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Poetry.

WHAT IS LIFE?

And what is life? An hour glass on the run,
A mist retreating from the morning sun,
A busy, bustling, still-repeating dream.
Its length? A minute's pause, a moment's thought.
And happiness? A bubble on the stream,
That in the act of seizing shrinks to nought.

And what is Hope? The puffing gale of morn,
That robs each floweret of its gem—and dies;
A cobweb, hiding disappointment's thorn,
Which stings more keenly through the thin disguise.

And what is Death? Is still the cause unfound?
That dark mysterious name of horrid sound?
A long and lingering sleep the weary crave.
And Peace? Where can its happiness abound?
Nowhere at all, save heaven and the grave.

Then what is Life? When stripped of its disguise,
A thing to be desired it cannot be:
Since everything that meets our foolish eyes
Gives proof sufficient of its vanity.
'Tis but a trial all must undergo,
To teach unthankful mortals how to prize
That happiness vain man's denied to know,
Until he's called to claim it in the skies.

The following lines were sent with a white Rose from a lover of the House of York to his mistress of the House of Lancaster:—

'Though a pale rose offend thy sight,
This in thy bosom wear:—
'Twill blush to find itself less white,
And turn Lancastrian there.

But if thy ruby lip it spy,
And kiss it thou should'st deign,
With envy soon 'twill fade and die,
And Yorkist turn again.

Literature.

(*From Blackwood's Magazine.*)

THE BRITISH FLEET.

STATE OF EUROPE.

At the time Sir John Jervis, afterward Lord St. Vincent, received the command of the British fleet in the Mediterranean—

The fleet was a noble command. It consisted on the whole of about twenty five sail of the line, two of them of a hundred guns, and five of ninety-eight; thirty six frigates, and fifteen or sixteen sloops and other armed vessels.

Among the officers of the fleet were almost all the names which subsequently obtained distinction in the great naval victories—Troubridge, Hollowell, Hood, Collingwood, &c. and first of the first, that star of the British seaman, Nelson. It is remarkable, and only a just tribute to the new admiral, that he, almost from his earliest intercourse with those gallant men, marked their merits, although hitherto they had found no opportunities of acquiring distinction—all were to come.

The French fleet, of fifteen sail of the line, lay in Toulon, ready to convey an army to plunge upon the Roman states. Sir John Jervis instantly proceeded to block up Toulon, keeping what is called the in-shore squadron looking into the harbour's mouth, while the main body cruised outside. The admiral at once employed Nelson on the brilliant service for which he was fitted, and sent him with a flying squadron of a ship of the line, three frigates, and two sloops, to scour the coast of Italy. The duties of the Mediterranean fleet, powerful as the armament was, were immense. Independently of the blockade of Toulon, and the necessity of continually watching the enemy's fleet, which might be brought out by the same wind which blew off the British, the admiral had the responsibility of protecting the Mediterranean convoys, of sustaining the British interests in the neutral courts, of assisting the allies on shore, of overawing the Barbary powers, which were then peculiarly restless and insolent, and of upholding the general supremacy of England, from Smyrna to Gibraltar.

The French campaign opened on the 9th of April, 1797, and the Austrians were beaten on the following day at Montenotte, and in a campaign of a month Bonaparte reached Milan. The success of the enemy increased to an extraordinary degree the difficulties of the British admiral. The repairs of the fleet, the provisioning, and every other circumstance connected with the fleet, lay under increased impediments; but they were all overcome by the vigilance and intelligence of the admiral.

But other dangers now menaced the British supremacy in the Mediterranean. The victories of Bonaparte had terrified all the Italian states into neutrality or absolute submission; and the success of the Directory, and perhaps their bribes, influenced the miserably corrupt and feeble Spanish ministry to make common cause with the conquering republic. Spain at last became openly hostile. This was a tremendous increase of hazards, because Spain had fifty-seven sail of the line, and a crowd of frigates. The difficulty of blockading Toulon was now increased by the failure of provisions. On the night of the second of November, the admiral sent for the master of the Victory, and told him that he now had not the least hope of being reinforced, and had made up his mind to push down to Gibraltar with all possible dispatch.

