule of this

gentle girl, Victoria, whom God preserve. In truth, I know not where the years have gone. However this may be, it seems that even now, after more than a quarter of a century, the world still misinterprets the events in which I was associated with the Admiral and the beautiful woman who so long enslaved him, and that I am the only remaining one at liberty to tell the truth. Nay, when I recall Nelson's last whispered words, "Kiss me, Hardy," uttered as he passed away forever, while the mighty guns, belching death to French and Spaniards, sang for him a sailor's requiem,—when I recall that moment, does it not become more than a privilege, is it not, indeed, a sacred obligation?

But let me further justify myself, and on grounds other than those of sentiment. After I had been somewhat instrumental in the capture of the French man-of-war *Mutine*, Lord St. Vincent gave me her command, and on her deck I was present at the Battle of the Nile. Despatches home announcing the victory were intrusted to Captain Berry, and in his place I was promoted to Nelson's flag-ship, the *Vanguard*. Before taking command, however, I went to Naples in advance of the fleet, accompanying thus far Captain Capel, the bearer of the duplicate despatches overland—the only ones to

reach England. Thus I became in a sense a special messenger to the Neapolitan court and witnessed the birth of a passion that—but why should I twice tell of it? On board the *Vanguard*, and later on the *Foudroyant*, I continued with Nelson during all that stirring period at Naples and Palermo. I was his flag-captain up the Baltic and at Copenhagen; was a witness to his last will, was at his side on the quarter-deck of the *Victory* when he met a hero's death, and in the funeral *cortége* carried the banner of emblems. The naval rank and baronetage of later years have nothing to do with the present purpose—although I am not ungrateful; but surely I have given sufficient evidence that, regarding certain events, I have some claim to a knowledge possessed by few. This granted, I may be spared your charge of egotism.

It is true that in what follows—or will follow if God spares me long enough to write it—some few things are set down of which I was not an actual witness. But of several I was informed by Sir William and Lady Hamilton herself, while Miss Knight told me more than ever she put in writing. And, too, the intimacy that in time I formed with those that I shall name, gave me a knowledge of their characters by means of which I can fill in

many blanks. If at times I give the impression of attempting the novelist's art, forgive it as an old man's foolishness. The occasional form of fiction covers no intentional untruths—although, perhaps, a guess or two.

.

After the introduction I have given myself—necessary because fame is a fleeting thing, and I am not certain that posterity will find me in its histories—you that may read these pages in the years to come will have no cause to cavil when I say that I know something of the emotions of her whom I was later to acknowledge as the most beautiful woman in Naples, and who on the first day of September, 1798, as I passed on my way to the King, looked with wistful eyes from one of the windows of her bed-chamber in the splendid residence wherein for twelve years she had made her home. She had entered it a girl of twenty-three—slender, lithe, sensitively and winningly mouthed, physically a delight to the eye, though not yet complete—with just a single friend in all that great city of pleasure, magnificence, poverty and filth. On the day of my arrival she stood there, thirty-five, in the perfection of her beauty—the figure superb in the almost bold-

ness of its contour, a colour of the most delicate brightness, broad-browed, arched and finely pencilled eyebrows, a nose of classic symmetry, blue eyes of strange yet frank and merry shyness, short upper-lipped, a mouth of exceeding sweetness, the head poised upon neck and shoulders that were incomparable: and to the God-given possession of such charms was the added fact that now she reigned all but supreme in Naples, giving place only to its lawful Queen. You may judge how she affected me in those days when I can thus recall her now that I am almost seventy.

As thus she stood, all about her objects the most exquisite and the rarest—for they became familiar to me in the after days—brought together by him who loved her, and loved and appreciated not only her beauty but also that of all the fine arts; in the distance, floating at her pleasure in the waters of the bay, a splendid barge, its boatmen in her livery; in the street below her position further typified by the encrested carriage that was to carry her to the royal residence where lived her inseparable friend, proudest, loveliest and most ambitious of the daughters of Maria Theresa;—as thus she stood, did these evidences of luxury, of love, and of power call forth any thought of other days? Think you she remem-

bered a light-hearted, ignorant nurse-maid of fourteen in a far-away English village, or a servant of sixteen in London, a shop-girl in St. James's market, the care-free model in many studios, the unthinking, generous victim of a still later period of wildness and recklessness? Or, looking in another direction, had she any prophetic vision of a debtor's prison and of a dishonoured and a nameless grave? Whatever else, not these. For women, who seldom regret their past, are never hopeless as to their future—and for this let us thank God. We men are a gloomy and a pessimistic lot: we could accomplish little save for woman's dauntless bravery and encouragement.

But of these events at which I have hinted as having formed a part of Lady Hamilton's life, I knew nothing at the time of which I speak, nor, of course, did Nelson. Doubtless the past came often to her, but the sadness of her eyes on this particular day I imagine was caused by thoughts of present moment. For at this time, and for long after, Lady Hamilton adored her rival beauty, Maria Caroline, Queen of the Two Sicilies, and that sovereign's throne was threatened; she worshipped the navy of England, and her heroes might even now be resting at the bottom of the sea, sent there by the hated

Buonaparte. The suspense of uncertainty had been killing her, as also it had been the Queen and all the royalists of Naples. Sensitive, enthusiastic, passionately devoted as she was to her few ideals and to all those that were kind to her, tears of rage and sorrow came to her eyes at thought of the dangers hovering about the sovereign she loved, and of the fate that possibly had already befallen the brave sailors of her native land.

Tears and forebodings alike were banished as there came to her distant shouts from the street and the sound of rapidly approaching horses. A carriage, bearing on its panels the arms of the English Ambassador to the Court of Naples, from which official I had that moment parted, halted at the entrance and, almost before it came to a stop, Sir William Hamilton sprang to the curb and entered the house. You need not ask how I came to learn of what now took place. The whole world has been minutely informed of every disgraceful incident of these people's lives. Is it strange that I should know some innocent details? Believe me, then, that from the sheer weakness of anxiety his wife sank to her knees, and with tremblingly clasped hands awaited Sir William's coming.

"Dear God," she whispered, racked between fear

and hope, "surely he did not seem the bearer of ill news."

A second later the door was thrown open, and her husband leaned to lift her to his side.

"You must forgive me, dear, this uncouth entrance; but I could not delay a single moment. The news is glorious. Nelson has utterly destroyed the French. The throne is saved. Nelson and his squadron are now on their way to Naples."

But even while he spoke, even as she listened to him, still on her knees, her hands still clasped, her beautiful eyes now glistening with the tears of gratitude, there came a soft, tremulous moan from her lips and she fell prone at his feet. Three weeks after, I saw the bruise of the fall still showing on her temple.

That the suddenness of the news for which she longed should thus have overcome her is not a matter at which any that really knew her will wonder. For this splendid creature, as impulsive as she was lovely, as emotional as she was unaffected, never once had known a woman's friendship until she found it there in Naples. That friend was a proud and powerful Queen, and for months Lady Hamilton had trembled for the safety of her idol. She had never, in her native land, known the meaning of

patriotism; in Italy there had dawned upon her all that it has meant to the women of every clime in all the history of the world. Yet for months she had awaited the promised succour of her countrymen. And now, in a breath, she had learned that the Queen was safe, and that the deliverer and preserver of Naples was on his way.

But has joy ever killed? And yet, another and an almost equal happiness greeted her when she came to herself. A servant had just entered bearing a letter. Sir William took it and glanced at the handwriting. "From Her Majesty," he said, well knowing how the fact would stimulate her.

"From the ever dear, dear Queen! How generous to write me almost at the very moment she, too, must have received this glorious news! Listen:

"How obliged and grateful I am to you! I cry, laugh and embrace my children and husband. If a portrait of Nelson is taken, I will have it in my chamber. My gratitude is engraven on my heart; *vive, vive* the brave nation and its navy! I participate in the glory doubly, as being so greatly for our advantage and also redounding to the fame of the first flag in the world. Hip! hip! my dear Lady. I am wild with joy!"

"She thanks *me*! Bless her heart! What had I to do with the victory? But, oh, Sir William, is

it not well to have lived if only to know this moment?—to win the gratitude of the Queen, this dearest, best of women—to have her link my name with that of our hero. And yet how little I deserve it!”

“You do yourself injustice, Emma, dear. You have accomplished miracles for both Naples and England. I am assured by the bearer of Nelson’s despatches that the fleet could never have returned to Egypt but for the supplies ordered by the Queen. Even had it been able to do so later, Nelson would not have met the French, and there would have been no victory of the Nile. You know was your influence that secured the supplies that were so vital, and I, on my part, know that neither the Queen, Nelson nor England will be ungrateful. You dear, brave, beautiful woman, I am proud of you.”

Doubtless with the same gentle dignity and the touch of adoring passion I have always noted in his demeanour toward her, the diplomat bent over the couch on which she sat and kissed her—first on her forehead, and then, as though with unaccustomed boldness, on the mouth.

If he was proud of her, certainly she, up to that time at least, had little cause to blush for him. Although approaching his seventieth year, even as I now am, this foster-brother of King George the

Third, this learned diplomat, *connoisseur* and man-of-letters, was still a brilliant man of the world, an able musician and painter, a graceful dancer, a keen sportsman. None of these I ever was, and now can scarcely hope to be. But stay—have I not danced a hornpipe in my time? and who shall say that at the present moment I am not willing to be a man of letters? There—I'm a garrulous and conceited fellow: I cannot keep myself out of the story even up to the time when I make an actual and legitimate entrance. As for Sir William, he was tall, slender but powerful, restless but indefatigable, appeared fifteen years younger than he was, and looked old only at the side of his incomparable wife. His love for her was blindly adoring. She on her part was grateful—with the same gratitude she felt, with spontaneous honesty and frankness, for every kindness throughout all her marvellous career.

“There—enough of kisses,” exclaimed the imperious beauty, releasing herself from his embrace. “At least, dear,” she added with propitiating sweetness, “on a day like this. When we have such news my place is with the Queen. Her days of sadness are over now, I hope, forever.”

“I hope so indeed. This victory should place the Bourbons firmly on the throne of Naples.”

“Please God, England may also restore them to that of France. Oh, these villainous, ungrateful French! Did ever such a race exist before!”

In a twinkling she was dressed, and raced joyously down the stairs to her carriage, caring nothing, in her happiness, for the dignity of an ambassador. She called to the coachman a gay command to hasten. When, unaided, she jumped with almost boyish freedom among the cushions and threw a kiss to her husband, who more leisurely stepped into his own conveyance. As with something of military exactitude the carriages, abreast, wheeled about from the curb, she laughed softly to herself at thought of her own haste, and, leaning out, said: “You’d think the kingdom depended upon me, wouldn’t you?”

The horses flew through streets that were picturesque in their ancient darkness and filth, streets that had remained unchanged through the centuries, always the most crowded in the world, and the dirtiest. As the Calabrian barons knew the city so did Lady Hamilton. At once one of the most repulsive and most beautiful on earth, it had been the scene of many an entrancing story of love; and, although as yet she knew it not, this fair, conflicting and generous woman was now entering upon

the first chapter in a similar story of her own. No wonder that to her there was not one defect in streets seen through those happy, dancing eyes; no wonder perfection seemed possessed by these frantically cheering crowds, upon whom the far famed lips of the queen of beauty now smiled with joyous *camaraderie*.

Arrived at the palace, past whose guards she rushed with more than the pardonable freedom even of a sovereign's favourite, she for once found the Queen, in her happy relief, even more childish than herself. Maria Caroline ran forward in far from royal greeting and clasped her friend in her arms.

"We are saved!" she cried hysterically, "saved by your brave countrymen and by you. Oh, this heroic Nelson! Now we shall see how Buonaparte will end—and the French, the assassins, my sister's murderers, these monsters that seek the blood even of my children! And, think of it!—here in my own palace are those that sympathize with them. Ah, can I ever be sufficiently grateful to you that are ever true and loyal, ever my wise counsellor and friend!"

"Oh, your Majesty! I have done nothing but love you—and none can help doing that."

"Then some, indeed, are to be congratulated on so admirably concealing their affection. And you

have done much more than you realize. Were you not the first to write to Lord St. Vincent of my humiliation and begging his protection?"

"'Tis true I wrote to him."

"Yes, and in reply he sent the fleet that has but now destroyed our enemies. When we seek the origin of all this, I do not err in saying that to you is due the victory of the Nile. Nelson will thank you as I do."

"Ah, Nelson! Is he not simply glorious! Does your Majesty remember how St. Vincent spoke of him in his answer to my letter?"

"But imperfectly."

"Here; I have it with me." But she bit her lip to a brighter red with vexation at her hasty admission, and her cheeks flushed as she drew St. Vincent's letter from her bosom and read it aloud:

"I am bound by my oath of chivalry to protect all who are persecuted and distressed, and I would fly to the succour of their Sicilian Majesties were I not forbid to quit my post. I am happy, however, to have a knight of superior prowess in my train, who is charged with this enterprise, at the head of as gallant a band as ever drew sword."

"Spoken like a knight of old. Truly, Emma, when it is still possible for men to write as has St.

Vincent, and to fight as has Nelson, we may hope that the days of chivalry are not forever gone."

"Indeed, no. These two are men King Arthur himself would have honoured. I once met Nelson, as has also your Majesty, and, although that meeting was five years ago, his image is still perfectly pictured on my mind."

"Not a handsome picture, Emma?" Smiling as she made the subtle query, the Queen drew the other to a seat beside her.

"Is it not? Why, I never thought of that. Perhaps 'tis true. Yet no one could mistake the greatness of the man. I remember a noble forehead, eyes that looked into your very soul, a mouth showing an indomitable will, and a voice such as God gives only to those whom he intends shall be leaders of men."

"My dear child! Is this patriotism—or love?"

"Oh, your Majesty! It is only the truth."

"Forgive me; but you see, while I have found men patriotic for love of their country, women are usually so for love of their countrymen. But you are right. Nelson seemed a chieftain born. I think you found it out, however, long before England did. The government, I understand, has not been over-appreciative."

“True; but after the Nile it can no longer be ungrateful. And strangely united as he and I have been in our devotion to your Majesty, although barely knowing one another, I hope, while aiding you, also to aid him to greater honour.”

“And Sir William?”

“Sir William, your Majesty, admires Nelson as I do. My hero will bring my husband only the more closely to me.”

“Captain, the Honourable Thom. Hardy.”

Thus announced by an usher, my arrival interrupted these confidences. I entered, and, advancing, bowed low and kissed the extended hand of the Queen.

“Captain Hardy, you are thrice welcome. Doubtless the King has told you of our happiness and gratitude. This victory means everything to us.”

“If your Majesty will pardon me, it was more than a victory—it was a conquest. In terming it such I but quote the words of the Admiral.”

“He spoke truly. Let us hope it is the first step toward the conquest of France itself.”

“Could all the battles be fought at sea, your Majesty, that would soon be brought about by Nelson.”

“I believe you. He is superb. He wrote to

Lady Hamilton that he would return either crowned with laurel or covered with cypress. Thank God it is with the laurel that he comes back to us. And now, tell me something of this triumph."

"Madame, I will not be in error if I start with the claim that more than five thousand Frenchmen perished."

"Would that it had been five million. Even that would not have restored my sister to me and to her throne."

"No, your Majesty, and I sorrow deeply that God has willed it that her son may not be seated there. Yet it may be regained by the House of Bourbon. Surely, that is promised by the Battle of the Nile, for it has no equal in the history of the world. Of all the French fleet but four vessels escaped, and I am confident these also would have been captured or sunk had Nelson not been wounded."

"Wounded! Nelson wounded?"

The startled cry came from Lady Hamilton, and I noted with some astonishment that her cheek paled instantly, and that her hand was pressed convulsively upon her heart.

"Yes, madame," I made answer, "and as we all at first believed, and the Admiral himself, mortally

so. Captain Berry, who is now carrying by sea the despatches whose duplicates Captain Capel has brought by way of Naples, caught him in his arms. The wound was on the head. The blood flowed from it frightfully, and the skin of the forehead had been so strangely cut that it had fallen over his one remaining eye, leaving him in total darkness. And yet, dying though he thought himself, he refused the surgeon's aid. 'I will take my turn with my brave fellows,' he said, and would accept no attention until every sailor wounded previously to himself had been cared for. And later, when from his cabin he heard the cry that the *Orient* was on fire, he struggled to the deck and gave orders to send relief to the enemy."

"What heroism! Was there ever such a man!"

"Lady Hamilton is an enthusiast," said the Queen smilingly, although to her own eyes the tears had come.

"I am rejoiced to find her unchanged in that respect, your Majesty, for Nelson calls her 'the Patroness of the Navy.'"

"Truly, Captain?" Lady Hamilton's cheeks flushed with girlish delight. "Oh, how good of him!"

"And now, Captain Hardy, you must give my

people some of the pleasure you have given their Queen. You see how like and yet unlike is my position to that of my martyred sister. Her enemies were the people. Mine are found only among the nobility and the philosophers. Sir, at this moment students, for whose colleges I have done everything, wear in their breasts the red cap of my sister's murderers. The people love me. Let me be grateful. Lady Hamilton, will you take Captain Hardy in your carriage through the city that all may see the brave man that has brought this splendid news?"

"Your Majesty thus lessens my regret at this dismissal," I said as again I bowed and kissed the strong, white hand.

"I but assign her to duty in her official position as Patroness of the Navy."

"My duties are my only pleasures, Captain," said Lady Hamilton, rising to accompany me—for our chat had been informal, and the Queen had kept her favourite at her side. "I have but three passions: devotion to her Majesty, hatred of France, and love for the English navy."

"The navy is large," laughed the Queen, with a glance of amusement in my direction.

"But not too large to find room and welcome in

my heart," rejoined Lady Hamilton as she curtsied low.

"And now," she said eagerly as, once outside the door, she placed a detaining hand on my arm, "tell me of Nelson. He is recovering? There is no danger?"

"None whatever, madame. True, he is greatly shattered, for he has seen nearly five years of almost ceaseless service. He is wounded and ill, but he will recover."

"He will, indeed, for he is coming to Naples, and I will be his nurse. Sir William shall write to him at once. Your faith, Captain, gives new life to my own, so that now I can rejoice in obeying the Queen's command. And here comes what we need. Look you, sir, how the Patroness of the Navy will tell the people of your triumph."

One of her servants was entering the palace yard. She took from him a small package and, quickly opening it, showed me a broad head-band of silk, on which in letters of gold appeared the words "Nelson and Victory." This she fastened in Greek fashion about her forehead.

"That," she exclaimed, flushing as always she did when excited, "will carry the news to all Naples. I ordered it this morning on the way to

the palace. It was certainly an inspiration, for I had no knowledge of the present honour."

And, so, through all the streets of the city we drove, the beautiful woman with her victory-proclaiming bandeau, and I garbed in the uniform of those that had saved the monarchy. Everywhere we were greeted with the applauding shouts of the thousands that thronged until nearly nightfall about the carriage. Ah, the happiness of that day to her! She was to know greater triumphs, greater honours, aye, and a far more poignant joy; but the untroubled, perfect content of that day's happiness was never to come to her again. For this was due to patriotism to her native land, loyalty to a gracious Queen, and a strange, sweet and almost impersonal idealization of a hero who was as yet to her all but unknown. Than this there can be no more restful content; for even I know that that does not come, of necessity, with the coming of love, however complete and all-surrendering.

As the horses were drawn up at her door, I begged that she and Sir William would take the boat with me and join the officers' table on board the brig *Mutine*.

"I would, gladly, if only to be among the dear, brave sailors again—but can we return in time for

the theatre this evening? We must all attend in force to confound the enemies of the Queen. I warrant you there'll be no French cockades there to-night."

"I promise your timely arrival."

"So be it then, Captain. My desire to put foot on one of Nelson's ships destroys all my sense of hospitality, you see."

"But it causes you to do me all the greater honour," I protested, as I aided her to alight. Verily, I was becoming the typical courtier of royal courts I flattered myself, as I paced up and down awaiting her reappearance. Another week of such companionship, and the mere sight of the quarter-deck would make me sea-sick.

It was, perhaps, twenty minutes later that Sir William brought to me such a vision of loveliness as I had never even imagined—a vision I have treasured through all these after years, myself remaining silent, but thinking much, while many whose voices have been most loudly heard have had no words of sufficient cruelty to say of her. It would be, perhaps, an easy task, even for an old sailor, to tell what she wore that evening: to hint at its effect is hopeless. For she was gowned in simple white; there was not a jewel and not a bit of color save for

the great blue hat. But that wonderful mass of chestnut hair that had enveloped her completely when great artists painted her as a Bacchante, now was unloosed and fell quite to her feet. London would have been shocked into hysteric horror, but often thus had she been seen by the Neapolitans that adored her. Never, however, by myself, a young and, on the whole, conventional naval officer. Let me confess that I was intoxicated by her beauty. I think we were all, in those days, in love with her—and you must remember that I had not yet been married to Sir George Berkeley's daughter.

At the wharf my gig was waiting, and quickly carried us to the trim little two-masted vessel. Thither I had managed to send word of our coming, so that the guns due an ambassador saluted the approach of our merry little party. And a merry dinner, too, it was, prolonged an unconscionable time by the desire of all of us of the brig that another toast and still another should be drunk to "the loveliest woman in the world." And I noticed that while she scarcely touched the wine, the loveliest woman in the world did not urge haste. Was she not on her hero's ship, among the sailors of old England? Could she not see in our eyes and hear from our lips the fact that she was queen of hearts?

Above all, was she not overcome with joy at having her name allied with that of the great Admiral as joint saviours of Naples and idols of the navy? No wonder she tarried. I could read it all in her sweet face: "God was good," it plainly said; "surely she was the happiest as well as the loveliest woman in the world."

And so it was that on regaining the shore we found that Lady Hamilton must go to the opera house as she was or not at all; there was no time in which to return to her home. Therefore we entered the ambassador's carriage—she in her white gown and her hair all about her—and were whirled away to the San Carlo through streets alight with bonfires and still resounding with the undiminished enthusiasm of the people.

"Alas, Captain!" she exclaimed, as the horses dashed from the quay, "my patriotism is at last demanding a sacrifice. Can you grasp the heart-breaking fact that, carefully laid out on my bed at home is a purple satin gown, with a petticoat all of crape and spangles, to say nothing of a cap fresh from Paris—a love of a thing, all of white feathers? And here am I, garbed like a fisher maiden."

Heaven alone knows what I answered—I was made silly enough for anything by the occasional

glimpse of those laughing blue eyes—the oddest little brown spot in the pupil of one giving it a strangely added charm. So, nothing I must have said, for she quite shrieked with laughing.

“Bravo, Captain!” she cried. “Our Neapolitan climate acts quickly on you. And my hero—does he flatter as prettily?”

“I am afraid the Admiral is a bit shy; but then, you see, his reputation makes it needless for him to work as hard as we others to gain the good graces of your sex.”

Opposite me was a quaking of shoulders and a gurgle. I was afraid that indeed, I had said something. Then:

“You heard that, Sir William? I resign my office. I renounce my country. Henceforth I am Neapolitan. An English sailor has confessed he finds it hard work to say nice things to the Patroness of the Navy. Fie, Captain, so in reality it was that last bottle that made you proclaim me the most beautiful woman in the world! And, alas, at the moment, I believed in you.”

Our arrival at the Teatro San Carlo was all that spared me her further raillery, and covered to some extent my confusion. Italy’s most famous home of opera, with even then a half century’s record of

music, was to-night filled in every part. In that statement, however, I am not absolutely truthful. But if the candelabra, projecting from the dividing pillars, shone here and there upon an empty box usually occupied by Jacobin sympathizers with the revolutionists of France, this fact but added to the enthusiasm of the nearly three thousand royalists that had assembled, not so much from a love of music, as from a desire to express their joy at the victory of the Nile. The opera had already commenced. But as the divine Hamilton, seemingly clothed only in the waving wealth of her chestnut hair, entered the box and, thrusting aside its dark draperies, revealed not only her own popular self but also my own now equally popular British uniform, the music of Cimarosa's "Secret Marriage" was drowned in the mighty shout of welcome that rose from the vast audience.

And, carried out of herself by the excitement of the day, the enthusiasm of the moment, and the worship that was unconsciously growing within her for this demi-god of the sea that even now was sailing toward her from the mighty battle of the Nile, Lady Hamilton leaned far out from the box, her hair streaming all about her face and floating above the heads of the enthralled thousands below. Time

and again since then in the streets of Naples and Palermo have I seen ignorant women and children fall before her and kiss her feet, so wonderful was the likeness of her marvellous face to that of the Blessed Virgin in such pictures as they possessed. And never was this resemblance greater than to-night, when, her face aflame, her blue eyes agleam with a holy patriotism and an as yet unrealized love, she looked down upon these spell-bound people. Suddenly she drew from the covering of her breast the bandeau of the afternoon and, waving it aloft, her voice—which charmed all that heard it whether in song or speech—rang out clear and sweet:

“Viva Nelson!”

And then as she turned from their deafening response—“*Nostro Liberatore!*”—her lips just pouted to again express to us her all but unspeakable happiness in this hour of glory for England, another officer in the uniform of that country entered the box. I saw the half-opened mouth close into a tremulous line of pent-up terror. I saw the gayety of the eyes fade to a stare of unbelieving horror. Slowly she sank back in her seat.

“Lady Hamilton”—I could see that my voice came dully to her—“Captain Stuart, who is to accompany Captain Capel to London.”

Now doubtless there were some slight traces of dissipation, of selfishness and even of cruelty in Stuart's face. Yet could such signs as these in the countenance of a stranger thus frighten a woman that for years had known the selfishness, the dissipations and the cruelty that surrounded the throne of the Sicilies? For, when I made a place for him and, seating himself beside her, he spoke in an undertone and with admiring eyes, his voice could neither fascinate nor fright her. She had fainted even while the plaudits of thousands still echoed through San Carlo. Sensitive, generous and grateful lady of laughter, poor little loving and lovable Queen of Hearts, why must this death's head of the long ago have come back into your life?

Chapter II

The Making of a Queen of Hearts

HOW came it that the events just chronicled could have thrown the court and city of Naples into such a paroxysm of joy? How came it that my presentation of a seemingly commonplace English officer could have thrown the Queen's favorite into such an one of terror? At that time I myself could not have answered the latter question. And, so quickly does the world forget the most historic deeds, there may be even now those that cannot answer the former. As briefly as possible—for the one involves, perhaps, the dull, the other certainly the pitiful—let me reply to both.

The French had guillotined those that by divine right ruled over them—the ill-starred Louis XVI. and his beautiful, misguided Queen, Marie Antoinette. All Europe had given an outcry of grief and horror. France was now arrayed against the world. Toulon, almost alone among her cities, remained royalist. To its assistance, therefore, England had sent a fleet under Admiral Hood, while

Nelson, at that time merely a captain, had been hastened to Naples with despatches for Sir William Hamilton, our envoy at that court. For the garrisoning of Toulon that official had then secured Neapolitan troops from Ferdinand IV., the weak and pleasure-loving King of the Two Sicilies, and from the real ruler, his Queen, Maria Caroline, daughter of Maria Theresa of Austria and sister of Marie Antoinette of France. Thus had come about the brief first meeting between Nelson and Lady Hamilton, the woman that was to love all his after life. But not then commenced his infatuation. Of that first meeting I was not a witness; but from the moment he hoisted his broad pennant on the *Minerve* and some luck of mine in the capture of the *Sabine* won his praise, I saw almost every development in the unhappy story.

Five years later, during which interval these two never met, Buonaparte entered upon his Egyptian campaign, an expedition believed, however, to be directed against the Two Sicilies. The Corsican's victory at the Battle of the Pyramids was quickly followed by defeat at the hands of Nelson, who, at the Nile, annihilated the French fleet and isolated Buonaparte from all communication with Europe. Now you must bear in mind that, while Maria

Caroline had twice been forced into a hypocritical treaty of neutrality with the government that had murdered her sister, she had, in reality, a secret alliance with England against the French. The republic hated Naples because it was ruled by a sister of the detested Antoinette. The French had already entered the sacred city in their progress through Italy. Would not Naples be next? Such a catastrophe it was believed the Battle of the Nile had prevented.

In these events Lady Hamilton was looked upon as having played no unimportant part. From Maria Caroline she had obtained the King of Spain's letter announcing his purpose to unite with France in war on England. This information she made known to the English ministry. Also through her influence with the Queen had been secured the supplies enabling us to return a second time to Egypt—aid rendered in direct violation of the treaty of neutrality. I am not certain but that in some way we would have managed to return even had there been no Lady Hamilton; but Nelson never thought so, believing that she alone had made it possible.

Why, then, should this woman, whose exalted station and influence permitted her to perform such services for England, fear one that wore that coun-

try's uniform?—and assuredly I saw fear in her face the night I presented Stuart to her. Here is the explanation:

Some twenty years before that night, there came to London a fifteen-year-old girl of extraordinary beauty. Daughter of a village blacksmith, a poor and thus humbly born country girl, uneducated, but with a certain refinement and an innate sense of goodness, she was unfitted, save for her good looks, for anything but domestic service. Nurse, servant, shop-girl, companion—these were the gradations of her career up to the time that the whole-hearted generosity of her nature caused her to ask the influence of a certain naval officer in aid of a stricken Flintshire family, friends of her childhood. The favour was granted, but in return the man demanded the greatest price a woman can pay. She, in her gratitude and innocence, paid the price, and at seventeen became a mother. This done, the father left them destitute and by her was seen no more until the night on which, happy, an honoured wife, the favourite of a Queen, acknowledged by her hero and England's as the Patroness of the Navy, this Shylock in woman's virtue stood smilingly before her. And, God forgive me, it was I, all unknowing, that brought him there. For it was Stuart.

When a woman sins, what is left for her? What she would do is one thing; what the world permits her to do is quite another. Immovable as the laws of Medes and Persians comes the social mandate: Continue to sin or starve—you have no other alternative. And to Emma was offered no relaxing of this cruelty. The inevitable, therefore, came. Successively she had the protection of Sir Henry Fetherstonehaugh, too dissolute to be deep in his affection, and of his friend, the Hon. Charles Greville, son of Francis, Earl of Warwick, too ambitious to be ruled by passion. And when Greville, seeking an advantageous marriage, induced her by trickery to travel alone to Italy, she believed he sent her only to give her glorious voice the training of that country's teachers. Not until long afterward did she learn that the cold-blooded cur, who looked upon her just as he did upon one of his beautiful paintings or an exquisite piece of bric-à-brac, had entered into a conspiracy with his uncle, Sir William Hamilton, himself a noted *connoisseur*, by which the latter was to come into possession of this unrivalled example of human loveliness.

Now, there have been many versions told of this affair and of all that followed. I doubt if any woman has ever been so lied about as this one.

She was not perfect, and after Nelson's death she was a spectacle. True, too, I believed it would be better for Nelson to break with her. Nevertheless, this I know: that she went to Naples broken-hearted, that amid the corruption of its court she remained a loyal wife to Sir William until she was swept from her feet by the one and only great love of her life, and that she never intentionally did a cruel thing to a living creature, nor knowingly an injurious one to Nelson. And so when, some thirteen years since, the alleged "Memoirs" of her life anonymously appeared, my blood boiled at their hypocritical, prurient lying, and I then determined that some day the world should know the truth.

But now you can understand all that was involved in this reappearance of Captain Stuart. Sir William may have understood her former relationship to Greville, but certainly he knew nothing of the shameful period that went before. None in Naples knew the scandalous stories whispered of her in London. Here she was an honoured wife, a leader in the highest circles, a power behind the throne. I know her past, but despite it I tell you that then she was as pure in heart as any woman in all Italy. She looked back upon her former life with a sort of uncomprehending horror. She was

trying honestly to prove worthy of the present, to earn by great services the gratitude of her country, above all to deserve the place accorded her side by side with Nelson, this idol she had enshrined in the innermost recesses of her heart. What came later may, in the telling, wear another complexion, but such is the truth of the conditions of that time.

And so in the return of Stuart she saw the possibility of the wreck of all this peace and power and purity. He had once left her and their child to starve. Would he not now be guilty of any evil if he wished? At a word he could estrange her from her husband, disgrace her at court, make her the scandal of Europe, and, above all, dishonour her in the eyes of Nelson.

Chapter III

Foreshadowings of the Inevitable

N the three weeks that intervened between that night at the San Carlo and the day on which Nelson arrived in Naples, I saw nothing positively to explain the fear I had seen in Lady Hamilton's eyes. Stuart, indeed, informed me that he had decided not to go to London with Capel, but would remain in Naples and rejoin his ship on the arrival of Nelson. He was his own master in this respect, having obtained leave of absence and being in no sense one of the official messengers. Nevertheless I liked not his decision, thus suddenly taken. Nor had I ever liked the man himself—had distrusted him in truth, and now I had still further reason for this feeling. He was in daily attendance upon Lady Hamilton, and I could see that not only was his presence loathsome to her, but that also it was destroying some of that girlish and patriotic delight with which she had anticipated the coming of the fleet.

But all her happiness and enthusiasm revived on the memorable day we sighted the *Vanguard*

bearing the conqueror into the beautiful Bay of Naples. I am certain that not a living soul remained that morning in the city's streets. As during the Battle of the Nile we saw the shores black with Arabs and Egyptians, overjoyed at every advance in our victory, so now the Neapolitans lined the shore to cheer the hero of that battle. And the fleet of gayly decorated boats that flew out over the rippling water to meet him, in size and magnificence was, I verily believe, never before brought together in honour of any save a king or emperor. All was music and flowers, bunting and streamers; while from scores of the boats cages were held aloft and the imprisoned birds let go to typify the freedom that Nelson had brought to Naples.

"You must be one of us!" cried Lady Hamilton to me as I was hastening to the quay on foot—and her carriage stopped at my side. It was already well filled, Sir William, Prince Caracciolo, and, to my annoyance, Captain Stuart, occupying the other seats. But in some way they made room for me. As we reached the water and I looked out over the hundreds of pleasure craft to the noble but shattered *Vanguard*, I confess the sight brought moisture to my eyes. Lady Hamilton, who stood at my side, saw my emotion. Suddenly her hand was slipped into

my own and gave it a little squeeze of honest sympathy. And as thus she stood looking into my face with such frankness and an almost sorrowful enthusiasm, I realized that here was a woman whose patriotism, centering around an individual ideal, might mount, on occasion, to the ecstasy of a Joan of Arc.

I aided her into the ambassador's barge, resplendent in the colours of England and of Naples, and conveying liveried oarsmen and musicians. The latter, as we stepped on board, broke into the inspiring strains of "See the Conquering Hero Comes," and instantly I felt Lady Hamilton tremble and her hand close convulsively on my arm. The stately royal barge bearing the King and Queen had already passed seaward but, under the strong stroke of our men, the Hamilton's lighter craft shot rapidly to the lead of all the boats on which the musicians now joined in the blood-quickenning strains of triumph and of welcome. Not a word was spoken by Lady Hamilton as we advanced. I saw Stuart bend once and whisper something in her ear, but she remained as though she heard him not. Caracciolo, too, whose proper place, indeed, was not here but with the royal family, remained unanswered. She sat immovable at my side, one hand still rest-

ing on my arm, the other pressed to her nervously convulsing bosom, her eyes fixed on the distant *Vanguard*.

I know not exactly how it came about, and even in the excitement of the moment I thought it an error, but ours was the first barge to come alongside the Admiral's ship, being some moments in advance even of their Majesties. Lady Hamilton, as one awakening from a dream, was the first to spring to the *Vanguard's* deck, but I was close behind her. As I reached it Nelson stood there with uncovered head gazing silently at this vision of beauty that thus suddenly had appeared from over the side. She, on her part, stood also motionless, looking with worshipping yet horrified eyes at the noble but mutilated and careworn face of her hero, the sightless eye, the bloody bandage on the forehead, the empty sleeve.

"Oh, God!" she whispered, "is it possible!"

I saw her totter, and rushed forward to aid her. But Nelson was quicker, and she was instantly clasped in the one outthrust arm. As for a second he supported her, the glorious chestnut hair spread over his shoulder, her fair face upturned to his battle-scarred features, it seemed to me a fitting union of bravery and beauty, of the navy's hero and its god-

dess. But as I glanced around the group I noticed a look of sneering cruelty and of smiling satisfaction on the lips of Stuart. This, however, did not so greatly startle me as did the black rage and hatred depicted on the face of Caracciolo. But there was no time for meditation on these mysteries, for already the royal barge had shot alongside us, and Lady Hamilton, her form convulsed with sobs, gently withdrew herself from Nelson's lingering embrace.

Thus the deck of the *Vanguard* was the scene of the first act of the drama. The home of the English ambassador, seven days later, saw the second. The interval, too, was vital in danger, for Nelson was persuaded to take up his quarters at the embassy and there Lady Hamilton became his devoted and sleepless nurse. I am not sure, indeed, but that she saved his life. Worn out with anxiety, ceaseless vigilance, wounds and fever, he looked the day on which he sailed into the Bay of Naples as though Death already claimed him. She brought him back to health and strength, but I have often thought that, for the sake of his name in the eyes of posterity, it might have been as well had she allowed him to die. With the Battle of the Nile gone into history, he could well have spared Trafalgar and still gone down the ages as the greatest

admiral in all our English annals. But that was not to be.

Naples now was in perpetual gala dress. There were innumerable festivities, one of note, I remember, at Count Francis Esterhazy's, and others of great splendour at the royal palace, where the Queen made the garden terrace a fairyland. The people of the city, too, gave vent to their enthusiasm in *fêtes* held among the palm trees surrounding the Farnese Bull in the Villa Reale. But all these were as nothing when compared with the magnificence of the ball given by Lady Hamilton to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of her hero's birth.

How an I, being neither a gifted writer nor a man much accustomed to social festivity, to describe the splendours of that night? I fear me much that, in the poverty-stricken language in which I shall tell of it, the affair will seem like little more than a gathering for tea at my Aunt Martha's. But when I say that it cost Sir William something more than a thousand pounds, a faint glimmering of the thing may be had. For you must know that a thousand pounds in Naples is a tidy sum, the like of which spent in a single night was unheard of by Neapolitans, save only such as were familiar with the life of Cagliostro, who recently had been somewhat conspicuous in the

affairs of the Queen's unfortunate sister—particularly in the matter of the diamond necklace.

But, now I think of it, it's a bit mean of me thus to gossip about the cost of hospitality. Details such as these seem unworthy a British sailor, although perhaps only a dozen of us who were there that night still live to talk of it. However, I'll give you an excuse for my crabbedness. I didn't approve of the ball. Not but what I was glad that Nelson was alive to celebrate his birthday, and not that I think any braver Englishman was ever honoured. But the fact is I was afraid all these festivities would end badly, and if it had been possible for me to be angry with Lady Hamilton I should have been so because of the recklessness with which, as I thought, she was rushing onward to the certain ruining of old Nel's health and happiness. I would have been as pleased as a boy out of school could I have walked into that ballroom with Lady Nelson on my arm. Had I done so I think the effect would have been something like the unexpected descent from out the fog of a frigate upon a drifting long boat. But I had not that pleasure, more's the pity for myself and for history.

I went, on the contrary, quite out of sorts. I was accompanied by a number of our officers, having

most ungraciously remained away from a dinner which preceded the ball. To the former affair I was one of an honoured eighty or so to be invited, and I had a keener appreciation of that honour when, on reaching the embassy, I found the great mansion filled by a crowd estimated to number fully two thousand. Probably in no other country in the world could a gathering of similar character have been brought together. With the court soon to seek refuge at Palermo, here were courtiers already planning treachery; and maids of honour shameless in their intrigues when within a few weeks starvation or death might stare them in the face. Here were spies of France in smiling conversation with Neapolitan generals who, when confronted with the armies of Buonaparte, would show their incompetence and cowardice. Here, indeed, was an assemblage such as fully justified the letter to Earl St. Vincent which on the following day Nelson wrote and read to me, and in the course of which he said: "This is a country of fiddlers and poets, strumpets and scoundrels!" The poets were there that night, a sorry lot; the scoundrels were legion; of the women Lady Hamilton, despite all that has been said against her, was, I vow, almost the best; and the fiddlers sat beneath a gorgeous covering and set the whole fan-

tastic and reckless crowd of notables and nobodies a-dancing. Royalty must have its human feelings like the rest of us, I suppose, and although the court of Naples always seemed to me a sort of fairy tale or, better, something of a burlesque affair, I really should not have had such thoughts, for God knows we had little enough of royal dignity under one or two of the Georges.

And yet it was a pretty sight, that of this gay crowd floating about the towering column of Victory erected to Nelson's glory in the centre of the ballroom. At the moment you actually view it, decorous and prosperous immorality has an indefinable witchery. It is only when the lights have faded and the colours, the smiles and the wit have vanished, that you feel disgust. And so while I had more than a suspicion of what was beneath the surface, I could not but lose a bit of my ill humour when I entered the ballroom and was almost immediately greeted by Nelson, whose attitude to me, I regretted to notice, was almost as much that of the host as of the guest of honour.

If ever Nelson seemed handsome it was on this night. Remember that the sightlessness of his eye was scarcely noticeable, while the empty sleeve and the pallor of his face but gave him added distinc-

tion. And if in my seventy years I have learned anything of women, it is that mere good looks in men does not touch their hearts, although occasionally it may their passion. What they crave is the man that has done something, anything; the man that is different in some way from other men.

And to-night, also, Nelson seemed to have acquired the flattering tongue of the proverbial courtier. I recall that shortly after we had arrived, Lady Hamilton expressed to us her regret that the Queen could not be present.

"Madame," responded Nelson, "while you remain in Naples, the daughter of Maria Theresa cannot hope to be its only queen."

"Treason, Admiral, but delightful. Captain Hardy traduced you when he claimed you could not say such things."

"So, Hardy, you who stand by me so nobly at sea, thus desert to the enemy on land."

"Nay, Admiral, I did not say what you might not do under the inspiration of such a moment as the present. Are we to hear you sing to-night, Lady Hamilton?"

"I think not. I had a siege of it at the palace last evening. The King and I sang duets for hours."

“And how does he sing?”

There was not the trace of a smile on her face as she replied, though to me it seemed her eye ached to wink. “He sings,” she said slowly, “quite like a King.”

“He probably sings as well as he governs,” said Caracciolo to me as through the crowded rooms we trailed after Nelson and our hostess. I looked at him in amazement. It was a strange sentiment to come from a Neapolitan Prince. But he continued with an air of utter unconcern. “You know how it came about? It’s one of the real comedies of politics. They had the king so educated that he would reign but would prefer not to rule. It was his father, over in Spain, that intended to do the ruling, but along comes this little Austrian and does it herself. And what’s more, sir, that shrewd mother of hers put it in the marriage contract that the Queen should have a seat in the council.”

