

# IN NELSON'S FOOTSTEPS IN THE TWO SICILIES

By Douglas Sladen.



TRAPANI, AND MONTE ST. GIULIANO, THE ANCIENT ERYX, WHERE AENEAS HELD THE FUNERAL GAMES OF ANCHISES.



IN MARSALA HARBOUR.

**I** S I T  
d o w n  
to write  
these words  
on Nelson's  
Day—the  
hundredth  
anniversary  
of the Battle  
of the Nile,  
which was  
fought on  
the 1st of  
A u g u s t,

1798. From my verandah at Salcombe I look out past the soaring rocks of the Bolt Head to the Channel filled with shipping by the naval supremacy which he founded on that day.

Nelson paid a passing visit to Naples, carrying despatches for Hood, as early as 1793, but his real connection with the Two Sicilies, as the kingdom of Naples and the kingdom of Sicily were called, did not begin till five years later, and he did not so much as set foot in them in the interval. He was in the Bay of Naples on June 17, 1798, before his first voyage to Alexandria in chase of the French fleet with Napoleon on board. But he did not land; nor did he see the Hamiltons. On the 20th of the same month he was off Messina, and on the 21st off Syracuse. On the 22nd, under full sail for Alexandria, he passed Cape Passaro; on the 28th he was off Alexandria, but was disappointed of finding the French, for Napoleon had made a *détour* round Crete to throw off his pursuers.

On July 20 Nelson was back at Syracuse, and there his noteworthy connection with

the Two Sicilies began. Nelson did not inhabit any house in Syracuse. He anchored in the "great harbour" a few days to water his ships, and the most notable fact about his visit is the still uncleared-up double-dealing of the Sicilian court.

The French had informed Ferdinand that they should treat it as a *casus belli* if he admitted into any of his ports more than three or four ships at a time belonging to any other power, by which of course they meant England. But Nelson was given to expect secret orders procured from the Queen by the good offices of Lady Hamilton, to supersede this general despatch. As the Queen was the real monarch, this should have been sufficient, but it is now thought that the Governor had received yet more secret orders not to act on those secret orders unless he was compelled to do so by force. But the matter has never been cleared up. At all events, Nelson got the water, and was able to write to Sir William and Lady Hamilton, whom, it must be remembered, he had not seen for five years, on July 22, 1798:—

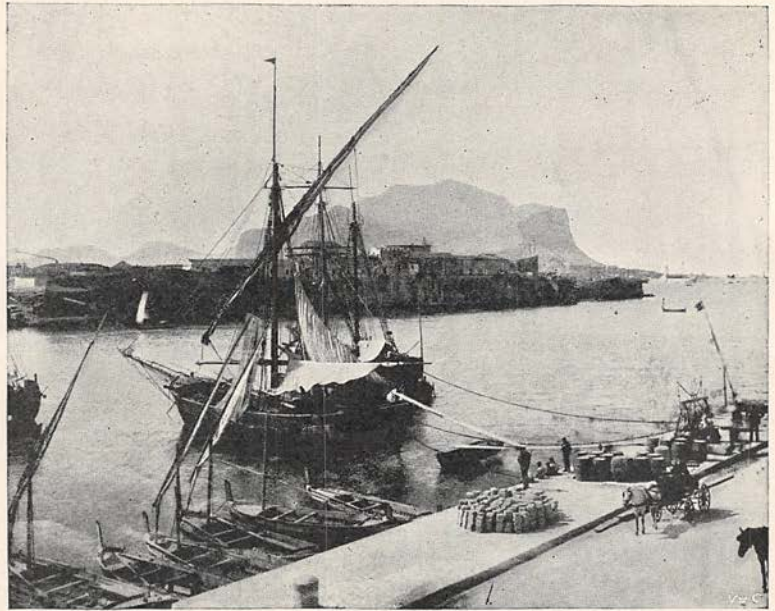
"MY DEAR FRIENDS,—Thanks to your exertions, we have victualled and watered: and, surely, watering at the Fountain of Arethusa, we must have victory. We shall sail with the first breeze, and be assured I will return either crowned with laurel or covered with cypress."

In Nelson's day the Fountain of Arethusa sprang, quite a river in volume, out of the natural rock. It is now built into a not unpleasant sort of open alcove, and is dammed back into a clear pool full of waving

papyrus and great grey mullet. The water is now salt, having been disturbed by an earthquake only a year or two after Nelson's visit.

