

FAMOUS NAVAL FIGURE-HEAD RELICS.



FIGURE-HEAD DREDGED UP
IN THE OUTER BAY
AT PREVYSA (ANCIENT
ACTIUM).

IN one of the galleries of the British Museum there is preserved a relic of antiquity that should be of as stirring historic interest as any of the world-famous treasures of classic times stored up within the Museum walls—the actual figure-head of one of the war triremes,

“The thunder of whose brazen prows
O'er Actium's ocean rang.”

It may even have belonged to Octavian's own ship. There is no trace of fire having passed on the bronze bust, and, as far as we know, the ships that perished at Actium, in nearly every case, owed their destruction to fire.

There is a good deal that is interesting about old figure-heads—especially those of renowned vessels that have braved the battle and the breeze with famous leaders—in the old associations that they call up. Until a few years ago, not a few with notable memories attaching to them were in existence in England, preserved as mementoes of the mighty past. For instance, there was the famous old carved lion-head of the *Centurion*, the ship in which Anson made his adventurous voyage round the world, that was preserved for so long at Goodwood, afterwards at Windsor Castle, and finally at Greenwich, where—about fifteen years ago—certain official Vandals allowed it to rot and crumble away.

The figure-head of Nelson's great prize, the *San Josef*, a trophy of the battle of St. Vincent, is to this day preserved at Deptford. That thrilling romance of the sea, the story of the capture of the *San Josef*, of course every Englishman knows: how Nelson ran his little shattered 74-gun ship, the *Captain*, alongside the Spanish *San Nicolas*, of 80 guns, and, after boarding her and taking her with a handful of men, how he pressed on and took the huge, over-towering *San Josef*, of 110 guns, with a crew of a thousand and more, that was lying next to and foul of her, is an exploit unparalleled in history, and never to be forgotten while the red cross of St. George flies on British man-of-war.

The Museum at Greenwich Hospital possesses two old figure-heads, but no special history seems to attach to either of them. It would be interesting, however, to know for certain whether the *Thames*, to which one of them belonged, was Sir Charles Napier's old *Thames*—so renowned during the closing years of the war with Napoleon—or a



ROMAN GALLEY.

later ship of the same name. Or is it the figure-head of that *Thames* whose strange fight with the French *Uranie*, off Brest, was one of the naval mysteries of Nelson's day? The two ships had fought a drawn fight for some hours, and had stood apart for a short time, out of gunshot, to repair damages, and go at one another again. It was mid-day, in clear bright weather, with scarcely a breeze blowing and a smooth sea. When, however, the *Thames* was ready to re-open the battle, no *Uranie* was to be seen anywhere, and there was no glimpse whatever of a sail on the horizon. The lookout, only a few minutes before, had noticed her lying-to, apparently busy in making good her damages, not a quarter of a mile off. The *Thames* kept cruising for some hours over the spot where her enemy had just been seen, but there was not a dead body, or spar, or fragment of wreckage of any sort visible. Nor was the *Uranie*, nor any of her officers, ever heard of again as having arrived at any French or other port.

The other figure-head shown at Greenwich is that of one of George the Third's royal yachts. It is preserved, apparently, more because of its intricate and



THE "BUCENTAURE."

finished workmanship, and the close likeness of the bust to the member of the Royal Family it was modelled from—Queen Charlotte in her young days—than for any famous story attaching to the ship that bore it.

Interesting, in its way, is the figure-head of the old line-of-battle ship *Howe*, preserved with such care at Boxley, in Kent, among the trees of the village inn garden, where on summer afternoons the sailors and soldiers from Chatham are so fond of making holiday. As every anniversary of the "Glorious First of June" battle comes round, the venerable figure-head, a bust of the fine old chief, Admiral Lord Howe, next after Nelson of all Britain's great captains, perhaps, the most popular with our blue-jackets—"Give us Black Dick, and we fear nothing!" the sailors of his time used to say—is crowned with



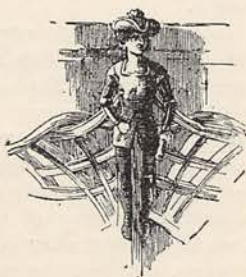
THE "CAPTAIN," 1678.

laurel wreaths in memory of the famous victory off Ushant, won ninety-six years ago. Originally the *Howe's* figure-head had two colossal supporters placed on either side of the bust, full-length effigies of a sailor and a marine, each seven feet high and elaborately carved with waving caps to appear as though cheering the old chief; but these seem to have been destroyed.