“But by what a chance it was that she came to the throne at all,” said Stuart, who had joined us. “As I remember it, the bride was really to have been her sister, the Arch-Duchess Maria Josephine. Going down into the ancestral vaults to give thanks to heaven—for the gift of a throne, I suppose—she caught smallpox from a newly buried corpse, and

was taken away to gaze on what I presume is a mightier throne than that of Naples."

"It is doubtless just as well for Naples," I ventured. "From the little I have seen of the Queen, I'll wager that, had she married Louis XVI. she'd never have allowed the guillotine to touch her pretty neck."

We had by now entered a small nook adjoining the ballroom, and there standing at a buffet were our hostess, Nelson, Sir William, and a fat and frowzy old woman, flushed of face and strident of voice.

"Whom in heaven's name have we here?" I asked in a low tone of Caracciolo.

"The mother of the fair Hamilton," replied the Prince with more than the trace of a sneer. "You'd scarcely expect snow and ice in the offspring of such a parent, now would you?"

"Yet I understand that she had to contend even with the King, who had also fallen a victim to her charms."

"Quite true. Even before the Queen consented to receive her, his hat touched the earth when he passed, and Sunday after Sunday musicians serenaded her from his barge. But it was all most hopeless. She has been unapproachable here in Naples. And I

assure you the Queen would not have permitted affairs to go too far. She never does. There, for example, was Mme. Banti. The actress had commenced to think she saw a throne in the future, when one night, by the Queen's orders, she was seized in her dressing-room at the theatre, bundled into a carriage, and, almost before she could catch her breath, found herself outside the country. From which you will doubtless gather that our fair ambassadress was safe—as far as the King was concerned. But, Captain, even ice melts—especially, if you'd pardon the mixed metaphor—when it has a mother like that."

I glanced thoughtfully at his retreating form. So this gossipier and cynic, this disbeliever in the firmness of woman's purity, was one of the noblest born of Neapolitans, coming of a line of distinguished diplomats and cabinet ministers. I felt that I had some cause for uneasiness when female honour and the country's safety rested with such men. But, after all, what affair was it of mine. I crossed to the group at the buffet. Mrs. Cadogan, with a wry face, had just put down her glass.

"They may talk of their *Lachrymae Christi* and that sort of stuff," said the poor old soul regretfully, "but, Admiral, I confess I prefer a glass of

good London gin before a whole bottle of the other."

"My dear Mrs. Cadogan, you shall have your wish instantly." Nelson's tone and attitude were as respectful as though he had been addressing a duchess, and, for that matter, no other was ever adopted by any man of sensibility that knew of Lady Hamilton's life-long devotion to her ignorant but good-hearted mother. "Fortunately on board the *Vanguard* we have the best of London gin. I'll send for some at once and when it comes you will, I hope, permit me to join you in drinking it to the happiness of the Patroness of the Navy."

"The Patroness is already happy," interrupted Lady Hamilton, "because your birthday happens so soon after your arrival in Naples. For this I have a particular reason, as it was on the very anniversary of my own birth that I first reached the city."

"The fact interests me deeply," responded Nelson, "for it would seem that, leaving aside the international events in which we have been allies, a score of trifles, such as that, associate our destinies. But you came here in all your youth, your beauty, your happiness; everything before you that heart could wish. To-night I am forty and feel an old man. The best of my deeds as well as the most

cherished of my youthful illusions belong to the past."

"You shall not say so," and she laid a hand reproachfully on his arm. "The future has even greater honours for you. As to myself, you are only partly right. I came here with youth—yes, with beauty, if you will; but not in happiness. Devotion to the Queen and to—to our navy, at times have saved me from despair."

Sir William, who had absented himself for a moment and had not heard this somewhat startling confession, now returned to inform his wife that there was a general desire that she should sing.

"No," she said, "I have been spoiled. Do you know they wished me as first woman at the Italian opera in Madrid? I was to have had six thousand pounds a year—six thousand for poor little me, that thought myself unable to earn a shilling! And Gallini has been here begging me to engage at two thousand guineas at the Opera House in London, or, if not that, then in concerts at Hanover Square."

"The impudence of the fellow!"

The remark came from Stuart, and, while seemingly innocent, to me there sounded a note of unpleasant irony.

“I informed him,” said the smiling Sir William, “that she was already engaged for life.”

“But he’s capable of anything,” continued Stuart. “Didn’t he have the audacity to run away with the Earl of Abingdon’s sister? Think of it—that beggarly little ballet dancer! Really, as a matter of fact, it seems there was a time when it was better for lovers to be actors rather than sailors.”

“Quite true!” said Nelson. “I myself came in contact with a similar case, for our handsome comedian, ‘Gentleman’ Smith, eloped with the sister of the Earl of Sandwich, and it was his lordship, you know, that fitted out the expedition in which I sought the North Pole.”

“He is more successful when nearer the Equator, eh Captain?” whispered Stuart in my ear, and with a sneering glance at Lady Hamilton that made me long to take him by the throat.

At this moment, however, I was saved any expression of my indignation by the sound of the national anthem played by the distant orchestra. We adjourned to the ballroom and all joined in the singing, but the admiral seemed just a trifle bored when to the old time words an added verse was sung. It had been written by the indefatigable Miss Knight and, as I recall it, ran in this fashion:

“Join we great Nelson’s name
First on the roll of fame:
Him let us sing:
Spread we his praise around,
Honour of British ground:
Who made Nile’s shores resound,
God save the king!”

“Doubtless this is the first time our anthem ever had an added verse in honour of an individual,” remarked Sir William to me as the voices died away. “But he deserves it. It’s curious now to recall that some five years ago, before presenting Nelson to Lady Hamilton, I informed her he was a little man, and far from handsome, but that he would live to be great. And I remember that on the same day he said to me, ‘I am now only captain but, if I live, I will be at the top of the tree.’ Well, we were true prophets, were we not, Captain Hardy?”

“You were indeed. And so it was you that first made the Admiral known to Lady Hamilton?”

“Yes, and it is not the act upon which I least pride myself in a long and, I hope, not altogether useless life—this alliance of Mars and Venus!”

I looked at him in amazement. But his kindly eyes rested with perfectly innocent approval upon the subjects of our conversation.

I recall one other significant incident of that evening. Lady Knight, mother of her whom we had dubbed Nelson's poet laureate, arrived almost at the moment when the rest of us were thinking of leaving. Instantly she swept down upon Nelson.

"A week in Naples, Admiral," she exclaimed, "and you have been such a butterfly for half of it, and such an invalid for the rest, that I have not had a chance to say one word to you of your victory. I suppose, however, that by now it has become so old a story that you speak of it as you might of having won at cricket! Seriously, though, it must have been the happiest day of your life—that of this great battle."

"No, madam. The happiest was that on which I married Lady Nelson."

Lady Hamilton was passing as he answered, and I saw the colour quickly leave her face while an odd look came into her eyes as though suddenly confronted with some unanticipated terror. Then, touching Nelson on the arm, in a low voice but with intense sincerity she said:

"Bravo, my lord! If there were more like you in Naples we should be the better for it!"

But I think I then for the first time fully realized the situation—as yet scarcely appreciated by these

two themselves—and was not in the least astonished when Nelson turned to me and whispered: “By God, Hardy, if I stay in Naples another month I fear I’ll not be able in honesty to repeat my boast!”

Chapter IV

A Threatened Throne

 HE days immediately following were happy ones for the court and royalists of Naples. The Queen, of course, was quite carried out of herself by the victory of the Nile, and was now determined, at all hazards, to break entirely with the French republic. I was at the palace with Nelson and Lady Hamilton on the morning she definitely decided upon this momentous step—momentous alike to Naples, to the royal family, to those whom I that day had accompanied, and, need I say, to Lady Nelson, far off in England, alone at cheerless Burnham Thorpe Rectory with the aged and paralytic father of her husband. And as I thought of the latter fact, I cursed this tinsel folly, this union of Mars and Venus in aid of a burlesque kingdom of petty intrigues and vile treachery. And, mark you, when I write in this manner I do not forget my adoration of Nelson, my admiration and respect for the Queen, nor the almost boyish affection I then had for Lady Hamilton. But, if you have forgotten it, my poor chronicle will remind

you of the woe that was brought about by all these attempts to save a worthless throne.

“My friends,”—and the Queen turned to us that morning with a confident smile, “I think I am now strong enough to defy France. What think you?”

Lady Hamilton was loud in her approval, and the Queen was far too occupied by her confidence and excitement to note the silence maintained by Nelson and myself.

“Think of it!” she continued indignantly as she paced the floor, once or twice angrily striking her white, clenched hand in the other palm: “Here am I with the friendship and aid of the world’s greatest naval power; here am I secretly allied with Russia and the Porte; here am I a daughter of Austria which stands ready to join me on the north, and yet I have been forced to receive an envoy from these French republicans whose hands are still red with my sister’s blood! And that envoy is still here at my court! Shall this thing be? I say that within twenty-four hours this man must leave Naples and that we shall at once and openly arm against the French. What think you, my Lord Admiral? You have caged Buonaparte in Egypt. Is not this the time for us to strike the blow? Shall we not drive

Berthier from Rome and forever prevent the disgrace of his triumphal entry into Naples?"

In her fury and agitation she did not note that the King had entered unannounced and had heard the last half of her passionate outburst. It was to his Majesty, however, that Nelson turned and gave answer.

"Your Majesty must either advance, trusting to God for his blessing on a just cause, and prepare to die sword in hand—or remain quiet and be kicked out of your kingdom."

We all instinctively fell back, startled at Nelson's frank and almost brutal advice. But the King, after a silence of some moments' length, finally stretched out his hand most cordially and grasped that of the Admiral, saying gently but with dignity and decision:

"I will go on, trusting in God and Nelson."

Then turning to the Queen with, I thought, just a tinge of reproof in his tone, he continued:

"Madam, with your permission we will discuss these matters at the council of state this afternoon."

Not only did the Queen carry through the council her measure regarding the French envoy, but also it was decided to at once raise an army of thirty-five thousand men whom the King should lead in person

against the detested enemy. And then were we in the midst of as pretty a preparation for what seemed to me but lilliputian warfare as ever I was engaged in. For you must know that Lady Hamilton and I and all the rest of us were as much in the thick of it as if we had been Neapolitans born, although for the life of me, being but a sailor and nothing at all of a politician, I couldn't see just what we had to do with it. And throughout the excitement of preparation Caracciolo and Stuart stalked smilingly, yet with a subtle threatening, until I was quite out of my mind with anxiety to solve the mystery of these two.

The army was encamped at San Germano. Thither we English one day accompanied the Queen and court, her Majesty intending to make a long stay that her presence might add to the enthusiasm of her soldiers. The brilliancy of her first review I shall not soon forget. Not soon! Already I have been able to picture it any time these forty years and more. You must know that these Neapolitan soldiers were not the most ill-looking fellows in the world, and when some twenty thousand of them were assembled there at San Germano they were well worth looking at. But this was not what most strongly lingers in my memory.

I reached the field somewhat tardily on the morning after our arrival, and although in my time I have had some inspiring sights none compared with this that greeted my eyes. It was that of Maria Caroline arrayed in royal military garb, the fleur-de-lys of the Bourbons embroidered on the collar of her smart, gold-buttoned blue riding habit, and a white plume waving from the generalissimo's chapeau atop her beautiful head. Mounted on a magnificent animal, she was dashing along the line at the moment I approached, Lady Hamilton at her side—riding splendidly, too, the English darling!—and followed by a brilliant group of aides-de-camp. Many a time since have I wished that, like a modern Boadicia, the Queen could herself have led the army against the French. She was quite capable of it, and had she done so, perhaps the Admiral and I would have returned in peace to London, Lady Nelson would never have known the meaning of a broken heart, and the Hamiltons—well, as to that strangely mated couple I shall not hazard a guess.

In the afternoon we witnessed a sham battle with which the Queen and Lady Hamilton were delighted. Not so Nelson. When General Mack, the Austrian who had been made the Neapolitan commander-in-chief, rode up and received the enthusiastic congrat-

ulations of her Majesty, who was radiant with approval and the hope of vengeance, the Admiral remarked to me in an undertone:

“ You and I, Hardy, are only sailors, but mark my word, this great, hulking general doesn't know his business. As for his officers, they are frightened at a drawn sword or a loaded gun. God knows what they'll do on the battlefield. I have formed my opinion. I heartily hope I may be mistaken! ”

I shall not make long drawn out my chronicle of that period wherein the Queen, Lady Hamilton, and the royalists lived in a fool's paradise. The sham battle was followed by a banquet, at which the Neapolitan officers showed greater courage in their attacks upon bottles than later they displayed in their assaults upon batteries. They loved the vintage of France; they feared her veterans. Day after day there were drills, reviews, enthusiastic consultations; and daily Nelson and Lady Hamilton cantered over the field with her Majesty, or rode with her in her chariot drawn by four superb white horses.

If ever the fates conspired they did so in the case of these two. Ordinary propinquity is always something in the growth of affection. But it is absolutely fatal when, as now, a romantic queen makes two fame-desiring people such as these her constant

companions and advisers; sharing with them her royal hopes and fears; danger near, courage present; everything surrounded by martial music and flashing sabres by day, brilliant court functions and splendid festivities in many palaces by night. I should myself have fallen in love with some one but the entire court circle seemed already rather well pre-empted. To be sure there was that little affair with—but, there, this is Nelson's love story I am trying to tell.

When we had returned to Naples, leaving the troops still mustering at San Germano, Nelson and "the Patroness of the Navy" were for a time left much alone and seemed inseparable. Occasionally Sir William would accompany them on a visit to his country place at Caserta, where from his roof the smouldering fires of Vesuvius could plainly be seen. But usually he was otherwise engaged and then they made daily excursions in the saddle among the environs. Particularly did they favour Castellammare, and I, knowing the charm of the place, its seductive mountain roads and the dreamy allurements of its views over the beautiful bay of Naples, fairly ground my teeth at thought of the effect of all this upon these two, already wrought to an unnatural pitch by the romance and dangers in which they had

been so strangely and mutually involved. Possibly you will think that I was something of an old foggy, or, more likely, a decidedly jealous young officer. If so you will be wrong. I thought of but three things that were concerned in this affair—the honour of England, the fame of the Admiral, and the happiness of Lady Nelson.

At last came the day when the troops marched through the city and off to the north and to Rome. King Ferdinand rode at their head and looked both soldier and monarch, tall and slender, yet powerfully built but graceful. As his bright, fearless eyes sought the queen where she stood on the palace balcony, he gave little indication of the pleasure-loving prince who so long had been content that his wife should rule his kingdom. Away they went northward through the crowded Toledo, past the Teatro San Carlo, where pretty actresses cheered the departing heroes, past the Villa Reale packed with the lazzaroni, who were the most enthusiastic and sincere of all the city, and to-day admitted to precincts usually by law sacred to the upper classes; past many a palace from whose balconies proud and beautiful women waved farewell to men bearing the oldest and noblest names in the two Sicilies. It was the same old scene, as old as the human race. Sesostris saw it

when he marched out of Memphis and we Londoners knew it almost daily during the Napoleonic wars. Nevertheless the thing impressed me that day as similar events have always done. The Queen looked with splendid pride upon her forty thousand soldiers as hour after hour they past beneath the balcony. Lady Hamilton shed tears of joy. Nelson alone was gloomy with foreboding.

Well, you know what followed. The King and General Mack easily entered and occupied the city of Rome. But, alas for Maria Caroline's dreams of vengeance, of bringing back the Pope, of a united Italy over which she should rule! The forty thousand Neapolitans met eighteen thousand of the French and, in almost the twinkling of an eye, one thousand of the Queen's picturesque heroes were dead and ten thousand were prisoners. The hated republic was again in power in Rome and the King in disguise fled through the gate of San Giovanni Laterano, over the crumbling Campagna, the ruins of its ancient palaces—wherein were held the most voluptuous orgies of the long ago—warning him that soon his own would be laid as desolate; southward until at Terracina he could see across the water his own territory—his own as yet, which he prayed he might reach in safety; southward again, passing

swiftly through wretched Fondi, his heart sickening at its repulsive misery, the monarch greeted only by silent beggars and snarling dogs; still southward, passing beneath Itri and rushing through the streets of Capua—and so into his capital. In all that whirlwind flight came no welcome from his subjects save by eyes that scowled in hatred or glared in madness. Had he then reigned, he wondered at times, over a race of ingrates and of idiots?

I shall not describe his entrance into the royal palace where we were sadly grouped awaiting him. But I recall that when he had recited the story of that pitiful and unprecedentedly brief war, Nelson turned aside with me and bitterly remarked:

“Well, Hardy, it seems the Neapolitan officers did not lose much honour, for God knows they had not much to lose: but they lost all they had.”

As he finished there came to us the sound of a thousand roaring voices beneath the palace windows. Now the King's return had been greeted by the populace with silence. He had past swiftly through the streets greeted by no cheers and no signs of sympathy. But there had been no outbreak of anger or disorder, and so these menacing shouts puzzled rather than alarmed us. We rushed to the window. The Toledo was filled by lazzaroni of most threat-

ening visage. No weapons of any kind were visible but about them all was a sullen and dangerous air of determination. As we looked out, some one, evidently in authority, parted them and on the ground in their midst there was suddenly revealed to us the dead and horribly mangled form of a man. The Queen screamed and, for the first and only time of which I was ever a witness, fainted.

The mob had now become completely silenced, the previous turmoil having evidently been a means of drawing the attention of the royal family to the grewsome spectacle. Around their victim's neck a rope had been tied and with this they now, in silence, dragged the body to the Villa Reale opposite, crushing to the earth its iron railing and driving the guards in terror from the gates. Here, in a strangely calm and precise fashion, they proceeded to suspend the body from a tree facing the street and nearest the palace. About this whole performance, the hanging of a man already dead, the evident desire that the thing should be witnessed by the King and Queen, the grim quiet of the perpetrators, the non-interference of any of the guards—about all this, I say, following so soon upon disaster and disgrace, there was a threatening horror and seeming mystery that chilled the bravest of us in a way that the sudden

arrival of an overwhelming army of the French could never have done.

We were in complete ignorance as to the meaning of all this, but, the Queen now being recovered, Ferdinand gave hasty orders that the body in the Villa Reale should be cut down and removed, that the mob be dispersed, the leaders arrested and one of them brought at once into his presence. These orders were quickly obeyed and on one of the lazaroni being brought before the King we were surprised to note that the fellow appeared to come willingly enough.

All dusty and bedraggled though he was after that hasty return to Naples, Ferdinand was stern and kingly as he stepped from out the group we had formed about the windows and addressed the prisoner.

“What is the meaning of this crime, and why have you chosen that your sovereigns should be its chief spectators?”

“Had not your Majesty sent for me,” came the reply in a firm and fearless voice, “I should have implored an audience in order to explain our conduct. The body hanging from yonder tree is that of an Austrian messenger. I hope that your Majesty is fully aware that we who have done this thing are

devoted to the royal family and to the monarchy. We are not revolutionists. We do not, as do some of your most trusted nobles, sympathize with the French. But we have been told that your Majesty's object in returning to Naples was to accompany the Queen and her children in flight to escape the army of France. This messenger brought word from the Austrians arranging for your ultimate arrival in their midst. It is not our purpose to permit the royal family to desert the people who have been faithful and loyal to them. We killed the messenger in the manner we did in order that this fact might be the better understood. That is all, your Majesty."

We were thunderstruck. Even the King for a moment was unable to speak. That this man, one of the lazzaroni, should thus calmly and deliberately face what he must have felt to be certain death, was incomprehensible. It was devotion if you please, but it was devotion savouring too much of the kind which so recently had surrounded Louis XVI., confining him to his own palace and ultimately leading to the guillotine.

Ferdinand, physically weakened by his disastrous two weeks campaign, and by his long and dangerous journey, did not trust himself at this time to ques-

tion of the man much more in detail. Indeed, such questions were well-ness. In his one statement the presence had made clear the conditions surrounding the royal family, the French at any moment likely to descend upon the city; the Neapolitan forces scattered and demoralized; in the capital the *lazzaroni* determined that their rulers should not leave, and, on the other hand, half the nobility waiting to throw themselves into the revolutionist cause.

The King having given orders that the man should, for the present, be confined in one of the dungeons beneath the palace, again strode to the window and gazed thoughtfully down upon the still dispersing and silent mob. Then he turned and, with a few courteous words, dismissed us.

Nelson left the palace a little in advance of us. As I accompanied Lady Hamilton to her carriage we were met at the gate by Sir William, Prince Caracciolo and Sir John Acton, minister of foreign affairs. Briefly I explained to them the events of the last hour and, somewhat alarmed, the ambassador and Acton turned to enter the palace. Caracciolo, however, tarried at the side of Lady Hamilton.

“And you, madam,” he asked, “in the midst of matters of such moment do you so soon return home because you have left a lover there?”

He was bending low before her but the expression in his eyes was as brazen as his words. I felt like cheering when she drew haughtily back and responded:

"Sir, do you take me for one of your country-women? I am English. I have but one *cavaliere servente* and him I have with me."

And she swept across to lay a detaining hand on Sir William's arm.

"Sir John and I must have a conference with the King," he said, stopping at her touch. "Will you drive home or await me inside?"

"I should prefer waiting. Captain Hardy, you will keep me company, will you not?"

"I am honoured by the suggestion but Nelson is doubtless already impatient at my tardiness. We have important despatches to prepare for London."

"I trust my services will be equally acceptable, Lady Hamilton?"

It was Caracciolo who spoke. She could not, of course, decline, nor could she well pretend a change of mind and return to her carriage. But, although she gave me a smile and nod of adieu I noted that it was with reluctance that she turned with the others and re-entered the palace.

I strode down the Toledo, which now was quite

deserted by the lazzaroni. Indeed the street seemed almost free from pedestrians of any class and a threatening and oppressive quiet was everywhere. At one corner I chatted for a moment with the young Chevalier Luigi de Medeis, and the comments of the distinguished noble accentuated my fear that days of happiness for many in Naples for whom I cared were practically a thing of the past. For de Medici was the Queen's chief of spies, and the work accomplished by these officials had shown the strange and alarming condition of affairs in Naples. The royal spies, you must understand, were not of the class with which we English are most familiar. They were not such from necessity nor by profession. They were, on the contrary, of the highest social rank. Her Majesty's secret service was filled by loyal nobles and by women of fashion. Thus it was that wheresoever I went in Naples, in whosoever drawing-room or at whatsoever ball, I knew that the beautiful woman with whom I danced or flirted was not unlikely one who treasured every bit of gossip, every lightly or whisperingly offered opinion, and that on the following night the Queen, in her mysterious *salon oscura*, would receive additional information regarding the sentiments of her people. Also, day after day, were there strange dis-

appearances for which only the Queen and her spies could have accounted. Nevertheless we all knew that the revolutionists were increasing in number. That this increase was particularly rapid among the nobility was a source of angry sorrow and humiliation to the Queen. The few that were conscientious in their desire to overthrow the monarchy believed that the French desired to give the country freedom; we of the court party knew that the frog-eaters thought only of plunder.

A strange land and stranger conditions, I thought as I passed onward to my appointment with Nelson; the nobility among the revolutionists, the lazzaroni the last of the royalists; in command of the army an Austrian unable to address his soldiers in their own language, and an English adventurer in supreme control of the council of state.

Our despatches prepared, and a number of important affairs attended to, Nelson and I again returned to shore and strolled from the quay in the direction of the Hamiltons', where we were scheduled to dine.

"There is nothing to surprise you, I presume, in this Neapolitan defeat?" I queried as we entered the embassy grounds—for our business had occupied us to the exclusion of any discussion even of the exciting incidents of the day.

“No, Hardy, unfortunately no. But, then, from experience I am aware that soldiers have not the same boldness that we sailors have. We look to the benefit of our country and risk our own fame every day to serve her. A soldier obeys his orders and no more. As for these Neapolitans, poor fellows, they had no orders. They were commanded by incompetents, cowards and traitors. The result was inevitable. There is nothing left for you and me but to find a means of getting the royal family safely out of Naples.”

“And from to-day’s affair I judge the lazzaroni are determined we shall not do so,” I responded as Sir William met us at the door.

“Is not Lady Hamilton with you?” he asked uneasily as we entered.

“Why, no. How could she be?” I replied in astonishment. “I left her at the palace awaiting your return from the King.”

“And you have not seen her since?”

“No.”

“Nor you, Lord Nelson?”

“No, Sir William. I left the palace even earlier than Captain Hardy.”

“This is very strange. And yet it must be that I am needlessly alarmed. The fact is that no one

appears to have seen her since she returned to the palace after parting from you, Captain. When I came down from the King's apartments she was not in the *salon* where I had promised to join her. None of the guards or servants had seen her leave. Her carriage was still waiting and the coachman had received no orders."

"But Caracciolo was with her?"

"True, but he is known to have left the palace alone just a moment before I came down from the King."

"Did you seek her in the Queen's apartments?"

"Naturally, at once. But her Majesty was as ignorant as myself. Therefore, all else failing, I thought that in some caprice she might have gone out to visit the flag-ship, although I could not understand why she should leave the horses standing, nor did it seem possible she could have left the palace unnoticed by a soul."

"It would seem, then," said Nelson as he paced the floor, "that she has not yet come out, although, as the Queen knows nothing of her, that, too, seems impossible."

"Pardon me, Sir William," I broke in, "but have you sent to inquire of Caracciolo?"

"I did not wish to do so unless it became absolutely necessary."

"It seems to me it is quite that now. I see your carriage is still at the door. If you'll permit, I'll make use of it and discover if the Prince can hazard a guess as to the mystery."

"Certainly, Captain, but I dislike to trouble you with such an errand."

I was, however, already seated. In five minutes we were at the door of the Caracciolo Palace. I was informed that the Prince was at home but was preparing to go out. An urgent request brought in response his order that I should be shown to his dressing-room. As I entered he called to me from an adjoining bath to make myself comfortable, and almost immediately he appeared, wrapped in his robe. Cordially extending his hand, he exclaimed:

"Well, Captain, this is an unusual honour. Are the French upon us, or has the lovely Hamilton eloped with Nelson? Something's certainly up, judging from your face. Here, try one of these—you smoke, of course?"

He stretched himself upon a couch and, lighting one of the cigars, waited with somewhat irritating calmness for my reply.

"The fact of the matter is," I said, jumping at once to the heart of the affair, "Lady Hamilton has not been seen since we left her with you this afternoon at the palace."

“Indeed! I assure you she’s not here, if that’s what you mean. I’m not sufficiently in her good graces for that, as you ought to know by now.”

“I intended to insinuate nothing of that character. You are, however, the last known to have been with her, and it was not unnatural to hope she might have said something to you that would give us an idea as to her plans.”

“I presume the Admiral is also among those missing?”

“The Admiral, sir, has spent the entire afternoon with me.”

“Don’t be indignant. I thought the suggestion the most natural one imaginable. However, Captain, while I’m sorry to see you so distressed, isn’t it a bit silly to kick up all this row just because a woman is not home on the stroke of the dinner hour?”

“It would be, perhaps, if it were not that Lady Hamilton allowed her horses to remain in front of the palace, and that, despite this fact, the Queen knows nothing of her whereabouts.”

“H’m, that does complicate matters a little. Still, you know, here in Naples women have occasionally given their coachmen the slip. Of course Lady Hamilton is perfectly devoted to Sir William—and

the English navy—but still you never can tell. My advice—and you must pardon its seeming inhospitality—is that you return to the embassy, where you'll probably find her by now, and that you believe implicitly in any little excuse she may offer for her tardiness."

I felt myself grow red at the implied insult to the subject of our conversation, but by a strong effort I controlled myself sufficiently to ask another question:

"You took my place in attending her until Sir William's return. Do you know where she intended going when she left you?"

"Unfortunately I must plead guilty to the crime of leaving her. She was not particularly gracious, and believing she would be more content if I withdrew, I did so. At that time she was seated in the small *salon* where she was to await Sir William, and I presumed of course that he had later joined her there."

I saw that it was useless to question him further and so withdrew. I returned to the embassy with no news, but hoping that the surmise of the Prince might prove correct and that I should find her at home. But here again I was disappointed. She was not there, and we three men, each of whom in his

own way cared for her, spent the night in fruitless search and in debates of gradually increasing hopelessness. The night passed and half the following day, yet not a trace was found that could even hint at an explanation of the mystery.

CHAPTER V

The Secret Passageway

GAIN I must ask you to bear with me while I tell of an affair in which I had no part and of which I could not have been a witness. Yet in the very nature of things it was necessary, as matters turned out, that the royal family and all of us intimately associated with the embassy and court should in time be informed of the most minute detail in the important affair of which I speak. Later you will see why this was so.

Lady Hamilton, on the afternoon I left her at the palace, entered the small *salon* where Caracciolo had insisted upon attending her while she awaited the return of Sir William. As the Prince was later to inform me, she was not over cordial and, but for her aversion to anything that would furnish food for gossip, would have rejected his offered companionship and returned to the embassy. Forced, as it were, into compliance, she walked across the room, planted her elbows on the window-sill, and, dropping her pretty, defiant chin in her palms, in utter dis-

regard of his presence gazed silently out upon the gardens. However courteous to him she might be in public there should be no mistaking her opinions when they were alone.

The afternoon was drawing to a close and the *salon* was comparatively dark. A single tall, shaded lamp in a distant corner sent some softened light upward to the frescoed ceiling and outward to the Prince, standing where she had swept from him, standing there torn by an inward conflict between the rage engendered by her contempt and the mad passion her mere presence always aroused in him. He stepped from out the mellow circle of the lamp into the stronger light of the window. Before she could turn toward him his arms were about her and his glowing eyes were gazing into her own.

"You have always known it. Now for the first time let me tell it you in words. I love you."

Her responding movement was something between a shiver as of cold, and a tremble as if touched by some slimy horror. Her eyes closed as if to shut out of her vision the sight of his face, pressed so close that his breath touched her lips. Suddenly her eyes opened again; she looked up at him with fierce contempt, and then—he found himself reeling backward with such violence that he would have

fallen had he not struck the wall and recovered himself.

“How dare you!”

The words were spoken with proud scorn and bravery, but at their repetition—“Oh, God, what have I done that you should dare!”—the lips trembled and she pressed her hands across her eyes in sudden shame.

It was not the shame of insulted patricianism. Behind her had been no ancient race of high born women and chivalrous men. In this sudden wave of aversion ancestry played no part. Training had naught to do with it, nor was it the natural revulsion of innate purity. It was caused only by a flashing memory of those early days in London when she had been the artists' model and the careless plaything of a score of noblemen who, as each grew poor or tired, passed her on to another. And now she saw how useless had been her marriage, how unavailing had been these years of perfect conduct, and above all how hopeless it was to pose before men like Nelson as worthy their respect. Stuart doubtless had been the one to tell the Prince of those almost forgotten miseries in England. Her shame had followed her: she was defenceless against the offered love of any man that chose to insult her.



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She steadied herself and removed her hands from before her eyes. What right had she to express any such lofty indignation, or thus repulse a man, no matter how he might address her? Despite all these years of peace and purity she was still the outcast. Yet, for all these bitter thoughts and the effort to harden herself, there was a piteous tremulousness in her voice as she turned to him and said:

“Possibly I should apologize for my rude reception of your declaration. I had forgotten that there can be no insult in the words you used when addressed by a prince to a woman like myself.”

“Madam, I know not your meaning but to my mind there is no insult in love. I offer you a love that is beyond my power to express in words. The time is approaching when you will wish that you had accepted it.”

“And now it is I that fail to understand your meaning.”

“Unfortunately for you I cannot explain. I have laid bare the secrets of my heart. Those of my country I cannot tell even to the woman I adore—since she cares nothing for me in return.”

“You are most mysterious, Prince. Surely you know there are few secrets of state of which I am not informed. Between my husband and the Queen you can scarcely have much the advantage of me.”

“Have the events of the last few days taught you nothing? Have they not proved to you that beneath the surface seen by such as you and the Queen are movements of which you have no knowledge? Madam, you, who see the slight reflections of the revolutionary fire, have no conception of the Vesuvius that rages below and that soon will burst forth to destroy the monarchy as utterly as Pompeii was destroyed.”

Lady Hamilton seated herself at a table near the window. She realized that Caracciolo, trembling with the passion she had aroused in him and made furious by her reception of its avowal, was on the verge of a revelation of grave importance. What that revelation was she could not conceive, but she cudgeled her brain for the means to force it from him. Accustomed though she was to the moral laxity of the Neapolitan court, she reddened nevertheless, and the finger nails pressed deep into her palms as she thought of the one way in which it could be accomplished.

“But I do not see,” she said at last, hesitatingly, looking up at him with a returning suspicion of her winsome smile, “I do not see what all this has to do with secrets of state. We all know there are such people as revolutionists. And, particularly, I fail

to see what it has to do with the love you expressed a moment ago."

"It has everything to do with that love."

"But how? Revolution, it seems to me, would mean an end to it."

"On the contrary, with your acceptance, it would mean its real commencement. But as you do not care——"

"Nay, Prince, I did not say that. I did, it is true, use some unnecessary English muscle in repulsing you. But you were somewhat sudden in your avowal—and violent, too; and even the maidens of savage races have been known to resist those that would abduct and carry them off in marriage."

"Am I then, after all, to have some hope?" Caracciolo bent low above her and whispered the question.

"Ah, Prince, what am I to say? The married woman is far more defenceless than the maid. She is, too, more easily deceived. The man knows that in her he has a victim he may cast aside at any moment, without dishonour, without the slightest fear of consequences. God help me; how am I to know you speak the truth when you claim to love me?"

She had looked at him for a moment with ques-

tioning longing before she spoke, and now the tears seemed to flood her eyes as she turned away and buried her face in her arms on the table at her side. She was ravishing in her apparent doubt and misery. Caracciolo fell upon his knees beside her.

“How can you doubt? Have you not for two years seen the truth in my eyes and heard it in every tone of my voice? Have you not known that always its avowal trembled on my lips? Love you! Now you shall know how much I love you. Nelson has dared term you in public the ‘Patroness of the Navy.’ You, in the sacred soul of my heart are the Goddess of the Revolution. The revolution exists because of you. Yes—now you understand all; because of you I am its leading though secret spirit. Through it I hoped to sweep every obstacle from my path and win you by saving you from the destruction and death that will fall upon the royal family and its dupes. But there is a better way. Give me your love freely; let me keep you safe outside Naples through all the terror that is to come, and when it is over the revolution will have made you greater than ever Maria Caroline could have done.”

A little hand stole from the table and, shrinkingly, was half held out to him. He seized it, pressed

it to his lips, and continued to pour forth his confession.

“Listen to what I have planned for you, my love. The revolution will be successful. So much is certain. Our adherents are everywhere. Practically the entire nobility, all the schools and universities, and half the merchant class are with us. The lazaroni will prevent the escape of the royal family and the King and Queen will meet death on the scaffold. The republic will follow. But it cannot last. It can find no permanent place in the hearts of Neapolitans. They will again long for the monarchy. Having no Frederick to recall, they will desire their future king to be of their own race. Whom will they place on the throne of the new constitutional monarchy? Unless I am grossly deceived none but Prince Francesco Caracciolo, the leader of the revolution, than whom no one in all Italy is of nobler lineage. And you, my love, shall share his throne, you who will be loved by the Neapolitans as never before was queen in all the history of the world.”

When for a moment he had been silent Lady Hamilton raised her head from the table. There was not the sign of a tear in her eyes. She rose from her seat, and, withdrawing her skirt from his clasp, retreated

slowly from him. The dignity of her movement, the silence she maintained, and this sudden change, from what had seemed an appealing doubt as to his love, to the mysterious calm now showing in her face and manner, held him motionless on his knees.

“Traitor!”

The word came from her with quiet, low-voiced contempt. She emphasized it by a slow nodding of her head. Her eyes were almost closed as she looked down upon him.

There was the fraction of a minute before he had recovered from this unanticipated attack. Then he sprang to his feet and in an instant had fiercely clasped her in his arms, lifting her clear from the floor and raining kisses on her eyes, her cheeks, her throat and her lips.

“Yes, a traitor, if you will, but a traitor because of you, enchantress. Give me your love and you shall be a queen. Refuse it and, unless I take you by force, you will be killed. Between the revolutionists and the lazzaroni there can be no escape.”

Strengthened by her very loathing, once more she managed to free herself from his frenzied clasp. She retreated until she stood facing him, one hand behind her resting against the wall, the other out-held as though to prevent his approach.

“So, you love me sufficiently to turn traitor to your king!—sufficiently to head a revolution that may send me to the scaffold! And I!—I hate and abhor you so that it is a happiness to realize that you yourself will not live to see this revolution. Within the hour the Queen shall know what you are, and so will I not only serve her Majesty but also gain some recompense for the degradation you have to-day made me suffer.”

Caracciolo heard the threat but his eyes were not upon the speaker. Behind her, as she denounced him, a portion of the wall was slowly, silently, sliding to one side, until, as she finished, although her hand still rested on a panel that remained intact, the space from that point extended to the proportions of an open doorway, looking through which nothing could be seen but impenetrable darkness.

Lady Hamilton had neither seen nor heard the movement of the wall, but the resulting inburst of cold, sepulchral air caused her to turn. She fell back from the yawning blackness, her hands in her fright pressed, womanlike, to her cheeks.

“What have you done?” she cried to him.

“I, madame, have done nothing, but you yourself have both sealed your doom and found the means for its execution. In some manner your

hand has touched the spring opening this secret door. The legend as to its existence was, I see, correct, although none now living has known its location."

With rapid strides he crossed the room, closing and fastening the doors leading to the hallway, and then returned to where she stood, frozen with horror.

"Your discovery is most opportune," he continued, with exaggerated calm and politeness. "I think, my fair Patroness of the Navy, that, after all, your death need not await the revolution. I dislike to deprive the Queen of the information you were about to give her, but it is necessary that I should. I love you, but I love life better. I love you, believe me or not as you will, yet you must die. By a feigned love you have won my secret, and it is not well that the Queen should share it until I tell it her myself."

She attempted to pass him in the direction of the hall, but it was useless. He clasped her once more in his arms, once more lingeringly kissed her, once more whispered to her "I love you!"—then, pressing a handkerchief to the mouth he had just touched so fiercely with his own, he carried her through the secret doorway into the gloom beyond. As he did so, the drooping limbs and closed eyes told him that she had fainted.

Caracciolo was not certain where the stairs he now descended would lead. But it was well known that at one time there had existed beneath the palace, and far below the dungeons themselves, a secret passage tunneling clear to the sea. All efforts to find it, however, had been unsuccessful. Neither the palace entrance nor the subterranean exit on the coast had been discovered. He was now confident that Lady Hamilton had unconsciously touched the spring opening the long-sought doorway. As he descended the damp stone steps, the smell of salt water came strongly to him and made him more certain he was not in error. At the bottom a heavy iron grating barred the way to the tunnel beyond; but the gate in its centre was ajar, and, carefully feeling his way, he passed on with his beautiful burden. He shivered at the dampness of the place and at its gloom, but not at the awful deed of which he was about to be guilty.

“Here as well as any spot,” at last he muttered as, at the base of a frail wooden pillar supporting the roof, he laid the senseless form upon the tunnel floor. Carefully he explored the place clear to its outer exit and, satisfied that any attempt at escape in that direction meant certain death, he returned to his motionless victim. He leaned over her and

for a last time kissed her lips, unresponsive, unconscious of the sacrilege. Then he turned and retraced his way toward the faint ray of light that struggled down the stairway. Suddenly a more pitying thought came to him. He drew from beneath his cloak a tiny dagger and, returning to where she lay, sought her bosom and thrust the jewelled weapon beneath her bodice.

“If she has courage to use it, it will be quicker,” he thought. “Doubtless I would regret it in the days to come if I left her with starvation or a leap into the sea as her only alternatives.”

He examined the iron gate and found that by the exertion of all his strength he could move the rusty lock. He closed the grating after him, turned the key and tossed it in a pile of ancient rubbish at the foot of the stairway. Then he ascended the steps and searched until he had found the place where Lady Hamilton's touch had opened a way for the punishment of her tongue's frank scorn. Slowly and silently the wall closed into its former appearance of solidity. He unlocked the doors opposite, left the *salon*, and, saluted by the guard at the far end of the entrance hall, passed out of the palace. As he did so he heard the voices of Sir William and Acton as they descended from the king's apartments.

He stood for a moment inhaling the outer air with long drawn breaths of keen delight, then entered his carriage and was driven home through the moonlit streets.

As Lady Hamilton slowly regained consciousness she heard a clanging sound as of a closing gate, and then a key turned screechingly in its lock. Her mind wandered only for a moment: almost instantly the events of the last hour came clearly to her and she had a perfect realization of her position. Nevertheless, she had not a single fearsome thought nor the shadow of a doubt but that she would find a way to summon aid. She rose to her feet and, doing so, something fell from her bosom and rang against the paving. Surprised, she stooped and sought it in the darkness. She groped her way to the grating and, in the faint suggestion of light, saw that she held a jewelled dagger bearing the crest of the Prince. She frowned a bit at the puzzle of its meaning; then, as the truth dawned upon her and she realized that it had been left there to enable her to cut short a more lingering death, she for the first time felt her heart beat faster with something akin to fear.

"He must have believed there could be no escape," she thought as she replaced the weapon in

her bodice and, looking with frightened eyes through the bars of the gate, strove to peer up the winding stairway. But at that instant the light faded from the steps and she knew that the silent door above had closed, perhaps never again to open.

"It shall not be as he has said," she whispered firmly, and rattled at the gate although she knew the effort to be useless. Then she seated herself on the ground and rested her head against the iron while she endeavoured calmly to collect her thoughts. She would not cry out for help—not yet, at least. If her voice were heard at all it might reach the ear only of him who would not aid. But in her heart she felt that the strongest voice could never penetrate these walls, and, rightly conjecturing herself to be beneath the dungeons, she realized the hopelessness of any sound reaching the inhabited rooms above. She would be missed, of course. Her husband even now might be seeking her in the *salon* just at the head of those stairs. And, at that thought, despite her resolve, she leaped to her feet and called aloud to him through the bars. From the darkness of the tunnel came a rumbling echo, but that was the sole response. She ceased when her voice became so hoarsened that even a whisper was beyond her power. But then there came the briefly com-

forting thought that they would search ceaselessly, would arouse all Naples if she were not found. Her husband, Nelson, the Queen! Why of course they would find her; and a pitiful smile fluttered for an instant on her lips as she prided herself on her power and popularity. Then crushingly came the remembrance that the location of the passageway was unknown, that its very existence was a legend looked upon by many as purely mythical. Her deliverance must be accomplished, if at all, by herself.

