



## NELSON AT CAPE ST. VINCENT.

BY THE AUTHOR OF «INFLUENCE OF SEA POWER UPON HISTORY.»



FOR nearly two centuries Great Britain has been a Mediterranean power, and has attached the first importance to her position and influence in that sea. When the year 1796 opened, her fleet there numbered over twenty ships of the line, commanded by Sir John Jervis, a veteran of sixty-two, of singularly determined character, an admirable organizer and disciplinarian. Under his able administration it soon became one of the finest bodies of sailing ships of war that have ever been gathered under the same flag.

Yet, before the year ended, the government felt compelled to withdraw this superb fleet and its resolute admiral from the Mediterranean, which she entirely abandoned for over eighteen months to her enemies. The cause of this extreme step, bitterly resented by men like Nelson, then one of its officers, was the tide of disaster which throughout the year set steadily against England and the states friendly to her in Italy. Her allies, the Sardinians and Austrians, had been successively overthrown. Sardinia had made peace with France, and the Austrians had been driven out of Lombardy, retaining possession only of the strong fortress of Mantua, which was closely blockaded by the French. Naples, which was of service through the use of its port, and the anxiety it necessarily caused to the French, was wavering and ready to submit if seriously threatened.

Upon these causes of danger followed a declaration of war by Spain. Three years before, the peninsular kingdom had declared against France. In 1795, thoroughly beaten and disheartened, it made peace. In the summer of 1796, swayed by the successful advance of the French armies in Germany and Italy, it entered into alliance, offensive and defensive, with the republic. This brought the Spanish navy into the war, and twenty-six of its heaviest vessels gathered in the western Mediterranean, making, in conjunction with the French at Toulon, thirty-

eight ships of the line. Upon this the British government ordered Jervis to evacuate Corsica, which had been held for over two years, and to retire with the fleet to Gibraltar. Thence it again fell back to Lisbon, where it was assembled in December, 1797, having, meantime, by various accidents, been reduced to ten ships of the line.

The French government had now recognized that their chief enemy was Great Britain, and that upon her sea power the issue of the war was depending. It thought that if a corps of 20,000 men could be landed in Ireland, the effect, succeeding the other disasters of the year, would force a peace. To support this movement the Spanish alliance was invoked, and twenty-seven ships of the line sailed from Cartagena for Cadiz on February 1. The Rock of Gibraltar was passed on the 5th, in heavy easterly weather, the continuance of which during the following week not only prevented the fleet, which was ill manned and ill disciplined, from reaching Cadiz, but drove it one hundred and fifty miles to the northward and westward of that port, into the neighborhood of Cape St. Vincent, on the Portuguese coast, where it was met by Sir John Jervis on the 14th.

Jervis with his ten ships had quitted Lisbon on January 18, 1797, and after some incidental services, needless to particularize, had taken his station off Cape St. Vincent, where he was well placed for intercepting communication between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, and also for covering Lisbon, a hundred miles north of the cape, from any attempts made upon it from the sea. The French and Spanish governments were then understood to contemplate an attack upon Portugal, as the ally of Great Britain; and the project of forcing the entrance to the Tagus was openly discussed in France—probably, however, as a ruse to divert attention from the intended invasion of Ireland. This position of the British fleet had been communicated to the home government as the rendezvous where either it or one of its

lookouts would always be found; and here, on February 6, Jervis was joined by a reinforcement of five ships of the line from England, raising the total under his command to fifteen.

During the following week, although the actual collision of the 14th had some of the features of a surprise for the Spaniards, neither of the hostile fleets was quite ignorant of the other's proximity. Jervis's information, however, was both fuller and more accurate than that of his enemy, who, by the report of a passing American merchantman, had been led to believe that the British numbered but nine ships of the line—a delusion that doubtless contributed to the careless disorder in which the Spaniards were found at the critical moment. The British admiral, on the contrary, had fairly accurate knowledge of the numbers about to confront him, and wrote on the 7th that he had learned they were about to leave Cartagena for the Straits. But, better than mere knowledge of numbers, he and his officers had had abundant opportunity to observe the indiscipline and inefficiency of the Spanish navy. Months before, while still at Corsica, he had written home: «The extreme disorder and confusion the enemy was observed to be in, by the judicious officers who fell in with them, leaves no doubt on my mind that a fleet so trained and, generally, well commanded as this is would have made its way through them in every direction.» And while waiting off Cape St. Vincent he said to a young commander of a brig which had brought him precise details of the enemy's great superiority: «Notwithstanding the disparity of force, with such stuff as I have about me I shall attack them, and England shall hear of them.»