The passage became a stormy one, and it was with considerable difficulty that the fleet reached Gibraltar. Some of the transports were lost, a ship of the line went down, and several of the fleet were disabled.

The prospect now darkened round every quarter of the horizon. The power of Austria had given way; Spain and Holland were combined against our naval supremacy; Italy was lost; a French expedition threatened Ireland; there was a strong probability of the invasion of Portugal; and the junction of the French and Spanish fleets might endanger the Tagus fleet to an encounter with numbers so superior, as to leave the British shores open to invasion. The domestic difficulties, too, had their share. The necessity of suspending cash payments at the Bank had, if not thrown a damp upon the nation, at least given so formidable a ground for the fallacies and bitterness of the Opposition, as deeply to embarrass even the fortitude of the great minister. We can now see how slightly all these hazards eventually affected the real power of Britain; and we now feel how fully adequate the strength of this extraordinary and inexhaustible country was to resist all obstacles, and turn the trial into triumph. But faction was busy, party predicted ruin, public men used every art to dispirit the nation and inflame the populace; and the result was, a state of public anxiety of which no former war had given the example.

It is incontestible that the list of the British navy at this period of the war exhibited some of the noblest specimens of British character—brave, intelligent, and indefatigable men, ready for any service, and equal for all; with all the intrepidity of heroes, possessing the highest science of their profession, and exhibiting at once that lion-heartedness, and that knowledge, which gave the British navy the command of the ocean. And yet, if we were to assign the highest place where all were high, we should probably assign it to Lord St. Vincent, as an admiral. Nelson certainly, as an executive officer, defies all competition; his three battles, Copenhagen, Aboukir, and Trafalgar, each of them a title to eminent distinction, place him as a conqueror at the head of all. But an admiral has other duties than those of the line of battle; and for a great naval administrator, first disciplining a fleet, then supplying it with all the means of victory—Lord St. Vincent was perhaps the most complete example on record of all the combined qualities that make the British Admiral. His profound tactics, his stern but salutary exactness of command, his incomparable judgment, and his cool and unhesitating intrepidity, form one of the very noblest models of high command. All those qualities were now to be called into full exertion.

The continental campaign had left Europe at the mercy of France. England was now the only enemy, and she was to be assailed, in the first instance, by a naval war. To prevent the junction of the Spanish and French fleets, the Tagus was the station fixed upon by Lord St. Vincent. Ill luck seemed to frown upon the fleet. The Bombay Castle, a seventy-four, was lost going in; the St. George, a ninety, grounded in coming out, and was obliged to be docked; still the admiral determined to keep the sea, though his fleet was reduced to eight sail of the line. The day before he left the Tagus, information was received that the enemy's fleets had both left the Mediterranean. The French had gone to Brest, the Spanish, first to Toulon, then to Carthagena, and was now proceeding to join the French at Brest. A reinforcement of six sail of the line now fortunately joined the fleet off the Tagus; but at the same time information was received that the Spanish fleet of twenty-seven sail of the line, with fourteen frigates, had passed Cadiz and could not be far distant. To prevent the junction of this immense force with the powerful fleet already prepared for a start in Brest, was of the utmost national importance; for, combined, they must sweep the Channel. The admiral instantly formed his plan, and sailed for Cape St. Vincent.

BATTLE OFF ST. VINCENT.

On the announcement of the Spanish advance the first object was to gain exact intelligence, and ships were stationed in all quarters on the look out. But on the 13th Captain Foote, in the Niger frigate, joined, with the intelligence that he had kept sight of the enemy for three days. The admiral was now to have a new reinforcement, not in ships but in heroes; the Minerva frigate, bearing Nelson's broad pendant, from the Mediterranean, arrived, and Nelson shifted his pendant into the Captain. The Lively frigate, with Lord Garlies, also arrived from Corsica. The signal was made, "To keep close order, and prepare for battle." On that day, Lord Garlies, Sir Gilbert Elliot, and Captain Hollowell, with some other officers, dined on board the Victory. At breaking up the toast was drunk, "Victory over the Dons, in the battle from which they cannot escape tomorrow!" * * *

