

A Hundred Years Ago.

BY ALFRED WHITMAN.

[With Illustrations from Old Prints.]

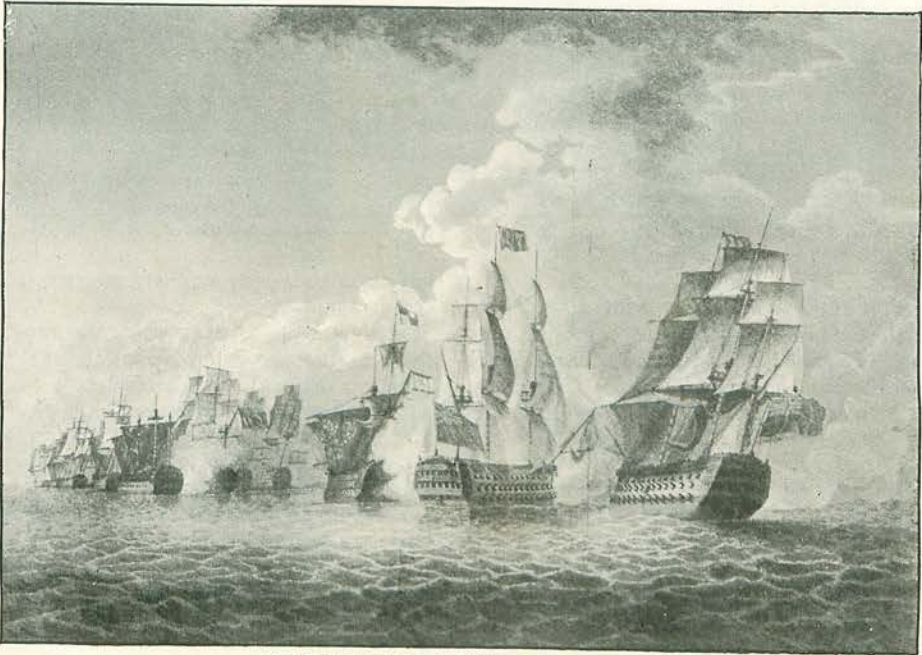


THE year 1797 was strongly marked by its contrasts of bright high lights and deep depressing shadows; and the subjects that chiefly occupied the attention of the people alternately convulsed them with outbursts of joy, and cast them into almost the depths of despair. It was a year of kaleidoscopic changes. First came the scare of foreign invasion, when rumours of landings were rife all along the coast, and serious preparations were made to resist attacks. Then the country was thrown into a paroxysm of delight by the news of the victory off Cape St. Vincent. But the joy of victory was soon contending with the alarm of a financial crisis, when the scarcity of coin brought about the introduction of a paper currency. Next came the mutinies at Spithead and the Nore. Then with the dull season came a comparative lull in public events, from which the nation was roused by the booming of cannon that announced another victory—this time off Camperdown. Thus, the year which opened with the dread of invasion and a financial crisis, closed with a victorious fanfare of trumpets and the country in a thorough

good humour. But we must examine these events and ceremonies more closely.

That the fear of invasion was very real is shown by the records of the time, from which we learn that associations were formed in almost all the principal towns in the kingdom to render service against attacks, troops and ammunition were moved to strategic points to be in readiness in case of need, and the Admiralty ordered every ship at Spithead to be kept fit for immediate service; while at Liverpool the townsfolk "busily employed themselves in erecting batteries at all points, on both sides of the river, with a furnace to each for the purpose of heating shot."