The day before the battle—February 13—Jervis was joined by Nelson, then a commodore under his orders. The title commodore was one given to officers of the rank of captain when in command of several ships—a position which had then for some time been occupied by Nelson, who did not become an admiral until a few days after this battle. When the fleet reached Gibraltar in the previous December, he had been sent back to the Mediterranean with a couple of frigates on a special mission. Returning, he touched at Gibraltar on February 9, remaining until the 11th. There were then in the bay, but in the Spanish part of it, three Spanish ships of the line belonging to Cordova's fleet, but temporarily detached at the port. When Nelson sailed, these pursued him, and the frigate which carried him was for some time

in imminent danger of capture. She escaped, however; but that same night she fell into the midst of the grand fleet itself, being for some time entangled with it. Fortunately she was taken for one of their own frigates; and edging away gradually,—for any decisive change of course would have aroused suspicion,—she succeeded in drawing out from among the enemy before daylight revealed the presence of a stranger. The next day she was out of their sight, and on the 13th, shortly after noon, rejoined the commander-in-chief. At 6 P. M., it being at that time of the year a little after dark, Nelson went on board the *Captain*, a ship of the line of the most usual size, with two gun-decks, and carrying seventy-four guns. The broad swallow-tailed pennant, the distinguishing mark of a ship on board which a commodore serves, was then hauled down from the frigate and run up at the mainmast-head of the *Captain*, where it flew the following day. On board the *Victory*, a ship of a hundred guns, upon three decks, there was in like manner hoisted the square flag which betokened the rank of Jervis as the commander-in-chief—at the main, because he was a full admiral, and blue in color, because he belonged to the Blue Squadron of the British navy, considered as one great fleet.

The tidings brought by Nelson were particularly valuable, because there came with him two British lieutenants who had been prisoners in Cartagena on board one of the Spanish ships, and had sailed with the fleet as far as Gibraltar, where they were exchanged during the short stay of the frigate at that port. They had, therefore, had particular and prolonged facilities for noting not only the exact force, but the manœuvring power and general efficiency of the enemy's vessels, the knowledge of which could not but confirm Jervis in his purpose to fight at all hazards. This determination being now decisively and finally reached, signal was made to the fleet to prepare for battle, and to keep in close order during the night. The ships were formed in two columns, a disposition more compact than the single line of battle, which from its greater length tended more to straggling, and in thick weather might entail permanent separation.

The atmosphere had for two or three days been hazy, and at times even foggy, a circumstance which delayed the hostile fleets from seeing each other, and also, like most difficulties, favored the more efficient. The easterly wind that had so long prevailed now changed to the west; and as the news brought, not by Nelson only, but by the scouting vessels of

the fleet, indicated that the Spaniards were to the westward, the British stood slowly to the southward, to cross the track which the enemy would probably follow in his wish to reach Cadiz. The course steered was south by west, or south-southwest—that is, a little to the westward of south itself; more westerly the wind would not allow them to head. That afternoon Sir John Jervis entertained at dinner several distinguished persons, officers and others; and as the company broke up, before returning to their ships, they drank the toast, «Victory over the Dons in the battle which they cannot escape to-morrow.»

With the change of wind the Spaniards naturally shaped their course for Cadiz, upon which, and not upon the British fleet, their minds had from the first been set. The direction taken, east-southeast, was nearly perpendicular to that of their enemy, both fleets thus running down by the shortest road toward the point where the two tracks met; but the general slovenliness and inefficiency which at this time characterized the Spaniards at sea were painfully evident, and their ships were strung out irregularly on a long line of twelve or fourteen miles. By morning, in the haze and through their own neglect they had become divided into two groups, of which the leading, and therefore the leeward, one, of six ships, was separated by an interval of eight miles from the other, of twenty-one ships. The latter, from its size, will be called the main body.

Sir John Jervis, with a half-century of naval experience behind him, was not only a man of singular energy, and thoroughly master of his profession in all its details, but possessed also an unusual power of bearing responsibility. Nevertheless, fearless though he was, and confident in the powers of his fleet, which he had for fifteen months subjected to a drill and discipline like that of Cromwell's Ironsides, he was too well aware of the tremendous risk he had assumed to relax for an instant the vigilant supervision upon which victory must depend. Though one of the half-dozen most distinguished officers of the British navy, he had never before commanded a fleet in action; and now, in willingly and deliberately going to meet such heavy odds, he was staking his reputation, the hard-won fruit of a lifetime, upon a hazard which in case of failure would be condemned as folly. He did it because he felt that his country, in this hour of accumulated disaster, needed a brilliant counter-stroke.

Through the first and middle watches of the night the signal-guns of the hostile fleet

were heard from time to time in the southwest, on the weather bow of the British ships, as the dark hulls, in close array, moved noiselessly and slowly along the appointed path, ready, watchful, and silent. Others slept, but not the admiral; and as the sound of the guns became more and more audible, telling of the gradually lessening distance between the foes, he sent from time to time to ask what the keen eyes of the seamen on watch, peering through the darkness and the misty air, could make out of the order and positions of his own fleet, in which the *Victory*, as flag-ship, held a central position. Always an early riser, long before daylight he was pacing the deck; and as the dawn enabled him to see for himself, and clearly, with what success the ships had held their stations during the night, his sense of relief found utterance in an ejaculation of satisfaction at the «admirable close order» in which they were. «I wish,» he added, «that we were now well up with the enemy; for»—and this was the key to his action and his anxiety—«a victory is very essential to England at this moment.»