She felt her way along the wall, sounding it as she went. She had gone a hundred yards or more when a faint ray of light struggled into being in the distance. Was a rescue party already at hand, or was this an exit of which the Prince knew nothing and by which she could escape? She gathered her skirts about her and ran rapidly toward the welcome point of light. It broadened steadily and shortly she halted, breathlessly facing the sea. But, although there was some comfort in even this sight of the outer world, she quickly realized that her discovery afforded little hope. It was but a tiny vignette of the water that she had, framed by the rocky entrance to the cave-like tunnel, its roof overhanging the sea, the waves dashing with rhythmic menace far into the interior and breaking at her

feet. There was here little more chance of escape than by the stairway. The water entered so far that she could not reach the actual entrance, while the waves dashing against the rocks would drown in their crashing any call she might send forth. The softened moonlight was not sufficient for her sight to penetrate far out over the sea, and it was evident that, even in broad day, the distance to which the water forced her to retreat would prevent her being seen by any passing boat. Castaways on a desert island, with a shirt tied to a lofty tree and possibly a smoking signal fire, have had a greater chance of succour than had she, although she was beneath the palace of the Bourbons and could almost imagine that she heard the tread of the royal guard above.

As she stared hopelessly out over the water, something floated toward her and retreated; came nearer and again went back with the movement of the waves; then, as though shot from out a cannon's mouth, sprang full at her and fell on the sand at her feet. She gazed in horror at this nameless, shapeless thing that once had been a man, shrieked with terror and fled back into the darkness. It needed but this to make her fear for her reason. There must be some way out. She beat with her fists against the walls until the flesh was bruised and bleeding.

She had felt it to be useless, but now in the utter darkness as she sank once more by the iron gateway she was seized with dread. Could it be, after all, that Caracciolo had spoken truly? Was she really to die there, alone in the dark and damp, of hunger and thirst and horror? No, she would not die that way. There was the Prince's dagger if nothing else. Nevertheless, whether it was hunger or fright she could not say, certain it was that something caused her to become strangely nauseated. Already, too, she felt giddy and faint and weary. And so my lady of lights and laughter fell asleep with her head against the iron in the dungeon-like tunnel of dampness and gloom.

Hours later she awakened, a muffled scream upon her lips, her heart beating violently. She drew back against the grating. Something had struck her ankle, something cold and silent that had stolen away and returned to strike again. Had the dead man crept in to draw her to her doom? She clung tremblingly to the gate looking back over her shoulder, gazing at nothing but the blackness. Then again the unseen struck cold against her, but now there was a faint lapping as of gentle waves against an anchored ship. She turned and, leaning over, reached out her hand. She drew it back wet with the salt water of the sea.

The tide! God in heaven, she had not thought of this!

The possibilities involved in this unanticipated danger were at once clear to her. In case the tunnel was far below high water, death was inevitable. Drowning, which in itself might have no horrible agony, would be maddening when made long drawn out by the slow movement of the water, rising almost imperceptibly until the roof itself would force her beneath the surface.

The mere thought was unendurable. Again she rattled the iron bars until her fingers were cut and bled afresh; again she called for help until it was impossible to bring another sound from the tortured throat. No answer came. She endeavoured to calm herself by the thought that perhaps, after all, the tide would not rise much higher. She stood quietly once more, clinging to the grating, feeling the water gradually mount to her ankles, then to her knees and thighs; and, weakened as she was by hunger and terror, already she felt herself swaying in the flood.

No, she would not remain here to die. She would once more face the dead if necessary in order to reach the sea, and then would cast herself outside, to be dashed to death, if that must be, against the

rocks. She struggled forward, the water creeping higher at every step. Her limbs with difficulty forced themselves against the incoming tide. She stumbled frequently and scarce was able to recover herself. At last, exhausted, she fell backward and the water closed above her. Blinded, breathless, drenched, but aided by the wooden pillar against which she had been swept, she staggered to her feet, and, holding to the wall, crept back to the grating and again grasped its bars for support. But she already stood waist deep and the tide still rose. Now it rolled above the fiercely panting bosom. Her arms were stretched above her head, the hands clasping the gate, whose imprisoning iron extended to the ceiling. The water at every slowly advancing swell filled her mouth and eyes and nostrils with its sickening, blinding saltiness. She reached yet a little higher, clasped the bars still more firmly, and drew herself up. Thus holding by her hands, her body floated on the surface.

And so, inch by inch, as the tide rose she crept with her hands onward up the grating, her body half supported by the water. She had by now almost reached the deadly roof. Another foot and all would be over. She was greatly worn by her exertions, and now this evidence of the approaching

end weakened her grip upon the grating. The sickening sense of fainting, too, was accentuated by the foul fumes of the passage, forced upward by the rising water and now confined to this narrow space. Fearing that at any moment she might lose her hold of her one safeguard, she held to one of the iron bars with a single hand and with the other managed to wrench her bodice from her body. This she fashioned into a sort of rope, securing it about her and beneath her arms, then fastened its ends tightly to a crosspiece of the grating. The strain thus lessened, she tossed gently like a bit of seaweed on the surface.

The water for a moment longer rose. The beautiful head, about which floated the mass of chestnut hair, was now, by reason of the fastening to the gate, partly drawn below the surface. But the woman, while not unconscious of, was all but indifferent to the apparent nearness of certain death—with something of the indifference of the doomed traveller half buried in Arctic snow.

The tide had reached its height when only the face of Lady Hamilton remained above the surface. As slowly it sank her body was lowered until, suspended by the bodice rope, she hung there against the grating, only the lower limbs covered by the retreating

water. Thus weighted, the knot she had made about the crossbar broke and she was plunged beneath the flood. Dazed, yet by the shock made more conscious of her position, she came to the surface and, gently tossed about, was borne outward. Instinctively she stretched out a hand. It grasped in the darkness and held fast to the wooden pillar in the centre of the tunnel. The rotting support creaked and shivered at this tax upon its wasted strength, slowly gave way, fell with a crash and, the woman clinging to it, floated out toward the exit to the sea.

The passage here was like the leap over a mighty waterfall. Slowly at first, back and forth, went log and woman; then by a retreating wave they were carried with blinding speed outside. There again they were caught up and twice were washed against the rocks, to which the woman made vain and cruelly hurting attempts to cling, retaining one arm wound about the log. Then at last they were sent tumbling still farther out, and, beyond the rocking of the surf, were somewhat at rest. She drew herself up and stretched at full length upon the beam, steadying it by splashings of her hands and feet. She longed for sleep, and had an almost irresistible desire to take off her shoes, but, womanlike, felt safer with them on against the bite of unknown things that might float beneath her.

Thus she lay the rest of the night, floating slowly onward. The dawn was scarce discernible when, almost without her realizing it, the morning tide drifted her to shore and left her there on the snow-white sand. The long, thin waves stole in and broke with a hushed, liquid murmur at her side, as though the sea bemoaned its weakness in giving up so fair a captive. She rested for some moments unmoving. Almost she feared a second time to open her eyes, lest they again rest upon the interior of the dreadful tunnel of death. But when at last she dared look about her, and saw the gentle waves, the trace of coming daybreak, and, near at hand, human habitations, she sighed contentedly. There was no wild tumult of thankfulness. Rather did she, now it was accomplished, take deliverance somewhat as a matter of course. She lay there, smiling faintly, satisfied to know that life would soon be as it was before.

She turned on her side and kissed the wooden beam that had saved her. Then with difficulty she struggled to her feet. Hat and bodice were gone; her hair in wet, matted thickness hung to her feet; her face was cut where she had been thrown against the rocks, and her hands were bruised and scratched where she had beaten them against her prison bars. She cared for none of these—indeed, was scarcely

conscious of them. She looked off at the faintly visible collection of houses and then, wonderingly, out at sea again. Surely she knew the place. Suddenly, with a heart-throb of delight, she caught a glimpse of the tiny, wave-washed castle of Castellammare. And as she convinced herself of this, she thought of the recent happy days when she and Nelson had come here in the saddle and dreamed away the hours along the shaded roadways.

Fortunately the town boasted one of the royal residences. There she could find shelter, clothing and a conveyance to Naples. Now, perfectly knowing her way, she passed swiftly along the beach, sufficient strength given her by life and purpose, hurried silently through the deserted streets, and at last stood before the Castellammare residence of the Queen. At that moment a carriage came clattering through the town, the horses were drawn up beside her, and the trim and dainty figure of a woman tripped toward the palace gate.

Lady Hamilton, who, made uneasy by very weakness, at the sound of approaching hoofs had crouched in the shadow of the wall, now burst into a fit of almost hysterical laughter. The humour of this meeting—for the figure was that of her own maid—irresistibly appealed to her, despite her wounds and misery.

“ Oh, Therese, Therese! ” she cried, throwing her arms about the startled girl. “ This is absolutely ridiculous. No one would believe such luck could befall a woman if Mrs. Inchbald were to tell it in one of her romances. I am imprisoned in a vault, tossed about on a log in the sea, cast on shore a perfect sight and almost dead, and the first I meet, of all welcome persons on earth, is my own maid! It’s really you, is it? Therese, you darling, how do you happen to be here? ”

Therese, recovering from her fright, returned the embrace of her mistress and, although herself in tears of joy, drew the beautiful, dishevelled head down upon her breast.

“ Someone is everywhere, ” she replied. “ Searchers are out from Rome to Policastro, and messengers have left by ship even for Messina and Palermo. They had sent here before, but, some way, I was not satisfied, and to-night, as I could not sleep, I determined to come here myself, persuading that good old Tom Allen, the Admiral’s man, to drive me. I thought perhaps you might have— Oh, forgive me, my Lady, I know I should not have thought such things; but, you know, the other day, Lord Nelson—— ”

The girl stopped in confusion.

Lady Hamilton was too exhausted to be angry. Even had she not been in her present condition, she might perhaps have offered only a conventional reproof. The scene with Caracciolo had hardened her to suspicions such as this. All Naples doubtless knew her history. Why should she strive to be other than what they were aware she had been?

Wearily she asked Therese to gain entrance to the palace. Meanwhile she entered the carriage and with a sigh sank back among the cushions. The experience of the last few hours passed sluggishly through her mind—Caracciolo's avowal and threat, the blackness of the tunnel, the dead body leaping from out the waves, the rising and receding tide and her struggle for life in the sea. And then, as thus she mused, like a flash there came to her a thought that sent her to her feet with an exulting cry of joy.

"Yes, it was the purpose of the good God," she murmured, slowly reseating herself, her eyes sparkling, her hands clasped in thanksgiving. "Surely that was it. All has been for the best. Again He has chosen me as an instrument in His hands to save the Queen!"

Inspired by this thought she eagerly called to Therese and the maid almost instantly appeared. She had roused the sleeping guard as well as two of the servants who were now preparing the apart-

ment the Queen always reserved for her favourite. She would give madam her bath, a little collation would be prepared; then, after a good sleep, some of her Majesty's gowns would be laid out to select from, and they would journey back to Naples. In the meanwhile Tom Allen would set out to allay the fears of Sir William and the royal family.

"Therese, you're a treasure, but I've changed my mind. I am off to Naples at once. There are matters there that must receive my instant attention."

"Oh, my Lady, you cannot in your present state. You would not live to reach the city; or, if you did, would be unable to accomplish anything. Pray listen to reason. Rest here for a few hours. This afternoon will do for everything else. 'Tis not a matter of life and death that calls you."

"But that is just what it is. Come, hasten, girl, we must be off."

"But, my Lady, do you know how you look? Would you enter Naples in broad day in your condition—much less appear at the palace?"

This was quite a different matter. My Lady noticed that several early stragglers had gathered in the street and were staring curiously at her. She hesitated a moment. Then devotion and patriotism grounded arms at the feet of vanity.

“ You are right, Therese. Let us go in, since they are preparing for me. But send no messenger to Naples. We will ourselves reach there by mid-afternoon. And you, Tom Allen”—my Lady turned to Nelson’s faithful body-servant and shook a playful finger—“ you stand in peril of your life if ever you tell your master how I looked this morning.”

By now the whole palace was a scene of activity. Next to the arrival of the Queen herself, that of no one in all the kingdom could have aroused greater interest; and, in addition to her universal popularity, Lady Hamilton was now surrounded by a mystery which for the present she made no effort to explain. But as Therese bathed the tired and bruised body, salved the cruel wounds of rocks and waves and brushed the matted, sea-stained hair, her mistress related all that had befallen her. Sweet, clean and once more warm with life, she was tucked between the bed’s perfumed sheets and fell asleep as quickly and as soundly as a child. Then Therese stole outside and was the heroine of the day as she recounted to all the retainers of the palace the story of her mistress’s adventures.

It was noon when Lady Hamilton awakened. For a moment it was difficult to realise that she was actually alive. The softly clinging sheets, the cur-

taining draperies, the subdued light from shaded windows stealing into the familiar luxury of the room, seemed just now, after a night in the cave of horror and buffeted by the sea, her modest ideal of heaven. But there came evidences that she was still a mortal, for she was sore in every limb and muscle, aching as though she had passed through inquisition tortures. Nevertheless, as she thought of all she had to do, of her plans both for vengeance and for succour, she arose to a sitting position in the bed, a smile of joyous determination on her lips, and rang for her maid.

"Are the horses fit for the trip back to town?" was her first inquiry.

"I will see, my Lady."

"Make certain of it, Therese. If they are in no condition to do the distance in two hours at the most without injury or fatigue, obtain others from the royal stables. I wish to set out at once, and I must not lose an instant on the way."

An hour later, looking radiantly beautiful despite her recent experience, animated by thoughts of all that would ensue upon her arrival, Lady Hamilton was seated in the carriage and her own horses, refreshed and as eager as herself, were carrying her swiftly toward Naples.

Chapter VI

A Royal Flight

LATE in the afternoon following the day of Lady Hamilton's disappearance, we were gathered in the King's cabinet, those present being his Majesty and the Queen, Nelson, Sir William, Sir John Acton, Prince Caracciolo and myself. We had exhausted, as we believed, every means that might lead to the discovery of the missing ambassadress; and, while of course her husband was almost distracted over the mystery and Nelson little less so—although of necessity less clamorous in his grief—other affairs had reached a crisis where they demanded immediate consideration.

Chief among these was the proposed and seemingly necessary flight of the royal family. To remain meant almost certain death, yet to escape appeared impossible. Spies of the Neapolitan mob constantly guarded the palace and the lazzaroni were immovable in their demand that their Majesties must remain to face any consequences following the arrival of the French.

“Can it be possible,” suggested Caracciolo, “that

in some manner the lazzaroni have managed to abduct Lady Hamilton, intending to hold her as a hostage guaranteeing that your Majesties—and doubtless Lord Nelson also—will remain in Naples? Unquestionably they are confident you would not leave without her.”

“That is not unlikely,” was the thoughtful reply of the King. “Or it may be they hold her as a hostage to insure the safety of our prisoner, the leader in the affair of yesterday.”

“In any case,” said Nelson impatiently, “I would suggest that your Majesty have the lowest quarters of the city searched, and every house levelled to the ground if necessary to satisfy yourself on this point.”

“Your suggestions are usually of golden worth, my Lord Admiral,” the King responded smilingly, “but if we cannot leave the city because of the mob, how on earth are we with impunity to carry out such a measure as you propose? By heavens, gentlemen, when these evil times have passed, as pass they will, I’ll give Naples a government beside which that of Nero was the people’s paradise. However, for the present I am as helpless as my late brother of France. But why should I not release this prisoner? Might that not result in the return of Lady

Hamilton? After all, what has the fellow done beyond insisting that we shall remain with the people that love us?—although why they do, only God knows: I'm sure I don't."

"My fleet," came Nelson's assurance, "is in your harbour for the sole purpose of aiding and protecting your Majesties."

"Yes, Admiral, I realize your devotion and the friendship of your government. But your fleet might as well be still in Aboukir Bay as far as concerns our ability to reach it. My guards and the remnant of my army would avail nothing against the mob if we attempted to embark. For my part I am opposed to any attempt at flight."

"And I," sadly said the Queen, "know that we must fly if we are to escape the scaffold. Yet I would not wish that the attempt should be made until we have discovered Lady Hamilton."

"Your Majesty doubtless realizes my grief at the misfortune that has befallen me"—it was Sir William speaking—"but I wish to assure you of what I know to be the truth. Were Lady Hamilton aware of your dilemma she would be the first to pray that you fly at once, leaving her to her fate."

At that instant the door was violently thrown open, there was a quick movement of white garments and

the figure of a woman sank at the feet of her Majesty.

“Lady Hamilton is here to fly or perish with her Queen!”

Then, before any of us had recovered from our astonishment, she had sprung erect once more, and, her arm outstretched toward Caracciolo, she cried to the King:

“Your Majesty, I entreat you to arrest that traitor before he escapes!”

For a second her request was so beyond our comprehension that we stood motionless while the fair Englishwoman continued pointing at the shrinking Prince, her beautiful eyes blazing with scorn and hatred. Then Nelson and Sir William started forward, not toward Caracciolo but toward Lady Hamilton. But, in a flash of sanity, I caught and held the Admiral, fearing that, in the happiness of this sudden reappearance, he would reveal to all the feelings I doubted not were clustered in his heart. Sir William, however, clasped his wife to his breast, but she seemed scarcely to be conscious of his presence. Disengaging herself, she turned to the Queen, passionately exclaiming:

“For God’s sake, madam, pray don’t wait to question me. Another moment and it may be too late. In heaven’s name secure the traitor!”

Certainly all this had occurred within the space of a single minute. At her first cry, the King's aide-de-camp and the guard at the door of the cabinet had rushed in and now stood irresolutely awaiting more definite orders. Caracciolo crouched against the casing of the open window, gazing with a strange horror at Lady Hamilton, an expression on his face more as though he saw a ghost than a living woman that had denounced him as a traitor.

"Secure him," quietly commanded the King, addressing his aide-de-camp and nodding toward the Prince.

The officer and guard hastened to execute the order and the rest of us instinctively moved in the same direction. But the Prince, regaining his presence of mind, turned swiftly to the window, grasped the curtain with one hand, leaped lightly to the sill, and thence into the early darkness of the garden.

Lady Hamilton screamed with indignant alarm, we of the sterner sex swore beneath our breath, and the King, now for the first time really aroused, cried out to the guard to follow the fugitive and, as they valued their lives, not to permit his escape. The men had not waited for this warning and were already outside, one of them shouting the alarm to their fellows on duty at the palace gate.

For a moment we stood grouped about the window, Lady Hamilton, in a semi-hysterical condition, clasped in the Queen's arms, the rest of us listening intently to the turmoil without and endeavouring in the outer gloom to gather some idea as to the whereabouts of the participants in the pursuit. The King, I felt, had at first thought the charge against the Prince had been the outcome of a mind unsettled by some frightful experience as yet unknown to us, but undergone by Lady Hamilton during the previous night. Some such belief, indeed, had occurred also to me, but this suspicion was, of course, dissipated by Caracciolo's wordless and instant flight, in itself a confession of guilt. So we soon turned from the window, eager that their Majesties should question Lady Hamilton as to the cause of her disappearance and learn the basis of her accusation against the Prince.

And so, while the pursuit went on, we for a time were indifferent to its outcome. Listening to her we forgot the villain in the heroine. Later, as the terror of it grew upon us we were in a frenzy that he should be taken and fitly punished—more for his crime against the woman than for that against the monarchy. She told the story hastily that first time—so excitedly and disjointedly in her hysteria that

I have thought best to tell it other than in her own words, as already I have set it down, myself inserting the minute details gathered from her in later conversations at Palermo and London.

When she had finished and had become somewhat calmer, her face brightened and, looking around the circle of faces, she exclaimed:

“While driving here I was the happiest person alive. It was only the sight of the Prince that changed and unnerved me. Don't you know why I was so happy, despite my sufferings? Oh, what a stupid lot of people! Your Majesties, don't you see that now a way is found for your escape? The secret passage-way has been revealed by God himself,—by it you may reach the sea; once there, you, Lord Nelson, will carry them to Sicily.”

There was a general shout of astonished approbation. In the excitement aroused by Caracciolo's flight and Lady Hamilton's recital, the possibilities created by the discovery of the secret passageway had occurred to none of us. Now, however, all were eager to visit this subterranean region, convinced that it would prove the deliverance of the royal family.

Lights were hastily summoned and we prepared to make the inspection under guidance of Lady

Hamilton. On reaching the salon where she had had her memorable interview with Caracciolo, she had much difficulty in discovering the hidden spring, but at last, after a long and systematic search, the spot was found and the door slid slowly into the wall with uneasy quietness. With servants in our midst bearing lights, we descended the winding staircase. At the foot the iron grating barred our entrance, and it being also seen that the tide again was rising we for that night gave up the attempt. Fortunately, however, Nelson's eye, strengthened perhaps by its lack of a fellow, caught the dull glitter of the key the Prince had thrown in the tide-tossed rubbish, and with its aid the place was explored on the following morning.

When we had returned to the King's cabinet, Nelson expressed his faith that rescue was possible by means of the passage, and outlined his plans for the fleet to await the fugitives in the bay, while smaller boats at night should enter the tunnel and carry every one on board the various ships.

In the meantime no tidings came of the traitorous Prince. He had slipped into the adjoining Teatro San Carlo, leaving it by a private door in the rear and disappearing in the streets beyond, thence doubtless escaping to the mountains. As late that

night we prepared to separate, Nelson turned to Lady Hamilton and, within my hearing but in low tones of fiercest hatred, said:

“And still another thing shall be accomplished. Although it require a lifetime, Caracciolo shall suffer for his crime!”

“Will you see that he dies?” she whispered. “Let him be caught and brought to justice. For my sake, see that he dies!”

At the time I thought little of her words, attributing them to a temporary and almost insane vindictiveness naturally following immediately after such a frightful experience.

The succeeding days were among the strangest of my life. It had been positively decided that the flight of the royal family should be attempted through the subterranean passage, whence they should be conveyed to Nelson's flagship. But this decision had been arrived at only after long argument with the King. His Majesty consented on condition that the royal treasure and practically everything of value should be carried with us, a stipulation making the arrangements doubly difficult and greatly retarding the date of the attempt. From without, the palace was under the mob's constant surveillance. Within was the nerve-racking neces-

sity to continue in normal fashion the social duties of the court lest the truth be learned by the nobles thronging the Queen's receptions, but few of whom were not secret supporters of the revolution. Assassinations were becoming mere incidents. Encounters between bodies of Jacobins and the loyal lazzaroni were of daily occurrence. The Neapolitan army had vanished. The French were approaching the capital which traitors were waiting to deliver to the conquerors.

I must give myself some credit for considerable activity during this period, but Tom Allen and Jack Herbert, Nelson's orderly, a mere lad, proved the most energetic and enthusiastic fellows that ever aided a royal flight. Now they were at the palace engaged in packing the Queen's treasures in chests and barrels; now they were at the embassy doing similar service for the Hamiltons. All this had to be carried on with the utmost secrecy. Everything was transferred at night, going first from palace to embassy, and then gradually to the docks, marked as stores for Nelson to be taken on board our ships. On one evening Lady Hamilton and I in her carriage, with Tom and Jack well armed on the driver's seat, carried from the royal residence some sixty thousand Spanish ducats of gold and the diamonds

of the entire family. Similarly we smuggled out paintings and many precious things from the Neapolitan museums and the palace at Caserta, as well as a vast amount of gold from the royal bankers. Practically we stripped the city, and upon my word I scarcely knew whether I felt most like patriot or bandit. Who would not have been content in either rôle, however, with the beautiful Hamilton as accomplice? But that all this was accomplished without discovery is almost beyond even my own credence as now I look back upon it.

The fateful day at last arrived and, as luck would have it, that very night was selected as the occasion for a great ball given by Kelim Effendi, who was in Naples as envoy from the Sultan, bearing the Plume of Triumph for presentation to the hero of the Nile. Lady Hamilton dared not absent herself from this affair. Had she done so, suspicion would at once have been aroused, for rumours of the flight were freely circulated despite repeated denials.

Fearing that the probable experience in the dampness of the subterranean tunnel would prove too much for a man of Sir William's advanced years, he had gone out to the flagship in the afternoon—a proceeding that could cause no comment since it was but natural at any time on the part of

an English ambassador. The crisis was now too near at hand to permit Nelson to leave the ship, but I attended the ball with Lady Hamilton and bore word that he would arrive at a later hour.

As greatly as on any of many occasions fit to try the nerve and courage of a woman, I admired her that night. Self-possessed, to all appearances care-free and joyous, she moved through the great mansion, conversing and jesting even with the many that longed for the arrival of the French and were in secret correspondence with their generals. While she danced with all her far-famed grace, abandoning herself to the pleasure as though it were for the night the sole object of existence, I stood idly by, feeling myself a dunce even if not a coward, scarce able to speak so unnerved was I at thought of the possible outcome of our undertaking. And yet surely it is no sign of cowardice in man that woman always wears a mask more gracefully. Even in affairs of the heart the rule holds true. Woman can conceal a love that is consuming her, or she can feign to absolute perfection a passion that has never touched her. Man blurts out his affection irrespective of policy or consequence; when he is pretending only, any child could detect the lie.

The ball was at its merriest when, under pretext

of seeking the fresher garden air, she took my arm and, having secured her cloak and a fatigue cap of my own, we strolled out through the conservatory door. The place was surrounded by a great crowd eager for a glimpse of the festivities within. Among the number doubtless many spies were on the alert, and to deceive them we decided to allow Lady Hamilton's carriage and servants to remain standing prominently near the main gateway while we chose a more secluded exit. Reaching the street we took a leisurely way on foot toward the palace, Lady Hamilton veiling her face and carefully wrapping herself in her cloak.

Twice were we stopped and questioned by small detachments of armed and suspicious lazzaroni, and on each occasion it was only with the greatest difficulty and by the exertion of all my ingenuity that I succeeded in persuading them to let us pass without disclosing the identity of my companion. To have done this would have revealed everything, for later her carriage would have been found and all the restless mob would have known they had been tricked. It was pure luck rather than my English uniform that saved us, for had I not seen the Austrian killed in broad day before the very eyes of the King?

Yet, though it may seem strange, I had thoughts of keen regret at leaving Naples, as that night I walked through the streets with my beautiful countrywoman. Still stranger was it to hear my thoughts echoed in the spoken words of Lady Hamilton. As we neared the palace, she stopped for a moment and looked back at the lights, the trees of the gardens, and the houses of the city with their sky line standing out in the faintest silhouette. I now know that she was bidding farewell to the place where first she had known content.

“I have learned to love it,” she softly said, looking up at me with moistened eyes, realizing that I partly understood her mood. “I have loved to think of its old-time Greek and Roman rulers, the strange Goths and Byzantines that have plundered it—though 'tis not so long ago I was too ignorant to know such people ever lived. I have loved to imagine myself supping here with Lucullus, and that Virgil was reciting to me his verses. I have found delight in the noise and rubbish of the streets and in even the very braying of their donkeys. The flower-sellers, the beggars, the thieves, the little street shows, the dirty lazzaroni—all have become dear to me. I shall miss even the sight of the hideous, black-masked brotherhood, creeping by me silently, carrying a coffin to its grave!”

I listened and sympathized, but in my heart I feared that none of these it was that brought the keenest regret; that this was based solely on the dread that leaving the city would mean the end of her daily and triumphant association with Nelson, and that, later, London might make them all but strangers. She breathed a little parting sigh and, retaking my arm, turned again toward the palace.

“And even the summers, Captain,” she continued as we walked, “even the summers!—and a Neapolitan August is supposed to be unbearable. How often have I drowsed on my balcony at night, looking out over the crescent bay, inhaling the fragrance of the jessamine, and dreaming, oh, such dreams!—as though I were still sixteen. And then, in the wee hours of the night, when it is always cool, I would descend to the street for a drive quite alone, to dream again on the outskirts of town, and run chances of brigands—and scandal. I wonder if any of my dreams are to come true!”

“Is it not something that, at least to a girl of sixteen, would seem a dream—to-night’s rescue of a beautiful queen from almost certain death?”

“True, Captain, but we have not yet rescued her. Let us pray God that all goes well!”

I was almost sorry when at last we reached the

palace, and, indeed, it was the evidences of an approaching storm, rather than the important duty before us, that prevented me from prolonging our walk. We found that we were arrived at the very moment appointed for the descent. The King and Queen, with all the royal family and a few trusted servants, were awaiting us in the small *salon* of the secret doorway, and all were in an agony of fear that harm had befallen us and that, as a result, the mob would storm the palace and either assassinate or imprison the would-be fugitives. Even after our arrival the Queen continued in a state of despair.

"I am brave enough when face to face with my enemies," she said to me as we prepared to descend the stairs, "but in a secret flight I am a coward. The suddenness of the blow has bewildered me, and its effects will remain with me to the tomb. This change is for life. I feel that, even if to-night we escape, I shall never again see Naples."

The King, who was calm and hopeful, joined me in an endeavour to reassure the Queen, yet she entered the tunnel in almost the unconscious condition in which Lady Hamilton first had done so.

The hour was that at which the tide had practically receded from the place, so that we were able to advance almost to the outer entrance, but to

reach which the ladies were forced to pick their way over piles of matter scattered by the waves and reeking with decay. I carefully circled a light three times at arm's length—the signal agreed upon, and awaited the response with some uneasiness. We had no doubt but that Nelson was safe and ready to carry out his part of the arrangements, but a wind storm, signs of which I had noticed on entering the palace, in the last few moments had broke upon the coast with an awesome suddenness and already had grown almost to the dimensions of a hurricane. It seemed impossible that boats could safely reach us, that in the tremendous sea they would certainly go under or be dashed to pieces against the rocks. So, although the water in mountainous form crashed and broke against the outer wall and drenched us in its breaking, we stood indifferent to it, staring out at the raging sea, shuddering with the dread of a forced return to we knew not what above.

I had held the light aloft, although in the gale not with ease, and at last, aided by a faint, momentary shred of moonlight, we saw three barges fighting their way through the waves. I could not conceive how they were to reach the cave, and, accustomed all my life as I have been to every peril of the sea,

nevertheless to the present day I am warm in admiration of the brave fellows at those oars. As they approached and were caught by the long, rolling surf, two of the boats were purposely reversed and rested for a moment in what, despite the storm, was a comparatively calm trough in the interval of the oncoming waves. The third boat advanced, at times was seemingly submerged, and then, guided with marvellous strength and skill, shot in at the very centre of the entrance and grounded on the sand at our feet. Nelson leaped quickly from it and,aving in silence kissed the hands of the Queen and Lady Hamilton, gave orders to the men to drag the barge farther into the cave.

“Your Majesties,” he said when this had been accomplished, “I believe everything is provided for. Another barge is on service at the wharf. The men on these three are armed with cutlasses. By this time, too, all the other boats of the *Vanguard* and *Alemena* armed with cutlasses, and launches with carronades, have reached a point midway between here and the fleet. There they will remain, each with a half-dozen soldiers, to be summoned by false fires in case we need their aid. I can imagine nothing, therefore, that you need fear.”

The two remaining boats now drew in their grap-

nels and came on, the first entering without mishap, but the last dashing against the rocks and being saved only by the prompt action of the men already landed. These sprang into the water and with splendid strength and daring prevented a second crash, then dragged the boat ashore. When all this had been accomplished, I placed my torch firmly upright in the sand and by its wind-swept flickering we commenced the embarkation.

Lady Hamilton insisted upon remaining until the last boat, in order that she might be of aid to all.

“Very good!” cried Nelson. “Now, Captain Hardy, will you accompany their Majesties in the first?”

It was shoved half way into the water, to gain that much before too greatly weighted, and I handed the Queen to a seat. The King followed, and then a servant with the younger children. As it was given a final heave I jumped in and the men bent vigorously at the oars. Stuart, who had arrived with the Admiral, was given charge of the second contingent, consisting of the rest of the royal family and the retainers; and then, as I looked back into the faint light of the receding entrance, I noted that the rowers of the third barge would have an easier task, for only Lady Hamilton and the Admiral remained.

I saw them put out through the breakers and gain the waters outside. Then suddenly there swiftly shot from out the shadows of neighbouring rocks something long and dark that came alongside the Nelson barge; I saw a confused rush of figures and heard a pistol's sharp report and a woman's cry of pain and terror. There was another flash, followed this time by a roar. It was the response from the brass carronade at the prow of Nelson's barge. By a trembling bit of moonlight I saw it crash through those that thronged the attacking boat, at least three of whom threw up their arms in agony and fell, two among their comrades, the other into the sea. The Admiral's oarsmen bent to their work, not to escape but to leap forward closer to the enemy, the half-dozen scarlet-clad soldiers on board holding their bayonets ready while again the little carronade belched forth. The presence of their Majesties prevented me from closing, but at the King's command I had my men quickly come about, and we flew to within a short distance of the contestants. By that time it had become a man-to-man encounter, pistols blazing face to face, cutlass clashing against cutlass. So confusing were the shouts and imprecations that it sounded like the coming together of entire fleets, although all told no more than half a hundred men were engaged.

Above this turmoil I heard an unmistakable voice: 'twas that of Caracciolo crying to his men to see that Lady Hamilton received no further injury, but elsewhere to give no quarter. A moment later I saw him plainly. Reckless of risk he leaned far over the side of the boat. With upraised cutlass he towered immediately above Nelson, who, with equal disregard of danger, had stooped to ascertain the extent of Lady Hamilton's wound. With an oath of hatred the Prince brought his weapon sweeping through the air. Midway the blade close to the hilt was caught and firmly held in a hand that instantly was drenched in blood. 'Twas that of brave Tom Allen, whose daring, however, would have been useless had it not been that young Herbert supplemented it by a shot from his pistol. This should have ended the Italian's career, but a lurch of the barge caused the bullet to reach the dastard's arm instead of its proper place, his heart. Nevertheless, the cutlass fell from his grasp and at the same moment there was a crash from our third crew. Caracciolo's boat capsized and sank, and instantly his men were struggling in the water. It was the finish of a brief but right goodly little fight.

For a time we remained in the vicinity, seeking the leader of the foul attack. But soon it was

evident that either he was drowned or had managed to reach the shore. One of the barges Nelson ordered to land, if possible, and capture or kill the traitor; but, in the storm and amid rocks unfamiliar to all of us, the attempt had at last to be abandoned. So again our men pulled for the fleet, Lady Hamilton making light of her injury, but poor Allen's hand a grievous sight. Two of our brave fellows were left beneath the waves, but we had come off splendidly considering how far apart our boats had been and the entirely unexpected nature of the attack.

A moment's reflection explained the affair to all of us. Caracciolo must of necessity have realized that Lady Hamilton could have escaped from the tunnel in but one way—by the sea, which originally he had deemed impossible, and doubtless also had anticipated that the royal family would adopt the same means for flight. Accompanied by his accomplices he had laid in wait in the darkness of the rocks, had allowed the rest of us to pass, and had endeavoured to take the life of Nelson and capture the woman he before had left to what he thought a certain death. His treason revealed, and finding Lady Hamilton still living, unquestionably he had intended she should become, willingly or otherwise, a sharer in his villany.

Lady Hamilton's wound having been attended to, poor Allen, now maimed almost as was the man whose life he had saved, made as comfortable as skilful surgery and womanly kindness could accomplish, and all our passengers fairly well quartered, we were eager enough to set sail. This desire increased when the following morning brought a splendid wind from the northeast, weather and wind exactly suited to a safe and speedy dash for Palermo. Yet two days and nights we were forced to pass at anchor in the bay that all those who wished among the Neapolitan nobility and foreign residents might embark and seek refuge in Sicily. It was dreary waiting, and, although we had no particular fear of an attack from shore, the delay was not without its elements of danger.

At length on the third night was heard the welcome sound of the anchor chain as it came in link by link. Never had our passengers heard sweeter music from a symphonic orchestra than this grinding noise that told them we were getting under way. Having tripped the anchor, the crew in advisable but somewhat disheartening silence—for your true sailor loves to make merry at such moments—became busy at making sail. Soon the noble *Vanguard*, leaning not a bit under the pressure of a

stiffish breeze, was slipping past the other craft and swiftly moving out to sea. I walked aft with Lady Hamilton that she might have the view of the splendid ship usually obtainable from there, but the darkness and the now commencing rain soon drove her below to join the Queen.

Something over two thousand fugitives were on board the fleet that accompanied us—some twenty-five transports, merchantmen and ships of war, and, what with passengers, luggage, treasure and furnishings, and the collections smuggled from the state museums, we were all rather heavily laden. The night, however, was intensely dark, and, for obvious reasons, we were chary of our lights, so that we could tell little about the others of the fleet. We were soon to lose sight of them because of a more alarming reason.

We had the wind from the east at the start and were anticipating a fairly decent run to Palermo, but you can never count on anything as regards wind on the Mediterranean. I never had much faith in it on any waters that ever I sailed, and none at all on these. However that may be, we had no sooner cleared Capri than you would have thought that all the winds of the universe had been laying in wait for us behind that tiny island. In the

space of a breath our little breeze from the east chopped to west and we had a perfect deluge of gales and squalls, while at the same time a pouring rain descended. We had no means of knowing how it was going with the others, but we were congratulating ourselves that we, at least, were going to outride it without a mishap, when suddenly, with a crash a west-southwest blast struck the *Vanguard*, and, before a move could be made, the topsails, driver and foretopmast stay-sail were in shreds.

In all my experience I can recall no such wild and raging sea as we encountered that night. The waves came against us with such frightful poundings that it seemed as though we were being dashed continuously against the rocks. Seas so fiercely swept the deck that more than once I was carried off my legs, and, having no business there anyway, I was glad enough to seek Nelson's cabin, where the most distinguished of our guests were assembled.

Little air of distinction had they now, however. A more wretched crowd I never saw, what with seasickness and the anticipation of death. In the midst of all this misery I quickly grasped the fact that the Queen was undergoing an additional agony of her own, for the King, furiously but silently angered, was indicating by every glance he shot in

her direction that he held her responsible for what all believed would soon prove a tragedy. And, indeed, but for the Queen and Lady Hamilton, 'tis true he might even then have been seated in his box at the Teatro San Carlo. But for my part, I would prefer to die by drowning rather than on the scaffold, and the latter would have been his fate had they not almost dragged him to Palermo.

What a heroine she was that night!—our Patroness of the Navy. And how proud Nelson and I were of her. She soothed the royal children to sleep, was a slave to the Queen during her illness and aided all the sufferers with untiring zeal and tenderness.

“Have you seen Sir William?” she asked as I entered the crowded state-cabin. “I’ve been so busy that I’ve missed him only this minute.”

“He’s certainly not on deck,” I responded smilingly. “We’ll be fortunate to have any one or anything up there if this keeps up another half hour. I’ll have a look for him in his sleeping-cabin.”

She accompanied me, and when we opened the door there sat the ambassador, bolt upright on his bunk, calm and dignified as always, but holding a pistol in each hand. I thought, of course, that illness had temporarily unhinged his mind. But Lady

Hamilton ran to him and took the weapons from his unresisting hands.

"You great big foolish dear!" she exclaimed. "What on earth do you mean by this conduct? Which are you thinking of committing, murder or suicide?"

"Well, I suppose I do look a bit idiotic," replied Sir William, rising and ruefully eyeing the confiscated pistols. "The fact is that, at the moment the ship sinks, I'll be obliged to put one of those bullets in me. I know I can never stand hearing the gurgle-gurgle-gurgle of the salt water in my throat."

Lady Hamilton fairly shrieked with laughter.

"Nonsense, you goose. The ship hasn't the slightest notion of sinking, has she, Captain?"

"Not the remotest," I answered stoutly, although I wasn't as sure of it as I seemed.

"You don't deserve it, Sir William," continued his wife, "but I'll forgive your selfish purpose to blow yourself into Paradise and to allow me to have that gurgle-gurgle all to myself. Now you just climb back into bed and dream of Palermo and Pall Mall and me. Captain, you take charge of these," and she handed me the pistols. "I'm off to resume my duties as the official nurse of the flagship."

It was this incident that first drew my attention

to a gradual and almost imperceptible mental and physical breaking down in the ambassador. Always maintaining his customary chivalrousness of attitude toward his wife, and never losing his enthusiastic admiration for Nelson; retaining, too, to the very end the appearance and manners of a gentleman of the old school, there, nevertheless, was this increasing childishness. I remember wondering, on this occasion, whether when he had passed away it would open new complications of unhappiness for Lady Nelson, or if, on the contrary, Lady Hamilton being free, that very fact would cause her to lose her fascination for the Admiral. I have known this to occur in the love affairs of many men; but they who changed for such a reason usually have been either shallow cads or thorough villains. Nelson being neither, I prayed that Sir William might outlast us all.

All that night and all the following day Lady Hamilton was the good angel of the *Vanguard*. But on the second morning out from Naples her rôle became sacred indeed, for then the youngest of the royal children was taken ill, and, although receiving her unceasing and loving devotion, the little seven-year-old Prince Albert died that night in her arms. Upon me devolved the unhappy task

of breaking the news to the Queen, a task made doubly hard by the continuance of the frightful storm which seemed likely at any moment to sink us. Indeed, when the mother's first paroxysm of grief had passed, she exclaimed: "We shall all shortly join my child."

However, we did nothing of the kind. The gale broke that evening, and the setting sun, for the first time since we left Naples, flushed the still lashing sea to crimson. By the first gleam of the morning's light we saw the long north-coast line of Sicily. At five o'clock we cast anchor, sails were furled and the slight, regular roll of the ship and the lazy lapping of the water against her run betokened welcome rest after these days and nights of terror.

Chapter VII

A Traitor to Land and Love

 HE reception given the royal family by the population of Palermo was a comfort to all of us. Here at least was not even a thought of revolution or disloyalty; here Ferdinand and Maria Caroline could occupy their throne in peace and regal splendour. But at first there was little thought of this. The more distinguished passengers on the *Vanguard* were disembarked at sunrise, and even at that early hour they were greeted by the cheers of thousands. But for nearly a week thereafter the landing of the others continued—a sorry spectacle, men, women and children enervated by sickness, terror and misfortune.

It was necessary, however, that the King should maintain at Palermo much of his accustomed extravagance and pomp that his people on the island might not, for lack of these symbols of power, falter in their loyalty. Thrones have been lost because their occupants have seemed as poverty stricken as their subjects. For the accomplishment of this purpose Ferdinand had with him ample

means. Altogether we left Naples with royal treasure to the value of more than two and a half million pounds sterling, all of which, had it not been for Lady Hamilton, the French robbers would have included in their loot.