But the fears of the people were considerably diminished when, in the early morning of March 4th, the news of the victory off Cape St. Vincent reached London. The battle was fought on February 14th, and though one of the smallest in extent, was the most brilliant of any during the war. The Spanish fleet comprised twenty-seven ships of the line against only fifteen English; and yet in the result, by skilful seamanship, as well as by courageous fighting, our men succeeded in capturing four Spanish vessels of the line,



THE BATTLE OF ST. VINCENT, FEBRUARY, 1797.

ten merchantmen, and 3,200 prisoners. The share our gallant Nelson took in this brilliant engagement is forcibly told by an eye-witness who writes: "However incredible it may appear, it is a positive fact, that in the action of the 14th February, Commodore Nelson, in the *Captain* of 74 guns, and Captain Troubridge in the *Culloden* of the same force, turned the whole van of the Spanish fleet, consisting of three first rates, and four 74 or 80 gun ships." Nelson's fame in this battle, however, was made by the remarkable intrepidity with which he, with Troubridge, engaged the *San Nicolas* and *San Josef*,

resources; so much so that the supply of specie in the Bank of England became alarmingly small, and Consols dropped to below 48. As a consequence, an Act of Parliament was passed authorizing the Bank to suspend payments in cash, and to substitute the paper currency with which we are now so familiar. At the same time the City merchants met at the Mansion House, and agreed to accept bank-notes in payment of debts, in order to strengthen the credit of the country and reduce the fears of timid depositors. The scheme was an experiment of great importance, but the experience of later years



NELSON BOARDING THE "SAN NICOLAS," FEBRUARY, 1797.

boarded them, and finally received the sword from the Spanish rear-admiral, which he afterwards presented to the corporation of Norwich. Nelson boarding the *San Nicolas* is portrayed in our second illustration; and a special interest attaches to it, for it was the last occasion in which he was represented with both arms. His right arm, which he was to lose at Santa Cruz in less than five months, is raised aloft, and his left hand grasps a pistol in his belt. For this victory Admiral Jervis was created an Earl, and Commodore Nelson a Knight of the Bath.

But the war, which had been in progress since 1793, was a vast expense to the country, and had been an enormous drain upon its

resources; so much so that the supply of specie in the Bank of England became alarmingly small, and Consols dropped to below 48. As a consequence, an Act of Parliament was passed authorizing the Bank to suspend payments in cash, and to substitute the paper currency with which we are now so familiar. At the same time the City merchants met at the Mansion House, and agreed to accept bank-notes in payment of debts, in order to strengthen the credit of the country and reduce the fears of timid depositors. The scheme was an experiment of great importance, but the experience of later years

has approved it as an extremely convenient arrangement. Early in the year it was announced that the King's eldest daughter was about to marry Frederic Prince of Wurtemberg; and the happy event was solemnized on May 18th. We will not trace the events leading up to the wedding, but the following items appear amusing at the present day, when State affairs are arranged with such precision. The bridegroom reached Harwich from the Continent on April 11th, but no one was there to meet him. It was expected he would land at Yarmouth, where preparations for his reception were made and where the Royal carriages were awaiting him. When he reached London

he stayed at an hotel in Pall Mall, and "a party of butchers with marrow-bones and cleavers played their rough music at the door; and as soon as the Prince was apprised of the object of their visit he sent them a present of £5 5s." Then his arrival in this country was premature, and he was sent off on a tour to the principal provincial towns to fill in the time until the arrangements were complete. Although the wedding took place in St. James's Palace, the banquet that followed was not held in London, but "in the afternoon the bride and bridegroom, King, and Royal Family set off for Windsor to dinner."

Turning from the Royal nuptials, we find that at this time there was grave cause for anxiety on account of the mutinies that broke out at Plymouth, Spithead, the Nore, and Yarmouth. The most serious of these was at the Nore, and space will permit us to notice only that one. The men, it appears, had cause for complaint, and appointed delegates from each vessel to champion their cause, with Richard Parker, whose portrait is here given, as president. The grievances of the mutineers included:

unfair distribution of prize money, smallness of pay, unnecessary restrictions when in harbour, and unpunctual payment of wages. The red flag of mutiny was hoisted on Parker's ship, the *Sandwich*, on May 23rd, and in a few days as many as twenty-four ships had joined the mutineers, who blocked up the Thames by mooring four vessels across it, and effectually stopped all traffic on the river, so that even the Royal bride and bridegroom could not venture down for fear of being taken as hostages. The greatest alarm was felt at the