The Spanish admiral was more unconcerned. Secure in a superiority of numbers actually in the proportion of over five to three, and which, from the erroneous information received, he believed to be even greater, he appears to have made no attempt to keep his fleet in hand. Possibly he thought the effort hopeless, with so unpractised a force. Be this as it may, while the British had held so close together that it is asserted each ship could throughout the night have been hailed by voice from the one next her, the Spaniards had scattered as already described; yet it is said that their admiral felt so little anxiety that he made no reply to his lookout frigate signaling the British approach, until her captain, to extort attention, reported that there were forty ships of the enemy in sight—a ludicrous exaggeration that naturally startled, not the admiral only, but also the fleet, which was not near enough to detect its falsity.

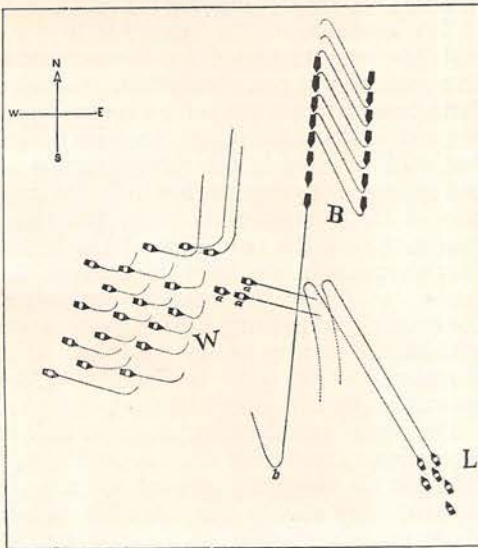
At 5 A. M. Jervis was joined by the lookout frigate *Niger*, which had kept in view of the Spaniards the day before. Her captain reported that he had but a few hours since lost sight of them, and that they were now probably not over twelve miles distant. At 6:30, it being then daylight, the leading British ship, the *Culloden*, seventy-four, reported five sail to the southward and westward, and a small sloop of war was sent ahead to reconnoiter, the fleet proceeding under moderate

canvas. As it advanced, and more and more enemies loomed up out of the haze, the customary reports succeeded one another in monotonous yet somewhat exciting rotation. «There are eight sail of the line, Sir John.» «Very well, sir.» «There are twenty sail of the line, Sir John.» «Very well, sir.» «There are twenty-five sail of the line, Sir John.» «Very well, sir.» The admiral had by this time been joined by Captain Hallowell, an officer of very distinguished merit, but of eccentric character. His ship had been lost during his temporary absence on other duty, two months before, and he was now present only as a passenger. When the final report of twenty-seven ships was made, the admiral's chief of staff ventured a remonstrance on the inequality of force. «Enough of that, sir,» retorted the admiral. «If there are fifty sail, I will go through them.» Jervis was not a man with whom liberties could well be taken, but Hallowell was not to be restrained.

still separated the lee group of six ships from the main body to windward (Fig. 1). Jervis's plan of action, as yet held in suspense, but gradually forming as the situation developed, was now fixed. Already at 9:30 A. M., when the fatal interval in the enemy's array was ascertained, he had ordered a half-dozen of his fastest ships of the line to hasten forward to prevent the divisions uniting. Three of the main body had succeeded in passing across, raising the lee group from six to nine; but it was evident that no more could do so before the arrival of the British in the gap. Signal was therefore made for the two columns to form into one, the fighting order, «as most convenient»; that is, that the ships should each take the place, before and behind the admiral, which they could then most rapidly reach. This movement was executed, to use Jervis's words, «with the utmost celerity,» and at eleven the single column was standing south-southwest, still straight for the breach in the enemy's line—the *Culloden*, Captain Trowbridge, leading; the *Victory*, seventh; Nelson's ship, the *Captain*, thirteenth; and Collingwood, in the *Excellent*, bringing up the rear.

The Spaniards had by this been rudely roused out of their apathy to a realization of their danger. The main body continued to stand on, for it was already headed for the separated lee ships; but the latter, also seeking to rejoin, had, after some vacillations, settled down to steer north-northwest, as nearly the reverse of their former course—east-southeast—as the wind, before which they had been running, would allow. It was too late. The British were nearer the gap than themselves, and before noon the *Culloden* with her next astern had interposed, while over a mile still separated the two Spanish divisions.

