

## **Chapter XLVII.**

The British navy may well have ceased to count its victories. It is rich beyond the wildest dreams of success and fame. It may well, rather, on a culminating day of its history, cast about for the memory of some reverses to appease the jealous fates which attend the prosperity and triumphs of a nation. It holds, indeed, the heaviest inheritance that has ever been entrusted to the courage and fidelity of armed men.

It is too great for mere pride. It should make the seamen of to-day humble in the secret of their hearts, and indomitable in their unspoken resolution. In all the records of history there has never been a time when a victorious fortune has been so faithful to men making war upon the sea. And it must be confessed that on their part they knew how to be faithful to their victorious fortune. They were exalted. They were always watching for her smile; night or day, fair weather or foul, they waited for her slightest sign with the offering of their stout hearts in their hands. And for the inspiration of this high constancy they were indebted to Lord Nelson alone. Whatever earthly affection he abandoned or grasped, the great Admiral was always, before all, beyond all, a lover of Fame. He loved her jealously, with an inextinguishable ardour and an insatiable desire--he loved her with a masterful devotion and an infinite trustfulness. In the plenitude of his passion he was an exacting lover. And she never betrayed the greatness of his trust! She attended him to the end of his life, and he died pressing her last gift (nineteen prizes) to his heart. "Anchor, Hardy--anchor!" was as much the cry of an ardent lover as of a consummate seaman. Thus he would hug to his breast the last gift of Fame.

It was this ardour which made him great. He was a flaming example to the woovers of glorious fortune. There have been great officers before--Lord Hood, for instance, whom he himself regarded as the greatest sea officer England ever had. A long succession of great commanders opened the sea to the vast range of Nelson's genius. His time had come; and, after the great sea officers, the great naval tradition passed into the keeping of a great man. Not the least glory of the navy is that it understood Nelson. Lord Hood trusted him. Admiral Keith told him: "We can't spare you either as Captain or Admiral." Earl St. Vincent put into his hands, untrammelled by orders, a division of his fleet, and Sir Hyde Parker gave him two more ships at Copenhagen than he had asked for. So much for the chiefs; the rest of the navy surrendered to him their devoted affection, trust, and admiration. In return he gave them no less than his own exalted soul. He breathed into them his own ardour and his own ambition. In a few short years

he revolutionized, not the strategy or tactics of sea-warfare, but the very conception of victory itself. And this is genius. In that alone, through the fidelity of his fortune and the power of his inspiration, he stands unique amongst the leaders of fleets and sailors. He brought heroism into the line of duty. Verily he is a terrible ancestor.

And the men of his day loved him. They loved him not only as victorious armies have loved great commanders; they loved him with a more intimate feeling as one of themselves. In the words of a contemporary, he had "a most happy way of gaining the affectionate respect of all who had the felicity to serve under his command."

To be so great and to remain so accessible to the affection of one's fellow-men is the mark of exceptional humanity. Lord Nelson's greatness was very human. It had a moral basis; it needed to feel itself surrounded by the warm devotion of a band of brothers. He was vain and tender. The love and admiration which the navy gave him so unreservedly soothed the restlessness of his professional pride. He trusted them as much as they trusted him. He was a seaman of seamen. Sir T. B. Martin states that he never conversed with any officer who had served under Nelson "without hearing the heartiest expressions of attachment to his person and admiration of his frank and conciliatory manner to his subordinates." And Sir Robert Stopford, who commanded one of the ships with which Nelson chased to the West Indies a fleet nearly double in number, says in a letter: "We are half-starved and otherwise inconvenienced by being so long out of port, but our reward is that we are with Nelson."

This heroic spirit of daring and endurance, in which all public and private differences were sunk throughout the whole fleet, is Lord Nelson's great legacy, triply sealed by the victorious impress of the Nile, Copenhagen, and Trafalgar. This is a legacy whose value the changes of time cannot affect. The men and the ships he knew how to lead lovingly to the work of courage and the reward of glory have passed away, but Nelson's uplifting touch remains in the standard of achievement he has set for all time. The principles of strategy may be immutable. It is certain they have been, and shall be again, disregarded from timidity, from blindness, through infirmity of purpose. The tactics of great captains on land and sea can be infinitely discussed. The first object of tactics is to close with the adversary on terms of the greatest possible advantage; yet no hard-and-fast rules can be drawn from experience, for this capital reason, amongst others--that the quality of the adversary is a variable element in the problem. The tactics of Lord Nelson have been amply discussed, with much pride and some profit. And yet, truly, they are already of but archaic interest. A very few years more and the hazardous difficulties of handling a fleet under canvas shall have passed beyond the conception of seamen who hold in trust for their country Lord Nelson's legacy

of heroic spirit. The change in the character of the ships is too great and too radical. It is good and proper to study the acts of great men with thoughtful reverence, but already the precise intention of Lord Nelson's famous memorandum seems to lie under that veil which Time throws over the clearest conceptions of every great art. It must not be forgotten that this was the first time when Nelson, commanding in chief, had his opponents under way--the first time and the last. Had he lived, had there been other fleets left to oppose him, we would, perhaps, have learned something more of his greatness as a sea officer. Nothing could have been added to his greatness as a leader. All that can be affirmed is, that on no other day of his short and glorious career was Lord Nelson more splendidly true to his genius and to his country's fortune.