perilous state of affairs, and while Parliament was passing an Act to cope with the danger, a subscription was raised among City men to equip a volunteer force. Troops were stationed along the Essex and Kent coasts to prevent the mutineers from communicating with the shore, and "furnaces for heating red-hot shot were kept in readiness at Sheerness." At first an endeavour was made to pacify the men by granting the King's pardon to all who would immediately return to their duties; but as the offer was

flagrantly scorned by the mutineers, preparations were made on a large scale to enforce strict obedience to the laws. The men then realized that their game was a losing one, disaffection set in, and on June 14th the gratifying message reached London by telegraph: "The mutiny at the Nore is completely at an end." Parker and some 250 others were taken prisoners, and the ringleader, after a court-martial which lasted three days, was found guilty and suffered the extreme penalty at the yard-arm of his ship, his body finally finding a resting-place at Whitechapel Church. A few

other mutineers were executed, but most of the prisoners sooner or later received the King's pardon.

The rebellion being settled, Government at once turned its attention to the complaints of the Army, which were beginning to find expression, and inquired into the conditions of the Service, with the result that it was decided to augment the pay by an increase of two shillings a week.

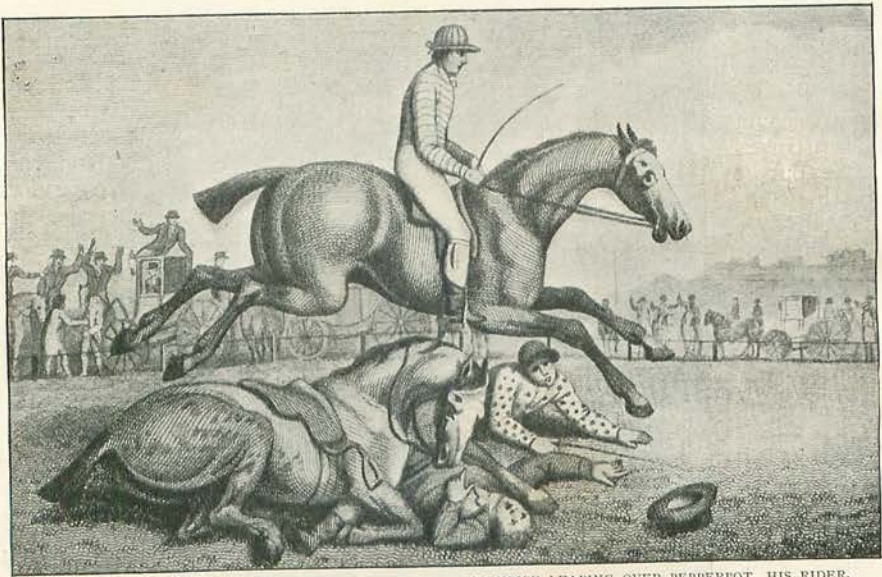
During the year many eminent persons died; and among the number we recall the world-famed Horace Walpole, the man of



RICHARD PARKER—RINGLEADER OF THE MUTINY
AT THE NORE, JUNE, 1797.

letters and art amateur, who died on March 2nd worth nearly £100,000, and was buried quite privately; Mrs. Pope, the celebrated actress, who found a resting-place in Westminster Abbey; Edmund Burke, the statesman and orator, who died on July 8th; and on Boxing Day John Wilkes, the apostle of freedom and Alderman of the City of London. To these must be added John Pitman, the miser, who died at Exeter in August, denying himself even a rushlight, while his property was worth nearly £200,000. Among the marriages must be mentioned that of Miss Farren, the actress who became Countess of Derby, and Miss Spooner, who was led to the altar and became the wife of William Wilberforce, the Slave Abolitionist.

the presence of Royalty. "After the first heat, the Royal Family rode in procession up and down the course; His Majesty and suite on horseback, the Queen and Princesses in sociables." But the weather did not remain fine; for we read "the storm was the most severe of any we have had this year; the Royal Family was overtaken in it, and got home dripping wet." The incident depicted in the accompanying illustration occurred at Lincoln Races on September 8th. A farmer's son carelessly endeavoured to cross the course as the horses were coming along. He came in collision with a horse named Pepperpot, which with its rider he brought down upon him; and another horse—Hornpipe—running close behind was cleverly taken at a leap safely



AN INCIDENT AT LINCOLN RACES, SEPTEMBER, 1797—HORNPIPE LEAPING OVER PEPPERPOT, HIS RIDER, AND A FARMER'S SON.