The battle had begun before this. The Spanish main body, headed by two three-decked ships, had persisted in standing east-southeast, apparently hoping to bluff the *Culloden* from her course by the prospect of having one or more vessels so much larger than herself run directly on board her. The first lieutenant reported the danger to Trowbridge. «I can't help it, Griffiths,» he replied; «let the weakest fend off.» As the two enemies drew thus together, the *Culloden's* broadside began to bear, from forward aft, in succession, as she advanced. Her fire opened at once with guns double-shotted, after the manner of those days; the reports following each other with such steady regularity as to resemble, to use Trowbridge's expression, a salute timed



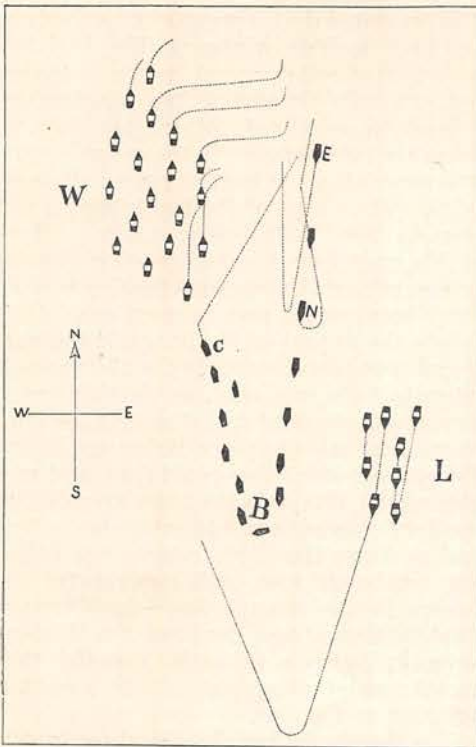
DRAWN BY D. B. KEELER.

FIG. 1. BATTLE OF CAPE ST. VINCENT, FEBRUARY 14, 1797. ♣ BRITISH SHIPS. ○ SPANISH SHIPS. 10:45 A. M. WIND, WEST BY SOUTH.

B, British fleet, in two columns, forming in single column; W, Spanish weather division, 21 ships, steering E. S. E. before the wind, change to N. by E.; L, Spanish lee division, six ships, on the wind port tack seeking to join weather division; a, a, a, three Spanish ships from weather division cross the British advance and join the lee division; b, British column tacks in pursuit of Spanish weather division. (From "Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire," by Captain A. T. Mahan.)

«That's right, Sir John!» cried he, patting him on the back; «and, by —, we'll give them a d—d good licking!»

At 10:30 A. M. the deliberate but steady advance of the two fleets had brought the British within four miles of the Spanish line, heading directly for the great opening which



DRAWN BY D. S. KEELER.

FIG. 2. BATTLE OF CAPE ST. VINCENT. 1 P. M.

B, British fleet in single column tacking in succession; W, Spanish weather division, 18 ships, standing N. by E., keep off east to join lee division by passing British rear; L, Spanish lee division seeking to join weather division; N, Nelson's ship, the *Captain*, leaves her line to head off Spanish weather division; C, the *Culloden*, British van ship, joins and supports Nelson, followed by other van ships; E, the *Excellent*, Collingwood's ship, tacks by signal for the same purpose. (From "Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire," by Captain A. T. Mahan.)

«by a seconds watch, in the silence of a port-admiral's inspection.» The Spaniard's obstinacy had left him at a disadvantage to receive this murderous onslaught, for the *Culloden's* guns bore first. Abandoning his purpose, he now hauled rapidly toward the wind until he headed about north, thus turning to the enemy his other side, upon which, it is said, the guns had not even been cast loose, and so could not at once return the *Culloden's* fire. His movement was imitated by the whole Spanish main body, which ran in a confused column to the northward, nearly parallel, but opposite in direction, to the advancing British column, with which it exchanged distant broadsides. Thus was given up the attempt to cross ahead of the British in order to join the lee division (Fig. 2).

<sup>1</sup> There was to this general procedure a single exception. One of the Spanish lee division steered north-northeast instead of south-southwest; and, passing the British rear, succeeded thus in reaching the main body. This raised the latter to nineteen ships, eight remaining to leeward.

The latter, meantime, had continued to steer north-northwest, and it also manifested the intention of forcing its way through the British to its consorts to windward. As it drew up to the enemy's line it found, not the *Culloden*, but the *Victory*, barring the way. The latter stopped,—hove to, as seamen say,—laying the maintopsail aback, to deaden her way. The approach of the Spaniard,—here also a three-decker, with a vice-admiral's flag,—being nearly perpendicular to the *Victory's* course, entailed the same disadvantage as was undergone by the *Culloden's* opponent. Her guns would not bear, her enemy's did. Jervis's seamen were practised gunners. «Keep men at sea,» he used to say, «and they will generally become seamen; but gunnery must be drilled into them.» The *Victory's* well-aimed broadside swept through the crowded decks, and this body of Spaniards also went about, heading south-southwest, a course similar to that of the British, and opposite to that of their main body.<sup>1</sup> The *Victory* then resumed her speed, following her next ahead.

Two attempts of the Spaniards to unite had thus been frustrated; but it was imperative upon them to renew the effort. A divided force has got far toward being a beaten force. Meanwhile the *Culloden* and the ships behind her, still standing in the same direction as before, and engaging successively the vessels of the Spanish main body, had come nearly abreast the rear ships of the latter. Jervis's purpose was now to reverse the course, to follow the weather division of the enemy, and to bring it to decisive action without the support of the lee ships. This, if realized, would make the odds, in actual encounter, British fifteen, Spanish nineteen.