At forty minutes past ten the signal was made to form line of battle ahead and astern of the Victory, so as to steer S. S. W. The fog was now cleared off, and the British fleet were seen admirably formed in the closest order; while the Spaniards were stretching in two straggling bodies across the horizon, leaving an open space between. The opportunity of dividing their fleet struck the admiral at once, and at half past eleven the signal was made to pass through the enemy's line, and engage them to leeward. At twelve o'clock, as the Culloden was reaching close up to the enemy, the British fleet hoisted their colours, and the Culloden opened her fire. An extraordinary incident even in those colossal battles occurred to this fine ship. The course of the Culloden brought her directly on board one of the enemy's three deckers. The first lieutenant, Griffiths, reported to the captain, Troubridge, that a collision was inevitable. "Can't help it, Griffiths—let the weakest fend off," was the hero's reply. The Culloden, still pushing on, fired two of her double shotted broadsides into the Spaniard with such tremendous effect, that the three decker went about, and the guns of her other side not being even cast loose, she did not fire a single shot, while the Culloden passed triumphantly through. Scarcely had she broken the enemy's line, than the commander-in-chief signalled the order to tack in succession. Troubridge's manœuvre was so dashingly performed, that the admiral could not restrain his delight and admiration.

"Look, Jackson," he rapturously exclaimed, "look at Troubridge there! He tacks his ship to battle as if the eyes of all England were upon him; and would to God they were, for then they would see him to be what I know him."

The leeward division of the enemy, perceiving the fatal consequences of their disunited order of sailing now endeavoured to retrieve the day, and to break through the British line. A vice admiral, in a three decker, led them, and was reaching up to the Victory just as she had come up to tack in her station. The vice admiral stood on with great apparent determination till within pistol shot, but there he stopped; and when the Victory could bring her guns to bear upon him, she thundered in two of her broadsides, sweeping the Spaniard's decks, and so terrified him, that when his sails filled, he ran clear out of the battle altogether. The Victory then tacked into her station, and the conflict raged with desperate fury. At this period of the battle, the Spanish commander-in-chief bore up with nine sail of the line to run round the British, and rejoin his leeward division. This was a formidable manœuvre; but no sooner was it commenced, than his eye caught it "whose greatest wish it ever was to be the first to find, and foremost to fight his enemy." Nelson, instead of waiting till his turn to tack should bring him into action, took it upon himself to depart from the prescribed mode of attack, and ordered his ship to be immediately wore. This masterly manœuvre was completely successful, at once arresting the Spanish commander-in-chief, and carrying Nelson and Collingwood into the van and brunt of the battle. He now attacked the four decker, the Santissima Trinidada, also engaged by the Culloden. The Captain's fore topmast being now shot away, Nelson put his helm down, and let her come to the wind, that he might board the San Nicholas; Captain, afterwards Sir Edward Berry, then a passenger with Nelson, jumping into her mizen chains, was the first in the enemy's ship; Nelson leading his boarders, and a party of the 69th regiment, immediately followed, and the colours were hauled down. While he was on the deck of the San Nicholas, the San Josef, disabled, fell on board. Nelson instantly seized the opportunity of boarding her from his prize; followed by Captain Berry, and Lieutenant Pierson of the 69th, he led the boarders, and jumped into the San Josef's main chains. He was then informed that the ship had surrendered. Four line of battle ships had now been taken, and the Santissima Trinidada had also struck; but she subsequently made her escape, for now the Spanish leeward division, fourteen sail, having re-formed their line, bore down to support their commander-in-chief; to receive them, Sir John Jervis was obliged to form a line of battle on the starboard tack—the enemy immediately retired. Thus, at five in the evening, concluded the most brilliant battle that had ever till then been fought at sea.

RECORDS OF STEAM.

About 208, B. C., Hero, of Alexandria, contemporary with Ctebiscus, formed a toy which exhibited some of the powers of steam.