From Syracuse he sailed straight back to Alexandria and won the Battle of the Nile, and on the 22nd of September he arrived at Naples, though he nearly died the day before from the effects of his wound and fever.

Lady Hamilton, who had in the interval, on September 6, written him the delightful letter of congratulation I quoted in "The Admiral," went out in the Ambassador's barge to meet the hero. When she saw him she exclaimed, "Oh, God! is it possible?" and when she noticed the change that five years had made in his appearance she fell into his arms fainting. She would not hear of his going

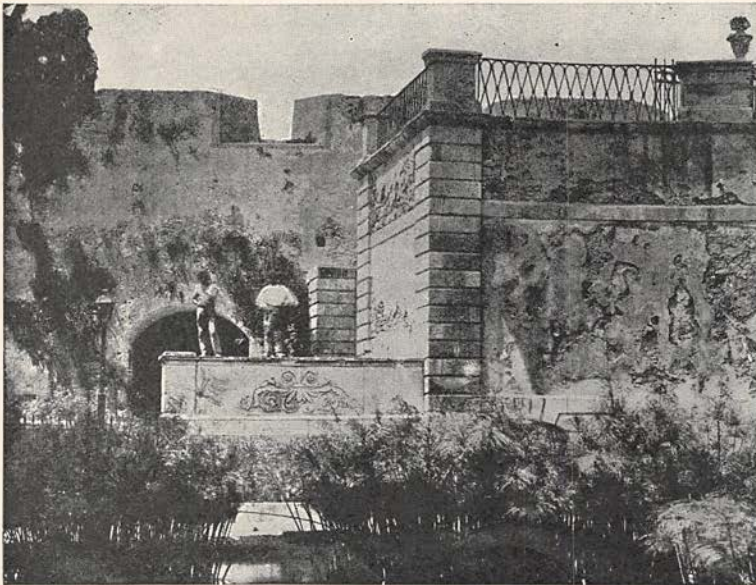


THE HARBOUR OF PALERMO.

*Lord Nelson's ships probably lay just outside the lighthouse, on the point of Monte Pellegrino.*

to the inn by the port, where he had thought of establishing his headquarters, but carried him off in the Embassy coach to her palace, which is fortunately still standing, though its surroundings have altered so much. It stands, under the shadow of the acropolis

now known as Pizzofalcone, on which the earliest of the classical fore-runners of modern Naples stood, between the Piazza dei Martiri and the Largo Vittoria. It is almost opposite Cook's offices. It is of enormous size and is now let in apartments. It occupies three sides of a quadrangle, the fourth front, that nearest the sea, containing the stables, a comparatively low block of buildings. In the corner of the palace front abutting on the stables, on what we should



THE FOUNTAIN OF ARETHUSA, SYRACUSE.

call the second floor, there is a little sort of roof garden. Nelson seems to have had an apartment, now divided up, which opens on to this.

As you enter the great gateway which leads into the courtyard, round which the palace is built, a fine red marble staircase on the right carries you up to the principal apartments. Here Nelson stayed with the Hamiltons all the time he was at Naples, in 1798. In their day the Villa Reale—the public gardens of Naples, which came right up to the palace—had only recently been formed by King Ferdinand I., to receive the splendid statuary he had inherited, including the celebrated Farnese bull. The site was land recovered from the sea, a process which is going on all the time in Naples to such an extent that Nelson would hardly recognise the fore-shore of to-day. Besides being at the Hamiltons' palace at Naples, he is known to have stayed in the royal palace of Caserta, and it is probable that he stayed in the Hamiltons' villas at that place and Posilippo. From Naples, on October 15, 1798, he sailed for Malta, and arrived back on November 5. On November 22 he left for Leghorn, taking part in the ill-fated operations against the French which led to the fall of the kingdom of Naples. Nelson personally was unable to have any part in

the fighting, or the result might have been very different. The Neapolitans behaved with such poltroonery that on the 23rd of December, 1798, the royal family had to fly to Palermo. By Lady Hamilton's courage and forethought, an enormous treasure of money, plate, diamonds, pictures, and antiques, to the value of two and a half millions sterling, was conveyed by night to her palace

and thence on board the ships, the bulk of it on the flagship, to which the royal family themselves were conveyed by the secret passage which still runs from the palace down to the little port called the Arsenal. They made the passage in the most awful weather which Nelson ever experienced in his career at sea. The little Prince Albert, aged seven, died of sea-sickness in Lady Hamilton's arms, and they did not arrive at Palermo till the 26th.

