

Chapter XLVI.

"A fellow has now no chance of promotion unless he jumps into the muzzle of a gun and crawls out of the touch-hole."

He who, a hundred years ago, more or less, pronounced the above words in the uneasiness of his heart, thirsting for professional distinction, was a young naval officer. Of his life, career, achievements, and end nothing is preserved for the edification of his young successors in the fleet of to-day--nothing but this phrase, which, sailor-like in the simplicity of personal sentiment and strength of graphic expression, embodies the spirit of the epoch. This obscure but vigorous testimony has its price, its significance, and its lesson. It comes to us from a worthy ancestor. We do not know whether he lived long enough for a chance of that promotion whose way was so arduous. He belongs to the great array of the unknown--who are great, indeed, by the sum total of the devoted effort put out, and the colossal scale of success attained by their insatiable and steadfast ambition. We do not know his name; we only know of him what is material for us to know--that he was never backward on occasions of desperate service. We have this on the authority of a distinguished seaman of Nelson's time. Departing this life as Admiral of the Fleet on the eve of the Crimean War, Sir Thomas Byam Martin has recorded for us amongst his all too short autobiographical notes these few characteristic words uttered by one young man of the many who must have felt that particular inconvenience of a heroic age.

The distinguished Admiral had lived through it himself, and was a good judge of what was expected in those days from men and ships. A brilliant frigate captain, a man of sound judgment, of dashing bravery and of serene mind, scrupulously concerned for the welfare and honour of the navy, he missed a larger fame only by the chances of the service. We may well quote on this day the words written of Nelson, in the decline of a well-spent life, by Sir T. B. Martin, who died just fifty years ago on the very anniversary of Trafalgar.

"Nelson's nobleness of mind was a prominent and beautiful part of his character. His foibles--faults if you like--will never be dwelt upon in any memorandum of mine," he declares, and goes on-- "he whose splendid and matchless achievements will be remembered with admiration while there is gratitude in the hearts of Britons, or while a ship floats upon the ocean; he whose example on the breaking out of the war gave so chivalrous an impulse to the younger men of the service that all rushed into rivalry of daring which disdained every warning of prudence, and led to acts of heroic enterprise which tended greatly to exalt the

glory of our nation."

These are his words, and they are true. The dashing young frigate captain, the man who in middle age was nothing loth to give chase single-handed in his seventy-four to a whole fleet, the man of enterprise and consummate judgment, the old Admiral of the Fleet, the good and trusted servant of his country under two kings and a queen, had felt correctly Nelson's influence, and expressed himself with precision out of the fulness of his seaman's heart.

"Exalted," he wrote, not "augmented." And therein his feeling and his pen captured the very truth. Other men there were ready and able to add to the treasure of victories the British navy has given to the nation. It was the lot of Lord Nelson to exalt all this glory. Exalt! the word seems to be created for the man.