The signal was therefore made to tack in succession. Trowbridge had so anticipated this that his answering pennant was already hoisted; rolled up, however, after the manner of the sea, and needing but a turn of a wrist to fly out. The flags on the *Victory*, therefore, were no sooner up than Jervis saw, by the flapping of the *Culloden's* sails, that his order was being executed. «Look at Trowbridge!»<sup>2</sup> he cried exultingly. «He handles his ship in battle as though the eyes of all England were upon him; and would to God they were, that she might know him as I know him!» Ship following ship tacked at

<sup>2</sup> This eminent officer, whom Nelson esteemed the best in the navy, and Jervis second only to Nelson, rose to be a rear-admiral, and was lost at sea ten years later; his flag-ship, the *Blenheim*, having never been heard from after she left the East Indies for England, in 1807.

the same point, the effect being to range the British ships on a line between north and north-northwest, following close the Spanish main body. The lee division of the Spaniards continued to stand south-southwest for the time.

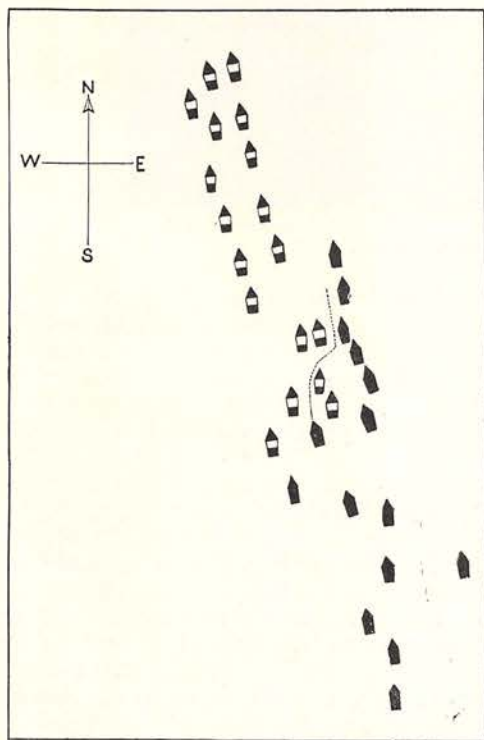
Jervis's new step entailed upon him one serious disadvantage. As each ship was standing on to the point where the *Culloden* tacked, while the Spanish main body was receding from it, the effect of the two movements would be gradually to remove the British rear from the position in which it had hitherto effectually separated the two sections of the enemy. If completed, Jervis's column would be following the Spaniards, its van possibly overtaking and lapping their rear; but abreast their van would for a while be no British ships to prevent it from crossing and joining the lee group. Upon this chance was based Cordova's next move, which brought Nelson so conspicuously «to the front» in every sense of the phrase, physically on this field of battle, as well as in personal renown and in future opportunity.

It will be remembered that Nelson's ship, the *Captain*, was thirteenth in the order, only two being behind her. At 1 P.M., taking his own

account, the *Captain* had passed the rear of the Spanish main body, but had not yet reached the common point of tacking. Jervis ought by this time to have seen the mistake of allowing the rear of his column to go so far in a direction opposite to the particular enemies whom he meant to attack; but if he did, he had taken no steps to remedy the evil. At this moment, and in the position stated, Nelson saw the Spanish main body by a simultaneous movement change course to the eastward, to cross the line over which the British had just come, and, by passing astern of their rear ship, the *Excellent*, to find a clear sea for joining their comrades to leeward.

This was the crisis of the battle; and owing to the rapidity with which ships move, and the slow methods of transmitting orders from one to the other, there was no time for signaling. Fortunate indeed was it for Jervis that Nelson was in the rear of the column. Not waiting to reach the point where the *Culloden* tacked, the *Captain's* helm was instantly put up, the ship turned short round, all sail made, and, steering between the fourteenth and the rear ship of her own fleet,—the *Diadem* and the *Excellent*,—she pressed toward the head of the British column, passed beyond it, and threw herself in front of and across the track of the Spaniards; much as one of the latter had attempted at the opening of the fight to stop the *Culloden*, but with different results. Nelson being immediately joined by Trowbridge, who till now had continued to lead the fleet, and by whom, to use Nelson's words, «I was most nobly supported,» the Spaniards relinquished the attempt. They hauled up again to north-northwest, and resumed their flight.

Thus it happened, to use Jervis's own words, that «Commodore Nelson, who was in the rear on the starboard tack, took the lead on the larboard, and contributed very much to the fortune of the day.» Much, indeed! for never was a more timely or a more daring act done upon a field of battle. So much, did he take the lead that for some time—Nelson reckoned it an hour, but it was probably less—the *Captain* and the *Culloden* stood alone, facing the fire of half a dozen of the enemy's vessels, among them that of the Spanish admiral, the *Santisima Trinidad*, of 130 guns, then the biggest ship in the world, which afterward sank at Trafalgar. Of the total British loss, among fifteen ships, over a fourth—nearly a third—fell upon the *Captain*, and much more than a third upon her and the *Culloden* together. But Jervis, if he had not directed the movement, quickly saw its merit, and



DRAWN BY D. B. KEELER.