A. D. 540.—Anthemius, a mathematician and architect, employed by Justinian to embellish Constantinople, in the dispute about the walls of a house, was vanquished by the eloquence of Zeno. To avenge the defeat, Anthemius arranged several caldrons of water, each covered by the wide bottom of a leather tube, which rose to a narrow top, with pipes extended to the rafters of the adjoining building. A fire was kindled beneath the caldron; the steam of the boiling water ascended through the tubes, and the house was shaken by the efforts of the imprisoned vapour. This is the first notice of the power of steam, as recorded by Gibbon.

Stuart, in his work on the steam-engine, says, that the royal Spanish archives record that "Blasco de Garay tried a steam-boat of 290 tons, with tolerable success, before Charles V., at Barcelona, June 17th, 1543. Ravago, the chancellor, opposed it, and it was laid aside. It consisted of a caldron of boiling water, and a moveable wheel on each side of the ship." The expense of the experiment was paid by the Government, and a present made to Garay.

The first railroad was constructed at Newcastle-on-Tyne, England, A. D. 1650.

The first idea of the steam-Engine in England was in the Marquis of Worcester's Century of inventions, A. D. 1663.

Newcomen made the first steam-engine in England, A. D. 1710.

Steam-engines were first applied by Savary for taking ballast or gravel out of rivers, and for raising great quantities of water. Patents granted in London, 1718.

James Watt made the first perfect steam-engine in England, 1764.

The first idea of steam navigation in England was set forth in a patent to Jonathan Hulls, for a vessel to go against wind and tide, 1736. Thomas Paine proposed this application in America, 1778. Marquis Jouffroy constructed one on the Soane, 1781. Two Americans published on it, 1785. Wm. Symington made a voyage in one in 1789, on the Forth and Clyde canal; in 1802 the experiment was repeated.

In the meanwhile, John Fitch, of Philadelphia, navigated a boat by a steam-engine of his own contrivance, on the Delaware, 1797.

Ramsey propelled a boat by steam at New York, in October, 1782.

But it was Robert Fulton, a native of Pennsylvania, who first brought steam navigation to such practical perfection, that it became successfully and generally used by all nations. As early as 1793, he began to apply his attention to the subject; soon after, he visited England and France; examined Symington's vessel in Scotland; in 1803, in conjunction with Mr. Livingston, the American Minister in France, navigated a boat by steam on the Seine—and succeeded in perfecting steam navigation in 1807, when he started the first permanently practical steam-boat, the "Clermont," on the Hudson river, at New York.

IMPRISONMENT FOR DEBT.—We are glad to find that legislation is at last taking a right course in the relation between debtors and creditors, and that premeditated swindling, under the name of trading, will in future be dealt with where it ought to be—before a criminal court, and a jury of honest men. Nothing is more injurious to the upright dealer, and to society at large, than the insufficiency of the bankrupt courts to deal with the hardened and heartless scoundrels who are daily applying to pass their final examinations, and to be discharged with certificates, after the commission of the most barefaced robberies. Lord Cottenham's bill is intended to provide for such cases: "it would," he says, "contain a provision that persons guilty of fraud should be proceeded against criminally, and tried by a jury, and punished by imprisonment, if found guilty." This is as it should be; and we trust the clauses of the bill on this subject will be rendered so clear in the definition of what constitutes fraud, that there will be no loopholes left for the ingenuity of lawyers to creep through.

We are not quite certain, however, that even imprisonment will be an adequate punishment for some of the frauds that "the march of mind" has of late years taught *men of talent* to put in practice against honest and unsuspicious tradesmen. Certainly cases have come before the Commissioners of Bankruptcy for which, if moral justice had been done to the parties implicated, if they had not been shielded under the name of traders, we should have thought them fully entitled to a free passage to our Australian colonies. A man may be on his guard against the common depredator: he may in some degree secure his property with bolts and bars—he has the vigilance of the police to assist him; but it is difficult to find protection from the plausible ingenuity of a practised swindler, who assumes the mask of fair dealing. Where there is no distinction in the moral guilt, we do not think there ought to be any in the punishment. Independently, therefore, of the ameliorating portion of Lord Cottenham's bill, abolishing imprisonment for debt, which is the main object of it—we think his lordship has conferred a material benefit on the trading community by his *equitable* dealings with fraudulent debtors.