But beneath the gaiety and splendour that prevailed soon after our arrival there was deep gloom and genuine sorrow. The King was now fearful that he might never regain his capital; while the Queen, for the first time in her life, was humiliated by the angry contempt of her husband. On one occasion, indeed, this was so openly expressed that the unfortunate woman turned to me and exclaimed, her eyes swimming in tears:

“Alas, Captain, that a Queen’s unhappiness should thus be made known to you gentlemen of England! I now bitterly regret that I did not seek shelter in Austria. But one must submit to fate and die. I grieve only for my children.”

There could be no question but that she had lost, for the time at least, every vestige of her power over her husband. He now looked upon their flight as an error, and did not hesitate to show that for it he held his wife responsible. Neglected thus by him during this dark period, Maria Caroline made Nelson and myself doubly welcome when, as was our daily custom, we called at the Palazzo Reale.

Strolling silently one evening along the Cassaro, we turned at last and climbed the hill to the palace. We had no sooner entered by the gate into the arcaded court than we perceived the Queen and Lady Hamilton crossing it toward the staircase on the west. Her Majesty, observing our entrance, beckoned us to them.

"My Lady and I," she said, "are going to the roof, stretch out, and be lazy and comfortable; talk scandal and look off toward Naples and wish all Frenchmen and revolutionists could be dumped into the crater of Vesuvius. You may come with us if the programme is not too exciting."

And so we all toiled up the three flights of steps to the great flat roof beside the tall, arched tower that had stood there since Norman days, here and there in the walls hints of the time when it was more a fortress than palace. The moonlit scene about us was so peacefully beautiful that it was difficult to realise that, at the very moment, Naples was drenched in blood and thunderous with riot; almost at our feet the Mediterranean, palaces and churches and stately mansions clustering near us, and, to the south, a panorama of gardens and cypress groves stretching away to the dim background formed by the mountains of the Capo Gallo.

Servants had preceded us with rugs and cushions, and, seating ourselves among them, we carried out at least a part of the Queen's jesting programme. That is to say, we were lazy and comfortable, and we all in our hearts cursed the French and revolutionists in general. But of scandal there was none. When one in a group such as ours is a dethroned Queen hoping for restoration, the others are scarcely in the mood for gossip. One subject alone is uppermost in thought and speech.

Half reclining on her rugs, Maria Caroline leaned her head on her arm as it rested on the low, protecting wall, and gazed fixedly northward toward her former capital. At last she turned to Nelson.

"My Lord," she said, with intense earnestness, "you who never err and who always succeed, tell me what has been my greatest error and why I have so ignominiously failed."

"Madam, your present position is not a failure. It is a reverse. We shall again place you on your throne or England has no navy and Austria and Russia no armies. But, if you will pardon me, your chief error has been that in Naples you endeavoured to train professors where you should have encouraged warriors."

"Right, my Lord. That is it exactly. But I

need not say that to-day when, perhaps, it is too late, I prefer men of the sword. There was a time when I revered and aided men of learning. See what they have done! Ah, these philosophers! They caused the French revolution, source of all the trouble we now know in Naples. Who are my enemies? The professors and students whom once I befriended! Who stand by me? The lazzaroni! I have always loved power—that was natural in a daughter of Maria Theresa. But, as God is my judge, until republicans killed my sister I was also a lover of humanity.”

“If humanity is represented by the French revolutionists, I want none of it,” angrily exclaimed Nelson. “My sole humanitarian principle is to assist in driving the French to the devil and in restoring peace and happiness to mankind. My blood boils at the name of Frenchman, be he royalist or republican. In some points the latter is the better.”

“A French republican,” I ventured, “is something that exists only in name. You remember what that queer philosopher, Rousseau, said of his countrymen: ‘If they knew of a freeman at the other end of the world they would go thither for the mere pleasure of extirpating him.’”

“And, your Majesty,” ejaculated Lady Hamilton,

with a fierce little shake of her head, "I'll wager the traitors in Naples to-night are sick of the so-called freedom the French have brought them."

We relapsed into silence. One cannot go on indefinitely ringing the conversational changes on the night and ought-to-have-beens, in heaping maledictions on one's absent enemies and in planning future vengeance upon them. Yet what I have here repeated is an example of our daily talks for weeks, until we seemed like a set of monomaniacs, the madness of all having a common subject. Can you wonder, then, that frequently we resembled also a gathering of Quakers?

At last, with a gesture of impatience, the Queen arose.

"Come, shall we drive out to La Favara?" she asked. "I am too restless to remain a moment idle. I think too much of the past and too little of the future. Even now my mind has been dwelling on the joyousness of years ago, when the King and I visited the princes of all Italy, my vessel followed by a dozen of our warships festooned as for a festival, and—strange passengers on these instruments of battle!—filled with the most beautiful women and most chivalrous men of my kingdom. And to-night, deserted by my nobles, thrust from my

throne, a price upon my head, I must be content with a drive to my poor little Sicilian country house."

But as she reached the stairway she turned impulsively, and, its old-time sweetness returning to her countenance and the resistless smile to her winsome lips, she stretched out a hand each to Nelson and Lady Hamilton and included even myself in her propitiating glance.

"There, that was unkind. I did not mean it to be just that way. Should I bewail a few worthless traitors when the friends I love most on earth and to whom I owe the most are with me at this moment? And, after all, who would not exchange the cares of state for a night like this and not a duty in the world? Lord Nelson, will you aid Lady Hamilton down these treacherous stairs? And you, Captain Hardy, have my permission to forget I ever saw a throne. Come, we'll go to La Favara and imagine ourselves to be a happy band of Sicilian outlaws. They are the people I envy under a glorious moon like this."

"But," protested Lady Hamilton, "these very outlaws you envy are scarcely a jesting matter at this time of night. 'Tis really dangerous for us to trust ourselves outside the town. Had you not better content yourself here, your Majesty?"

“My Majesty will be content with nothing but La Favara,” was the laughing reply. “I scarcely think these outlaws would molest their Queen, and in any case I would prefer to trust myself to the brigands of Sicily than to the nobility of Naples.”

But in time even the Queen was no longer forced thus impatiently to seek means of passing the time. Events came that brought to all of us new thoughts and hopes, and to some of us renewed and welcome activities.

Prior to this, however, news had reached us of the French occupation of Naples and of the establishment of that republic for which a few malcontents had longed—established over the bodies of thousands of loyal Neapolitans slain by the hypocritical French, who had claimed to be bringing them the vaunted “liberty, equality and fraternity” of republicanism. Traitors and frog-eaters ruled in the capital of a race still devoted to the throne. And the rapacious conquerors spared no one in their greed for plunder, calling alike upon nobility and lazzaroni for money, melting the statues in the streets and the treasures in the museums to add to their hoard of metal. When they had swept the surface clear, still unsatisfied, they tortured the very bowels of the earth, seeking what might still be hid in Pompeii.

But Lady Hamilton had been a true prophet. The Neapolitan traitors were indeed sick of their bargain. To the south, too, an army of peasants was holding its own for royalty, while in the north Austria was giving a series of defeats to France. Then it was that the cowardly French withdrew from Naples, the hypocritical excuse being that they had accomplished their glorious mission of freedom, and that now the young nation would gain in dignity if left alone, to grow strong and prove itself worthy the great name of Republic. As well might one toss a hot-house flower into a snow-bank and tell it to fight the whirlwind. The few Neapolitans that had brought about this frightful fiasco of a revolution were in consternation. Now in all its grim truth did they realize the fact that in their revolt they had been mere puppets in the hands of bandits flaunting the flag of freedom; that they had been fleeced of their wealth and their honour and now were deserted to face alone their lawful sovereign, their indignant fellow-citizens and the English navy and its unforgiving Admiral.

These changed conditions deeply affected us at Palermo, and, you may be sure, the light-hearted court was not slow to resume its former career of pleasure. We of the English fleet, however, had

other matters to engross us. Nelson changed his flag to the *Foudroyant*, which I now commanded, and taking on board the Crown Prince, and, to my chagrin, Sir William and Lady Hamilton, set sail for Naples. It was supposedly as interpreter for Nelson and as secretary to her husband that Lady Hamilton accompanied us; but it was most unusual thus to take a woman of her rank on board a ship of war at such a time—and, even aside from that, I liked it not, as will be understood by any that may have read what I have already written. Certain it is, however, that during the succeeding period she acted as the personal representative of royalty, and for the time being was, indeed, Queen of Naples. Nor can I say, much as I wished her back at Palermo, that she ill became the part.

'Tis not required that I speak in detail of the republic's fall or of the restoration of the monarchy in Naples. But one resulting event I must narrate at some length, for it was an important link in the story of infatuation I have set out to tell. This link was fastened one morning at daybreak by the information brought to us of the fleet, that Caracciolo had been captured.

The Prince, whose leap from the palace window had been my last sight of him save for that moment's

glimpse during his mad attack at the entrance to the cave, had lied to Lady Hamilton when he claimed that for her sake he had instigated the revolution. He had joined it only when he saw that it was inevitable. But he spoke truly, I believe, when he expressed the hope that in the reaction he might reach the throne. And in all that he did, his mad passion for this woman was, to a large extent, the mainspring of his conduct. It brought about in him a certain insanity, now taking the form of a willingness to kill her that he might save himself, then again in the readiness to risk his own life in the attempt to gain possession of her. Upon the establishment of the republic he was given supreme command of its navy. Upon its downfall he fled hither and thither, writing to former friends letters imploring their protection, always hanging over him the offered reward for his apprehension. And at last the miserable traitor, disguised as a peasant, was tracked into the mountains, chained and brought straight on board the *Foudroyant*.

Much as I loathed the man I could not altogether resist his wretched appearance, particularly when I compared present conditions with those of our early meetings at the Neapolitan court. I saw, too, that for days, perhaps, he had eaten nothing. There-

fore I ordered that the chains be taken off him and that he be given food.

Doubtless that which followed was the most appalling in its tragic rapidity of anything known in the history of the English navy. I myself carried the news to Nelson, who was at breakfast with Lady Hamilton. Never shall I forget, although it is beyond my ability to express the full horror of the thing, the effect of my information. Both the Admiral and Lady Hamilton became livid. Then slowly he turned toward her, and she with swift fierceness toward him. For full a minute thus they stared at each other, he with a look almost of fear in his eyes, she with something akin to a cat-like, longing cruelty. She rose and leaned across the table: again, as that night at Naples months before, I heard the whispered words, "For my sake, see that he dies!"

In a strange fear and sudden revulsion of feeling against these two, I stepped forward, exclaiming, "Surely, Nelson, you would not permit——"

The Admiral's face flashed from white to scarlet. He sprang to his feet.

"Captain Hardy, you strangely forget yourself when you thus take advantage of our friendship. But, on account of that friendship, bring this man



"For my sake, see
that he dies!"—*Page 156.*

before me that you may hear my promise to him of a duly authorized court-martial."

"I spoke hastily, Admiral, and thoughtlessly. No such act is necessary. Who better than I knows your unswerving truth and justice?"

"Nevertheless, bring him here."

I hastened from the cabin, chagrined at my blundering interference. Either old Nel would be just or he would be made irresponsible by his enchantress. In either case nothing I could say or do would change him.

When I returned with the prisoner, they stood in exactly their former positions, Nelson at the side of the table, Lady Hamilton at the far end of the cabin, to which she had retreated at the time of my interruption. Caracciolo glanced for a moment in her direction, then turned and faced the man who for him must be a court of last resort. Nelson in turn and for some moments in silence fixed his eyes with an inexplicable look upon the prisoner. At last he spoke.

"Prince Caracciolo, your conduct toward this lady would in itself make you deserving of death had I the making of the laws, and were you in England I doubt if you'd escape it. There they hang men daily for less cause. Nevertheless, you shall go free

unless the judges have conclusive proof of your treason."

"And, pray, what guarantee have I of that?"

"My word of honour, sir; and you as a Neapolitan have reason to know that the word of a British admiral is as sacred as that of any sovereign in Europe."

"It is ample for me, my Lord. True, I loved this lady. That is not a crime. Of the crime of treason I was not willingly guilty. Therefore, trusting your word, I hope by to-night to meet you on our former footing."

Nelson a moment later had prepared and handed me a warrant directing Count Thurn, the Sicilian admiral, to assemble five of his senior officers as a court-martial. This I sent on board *La Minerva*, commanded by the Count, and so expeditiously was all carried out that Caracciolo, who had been brought to us at nine, was placed on trial at ten.

Naturally the Prince did not, before the court, offer the same excuse for his conduct that he had given to Lady Hamilton. The trial was one of fact, not of causes. That he had become a traitor to his king in order that he might snatch the woman he loved from beneath the falling throne was a matter that would little influence these six officers who had

themselves been witnesses when he fired upon the very ship whereon he now was being tried. The Prince, therefore, confined himself largely to attacking the King, a procedure, it seemed to me, indicating either madness or the absolute absence of hope.

“I am accused of deserting my King during his distress and of leaguings with his enemies,” he cried excitedly as he faced Count Thurn after the evidence had all been presented. “On the contrary, you know as well as I that the King deserted me and all his faithful subjects. He collected everything that could be converted into money and fled with it to Palermo, there to riot in luxurious safety. Who, then, was the traitor—the King or myself? After his cowardly desertion, had I not succumbed to the ruling power my children would have been vagabonds in the land of their fathers. But, gentlemen, my destruction has been predetermined. No defence, however eloquent, no fact, however conclusive, could save me. My blood be upon your heads and upon those of your children.”

While the court debated, the Prince was led from the room and, closely guarded, permitted on deck. Thither I followed, and found him despondent and vindictive.

“Captain Hardy,” he cried wildly as I approached, “this court-martial is a mockery of justice. My fate was decided two hours ago over a delightful breakfast-table set for two, yonder in the cabin of your flagship.”

The frenzied man shook his trembling fist in the direction of the *Foudroyant*. But there was little time for such heroics. Almost immediately the prisoner was again called below. Had he not practically confessed his guilt? Count Thurn arose as we reëntered, and the Prince straightened in a final attempt at bravado.

“Admiral Prince Caracciolo, you have been unanimously found guilty of the charges brought against you. You have repaid the high rank and honours conferred on you by a mild and confiding sovereign with the blackest ingratitude. The sentence of the court is that you shall be hanged by the neck at the yard-arm of *La Minerva* in two hours from this time, and may God have mercy on your soul.”

It struck the noon hour as the sentence was completed. For a minute thereafter absolute silence prevailed. Then Caracciolo in low tones made a request.

“Count Thurn, we have met under happier cir-

cumstances. Is it possible that I may be shot in place of the disgraceful death you have imposed upon me?"

"No change can be made by this court. You may, however, if you wish, appeal to Admiral Lord Nelson."

Immediately the Prince busied himself in carrying out this suggestion, asking, if it were impossible to grant a new trial on the ground of personal prejudice, that he might at least be given the death of an officer. But the only reply that was returned from the *Foudroyant* was Nelson's confirmation of the sentence and an order that the body hang until sunset, when it should be cut down and cast into the sea. The Admiral fixed the hour of execution, however, at five o'clock, in order, as he later told me, that the condemned man might have the last offices of the Church.

In a faint but final hope Caracciolo turned to me—although he looked somewhat shamefaced, for he well knew that I was informed of his crime beneath the palace—and asked if I believed an appeal to Lady Hamilton would prove of any avail. I confess that the request disgusted me. I did not blame him for his repugnance to a criminal's mode of death, but it seems to me that had it been I, any-

thing would have been endured before supplicating the woman I had so cruelly wronged. The appeal for life to her whose life he had sought was Caracciolo's final degradation.

But this appeal, like the first, was unavailing, the somewhat odd response reaching us that "Lady Hamilton could not be found." As the hours passed, the prisoner's mind seemed to be giving way under a strain of fear and hatred, augmented by his days of privation when pursuit was close upon his trail. At times he raved of his devotion to Lady Hamilton and then would curse both her and Nelson. As the dread moment approached, his frenzy bordered on convulsions, and the services of the ship's physician were required before he could be quieted. This accomplished, the door of an adjoining cabin was opened, and within I saw lighted candles and heard the faint prelude of a choir. The priests slowly entered and approached the doomed and trembling man. All in the room sank to their knees as the sacred office commenced.

"Illustrious Prince and Christian brother, are you in the proper condition of mind to meet your God?"

I softly withdrew to the deck, and climbing down to my gig was carried over to the *Foudroyant*. I

had no desire to witness the most frightful form of death known to civilization. Yet, as I gained the flagship, I saw the gathering group on *La Minerva* as the tide floated her stern full in front of me, and immediately the sinister rope was cast over the fore yard-arm.

Although in little humour for it, I acceded to a message requesting that I should join at dinner Sir William and Lady Hamilton, Nelson and two of our visitors, Lord Northwick and Commodore Sir Augustus Collier. These five, who formed under ordinary circumstances a jolly party, were already awaiting me in Nelson's cabin; but, at the instant I entered, there came booming over the water the dull sound of the gun telling that the execution had taken place, that justice had been satisfied and that a relentless woman's vengeance was now complete.

Of those present, at least two paled at the sound, and none dared glance out a port-hole. There was a moment's silence. Then Lady Hamilton turned to the table and, with a smile that was somewhat forced, seemed about to commit some conventional pleasantry, when suddenly her eyes filled with a look of fearsome horror, and, staggering back, she supported herself against the partition. She was staring speechlessly at Nelson, who had calmly

stepped to his chair at the table. Immediately behind him, leaning on end against the wall and seeming almost to enclose the Admiral, stood a ghastly, empty coffin.

Nelson turned to see what had caused this terror in Lady Hamilton. Face to face so suddenly with the grewsome object, he, too, seemed deeply agitated. Then anger mastered him, and he looked for some one upon whom to vent it. He caught my eye, and I became the momentary scapegoat.

“Captain Hardy, can you explain this outrage? 'Tis true we were some time in Egypt, but that is no reason why we should follow the customs of their ancients and have such horrors at our feasts. Who's to blame here?”

“My dear Admiral,” and, although the situation was almost uncanny when one recalled the attendant circumstances, I could but smile as I entered upon my explanation, “I'm afraid that you're yourself the culprit. This coffin, while unpleasant in prophecy, is glorious in remembrance. It is made of the mainmast of the *Orient*, the French flagship in the Battle of the Nile.”

“Ah, true, Hardy. I remember now.”

“After the battle,” I continued, turning to the others, my chief object now being to reassure Lady

Hamilton, "Captain Hallowell ordered his ship carpenter to construct the coffin as a gift to Lord Nelson, intending that when the Admiral had finished his earthly career he should be buried in one of his own trophies. A happy idea, I think, although I did not approve when Nelson requested that, when finished, it should be placed in his cabin—a request unfortunately only carried out, it seems, this afternoon."

"I fail to see, Captain," and there came to Nelson one of those quick flashes of temper such as thereafter marked even the most distant reference to Caracciolo's death, "I fail to see why to-day was a more unfortunate time than any other. But I am deeply pained, Lady Hamilton, that this should so have frightened you. My idea was that at the Nile I had doubtless attained all of honour I could hope for on earth, and that perhaps it were as well if henceforth I had before me some reminder of what must come to all of us. And now, if you've all forgiven me, shall we dine?"

"Not until it is taken away, I beg of you," entreated Lady Hamilton, speaking for the first time since I had entered the cabin. "Please, please, my Lord, do not keep it near you. You have greater honours before you—yes, and, I'm sure, years of happiness such as you have never known."

Chapter VIII

The Goddess of Victory



HAVE already likened Lady Hamilton's position on board the *Foudroyant* to that of the actual Queen of Naples, and from this time onward the likeness increased. It saw no lessening even after the King joined us, leaving Maria Caroline still at Palermo; for Ferdinand, from the day of Lady Hamilton's arrival in Italy, had always had a warm spot in his heart for the bewitching Englishwoman and would gladly have had her follow the example of more than one woman of rank in his capital. With Nelson, as always, her influence was supreme, so that now she was able, in the greatness of her heart, to mitigate much of the atrocity that invariably follows the putting down and punishing of revolution. Often, indeed, the choice between life and death rested in her hands. Never before had she attained such royal power, and that the London nursemaid of twenty years before exercised it with such regal dignity, yet with boundless generosity, is one of the most marvellous things that I have ever known. Even now, it is thus

that I like to think of her, that it may cause me to forget the unrelenting manner in which she pursued the crazed Caracciolo to his death. Scoundrel and traitor though he was, his greatest crime, after all, was his love for her; and, if the truth were known, had the same penalty been awarded all those guilty of that crime, his Majesty's navy would have been pretty well bereft of officers.

However, her vice-regal reign came to a close soon after the rebel flag fell from Fort St. Elmo. As one morning the royal standard rose in its place, the King embraced both Lady Hamilton and Nelson. They had been the leading factors in his restoration, but I thought his Majesty's arms rested for an unnecessary length of time about the fair Patroness of the Navy. Then, following the brilliant celebration in the Bay of Naples of the anniversary of the Battle of the Nile, the *Foudroyant* sailed away for Sicily. But the joyousness of it all was not destined to be unbroken.

Scarcely had we put out to sea when Jack Herbert, Nelson's orderly, entered the cabin where we were holding a merry conference, planning new pleasures for Palermo. The boy looked positively frightened as he called me aside.

"For God's sake, Captain Hardy," he whispered,

"come on deck. Caracciolo has returned to life!"

"Lad, you're mad!"

"Not a bit in the world, sir. Go and see for yourself. He's come up from the bottom and is swimming straight for Naples."

I hastened on deck, convinced that Herbert's reason was tottering. The morning was delightful. From abaft came a refreshing breeze. We were gliding swiftly over a smooth blue sea against which in the distance were silhouetted many sails of ivory whiteness. It was a day and a scene to make life seem well worth living. But near at hand was something fitted to destroy it all and fairly freeze one's marrow. On our quarter, floating in the water, yet half out of it, as though it were that of a living man, was a dead body, its head repulsively decomposed, yet, as the face was turned toward us by the action of the waves, instantly recognizable as that of the Prince. I stared at it for an instant in loathing and with just a tinge of superstitious awe, for indeed it seemed at first the dead returned to life. I was about to give orders that no information of this mystery be allowed to reach the Admiral's cabin, when a low-toned cry at my shoulder told me the precaution was useless. I turned to find Lady Hamilton hiding her eyes in her quivering

hands, the King and Nelson staring with compressed lips at the nameless thing in the water.

"Bring the ship to, Captain," muttered the Admiral. "God! We must have that floating into Naples!"

"You are the Nelson," said Majesty. "It would do me no more harm than half a dozen revolutions."

"How do you account for this, Hardy?" queried Nelson.

"I cannot. The body was heavily weighted when thrown into the sea. Some of the weights may have become unloosened, leaving just enough to hold the body in this frightfully natural position on rising to the surface."

One of the boats was quickly cleared for lowering. A minute later it sank down the side of the ship and with two men at the oars was seen spinning over the waves toward the body, which now was rapidly floating from us toward the bay.

Before we rejoined Lady Hamilton, who, unable to witness this grewsome pursuit, had gone below, the King requested that when the body should be recovered one of the ships be detached to take it to Naples, there to be given burial. Although the incident was not again referred to, I could see that it

clung with remorseful unpleasantness in the minds of Nelson and Lady Hamilton. Later I was to see it even more powerfully affect the Admiral.

It was only on the third day, when we made a splendid and impressive landing at Palermo, that my lady recovered her natural gaiety and charm. As we let go the anchor we saw the shores crowded with the entire population of Palermo, and on a landing-place, specially constructed for the occasion, stood the Queen, surrounded by those of her nobility that had shared her exile. Banners, colours, flowers, music were everywhere. One would have thought that, in place merely of having been restored to his own, the King had conquered a hostile and distant country and was returning in triumph.

His Majesty having landed, Lady Hamilton was the first to follow. She rushed into the outstretched arms of the Queen, and for a moment the two beautiful women remained in a close and silent embrace, the eyes of both brimming with joyous tears. Then the Queen's favourite released herself and, as the rest of us gathered about, with her old-time whimsicality exclaimed:

“Your Majesty, we have returned with a kingdom to present to you as a small token of our love!”

“May God bless you for all you have done. The

great gift you bring me makes my own seem slight indeed!"

So speaking, the Queen placed about the neck of Lady Hamilton a heavy chain of gold. From it was suspended a miniature of her Majesty framed in diamonds forming the words "Eternal Gratitude!"

From the reckless prodigality of our reception and the richness of the gifts that were showered right and left even before we had entered carriages for the palace, I realized that we were in for a season of almost barbaric rejoicing and splendid roistering. Men carry the memory of temporary prosperity to the grave, and once having known it are seldom able to regulate their lives according to any but the rules of the inexhaustible. Yet how quickly we all forget adversity. So now it was with the royal family and the court.

Their folly reached its height in a theatrical and extravagant celebration of the recovery of Naples and the restoration of the Bourbons. At dusk, cars on which beautiful maidens posed in allegorical representations passed through the city's streets preceded and surrounded by musicians playing upon the antique instruments of the Greeks. At the *fête champêtre* at night the palace grounds were aglow with coloured lanterns linking together all the trees;

swiftly changing colours played in the leaping fountains; and fairy-like boats floated on the waters, the oarsmen in ancient costume and their very oars a-glitter with tiny bulbs of light. Then, too, took place the parade of royalty and notables from the palace to a temple erected for the purpose on an island of the lake sparkling in the wooded park;—a piece of affectation intended by its splendour to duplicate the triumphal entry into Naples of Alfonso the Magnificent more than three centuries before. Every detail of that gorgeous affair was followed; the priests leading the way and closely followed by a prancing group of horsemen composed of the highest nobles; the officials of Palermo next, clad in scarlet; then the King's favourite horse, its covering being silk and cloth-of-gold, the charger led by two cavaliers who, in turn, were attended by some score of grooms, their liveries green cloth trimmed with black velvet. The King and Queen were seated in a triumphal car in which the Hamiltons and Lord Nelson were given places of equal honour with their Majesties. Coming next, somewhat to their own chagrin, were all the ambassadors other than Sir William, and running at their side their grooms clad in yellow velvet. Bringing up the rear was a glittering cavalcade of court officials gowned in crimson.

Arriving at the shore of the lake, we embarked in galleys and, lighted by perfumed torches and the twinkling oars, were swiftly guided to the portico of the temple. Here as a song of welcome burst from a hundred childish throats and while dancing girls bearing boughs of palm scattered flowers along their path, the monarchs advanced and seated themselves on their throne. At the same moment, between the pillars of the colonnade, alone separating us from the outer air, a dazzling display of fireworks was seen. The song ceased, and Nelson and Lady Hamilton were led to the foot of the throne, where the Queen crowned each with laurel. Then the King arose and approached the kneeling Admiral.

“My Lord,” he said, “to-day we celebrate and do honour to all you have done for Naples. It is not within our power adequately to repay these services, but we desire that you shall return to your noble country with some slight reminder that we are grateful. This sword, presented me by my illustrious father, Charles the Third of Spain, can be grasped by no more loyal or braver hand than yours. Accept it, then, from Ferdinand of Naples. The devoted island of Zante sends you still another sword and this truncheon. From our own hand pray receive the domain of Bronté; and, that you may have

a still closer tie to the land you have defended and the throne you have preserved, you have been created Duke of Bronté in Sicily and a Knight Grand Cross of the Sicilian Order of St. Ferdinand and of Merit."

Nelson, deeply moved, rose to his feet and kissed the extended hand of the King. When the cheers of the court and a burst of triumphant music from the colonnade had ceased, he replied to the speech from the throne.

"Your Majesty honours me too greatly," he said. "Yet the swords and truncheon I accept: the one will be dear to me as the gift of two brave sovereigns, the other as coming from a people for whom I have the deepest admiration. Knighthood in your noble order, too, I accept, since you deem me worthy of such companionship. But pardon me, Sire, if I crave permission to decline the domain and dukedom of Bronté. I have no right to a reward of such intrinsic value nor to enrolment in your ancient nobility of the Sicilies."

"How now!" cried the King. "Is it your wish, Lord Nelson, that your name alone should pass with honour to posterity and that I, Ferdinand of Bourbon, should appear ungrateful?"

"Do you persuade him!" whisperingly commanded the Queen, leaning toward Lady Hamilton.

She, ever prepared for the theatric, cast herself at Nelson's feet.

"My lord," she exclaimed, "I beg of you not to refuse. Can you not see that to do so would be selfish?—a quality I thought unknown to the victor of the Nile. You consider your own honour too much if you persist in refusing what the King and Queen feel to be necessary to the preservation of theirs!"

Thus reasoned with by so fair an advocate, at length the Admiral yielded. Well it was that he did so, for the time was coming when the revenue from this domain of Bronté would be sadly needed.

The ceremonies at the temple over, again the mainland was reached and the gaily attired throng scattered through the enchantments of the park and forest, not a soul among them caring that, as they thus made merry, the scaffolds of Naples dripped with blood and thousands groaned within her nauseous prisons.

Despite the honours showered upon her and upon her hero, I fancied that Lady Hamilton's eyes showed to-night a look of worry. I was little prepared, however, for the hint as to its cause which I received when, on unexpectedly meeting her and Mackinnon, Sir William's English banker at Naples, I heard his voice raised with almost angry energy.

“No, Lady Hamilton, it is impossible. Not another bill. Your demands of late have been beyond all reason. For the present they must cease.”

She clasped her hands with a movement of anguish, then abruptly turned from him into an alley of the park. Mackinnon bowed slightly on noting my approach and with a look of annoyance passed from sight in the opposite direction to that taken by Lady Hamilton. I was startled at this revelation. Why should she need money in such sums and with such frequency as to cause this stern ultimatum from the banker? I turned into the alley with some vague and foolish notion of offering her my aid, but had walked no great distance when I found the path blindly end at a wall surrounding that part of the palace park. I was about to turn and retrace my steps when I heard close at hand the menacing tones of Stuart.

“He’ll not let you have it! Well, then, damn you, get it elsewhere. Money I must and will have, and you’ll supply it, too, more generously than you have of late or else I’ll set all Naples agog. Here, perhaps you think my mere word can do you no great harm. How do you think this will sound!”

I saw him draw from his pocket a bit of paper which he read aloud, hastily and with sneering emphasis:

“To live without you is impossible. I love you to that degree that at this time there is not a hardship on earth, either of poverty, hunger, cold, death, or even walk bare-footed to Scotland to see you, but what I would undergo. I belong to you, Greville, and to you only will I belong. Nobody shall be your heir apparent. I would rather be with you starving than from you in the greatest splendour in the world.’”

“Where did you get that paper?”

Her voice was all but inaudible from horror.

“I thought that would have some effect. Thrice a mistress, a wife through threats, and now eager for a new world to conquer—a nice story for London. No matter where I got the letter, but I’ve been intimate of late with Greville, and your love letters will make pleasant reading for Lord Nelson, eh, my dear?”

“You cur!” I thought, “he’ll never see them!”

But my movement to rush toward him was arrested by a crash in the shrubbery. Nelson himself leaped across the intervening flower-beds and with a blow strengthened by contemptuous fury laid the scoundrel in the dust.

No word did the Admiral speak, nor did he so much as glance at Lady Hamilton until the fellow had struggled to his feet, his face cut and bleeding, his eyes blazing with impotent hatred. In silence

they for some moments gazed straight at one another. Then Nelson's command came cold and clear.

“Captain Stuart, report yourself under arrest immediately on board the *Vanguard*.”

He watched the sneaking figure until it disappeared among the trees. Then he turned with a look of longing and of pity toward Lady Hamilton.

“Nelson! You of all men thus to learn my shame! You!—before whom I had hoped to appear the good woman I would give my life always to have been! God is unkind to permit that you alone should have heard this thing, you whom I adore—ah, yes! that is it. I do, I do, and *that* I did not realise myself until this very moment. And now I am lower in your esteem even than before!”

She had fallen on her knees at his feet, her bowed head clutched by her hands. For any means of escape I would have exchanged all my earthly possessions. But I could not scale the wall against which I pressed, and to retreat two steps from it would bring me into their very presence. Nelson leaned and gently drew her to his side. Her head rested on his breast. When at last he spoke his voice was hoarse and broken.

“Hush, I beg of you. Do not and never again.”



"Nelson! You of all men thus
to learn my shame!"—*Page 178.*

reproach yourself, for—I love you, and I, too, never dreamed it till to-night!”

There was a long silence. Then, speechless, she slowly lifted to his haggard face her glorious eyes, now filled with tears. Their lips met. And I, at that moment, had in my heart no blame for either.

“Ah, Emma, God who is himself Love will understand and forgive ours. Surely, having brought us together, having for the first time revealed to me the real meaning of love, He cannot intend that I shall cast it aside.”

“But perhaps you will wish to cast it aside when you know all my history. But, dear, in all those years in London, of which you have heard a hint to-night, I was never told of such things as right and wrong. And throughout them all I never but once even imagined that I loved. I did love Greville, loved him, I know now, not as I love you but out of pure gratitude for his kindness in educating me, in giving me ideals to live for, in—but oh, it is shameful to tell you of these things!”

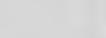
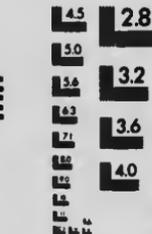
“I beg that you will not. And what do they matter now, what will they ever matter in the future—yours and mine?”

“Oh, much, much, Nelson. But I would rather you knew the truth and despised me, rather than



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that you should love me believing that I had loved others as I do you!"

"I know you have been unfortunate; that you have been my guardian angel, and that I love you. That is sufficient. We are alike in our strength and in our weakness. Many times in my life I have believed love found—once in France, again in America, and that it actually comes to me only after a marriage entered into under a third illusion is a fact that I swear shall not ruin the happiness of my future. And you mistake in thinking our pasts to greatly differ. All my life I have been poor and struggling, as you were in your childhood; but always I have had faith in my destiny, and I am certain you also have had in yours. I have attained the glory that I sought, and you have not only aided in its attainment but also in the eyes of the world actually share in it. There is something far higher and nobler and sweeter that we may share of which the world knows nothing. Circumstanced as we are, with the past that we have had, with the triumphs we have mutually gained, I defy the world to judge us by its conventionalities. In the sight of God we are——"

"Oh, as you love me, do not say that, do not say that! They said it to me so often when I was but

a child, and I, who did not care, did not even know what they meant. But you must not say it! For I love you, and I know what you mean and I know it is not true. Only this is true, dear, that I love you, that you can give me my heaven in this life, and that after death I care not. But, 'in the sight of God!'—oh, what difference? This that has swept over me is a love that cares for neither God nor man. Nothing counts now, neither honour nor duty—these are merely empty words to me!"

"Nay, I would not have you say that!" responded Nelson. "Although I have given such matters little thought, I know how seldom do the world's great loves go where they should. You can neither bid them go nor bid them stay. But in this realization of a new-found joy, I would have us forget neither honour nor duty—the honour of our country, duty to those to whom we are already bound. Should the day ever come when, before the world, you can be my wife, it will be well; till then we must be content in our mutual love, yet I verily believe with honest hearts we can also continue to make happy those to whom our duty is owing!"

My torture might have continued half the night had not the King at this moment appeared upon the scene with such suddenness that the two had scarcely time to assume a less tale-telling pose.

“ Ah, Bronté! ” smilingly cried his Majesty. “ I see you’re quickly adopting the manners of my nobility now I’ve made you one of them. But even on such a beautiful night and with so charming a companion, it’s hardly fair to deprive us of the two chief figures in our fête! ”

Nelson appeared too embarrassed for speech, but Lady Hamilton’s laughing response came instantly.

“ Nay, your Majesty is but jealous. Don’t deny it, Sire! Did you not on the *Vanguard* have a most careless habit of calling me your *grande maitresse*? Gad, Bronté, I had half a mind to take him at his word. And now that I did not, I suppose he thinks I ought to take the veil! ”

What an actress the woman was! And yet how ignorant, utterly failing to realise how frightful was her jest in association with the scene through which she had just passed. When they had gone I seated myself on a rustic bench and gave myself up to much unhappy thought. The die, then, was cast. It was hopeless that anything could now avert the tragedy. And, in accordance with my fears, during the months we idled in the folly of Palermo, the passion waxed and became reckless in its boldness, the talk of a court and nobility that looked upon it all as the most natural thing imaginable.

We were flirting when we should have been fighting; we were exchanging empty compliments with the ladies of Naples when we should have been exchanging shots with the sailors of France. Yet, when Nelson was superseded in the command of the Mediterranean, he seemed to have no idea that the lessening confidence of the Admiralty could be due to his conduct of affairs or his attitude toward Lady Hamilton, rumours of which were already circulating in London.

"I have serious thoughts of giving up the service," he passionately exclaimed one day. "Greenwich Hospital seems a fit retreat for me after being thought unfit for this command."

Yet there came no change in his manner of life. All else was swallowed up in love and gaiety. The court joined in our celebration of Lady Hamilton's birthday, and away we sailed for Malta, a thoughtless, merry crowd, the ambassadress our sovereign of frivolity. Always was she picturesquely gowned on that mad excursion; now in white dimity and a blue sash; again in Turkish fashion, ribbons tying the lace-trimmed sleeves in folds; or occasionally more gorgeous in white satin with India painting.

We gathered on the deck for idle morning promenades, the band playing joyously about two each

day and shortly thereafter the drums beating "The Roast Beef of Old England" to call us to dinner, which we washed down with champagne and a half-dozen other wines much loved by Lady Hamilton. Music again in the evening, songs, dancing, the cards and high play. And when Nelson's enchantress became dejected at the coming parting from her hero, Miss Knight, his poet laureate, whose versifying talent seemed bent on throwing a halo around these two, wrote a song of comfort which even I was idiot enough to sit on the moonlit deck and join in singing:

"Come, cheer up, fair Emma! forget all thy grief,
For thy shipmates are brave, and a Hero's their chief.

Look round on these trophies, the pride of the
main,
They were snatched by their valour from Gallia
and Spain.

"Behold yonder fragment: 'tis sacred to fame;
Midst the waves of old Nile it was saved from the
flame—
The flame that destroyed the new glories of
France,
When Providence vanquished the friends of blind
chance.

"Those arms the *San Joseph* once claimed as her
own,
Ere Nelson and Britons her pride had o'erthrown.

That plume, too, evinces that still they excel—
It was torn from the cap of the famed William
Tell.

“Then cheer up, fair Emma! remember thou’rt
free,
And ploughing Brittania’s old empire, the sea.
How many in Albion each sorrow would check,
Could they kiss but one plank of this conquering
deck!”

Chapter IX

As Another Saw It

Y impatience with the thoughtless festivities of the court and my angry sorrow at the culmination of Nelson's infatuation for Lady Hamilton so wore upon my health and spirits that I gladly welcomed Captain Berry when he came to relieve me of duties that had grown almost unbearable. I was appointed to the *Princess Charlotte*, and, while I had grave misgivings as to the state of affairs I was leaving behind, it was, on the whole, with a feeling of intense relief that I set sail for England.

Arrived in London, I could not for some time accustom myself to the life of the town, although 'twas but little changed since I last had delved into it. I felt almost a stranger as by day I strolled along Pall Mall, or at night watched rather than shared in the drinking, gaming and quarrelling at Almack's—Crockford not yet having dazzled us with his magnificent gambling palace. The Prince of Wales and Sheridan and Beau Brummell were still getting their ideal of life out of women and tailors

and wine cellars, and their imitators in the good old way still wined and dined at their unchanging haunts and sang indecent songs and occasionally lost a fortune in a night.

But these things interested me little. A sailor's life is something like that of a prisoner in that both are of necessity taken away from the artificial and the petty things of life to a quiet from which they return to be surprised at the disgust they feel for the affairs in which they once found their chief delight. So, in this reaction, I endeavoured to be as respectable as possible, going even the length of attending a fête given by the Princess Elizabeth at the Radipole Parsonage—quite a military and naval affair as I now recall it, a number of actors, Elliston being one, impersonating sailors, and the toasts beside those to "the King's good health and a long continuance," to her Majesty, the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York, being to Cornwallis and Admiral Nelson. But the childish simplicity of the affair—toyshops and a lottery, an open-air luncheon and a fellow arrayed as a Merry Andrew riding about seated on a donkey, being the chief attractions—wearied me, and, although feeling that perhaps 'twas well our ruling family could be content with such amusements, I could but compare it with the

life at the Neapolitan court. And this very comparison taught me how differently their Majesties of England would treat Nelson's moral transgressions should he continue his conduct after his return.

What with this revulsion against the purely reckless and a weariness at the dead-end respectable, it was natural and inevitable that I should find time hanging heavily on my hands. St. James Street, therefore, became a God-send, no small number of my hours being spent at Brook's Club, at the Cocoa Tree, Arthur's and Boodle's. But, for dining, I preferred White's, which then, I think, both as regards food and fashion, had a bit the best of Brook's. There one night I was about ordering a cut off the joint and some accompanying trifles when St. Vincent entered and joined me at the table. It was unnecessary to ask whom he meant when impatiently he exclaimed:

"Well, they'll be here before long."

"So? I have had no details since they left Italy."

"You know, of course, he's travelling with the Hamiltons?"

"That much, yes; and a pretty state of things it is."

"Isn't it? That woman has much for which to

account, including her husband's recall from a post he's ably filled for years—and, between ourselves, Nelson's return is little better than a recall. However, there was no stopping their coming together. Nelson wanted the *Foudroyant* as their conveyance. Keith refused it, unwilling to give even a tinge of sanction to the fair Hamilton's pretensions. True he offered a frigate, but of course they were all too high and mighty to accept so humble a vessel. Therefore, they started en route by land, making a sight of themselves, I'm told, in every town."

"Poor Lady Nelson!"

"You may well say so if she ever learns the details of this journey, and I presume the facts are still more harrowing since they left the Queen at Vienna."

"Unfortunate woman! I suppose that with this Maria Caroline passes out of my life. I liked her greatly. As a queen she deserved a greater sovereignty, as a woman a nobler love. Ah, St. Vincent, you'll think me romantic, but I bend over her strong, small hand and do her a last reverence. The gods have been unkind to her. I suppose history will all but forget her, yet she was a blending of Marie Antoinette and Catherine the Great fettered to a Punch and Judy court."