FIG. 3. BATTLE OF CAPE ST. VINCENT.



PAINTED BY JOHN HOPPNER.

ENGRAVED BY R. G. TIETZE.

JOHN JERVIS, EARL ST. VINCENT.

signaled the *Excellent* to imitate and support it. Collingwood was thus brought from the rear to insure and share the triumph of his old friend and messmate; the other van ships, some sooner, some later, arriving at about the same time.

Thus the battle was won. What had preceded was the preliminary manœuvring to obtain a great tactical advantage. What followed was the culling of the fruits of victory already achieved. Many a hard blow was yet to be exchanged, but there could be only one result. The scales turned in those few dazzling moments when Nelson seized the key of the position, and Jervis ordered up the reinforcements which enabled it to be held.

The strife now raged about the rear of the Spanish main division, a formidable mass in itself, but in confusion, and handicapped by

the inefficiency of its own units and the surpassing skill of Jervis's remarkable body of captains. Passing for the most part to leeward of the enemy, the successive British ships, from the *Captain* on, concentrated their fire upon the rear third of the main body (Fig. 3). Of the four heavy ships that were captured, all were in the rear, and all had shared in the unique combat, where, for an appreciable time, Nelson and Trowbridge had held them at bay. Disordered, and crippled in spars and rigging by the oft-renewed broadsides which they thus underwent from ships comparatively fresh, they tended more and more to drop behind their center and van, which had received little or no punishment. Cordova's flag-ship, the *Santisima Trinidad*, was in the midst of this mêlée, and so badly handled as to be reduced to a wreck. Several

British officers—notably Sir James Saumarez, one of the greatest of his generation—affirmed that she struck; but possession was not taken, and she ultimately escaped.

Upon this scene of confusion the *Excellent* entered; and this ship, with the *Captain*, bore the most conspicuous parts that have been transmitted to us in the brilliant and singularly dramatic episodes with which the fight-

standing, and was incapable of further service in the line [of battle] or in chase.» In consequence, being herself scarcely manageable,—the *Culloden* having now dropped behind crippled, out of supporting range, and the *Blenheim*, which had come up and passed the two, having fallen to leeward,—the *Captain*, almost unaided, was at this time being fired upon by three first-rates of over 100 guns each, the



ENGRAVED BY R. G. TIETZE, AFTER ENGRAVING BY C. TURNER.

COLLECTION OF W. C. CRANE.

ADMIRAL LORD COLLINGWOOD.

ing concluded. It was a marked coincidence that here linked so closely together the names of the two great seamen, Nelson and Collingwood, who eight years later led the columns at the crowning victory of Trafalgar, and many years before had been young officers at the same mess-table. The *Captain* had at this time lost one of her principal spars, the fore-topmast; her sails were riddled, the wheel was shot away, and the rigging necessary for manœuvring the ship cut to pieces. To use Nelson's words, she «had not a sail, shroud, or rope

*San Nicolas*, of 80, and a 74. The *Excellent*, coming up from the rear, passed between two great Spanish ships, the *Salvador del Mundo*, of 112 guns, and the *San Isidro*, 74, which had dropped astern, and into which, from each hand, she in alternation discharged the forty double-shotted guns of which her broadside consisted. But let Nelson and Collingwood themselves here tell their tales, written for friends immediately after the battle, with its vivid realities and its heat still fresh on mind and temper:





PAINTED BY SIR W. BEECHEY.

ENGRAVED BY R. G. TIETZE.

COLLECTION OF W. C. CRANE.

SIR THOMAS TROWBRIDGE.

The first ship we engaged [says Collingwood to his wife] was the *San Salvador del Mundo*, of 112 guns, a first-rate; we were not further from her when we began than the length of our garden. Her colors soon came down, and her fire ceased. I hailed, and asked if they surrendered; and when by signs made by a man who stood by the colors I understood that they had, I left her to be taken possession of by somebody behind, and made sail for the next, but was very much surprised on looking back to find her colors up again, and her battle recommenced. We very soon came up with the next, the *San Isidro*, 74, so close alongside that a man might jump from one ship to the other. Our fire carried all before it, and in ten minutes she hauled down her colors; but I had been deceived once, and obliged this fellow to hoist English colors before I left him, and made a signal for somebody behind to board him, when the Admiral ordered the *Lively* frigate to take charge of him.

Collingwood still pressed on. «Disdaining,» says Nelson, «the parade of taking possession

of beaten enemies, he most gallantly pushed up to save his old friend and messmate, who was, to appearance, in a critical situation,» surrounded by Spanish ships as just before described. The *Excellent* interposed—a nearly fresh ship—between the *Captain* and her nearest enemy.