At Palermo, Nelson's movements are much more difficult to trace. It is

fairly certain that he spent a while in the royal palace, which contains, not only the Cappella Reale—the gem of Norman Byzantine architecture, whose mosaics are, perhaps, in the finest state of preservation of any antique mosaics in the world—but also a Norman dwelling-room, built by King Roger and preserved intact.

He hired for his own use the villa of



NELSON WHEN IN SICILY.

*From a print, not previously reproduced, described in the British Museum Collection as "Engraved by T. Burke from an original drawing taken at Palermo, in possession of Captain T. B. Savage, of Marines."*

the Marquis de Gregorio, which stands on the edge of the harbour where his fleet lay, and was then outside the city. It is on the Pellegrino side, a short distance from the ancient building known as the Arsenal. A garden of sixty acres, mostly devoted to lemon groves, is still attached to the back of this villa, which is quite unchanged from Nelson's time. It has an ordinary-looking white façade, with a plain iron balcony running along the first floor. A narrow entrance in the centre admits you into a small courtyard containing a fountain and a fine tree. From this a narrow staircase

walled in on both sides conducts you to the first floor and you find yourself in a suite of magnificent apartments leading off each other. The finest of these apartments is the Salone—the centre front room, a large vaulted chamber with the very furniture which was there in Nelson's time and when the Viceroy from Spain used it. It was the custom for the Viceroy, on landing, to

stay in this villa to recover from the sea voyage and make the proper preparations, in the way of unpacking his plate and fitting his liveries with servants, for his ceremonial entry into the royal palace. In the centre of the room is a huge circular ottoman, with a fine porcelain vase rising from the centre, under a chandelier of rock crystal. In the centre of each wall is a tall mirror running down from the ceiling to a little table with lions' legs. There are several doors, all of them going from floor to ceiling, although the top panels are fixed and have paintings sunk in them. The floor is covered with

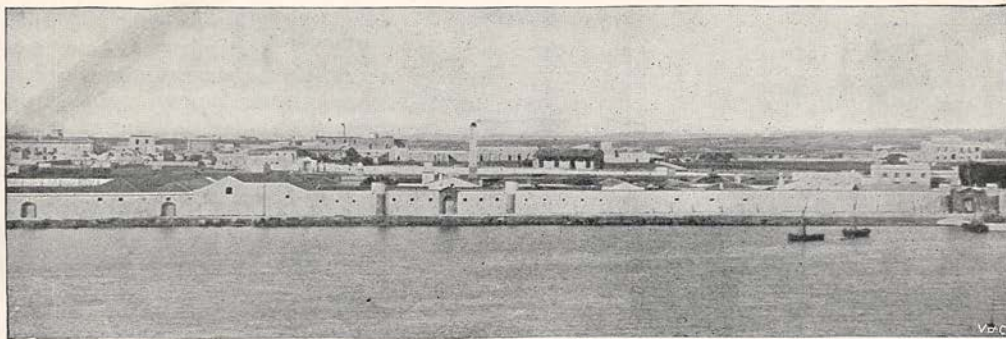
fine old Spanish tiling, with a huge blue and yellow pattern, each flourish of which occupies several tiles. At each end there is a couch of the stiff eighteenth century pattern, with a number of chairs facing it in the form of a horseshoe. This arrangement the Marquis Antonio di Gregorio, the heir of the house, and one of the most distinguished geologists in Italy, the author of nearly a hundred well-known scientific works, tells me was invariable a hundred years ago. The ladies all stayed at one end of the room and the gentlemen at the other. Passing through one of the great

doors, with each panel four feet square, the next chamber you come to but one is the bedroom which was occupied by the Viceroy and the great Admiral—a plain room with an alcove, in which the bed then stood. At the back of the palace, which is of immense size, containing over one hundred rooms, are the stables, divided by handsome park railings from the



THE FAVORITA, QUEEN MARIA CAROLINA'S SUMMER PALACE AT PALERMO, WHERE SHE OFTEN ENTERTAINED NELSON.

inner garden, which is very quaint, with its fountain in the centre of a vine arbour, its aviary, and its tiled flower boxes along the borders of the beds. They were constructed for water channels, such as are still in use in the lemon grove, though they are devoted to flowers in the inner garden since the introduction of pipes. There are very fine oleanders, a splendid clump of bananas with (when I saw them) great bunches of ripe fruit, custard apples, pine-apples, and other tropical plants. Beyond this are the shady lemon groves, which contain curious caves and ancient buildings, and



WOODHOUSE'S BAGLIO AT MARSALA, FROM WHICH NELSON BOUGHT FIVE HUNDRED PIPES OF WINE.

extend almost to the foot of Monte Pellegrino.

