The story of Nelson

Edmund Francis Sellar

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[Transcriber's note: the source book was in extremely poor condition, with its illustrations in varying states of wear and tear.]

[Frontispiece: Nelson at the Battle of Copenhagen (page 75)]

THE CHILDREN'S HEROES SERIES

THE STORY OF NELSON

BY EDMUND FRANCIS SELLAR WITH PICTURES BY MONRO S. ORR

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TO

Miss E. RUTH DENT

MY DEAR RUTH,

This little book tells the story of the greatest seaman that the world has ever known.

I hope it says enough to make you want one day to read for yourself the many other things about him that I have not room to tell you here.

Yours affectionately, THE AUTHOR.

CONTENTS

Chapter

I. Early Boyhood--Joins his Ship

II. Nelson's Early Years at Sea--His First Command

III. Nelson in the West Indies--and in the Mediterranean

IV. Battle of St. Vincent

V. Battle of the Nile

VI. In the Mediterranean--and at Home

VII. Battle of Copenhagen

VIII. Napoleon's threatened Invasion of England

IX. Nelson in Chief Command in the Mediterranean--In Pursuit of the Enemy

X. Trafalgar--Death of Nelson

THE STORY OF NELSON

CHAPTER I

EARLY BOYHOOD--JOINS HIS SHIP

On the 29th of September 1758, or nearly a hundred and fifty years ago, Horatio Nelson, "the greatest of our heroes and the dearest to ourselves," was born.

His father was a country clergyman, who lived at Burnham Thorpe, in the county of Norfolk.

The boy had many brothers and sisters. There were eleven children in the family, only two of whom, however, lived to grow old.

Horatio as a child was weak and sickly, and all his life he was delicate. Even after his many years afloat, we are told that he never quite got over the feeling of seasickness.

Although not a strong boy, there was nothing of the milksop about him, and at an early age he showed the spirit of absolute fearlessness which in later years was to stand him in such good stead.

"Fear, grandmamma! I never saw fear; what is it?" he once asked while quite a little child.

His father, in bringing up his children, trusted entirely to their own sense of honour, and in this respect Horatio never failed him.

Once, while riding with his brother to school through deep snow, William, the elder, wanted to turn back, as the drifts were thick, and in parts dangerous. "No! we must get there if we possibly can. Remember, we are on our honour to do so," was Horatio's reply; and his pony and he struggled on, and after some difficulty reached their journey's end in safety.

On another occasion, while at school, he lowered himself with sheets from a window, and took a quantity of fine ripe pears from the head-master's favourite tree. On his return to the dormitory he laid down the spoil before his companions, who had often coveted the fruit, but had not dared to take it because of the severe flogging which would probably follow. Our hero refused to eat a single pear, for greed had not prompted his daring action.

"He only took them," he explained, "because every other boy was afraid."

Horatio's school days were brief.

At the time when he was twelve years old, Spain suddenly attacked the Falkland Islands, a British colony in the far South Atlantic, and forced our colonists to lower their flag. This act naturally aroused great anger in England, and as a result our ships were immediately made ready for war.

At this time both Spain and France had mighty fleets, manned by

skilful and brave seamen, and Britain was not yet the all-conquering power at sea which she afterwards became, thanks to Nelson and his sailors.

The boy himself wished to go to sea, and on his uncle, Captain Maurice Suckling, getting command of the _Raisonable_, he begged hard to be allowed to serve in his uncle's ship.

Mr. Nelson, who had always said that in whatever station his son might be placed he would, if possible, climb to the top of the tree, accordingly wrote to his brother-in-law.

"What has poor Horatio done," came the answer, "who is so weak, that he, above all the rest, should be sent to rough it out at sea?"

Still, his uncle said he might come, though he evidently did not approve of his choice of a profession. And so, at an age when boys nowadays have not yet gone to a public school, Nelson said farewell to lessons, and, no doubt to his great delight, started off alone to join the _Raisonable_, then lying at Chatham, in the Medway.

No boy going to school for the first time ever had more reason to feel unhappy.

On leaving the stage-coach at Chatham, he was at a loss where to go, and how to find his ship. Too shy to ask his way, he was wandering about feeling very forlorn and miserable, when fortunately a kind officer saw him, and spoke to him.