Making all sail [resumes Collingwood], passing between our own line and the enemy, we came up with the *San Nicolas*, of 80 guns, which happened at the time to be abreast of the *San Josef*, of 112 guns; we did not touch sides, but you could not put a bodkin between us, so that our shot passed through both ships, and, in attempting to extricate themselves, they got on board each other. My good friend, the Commodore [Nelson], had been long engaged with those ships, and I came happily to his relief, for he was dreadfully mauled. Having engaged them till their fire ceased on me, though their colors were not down, I went on to the *Santisima Trinidad*, the Spanish Admiral Cordova's ship, of 132 guns, on four complete

decks—such a ship as I never saw before. By this time our masts, sails, and rigging were so much shot, that we could not get so near her as I would have been; but near enough to receive much injury from her both in my men and ship. We were engaged an hour with this ship, and trimmed her well. She was a complete wreck. Several others of our ships came up, and engaged her at the same time; but evening approaching, and the fresh Spaniards coming down upon us, the admiral made the signal to withdraw, carrying off the four ships that had surrendered to our fleet.

Collingwood's action, here described in his own spirited words, conveys a graphic and clear impression of the scenes through which a ship passed in the heat of an action, when once the general direction had been imparted to the attack and the battle fairly joined. It was exceptional only as guided in this case by a man of unusual skill, calmness, and judgment, actuated by the noblest ideals, and favored with a special opportunity. It was like that of many other ships in many other battles, from which it differed in degree rather than in kind. While the same may perhaps be said of Nelson's action which followed the passing of the *Excellent*, yet to that was also granted that stamp of originality which characterized all the chief situations of life in that extraordinary man—extraordinary alike in his genius and in his weakness. Here also we may use the hero's own words, though his style is far from equaling that of his companion in arms.

The *San Nicolas*, luffing up (towards the *San Josef*), the latter fell on board her,<sup>1</sup> and the *Excellent* passing on for the *Santa Trinidad*, the *Captain* resumed her situation abreast of them, close alongside. Being incapable of further service in the line, . . . I directed Captain Miller to put the helm a-starboard,<sup>2</sup> and calling for the boarders, ordered them to board.

The soldiers of the Sixty-ninth Regiment, with an alacrity which will ever do them credit, with Lieutenant Pierson of the same regiment, were amongst the foremost on this service. The first man who jumped into the enemy's mizen chains was Captain Berry, late my first lieutenant. He was supported from our spritsail-yard; and a soldier of the Sixty-ninth Regiment having broke the upper quarter-gallery window, jumped in, followed by myself and others, as fast as possible. I found the cabin doors fastened, and the Spanish officers fired their pistols at us through the windows, but having broke open the doors, the soldiers fired, and the Spanish brigadier (commodore, with

a distinguishing pendant) fell as retreating to the quarter-deck. Having pushed on the quarter-deck, I found Captain Berry in possession of the poop, and the Spanish ensign hauling down. The *San Josef* at this moment fired muskets and pistols from the admiral's stern-gallery on us. Our seamen by this time were in full possession of every part: about seven of my men were killed and some few wounded, and about twenty Spaniards.

Having placed sentinels at the different ladders, and ordered Captain Miller to push more men into the *San Nicolas*, I directed my brave fellows to board the first-rate, which was done in a moment. When I got into her main-chains, a Spanish officer came upon the quarter-deck rail, without arms, and said the ship had surrendered. From this welcome information it was not long before I was on the quarter-deck, when the Spanish captain, with a bended knee, presented me his sword, and told me the admiral was dying with his wounds below. I gave him my hand, and desired him to call to his officers and ship's company that the ship had surrendered, which he did; and on the quarter-deck of a Spanish first-rate, extravagant as the story may seem, did I receive the swords of the vanquished Spaniards, which, as I received, I gave to William Fearney, one of my bargemen, who placed them with the greatest *sang-froid* under his arm. I was surrounded by Captain Berry, Lieutenant Pierson (Sixty-ninth Regiment), John Sykes, John Thompson, Francis Cook, and William Fearney, all old Agamemmons, and several other brave men, seamen and soldiers. Thus fell these ships. The *Victory*, passing, saluted us with three cheers, as did every ship in the fleet.

The letters that passed next day from ship to ship between these two gallant friends are pleasant reading to those who rejoice in seeing self forgotten in generous appreciation of another's worth—worth which neither in this case can be said to exaggerate.

MY DEAR GOOD FRIEND [wrote Collingwood]: First let me congratulate you on the success of yesterday, on the brilliancy it attached to the British navy, and the humility it must cause to its enemies; and then let me congratulate my dear Commodore on the distinguished part which he ever takes when the honor and interests of his country are at stake. It added very much to the satisfaction I felt in thumping the Spaniards that I released you a little. The highest rewards are due to you and *Culloden*. You formed the plan of attack—we were only accessories to the Dons' ruin; for had they got on the other tack, they would have been sooner joined, and the business would have been less complete.

Nelson's letter crossed Collingwood's:

MY DEAREST FRIEND: "A friend in need is a friend indeed" was never more truly verified than by your most noble and gallant con-

<sup>1</sup> That is, the two ships lay together, in contact.

<sup>2</sup> When the wheel has been shot away, as the *Captain's* had been, the ship is steered by tackles, efficiently, though awkwardly.



PAINTED BY F. L. ABBOTT.

HORATIO, VISCOUNT NELSON.