“That may be all very true, Hardy, but had she never lived Nelson would have been a happier man. She and her confounded Naples dragged him into this mess with Lady Hamilton. However, there she is at Vienna, and I think she’s through with Italy for good and all. But all this is of little moment to us now. The rest of my news is brief. Nelson and the Hamiltons travelled on to Prague, Dresden and Hamburg, and, although at all these there has been the wildest enthusiasm, everyone, I am told, notes that the Admiral acts the submissive captive and that Lady Hamilton is almost brazen in her triumph. Why, the whole disgraceful affair is like some travelling menagerie. They’ve probably left Hamburg by now, and any day are likely to be seen off Yarmouth.”

“Of course he’ll be given a glorious reception, but, damn it, the town talks of little else save his relations with the Hamiltons. Why, ’twas not an hour ago that I saw a bet offered and taken here that Lady Nelson will refuse to see him.”

“Where is she now?”

“In the country still—at the rectory, living alone with Nelson’s father. I really ought to run down there and see how matters are, but I hate the task.”

“Naturally. Yet, if you can undertake it, it may

be a Christian kindness to the poor woman, and perhaps, in the end, equally so to the Admiral. Gad, I hope he'll drop this miserable business when he's again in civilization."

"Amen! I'm no stickler for puritanism, but a forbidden love affair loses its only excuse for being when flaunted publicly. However, I have little hope of any change. Nelson's a fool where a woman's concerned. He never yet became intimately acquainted with one that he didn't fall in love. He can no more exist without the flattery of a woman's admiration than the throne could stand without the navy. Now that he has attracted the genuine passion of one of the most brilliant of living women, he's done for, for all time. Still, since you approve, I'll go down and see Lady Nelson, hoping for better things."

I carried out my determination the following day, and by the second afternoon had completed the hundred or so miles to Burnham Thorpe in Norfolk. The winter was backward, and it was almost spring-like when we pulled up in the little village. So cheerful was everything and so peaceful that I gained renewed hope as I strode along one of the only two streets of the place. I convinced myself that surely there would be a reconciliation—if the

term could be used when, as yet, there had been no open quarrel, whatever had been said by letter; all the wild Neapolitan days would be forgotten; the sturdy, honest air of old England would bring Nelson to his senses, and by his conduct he would strengthen his position as the idol of the nation.

A child directed me to the rectory, standing at the eastern end of the straggling village. I walked in that direction along the pleasant street, edged by fine old oaks and elms that half concealed the little cottages, each with its tiny garden front. The rectory, low, slantingly roofed, its windows attractively diamond-paned, its lawn well kept, and the whole, buried in splendid foliage, was quaintly picturesque; simple, yet, to my mind, so beautiful as to be a worthy birthplace for the greatest admiral in our history.

At the door I was courteously greeted by a feeble, white-haired man, suffering, as I could see, from partial paralysis and far advanced in years. I knew at once that I stood before the aged rector, Nelson's father. With some difficulty, for he was hard of hearing, I made myself known and asked for Lady Nelson. He gravely welcomed me and begged that I would enter and wait while he sent for her. She had gone, it seemed, as was her daily custom, to visit

the church at the other end of the village. Thither I insisted upon following her.

“If you go by the road,” said Mr. Nelson, directing me at the door, “you might pass each other. She always strolls back by the brook, which you’d better follow, though the way’s a trifle farther. And of course you’ll return with her, Captain Hardy? It’s long since I’ve had the opportunity of talking of my son with one of his companions. Remain beneath our roof, sir, as many days as you can stand our quiet life and you’ll be welcome. He’s coming home soon, they say?”

“Yes, he may be off Yarmouth now at any time. I’ll come back with pleasure, Mr. Nelson, and give you all my news of Italy.”

I took the path beside the pretty, murmuring brook, running past the rectory eastward to the sea. Alders and willows shaded it, and all about were pleasant meadows. In a few moments I saw, standing in the midst of cornfields, the unpretentious church with its casings of flint and stone. I unlatched the gate, walked up the hawthorne-bordered path and entered the open door.

Seated on a step in front of the crudely-fashioned pulpit was the form of a woman, her attitude bespeaking at once sorrow, weariness and an entire

absorption in her occupation—that of reading a number of letters scattered about her on the floor. I knew her to be Lady Nelson, although it was years since we had met. I stood some moments unnoticed. Then at last she let fall another bit of paper, raised a hand to her eyes and in doing so lifted also her head and saw me. The hand passed swiftly across her eyes, as though dashing away their moisture; she rose to her feet and faced me with resentful dignity. I advanced through the aisle, and as I neared her a sudden faint smile flashed over the dark countenance, although she paled a trifle even while thus greeting me.

“’Tis Captain Hardy,” she said quietly, but with genuine cordiality. “At first I did not know you. You’re very welcome, sir, for I suppose ’tis me you’ve come to see? I may be pardoned for deeming myself the sole possible attraction in our humdrum village.”

“Waving the fact that Lady Nelson would be an added attraction to London itself, you are, indeed, the cause of my journey. I’ve come partly to renew our old acquaintance, partly because the Admiral hoped I’d be the bearer of his best wishes.”

Her lips compressed for an instant, angrily and somewhat scornfully I thought, but she said nothing

to explain this evidence of feeling. On the contrary, her next words were kindly.

“On both accounts you’re welcome, Captain. Did you seek me at the rectory? Then, doubtless, you met his Lordship’s father. Poor man, he’s suffered greatly these last few years. The winters here aggravate his illness, and soon we shall be forced to seek a better air at Bath.”

“But surely you’ll postpone it until the Admiral’s arrival? That should be within the week, and you’re so close to Yarmouth—not thirty miles distant, is it?—that you should run over there with me and await his coming.”

She smiled, looking me straight in the eye, and there was the tinge of a sneer in the curling lip.

“You are very kind to suggest it, Captain.”

“You will go with me, then?”

“I thank you, no.”

“But, after three years’ absence——”

“Exactly, after three years’ absence. That is the point precisely. At Yarmouth he will be all but killed by the enthusiasm of his first welcome to England. Is it amid the clamour and distraction of such a time and place that after all these years a wife would wish to greet her husband? Recalling all the circumstances, can you wonder I have no desire our meeting shall be witnessed by a mob?”

“In that respect you are perfectly correct. An old bachelor like myself is liable to overlook such matters. But he will not be permitted to stop here en route to London. The King, the Admiralty, the people themselves, all will demand that he post there at once.”

“Then I’ll await him here until those official duties and frivolities are over.”

“I hope you will not. I trust that at least you’ll return with me to London. His wife must be among the first to greet him. There are many reasons why I urge this.”

“There is just one reason why you urge it.”

She had been gazing somewhat abstractedly out the window, but, in saying this, she turned fiercely, facing me, her shoulders squared, her head haughtily, angrily erect.

“Well,” I exclaimed desperately, fully aware now that she was far with the rumours from Naples and that further skirmishing was useless, “well, I suppose there is one reason of greater importance than the others. Is it not one that should urge you to hasten to him, smiling and affectionate, expressing your pride in his achievements, your happiness at his return?”

“Quite the contrary, I should say.”

“Perhaps so, Lady Nelson, if you are determined to believe all the lies that have been printed and whispered, and if, in consequence, you purpose enacting the rôle of the crushed and injured wife. But, believe me, the proper tactics now are boldness, laughter and love rather than weakness, tears and recriminations. Suppose, for the sake of argument, there has been a not very alarming bit of flame behind all this smoky scandal: then all the more reason why you should fight fire with fire.”

“You admit, then, as actually existing, this infatuation that has been the talk of Europe?”

“I admit nothing of the kind, but I beg of you that you will not allow your coldness and anger to drive him, in despair, into just that sort of distraction. As for the existing relationship, it has the hearty approval of Sir William Hamilton, a man of honour, and is the perfectly natural and innocent outcome of the services they have jointly rendered England and Naples. A close but necessary and official association has been tortured by the scavengers of the press into a criminal intimacy. Pardon me the rebuke, but they would not have dared do this had you realised your duty after the battle of the Nile and become your husband’s nurse at Naples.”

“In that charge, Captain, you are both unkind and incorrect. I would have gone to Naples, was anxious to go, and wrote him asking permission. He refused. I would gladly have been all to him I was after he lost his arm at Santa Cruz when for months he was in agony and I was his constant nurse.”

“Then I crave forgiveness. But again I urge that if you will not go to Yarmouth you will to London.”

“But imagine the humiliation of being forced to make the journey in order to meet a husband who is returning in company with a woman whose name, whether justly or not, for two years has been scandalously associated with his own! Is not this an affront he should have spared me?”

“He would have done so, I’m sure, had he realized the interpretation possible to place upon his action. But, though so wise a warrior, he is thoughtless and ignorant in many of the social niceties. In returning as he does he sees only the British Admiral in a matter-of-course companionship with the family of the British Ambassador. Believe me, you have heard more of these idle stories than has he. And, in London, you need not become intimate with the Hamiltons—may not be required even to meet them.”

There was a moment's silence.

"Is she very beautiful, Captain, as beautiful as they say?"

Oh, the woman of the question! I'll wager she had it on the tip of her tongue this last half hour.

"Beautiful? Yes, in a way," and I cudgelled my brain seeking all the imperfections possessed by Lady Hamilton. "But you know birth, like murder, will out, and hers shows in a certain coarseness of feature and carelessness of speech. She's growing stout, too, and her ankles always have been hideous. But were she perfect from head to foot, you would have no cause to worry. I heard Lord Nelson, in her presence, say that his life's happiest day was that on which you became his wife."

Her face flushed with pleasure.

"And when was it he said that?"

"On his fortieth birthday."

I realised instantly what a fool I had been to answer her so truthfully.

"Ah!" It was a sigh of disappointment, breathed with a slight, slow nodding of the head.

"More than two years ago. Do you think he could say it now?"

"I'm sure of it. Come to London with me and hear him repeat it to yourself."

“ Oh, well,” a little wearily, “ later we’ll talk of that. For the present, let’s return to the rectory for a cup of tea.”

She resumed her seat, gathering the scattered letters. I stooped to aid her, and saw that all were Nelson’s—some of them faded with age.

“ You see how foolish I’ve been,” she said, colouring and looking up at me, almost shyly. “ I tried to combat rumour by the words of his own letters. I’ve found no great encouragement, yet when a man says, as he does here”—and she looked longingly at the letter held in her hand—“ ‘ Without you I care not for this world. These are my present sentiments. God grant they may not change ’—when thus once he wrote, the wife cannot be blamed if she cries, ‘ God grant they *have* not changed!’ He is not demonstrative, nor ever was,” she continued, picking up the last of the letters and glancing at it thoughtfully. “ Yet here is something that, when we were only promised to each other, assured me of the depth of his feeling. ‘ His Royal Highness,’ he said, speaking of Prince William Henry, ‘ tells me he believes I am already married, for he never saw a lover so easy or say so little of the object of his regard. When I tell him I certainly am not, he says then he is sure I must have a great esteem for you, which

is not what is vulgarly called love. He is right. My love is founded on esteem, the only foundation that can make the passion last.' ”

Poor woman! How utterly she failed to grasp the wretched truth contained in that paragraph from which she sought consolation. Esteem, indeed! I have known something of love in my sixty-nine years of life, and I know that if a man, only a few days betrothed as was Nelson when he wrote that letter, shows and feels for his promised bride nothing more fierce and passionate than esteem, it augurs ill for happiness or constancy. Now I realized, as I before had not, that Nelson had never known for his wife that great love which every man may have for one certain woman in all the world. I felt that, for him, that one certain woman had been found, too late, in Lady Hamilton. But such thoughts I tried to banish, and did not, of course, permit them to be suspected by Lady Nelson.

While we returned along the path beside the brook, I had an opportunity better to study her appearance and guess as to the inevitable conflict and comparison with Lady Hamilton. For one thing, I knew Lady Nelson to be five years older than her rival, and I was forced to admit that she looked still older; for, while Lady Hamilton was uncomfortably

adding flesh, her frame and height bore it well, and at the same time her face retained its former youth and brightness. Lady Nelson, on the contrary, although her hair remained unstreaked with grey, showed her Creole blood in the greater fading of features and complexion, and her over-plumpness ill became her lack of height. Her eyes were dark and somewhat pretty, but I saw detracting crows-feet, and the beautifully-shaped hand and tapering fingers, too, were slightly wrinkled. Doubtless she was sweet and home-like, if a bit out of fashion in gown and head-dress; but, in brief, I saw at once how she must suffer when placed beside the dashing, brilliant and beautiful Hamilton.

That evening as we three—Edmund Nelson, his son's wife and I—sat around the fire, I noted another fact that gave more legitimate excuse for Nelson's conduct. Not once did she mention his achievements nor appear to take any pride or pleasure in his victories. The Nile had no meaning to her. Through her veins his daring sent no thrill. When to the father, whose aged eyes glowed with enthusiastic interest, I had narrated some deed of personal bravery and recklessness, she impatiently exclaimed:

“Why such foolhardiness? How often have I told him to leave boarding to mere captains!”

And so, having mixed the rector and myself another punch, steaming hot, she gravely bade us good night and retired.

Leave glory and bravery to captains, eh? Here was a simple and, after a fashion, a loving woman who would have been content had her husband settled down for life in this tiny village and never cruised again; a woman incapable of joy in the world's applause or in the making of a deathless name. Lady Hamilton may have been theatric, even insincere at times, but her dazzling enthusiasm, her appreciation of great deeds, her adoration of heroism, made her the ideal of which Nelson had dreamed throughout his life. I did not realize this until that night in the quiet of the rectory at Burnham Thorpe.

"And now," said the old gentleman, after Lady Nelson had gone and our pipes were lighted, "tell me of the boy and of the great affair at Aboukir Bay. I've read much of it, of course, but you're the first I've met who was actually present there."

So, until well into the night, I sat and again fought the battle over. Here, at least, was no indifferent auditor. He, in turn, told me of Nelson's unflinching devotion as a son and of how upon the rector he had settled a goodly share of the income

from his estate of Bronté. It was only as we were parting that he said, hesitatingly:

“I take it, sir, that these rumours regarding the wife of Sir William Hamilton are overdrawn?”

Thus again was I forced to go over the details of politics in Naples, and by plausible distortions to persuade him that the friendship was platonic, the intimaey official and necessary.

“You may depend upon it, sir,” came his thoughtful comment when I had finished, “there has been nothing criminal in this. Men of his rank and achievements are inevitably more exposed to temptation than are those living the normal and uneventful life. But my son would never shame his name nor break the heart of so good a woman as his wife. I only wish”—and, shaking his head a bit, he gazed thoughtfully in the fire, “I only wish our Fanny took a keener interest in what he’s done for England. She’s proud enough to be ‘my Lady,’ but she wouldn’t care if the whole navy sank to-morrow, Horatio alone remaining. But in one woman we cannot expect quite all the virtues.”

And yet, the following morning as I dressed, it came to me how much this poor woman had undergone and how pardonable she was for failing to appreciate naval triumphs even of world-wide fame,

or even those of which her absent husband was the central figure. I had finished breakfast before Mr. Nelson's infirmity permitted him to speak, his racking cough reaching me almost unbrokenly at the table. From the maid waiting upon me I learned that this was an every morning torture. Tied to such a wreck as this, daily a repetition of this mind-harrowing and body-earing experience, buried in this dead village of a few score souls, how could one expect the clash of cutlasses, the sound of shot tearing through the sails, the roar of cannon, the cheers for the victor—how could this affect a woman thus situated unless, indeed, to add to her impatience and discontent, and to arouse jealousy at the imagined scenes of rejoicing in which she could have no share?

Especially did I reflect on this after we had taken coach for London—for I at length persuaded both the rector and Lady Nelson to accompany me there and await the Admiral's arrival. I felt confident that the good, even if unspectacular, qualities of his wife, her purity and devotion, her care for the aged invalid, would show the Admiral his duty, and that bravely, even if not gladly, he would perform it. Since then I've realized that while 'tis not given to every man to hold for his wife a deathless love, the

words of Nelson at Trafalgar apply not alone amid the sound of battle, for "England expects every man to do his duty" at the hearthstone as well as on the quarterdeck. So I went up to London hopeful, almost confident, that affairs would right themselves.



Chapter X

"All Your Love or None"

E had been in town some days, and I was seated at my customary afternoon window at White's, debating whether to call on Lady Nelson or postpone that daily function until evening, when a commotion in the street aroused me from my reverie. Looking out I found that seemingly all the world was informed of news of which I alone was ignorant—that Nelson had arrived. I had learned that, two days before he had landed at Yarmouth, but I had not thought he would reach London until the morrow. Here he was, however, Miss Knight and the Hamiltons—confound them—in the carriage with him, the horses removed and the cheering crowd dragging the vehicle through St. James Street. The Admiral glanced up at the club window, saw me standing there and waved a greeting. Where he intended going I could not imagine, and sent a messenger to inquire. As he failed to return it was evident that the excitement had proved too alluring for the fellow, and I was about to call for my cloak and go forth myself when



St. Vincent entered. His face was ugly with rage, and for a moment he could not speak.

“ Oh, the fool! ” he ejaculated at last. “ By God, Hardy, if it were anyone but Nelson there’s no word I’d find too strong to use.”

“ What has he done now? ”

“ The worst, the most unbelievable thing. He’s taken the Hamiltons straight to Nerot’s Hotel, where you quartered Lady Nelson, and there, as his first act, forced her to meet them.”

“ Oh, that’s impossible! ”

“ But it isn’t. It’s true. Confound him, I was there.”

“ He must be mad.”

“ Mad or criminally thoughtless. The most ignorant tar that ever swabbed a deck would have known better, would have cut off a hand before he’d have been so cruel.”

“ Does he for a moment imagine that his wife intends calmly to permit and approve his public attitude toward Lady Hamilton, that London will tolerate what was thought conventional in Naples? Why this is the crowning shame, St. Vincent.”

“ It is. I was never present at a scene that more deeply hurt me. Lady Nelson seemed turned to stone. The shock of such an unexpected and un-

heard of affront must have been frightful. And Nelson, mark you, appeared indignant that she was not more enthusiastic over his friends, nor more affectionately demonstrative over himself! Affectionate, indeed!—in public after years of absence, and with that disreputable crowd about them!”

“Who were there?”

“All the titled scum, led by that old sinner the Duke of Queensberry and his inseparable Lord William Gordon—as unclean a gathering as ever welcomed a hero. Is he blind of both eyes now? Can't he see that all these reprobates were brought there solely by the gossip about Lady Hamilton's character? God! A fine lot to meet the innocent country wife and the decrepit old parson-father!”

“For all that, I suppose I must go over and join them.”

“I would not, were I you. The whole incongruous crowd is to dine together, and you'd be pained at the sight of them. Everyone is on edge at the smouldering fire that must sooner or later break out. Catch Nelson alone to-night, if you can. You'll find it less uncomfortable.”

I took St. Vincent's advice, talked with the Admiral alone for some moments that evening, being careful not to touch upon his personal affairs, and

then returned to my apartment to toss about through half the night and curse myself that I should thus allow another's folly to upset my peace.

Two days later being Lord Mayor's Day, I was obliged to attend the official dinner with Nelson, whose carriage was dragged by the people from the top of Ludgate Hill along Cheapside and so to the Guildhall. Although rather fatigued after all the formalities of the occasion, I was persuaded to become one of the evening's party at Covent Garden, the others, of course, being Lord and Lady Nelson, Sir William and Lady Hamilton, Miss Knight and the usual satellites.

It was a triple bill that night, and as poor a one as ever I sat through at either of the royal theatres. This was to have been expected, for two of the pieces were hurriedly written affairs prepared expressly to celebrate the return to England of the hero of the Nile. Such trifles are always without the slightest merit, and I was not surprised that the dull performance, added to the strained relations existing within our little party, soon put several of us in anything but good humour.

The bill opened with the comedy entitled "Life"—about the weakest ever perpetrated by Reynolds, and that is saying much. The plot is immaterial,

but it was filled with dissipated husbands, separated families and attempted seductions. 'Twas a fair sample, in those days, of the depraved taste of the town. The women were not of the cleverest—I recall Miss Chapman, Miss Murray, and Mrs. St. Ledger—but the men in the cast were more acceptable, and I leaned over to chat of them with Lady Nelson, hoping to remove her thoughts from the brazen manner in which the Admiral was devoting himself to Lady Hamilton.

“I take it that you have seen little of the play-houses of late,” I ventured, in a desperate attempt at opening the conversation.

“Almost nothing, Captain. For nearly three years I have been practically widow, nun and exile. As a residence, Burnham Thorpe rectory is but ill adapted to see or even hear much of London’s pleasures.”

“Then you know none of our favourites on the stage to-night?”

“Not even by name.”

“Let me instruct you. Nowadays it’s unpardonable if one cannot talk glibly of the mummers. The Prince has set us the example in that. As for the King, poor old soul, I don’t believe he knows one player from another, although he’s very fond of

coming here. I've seen the fellows in the pit, on a hot night, remove their coats despite his presence and bandy words with him as though he were a coachman. Even in Naples we had more royal dignity than that."

"You had several advantages in Naples, I believe, Captain. But as to these actors?"

"Well, there's Emery playing the part of Craftley. He was fiddling away in the orchestra here until two years ago, when he suddenly blossomed forth on the stage. There enters Lewis as Sir Harry Torpid—he's been here for nearly a quarter of a century and is the stage manager of the theatre. He's a droll fellow. He once asked Jim Smith, another actor, how old he was, and, upon learning that he was thirty, Lewis dolefully replied: 'Stick to that, my dear boy, and you'll do. I myself was thirty once. I was fool enough to let it go by, and have regretted it ever since.'"

Thus I rattled on about Munden, his ignorance and genius, about Fawcett and Farley and others in the cast, and thought up all the old anecdotes that we had been familiar with for years—although 'twas no easy matter to find any fit for the ears of this country-bred parson's daughter. Then when "The Mouth of the Nile," the second piece of the evening, went on, I tried to arouse some mutual enthusiasm

over what the bills had said would be "a representation of the glorious First of August," but I failed utterly. Ye gods! What a "representation"! Not that it greatly mattered. Lady Nelson, I believe, heard never a word said on the stage or by myself: she had ears only for the conversation of the infatuated and recklessly cruel couple back of us. And as for the Admiral, probably he never would have realised that his victory was being pictured behind the footlights had not the yells of the audience demanding his appearance brought him to earth and forced him to bow his acknowledgments from the front of the box. Lady Hamilton— Well, even then, I had a grain of compassion for the misguided woman as I compared her present position with that which she had held on the night I first accompanied her to the Teatro San Carlo in Naples. Here was no audience to worship her had she leaned above them asking renewed cheers for her hero.

And so Townsend and the others in the cast, including Dibdin, who had written the wretched affair, dragged their weary way through the piece, and then again came an intermission. Lady Nelson's agitation had gradually increased until by now her anger and shame at her husband's neglect of herself and open devotion to her rival had reached a pitiably nervous pitch.

Lady Hamilton arose as, prior to the afterpiece, the curtain closed over the stage. Lady Nelson appealingly stretched out a hand to the Admiral and addressed him in little above a whisper.

"My Lord, I am not well. This atmosphere is insufferable. Will you take me home?"

"Bronté!" called Lady Hamilton from the entrance to the box, and addressing him by his Sicilian title the better to keep the old Neapolitan days ever in his mind. "Bronté, shall we not stroll a bit between whiles? I see a score of my adorers making in our direction, and my only safety is in flight."

The Admiral may or may not have heard his wife's low-toned request. But, at all events, without a word or a look in her direction, he turned to join the other, waiting in the corridor. Lady Nelson tremblingly struggled to her feet. Despite her weakness and embarrassment, her dark eyes blazed with fury, for a score of people were watching the box with a full comprehension of the state of things.

"My Lord," she cried, "how dare you thus insult me?"

Nelson turned. Positively, for a moment he stared at her bewildered, as though understanding her outburst not at all.

"Insult?" at last he echoed questioningly.

“Surely there is no insult in my acceptance of dear Lady Hamilton’s invitation.”

“I am sick of hearing of ‘dear’ Lady Hamilton,” came the quick, angry response. “The time has come when you must give up either her or me. Make your choice here and now, my Lord.”

“Take care, Fanny, what you say. I love you sincerely, but I cannot forget my obligations to Lady Hamilton, and I would be ungrateful if I spoke of her with anything but affection and admiration.”

“You love me sincerely, do you? But not undividedly, that is plain. I demand all your love or none. If none, then I demand at least decency in public. Will you or will you not leave this woman long enough to see me home?”

“How dare you talk and act in this manner before all London!” The Admiral strode forward, grasped her fiercely by the wrist and dragged her into the shadow of the box. “Either as a public man or private citizen you must understand I wish nothing undone that I have done. What complaint have you to make of my conduct? I am accountable only to my country and my God. By what right do you demand that I shall turn my back on friends who have shared with me the dangers and the glories of the past two years?”

He threw her from him with a gesture more of

despair and wretchedness than anger. But she, swaying for a moment, turned as if to seek my supporting arm, clutched convulsively at her breast and fell prone at her husband's feet. Nelson gave a cry of alarm and stooped as if to lift her head. Then, with an impatient movement, he stood erect.

"Captain, where is Miss Knight?" he asked in a cold and perfectly calm voice.

"Visiting Lady Minto's box with Sir William. I'll call her."

"Do so, if you please."

I walked hurriedly around the tier, passing Lady Hamilton chatting in the corridor with old Queensberry and a half dozen other disreputables. Returning with Miss Knight, we found Lady Nelson somewhat recovered and seated in a corner, the Admiral standing motionless where I had left him. It was impossible to say whether either had spoken during my absence. Miss Knight went at once to the aid of her Ladyship, and as she did so Sir William entered with words of sympathy.

"Let me be of service here, Lord Nelson," he said. "I'm weary of this crowd, and 'twill be a pleasure if you'll permit me to escort Lady Nelson to your hotel. Miss Knight will, I know, be good enough to accompany us. There's no earthly reason why either you or Lady Hamilton should leave until

the performance is over. 'Twould disappoint the audience, too, should you do so."

"You are very thoughtful, Sir William."

"Your husband's departure is not necessary, is it, Lady Nelson? 'Twas only a passing faintness, eh?"

"Nothing more. As to Lord Nelson, I have already told him he may remain—if he chooses."

Her meaning was lost upon the diplomat.

"That's well," he said. "So it's arranged. No trouble, I assure you, Bronté. I'm glad to get away. Growing old, I'm afraid, and there'll be the usual crowd to greet on Grosvenor Square to-night. So I'll rest for it a bit. You'll be on hand?—and you, too, Captain Hardy, you know you're always welcome. Now, ladies, are we ready? It's an awful night outside, but I think we can weather it."

We stood there silent for a moment after their departure. Nelson appeared about to enter into some justification of his conduct, but evidently thought better of it and strode without a word into the crowded corridor. I was in no humour for further conversation with anyone, and certainly not anxious to sit through "The Deserter of Naples," the afterpiece announced. I took my cap and cloak and, without adieux to any in the throng, descended the stairs and plunged into the fog outside.

Chapter XI

A Foggy Night at the Cheshire Cheese



LEFT the theatre saddened and disheartened. After this public scene, in which Lady Nelson had revealed her feelings to all present save that thick-headed dotard, Sir William, I feared the end had come. Surely Nelson and his wife would separate, and possibly he might now go even so far as to take Lady Hamilton entirely from her husband's roof. Things were bad enough as they had been, but this! What world-wide shame for the darling of our navy, what disgrace for old England itself! Already the press was sufficiently maddening in its insinuations, but, if discretion and secrecy were quite thrown to the winds, to what lengths would not the contemptible journalists of Paris go—aye, and not a few in London. I think I have already shown that in many ways I respected and even honoured Lady Hamilton, but at that moment I would have given much had she never crossed the path of Nelson.

Once outside Covent Garden the weather did not greatly lessen my bad spirits. Practically all my

life, when not at sea, has been spent in London, but such a combination of fog and a disreputable something that might have been snow in any other climate, such a conspiracy of the elements as the town was cursed with that night, I had never known before. Seemingly I had taken but two steps when I was completely lost. My face dripped with the snow that had become but dirt in its career through fog, and the latter was so dense that I could not see my hand when placed before my face. I appeared to be the only idiot that had ventured on the street—at all events I collided with none, although scraping disastrous acquaintances aplenty with lamp-posts and others of that ilk. To discover a cab was out of the question, and I had commenced to think that thus I must pass the night when the door at my right was slightly opened, and in the outcoming ray of light I saw a head thrust forth to ascertain the outer conditions—doubtless the better to enjoy the warmth and coseyness within. But it was only after I had laid a detaining hand on the door and had entered that I realized that by chance I had stumbled into the snug and familiar tap-room of the Cheshire Cheese.

The place was well filled, all the papers were in hand and the tables surrounded by merry groups of

drinking, eating and smoking guests. But, being known to the host, a waiter, though with some difficulty, doubled up a number of less esteemed patrons and gave me a corner to myself. I was too contented to ask myself how I had managed to wander from Fleet Street, where now I realised I must have been, blindly finding my way through the alley and court to this most welcome and welcoming shelter. I looked about with an honest joy that even Goldsmith and Dr. Johnson would have envied could they have joined me in their favourite corner. I would not, in exchange for gold and precious stones, have consented that the low ceiling be raised an inch; nor could I have parted with a single one of the heavy, dark old rafters. I wanted mightily to cross over and stand legs apart and back to the old fireplace where the cheerful flames licked the humming kettle hanging above. With happy memories of the past within these walls, with a glass of rare old wine before me and an atmosphere all about speaking of that same good liquor, is it to be wondered at that I forgot my ill-humour?

But I soon saw that the fog had driven in a more motley crowd than would normally be tolerated, and was quite aware that charity alone prevented several from being forcibly ejected. Two in an ad-

joining booth seemed distinctly of this class, and, although I saw not a few familiar figures at near-by tables, I was in no mood to join them and found momentary distraction in playing eaves-dropper to these shabby neighbours. Shabby they were indeed, their clothes scarcely hanging on their bones. Flesh they had little, and that they were becoming acquainted with actual hunger was shown by the way they surreptitiously picked from the table and greedily ate its few scattered cracker crumbs. I thought I detected about them something of the proverbial air of "better days," but the waiters glanced suspiciously in their direction and one even took from them their newspapers without so much as "by-your-leave," and handed the journals to other guests. I had not long listened before the carelessness of the one and the bitter irritability of the other would have amused me sufficiently to take from me for the moment my own forebodings had not that already been done by the good cheer of the place. Nor had I been long enough returned to England, after all those months in Naples and Sicily, not to find novelty in their conversation.

Even a more inexperienced man than I would soon have grasped the fact that they were sharpers out of luck—and freshly out of jail as well, and

eager for a victim. While they discussed in earnest what they would eat could they but pay, it required no magician to understand their meaning when they spoke of the pleasure involved in "plucking a goose!" But at length the merrier of the two assumed a more hopeful tone.

"Damme, let's cheer up," he exclaimed, yawning from sheer hunger, I verily believe, and stretching both arms and legs to their extreme. "The Lord will provide. You see, I'm still the parson's son."

"Be so, and welcome, but for God's sake drop the sermon now."

"Good. But as fools and their money are soon parted, let's out and find a fool."

"Well, curse it, while I'm at hand you need not go far. And as for going out in to-night's storm, much good that would do us. I'll stay here and starve mid plenty."

"Do mine eyes deceive me? My misanthropic friend, you do not deserve this good fortune. Allah is Allah! Doubter, turn and look. Unless my reason totters on her throne, our fool is come."

I glanced in the direction indicated and from the appearance of the new arrival judged that the sharper indeed was right. He was the typical, old-fashioned country squire, well advanced in years,

short of stature but fairly round bellied, dressed with something of rural richness. Evidently despite the fog he had found a conveyance, for he stood quarrelling at the door, threatening with his cane and under the driver's nose snapping his fingers to emphasize his far from politely chosen words. In some manner, however, the dispute was finally adjusted and he paid the bill. Turning to the company within, all the eccentric ferocity of his face vanished in a broad and jovial grin as he glanced about from table to table. Several facts were plain—that he was one of the best-hearted men in the world, that at the present moment, being something more than half seas over, he was quite satisfied with himself, and that the honest fellow was in town for a good time and imagined himself to be having it.

“Stirrup and snaffle!” he exclaimed, and at these first words his pet weakness was made known. “What a crowd! By the sacred dash-board, no seat here! Oho, I see a place, doubtless saved expressly for me. Some one told 'em I was coming.”

Followed by the amused smiles of the company he strutted somewhat unsteadily through the tap-room.

“Gentlemen, do I disturb you?” with much politeness he inquired, halting at my neighbours'

booth. Not wishing him to fall into such dangerous companionship, I was about to call him to a seat beside myself, but already it was too late. He was received by the sharpers with ill-disguised satisfaction.

“Not at all, sir,” responded the irritable one, now assuming the air of a cheerful host. “You are, I may say, a welcome addition, for we are strangers here. You, I perceive, are of London.”

“I cannot blame you for your error, sir. My manners, in fact, smack somewhat of the town where occasionally I come to have a fling. True, I get the gout for it. But, by gad, gentlemen, it’s worth it. I don’t complain but take my steps and pay the piper well. My home, however, is in Staffordshire and nowhere in England will you find such sport. ’Tis I who say it, who, perhaps, should not, but my stud contains the best the country boasts.”

“We are devoted to every form of sport.”

“You are? Good! We shall get on. By Jove, we’ll spin a glass. Tut, tut, you can’t refuse. What is it? A drop of Hollands, wine, a sup of spirits? Fellow! Hey! Come here, we’re parched. Now, what shall it be?”

A punch was suggested, the honest squire ordering it to be made strong and of the best rum, excus-

ing his thirst by the announcement that the day marked the anniversary of his birth. Having congratulated him, one of the hypocrites—and despite the fact that such they were, the fellows still amused me, confessed regretfully that, suffering cruelly from the gout, he seldom permitted himself to drink.

“And my young friend,” he continued, “before the evening’s over will, I fear, have too much; so ’tis my double duty to restrain him by my good example. But if you wish it, if you still insist——”

Of course the countryman did insist and, in paying, displayed an amount of gold that plainly made the rascals think their troubles now were over. Where from sheer ennui I had heretofore kept an eye upon them, I now thought it best to do so for the safety of the coin. Its owner gave his name as Tobias Hasset, and his companions completed the mutual introduction.

“Allow me!” said the merrier of the two, “to present my friend—for a friend indeed is Captain Royden, late of the Royal Artillery, as you doubtless know.”

“And I,” completed the Captain, “present with pleasure my young ward, the Honourable Harry Stanhope, son of that distinguished churchman, the Lord Bishop of Bristol.”

Toby, evidently impressed by the quality of his new acquaintances, at once proposed a toast: "May the hoofs of Fortune's palfrey cast her golden horse-shoes of good luck where all my friends may find them."

The bishop's son produced a wretched-looking snuff-box, the appearance of which was fully atoned for in Toby's eyes by the Captain's explanation that it had been made from a helmet once worn by Julius Cæsar and presented to his friend by the late Duke of Not. The squire reverently fingered a pinch, although some glimmer of sense caused him to murmur that, "'Twas odd he failed to recall His Grace of Not!"

The Captain launched forth upon a eulogy of the charming character of the Bishop's son and of his winning ways. Of the actuality of the latter quality I myself had no doubt.

"His maternal grandmother," continued the retired officer, "has just died, leaving him a bequest simply ridiculous in its proportions."

"As true as gospel," muttered the Honourable Harry, who had risen and was standing by my curtain seeking a waiter. Upon the reluctant appearance of that functionary he was asked in a low tone for a pack of cards.

“A shilling in advance, then,” was the disdainful response. “I know you two!”

The Honourable Harry tenderly deposited the coin in the outstretched hand.

“Dear grandmama,” he said, not noticing my presence, and tossing an airy kiss toward the disappearing wealth, “your legacy departs. Your spendthrift Harry squanders it on cards. You knew he would. That’s why he got no more.”

Returning to his seat he found the others again engaged in talk of horses, a conversation in which he joined by the remark that they had once been his “hobby.” Toby was becoming almost incoherent as well as a decided nuisance to the other guests, who no longer smiled at his jovial mood. His cane continuously thumped the floor and table, and he emphasized his words by poking a stubby finger in his companions’ ribs. To the protests that came from various quarters of the room he paid not the slightest attention. Started on the topic that was his craze, there was now no stopping him, although the arrival of the cards gave us a moment’s freedom from his eloquence. The Captain assumed an air of surprise at sight of the pasteboards.

“I had quite forgot!” he exclaimed. “Yes, we ordered them some time since but your conversa-

tion, Mr. Hasset, drove them from my mind. The evening's yet long before we can decently show up at Lady Hamilton's rout. Damned to these late hours of fashion. My army training, sir——”

“Yes, yes, I see,” ejaculated the sympathetic Toby.

I had somewhat lost interest in the deceptions of the sharpers and the horsey slang of the countryman, but the mention of Lady Hamilton's name renewed my attention. Could the rogue have hit upon it by chance? I continued to listen, hoping to answer the question. The Captain was again speaking.

“We stopped in here because 'twas early. These absurd costumes we've assumed are due to the fact that it's a masquerade affair. Harry goes disguised as a poor young man, while I'm his tutor. You perceive the jest? My friend's valet is a wit. I thought he'd die of laughter while he helped us dress to-night. Come to think on't, Squire, damned if I don't procure a bid for you. Lady Hamilton denies me nothing.”

“Suppose you join the modest game we were about to play,” broke in the other and interrupting Toby's stuttered gratitude. Evidently he thought the politeness was needlessly long drawn out for such an easy victim.

“I will, indeed, even if it costs a farm.”

“Oh, this is merely to pass the time,” protested the Captain as they arranged themselves anew about the table. “Therefore shilling points—more I refuse.”

“Now, old miser,” exclaimed the younger man, addressing the Captain, “open your purse strings.” But to this appeal was given a firm and virtuous refusal.

“Put up no stakes, Mr. Hasset. We’ll settle later. To carry out our jest in artistic fashion we brought no money, but they know us here.”

“And that’s no lie. Twice he has spoken the truth to-night. Soon I shall cease to recognize my pal.”

The Bishop’s son had not, it is true, audibly made that last remark, but I could plainly read it in his merry eye and not unpleasing face. And as ’twas a fact they were known, it was the landlord’s duty to refuse them cards, if not actually to eject them from the place. Certainly I was not called upon to interfere even to save the countryman; and, now that I was satisfied the pretended captain had spoken at boastful random in using the name of Lady Hamilton, I again lost interest. But I noted that, as the game was started, Toby gave a parting word to his pet weakness:

“Don't forget you're to have a look at my horses. Come to my place at any time and welcome.”

A gentleman at an adjoining table turned impatiently.

“Sir,” he said, “if you'd oblige us, in God's name go there now.”

In turning he had discovered me in my corner, and, in quite a different tone, called out: “Come and join us, Hardy. In heaven's name, why are you moping there alone?”

I could not resist the old-time heartiness of the voice, for it was that of jovial Walter Scott, and I walked across and joined his merry party. Around the table were seated Bob Southey, just back from Portugal, as handsome as and not unlike poor Shelley; Tom Moore, who was making a pretence of preparing for the law at the Middle Temple, but whose voice and verses were causing him to spend most of his time in London drawing rooms; and Tom Campbell, then over from Germany, but later to see our ships off Copenhagen and give us that splendid war song, “The Battle of the Baltic.” They were bright fellows all, even then, and I was quite willing, on the whole, that they should draw me from the melancholy mood that had again crept over me.

But this was not to be. Greetings were scarcely over and Scott had barely finished explaining that he was down from Edinburgh seeking some antiquarian information at the British Museum, when Lord St. Vincent entered from another room flourishing a newspaper and pale with rage. Seeing us, he strode over and threw the paper on our table.

"Have you seen these lies!" he exclaimed. "Such a sheet is a disgrace to England. Why is it not excluded from every respectable tap-room in London?"

"What new uncleanness is the feast to-day?" queried Scott.

"Another batch of lies about the Admiral, of course."

"But cannot such victories as the Nile shield him from these scurrilous lampoons?"

"It seems not," said Campbell. "Yet when Nelson first returned, this very sheet, to advertise itself, hysterically advocated every imaginable performance, parades, arches, subscriptions, gifts of plate, a house——"

"Oh, yes, a house," interrupted Moore. "Doubtless they gave him one of glass, having in mind the future possibilities of stones. Now they're flinging them."

“ But what’s the new sensation, my Lord? ”

“ The story is that Nelson’s tactics were at fault! ”

“ Well,” said the irrepressible Moore, “ ’tis true they were all at sea.”

“ Peace, rascal,” commanded St. Vincent. “ Another was the real hero of the Nile; the French blew up their ships and killed themselves; Nelson deserves no credit there at all, should long ago have been degraded for disobeying orders—think of that!—and so on, and so on through a page of atrocious insult.”

“ And this of our dear old Nel, whose every fibre binds his very soul to England! ” I spoke excitedly, for the outrage of the attack came strongly home to me. “ ’Tis needless for me to defend him to any of you here. You know his story as every Briton does by heart. The whole world stands in awe of this pride and hope of our service. I know him to have the heart of a lion, yet he’s as gentle as a lamb. At Santa Cruz he gave his country an arm, at Corsica an eye; he has given not only half his eyes and half his arms, but all his heart.”

Moore leaned across the table and grasped my hand. “ That’s well said, Hardy,” he exclaimed.

The company had gathered around us as I spoke

and the applause that followed my outburst of indignation gratified me as showing that here at least the lying journalist had no followers.

“By Jove, Captain,” said Southey, “your eloquence gives me an inspiration. If I outlive the Admiral, I’ll write his life, I swear I will.” And in some ways, although I dislike to record it here, I’m almost sorry he has lived to make good the promise.

“Rather a singular task for you to set yourself, is it not, Mr. Southey?” remarked St. Vincent, somewhat sneeringly. “I thought you had gone over to the ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’ crowd. Have the French revolutionists ceased to be your high priests?”

“To some extent, my Lord. But a brave man’s the same the world over, whether royalist or rebel.”

In the last few moments I had paid no attention to the little comedy in the opposite booth, but Toby’s voice now recalled it to me. Evidently the countryman had heard my harangue.

“A toast to Nelson!” he cried. “A toast! A toast!”

“The game awaits, dear sir.” This from the impatient Captain.

“Oh, let it wait,” rejoined the patriotic Toby. “Listen to this—it’s worth a hundred pounds.”

“Very good, but here’s another arrival to arouse your interest—Bill Fagan, the famous pugilist.”

“Where? I’m a patron of the sport myself!”

Toby’s enthusiasm for the prize ring might have been as long drawn out as it had previously been for horse-flesh, but at this moment I heard a chorus of hearty cheers in the street, the door opened, and Nelson and Lady Hamilton entered the vestibule, thence passing quickly into an adjoining supper room. A crowd followed them and there was much confusion in the tap-room, everyone rising to honour old Nel. As for Toby, he was on a chair and his “Hoo-rays” could be heard above all the others.