There is still preserved at Portsmouth Dockyard the figure-head of the famous "*Billy Ruffian*"—on board of which Napoleon gave himself up—presented with a suitable inscription, by Captain Maitland, after the historic old ship, that had fought with the highest distinction at Lord Howe's "Glorious First of June" battle, with Nelson at the Nile and at Trafalgar, had been made a convict-hulk. Undoubtedly the old fighting *Bellerophon's* figure-head, with that of the famous *Shannon*, long preserved at the family mansion of the Brokes in Suffolk, and the *San Josef* figure-head at Deptford, are among the oldest naval relics which England possesses. The *Chesapeake's* figure-head seems to have passed out of existence by being built into the mill near Southampton, into which the ship's timbers were converted when the *Shannon's* prize was sold out of the service. It seems a pity that such relics could not find their way to the Naval Museum at Greenwich, to be there fittingly preserved for all Englishmen to see and be proud of.

Great havoc has been wrought by fire among the old figure-heads and naval trophies that our ancestors tried to preserve. The Tower fire, in 1841, destroyed—together with fragments of the *Victory's* steering-wheel, which was shattered in Nelson's presence at Trafalgar—the magnificent figure-head of Lord Duncan's favourite old ship, the *Monarch*, one of the most famous, men-of-war of her time, to whose commander, single-handed, in three different battles, three admirals of the enemy had hauled down their flags. This figure-head was a remarkably fine bust of King George the Third as he appeared in the year of his accession to the throne, when the *Monarch* was laid down.

Then there was, just twelve months before the Tower fire, the wholesale destruction of figure-heads at the great conflagration in Plymouth Dockyard, when "Adelaide Row" was burnt. In "Adelaide Row" had been carefully preserved, under shelter, innumerable naval relics of all kinds—figure-heads, splintered stumps of the masts of distinguished ships, riddled with balls,



THE "BLEMHEIM" (90 GUNS), 1761.

and many shot-torn flags carried in battle by famous British men-of-war, as well as French and Spanish flags captured in battle. Of these last, all that are now in existence, apparently, are the Dutch Admiral's flag, taken at Camperdown by Lord Duncan's *Venerable*, preserved at Lord Camperdown's mansion in Scotland, and the flag of the French *Guerrière*, captured by Sir Thomas Lavie's *Blanche* frigate, off the Faroe Islands, in 1807, long preserved at Greenwich Hospital. Among the figure-heads destroyed in the Plymouth fire were several of the highest historical interest. For instance, the bullet-pitted head of the giant of Gath, which had belonged to the old *Goliath* that fought at St. Vincent, and led the line at the battle of the Nile; the effigy of our Saxon King Edgar, which had belonged to the famous *Edgar*, seventy-four, that won such distinction under

Boscawen, and Rodney, and Nelson, closing her half-century of hard service by leading Nelson's attack on the Danish fleet at Copenhagen; the figure-head—a bust of King George—of the *Royal Sovereign*, one of the flag-ships at the battle of the "Glorious First of June," afterwards Admiral Cornwallis's flag-ship (when, with five sail of the line and two frigates, old "Billy Blue" held at bay on the high seas, and successfully defied, the whole French Brest fleet of twelve line-of-battle ships and eleven frigates); and, finally, Collingwood's flag-ship at Trafalgar. In "Adelaide Row" there were, too, the figure-heads of the *Conqueror* of Trafalgar (a head of William the Conqueror, afterwards replaced by a head of Nelson); of the *Berwick*, an English seventy-four, re-captured by us at Trafalgar, after being ten years in the French service (the bust of the old Duke of Berwick, famous



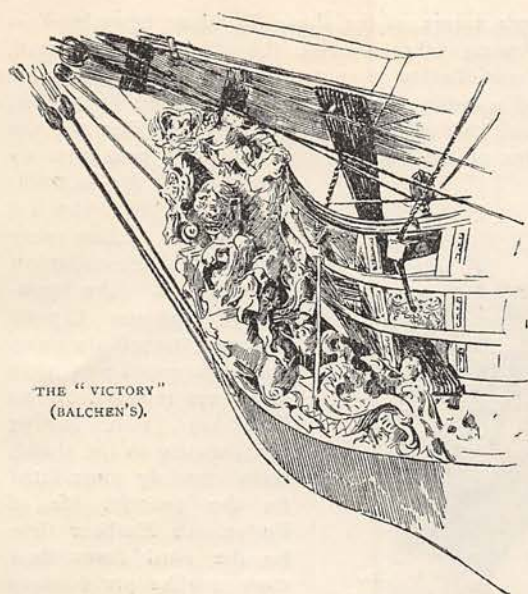
THE "GLORIOSO."