Every reasonable mind, we imagine, has been long convinced of the total inutility of imprisoning an insolvent debtor merely because he is insolvent; and considerable disappointment was experienced at the time, (in 1838,) that the act for abolishing arrest for debt on mesne process did not go one step further. That step Lord Cottenham has now taken, by proposing to abolish imprisonment for debt on execution. Imprisonment in all ages has been a punishment inflicted for the commission of offence, and, therefore, to justify the practice in the case of a debtor, it would be requisite to show the debt was contracted under criminal circumstances. It was on this principle that the insolvent Debtors' Act appeared to be founded; but that act was faulty both in its principle and in its practice; it began at the wrong end: it first inflicted the punishment, and then inquired into the offence; it was also faulty in practice, because the inquiry instituted before the court was rather to ascertain the available assets of the insolvent, than to inquire whether the debts were fradulently contracted or not. The object of the creditor is, of course, to get paid, and it is quite proper that the means of the debtor should be sought after; but where there are no assets, and no fraud, imprisonment, to say the least of it, must prove a very futile guarantee. It was ascertained by official returns, that the whole amount recovered by creditors, through the instrumentality of the Insolvent Court, was so insignificant as scarcely to deserve notice, and far short of the expense to the country of the court itself. It certainly was some improvement in the law to abolish arrest on mense process, but the great evil of imprisonment, in which fraud and misfortune were confounded, still remained untouched.

If there were no other objection to imprisonment for debt than the inequality of the punishment to different individuals, that alone would form a strong argument against it. The man whose means of subsistence, whose power to support his family, are dependent on his being at liberty, must sustain a greater injury from confinement than he who can live without exerting his mind or body; the latter suffers no other inconvenience from it than the mere personal restraint it imposes on him, while the former within the walls of a debtors' prison, may be doomed to starve, and to see his family reduced to beggary. In the prisons of London men have been known to be living at the rate of £2000 or £3000 a-year, of which the unfortunate creditors could not touch a penny, such debtors thinking less of the inconvenience of confinement than of the enjoyment of those luxuries of which they would be deprived were they to deal honestly with the world. Contrast this with the situation of the needy man, upon whose daily exertions, perhaps, a numerous family is depending for support, whom confinement in a prison, for even a few months, may deprive of his situation, and doom him to future years of poverty. Surely the inequality of the two cases must at once show the impolicy of the law.

Thoughtless and unprincipled men should not be allowed to victimise tradesmen with impunity. There ought to be, there must be, some check to wilful extravagance and improvident expenditure; there must be some means left of coercing the headlong career of folly, by which debts are incurred without the least prospect of liquidation; there must be some discrimination made between such cases and that of the unfortunate tradesman who, through bad debts, bankruptcies, and other vicissitudes attendant upon business, is unable to meet his engagements. As such cases are totally dissimilar—as the one is impudence and the other misfortune—we hope they will be sufficiently discriminated in the new Bill.—*Shipping and Mercantile Gazette.*

BANKRUPTCY EXTRAORDINARY.—The Bankrupt, Felix Cool, was opposed by a learned barrister on behalf of several creditors.—The debts were very unimportant to every one but the creditors; amounting only to a few thousand pounds; and the assets were of that nature that the time of the assignees would not be wasted in collecting them.

Sir C. F. Williams said this was so far favourable to the bankrupt, for he had evidently set an example of punctuality in receiving all he earned, though in paying all he owed, the same business-like exactitude had, unfortunately, not been exhibited. There was one thing, however, that he (Sir F. Williams) would take the liberty of asking the bankrupt—namely, how he came to get so much in debt in so short a period.

The bankrupt replied that he had gone on as fair a system as he could. For instance, he wanted goods, and asked for them. The tradesmen then wanted the money, and asked for it, and did not get it; that was all