If the world became poorer by the deaths of celebrated people, it was enriched by the births of those who in after years should become famous. Among the number may be placed Samuel Lover, the author of "Handy Andy"; Sir Anthony Panizzi, the originator of the great Reading Room of the British Museum; Madame Vestris, the actress, who made for herself a great reputation; and the Earl of Cardigan, who led the celebrated charge of the Light Brigade at the Battle of Balaclava.

Sports of all kinds held their place in public esteem, and for the month of September, no fewer than fourteen race meetings were announced. Ascot Races took place as usual in June, and were graced with

over the obstruction, and came in second at the finish.

But the account of the principal naval victory of the year has yet to be related. Quite early in the spring Admiral Duncan had been ordered to take his fleet into the North Sea, to prevent the Dutch fleet from effecting a junction with their allies of France and Spain. So carefully did Duncan watch the enemy that his fleet was kept closely in the Texel, and it was not until the autumn, when the English Admiral had put into Yarmouth to refit, that the enemy endeavoured to elude his vigilance and sail south. Duncan, however, was quickly advised that the Dutch had left harbour, and at once put to sea to seek an engage-

ment. He found the Dutch within nine miles of land between Egmont and Camperdown, and determined to break the enemy's line, which, with the assistance of Admiral Onslow, who commanded the rear division, he succeeded in doing. Then followed a most stubborn encounter, which lasted from noon until four o'clock in the afternoon, when the engagement ended in a decisive victory for the English. That the Dutch fought with great determination and valour is shown by the fact that Admiral De Winter did not yield until all his masts were gone and half his crew were dead or wounded. Thousands of people assembled along the coast and witnessed the disaster to their country's fleet. The ships on both sides were terribly disabled, but the English succeeded in capturing no fewer than nine sail of the line, besides two frigates; while the enemy's loss in killed and wounded amounted to nearly 1,500 men.

The next illustration gives us the scene on board Admiral Duncan's vessel at the close

account of their condition; and had a gale which occurred two days after the action taken place while the ships were at sea, there is grave doubt whether they would have arrived at all. The news of the victory caused great rejoicings throughout the country, and the feeling of the nation is well expressed in a leading article of the *Times* when it says: "This glorious engagement has reduced the Dutch Navy to a state from which it will not be able to recover, and it has rescued us from all the dangers with which the Batavians threatened both our coasts and our navigation in the North Sea." As was natural, the victory was at once seized upon by the world of fashion, and "the *Duncan* robe and *Duncan* cap has become all the rage; and nothing is to be seen but plaid ribbons."

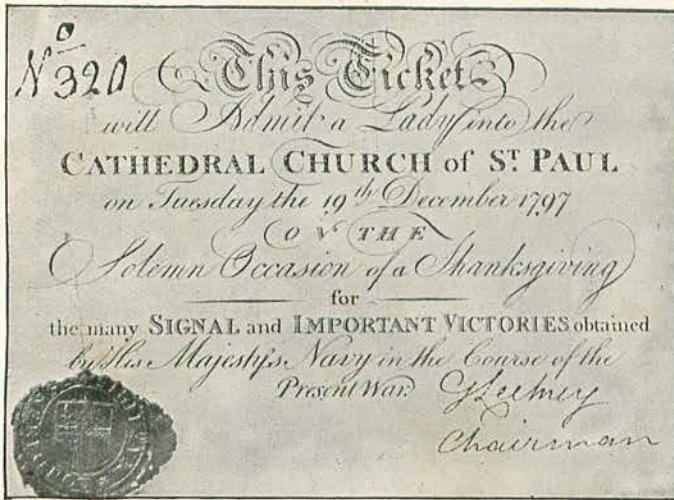
But the crowning event of the year was the National Thanksgiving for the naval victories, which George III. commanded should take place on December 19th. The King arranged to go in procession to St.