ENGRAVED BY R. G. TIETZE.

duct yesterday in sparing the *Captain* from further loss; and I beg, both as a public officer and a friend, you will accept my most sincere thanks. I have not failed, by letter to the admiral, to represent the eminent services of the *Excellent*. . . . We shall meet at Lagos; but I could not come near you without assuring you how sensible I am of your assistance in nearly a critical situation. Believe me, as ever, your most affectionate  
 HORATIO NELSON.

While these closing scenes of the battle were in progress, the lee division of the Spaniards, now consisting, as will be remembered, of eight ships, continued to stand away from the combatants, to the south-southwest, close to the wind, until they had got well to windward of the British positions. This they were the sooner able to do because all the engaged ships, both Spaniards and British, had gone off from the wind, and the latter had deliberately and properly engaged their enemy to leeward, cutting off escape in that direction. When it became certain that they could, by

heading to the northward, pass to windward of the British, these ships went about, and stood up to join their commander-in-chief. By this move was finally effected, after three abortive attempts, the junction of the two Spanish bodies, which should never have been exposed by their admiral to the disastrous separation which befell them. As the eight ships drew up with the battered *Santisima Trinidad* and the other sufferers from the fray, some of the van also put about to their assistance. The prizes taken were not yet properly secured; several of the British were greatly crippled; the enemy, roughly handled though they had been, were still much superior in numbers and material force; and night was fast approaching. For all these reasons Jervis decided to discontinue the engagement, and secure the results already obtained. The British accordingly formed in line of battle, heading to the southward, the four prizes to leeward of them. The Spanish

fleet lay to windward in great confusion; but although it was in its power to attack, no attempt was made to repair the misfortunes of the day.

The vessels taken were the *Salvador del Mundo* and *San Josef*, both of 112 guns; the *San Nicolas*, of 84; and the *San Isidro*, of 74. The British loss was 300 killed and wounded; that of the Spaniards on board the prizes alone, 261 killed and 342 wounded—total, 603. The loss on board the other Spanish ships engaged is not known.

As a naval action the battle of Cape St. Vincent is distinguished by the firm resolution which, for sufficient reason, dared to engage against odds so great; by the promptitude and vigor with which was seized the unforeseen opportunity offered by the severance of the Spanish fleet; by the sound judgment which led Jervis to attack the weather division, though far larger, because the lee could not for a long time assist it; and finally, by the brilliant inspiration and dauntless courage which enabled Nelson to redeem in time the single capital oversight committed by the commander-in-chief. This combination of daring and judgment, of skilful direction with energetic determination to have none but great results, marked an epoch in naval history. Succeeding the dawn that glowed around the names of Rodney, of Howe, and of Hood, this achievement of Jervis's foretold the near approach of that brilliant noontide of the British navy, which was coincident with the career of Nelson, and culminated at Trafalgar. Its timely importance, in the eyes of the government, was shown by the rewards bestowed upon the commander-in-chief. Already destined, for eminent services, to the lowest grade of the peerage, he was now at one step raised to the dignity of earl, with the title of St. Vincent, by which he is now best known to history.

As a political incident the importance of this battle can scarcely be overestimated. The strife between revolutionary France and the nations of Europe, although it had been in progress for over four years, was yet little more than beginning; but it had definitely assumed on the part of France the form of an armed propaganda, by which the principles

adopted by herself were to be imposed upon all peoples, as far as her military strength could carry her. In its course, the issue of the struggle was to turn upon the sea-power of Great Britain, the only state and the only force that possessed at once the vitality of principle, and the power of endurance, capable of resisting to the uttermost the genius of Napoleon and the energy of the early revolutionary period. But, on the one hand, the success that ultimately crowned Great Britain's efforts was unattainable, if there was to continue the timid and halting system of naval warfare which, with no conspicuous exception,—save in the case of Lord Hood, who was soon retired,—marked for some time the first years of the struggle; and on the other hand, it was very probable that the resolution of the British people would succumb under an unbroken series of disasters such as had marked the year 1796, and was still awaiting them in 1797; for the year of Jervis's victory was also that of the great mutinies of the fleet, of the suspension of specie payments by the Bank of England, and of a despondent expectation that Ireland—if not Great Britain herself—would be invaded under cover of the combined fleets of France and Spain. It was at this moment of gloom, deepening almost to despair, that the news of the naval battle of Cape St. Vincent flashed across the otherwise unbroken darkness of the sky. It not only carried with it a hope of better things, of a turning tide, but it aroused that spirit of national pride and well-grounded self-confidence, that moral force, which is the chief support in a great trial of national endurance such as then lay before the British people. Jervis had well said, «A victory is very essential to England at this time.» When the scales tremble in the balance a feather's-weight may turn them. The victory of St. Vincent was no feather's-weight; but as, in itself, it carried the promise of the Nile and of Trafalgar, so, in the impulse it gave to the spirit of the nation, it was no slight factor in determining the course of events which led to Waterloo, and to Trafalgar, without which battle Waterloo could not have been.

A. T. Mahan.