“Always with Lady Hamilton!” St. Vincent regretfully muttered to me. “’Tis a pity. Poor Lady Nelson! Where is she to-night, do you know?”

“They were at the theatre together,” I responded. But I enlightened him no farther. Others, I knew, would do that quite soon enough. It was some real comfort to hear Toby call out:

“I saw him! By the prancing palfrey, but they’ll be glad at home. And though you’d scarce believe it, my good woman is hand and glove with Lady Nelson!”

“My Lady Hamilton looked buxom, eh?” interrupted the Captain.

“Lady Hamilton! Where? Oh, I say, present me. I should like——”

“Why, did you not see her?”

“No.”

“I’ll arrange for you to meet her later. Come, let’s resume the game.”

We at our table by now had had all to drink that was absolutely necessary for us. In this we were being constantly urged on by Scott, whose head seemed liquor proof. Will we ever again have such a combination as was wrapped up in this wizard of the north?—built like a Hercules and with a brain to correspond, even his lame leg futile to destroy a graceful carriage, best of companions, yet a very Irishman at welcoming a scuffle. Recalling this last propensity, now that Toby seemed endeavouring to extend his acquaintance to our table, I was rather glad to find my friends in just that mellow condition where the proposal of a song is welcomed. Moore was urged to give us one of his own.

“Since, as it seems, they admit ladies here to-night,” he protested, “I do not dare. Even my modest translation of Anacreon the provost of Trinity told me he feared was too amatory and convivial.”

“Yes, but you published it the other day.”

“True, thanks to the Prince,” and Moore straightened himself peacockwise. “But my books are to be read in private, not bawled out loud in tap-rooms!”

“I’ll wager you sing to-night at Lady Hamilton’s.”

“Oh, perhaps, if she insists and—if I’m there. Fact is, I promised to sup with Wales and Mrs. Fitzherbert.”

We all smiled a bit at the harmless egotism of the young poet, his head almost turned, but never completely so, by the aristocratic women who for the moment were making of him a toy, although the proud but good-hearted Irishman believed himself quite something else.

“I say, Campbell,” he continued after a moment, “I’ll tell you what, if you’ll permit: I’ll sing one of yours—that you wrote in Germany. You haven’t yet published it and ’twill be new to the company besides not inappropriate to the subject of our discussion.”

And so, to the air of “Ye Gentlemen of England,” Moore’s sweet and sympathetic voice rang out in Campbell’s stirring ode, which not yet, thank God, needed the added verse on the death of Nelson:

“Ye mariners of England!
That guard our native seas;
Whose flag has braved, a thousand years,
The battle and the breeze!
Your glorious standard launch again
To match another foe!
And sweep through the deep,
While the stormy winds do blow;
While the battle rages loud and long,
And the stormy winds do blow.

“Brittania needs no bulwarks.
No towers along the steep;
Her march is o’er the mountain-waves,
Her home is on the deep.
With thunders from her native oak
She quells the floods below,
As they roar on the shore,
When the stormy winds do blow;
When the battle rages loud and long
And the stormy winds do blow.

“The meteor flag of England
Shall yet terrific burn,
Till danger’s troubled night depart,
And the star of peace return.
Then, then, ye ocean-warriors!
Our song and feast shall flow
To the fame of your name,
When the storm has ceased to blow;
When the fiery fight is heard no more
And the storm has ceased to blow.”

Toby was by far the most enthusiastic of Moore’s auditors.

“Come sir,” he called to the singer, “that’s

thirsty work. Join me in a drink—and your friends too. My birthday, gentlemen, and the expense is mine. More punch there, do you hear?”

St. Vincent informed him with some emphasis that the place was no country tavern, and the others, having had more than was good for them, added stronger words. We seemed for a moment in for a row, when there was a feminine shriek and the voice of one of the barmaids was heard:

“Please go away! Stop! You insult me, sir!”

“The pugilist seems inclined to strike the lady at the bar,” calmly remarked the Captain, less from sympathy than a desire to draw Toby’s attention from the comments at our table.

“By God, he’ll not! What, strike a lady! Whoa!”

And, calling out as though addressing a restive horse, Toby got to his feet.

“What lady is it? Whoa there, will you! Let her alone, you brute!” for Fagan had caught the girl about the waist and was attempting to force a kiss.

“What lady?” mimicked Moore. “Why, Lady Hamilton, my ancient friend.”

“What! Why, where’s her husband? Why don’t someone stop it?”

The honest countryman pushed his way toward the bar, first throwing his purse on the table with the hasty remark: "I've lost enough. Count your winnings out of that. I'll be back!"

More shame to us!—for a moment we all stood there in a flunk and saw the brute twist the barmaid's wrist, glaring sneeringly around the while as if inviting any of us to interfere. But, aroused by another piteous cry of fright and pain, I leaped across the room to her rescue. Not that I ever had been a great success at fisticuffs, yet often, in years gone by, I had taken a round or two out of our fellows both ashore and on ship. Earlier still, when but a lad, we fought with bare mawleys and not with fists covered by stuffed mittens little short of pillows—and such, I understand, are used in these degenerate days. However, on this occasion all my old fighting blood was up. I had almost reached the pair, my coat already half off, when:—

"Leave him to me! I'll crack the villain's skull!"

In a trice, from behind I was thrust aside and our country squire, like a human jumping jack, was prancing about the bully. He had been quicker than I, for his coat was off, the cuffs of his shirt were turned back, and his cane was threateningly

held aloft. Already at the feet of the pugilist, in the good old style, he had cast his beaver. A shout of merriment went up at sight of the bombastic and ancient challenge from this quaint and aged figure. Contrasted with the Hercules he purposed chastening, it could have suggested naught but laughter, unless, indeed, pity were inspired by the memory of a dotard grandfather. This latter emotion, however, was not likely to arise in favour of one who, during almost an entire evening, had made of himself a consummate nuisance. Some of the younger bloods among us banteringly tendered him advice, while Moore pretended to weep in anticipatory pity for the pugilist.

“Mr. Hasset,” cried the waggish poet in imploring, grief stricken tones, “pray don’t hurt him!”

The opinion of the entire tap-room was that a few cuffs administered by Bill Fagan about the ears of the farmer would send him home to ruminate upon his experience and possibly to profit by it. The little maid had escaped ere this to the shelter of the bar, and we felt that soon we would be rid of our over-talkative guest—two facts adding greatly to our satisfaction.

But I noticed that despite the excitement around him and the potations in which he had generously

indulged, the old man's face was neither flushed nor angry as it not unnaturally might have been. He was quite cool and his voice was clear; if his countenance gave the impression that he was hugely enjoying himself, it also bore a look of determination before which any man might hesitate. Could it be possible that he was familiar with such scenes? At all events, to my mind there now was nothing ridiculous about Toby Hasset of Staffordshire. But, remembering the disparity in their ages, I resolved not to stand by and see my new friend maltreated—for I gladly counted as my friend, a man plucky enough to face the champion of London.

How shall I describe what followed? I well recall that the story for days afterward set the town agog, told as it was on parade, in clubs and drawing-rooms. Certainly it was the strangest encounter ever witnessed by sailor or landsman, this battle royal of cane versus fists. Aye, and there was a significance in it, too, appreciated I think by all of us that had seen fisticuffs gradually displacing England's venerable and most typical sport. Here, then, was the old against the new: the noble art of cudgelling—back-swording as we once called it—striving with its modern rival, which at that time had not entirely supplanted it; and, true representatives of each, the afternoon of life versus lusty young manhood.

The exponent of the older school had two valuable allies: a shiftiness of feet as agile as that of a ballet dancer, and—a vocabulary!—a heavenly one. I have heard swearing by both sailors and lubbers in every land; by cooks, who are seldom surpassed, and, above all, by pirates who, having no country of their own, possess the eloquence of all. Never, however, have I heard issue from human lips anything half equalling that with which Toby enraptured us. Thus were combined three noble arts, those of cudgelling, of Terpsichore, and of fluent and well-assorted profanity. The last is now almost one of the lost arts, but they were familiar with it at the court of the Georges where a spade was never tricked out in any fancy name. Mind, I don't deny that customs have bettered; but the change reminds me of my whitened hair.

However, there was not time for all these thoughts ere the descending cane came in contact with the bully's mighty wrist—so quickly, with such ease, and so sure the aim, that a thrill of surprised expectancy went through the room. Moreover, there was wit in it; here had the maid been hurt. Immediately there was quiet.

“I'll kill you for that,” came with a savage oath from between the teeth of the pugilist.

With a grace not unlike that of a giant panther, the towering, burly form, all beef and bone, advanced, crouched into the approved position of the ring, the long arms moving backward and forward in front of the scowling and brutal face like the giant windmill attacked by Don Quixote, a character, too, not unlike our farmer. But even more graceful was the slight figure opposite, as on tip-toe and light of movement as a French dancing-master, the Squire manœuvred and shifted out of danger, his right hand above his head holding the cane with a hanging guard, and making it wind in and out between the fists and about the head of his advancing foe. Toby, although thus armed with his cane, at first seemed little more worthy game for the champion than had the girl herself. The thoughtless saw in him nothing more formidable than a garrulous old man in his cups flourishing a walking stick intended to help him home. But the marvellous manipulation of his improvised weapon caused us to gasp, while it clearly disconcerted his opponent. The latter might naturally expect easily to get past that slight stick held by so feeble an arm; yet whenever he advanced the menacing cane moved with such clever swiftness that, try as he might, he could not seize it with his hands.

Toby retreated and the pugilist, following, again and again drove his fists at the place where his opponent had appeared to be; ducking and dodging from right to left, stepping lightly backward or from side to side, the squire avoided every attack. But the pugilist knew a trick or two. He drew back his left hand as if about to strike with it; then fiercely sprang forward and shot out his right, backing up the blow with every atom of his tremendous weight. Yet the feint did not deceive, nor did the ugly fist reach its mark. Had it landed, there would have been an end to the career of Toby Hasset. But that genial and plucky individual was not in front of the fist; he was, in a fashion, behind it. The pugilist, impelled by his own momentum, shot by the cudgeller. As he did so, the cane, held as a quarter-staff and managed with a dexterity worthy of the immortal Jim Fig of the bear-garden in Hockley-in-the-Hole, descended on the badly defended head, which, had a fur cap not covered it, surely must have been broken. Truly the old fellow had scored heavily, for the blow sounded like the snapping of a tautened cable.

As the pugilist stumbled forward, striving to regain his balance, the squire turned and with an elaborate bow quietly remarked to the circle that

had formed about the combatants: "A little more room, gentlemen,"—a request, you may be assured, with which we instantly complied.

Whatever else he may have been, Fagan was no coward and, almost crazed with rage, he returned to the attack. Toby continued to prance about the object of his wrath, emitting his strange rantings, every syllable a choice product of the stable, the kennel or the hunt. These were followed by a perfect fusilade of blows on the neck, body, uplifted arms and head—aye, and the shins, too, of the champion of London. Every sally of the pugilist received an answer from the enchanted blackthorn, which seemingly had multiplied itself and now filled the air, darting from any point of the compass, and reaching every part of its victim's anatomy, its resounding whacks punctuating the weird railings of Toby Hasset of Staffordshire. Fagan was hopelessly outmanœuvred. The punishment he received was fearful and at last he was all but swept from his legs. Fairly beaten back he retreated to a goodly distance and paused for breath. Toby generously and calmly awaited his recovery.

But we who had witnessed the bout were by no means as quiet. The tap-room was in an uproar.

"Good, good! A Donnybrook!" cried the ex-

citable Moore. "I'll bet ten guineas on the old one." And although Toby had the confidence as well as the sympathy of all the crowd, the poet had many takers because of mere love of betting and to still further enliven the evening.

St. Vincent, the cool, sedate old First Lord of the Admiralty, hero of a hundred naval campaigns, shook hands with me, his face beaming as though the affair were a matter of personal pride.

"The best spell of back-swording I've ever seen," he exclaimed with enthusiasm. "He's wonderful, simply wonderful, that old gamester"—employing an epithet usual in the rural districts.

In truth I think perhaps no finer exhibition of cudgel play was ever known in London. Certain it is that, although often I have seen our brave fellows, and some who accounted themselves experts, at many a practice game on deck, all, and myself included, were the veriest clowns compared with this artist from Staffordshire. The old provincial, of whom we had made a butt, now had the respect even of the pugilist, while every buck and blood present admired the farmer who dared face the champion bruiser. Moreover, he had taught us all a lesson in gallantry, and now there was not one of us but would have helped him out had he received the worst of it.

Suddenly we ceased our chatter and rushed from tables and bar to our former position, for with an oath the pugilist again had sprung at Toby. Apparently the Londoner now realized that the long reach of that agile arm, reinforced by the omnipresent cane, made greatly to his disadvantage any attempt at long range fighting. He would try close quarters. Hammer and tongs he went at it. With right and left he rained a vicious volley of blows.

Will the slender cane be able to resist the terrific onslaught of sheer brute strength? Assuredly! The bully strikes only to meet the stick. He rushes into its circlings, he grasps blindly at it—it is no longer there. Toby, ever retreating and drawing his opponent on, belabours him and gets away. Does the pugilist come too near, Toby shortens his hold and plays over his guard at half stick until the bully finds this method worse than the first.

And then, one scarce saw quite how 'twas done, whack! and the Londoner's face was crimson from a long gash on the forehead.

"Blood! Blood!" cried Scott, who knew the game, and others no less enthusiastic indicated the broken head. But this was for no prize under quarter staff rules, and, as the pugilist had not called "Hold," the fight went on after some one had banded the wounded forehead.

St. Vincent, all the old salt in him aroused, fairly howled encouragement.

“Do you hear the old duffer rant?” yelled Davison to me across the table.

“Kill the old turkey-cock! Break his pumpkin head with your hoe, Toby!”

Could it be possible that such language came from Walter Scott, a Tory of all but royal ancestry and already the husband of that piquante beauty, the dark and lively Miss Carpenter? Certainly the voice was strangely like, and I was quite aware that the young fellow—he was not yet thirty—dearly loved a row, and was not averse to midnight London.

Then again came from across the ring amazing words in a familiar tone:

“He can’t stand the gaff, Toby! Wallop him! Go in and win!”

I’ll swear the encouragement came from that dreamer of dreams, that same Bob Southey who had thought of nothing but an ideal life of study in the virgin forests of America. Imagine a future poet laureate talking in a tap-room of “standing the gaff”!

But now the countryman assumed the offensive in dead earnest. With uplifted cudgel, straight at Bill Fagan he charged, and the cane cut figure eights be-

tween the hands that vainly tried to grasp it. While one might have drawn a breath the weapon landed on the jaw of the now defeated champion. Fagan staggered like a drunken man, his hands pressed to the shattered jowl, while, for good measure and as if in pure enjoyment of the exercise, another score of blows, landing on the head, avenged the insult to our pretty barmaid.

So, at last, the pugilist, who had sunk to his knees, lay unconscious on the floor, and, amid the cheers of the entire tap-room, Toby, perspiring and panting, but grinning as though it were the jolliest affair in the world, sank exhausted in a chair.

The mill was over, and the Squire had fought in a manner of which any gentleman might be proud. I was almost sorry when 'twas finished, for such goodly sights were already rare. It is sad to reflect that back-sword play, even then on the wane, in my old age has relapsed into almost absolute disuse. Although boxing is at present and for long may continue to be the vogue, I am convinced that it is to the almost forgotten exhibitions of skill and valour in cudgelling we owe our national supremacy. The cudgel was man's first weapon; it developed into quarter-staff, again to single-stick and then, swiftest and best, the cane. What is our national weapon—

the broadsword, the cutlass? Any one who has seen our brave fellows board the enemy—and there can be no more God-like spectacle—knows that these side-arms conquer both musket and cannon. Yet what are these same side-arms if not edged canes? With others than ourselves the weapons are pointed, such as the treacherous dagger. In comparison, of what account are such arms, or the nations that use them?

And as of nations, so of the individual. What strength and swiftness, what superior qualities of head, hand and heart were cultivated by the now well-nigh forgotten game in which men once battled for prizes at every country fair in the three kingdoms! Perhaps not so much science was required as in our later pastimes, but it was unsurpassed in the development of muscle, coolness and agility. It had also the advantage of being favoured of all classes. Even to-day the country clown cuts his cudgel from the nearest hedge, and the town beau parts with his guineas for an affair of ebony and precious metal. They are the same weapon, and, although nowadays neither clown nor beau knows how to use it, the fact that they still carry it shows how the custom is engrafted in our nature.

The truth is that the game was not at all the

brutal affair many have imagined. It required but a tiny bit of blood trickling down the face—and sometimes a trifling blow would cause it—to indicate the so-called “broken head.” Yet in these evil days I have known men so ignorant as to think the expression meant of necessity a cracked skull and insensibility.

The old-time game was unrivalled in fitting a man for a midnight brawl or scuffle, in preparing him for defence when suddenly attacked in the dark or a crowd. And morally! Conceit was cured by it, for there is no arguing with the club that knocks you down. Also was it conducive to truth, for a man may dispute the “touch” of a foil, but when the cane has laid him flat he can scarcely rise and exclaim, “It merely brushed me.”

Yes, we owe much to the cane. It abides with us from our school days, when it aids us in the learning of our lessons, until, supported by it, we totter to the grave. It might well be adopted as our national emblem.

I see that again I have grown garrulous. Who cares for an old man’s speculations? But it has been my duty here to set down so much pertaining to love that it is a comfort to dwell for a moment on an affair of manly skill and muscle. At all

events, my digression has given Toby time to catch his breath, mop his brow and receive the congratulations of the crowd.

Congratulate him most heartily they did, Lord St. Vincent being the first to grasp his hand. The Squire seemed somewhat astonished that so much applause should follow a fight.

"Oh, well, gentlemen," he said, at last finding his feet, "I'm no Quaker."

Then, suddenly bethinking himself of another duty, he pushed us aside, and with great respect raised to his lips the hand of the pretty barmaid in whose defence he had fought.

"Ah, Lady Hamilton," he exclaimed—and I thought at this that Moore would have a fit, "let me salute your charming hand. No disguise could hide your quality. I'm precious thankful I had this chance to serve you."

Great was his indignation when even the girl herself joined in our universal shriek of 'aughter.

"Well, jackasses," he said, fiercely glaring around upon us, "what now?"

"Why, sir," explained a spluttering waiter, "'tis only Verbena, our barmaid."

Oh, the look of amazement on that honest face!—and, it must be confessed, of chagrin also; for it

is one thing to risk your teeth and a rib or two in the cause of a titled, and of her day the most famous beauty; quite another to do it for a serving wench, however pretty. But Toby was game.

“Well, and what of that?” he cried valiantly. “I care not whether it be a barmaid or the queen’s grandmother, lady or scullion; if I am there no man shall strike her and go unpunished. But you fine fellows were mighty modest with your fists, now weren’t ye? Come on, I’ll fight the crowd of you!”

“There spoke the Englishman. Permit me, sir, to offer my hand. And this is Lady Hamilton.”

It was Nelson’s voice. He, with Lady Hamilton, had entered at the first sound of the scrimmage, and now stood there with his boyish orderly and Tom Allen, his faithful body-servant, both of whom had awaited him in the lobby. Lady Hamilton, as always, was graciousness itself.

“And permit me, sir,” she said, advancing toward the open-mouthed Toby, “to offer my congratulations. I saw the battle. It is regrettable that except yourself all here were content to see the insult—that none had the pluck to protect the maid and kiss a pretty hand.” Then, turning kindly to the girl, who in the new excitement had been brought to tears: “Come here, my dear.” And she took the sobbing creature in her arms.

At this point we were cheered—and we needed something enlivening, for the remarks of Nelson and Lady Hamilton had made us feel somewhat small—we were cheered, I say, by a shriek of delight from Toby, who suddenly seized upon Nelson's orderly.

“Jack, my boy!”

“The same old Jack, grandpa.”

“What, Jack? Jack Herbert?” asked Nelson.

“Why, he's my orderly.”

“And my grandson, my Lord, and a most *disorderly* one he was as a little shaver.”

“And of what were you thinking, Jack, while the battle raged?” asked the Admiral smilingly.

“Oh,” replied young Jack quite calmly, “I *knew* he'd lick him!”

The innocent cause of all this commotion now having recovered herself, Lady Hamilton asked her name.

“Verbena Morrison, my Lady.”

It did seem as though Toby must have a part in every moment's development of the evening's comedy, for here he emitted another of his delighted shrieks, and, deserting his grandson, placed a resounding kiss, not this time on the barnmaid's hand, but squarely on her rosy lips.

“Blind, staggering dolt that I am,” he cried, excitedly holding her at arm’s length. “Why, of course it’s Verbena, daughter of my good old friend and tenant, David Morrison. Bless me! That I could forget! Why once you used to ride with me to market every day. And then, you baggage, three years ago you eloped. My Lord, she’s a thoroughbred—father a sailor, too. He’s been looking for you everywhere, Verbena. Forgiven? Long ago. Dear Lady Hamilton, rest easy. I’m her friend. She’s under my protection now, and going home as a Christmas present to her daddy.”

“Oh, Squire, if you but would!”

“I will, lass, never fear. But, now, tell us all about it.”

“’Tis hard to tell; but, as you have said, I ran away and was married to a sailor.”

“Good, very good indeed,” commented Nelson.

“We were quite happy for a time, but then the press-gang took him, and from that day to this I never once have heard of him.”

“And your husband’s name?”

“Jack Sykes, my Lord.”

A shadow crossed the Admiral’s face. He removed his hat. “Jack Sykes,” he said gently, “was my quartermaster. A dozen times he saved my life,

and then—be strong and proud, my child—a brave man's death came to him at the Nile."

The girl, who had been noisy enough when a kiss was at stake, a real grief now struck silent. She put one hand appealingly out to Nelson, then again shrank into Lady Hamilton's arms and buried her pretty face on the shoulder where once a queen, in royal sorrow, had sought shelter.

"Poor little filly!" muttered Toby, brushing a suspicious moisture from his eyes.

"Nay, do not grieve, my dear," whispered Lady Hamilton, caressing the girl.

"No, not for him," added Nelson quickly. "His was the triumphant and most splendid death—the hero's in the hour of victory."

And then, turning to Toby:

"I envy you, Squire. You have defended her in a better fight than any ever made by myself."

"Why? How?"

"I never had the honour to defeat an Englishman. You will join us at supper?"

"But, my Lord, I must take charge of my new protégé."

"She is included in the invitation."

"What, I?" Verbena's tears were almost dried by the overpowering thought of such an honour.

“And, pray, why not? A sailor’s daughter, a sailor’s widow and a grateful sailor’s friend!”

“We’ll have a husband for her by and by,” whispered Toby. “I promise you to find the dower. Begad, I’ve just lost enough to make her a nest-egg.”

“It’s a shame these black legs should have fleeced him,” St. Vincent said in a low voice to Nelson. “This waiter saw them cheat him.”

“Aye, aye, sir”—for to-night even the tap-room menials had become nautical—“they’re notorious swindlers, fresh from jail.”

“Oh, they are? And none of you prevented this? Here, Hardy, board these privateers. Give them no quarter. You have been in sad company to-night, Squire.”

“Not if it brought me into yours, my Lord,” was Toby’s quick response. Decidedly he had, as it were, “come out strong” since rough exercise had driven the fumes of the wine quite out of him.

I walked across to the sharpers, who were moving as if to leave the place.

“Don’t weigh anchor, men, until you shift that ballast out.”

“But he played with us of his own accord,” muttered the “Honourable Harry.” Nevertheless, the fellow’s hand reluctantly produced the purse.

"And so do I," I replied, taking it from him.

"Then, by God, Hardy, you've played your last game, damn you!"

And, before I could even realize my surprise at the hatred expressed in the second fellow's look and voice and at his familiarity with my name, with one hand he had seized the purse and with the other drawn a knife, with which he struck furiously at me. Then, knocking about right and left with an uplifted chair, he gained the door and was gone into the fog. I had half fallen, and, recovering quickly, found myself on Nelson's supporting arm. He was as pale as any ghost.

"In heaven's name, Hardy," he whispered, "did you recognize the fellow?"

"No!"

"'Twas Stuart!"

And so it was. Fallen thus low was the scoundrel dismissed the navy in Sicily. The certainty came to me like a flash, and I cursed the stupidity that had made me so blind.

"Not a suspicion of this to Lady Hamilton. And now, yourself—are you badly hurt?"

"A scratch. I'll be able to join you at supper. You haven't asked me, but I'll invite myself."

"Ah, Hardy, lad, you're one of those that can-

not do so too often. Good! I'd forgotten the other rascal, but I see the rest have not been so thoughtless. They have him bound. We'll question the fellow later."

I staunched the blood while Verbena from the kitchen brought a salve of salt and vinegar, and, after she had bandaged me with it, physically I felt as good as ever. My conscience, however, twinged me a bit—first for not having rescued Toby from the sharpers, and then for having permitted one of them to escape with the money, once I had recovered it. But on the latter point my mind was soon set at rest, for, on searching the prisoner, Toby's wealth was found intact. That the purse I had for a moment held was empty was a fact evidently unknown to Stuart, who had attempted murder to regain it.

Toby jingled his recovered treasure before Verbena's eyes.

"Your dower, my dear, when you embark again."

"And I'll add to it a like amount," said Nelson.

Now, the late Jack Sykes was doubtless an excellent quartermaster, but I have serious doubts as to the record he made as a husband; for certain it is that, at these projects for her future, Verbena blushed most becomingly.

"And now, gentlemen," and Toby turned and

addressed the entire tap-room—needless to say all by this time were his friends, even the now recovered pugilist; while the enmity of Moore and Scott having been a mere pleasantry, the one he had easily captivated by his wit, the other by his prowess—“and, now, the evening must not end with any ill feeling betwixt us. You must forgive my folly and bear with my humours on my natal day. Before we part, a farewell drink all 'round—a bowl of Dr. Johnson's 'Bishop's Punch.'”

The room resounded with our approval, and, the punch having been brought, Toby, flagon in hand, gave his toast:

“Lord Nelson!”

“Nay, Squire,” protested the Admiral, “I'm not the hero to-night.”

“I have it, Master Hasset.” It was the all-conquering voice of Lady Hamilton. “Please, may I propose the toast?”

The witch! The inimitable, archly-appealing look and tone! *Might* she!

“Madam, I would have asked you an' I dared.”

She sprang lightly to a chair, one hand resting among Verbena's disordered locks, the other holding aloft the glass. And never again shall I see—but there, I'm almost seventy.

“Then, gentlemen, ‘Here’s the wind that blows,
and the ship that goes, and the [unclear] that loves a
sailor.’”

All this happened nearly [unclear] score year [unclear].
But, if memory serves me right, [unclear] almost [unclear] [unclear]
we drank the toast.

Chapter XII

A Rout on Grosvenor Square

ES, I, too, drank the toast, and as I did so looked up at her with much of that worship I had given her during my first days in Naples. I loved her then, after a fashion, and doubtless always I will love her memory, forgetting her faults, remembering the virtues I knew better than almost any of the others save Nelson. Yet, when the gaiety of the tap-room had faded, when she was no longer before me poised on the chair with sparkling eyes and merry jest, when the outer air had swept some of the illusioning cob-webs from my brain and at last I stood in the false and enfeebling glitter of her house on Grosvenor Square, I knew, as I now know, that it was all wrong, wrong, wrong!—that it was deadening her innate goodness, that it was blackly tarnishing the lustre of one of the noblest, bravest of men, and was slowly killing a loving, lovable and innocent wife.

I glanced around the rooms and saw at once the character of this midnight gathering, composed as it was of all bohemian London of the period—act-

rescæ, statesmen, poets, painters and royalty itself, scoundrels and honourables, would-bes and celebrities. It was Naples duplicated, but with an English setting, lacking the Italian lightness which, with us, is veneer, not nature. It was a go-as-you-please affair, here and there in cosy nooks a flirting couple, in more roomy places music and dancing, at the buffet a crowd drinking and jesting, and in more than one corner card tables on which were heaped no inconsiderable sums.

My arrival caused no cessation in these various amusements, but that of the Duke of Clarence a trifle later brought about a momentary lull. He was accompanied by Mrs. Jordan, the actress, and that fact alone would have told any but poor, ignorant Lady Hamilton how little the Prince honoured the house she was delighted to see him enter. He had fetched the player from Drury Lane, at which theatre she had been for fifteen years, a rival at one time of Siddons herself. But I noticed that she had grown fat since as a boy I sat in front and thought her the most charming "Sir Harry Wildair" that ever was or could be, and I wondered if the passion of His Royal Highness was as hot as ever. I saw, too, and smiled somewhat bitterly thereat, that the still comely Jordan had brought

with her Mrs. Powell, another of the Drury Lane company, a woman who, as I had learned since my return, had been a serving-maid at Dr. Budd's in London when our vivacious hostess of to-night was there as nurse. Truly this was a strange gathering to meet a future king and do honour to the hero of the Nile!

Lady Hamilton swept forward effusively to greet the new arrivals.

"This is kind and generous of your Highness," she said, extending her hand to the Duke and drawing all of them to a seat to which I also was beckoned.

"Pure selfishness," he responded smilingly. "I am here in anticipation of your songs and the attitudes of which I've heard so much but have never seen."

"But there's another pleasure for you—the acquaintance of my tap-room discovery, an original and a positive wit. The town will be agog of him to-morrow."

"It is somewhat so already. I heard of his prowess an hour since while in the green-room waiting for this indolent Mrs. Jordan to get through the interminable process of dressing. A veritable rustic, eh?"

“Oh, he’s changed. At ten to-night he knew nothing but dogs and horses. In the interval, inspired by Nelson and with Jack Herbert and Tom Allen as tutors, the navy’s become as familiar to him as his own barnyard. He’s as nautical as Davy Jones himself. You should hear him swear—it’s delightful! My word! he’s become almost bow-legged and rolls when walking. Faith, before he goes home he’ll visit every ship in port and poke his nose from keel to top-skysails.”

“Evidently the fellow’s an able-bodied seaman and didn’t know it. I love the breed: it’s in my blood, you know. And where are they now, Lord Nelson and his friend?”

“Not yet arrived, but I expect them every minute.”

“I’m glad the Admiral’s to join us. His mere presence inspires me. You know, I’m proud to have so long been the friend of your hero, Lady Hamilton. Gad, it’s amusing to recall how he looked when first we met—the queerest boy of a captain I ever knew, an old-fashioned waistcoat the chief feature of his uniform, and his unpowdered hair in a poker-like Hessian tail of alarming length. But his conversation should have told me what he would become. As to his looks, you have worked wonders there.”

“Do not hold me responsible for all the change,” responded Lady Hamilton. “For example, I am not to blame for the empty sleeve.”

“I am not so sure of that. And if you are, you have reason to be proud. Mrs. Jordan has inspired me to no such loss.”

“She is fortunate,” laughed Lady Hamilton. “She and I have reached a stage where both arms are required,” and she gave a look of comical distress at her generous waist.

The Prince acquiescing in her suggestion that he try his fortune at the tables, they left me with Mrs. Jordan as my sole companion. I had long known the capricious beauty and we were, in a way, great friends, made so, partly through my naval intimacy with the Prince, whose mistress she now had been for some ten years. So I did not hesitate to ask after their twelve months' old child, nor to touch upon other matters that one would not dream of broaching in any drawing-room save such as Lady Hamilton's.

“You are as quiet as myself to-night!” I said, opening the conversation innocently enough.

“Yes, I am a bit so,” she responded. “I'm tired, having just finished a little tiff with my ought-to-be lord and master.”

“In which, of course, you came off victorious?”

“Naturally.”

“May a common or garden outsider ask what it was all about?”

“Money. Imagine me quarrelling about a trifle like that! And, what’s worse, imagine a royal prince doing so! You see, Tom,”—I have already confessed that we were friendly—“it was like this. You know they give me only thirty pounds a week at Drury, so he’s been allowing me a thousand a year. Well, of course, this hasn’t at all tickled his stiff, meddling old Majesty, the King—small wonder, when until not so long ago he wouldn’t let the boys out at night. So what does he do but propose a reduction in the amount! And what does the dutiful son do but write me asking if I couldn’t get along on five hundred! Did you ever!”

“Ridiculous. And what did you do about it?”

“Sent him a single line by messenger. Merely quoted from the theatre programme: ‘No money refunded after the curtain has been raised.’”

“That was unanswerable,” I commented, my laughter joined in by her own—and if ever there was a laugh of delightful melody it was that of this piquant and impudent little vixen.

“Well,” she continued, “he was on hand as usual

to-night, and after a little scrimmage we made it up. But I ought really to have demanded an increase, ought I not? I'm too soft hearted, that's the trouble with me. Look at Mrs. Fitzherbert and her palace!—although, of course, they do say that Wales married her before he did his cousin Caroline. Do you think it possible?"

"Anything is possible in the first gentleman of Europe. But since you forgot to ask his brother for an increase, why don't you ask it of that clever man of yours? And, by the way, where is he to-day?"

"Who, Sheridan? Oh, doubtless off on some lark with Wales. He ought to be here. One of Lady Hamilton's routs would just suit him. What is it he wrote?"

"A bumper of good liquor
Will end a contest quicker
Than justice, judge or vicar:
So fill a cheerful glass
And let good humour pass.
But if more deep the quarrel,
Why, sooner drain the barrel
Than be the hateful fellow
That's crabbed when he's mellow!"

He'll drain the barrel all right, you mark my word,
and die in the doing of it."

So she babbled on, giving me all the gossip of green-rooms and shady boudoirs, and amused me with it for a time, such tattle still having for me the charm of novelty. But at last I wearied of it and enticed her to the table where sat the Duke, and presently she was busy, indiscriminately staking her own money and that of her good-natured lover.

People were constantly arriving, Lady Hamilton receiving them in a manner that made each think himself the most longed-for guest, then giving them the choice of punch or faro or both. Lord St. Vincent, Scott, Southey and the others came from the Cheshire Cheese, and Moore, too, with his best drawing-room peacock strut. And here came old Davison, who had given a medal to every soul of us who had been present at the Nile. Lady Hamilton's entertainment and the character of her guests must have amused the extravagant millionaire, whose splendid festivities on St. James Square, with the Prince of Wales as his frequent guest, were among the wonders of the day. Well, he could afford that sort of thing: not yet had he been found out in defrauding government.

Miss Knight, who was still living with the Hamiltons, sought me in a corner where I secludedly watched the antics of the motley throng, the hostess

here, there and everywhere; Sir William wandering aimlessly about, dignified but somewhat dazed, utterly neglected by the thoughtless, unfeeling crowd; Mrs. Cadogan sipping gin and listening with a maudlin smile to the flattery of Moore, who punctuated his extravagances by winks at Scott, who now was carrying on a wildly burlesque flirtation with the sprightly Jordan.

Miss Knight looked worried and I quickly learned the cause.

"Captain," she said, clasping her hands about her knee and thoughtfully swaying herself to and fro. "I need the advice of some one and I think 'tis yours. You are Nelson's friend and you were mine also in Sicily. You see the life that's led here now. I'm sure my mother never dreamed of it when she placed me in care of Lady Hamilton. In Italy I did not realize it all. How the Neapolitan atmosphere blunts one's sense of right and wrong! And her ladyship has sadly changed. There she was accepted. Royal recognition gave her dignity and saved her self-respect. Here she is ostracised and so she cares nothing for what she does nor for what the public thinks. Eventually she will drag Nelson to her level. Now, Captain, I dread your deeming me ungrateful, but ought I longer to remain be-

neath this roof? To-night's disgraceful scene at the theatre was the final blow to my devotion. In duty to myself should I not elsewhere seek a home?"

She was right and I knew it; yet, perhaps unjustly, I thought her prudery was aroused only when there was a public demand for that commodity, that she cleverly shifted her sails to every breeze, closing her eyes in Naples, opening them to a maidenly shock in London. Nevertheless I expressed to her my approval of her wishes.

"I would suggest, however," I continued after a moment's thought, "that you see me later to-night. I am in hopes that the recklessness of this gathering will sufficiently impress the Admiral to show him where he stands. If the opportunity presents itself, I shall make a last effort to save him. 'Tis almost useless, I know, particularly as he's pledged to spend Christmas with the Hamiltons at Beckford's place at Fonthill."

"Beckford? The name's familiar."

"It should be, since he's Sir William's cousin—and certainly you've read his 'Vathek.'"

"To be sure. I'd quite forgotten. But I've been so long in Italy that, positively, I know nothing of him."

"You are unkind, for I've heard him mention

your verses warmly. He's the strangest and the richest untitled man in England, had Mozart for a tutor in music, and to-day owns the library of Gibbon. He's been everywhere, was present at the Bastille's fall, and owns a Moorish palace in Portugal as well as this mysterious Fonthill Abbey."

"Surely an interesting character. I'm half tempted to postpone my flight until after Christmas. But I must not yield to the desire. It has now reached a point where 'tis '*sauve qui peut*' for all those who value their reputation."

At this moment another arrival was announced. The name was lost in the hubbub of the room, but I saw Lady Hamilton advance to greet that odd genius, Brummell, who but a year before had come into his fortune and now, taken up by the Prince, was become the fashion. By gad, how well he looked!—his figure a model for Apollo, his face intelligent, his reputation as a vulgar dandy notwithstanding, and his every article of apparel showing absolute perfection. To-night his cravat was tied in a new and revolutionary manner and became at once the subject of much comment.

"What a marvellous creation!" exclaimed Lady Hamilton as she fetched him to our corner where, also, we had just been joined by Moore and others. "Absolutely an inspiration!"

"Not ostentatious, I trust?" was the anxious query of the beau.

"Oh, no, not a bit. 'Tis perfection."

"No wonder he's worried about it," whispered Moore to us. "They say that yesterday he blubbered like a baby when the Prince found fault with the cut of a new coat he was showing."

"That's all very well," ejaculated Miss Knight, "but just the same he sets the fashion for Carlton House."

"What's this amazing story going round," asked Brummell, "about some rustic fellow putting all you bloods to shame?"

"A true tale," said Moore, "and a monstrously delightful act it was. Have you not seen him?"

"No, but I was promised I should meet him here."

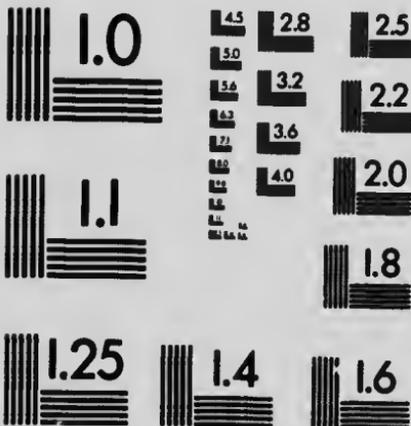
"And so you shall, Mr. Brummell," said Lady Hamilton, preparing to leave us; "that is, if they have not found a gayer place in which to celebrate his victory."

"Nelson has taken him up from sheer admiration of his pluck," continued Moore, glancing after our retreating hostess. "Of course Lady Hamilton could not miss the opportunity of having a new lion under her ample wings, so now she houses the pretty girl who caused the row!"



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"Houses her!" echoed Brummell. "Cages her I should say. She's not in evidence here."

"No, more's the shame," said the poet regretfully. "Think of the drinks that girl knows how to make!"

"Neither the Admiral nor her Ladyship can long afford the luxury of a protégé if all I heard on parade to-day be true,"—and the beau showed by his look that he was delighting in the possession of a rare bit of gossip.

"What's that?" came in chorus from the group.

"Well, in confidence, you understand, the Admiral financially has come a cropper. His property's mortgaged and he's hopelessly involved."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed. "Why, following the Nile, the India Company gave him ten thousand in cash, Parliament gives him thirty-five hundred a year, and his estate of Bronté yields another annual three thousand—all this in addition to his pay as rear-admiral."

"Doubtless the fair Hamilton's extravagances have ruined him?" hazarded Moore.

"So the story goes."

"He paid half the embassy bills at Naples and Palermo," came Miss Knight's contribution to the gossip, "and when we returned to England Sir William was two thousand in his debt."

“Too bad,” said St. Vincent. “I’ve feared this for some time.”

“’Tis not platonic,” commented Miss Knight with what I thought an air of hypocritical shyness. “Of course we all know that. Still I never suspected she was mercenary.”

“Nor I,” said Brummell, “and she’s always in debt herself. ’Tis a mystery what she does with all the money.”

“She must have a field of financial quicksand concealed somewhere.”

“A skeleton in the closet, more likely—one that hasn’t forgotten the chink of gold.”

In this manner the scandal-loving tongues wagged on until at last, disgusted, I joined another group more decently engaged in examining the various gifts presented the Admiral by sovereigns and others.

“How far gone he must be,” ejaculated St. Vincent, who had followed me, “when he displays such execrable taste as to exhibit these things in the home of Lady Hamilton”

“He’s a child,” I responded, “actually a child in everything outside battle. He doesn’t dream there’s anything wrong in this.”

“Can nothing end this madness?”

“Nothing save a miracle.”

“Heaven send it quickly then.”

We were interrupted by the sound of a rushing multitude outside, and of deafening and long continued cheering. Lady Hamilton ran to a window, threw it open, and from a balcony, looked down on Grosvenor Square.

“’Tis Bronté,” she cried, peering in again, her face aflame with pride. “As usual, they’ve taken the horses from his carriage and are dragging it to the door.”

The guests, some of them the worse for wine, crowded to the balcony and joined their cheers with those below. A moment later Nelson entered, accompanied by Squire Hasset and his youthful grandson, Jack. Lady Hamilton all but threw herself into the Admiral’s arms.

Toby, he of stirrup and snaffle, and all the strange oaths of stable and farm-yard, came rolling across the room like an old salt. He halted in front of Brummell, upon whose magnificence he for a moment gazed in wonder. Then he gave a hitch to his trousers and called out:

“Admiral! Take an observation of this craft. What do you make her out?”

“Quite the ancient mariner!” sneered Brummell.
“Had Coleridge our friend in mind, think you?”

“Not so,” exclaimed Nelson, approaching; “else, if ’twere possible, it would have been a better poem. Come, gentlemen, no quarrelling here. Leave that to those who quarrel with the French and bring back such trophies as these you’ve been admiring.”

In this remark the Admiral displayed a touch of that egotism which occasionally cropped out, surprising even those who knew him best. For this bad taste the lavish adulation of Lady Hamilton was responsible.

“Which do you value most, my Lord?” asked Moore.