THE DUTCH ADMIRAL SURRENDERING HIS SWORD TO ADMIRAL DUNCAN, AFTER THE BATTLE OF CAMPERDOWN, OCTOBER, 1797.

of the action, when Admiral De Winter surrendered his sword. Duncan at the time was about sixty-three years of age, and, as will be judged from the picture, stood well over 6ft. high. It was with some difficulty that the prizes were brought to our coast, on

Paul's to be present at a solemn thanksgiving service; and when reading the contemporary accounts of the preparations, one almost fancies one is reading a newspaper of last June. The *Times* of December 12th contains the following:

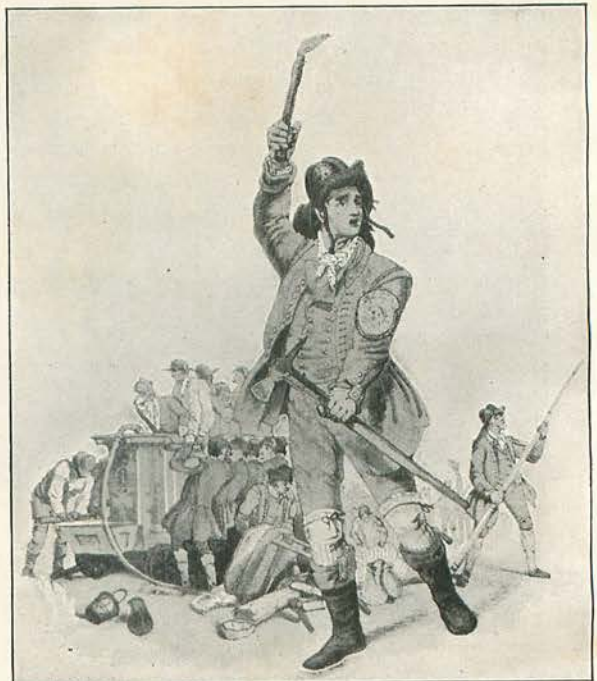


A TICKET OF ADMISSION TO ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL.

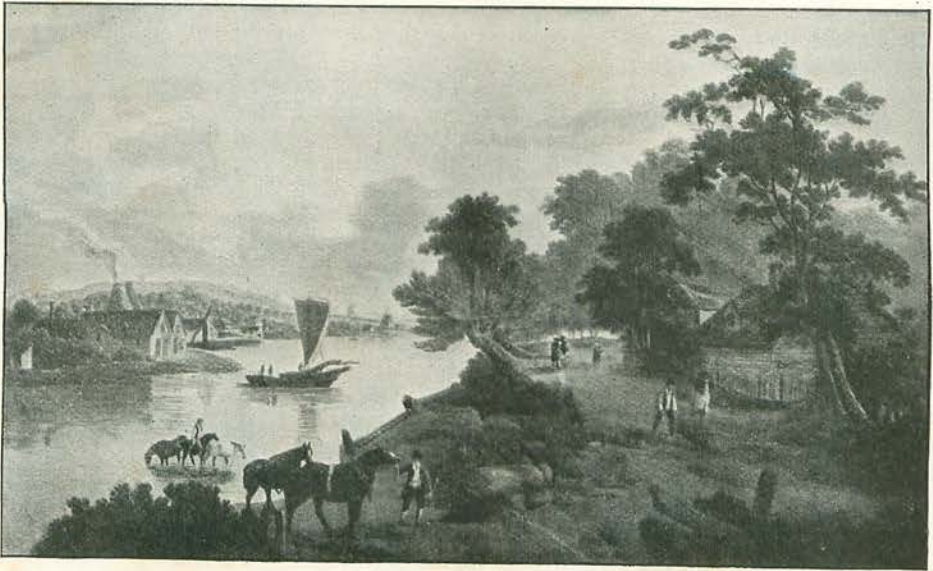
“Procession to St. Paul’s. No. 28, Ludgate Hill. To be Let, Front Seats in Dining Room 2 guineas, Second Seats 1½ guineas, Third 1 guinea. Seats in Shop 1 guinea, 2nd Floor Room 20 guineas, 3rd Floor Room 12 guineas.” This is a specimen of many advertisements. Besides other preparations at St. Paul’s, we find: “To render the Cathedral as warm as possible, a very large brazier is erected under the great dome, which is kept burning night and day until the 19th. Six other braziers in other parts of the Cathedral.” On the 14th we read: “The eight cream-coloured horses belonging to the King’s state-coach are every morning drove to St. Paul’s Church, to train them to the flags in Queen Anne’s Church Yard.” The auspicious day was fine, and “almost all the inhabitants of the Metropolis and adjacent parts were in the streets, and long before daylight the houses began to fill. . . . The naval procession began soon after eight o’clock, and the colours were brought within the church under the loudest shouts of applause. . . . The King reached St. Paul’s at 11.30, the sermon was preached by the Dean, and lasted thirty-seven minutes, and the service concluded at 2.30. . . . On the whole it was impossible to behold a more splendid sight, or one better conducted.” . . . “But some villains drove an ox into the crowd.” Thus the day came and