in the War of the Spanish Succession); of the brave old *Stirling Castle* man-of-war (a half-length Highlander in costume); of the *Windsor Castle*, of Sir Robert Calder's "foggy" battle (a bust of King Edward the Third bearing a sword in his hand, passed through the English, French, and Scottish crowns), and many others of less note.

There are numerous representations extant of the quaint figure-head of the famous *Bucentaure* of the Middle Ages, the State flag-ship of the Doges of Venice. One of the best of these is shown in our sketch. Who has not heard of the *Bucentaure*, and how the Doge went forth on board her every Ascension Day to the annual wedding of the Adriatic? The last of the series of *Bucentaures*—as each vessel



"LA GLOIRE," 1747.



THE "VICTORY"
(BALCHEN'S).

of the name grew old a new one was built—was seized by Napoleon just ninety-three years ago, and, after being stripped of its gold and ornaments, became a convict-prison hulk, till, in 1824, it caught fire and was destroyed: perhaps, after all, the best fate that could befall a vessel that fortune had used so ill.

It is a far cry from the lagoons of Venice to Mr. Pepys at his desk in the Admiralty, Whitehall; but the drawing of the *Captain's* figure-head takes us all the way. The figure-head of the first *Captain*—a brave old oak that fought with distinction at La Hogue—shows the fashionable wild beast type of figure-head in vogue in James the Second's time. A successor of this *Captain* it was which Nelson commanded on the "Glorious Valentine's Day," as has been already told.

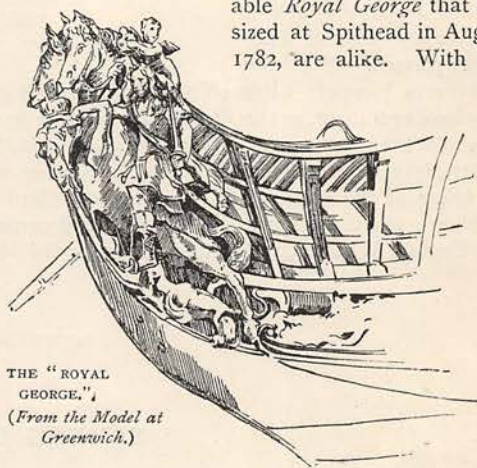
Blenheim is the name borne by one of our new ocean-keeping cruisers, built on the Thames, and launched nearly two years ago. The curious figure-head borne by the second of the line of *Blenheims*, so famous and so ill-fated, representing the Duke of Marlborough in military undress, is one of the



THE "VICTORY"
(100 GUNS—2,164 TONS),
1765.

early full-length human effigy types of figure-heads. Contemporary types in the French and Spanish navies are those of the *Gloire* and the *Glorioso*: names, these, that should be repositories of naval romance to Englishmen. There have been five *Gloires* at different times in the French service, and four of them—the last was the famous ironclad of 1859, which has never been in action—have been taken by us; while the adventurous voyage of the Spanish *Glorioso*, with treasure amounting to some millions on board, and her capture by us just after the ship had safely landed all this money, is one of the curious tales of the sea. The *Glorioso*—a magnificent man-of-war of 70 guns—was captured by a combined squadron of British frigates and privateers, after as gallant and determined a defence for three days against overpowering odds as the naval annals of any country can boast. The battle cost the victors one of their finest 50-gun ships (the *Dartmouth*), which mysteriously blew up in the middle of the fight.

We now come to the figure-head of the *Royal George*, or, rather, series of *Royal Georges*—for, from first to last, England has possessed no less than four flag-ships of that name. This is probably why no two pictures of the memorable *Royal George* that capsized at Spithead in August, 1782, are alike. With nine



THE "ROYAL
GEORGE,"
(From the Model at
Greenwich.)

out of ten it is the wrong *Royal George* that is depicted. In Plymouth Dockyard, in the sail-makers' loft, is preserved to this day a portion of the figure-head of the memorable *Royal George*—a laurelled bust intended to represent King George the Third arrayed in classic drapery.