There were gifts from the Turkish Sultan, from the Czar, and from the Kings of Naples and Sardinia; but Nelson instantly grasped the sword of the Spanish rear-admiral, given him after the battle of St. Vincent, and the truncheon presented by the Island of Zante.

“These,” he said earnestly. “The one because presented me by St. Vincent, from whom all of us caught our professional zeal and fire; the other as the gift of a whole people.”

St. Vincent thanked him by a silent pressure of the hand.

“My Lord,” continued Nelson, “it was an event when I boarded the *San Josef* and received the

Spaniards' swords, but your gift made me far prouder than I was even when on her quarter deck."

"*Her* quarter deck!" echoed Mrs. Jordan. "Now, pray tell me, why are all these dreadful men-of-war spoken of as feminine?"

"Because they're quarrelsome," came prompt response from Toby.

"Fie, sir, can you give no more gallant reason?"

"Well, then, perhaps because their broadsides are as effective as a lovely woman's laugh; like her bright eyes, they flash and conquer."

"That's much better, Mr. Hasset. When you wish, you're as witty as you are courageous and good. That pretty barmaid must have thought some militant saint had come from Paradise in her defense."

"Madam, you make me feel strangely unsaint-like," and the Squire, before she could guess his purpose, had planted a resounding kiss upon her lips. For this impudence he would have received a box upon the ear, had he not instantly and drolly claimed that he but took a sailor's privilege—an excuse that convulsed us all, including even the Prince who, at first, seemed inclined to resent the countryman's familiarity.

"Your friend's a budding diplomat," said the smiling Sir William, addressing Nelson.

“I hope not,” was the quick reply. “Pardon me for my frankness, but we’ve enough of that ilk already. I hate your pen and ink men. A fleet of British war-ships make the best ‘reports.’ They speak, are understood, and gain their point. Always fight, say I. The boldest measures are safest. Decks cleared for action, men at quarters; now a broadside volley, and we lock our yardarms into the enemy’s rigging—then blaze away, muzzle to muzzle, until we catch on fire.”

“’Tis an admirable description of a kiss!” said Toby, languishingly, and made a swift descent upon Mrs. Jordon, but she, shrieking and laughing, fled to distant safety.

“Here’s a battle for you, my Lord,” cried Nelson, whom there was no stopping once started on such a subject. He picked up St. Vincent’s eye-glass and a number of trifling objects, arranging them in battle array upon the table. “Three divisions, the fastest frigates first, the flying squadron well to windward in reserve. The line-of-battle-ships in two columns pierce the enemy’s position thus, cut off their vanguard and engage the rear, and now the windward squadron moves where reinforcements most are needed. What change would you suggest, my Lord?”

“Let me see,” responded St. Vincent, picking up his eye-glass and peering over the table.

“Nay, nay, my Lord, you’ve removed my flag-ship. You can’t capture her like that.”

“But I cannot see your plan without my glass.”

“He would not need it were the ‘g’ removed,” broke in Brummell. “His lordship can see a lass with the naked eye, I’ll be bound.”

“Remove the ‘l’ also,” cried Toby, “and you may see yourself. We know an ass in Staffordshire when we see one.”

The beau, fortunately, did not hear the jibe, and soon, at a general call for songs, there was a breaking up at the playing tables. Mrs. Billington sang, as I well remember—a pretty actress who had appeared at San Carlo in Naples and had been made much of there by Lady Hamilton. Then the latter gave us a ballad by Miss Knight, dealing with Lord Nelson, of course, the poetess accompanying on the harp. Following this our versatile hostess danced the tarantella most beautifully and vivaciously. Tom Allen then was forced to fetch his fiddle and the ambadress danced the hornpipe. Toby, at this last, was in ecstasies.

“D’ye see her luff and veer?” he cried. “And here she comes about, as rakish a craft as ever I’ve

scen. There's nimbleness of keel for you! Ah, what a lovely 'mate,' eh, my hearties, and what a skilful 'skipper,'” and the fellow commenced an impromptu dance opposite Lady Hamilton, who, breaking down from laughter, ceased, caught Toby in her arms, and with him went sailing down the room, the crowd cheering and some, inspired by the sight, calling for the “Roger-de-Coverly.”

It was almost dawn, yet the merriment continued—and the drinking, too. The effects of the latter were sufficiently apparent in Lady Hamilton, when the crowd demanded her famous attitudes, to cause me to refrain from joining the spectators. I thought too well of her to desire to see her, made reckless by wine, give rein to the possibilities in these posings—although naught immodest had I ever known in them in Naples.

The crowd having moved to the adjoining room, there to await Lady Hamilton's reappearance in appropriate costume, Toby and I seated ourselves for a quiet chat. I noted, as we did so, that behind a group of palms a door was opened and that someone entered stealthily, then apparently stood there motionless. I thought little of it at the moment, however, nor did the incident again occur to me until there reached us a sound as of a woman's

muffled scream. Then the lowered voice of a man was heard.

“You’re charmed to see me, of course—were doubtless broken-hearted when they got the best of me there in Sicily and you thought you’d seen the last of me. Nay, dear lady, I’ve waited long in London for your coming, and a dreary waiting it has been. You’ll be distressed to learn the shifts to which I’ve been put because I could not reach your generous wallet. So now let’s have at it quickly. I’ve been shabby and hungry for the last time, I promise you.”

There was a response, but so low-toned that we failed to catch the words. Toby had instantly risen, but seemed uncertain as to whether it was his duty to break through the row of palms and take a part.

“Oh, you’ve no money and you’ll call for help, will you? Well, I’ve had one experience to-night that I don’t want repeated here. You’ll find the money and quickly, too, do you understand? Your lover is my commander no longer, nor did he take from me at Palermo the only letters of yours I had. See, here, and here, and here. Now, look, I’ll be generous. A hundred pounds apiece for these and you keep the letters. Refuse, and I send half to the Admiral and half to Sir William. If that don’t cut

off your supplies, I lose my wager, for these are your letters to *me*, and both worthy gentlemen for the first time will learn you were the mother of my child."

"So help me heaven, I have no more money!"

At this moment Toby parted the palms and, passing through, we confronted Stuart and Lady Hamilton. The fellow at first looked frightened, but, quickly assuming an indifferent air, suggested:

"Perhaps this ancient ass will lend it you?"

"And if I do?" queried Toby.

"Then the lady will receive that she greatly desires to possess."

"I know what it is, you scoundrel. I'll give you your choice of a hundred pounds and all those letters peacefully returned, or not a shilling and the papers taken from you by force. We've met before, to-night, you blackguard, and you know by 'force' I mean no child's play."

"What! A single hundred for all these precious documents!"

"A hundred or nothing."

"Thank you, I can make a better bargain elsewhere."

"But you never will."

"And why?"

"If you'll fetch me my cane—a servant outside will hand it you—I'll show you."

"Oh, that being your line of argument I'll confess I'm a man of peace. Pay me the trifling sum and the letters become my lady's."

Toby took from his pocket a goodly roll of bills from which he selected one and handed it to Stuart. The fellow examined it carefully, then, handing the packet of papers to Lady Hamilton, flourished the note before her face and said:

"They'll cost you more than this before you die."

Toby's hand closed about a silver candlestick, placed on a nearby mantle. With a swift movement he brought it immediately beneath the upraised, threatening hand of Stuart. The flame fastened to the money; it blazed and Stuart, with a cry of pain, dropped it to the floor where it lay, a tiny bit of ashes.

"You cheat!" exclaimed the blackmailing cur. "Earlier to-night you lost to me fairly, then took your money back. Now you buy my property and destroy the money I've earned."

"Tut, man, you and Lady Hamilton are quits. There's no doubt she'll burn the letters. Why do you complain that the money shares the fate? Now



.. They'll cost you more than
this before you die."—*Page 284*

get out of here and don't be slow about it. I've no time for landlubbers like you. For half a biscuit I'd order you in irons. I'm criminal to let such a pirate cruise about these waters. However, out with you."

"Don't get excited about it. I'm going, but, Lady Hamilton, when we meet again there'll be fewer witnesses. We always hated crowds anyway, eh, Emma, in the old days?"

He swept us a sneering bow, opened the door by which he had entered, and was gone. Lady Hamilton stood pale and silent with shame. At last she raised her head.

"Gentlemen, I thank you. There is no time for more. They await my foolery in there. Mr. Hasset, if you will witness my performance I'll try to make you believe even that the scoundrel lied."

"Madam, I believe it now."

Had she been a duchess he could not have more courteously led her from the room. As the curtains closed after them, Nelson entered, looking, I thought, ill and worried. Perhaps now was my best time. He threw himself into a seat and I drew a chair next him, closing my hand affectionately over his own.

"My Lord," I said, "and my old friend and com-

rade, I'm going to speak plainly to you, perhaps to hurt you. But the time has come when someone must do so. I want you to look back over the past two years. After the Nile what might you not have expected? Why have you failed in some of those natural expectations? Ah, Nelson, the answer is known to all. You became Rear Admiral of the Red. Why were you not again promoted? Why did the Admiralty send Keith back to command? Because your associations at Naples led them to doubt your undivided attention to duty. In brief, the cause was Lady Hamilton."

"Hardy!"

"Nay, you know 'tis true. When the fleet was at Malta, you left it to fly back to Palermo and the court. Against this we all advised you. Why was this? Why were you absent when your officers captured the last of the French ships that had escaped us at the Nile? Lady Hamilton. Why did you disregard the order to change your headquarters to Syracuse? Because, in your madness, you could not tear yourself from Palermo and Lady Hamilton."

"Hardy, this is beyond bearing."

"Nevertheless you'll have to bear it. I'll speak the truth now, even though we speak to one an-

other no more on earth. In your right senses would you ever have taken two ships-of-the-line from the blockade, thus delaying the fall of Malta? Certainly not; but to convey your enchantress in state to Leghorn was of more importance to you than the triumphs of the British navy. God, Nelson, small wonder Keith told the Queen that Lady Hamilton had commanded the fleet quite long enough! Recall your return to London. The people cheered you—yes, but do you not still writhe at your reception at court, the King almost contemptuous, the Queen absolutely ignoring you? Can you ask how such could have been the greeting to a mighty victor? The answer is embodied in the form of this woman now posing in the room adjoining.”

“Can you expect that I shall forget her kindness to me?” cried Nelson, rising excitedly. “Can I forget her services to the nation? Can I slight a woman it seems my name has compromised? No, Hardy, I’ve never faltered in the face of opposition, nor will I now.”

“Your name has compromised!” I echoed. “Oh, Nelson, in God’s name slip your cable and get out into safe waters or your good name among the greatest of England’s heroes will go to pieces on the rocks.”

“But think of her whole-hearted and whole-souled devotion! Were I now to throw her overboard——”

“Whole-hearted! Come, I must, I see, cut deeper. Have you failed to notice her encouragement of the Prince of Wales? Think you it is from devotion to art that he has ordered three portraits, of her from Romney?—one as a bacchante, forsooth!”

“Is this true, Hardy?”

“As true as the compass, my Lord; as true as that this woman led you to assassinate Caracciolo—nay, be quiet, you know that that is what it was, for he died not as a traitor but as a lover. He deserved death, but that does not alter your motive nor the swiftness with which you sent him dangling from the fore-yard arm. Ah, my Lord, do you not see to what lengths this infatuation has led you? Look und on the scene to-night. Is this reckless gathering worthy your glorious record and the love in which the nation holds you? Nay, even more, look at this and see the shame you’ve brought upon your wife.”

I took from my pocket a clipping from that day’s paper in which it was openly charged that Lady Nelson’s flagrant infidelity had caused the Admiral

to decide upon a separation. Nelson read, then crushed it with his foot.

“I’ll kill the beast who printed that!”

“Respect yourself. You cannot fight with such vermin, but ’tis within your power to show the world how foul this slander is.”

“How?”

“By renouncing Lady Hamilton and returning to your wife. You said a moment since that, having compromised her name, you were in duty bound to this friend you made in Naples. You see, now, what you have brought on Lady Nelson. Is not the duty of protecting *her* good name doubly imperative?”

“Oh, my God, Hardy, I don’t know. I am wretchedly distracted and unhappy. You cannot understand what I have endured since my return. Lady Nelson, dazzled by the rank to which I’ve raised her, has tried to alienate me from all my relatives save my father, and has ceaselessly insulted them. She has flown into paroxysms of anger when I refused to submit to further insults her son directed at myself. Only two days since we had so disgraceful a quarrel that I fled to the streets and there wandered the live-long night, reaching here exhausted at daybreak when the kindness of these

dear Hamiltons saved me from serious illness. Mark you, Hardy, as regards her faithfulness—which is but a small matter when weighed against a thousand others entering into married happiness—there is nothing in Lady Nelson’s conduct I wish otherwise; but, sooner than continue the agony of the life I lead with her, I’ll go abroad and never again see England.”

Toby’s voice here came to us amid the clink of glasses from the room adjoining: “Here’s the toast we all love best: ‘Sweethearts and wives.’”

At the same instant Nelson, who in great agitation had been speaking while restlessly pacing the floor, staggered and clutched some silken hangings to save himself from falling.

“My head, Hardy!” he cried. “I’m faint. My God, that pain again! My head! My head!”

Tom Allen, the Admiral’s bravest and most faithful friend, always at hand even if unseen, appeared as if by magic and at once had Nelson in his arms, bearing him gently to a seat.

“’Tis partly his wounds, sir,” said the loyal fellow, as Nelson’s eyes closed wearily, “partly fevers and hardships. His pain sometimes makes him unconscious of what he does. He has not slept, now, for nights. I wish to God he’d have done with all this feasting, wine and cards.”

“So, Allen, 'tis you,” murmured Nelson, half opening his eyes and patting the shoulder of the man kneeling at his feet. “Hardy was right, I suppose, eh, Allen?” he continued, and I could see that his mind just a little wandered. “I’m off my course, then, adrift and beaten? Better I went aloft. Why is it that this maimed and broken body cannot resist the influences my soul would master? I’ve made gratitude the excuse for base ingratitude, for unfaith, untruth and folly. Where is now the dear old rectory? It was once my lighthouse, Tom. The thought of it cheered me in the old days on many a lonely night. It nestled there amid the trees, the scent of vines and flowers; and all about a pleasant summer noise of bees and song of birds and lowing kine, knee deep in brook or buttercups. ’Tis gone now, Tom, gone forever.”

“’Tis still there!” cried Allen, although he had to gulp a sob and the tears stood on his cheeks. “Hear me, even though ’tis only the old derelict that followed you in every boarding, landing, or attack. Shipwreck threatens now. I can hear the surf. Yet, if you will, there’s a beacon that will save us. Let us at last—go home.”

The poor fellow buried his face in his hands. We were all silent. And then Moore’s voice floated to us in one of the tenderest of his Irish melodies:

“ Oh! What was love made for, if 'tis not the same
Through joy and through torment, through glory
and shame?

I know not, I ask not, if guilt's in that heart,
I but know that I love thee, whatever thou art.”

“ Fanny's song!” exclaimed Nelson. He would have said something more but was stayed by the entrance of the applauding crowd. He rose somewhat unsteadily to his feet. Lady Hamilton, still clad in her Greek costume, noticed at once his haggard face and came toward him with a murmur of alarm.

“ 'Tis nothing,” he said, “ The old wound has given me another reminder of the past, that's all.”

“ He needs rest, my Lady,” said Allen, somewhat brusquely. “ Doings like to-night's will be the death of him.”

“ Oh, nonsense, Tom. Don't alarm them. I'm as fit as if I'd just slid off the ways. My dear Verbena, you're dressed for travelling, I see. Are you leaving us?”

Our pretty friend, late of the Cheshire Cheese, who now made her first appearance at the rout, blushed becomingly as she replied:

“ Yes, my Lord. The Squire is to take me home, you know.”

“And as it’s almost day” said Toby, approaching a window, “we must weigh anchor. By Gad! the sun’s up!”

“Yes, and it didn’t rise in the west,” cried Moore, who, of all the literary crowd, alone remained. “How do you account for that, Davison?”

Whereat there was a general shriek, for the medals Davison had given us for the Nile showed the sun setting in the east.

Toby, in throwing aside the curtain, had allowed the morning light to stream in on the tired, dishevelled, painted and powdered crowd; here and there a man fallen asleep, several of the women with hair tumbling in streaks about their drink-drawn eyes, the room in disorder, the whole made repulsive by the purity of the sun. The Squire gazed about with a new born and slowly growing look of disgust. When his eyes finally rested on the figure of the Admiral, it was easy for me to read his thoughts—for they were my own: how ill fitted was the scene to the hero’s character.

“Come with us, my Lord,” he exclaimed to Nelson, as though with a sudden inspiration. “Come and spend the holidays with us. There’s a land-locked harbour there that will give you welcoming shelter. Come, ’twill do you a world of good.”

“It might not be amiss,” remarked Nelson, turning thoughtfully and inquiringly to me.

St. Vincent and Tom Allen joined in my advice that he accept the invitation. Lady Hamilton, however, protested strongly, and we felt that if, as we hoped, Nelson intended using this as the forerunner of a final parting, we were in for squalls.

“Bronté,” she exclaimed, “you simply cannot go. You’ve forgotten we’re due at Beckford’s for the holidays!”

“True. But, Squire, is there any haste? Some one will look after your horses for another day or so, will they not? Come with us to Fonthill; afterwards I’ll gladly be your guest.”

“Oh, dash the horses. If those are your sailing orders, I’ll ship with you at once!”

“Sir William, I owe you an apology,” and Nelson turned smilingly to the old ambassador, who was blinking and puffing with the desire to go to bed. “I had no right thus to increase your party, but I hope you’ll permit the Squire and his nephew, and our fair Verbena also, to be of us on this trip to Beckford’s?”

“Most gladly. My cousin will welcome any friends of yours.”

“Then ’tis settled, Squire. To-morrow we journey

to Fonthill and we'll be at your home for Christmas. Where is Lady Nelson?" he continued, lowering his tone and turning suddenly to me.

"Sir William accompanied her to the hotel, but I called there later and learned that she was leaving immediately for a visit, no one knew just where. She sent word she was too busy to receive me."

"You need not worry, my Lord," said St. Vincent. "Keep your engagement at Fonthill. Then for as long as you please, take a room at Toby's. You need it. In the meanwhile I'll look after Lady Nelson. All will be well on your return."

"Good. And now, Hardy, I ask your pardon. I was in the wrong. I'll strive to do my duty. You see," and he smiled somewhat sadly, "I've struck my colours. 'Tis my first defeat."

"It happened on land," I answered him, "so it shall not count against you."

From the street came the cheers of a crowd of early workmen who, seeing the lighted mansion and then the figure of Nelson at the window, had gathered there.

"Why the devil do they cheer him at this hour?" asked Brummell, yawning. "'Tis absurd."

"Not at all," said Toby. "Unless I'm way off my reckoning, to-night he's won his greatest victory."

Chapter XIII

A Christmas Fête

 TWO days later we of the guests invited to Fonthill for the Christmas holidays, a half-dozen coaches of us and as joyous a company as any in all England, dashed with a clanking of harness and the toot of horns along the road toward Salisbury. There are times, rare but actual, when it seems almost as good to be on land as on the quarter-deck. This was one of them; a glorious sun making welcome the crisp December air, a fairly comfortable coach bowling over one of the best roads in the kingdom, and opposite me the most fascinating woman in the world.

There were four of us perched aloft in advance of all the others, Sir William and Lady Hamilton, Nelson and myself. Lady Hamilton was delighted and delightful, merry as she had been in her best days at Naples, contented at leaving London where the disdain of Queen Charlotte, the annoying proximity of Lady Nelson, and the half veiled insults of social leaders were as wormwood to her after all those years of power and popularity in Italy. Nelson was

quite himself again and seemingly had forgotten his remorse of two nights before in Grosvenor Square. Sir William, as usual, was densely satisfied with everything and everybody. Even I, under the stimulus of this beautiful woman's wit and happiness, was rapidly settling into the comforting conviction that whatever is, is right, and the memory of the poor little deserted woman in London grew fainter under the thud of every advancing hoof-beat.

Ten miles out from Salisbury we saw in advance of us the glitter of swords and plumes. In another moment a body of horse clattered up and formed in line. The commander advanced. It is all brisk formality on this keen December morning. Captain Windham. The Yeoman Cavalry. An escort into the city. Yes, indeed, Captain. Lady Hamilton, Sir William Hamilton and Captain Hardy. Most kind of you, Captain Windham. We are honoured. And the officer is back in the saddle, his face flushed with pride, the cavalry with clanking sabres forms on either side, and away we go again, dashing into the ancient streets of the cathedral town, filled with cheering thousands.

More honours. The hero of the Nile is conducted to the Council House, where, flanked by a sturdy corps of the North British Dragoons, the mayor

receives him and a dignified procession files into the council chamber. The freedom of the city, naturally—this time in a box of heart of oak. Then once again away, clattering out over the Wilton road, the faithful cavalry conducting us for many a mile. Then, at last, Fonthill at nightfall, vast mansion of splendid luxury, strange mystery and regal hospitality.

As we approached the lofty walls that girdled the estate, caught in the dusk a glimpse of the architectural extravagance of the whimsical and gifted author of "Vathek," saw his soldiers in double line drawn up at the lodge of the park, and heard the welcoming notes of his private musicians, I did not wonder at Lady Hamilton's sudden exclamation:

"How difficult it is to realize that this man is a simple subject of the crown! In truth the place would impress a stranger, Sir William, with the idea that your cousin were a sort of modern king-making Warwick."

"Bless you, my child," responded the baronet, "Beckford's a century nearer us than that. Surely he's more like a modern Wolsey, is he not? But he keeps greater state even than the gay Cardinal—though Beckford's far from gay. He is richer than the crown itself, and his abbey far more splendid

than any of the royal palaces. Of course his shoes are not of gold nor set with precious stones as, they say, were Wolsey's, but he could give such foolish footwear to a thousand menials if he wished. Yet here is this Aladdin of to-day in an agony of discontent because he has not obtained so petty a thing as a peerage."

We halted at the gate while the Fonthill militia presented arms and the band saluted us with "Hail Britannia." Then, the volunteers forming on either side, we proceeded through the park and brought up beneath the stupendous tower rising for hundreds of feet above us. The doors were thrown open and a blaze of light streamed out into the dusk upon the champing horses, the arms of the soldiers and the surrounding foliage. The lord of Fonthill, attended by a score of women in splendid toilettes and men tricked in all the finery possible under George the Third, appeared on the balcony to which, by a noble flight of steps, we ascended. As we did so there was a discharge of musketry by our escort and "God Save the King" burst from the musicians on the lawn.

Lady Hamilton, in a halo of romantic triumph, the favourite of a famous queen, the saviour of a nation, and the idol of a navy, passed into a house

she had entered not many years before with no dream of wifehood, and content to be the mad-cap companion of as wild a crew as ever such a mansion saw. To-day she was welcomed as an ambassadress and as the sharer of the honours of England's greatest hero. Her host, too, was changed; the sensualist had become the *connaissanceur* and man of letters, and to-night appeared to have brought together half the celebrities of the nation. Here were Wyatt and other Royal Academicians, Banti of the divine Italian voice, and scores of the greatest in art, music and literature.

Dinner was almost instantly announced and then were we given an example of luxury in food such as Lucullus or Cleopatra may have known, or as our host may have imagined spread on the table of his own Caliph Vathek, but such certainly as could not be had in all prosaic England save in the palace of this, her wealthiest citizen.

Beckford glanced around the circle, then leaned toward Nelson, next whom I sat, and exclaimed:

"Do my eyes deceive me, my lord? Surely it cannot be that the fair Miss Knight is not with you!"

"'Tis quite true. My poet laureate has deserted us for good and all, I fear," was Nelson's smiling response.

“Rather shabby in the daughter of a Rear Admiral of the White.”

“It does appear that way. And what’s more, ’tis rumoured she’s to be appointed companion to the Queen.”

“A double treason, then,” commented Beckford, lowering his voice, “for the melancholy Charlotte has not yet, I presume, consented to receive Lady Hamilton?”

“No, and yet ’twas to my lady’s guidance that Miss Knight was commended by her mother.”

“Oh, well, perhaps the fair creature has not been so immaculate as we all imagined and wishes to pass the remainder of her life in meditation. Queen Charlotte’s court and a convent are much the same thing. Or, no!—here, I have it. She’s resigned your poet laureateship hoping to gain that of the royal family. God knows the office cannot sink much lower. What’s-his-name that holds it now?—Pye, Henry James Pye! Where on earth did they find him? Colley Cibber was bad enough, but since then we’ve gone from bad to worse.”

“I doubt if ambition actuated the girl,” said Nelson thoughtfully and ignoring Beckford’s dissertation on the poets laureate. “However her conduct has taught me that friendship must be real that does

not slink away when enmity resorts to slander. You, Beckford, can sympathize with me in such a matter."

"Personally, such affairs are of little moment to me, I assure you. I should like to be Baron Beckford of Fonthill Abbey, and if His Majesty presented me with a dukedom I'd probably go insane. Yet, strange to say, I care not a jot for public opinion. As regards yourself, however, my Lord,"—and here his voice sank still lower—"since the rats seem to be deserting the beautiful but sinking ship, hadn't you better take warning and follow their example?"

The Admiral's face flushed instantly.

"Beckford, from any other man I'd take those words as an insult. Unless you wish to counteract all the kindness of your splendid hospitality, you'll discuss the subject no farther."

"A thousand apologies, my Lord. Upon my word I'd forgotten the matter was so serious. And, too, I keep myself so cooped up here among my books and pictures that I've almost forgotten how to converse with my fellow creatures."

For two days and nights our host bewildered us with a brilliant succession of music, dancing and feasting, his programmes carried out upon a scale

of barbaric and bizarre splendour that stopped little short of a refined debauchery. Then came the momentous visit to the Abbey.

As we descended the steps to the waiting coaches, the hero of the Nile was greeted by the applause of hundreds of enthusiasts gathered from the country for miles about. Darkness then was gathering and it had completely settled upon us when, an hour later, we passed beneath the soaring arch in the enclosing wall of Fonthill Abbey's noble forest. And now were we ushered into the midst of a stage setting seemingly taken from the life of Vathek himself—not unlike, indeed, the departure of the Caliph in search of the regions of the Sovereign of Fire. Never on an occasion of holiday rejoicing have I looked upon a scene of such impressive solemnity. It was one worthy of the strange and fantastic lord of Fonthill. The moon but faintly pierced the forest of the park, but hundreds of lamps were suspended from the trees, and on either side us flaring flambeaux were carried on horseback by figures garbed in fanciful mystery. The Fonthill soldiers, too, paced beside us and their military band rendered a solemn march, while from the surrounding hills came the long, faint roll of drums. We advanced slowly through the heavily perfumed atmosphere

engendered by the pines, and at last halted beneath the great walls and battlements of the Abbey. Looking upward I saw alternately flash and fade the light of many torches on the colours of the broad pennant floating in Nelson's honour from the staff on the summit of the mighty tower.

Lady Hamilton's reminder of Warwick the king-maker came strongly to me as I passed between the lines of armoured men into the stately hall. Here, indeed, was substantial splendour that made puny the theatrical burlesque of the court of Naples. One almost disbelieved that the lord of Fonthill was merely an untitled man of letters and of taste. Heaven alone knows what millionaires will be and do when another century rolls round.

Chattering the nothings of the conventional even while amazed at all we saw, we were ushered into the monastic apartment termed the parlour of the Cardinal—monastic only in technique, however, for everywhere was luxury. Priceless tapestries covered the walls, the arched windows were shielded by the damask curtains, and from rich ebony furniture came the deadened gleam of ivory. A thousand cones from the forests of pine blazed beneath the huge chimney, and from massive silver sconces lights shone on a mammoth banquet table which,

like the side-boards, glittered with costly plate. Here we were seated, the table extending half the length of an ordinary residence. The service was a continuous series of silver dishes on which marvelous delicacies reposed, prepared in the style of ancient abbey times.

“Is this to be a reproduction of your Caliph’s ‘Eternal and Unsatiating Banquet’?” I inquired of Beckford after an hour had passed and there seemed no signs of a conclusion to the feast.

“Alas, no!” he replied with a genuine sigh. “We poor mortals can duplicate but little that the imagination has pictured.”

“It would be a sorry meal for the Caliph’s mother,” exclaimed Lady Hamilton, replacing a wine glass on the table. “What a delicious broth you gave her, Cousin Beckford—powdered mummies and skeletons served in the oil of serpents! You did well to give her up to an eternity of anguish, but I shall never forgive you for punishing in the same manner poor Vathek and the adorable Nourouihar. Should not love absolve us from our sins?”

“Such was, and such should be, the punishment of unrestrained passions and atrocious actions! Such is, and such should be, the chastisement of

blind ambition!’” Thus in answer our host quoted from his famous romance of the Orient, then the sensation of the entire literary world. “Nay, Cousin Enima,” he continued, smiling across at Lady Hamilton, “do not look so unkindly at me. Those lovely eyes, like Vathek’s, have something of the power of life and death. And, like the Prince, you should not often give way to anger lest you depopulate your dominions.”

“Then you acknowledge yourself one of my subjects?”

“Oh, more than that; I am ready to obey thee as thy slave,” and then he added laughingly, “‘I and the other slaves of the lamp.’”

“Such being the case, listen to my commands. Admit instantly that when you wrote this fairy tale you sinned in condemning the sweethearts to unending fire.”

“Fair Queen, for that crime I deserve death.”

“Admit instantly that love justifies everything.”

“Everything, oh Queen,—save marriage.”

“For the present, you are forgiver. Now conduct us through your enchanted castle.”

We arose from the table and, led by Beckford, ascended to the second floor, passing up a broad staircase, at all the landings of which stood strange,

living beings in hooded gowns screening them in sinister fashion from head to foot, lighting our way with great torches of wax.

We advanced in astonished silence through a great chamber, walled with yellow damask and containing cabinets filled with innumerable vases of solid gold, to the library lined and alcoved with the precious volumes once owned by Gibbon. Thence we passed to a vast gallery, throughout whose stretch of full two hundred feet superb monasticism reigned. An alabaster statue of St. Anthony faced us on a towering shrine on whose reliquaries shone the lights of silver candelabrad wax, while in the gallery's mysterious perspective burned other lights borne on stands of ebony and gold. As we entered this place of almost awesome splendour and magnificence, we were greeted by the solemn tones of invisible musicians. Then to gayer strains we were shown into another apartment, where spiced wines and rare sweets in baskets of gold were served by dusky servants in oriental garb. Then onward again we moved, as in a dream, to still another chamber. When we were seated here, the music died away to silence and a faint light shone only on an open space in front of us. Suddenly into its gleam glided the glorious Hamilton, her body clothed in the simple clinging draperies of the classic Greeks.

Hitherto I have set down no account of these attitudes of Lady Hamilton, nor do I now see how my pen is to do them justice. Goethé, whose death I mourned just six years since, saw her in these poses when, already famous as the author of "The Sorrows of Werther," he visited in Naples. I find that he thus recorded his impressions:

"She is the most perfect of the wonders of nature and art. Dressed in an extremely becoming Greek costume, letting her hair loose and taking a couple of shawls, she exhibits every possible variety of posture, expression and look, so that at last the spectator almost fancies it is a dream. What the greatest artists have aimed at is shown in perfection, in movement, in ravishing variety. Standing, kneeling, sitting, lying down, grave or sad, playful, exulting, repentant, wanton, menacing, anxious—all mental states follow rapidly one after another."

How imperfectly even a poet tells of the delight she gave!

On that night at Beckford's it was the character of Agrippina she portrayed. Germanicus, joint emperor with Tiberius, has been poisoned by order of his fellow-monarch. Agrippina bears in a golden urn the ashes of her husband, and appearing thus before the citizens of Rome, incites them to revenge his death. Lady Hamilton was without the aid even of her voice, the sole instruments conveying her

meaning being her mobile features, her Greek gown's draping, and her expressive movements. With these she made us realize every possible thought torturing the unhappy woman, and made live again every gesture, pose and facial change by which Agrippina would have aroused the passions of the Romans. Particularly was there naught but the utmost grace of classicism in her imploring manner of stretching forth to the people the golden urn, or in beseechingly holding it aloft as to the gods. Without retiring, she would, for little more than the space of a breath, turn from us and rearrange the draping of her gown, her veil or head-dress, perfectly to accord with some certain situation in the wordless, all but motionless, drama she was enacting. Incredible as it may seem, remembering the absence of accessories and supporting actors, so masterfully did she portray this pathetic story of ancient days that many in the room were moved to tears.

Yet, when these admirable but somewhat morbid *tableaux-vivants* were finished, Lady Hamilton became at once her vivacious self again; the life of the gathering, overflowing with merriment and racy badinage, conversing here in French, there with even greater fluency in her beloved Italian, everywhere incomparably brilliant and alluring.

In the fight for the Admiral's good name and Lady Nelson's happiness, what chance had such amateurs as Toby and Allen and I, against such overwhelming odds? Convinced of this, I stole away into a nearby but more secluded apartment where I could smoke in solitude. I had not long been seated there, brooding over what seemed certain defeat, when the two who were uppermost in my mind entered and, apparently engaged in earnest conversation, passed out at a more distant door. Could it be possible that, after all, he would to-night fulfil the promise half made to us on Grosvenor Square? This seemed to be too good to be among even the remotest possibilities, yet I determined to wait there and see, for, if a separation should take place, I felt the Admiral would seek me out, knowing it was, to some extent, my right to learn the fact among the first.

What hopes and fears, what plans for the future of our hero, what strange fancies, regarding him and all of us, flooded my mind as I waited there! An hour or more later it was, perhaps, when he re-entered the room alone. For some moments he did not speak but stood motionless at the window. Even in the faint half-light of the place I could see that he was far more agitated than I had ever known

him. He was, too, frightfully pale, his lips twitched, and his hand nervously opened and closed, while I could see the sleeve, covering the stump of the lost arm, move tremblingly as always it did when he was under some mental strain. At last he turned and faced me.

“It is over, Hardy. God knows I hope it is for the best. Such sorrow as I feel this instant I have never known nor dreamed was possible. In the name of heaven, man, tell me you’re sure I’ve done my duty for I’m in an agony of remorse!”

I tightly grasped his hand.

“I’m certain of it,” I exclaimed, earnestly and in all truth. “God bless you, Nelson, and send you every happiness.”



Chapter XIV

And Another That Was Happier

UST when, where, or how we had taken the coach, I could not imagine, nor could I recall having bidden good-bye to Beckford or any of his guests. I decided I must have had a drop too much of that delectable wine of the Abbey, and I remembered that in this respect Lady Hamilton had set me a very fair pace. However, there we were, Verbena inside with Tom Allen, but Nelson, Toby, Jack and I snuggled in our great-coats outside the coach, with much good cheer tucked away in the fore-boot, everything in readiness to start on the journey to the Squire's much vaunted country place.

The coachman called out, "Now, then, gentlemen!" as though there were a score of tardy passengers struggling into view, and aloft went both he and the guard—the latter with much energy echoing the warning as though he had made a personal discovery of still another score. The coachman settled himself in the box and the guard behind, horsecloths were dragged off, and away we went.

There were two or three sharp cracks of the coachman's whip, and the four noble animals sniffed the air with the joy of sportsmen, tossed their heads and broke into a gallop. Leaving the jolting stones of the village street and reaching the country road, the wheels fairly flew along the frosty ground. The horn of the guard sounded clear in the cold, still atmosphere, and from the scattered cottages came women and children, leaving their blazing logs to shout to us a merry Christmas.

"A pity there's no snow," I remarked to Toby.

"I think we'll have it before night," was the reply, "just the thing for Christmas Eve."

"Christmas Eve!" I echoed. "Why, we spent that at Fonthill. You've lost a day, Squire."

"Indeed I've not. D'ye suppose I'd miss Christmas Eve at home? Not even for the Admiral, sir, though I had a time persuading him to come so soon."

I realized that it must, indeed, have been the Abbey wine. I had myself lost a day somewhere in my reckoning, but it really did not matter. I was glad enough to escape from the Hamiltons; that alone was worth a whole week lost.

A toy-like town loomed up in the distance, and soon the guard's lips again pressed against his bugle,

sending a lively air through the long High Street. With a great clattering of hoofs and tootings of the horn, we pulled up in the inn yard. The coachman threw the reins to the ground and there betook himself also. We followed his example, intending only to stamp our feet a bit while the horses were being changed. But I called Nelson's attention to the holly in the window and the tap-room fire glowing cheerfully from within. The sight was irresistible.

All of us entered save Ailen, who showed an inexplicable determination to remain with Verbena inside the coach. Hot drinks were ordered all around, and, when the landlord and the village loungers learned the Admiral was one of us, you may well believe the one did himself proud in mixing the concoction, while the others were wild in their enthusiasm. Soon, however, the warning call of the coachman was heard, and, regretfully buttoning up, we prepared to leave. I was the last to reach the door. As I did so I caught sight of a fellow, seated at a distant table in the tap-room, leaning back comfortably, almost defiantly, in his chair, and looking full at me with a sneering smile.

God knows what prompted me, but, when it finally dawned upon me that he was Stuart, I closed the door and walked over to his table. Remember

that, bad as he was, the fellow had once been my brother officer—but there, even if you bear that fact in mind, 'twill not excuse my conduct. I wondered at it later, myself. But, at all events, I sat there for full five minutes and talked kindly to him, urging reformation and renewed self-respect, the while the guard and coachman bawled angrily outside. By every conceivable argument I appealed to him to give up his degraded life. I even went so far as to suggest that he enlist on board ship, and promised, if he proved worthy, to use my every influence to gain him Nelson's pardon and the favour of the Admiralty. 'Twas all worse than useless. He listened to me with a contemptuous smile. And then, when I had finished, he rose, drew on his great-coat, and with brazen, brutal frankness, told me what he had in mind.

“Hardy,” he said, “what a kind-hearted ass you are! You helped to break me there in Sicily, and I've hated you for it ever since. Nevertheless you mean well, I suppose, and one can't deny you have a heart. However, I've other plans. It happens, no matter how, that I know Nelson last night parted from the Hamilton forever. Now, when a woman cannot have just what she wants, she takes what she can get. I don't care to fight under Nelson on

ship, but I think in time I'll be his accepted substitute on land. The Hamilton may no longer be the gold mine she has been to me at times, but as a woman she's still worth the possessing."

He saluted me with smiling elaboration and passed out the door. I glanced from the window and saw him turn in the direction of Beckford's place—yes, and I well knew, toward the woman he had ruined and deserted when she was poor and unknown. Would she, when time had eased the pain of Nelson's leaving, welcome back the scoundrel? I could not conceive this possible, and yet stranger vagaries have been known in the history of woman's affections. However, why should I permit the problem to worry me? The one important truth was that Nelson's chains had fallen, and that in a fortnight, at the most, he would, with his old time manliness, greet his wife in London.

Nevertheless I climbed to my place on the coach with so heavy a heart that I scarcely noted the rumbling swearing of the whip. And all the way to Hasset Manor I could not wholly remove from mind the remorseful thought of Lady Hamilton. Neither Nelson nor I proved particularly companionable, and only the ever jovial mood of Toby and the happiness of Jack at again nearing home, saved the journey from being fairly funeral.

That night, in a heavy snow storm which, as Toby had predicted, had come upon us late in the afternoon, we reached our destination. Driving through the park gates, the guard giving a final blast of the horn, we soon drew up before an open door. Through it I could see a well lit hall from which came a merry, welcoming crowd. The drive through the stately avenue, bordered on either side by a double row of ancient trees now heavily laden with snow, had given me glimpses of a quiet, beautiful and home-like estate. It was evident that the friend at whom we had jested at the Cheshire Cheese was a man of no small material importance and that doubtless his hospitality would prove more elaborate than we had anticipated. But Toby, whatever his position in the county, was still the boy—and still, under Nelson's spell, the salt.

"Ahoy, there, on board the Manor!" he cried as we drove up. "Pipe all hands on deck! Parade your forces to salute the Admiral! Ready about. Let go there. Hard a lee. Belay, avast, stand by! Clear the companionway, and man the gang-plank! With a will, yo-ho, all bear a hand!"

"Evidently we have arrived," said Nelson smilingly, preparing to descend.

"Aye, aye, sir. This is my old brig. Believe me, you are most welcome, my Lord."

Turning to a red-faced, clerical, fat and gouty individual, the Squire continued as he busied himself handing out a score of parcels:

"Tip the purser, scholar! London has emptied our treasure locker. Unstow the cargo there. Be careful of that freight—'tis no common ballast, I assure you. Steady there, old stevedore! Now then, inside and serve out grog!"

Although at first all but speechless with surprise at Toby's changed vocabulary, there was soon enough of greetings, kisses and screams of delight from all the family. Jack was particularly excited as he ran into the outstretched arms of a kindly-faced lady of some thirty years, whose relationship was explained by the murmured:

"My darling boy! My Jack! My Jack!"

"Order formation for complete inspection!" again came Toby's voice. "Lord Nelson, this is my first mate." And Mrs. Hasset came forward with cordial, welcoming dignity. "Here's Susannah, my eldest daughter. Another daughter, Mrs. Herbert—she's Jack's mother. And here's little Milly, grand-daughter and sweetheart, eh, my lass?"

The squire lifted the little tot to his shoulder, from which throne she leaned to be kissed by Nelson.

There was a moment's embarrassment when the Squire introduced the clerical looking gentleman as his son, the Rev. Paul Hasset, and Nelson, failing to catch the churchly title, calmly remarked, as he took the parson's extended hand:

"We've met before, sir. You were dancing at Vauxhall, I think, when first I saw you."

But in a moment this unconscious revelation of the parson's peccadillo was forgiven in a burst of hearty laughter; for my part I scarcely noticed it, for I had suddenly discovered that the elderly Susannah, a personage of most uncertain age, with corkscrew curls and plainly visible pantalettes, was favouring me with alarmingly languishing glances.

"By Neptune! I've forgotten Verbena!" And Toby wrenched open the door of the coach. There, for some strange reason, she sat with Tom Allen, utterly oblivious that we had arrived. Doubtless they had fallen asleep. It must have been somewhat lonely for them inside. The Squire quickly had Verbena out and the women folks almost smothered her in their arms.

"Little Verbena, safe and sound again," said Toby proudly. "A Christmas present for old Morrison. Just think, the girl's a widow now!"

"Oh, sir, that happened such a long, long time ago!"

Did I mistake or, as she thus protested, did she really glance somewhat oddly at Tom Allen?

"Now, off with you two, Tom, you and Verbena. The Admiral will grant you leave of absence to escort her to her father. Bring both of them over later and join our celebration."