Nelson, of course, did not hire the whole palace, but what is called an apartment in it, and after a while he seems to have used this chiefly for a sort of fleet office, and to have stayed himself with the Hamiltons in their palace near the Flora, as the public

gardens, now known as the Villa Giulia, were then called. It is not quite certain what palace the Hamiltons did occupy, but when I was last in Palermo, I was at a ball in the Princess Baucino's palace which stands on the sea-front, just before you come to the Villa

Giulia, and I was informed by a good many of the people present that the Hamiltons' palace probably stood on the site of the Baucino palace, and was partly incorporated in it

by Prince Cattolico when he commenced the ambitious alterations which made this palace one of the finest in Palermo. It is very imposing as it

rises from the Marina, but the famous Norman room, copied with so much taste from that in the king's palace, and the Moorish ballroom, copied from the Alhambra, were, one regrets to say, not built in Nelson's day; and the splendid collections of armour

*The Wine to be delivered  
as expeditiously as possible and all to be delivered  
within the space of 14 weeks from this date; a  
conveyance to be wanted for the vessel from Marsala  
to Malta visits are to turn by Mr. Woodhouse.*

*Oronthe Nelson*

FACSIMILE OF NELSON'S ORDER FOR WINE FROM MESSRS. WOODHOUSE.



THE KING'S PALACE AT PALERMO, WHERE LORD NELSON STAYED WHEN HE FIRST WENT TO PALERMO IN DECEMBER, 1798.

and priceless pottery were brought there by the late Prince Baucino. These are the three sites most intimately connected with Nelson's stay in Palermo.

He was at Palermo from December 26, 1798, to May 19, 1799, and again from May 29 to June 15, 1799; and on June 21, 1799, he was a few hours in the Bay embarking Sir William and Lady Hamilton for Naples. The intervals from the 21st to the 28th of May, and the 16th to the 20th of June, he was off Maritimo. Maritimo is one of the famous *Ægatian Islands*, where the Romans gained the great sea fight over the Carthaginians which ended the first Punic war. It is a few miles from Marsala, but it was during a subsequent visit that he gave Messrs. Woodhouse and Co., the original and still one of the principal wine firms there, his autograph order (now framed in their office) for 500 pipes of Marsala wine. Maritimo was a favourite *rendezvous* of Nelson's when he was looking out for a French fleet from the west. Another of his letters is dated from Trapano (Trapani), which is about twenty miles up the coast from Marsala, and was founded by Hamilcar, the father of Hannibal. The wine baglios of Marsala still have lofty walls, like fortresses and little towers, which in Nelson's day were mounted with cannon to prevent the descent of privateers on so rich a prize.

From June 24 to August 4, 1799, Nelson was in the Bay of Naples, and during a good part of the time the king and the seat of government were on board his flagship, the *Foudroyant*. On August 5 he carried the

king back to Palermo in triumph and remained there till October 5. It was during his second long stay at Palermo that Maria Carolina gave the famous mythological ball, probably out at her summer palace—the *Favorita*, a curious but elegant villa in the pseudo-Chinese style, of which she was so fond. The king, dressed as Jove, crowned Nelson, dressed as Mars, and presented him with the patent of the dukedom and lands of Bronte, then worth £3,000 a year. Lady Hamilton was dressed as Venus, and the Queen as Juno.

It was from June 1 to June 9, 1800, after several other brief sojourns there, that Nelson was at Palermo for the last time.

It does not come within the scope of this article to follow Nelson from Palermo, which he left on June 10, 1800, to Leghorn, from Leghorn to Ancona, and Ancona to Trieste. Sir William had been superseded by the Hon. Arthur Paget, and Nelson felt that he could no longer, with dignity, act under the commands of Lord Keith. After leaving Trieste, he made a triumphal progress across Europe by way of Vienna, and landed at Great Yarmouth in his own county of Norfolk, on the 6th of May, 1800, more than two years after he had immortalised himself by the victory of the Nile.

A curious thing remains to be related, that Nelson, once the idol of the Two Sicilies, now shares the unpopularity of the Bourbon dynasty he served so well, among the lower classes, who in a few years more will probably believe that he actually fought against, and was defeated by Garibaldi.



THE FORO ITALICO, OR MARINA OF PALERMO.

The large building in the centre is the palace of the Princess Baucino, in which the palace occupied by the Hamiltons and Lord Nelson is supposed to be incorporated.