Contemporary with the first *Royal George*, and reputed the finest man-of-war the world had yet seen, was the magnificent *Victory*, of 110 guns—fifth of her great name, and the immediate predecessor of Nelson's Trafalgar flag-ship of immortal memory. It was this ship's awful doom, a few years after she had been built, to founder in the Channel in a terrible storm one black October night of 1744, with Admiral Balchen, Governor of Greenwich Hospital, on board, and a thousand officers and men, besides more than a hundred poor little middies, belonging to the best families in the land, who were making their first

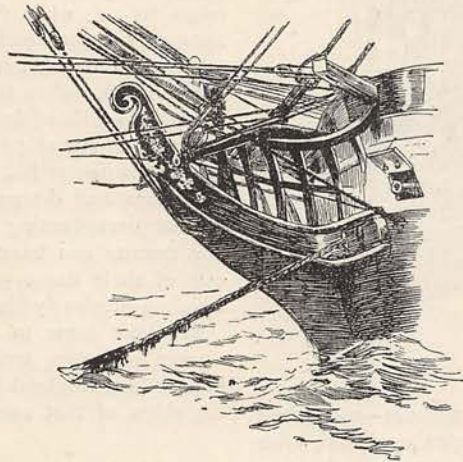
cruise under Balchen's tuition. Not a soul survived to tell the tale, and, except for one of the *Victory's* spars, which was washed up, and her rudder, which twenty years afterwards, in 1764, some Brighton (then Brighthelmstone) fishermen found floating off the Sussex coast, not a trace of the ill-fated three-decker was ever found on sea or shore. All that was ever gathered about her fate was what the Alderney fishermen told: how, on the midnight of the storm, they had heard distress guns booming out in a lull between the howling gusts, and had seen, or fancied they had seen, cannon-flashes far out to windward in the direction of the deadly Casquets reef.

Nelson's *Victory* came into being just twenty-one years after Balchen's was struck off the Navy List. During her career of a century and a quarter, the famous ship has had no less than four figure-heads—each of a different pattern. The first she wore in Keppel's battle off Ushant, where it got badly knocked about, as the *Victory* ran the gauntlet of the whole French line, not answering a shot until she got broadside with the French flag-ship; the second was borne at the battle of St. Vincent; the third at Trafalgar; while the fourth the old ship still carries. Says Captain Wharton, in his monograph on the *Vic-*

tory's career, of the ship's Trafalgar figure-head:—"Among other injuries, the *Victory's* figure-head, a coat-of-arms supported by a sailor on one side and a marine on the other, was struck by a shot, which carried away the legs of the soldier and the arms of the sailor; and the story goes (but we cannot vouch for its truth) that all the men who lost legs in the action were marines, and those who lost arms, sailors. The figure-head," continues Captain Wharton, "is still the same, but the wounded supporters have been replaced by two little boys, who, leaning affectionately on the shield, seem certainly more fitted for the peaceful life of Portsmouth Harbour than for the hard times their more warlike predecessors lived in."

Such are the stories wrought up with some of the famous naval figure-head relics of past times, and the memories that they recall of so many a brave old "wooden wall." They ought not to be without interest—nay, rather they ought to be of the highest interest—for us who vaunt ourselves sprung from the Sea-kings' loins—

"We, sons and sires of seamen,
Whose home is all the sea."



THE "CHESAPEAKE."

SIGNING THE REGISTER.

THE words that make them one are said!
Together, side by side,
We see the lovers newly wed,
The bridegroom and the bride;
A task remains whose sweet demand
Her joys may not defer—
She, smiling, takes the pen in hand,
To sign the register.

The last sweet time has come in life
To sign her maiden name!
On this bright morn a happy wife,
She now records the same;
And with the thought that his dear love
Is all the world to her—
How dear, their future lives shall prove—
She signs the register.

The scenes from many a vanished year
Return at fancy's call!
We see the lovely trains appear,
The brides who, one and all—
In gay processions without end,
Through golden days that were—
Above the time-worn pages bend
To sign the register.

A fleeting thought, but let it pass—
The light streams in to-day
In glory through the pictured glass!
And while the sunbeams play
Upon the lovers, side by side,
And brighter grace confer,
As if in blessing, on the bride,
She signs the register.

J. R. EASTWOOD.