As the young couple prepared to follow the Squire's suggestion, the rest of us entered the house where, for my benefit, the introductions were again gone over, the Admiral having somewhat monopolised these formalities outside. Within, the former cordiality redoubled and even the servants seemed to share in the hospitable intentions of our hosts. And is there anywhere on earth hospitality like that of an English country family? Is there anywhere on earth a Christmas Eve as jolly and whole-hearted as the one spent in that same England?

The best sitting-room, into which we were ushered, was attractive in its richly carved oak and the family portraits, while, in a huge, high chimney-piece, a great log fire blazed cheerily. In this apartment, as well as in the large old-fashioned hall and elsewhere, holly and greens appeared in holiday profusion. From one corner an old, deep-voiced clock, fitted with chimes, toned the quarter hours.

"'Tis time to splice the main brace," ejaculated Toby, smilingly glancing around the group.

“What is it, dear?” asked Mrs. Hasset.

“The sun is o’er the mizzen yard.”

“What on earth do you mean. Toby, dear? It must be something to drink? Will you gentlemen partake of wine?”

“Wine, madam!” exclaimed the Squire. “Rum you mean. Bring out the rum. I despatched you three days ago supplies for one year’s cruising.”

“They arrived safely, father,” eagerly announced the Reverend Paul.

“I’ll warrant you’d know it,” said Toby. “You’ve been here ahead of us, ’tis plain to see.”

“Some one must tell him at once,” I heard Jack’s pretty mother remark to Mrs. Hasset. “I say, Dad.”

“What is it, dear—a toast?”

“No, but——”

“Then, pray, don’t interrupt in the very middle of our grog.”

“Toby, listen to me!” cried Mrs. Hasset.

“Not even to hear you wish me merry Christmas.”

Despite the unmistakable heartiness of our welcome and the evident happiness of all at the return of the Squire and Jack, there seemed to me in the air a tinge of anxious embarrassment, partly evinced

by these repeated attempts to draw Toby into some family disclosure. Toby, himself, too, notwithstanding his merry spirits, appeared to have something on his mind and occasionally listened as if for some expected sound from without.

Nelson had seated himself by the fire, where little Milly had climbed to his knee and was peering curiously up his empty sleeve. I did not dare be seated lest the tot's example should be followed by that antique bit of femininity, Susannah, who was fastening up a branch of mistletoe, the while she glanced archly in my direction.

"Oh, grandpa," cried the little one, "Black Bess is sick; she has distemper."

"Well, what of it, pet?"

"Why, good gracious, what does Toby mean?" gasped Mrs. Hasset.

"The pack have not been out since you were here," continued Milly earnestly, giving the rest of her budget of news. "And the puppy's dead, grandpa. You know the one I mean?"

"Yes, dear—decent enough animals, of course, but, then, really nothing but dogs!"

"Why, grand-dad! I mean the *hounds!*"

"Yes, just spotted yellow dogs. Gentlemen, make yourselves at home. We are now 'tween decks at grog time, you understand."

"I'm happy to take you at your word, Squire," said Nelson feelingly. "Here I can relax, can lay aside the iron-bound coat of responsibility. For the first time in years I know the influence of home."

"We're proud to hear you say so, my Lord," said Mrs. Hasset, seating herself beside him. "And yet I'm sorry you've found such moments rare. Was it a pleasant journey from Fonthill?"

"Rather unpleasant, after the storm set in; but such a welcome as you extend has made it quite forgotten."

"A bad voyage, truly, madam," quoth Toby, after he had lighted his pipe. "We boarded the old transport at Fonthill doek and, by the barnacles on the confounded fleet of France, we'd hardly got the anchor to our bow and gained an offing before we ran into a snow-white squall and had to keep the fog horn busy. We had it like that all the way to Gloucester and till we made Worcester, where a new crew was shipped. Later the pole—that is to say, the bow-sprit was carried by the board. We lay to in the trough of the sea, the tars clinging to the starboard rigging. Ice and snow covered us from stem to stern. But at last we braced the jib boom, repaired the bob stay and scudded."

During this outburst Mrs. Hasset had grown pale

with alarm. The tears actually gathered in her eyes as she whispered to the Admiral:

“In heaven’s name, my Lord, of what is he speaking? What happened him in London. Has he lost his mind?”

“Not at all, dear madam. But for a time he’s foresworn allegiance to the stable and has given it to the sea.”

Toby, who had ceased only to refill his glass, continued:

“Hardly were we under way again when on our beam end a monstrous drift—I mean, a wave, almost swamped the coach—confound me for a land-lubber, I mean the transport. We righted her and got our course again, hoisted mainsail and flying jib. From the poop, where I was stationed, ’twas a glorious sight. Jack, on the mizzen-truck——”

But the jolly Squire got no farther. Mrs. Hasset led the attack on him. In an instant she and Mrs. Herbert and Susannah, and even little Millie, were upon him; he was being kissed by the quartet singly and in unison, on the nose, on his bald pate, anywhere the pretty lips could reach him; being pulled and hauled about meanwhile in every direction and with all the force that feminine hands could summon. By gad, it was a sight fitted to make one

wish he were a man of family or had any prospect of becoming such.

Toby, finally breaking free from this bevy of fair pirates, faced us and, with twinkling eyes, remarked:

“You see, gentlemen, how little encouragement my patriotism receives. I’ll tell you what it is, my dears,” and he turned with mock ferocity upon his tormentors, “unless you treat my profession more kindly, I’ll see to it that I have a sweetheart in every port next time I sail.”

“A voyage, I hope,” said Nelson, “that will be long put off. Were I lord of Hasset Manor, the quarter-deck would never again know my tread.”

Poor old Nel! I hoped the peace he had in mind would soon be his. I well knew his thoughts at this moment; how strongly impressed he must be by this homely scene, its honesty and simple purity, when he compared it, as I was doing, with the recent cold magnificence at Beckford’s and the artificial and suggestive merriment of Lady Hamilton’s gatherings.

A butler poked his head in at the door, his face agrin with good cheer.

“Supper is served, madam.”

Oh, such a supper! It was “My Lord, a glass of wine with you,” and “Simon, fill Captain Hardy’s

glass," at intervals of not more than two minutes each from the very start of the repast. And such songs and toasts! Even the languishing glances and quivering corkscrews of Susannah, and the long-winded dissertations of the pedantic parson could not destroy the charm it all had for me.

And then when the table had been removed, the carpet taken up, and two fiddlers ensconced in a corner, what a dance followed, lighted by a score of bright candles and the crackling logs! The servants were brought in, if you please, to make a goodly number—for on Christmas Eve there was no formality and no distinctions at Hasset Manor. Forward and back, hands across, down the middle!—oh, I'd like to be young enough to again spend such a night.

Long before any one was exhausted, another couple stole into the room and demurely took a place in the dance. So great was the fun and noise that for a moment they were unnoticed. Then Toby swooped down on Tom Allen and Verbena, and, after a whispered word or two, drew the girl into our very midst.

"Here's the best of shipping news, my friends!" he cried. "Dear little Verbena has signed articles for a life-long cruise with Allen."

Both because of this, and because she stood immediately beneath a sprig of mistletoe, Nelson and I led in tipping her pretty, blushing face up for a kiss. And, if you'll believe me, as I looked down in her sweet eyes, filled with tears of happiness, I'm blessed if for a moment I didn't regret having been careless enough to leave her alone inside that coach—with Allen.

"Paul," called Toby to his son, "you as chaplain must splice these young people with your grappling hooks before the squadron sails."

"Your nautical metaphor is getting a trifle mixed, Squire!" laughed Nelson, "but the sentiment is laudable. And neither of us must forget the promise we made Verbena at the Cheshire Cheese."

"Not I, my Lord. I'll double every promise I made that lucky night."

"But, sir," protested the parson, recovering with difficulty from a glass of wine that had slipped down the wrong way, "the haste suggested in this alliance is indecorous, unseemly and indelicate."

"My son, your conversation is like unto a jelly-fish. I'm in command here, and, unless you splice these two the instant I give the order, I'll disinherit you. And that reminds me that I have a quarrel with ancestry as well as with my offspring. Jack, lad, bring me a bucket of paint."

Not another word did he utter while the midshipman was executing this order, but paced the floor angrily glaring at a seemingly inoffensive portrait hanging on the wall. As we later learned, 'twas but a wretched daub executed by the parson, who prided himself on his versatility and had copied it from a valuable picture in the family gallery. The paint having been brought, Toby mounted a chair beneath the portrait.

"What are you contemplating?" queried the parson.

"I'm about to make a man out of this old weazel."

"What! Do you refer to the Dean?—to the revered and beloved Reverend Dr. Hasset?"

"The 'Dean,' eh! I'll give you to understand this is *Captain* Hasset—or will be when I'm through with him."

By a few deft splashes of his brush the Squire had placed what would pass for epaulettes on the shoulders of the Dean.

"The Hassets simply must have had a naval ancestry," he said, looking down upon us with a merry and not altogether sober wink. "I feel their blood tossing within my veins."

The brush again splashed against the canvas and

what might, by a strong flight of the imagination, be taken for a cocked hat appeared upon the head of the long ago departed.

“But I protest, sir, I protest,” cried the parson. “Respect the sanctity of the cloth! You are rendering ridiculous the great divine who was friend to the Bishop of Bristol. What’s more, you’re destroying the results of my artistic labours!”

“Oh, the Bishop of Bristol, eh!” echoed Toby, looking with fine scorn down upon his son. “I heard of him in London. And possibly the Dean had a snuff-box presented him by the Duke of Not?”

“But, father, if you insist upon this desecration, conform somewhat to truth. The Hassets had ancestors in the army. They fought with Cromwell.”

“The army! Pooh! A minor branch of service. Come, how do you know this sour-faced old chap was not at sea before he became a snivelling civilian like yourself?”

While the Squire still continued his alterations and we sat about the fire enjoying his strange humour, a door was opened and the butler’s voice fairly electrified us all.

“Lady Nelson!”

And, bless me, there she stood, looking hugely

pretty, too, her dark face well set off by furs and powdered from head to foot with snow.

"You must pardon my tardiness, Mrs. Hasset," she exclaimed, advancing into the room and smiling brightly—for she had seen neither Nelson nor myself. "I could not get here a moment earlier. Those poor sick little ones in the village——"

Suddenly she ceased, and the smile vanished; for Nelson, pale, yet with a look of hope, had risen and she saw him standing there, his arm impulsively, unconsciously held out toward her. Breathlessly we watched the tableau. But we were doomed to disappointment. Lady Nelson turned her back upon the Admiral, and, approaching Mrs. Hasset, exclaimed in a choking voice:

"I hope you had no knowledge of this when you asked me here."

Toby descended from his perch and crossed to her side.

"Dear Lady Nelson, reflect," he pleaded. "Take time to think."

"I've had the opportunity already, thank you. This situation is unbearable. Please arrange some way to send me home to-night—at once."

"Dear heart," murmured Mrs. Hasset, taking her in her arms, "to-morrow we will, if you still insist. But rest here until morning."

"To-night! I cannot, will not wait!"

"Oh, Fanny," and Mrs. Herbert added her entreaties, "please, please, don't leave us like this."

"To-night—I——"

But here the shock of meeting proved too strong. Kindly hands laid the unconscious form upon a couch while the women quickly brought restoratives. Then, too weak for further protests, Lady Nelson was lifted in the Squire's strong arms and borne to a room above.

The silence that ensued was oppressive; nor were matters greatly mended when little Millie, who had watched the scene with open-eyed astonishment, approached the Admiral's chair and, gently touching his bowed head, whispered:

"Oh, sir, I'm so sorry "

We were all, I think, relieved when, at this moment the sound of bells was heard outside, and the deadened beat of hoofs upon the snow. Any arrival would be welcome. A moment later a servant entered leading a figure I well knew, blind, lacking a leg and arm, clothed in a faded naval uniform.

"What! 'Tis you, Morrison?" Nelson had started from his chair and now advanced toward our old companion. "The same old Davy Morrison who was the first to teach me how to splice and swear!"

He would have placed his one arm about the poor, blind fellow's neck, but in an ecstasy of happiness, his sightless eyes filled with tears, he had knelt, stump and all, before his old commander.

"My Lord! My Lord! At last I hear his voice once more!"

Nelson raised Morrison to his side and led him to a seat.

"I wish you could be with me when I next sail," he said kindly.

"Oh, my Lord, I must go with you. Pray, don't, don't leave me behind! I'll be a powder monkey, anything you say."

"But, old timber toes, that stump would prevent your boarding, nor could you make sail with your hook."

"No, damn it, no; but I can cuss and cheer like hell, and for the flag I can go to Davy Jones's locker, sown in my hammock."

"By gad, and so you shall!" cried Nelson, laying his hand on the old man's shoulder. "And, now, Squire, where may I write a few despatches I've neglected these last few days?"

"Right here, my Lord. We'll all leave you in peace. Come, girls, away with you to the kitchen and put things ship-shape for the games to-night."

Davy, come with us. And, Captain Hardy, will you join also?"

"Thank you, Squire. I think I'll remain comfortably here by the fire. That tempestuous voyage you so graphically described somewhat wore me out to-day."

They all left the room; Tom Allen brought in his master's writing materials and placed them on the table; and I snuggled myself in my chair for a much needed rest. The Admiral wrote for a few moments; then the quill dropped from his hand, his head fell forward, and his whole body relaxed in an attitude of deep dejection. Evidently the fact that I remained had been unnoted by him, for he gave audible expression to his thoughts.

"God, grant me another victory! Let this last blessing fall on me and I'll resign to Thee my life, seeking no further glory save in the great Commander's love, in which I must rely for pardon. Yes, let it soon be over! When the ensign shall have been shot away, and Death has his grappling irons fast upon my heart—then, old Ocean, only mother I have known, receive me to thy billowed breast. Rock me, rest me there eternally!"

The half prayer faltered on his lips and died away in a whisper. His head sank forward on his

arm, which rested on the table, and he slept. Strange, stern conqueror! What an inexplicable blending was there in your character: an actor at times, theatrical even in your solitude, the bravest of the brave, yet panting for applause as did the woman you left at Fonthill, and as much a child as the little innocent who to-night wept because you sorrowed!

The candles burned low and, one by one, went out. But I sat there musing by the fire light until Toby entered. Seeing the Admiral asleep, he tip-toed softly to my side.

“ Ah, sir, there’s heartache there! ” he whispered, looking pityingly at the reclining figure. “ Can I do nothing? Suppose I jump in and bear a hand—take a trick at the wheel myself? At least I’ll reconnoitre, that’s what I’ll do. I’ll not wait for commission or orders. A privateer, eh, Captain, that’s the idea! Let’s see if I can’t bring about an unconditional surrender.”

Giving me no explanation of these seemingly nonsensical ejaculations, the honest old fellow crept out of the room. For another quarter of an hour I sat there thinking, not altogether happily, of the Admiral. Then the door again was opened, showing me Toby all but dragging Lady Nelson. He made

a beseeching gesture, whispered something, and kissed her hand. She hesitated: he picked her up bodily, deposited her on her feet inside, beckoned to me, and closed the door with a bang. I was about to carry out his motioned request, but the closing door, as was doubtless intended, awakened Nelson. He leaped to his feet, and husband and wife stood facing each other.

“Fanny, I ask forgiveness,”—a movement on my part now might mean ruin, and I slid farther into my corner seat: “I have been as blind as one who voyages on an unknown sea. The stars that guide the mariner have been o’erclouded. In a trackless waste, lacking chart and compass, I could not find harbour!”

There came no response. Her face remained averted.

“If the pilot, meeting treacherous tides, deceiving winds and tempests that come unwarned, wrecks his bark upon an unknown rock, can you not set it down to accident and forgive the blundering seamanship?”

Still she was silent. He approached nearer her.

“Or, suppose the fleet be scattered by a storm and a single man-of-war, lured by false beacons, cheated to his fate by strategies no tactics could

foresee, is overhauled and engaged alone with an outnumbering foe that fights unfairly—ah, will you degrade the sailor for one lost battle? Dear heart, give me a chance to win my rank again.”

“But, Horatio, these stories that I neglected you, was faithless——”

“Are all untrue, dear; I knew it well.” He was beside her now, and gently took the handkerchief she had pressed to her eyes. “Is this white pennant a little flag of truce signalling from your heart? Say but the word and it shall be a sail filled with fair breezes to bear us again together over tranquil seas. Look through the window there. Do you see the North Star shining sure and clear above us? Come let’s take our reckoning anew.”

He drew her to the far-projecting window and the curtains there enclosed them. A moment later the door was softly opened and Toby’s head appeared, glancing about the deserted apartment. His face grew long and he swore beneath his breath at finding me there alone.

There was a scramble in the hall-way and Jack and Millie came tumbling in, covered with snow and made rosy by the outer air.

“Oh, we’ve had such fun, grandpa,” cried the child. “We’ve been through the stables and re-

named all the stock. Just think, my little pony, May, is now 'Dreadnaught,' and old white Dobbin mama used to ride—you know how blind he is?—he's 'Argus.'"

"Yes," continued Jack, "and every hound's named after an English ship. Even Fido, the baby pup, is 'Victory.'"

"Why, they're now real dogs of war," exclaimed Mrs. Hasset laughingly as she with all the others entered in time to hear the children's chatter, and immediately busied herself in relighting the candles. "Call Lady Nelson, Molly, dear. See if you can't persuade her to come down a little while."

"I did so, mama, but there was no answer to my knock!"

I could have enlightened them on this point but I thought it best to let the Nelsons reveal themselves in their own good time and way.

"'Tis a sad Christmas for two of our party," remorsefully said Toby. "I've made a mess of it."

"'Tis not your fault, dear!" his wife assured him. "You could not know that Lady Nelson would be here."

"Yes, but I did. I knew it all the time. Milly told me when she wrote about the puppy's funeral."

"And you thought if you brought them together

they'd make it up?" Mrs. Hasset stooped and kissed the rueful face of the broken-hearted Squire.

"I thought I was a wise old diplomat and strategist. I'm nothing but a miserable old breeder of bad cattle. I'm a fraud, that's what I am, and if the truth were known, I couldn't tell a quarter deck from a court of equity. Oh, confound it all, 'tis such a shame, mother. Can't you speak to her again?"

"Bless your dear, kind heart! Leave it to the Lord. This is His night, you know."

"Oh, well, sing something, will you, Molly?" and Toby rose, shaking himself like a Newfoundland, as though striving to cast off his melancholy.

"Really, I've no heart for it, father."

"Then in God's name, let's drink to drown our sorrow—a doleful sentiment for Christmas eve. Paul's three sheets in the wind already."

"'Tis a pernicious practice prompted by lamentable environment." With which laboured utterance the parson fell soundly asleep and was heard from no more that evening.

By this he missed the one great moment of the night of nights, for his first snore was drowned in the chimes of the clock which struck the midnight hour. At the same instant the sound of distant

church bells came to us, and just outside the voices of carollers.

“ Eight bells! ” cried Toby, “ and——”

“ Peace on earth, good will toward men, ” interrupted his wife, kissing him.

There was a chorus of “ Merry Christmases, ” and then Toby directed Jack to call the singers in. The obedient midshipman drew back the curtains to throw wide the window. There in the flooding moonlight, their arms about each other, stood Nelson and his wife.

With the exception of myself all stood for a moment speechless with astonishment. Then Toby expressed the sentiments of all.

“ Thank God, flag-ship and consort are together again! ”

Now he was on a chair, pretending to hoist sail, now on the floor dancing the hornpipe, and for a quarter hour conducting himself like a genial madman. And, oh, what a mad night it was from that time on! Can I tell of it? How servants and singers were brought in to join the merriment! How the younger people, when we adjourned to the great kitchen and its Christmas tree, played at snap-dragon and blindman’s buff! How there was another supper, washed down with bubbling wassail! And

how, when Nelson and his wife and all the others at last retired, Toby and Allen and I sat long by the blazing logs and shed tears of maudlin but sincere happiness over our hot wine, well spiced and brandied! Never again shall I creep into bed so thoroughly at peace with all the world as I did that merry Christmas morning at Hasset Manor.

Chapter XV

An Obligatory Epilogue



HALF opened my eyes, then contentedly closed them again the better to think quietly of the events of the previous night. All was well, now. Dear little Verbena happy, the Nelsons reconciled——

“Why, Captain Hardy, your conduct has been most unflattering!”

This time I opened my eyes to their fullest extent, for the voice was strangely like that of Lady Hamilton, and it was out of tune with my pleasant morning thoughts. Oh, come, I had dozed for an instant; I had imagined the voice and of course it was not she standing there smiling down at me. How could she have reached Toby's, and how could I have thought she'd enter my bed-room? I moved to turn and snuggle my head more comfortably in my pillow. But the pillow seemingly had vanished. Had she removed it? My head now rested against a hard, woodeny something. I grew indignant at this, and started to my feet to expostulate about I knew not just what. A wondering calmness seized

me when I saw that I was fully dressed, that it was really Lady Hamilton in the flesh that stood before me, and that the room in which I lay sprawling in a chair was the familiar one at Fonthill Abbey. I gazed at her with idiotic blankness.

“How did I get back here?” I managed at last to ask.

“Why, to my knowledge, you haven’t been elsewhere,” she cried with laughing perplexity. “But if you remain much longer, you’ll do so alone. The rest of us are about to leave. The coaches wait below.”

“But, see here, Lady Hamilton, do you mean to tell me——”

“I mean to tell you, Captain, that some three hours since you deserted us most shabbily, and that at the present moment you’re giving an admirable imitation of sheer insanity.”

“I believe you, but I’d like to talk with Nelson.”

“He’s coming now. Bronté, I’ll be below. By the time you’ve brought this poor Captain back to earth we’ll be quite ready to start.”

“Nelson,” I exclaimed after I had dazedly watched her leave the room, “is it true there was no Toby’s, no Christmas tree, no mistletoe, no betrothal, no reconciliation, no——”

“My dear Hardy, evidently you’ve had a delightful nap.”

“But, my Lord, surely in this very room two nights ago you told me you’d left the Hamilton forever.”

“No more of that, I beg! Neither of us ever saw the room until this very night. You’ve dreamed that also!”

“If so, I wish I had not wakened. Then everything is as it was before—with Lady Hamilton?”

“Yes, Hardy, and ever will be. For a moment the other night in London you made me misconceive my duty. Now I realize how grievously we were both in error. There are many reasons why I have thus decided. One is—I trust you with a sacred secret, none other knows it—Lady Hamilton is soon to be a mother. Another is—oh, well, another is—I love her.”

He fiercely clenched his fist, raising it convulsively to his lips, and strode swiftly to the window to stand there silently looking down upon the lighted lamps of moving coaches.

Ah, dear God! yes, he loved her! And when a man says that, and means it; when every throb of his heart, every beat of his pulse, every thought of his brain centres in the woman he loves and will

love through all the years until death ends it—if even that does—then hell has no terrors. When such a man loves, what is one to say, what are laws and commandments and conventionalities and the suffering of others?—what do they all count? He loved her.

I gave up the struggle. I endeavoured to forget my dream. And yet my dream of Yuletide at Toby's seems less a dream to me than does that night at Fonthill Abbey. Partly because of this illusion it was that, when I had finished my account of the happiness at Hassot Manor, I at first intended that there my chronicle should close, so that, were it ever read, the world would believe that in this reconciliation with his wife Nelson's final days were passed. But sober thought tells me how impossible such deceit would be, and that only with the truth my narrative can end.

Alas, the mistletoe never grew beneath which Lady Nelson was ever again to know her husband's kiss. Submissive, unreproachful, even forgiving, in France she sought seclusion and there found death. Was there about her something that I did not see, making her unworthy a hero's love? I do not know, but this is suggestive, that Nelson's sisters would have naught to do with her, yet throughout their

lives adored the woman who had supplanted her. This at least I know: that to his death Nelson was faithful to his native land and to a woman he worshipped as a saint.

When Nelson raised his flag on the three-decker *Saint George*, I again had the honour to accompany him as flag-captain. We sailed from Yarmouth with a goodly fleet, fifteen ships-of-the-line, two fifties, several frigates and sloops of war, to say nothing of brigs, cutters, fire snips and bomb vessels. Certainly we were fit to cope with "all the might of Denmark's crown." But of how we did it I need say nothing, for the battle of Copenhagen, like those of Trafalgar and the Nile, is already a twice-told tale. One incident, however, I must set down, although that, too, has passed into English song and story.

The battle was raging furiously and we were far from having any advantage, when to our dismay there came flashing to us Sir Hyde Parker's signal to leave off action.

"Leave off action!" cried Nelson with profound disgust. "Now damn me if I do. You know, Hardy, I have only one eye. Have I not the right to be blind sometimes?"

He placed the glass to his sightless eye and with just the trace of a smile exclaimed: "Upon my word I do not see the signal!"

Here was one of the few men in all the history of warfare who dared and knew when to disobey orders. Had he obeyed that day, the sun would have sunk upon a discredited navy. Yet when the battle was won he thoughtfully remarked:

“Well, I have fought contrary to orders, and they will, perhaps, hang me. Never mind—let them.”

But during all this expedition, even in the midst of battle it seemed to me, I could see that he was mad to return to England and to Lady Hamilton. No braver man ever walked an English quarter-deck, none was ever more self-sacrificing, more devoted to his country; yet ever there was with him the wild longing that in some way the woman he loved might become his wife; ever he was dreaming of his Sicilian estate where, some day, they two could steal out of the world and pass their lives in calm content. These thoughts and dreams, however, interfered neither with duty nor with his companionable qualities. How jovial and youthful he was in those days between the Baltic and our return. When, at breakfast, he would have up at his table a half-dozen little midshipmen, he, in his life and fun, was the most boyish of them all; yet at dinner with his officers would be the dignified, wonderfully in-

formed, splendidly entertaining and hospitable host. Not for a single hour, however, did he seek social life on shore, nor join in any of its festivities even when it was almost an official duty for him to do so. Within the world he had created for himself there existed but a single woman. All others, whom at times he was forced to welcome on board, were to him automatons.

After we had returned from the Baltic, had again sailed and again returned, we found that Lady Hamilton had carried out his instructions and had purchased for him a delightful place at Merton. Here at last old Nel had a home. The *ménage* was not one to be approved by puritans, for here he established the Hamiltons also. But it was the first and only English home he ever owned, despite his wealth and glory, and in it were passed the most supremely happy days of his life.

I drove out with him—it was but an hour from Hyde Park—immediately on our arrival in London. He was an absolute child in his delight. When we had gone quite over the house and, guided by Lady Hamilton, had examined every nook and corner of the grounds, he turned to her with moistened eyes and, raising her hand to his lips, exclaimed, smiling through the tears of joy:

“You are to be Lady Paramount here, Emma; sovereign of all the territories and waters of Merton. We are all to be your guests and to obey all your commands.”

That she proved a charming *châtelaine* could not be denied even by myself who still had occasional memories of Lady Nelson. The Admiral's enchantress, his “guardian angel” as he called and truly believed her, retained almost all of her youthful beauty. Mentally, too, she was as yet unchanged; she was still the fearless woman of Neapolitan days, and the bravest I have ever seen in the hunting field. Also did she still possess her old time temper, but with it her sense of gratitude for kindness, her strict truthfulness—which in her final years she lost—her generosity, which led her at times to temporary beggary. How could even I long remain angry with one of such an irresistibly captivating character, housed as it was in so lovely a form and showing itself in so bewitching a countenance? In Nelson's eye she was a saint, sent to him by Heaven itself.

I did not attempt to excuse the strange establishment thus set up at Merton. But, as I have before put down, one may not bid love come or go. If it comes after marriage, and involves disloyalty, it is

a man's duty, doubtless, to strangle it. But sometimes it is stronger than himself and he must either give it shelter or be himself killed by it.

Nor is this true solely of men. That Lady Nelson remained a loyal wife through all those years of absence and evil tidings, is one of the truths even her enemies cannot take from her credit. Nor is it any common credit. Although we idealise them, women are but human and are weaker because more tempted and more affectionate than we of the sterner sex. A woman demands the daily tokens of fondness that God intended she should have: without them she fades as the rose unloved by the sun, parched for lack of the life and beauty-giving dew. The husband who has ceased to be the lover soon finds his wife no longer the sweetheart; and equally so the absent one is in danger, for absence makes the heart grow fonder—of someone else. It is only natural. When years have passed since the woman looked upon her husband's face, whether the cause be warfare in a distant land or misery behind a prison's bars, the result is all but inevitable. Although at first she is all devotion, anxiety and love, plunged in loneliness and sorrow, in time the memory of the man becomes to her a shadow; he seems as one dead, or, if anything more real, a living bar-

rier against happiness. For near at hand is always some one who will promise her a renewal of that happiness of which she has been robbed. And, when such a moment comes into the life of a woman, she is but honest, even if cruel, when she frankly says: "It is over. I love another." A man, of course, can speak no such words. The bit of chivalry that remains in us forbids. We must suffer on in silence to the grave.

The problem is one quite beyond my power to solve. That, personally, I have never had to struggle with it has been pure good fortune. But though I speak of it only from observation I am quite certain that God himself will forgive an old man for believing that a really great passion justifies itself, even though it smashes a commandment to atoms. With Nelson it was more than a great passion; his love was a part of his religion, the woman he loved standing a little below his Creator and a little above his king.

But if I speak thus seriously, it is not because those days at Merton were melancholy or clouded by conscience-stricken minds. Caracciolo and all the spectres of the past had faded quite away. Nelson, both in his home and in London, was now for the first time receiving compensation for a lifetime

of heroic service. By people of every class he was idolized and his appearance on the street was the occasion of an ovation such as we read of only in the careers of the Greek and Roman heroes. No man in England was ever so universally loved.

At Merton, where Nelson spent almost every moment of his time and where I was a frequent and, I have reason to believe, a welcome visitor, we were quite gay. There the Admiral had brought together all his relatives, his brother the Dean, and all his other brothers and sisters, as well as their children, the latter adding to the life and beauty of the place. Many were the great people who also found their way there, the Prince of Wales and his sailor brother, and half the statesmen, artists and poets of the day. Many a brilliant dinner have I attended there, Lady Hamilton at the head of the table, ignorant but faithful old Mrs. Cadogan facing her. And how often of an evening the fair Hamilton, always eager to honour her idol, led us in singing Campbell's "Battle of the Baltic":

"Of Nelson and the North,
Sing the glorious day's renown,
When to battle fierce came forth
All the might of Denmark's crown,
And her arms along the deep proudly shone.

By each gun the lighted brand,
In a bold, determined hand,
And the Prince of all the land
Led them on.

“ Now joy, Old England, raise!
For the tidings of thy might,
By the fatal cities’ blaze,
While the wine-cup shines in light;
And yet amidst that joy and uproar,
Let us think of those that sleep,
Full many a fathom deep,
By thy wild and stormy steep,
Elsinore.”

There was a cessation of all this hospitable jollity when at last came the long anticipated death of Sir William. Did ever another Englishman pass away amid such surroundings?—in the home of his supplanter, clasped in the arms of both those who for years had deceived yet respected and, in a way, honoured him? Yet, was he deceived? Even in the second childhood of his more than seventy years could he without comprehending have been a witness to one of the most overwhelming and all-engulfing passions in all history? Was he indifferent—no, of that I am sure. Was he forgiving, believing with Shakespeare that “Crabbed age and youth cannot live together,” that it is but right that “Youth is hot and bold, Age is weak and cold.” I

do not know. Ponder over it as often as I do here in the quiet of Greenwich Hospital, I can never unravel the mystery. For do I believe that Nelson or Lady Hamilton ever loved me as myself. The poor old diplomat buried his secret to the grave. Yet his chivalry protected one of his beautiful young wife lived after him in this country, pathetic codicil to his will:

“The copy of Mademoiselle Brunn’s picture of Emma, in enamel, by Bone, I give to my dearest friend, Lord Nelson, Duke of Bronté, a very small token of the great regard I have for his lordship, the most virtuous, loyal and truly brave character I ever met with. God bless him and shame fall on those who do not say amen.”

After that what is there that I can say?

Little time was allowed for mourning or for any rearrangement of the establishment. One morning, shortly after daybreak, less than a month following Sir William’s death, I was walking with the Admiral in a garden path he had affectionately termed the “quarter deck,” when we saw Captain Blackwood, freshly arrived from London, approaching us.

“I am sure you bring me news of the French and Spanish fleets,” exclaimed Nelson before Black-

wood could announce the purpose of his early visit. Then cordially extending his hand, he continued: "I'm not certain I'm glad to see you. You are going to drag me to sea again."

"Not against your will, my Lord," responded Blackwood, "but the Admiralty hope that you will resume command in the Mediterranean. All England is anxious to have you there."

"Ah, Hardy," and Nelson turned sadly to me, "such honours are not an unmixed blessing or happiness. I had hoped to lay my weary bones quiet for the winter, yet I ought, perhaps, to be proud of the general call for me to go forth."

He would, I knew, be proud to go, yet was overcome by the great longing to remain for a time with her he loved. And, Lady Hamilton at this moment coming toward us from the house, I could see how he dreaded to tell her of the call to duty. She greeted Captain Blackwood cordially but instantly turned to Nelson.

"What is it, Bronté?" she asked. "Something has made you uneasy."

"No, dear. I am perfectly happy. I have you and my family about me, and I would not give sixpence to call the king my uncle."

"You cannot deceive me. They have asked you to

take your proper place in command of the fleet. Am I not right? And you long to go yet long to stay. But you will be miserable if another takes your place. You know how my heart cries out in protest against saying so, but you must not dream of refusing your services. Go, my Lord. You will achieve another glorious victory. Then the nation can ask no more. Return here and be happy."

The tears came to his eyes.

"God bless you for your bravery," he said. "If there were more Emmas there would be more Nelsons. 'Tis settled, Hardy; I sail with you in the *Victory*. May the Almighty go with us. Captain Blackwood, I will take command because it is right that I should do so, but you well know how much I have to lose and how little to gain."

Never did Nelson so reluctantly leave England. The last day at Merton was one of utter wretchedness for me, a witness of the parting between these two whose souls seemed entwined in each other. The final hours found Lady Hamilton almost overcome with grief, though at dinner she tried nobly to be brave and cheerful. The hour of departure came, and when I went in search of the Admiral, I found him in the bed-chamber of his child, on his knees, praying over her little cot. Years after I

found the invocation he, that night, entered in his diary:

“ At half past ten drove from dear, dear Merton, where I left all which I hold dear in the world, to go to serve my King and Country. May the great God whom I adore enable me to fulfil the expectations of my Country; and if it is His good pleasure that I shall return, my thanks shall never cease being offered up to the Throne of His Mercy. If it is His good Providence to cut short my days upon earth, I bow with the greatest submission, relying that He will protect those so dear to me that I may leave behind. His will be done: Amen, Amen, Amen.”

Our embarkation at Portsmouth was wonderful, an enormous crowd pressing about to catch a farewell glimpse of the pride of England; here and there men and women in tears, others actually kneeling before him as to a god. As we seated ourselves in the boat that was to carry us out to the *Victory*, Nelson was almost overcome with emotion. “ I had their huzzas before,” he said to me, his voice breaking beneath this universal expression of affection, “ now I have their hearts.”

Two weeks after sailing we celebrated on the flag-ship the forty-seventh anniversary of the gallant Admiral's birth, and all his captains thronged his cabin, welcoming him as a beloved friend as well

as an idolized commander. This fête day was quickly followed by that on which the French and Spanish fleets put to sea from Cadiz, and we longed to give the detested Buonaparte a reminder of the Nile. At sunrise two days later Nelson signalled to prepare for battle, the enemy then being some ten miles distant, her thirty-three ships-of-the-line extending in the customary defensive formation more than five miles in length. Our twenty-six ships, under full sail, set their course in two attacking columns just as the Admiral had outlined that night in Grosvenor Square. Scarcely was this done when Nelson asked Captain Blackwood and myself to step down to his cabin.

“Will you have the goodness,” he said when we had arrived there, “to read this paper and then witness my signature.”

I examined the document. It was a codicil to his will, reciting all Lady Hamilton’s services to the navy and to England during her long residence at the court of Naples, and concluding as follows:

“Could I have rewarded these services, I would not now call upon my Country; but as that has not been in my power, I leave Emma, Lady Hamilton, a legacy to my King and Country, that they will give her an ample provision to maintain her rank in life. I also leave to the beneficence of my Country my

adopted daughter, Horatia. . . . These are the only favours I ask of my King and Country at this moment when I am going to fight their battle!"

And, to their lasting shame, his King and country ignored this only favour that the hero asked! By God! had I been King or Parliament I'd have given the crown jewels to Buonaparte had Nelson asked it at that hour.

As I leaned to sign my name to the codicil I caught sight of an unsealed letter on the table. It was the one, he knew, that might be his last to his idol. She it was who later read it to me.

"My dearest, beloved Emma, the dear friend of my bosom. The signal has been made that the enemy's combined fleets are coming out of port. . . . May the God of battles crown my endeavours with success; at all events I will take care that my name shall ever be most dear to you and Horatia, both of whom I love as much as my own life. And as my last writing before the battle will be to you, so I hope in God that I shall live to finish my letter after the battle. May Heaven bless you, prays your
"Nelson and Bronté."

One other document associated with this eventful day came, in time, into my possession. I did not know it at the moment, but when, an hour or so before the battle opened, I went below for a

final consultation and found him on his knees as if in prayer, it was indeed a prayer that he was, in this posture, placing on the last leaf of his diary:

“May the great God, whom I worship, grant to my country, and for the benefit of Europe in general, a great and glorious victory; and may no misconduct in any one tarnish it; and may humanity after victory be the predominant feature in the British fleet. For myself, individually, I commit my life to Him who made me, and may His blessing light upon my endeavours for serving my country faithfully. To Him I resign myself and the just cause which is entrusted to me to defend. Amen, Amen, Amen.”

When he arose from his knees Tom Allen entered to superintend the removal of the furnishings, a precaution taken to provide against their destruction, and to give the men greater freedom of movement about the ship during the battle. In addition to the miniature of Lady Hamilton, which he wore next his heart, Nelson had her portrait hanging in his cabin, transforming it into a sort of shrine wherein he literally worshipped her. Turning now to his servant he exclaimed earnestly:

“Be careful of the portrait, Tom; take care of my guardian angel.”

We then ascended to the poop, Nelson in full uni-

form and wearing on his left breast the stars of the four orders with which he had been decorated. Being well informed as to the great number of sharpshooters among the soldiers massed on the enemy's ships, I raged inwardly at the indifference with which the Admiral exposed himself to their fire, as well as at the inviting mark furnished by the sparkling stars on his breast. Yet I dared not remonstrate with him on his rashness.

We saw at once that we were rapidly nearing the enemy.

"There is yet a signal lacking," he said to me. For a moment he mused, then, proudly and happily lifting his head, called to his signal officer:

"Mr. Pasco, I wish to say to the fleet, 'England expects that every man will do his duty!'"

When the message had been made out, a mighty and long-continued cheering extended along both lines, and, almost at the same moment, the first gun of the battle belched from out the midst of the enemy. At once, too, there flew aloft on the various ships the colours of French, Spanish and English, and Nelson gave orders to signal for close action.

No need for me to repeat in detail the story of that great duel; all the world knows the fury of the

conflict and the splendour of our triumph. The *Victory* drifted into the smoke of battle, and for almost an hour the enemy seemed to concentrate all its fire upon the Admiral's flag-ship, stripping our sails from the yards, tearing away our mizzen topmast, and shattering our wheel. A shot passed between Nelson and myself where we walked together on the upper deck. He turned smilingly to me:

"This is too warm work, Hardy, to last much longer."

Warm indeed it was. We had not fired a gun, yet twenty of our brave fellows lay dead. Soon we crossed so close the wake of the French flagship that our yardarms touched her rigging. All our guns opened on her, carrying death and devastation from end to end. A half hour later we were alongside the *Redoubtable* with her scores of musketeers aloft. As Nelson and I paced the deck, the sharpshooters in the enemy's mizzen-top were almost directly above us.

We, in our walk, had reached the hatch ladder that led to the cabin. How unfeeling it seems to record, even after all these years, chronicling it—such is the poverty of my pen—with nothing more than the exactitude of an official report! Facing about, I found that he had fallen on his knees, his

hand touching the deck for support. Before I could move or speak, his arm had given way and he, on his side, lay prone upon the deck. I rushed to support him, exclaiming, "You're not badly hurt, I hope, my Lord?"

"Yes, Hardy," came the faint reply, "they've done for me at last."

I had him quickly carried below, but to the surgeon who at once attended him he said: "You can do nothing for me. I have but a short time to live." Then, as though to himself, I heard him whisper: "I leave Lady Hamilton a legacy to my country."

Almost immediately I was forced to return to the deck, for now the guidance of the fleet had devolved upon myself, thus suddenly, for the time, made commander-in-chief. Nor did I dare acquiescently respond to Nelson's frequent messages begging me to come to him in the cock-pit, although it cut me to the heart to hear that constantly he was crying out: "Will no one bring Hardy to me? Then surely he is killed."

But at last two of our ships that previously had not been engaged, came protectingly between the *Victory* and the enemy, and I felt that I could safely go below. Nelson warmly clasped my hand.

"How goes the battle, Hardy? How goes the day

with us?" he exclaimed eagerly, his eye, even amidst his suffering, sparkling with the warrior's lust of triumph.

"Excellently, my Lord," and I told him of our captures.

"I hope none of *our* ships have struck!"

"No, my Lord, there is no fear of that."

"Of course there's not. How could I ask? England's fleets are equal to meet the world. But I am a dead man, Hardy. I am going fast; 'twill be all over with me soon. Come nearer to me. Pray let my dear Lady Hamilton have my hair and all other things belonging to me."

It became necessary for me to return to the deck for an hour, but when I again came to his side I was able to tell him that his victory was complete.

"And how many ships have we captured?"

"Eighteen, my Lord."

"That is well, although I had bargained for twenty."

But, while he made no complaint of the agony he was undergoing, the end was approaching.

"Doctor," he exclaimed appealingly, "surely I have not been a great sinner. Thank God I have done my duty."

Then he turned again in my direction.

"Don't let them throw me overboard, Hardy. You know what to do. Take care of my dear Lady Hamilton—take care of poor Lady Hamilton. Kiss me, Hardy."

I knelt at his side, vainly striving to keep back my tears, and reverently kissed his cheek.

Already his hands were cold. His pulse was imperceptible. He opened his eyes and for a moment looked up at me. Then they closed forever. A smile not of this world was shadowed on his lips. I leaned over and heard the last faint whisper:

"GOD AND MY COUNTRY!"