On learning that the unhappy-looking youngster was no lost lad, but a midshipman seeking his ship, the officer, who knew Captain Suckling, showed Horatio every kindness, and after giving him a good dinner, finally saw him safely on board the _Raisonable_.

On arrival at the ship another disappointment awaited our hero. His uncle was away, and nobody on board knew anything about young Nelson, nor even expected a boy to arrive at all. However, he had to make the best of it somehow, and with the help of an old sailor, who took pity on his loneliness, he soon settled down to his new life, and from that time till the day of his death, except for a few brief months on shore, his home was on board ship.

These first few hours of misery and loneliness at Chatham Nelson never forgot.

In later years, remembering his own bitter experiences, he always made a point of giving a friendly welcome, and speaking a few words of encouragement and advice, to any young midshipman on first joining his ship; and he took good care that the boy's start in life should not be as trying and forlorn as his own had been.

CHAPTER II

NELSON'S EARLY YEARS AT SEA--HIS FIRST COMMAND

Before, however, war had actually begun, Great Britain and Spain agreed to come to terms, so Horatio was not yet to "smell powder."

Very shortly afterwards the _Raisonable_ was paid off, and Captain Suckling got the command of the _Triumph_, 74 guns, then the guardship in the Medway. To this ship his nephew followed him, and was on her books for the next two years. During this time, however, the boy, in order to gain experience in his profession, by his uncle's

advice went a cruise to the West Indies on board a merchantman. On this voyage he shipped as a volunteer, and as a common seaman he shared the hard work and rough life of a fore-mast hand.

Life in the forecastle of a merchant ship was, of course, very uncomfortable, but it had its advantages, and he returned after a year's experience, to use his own words, "a practical seaman."

On rejoining the _Triumph_ his uncle took care that his time should not be wasted, and among other duties he was continually employed in the cutter and long-boat. Thus he not only became a good pilot, "confident of himself among rocks and sands," as he afterwards wrote, but he was at the same time learning the lessons of responsibility and self-reliance.

Shortly after this, an expedition to the North Pole was fitted out, and although an order was given that no boys were wanted, Nelson so earnestly begged Captain Lutwidge, the commander of the expedition, to let him come, that his wish was granted, and he sailed as the captain's coxswain, a position for which his lessons in managing a small boat, learnt in the Medway, quite fitted him, in spite of his youth.

In these Arctic seas our hero came neat ending his life. One clear moonlight night, while the ship was lying ice-bound, he and another midshipman, armed with a rusty musket between them, slipped down over the side and started off over the frozen sea to try to shoot a Polar bear.

They had to wait some time before one was sighted, but at length a huge white fellow appeared. The middy took careful aim, pulled the trigger, but the musket missed fire.

"Never mind!" shouted young Horatio; "do but let me get a blow at him with the butt end and we shall have him." So saying, he dashed off with raised gun, determined to come to close quarters. Fortunately at this moment the noise of a gun from the ship broke the stillness of the Arctic night, and so startled the bear that, with a defiant growl, he turned tail and shambled off over the frozen snow.

When the boys got back to the ship, Captain Lutwidge, who had witnessed the scene and been thoroughly alarmed for their safety, spoke somewhat sharply to them for this piece of daring folly. Asked what he meant by it, Horatio, with the pout of his lip peculiar to him, could think of no other excuse than that "he wished to kill the bear that he might carry the skin to his father."

On his return from the Pole, he was as eager as ever for more service, and at his own wish he was transhipped, with scarcely a day on shore, to a small ship, the _Seahorse_, under orders to sail for the East Indies.

From the extremes of cold he was to go direct to the extremes of heat. "Nothing less than such a distant voyage could in the least satisfy my desire of maritime knowledge," he afterwards explained.

On the _Seahorse_ he at first did the work of an ordinary seaman aloft, but in a short time he was finally rated as midshipman and placed on the quarter-deck. We are told that he started from England a thick-set, athletic young man, with a ruddy-brown face and healthy complexion.

The frozen Pole was, however, kinder to him than the sun and heat of India. After two years he was invalided home, his life despaired of, and it was probably owing to the nursing and tender care of Captain

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