went, and as was the case last June, everyone seemed satisfied. The accompanying illustration is taken from a ticket that admitted a lady to the service in the Cathedral.

During the year 1797 many fires occurred at home and abroad. In January, nine houses were destroyed at Deptford; in March, twenty houses and a timber-yard were burnt in the Minories; in July, Lord St. Helen’s house in Bloomsbury caught fire during a severe storm, so that the spectacle “presented a most awful aspect”; and in September, thirty-one houses were burnt down at Honiton. The most disastrous fire of the year occurred at Scutari, near Constantinople, when upwards of three thousand buildings were consumed. In the illustration, we have a London fireman of the period, with, in the background, the best extinguishing apparatus known at the time. A hundred years ago, the arrangements for dealing with outbreaks of fire were almost entirely in the hands of the insurance



A LONDON FIREMAN A CENTURY AGO.



THE SITE OF THE TATE GALLERY, MILLBANK, IN 1797.

corporations; and the fireman depicted was in the employ of the "Sun" office, whose badge he wears upon his left arm.

The above illustration gives a view of the spot at Millbank where stands the Gallery of British Art, lately given to the nation by Mr. Henry Tate, and opened by the Prince of Wales last July. From it we can very well form an idea of the rural appearance of places

within a short distance of the City a century ago, and can the better realize the conquest that has been made by bricks and mortar since then. Another London item shows the length of time that is sometimes required to accomplish a great scheme. "August 21st, 1797. Snow Hill will soon be laid in ruins preparatory to the great improvement intended by a dry bridge from that spot to the



VIEW OF "THE STRAND MAGAZINE" COVER AS IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IN 1797.

pitch of Holborn Hill. All tenants are quitting the former spot." These tenants might have returned to their homes and remained a long time ere the houses were required to make room for the Holborn Viaduct!

The next illustration is introduced in order that the reader may see the view that would have appeared on the cover of THE STRAND MAGAZINE had the periodical been produced at the end of the last century. It is from a print of 1797, and forms a contrast to the site of the Tate Gallery. In the Millbank picture we realize the great changes that may

for the genuineness of the view we must look at the houses on the left, the costumes of the passers-by, and the build of the coaches. Somewhere in the foreground formerly stood the old Strand Maypole.

At the end of the last century, fashions in dress were in a state of transition—though for that matter it would be difficult to find a time when transition was not the order of the day. The wide skirts of 1780 were giving place to the very narrow ones of 1810, and in 1797 they were about half-way between the extremes. The extravagantly high and elaborate hair-dressing of



FASHIONS IN LADIES' HEAD-DRESSES IN 1797.

be brought about in a century; in the Strand view we are chiefly impressed with the small amount of alteration that has taken place. Somerset House, then an infant of twelve years, and St. Mary-le-Strand, which in 1797 had withstood the vicissitudes of some eighty winters, gave to this part of the Strand the same appearance as at the present day; and

the middle of the century had almost died out, and attention was being given more to the coverings for the hair than to the hair itself, and towards the close of the century these articles of millinery assumed many fantastic shapes. In the illustration are given some of the head dresses which were most fashionable during the year 1797.