REMINISCENCES OF WAR.

'The thing that hath been, is that which shall be, and that which is done, is that which shall be done : and there is no new thing under the sun,' said the wise man of yore—and true, indeed, was the aphorism. Forty -years of peace had mellowed down the memories of the last war; but the wail that rises amongst us now, awakens in the survivors reminiscences of similar sorrows felt then, and stories are told us, which shew that we do but progress through one of Time's ceaseless repetitions; that we only

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'Announcements of victory are, always, of blended rejoicing and weeping,' said an old lady of our acquaintance the other day. 'I recollect the first *I* ever heard rather by the bitter wo I then witnessed, than by anything else. I was a little child, and my mother, the wife of a naval officer, had let me go to the theatre at Portsmouth, with my nurse one evening, to see a performance considered fit for my age. Some little time after I had been in the box, nurse pointed out to me my father and mother in an opposite one, with a lady and gentleman whom I recognised as intimate friends of theirs—an old doctor and his daughter, the wife of an officer at that time with the fleet. They had coaxed my mother to follow me. I guessed that at once, for few people could have resisted the entreaties of pretty Mrs. Metcalf and her kind old father. I remember thinking how lovely she was, and how happy they all looked, when, just as the curtain fell, the manager stepped forward, and bowing, informed the audience, that he was rejoiced at having good news to communicate: "The English fleet had gained a glorious victory on the 1st of June, in the Atlantic, under Lord Howe; the *Glory*, one of the victorious squadron, was even then beating into Spithead." I never can forget the effect of this announcement. Nearly everybody in the house had some one dear to them in that fleet; it was, besides, a nearly nautical, and, in every sense, a martial assemblage. The people rose like one man. A cheer, absolutely deafening, thrilled through the house; it was repeated again and again; but the second time, other cries mingled with it—the hysterical sobbing of women—the movement of those who were removing some ladies who were fainting. When I looked towards my mother's box, to see what she thought of the tidings, Mrs Metcalf was still standing, with a look of triumph on her sweet face; her cheek was flushed, and she grasped her fan, like a weapon, under the strong excitement of the moment. And well, I thought, she might, for her husband was master of the *Glory*, and his renown was hers; besides, he was close at home, and I had often heard her long for his return. I joined my mother's party when we left the theatre. The streets were a perfect blaze of light, for the houses were all illuminated; and the old doctor insisted on us all going into the hotel—the *George*—and having a bottle of wine, to drink the health of the victors. Mrs. Metcalf was wild with joy; she was devoted to her husband, and had had sad forebodings respecting his fate. Now, all apprehension had vanished; she was eager to return home, that she might have *his* house illuminated also, and be ready to receive him if he came on shore that night. In the morning, my mother, who was her near neighbour, called at her house, to inquire if Mr. Metcalf had come on shore, and took me with her. We were admitted, and ushered in to a dressing-room, where Mrs. Metcalf was under the hands of her friseur, just having the last dust of powder shaken from the silk puff, with which, standing at a little distance, the hairdresser sprinkled the *creped* and pomatumed hair. She was a stately beauty, and now, full dressed for the day, looked quite radiant with hope and happiness. She told my mother she had been dressing for her husband—to do honour to his return and his victory. He had not arrived yet, but probably there was much to do, and he could not get leave to come on shore. She asked my mother to sit with her till he came; and we were there a long, long time, listening at first to the salutes and the happy bells, and at last, for Mr. Metcalf's knock at the door. The doctor had gone out to make inquiries. At last the expected sound came; the shadow of a cocked-hat brushed past the window; there was a knock at the door. Mrs. Metcalf had opened the parlour-door by the time the servant had admitted him whom she fondly thought to see, and, between tears and smiles, sprang forward to meet—two strange officers. Their looks were very, very sad, and a sailor stood behind them with a bundle on his arm: the name *Glory* was marked, in gilt letters, on his tarpaulin-hat. She stood absolutely tansfixed before them, then gasped out the words: "My husband!" The first of the strangers took her hand, and led her silently into the room. It was some minutes before they could tell her that he was gone—that he had fallen gallantly in the discharge of his duty. The sailor bore all that remained of her beloved—the blood-stained uniform and shivered sword! I never can forget the wail of anguish the hopeless agony, which followed that disclosure.'

We hear a great deal in the present day of injustice and maladministration, but what should we think of a period when officers in the navy were entered, and their time commenced on the ship's books, actually *before their birth*, on the chance of their after-services? the name being erased from the books, as dead, if the expected son proved a daughter. The same lady who was present at the announcement of the 'glorious 1st of June' victory, informed us that her brother was entered as a first-class young gentleman on the books of the *Seaflower* while he was still an infant; and that till his parents rejected it, his allowance, as such, was sent on shore; little Johnny thus regularly receiving beef, biscuit, currants, pork, lime-juice, &c., in the due sea proportions. These infants also received pay; and Master John, belonging to a lucky ship, actually had his share of prize-money sent to him before he could understand its meaning. Our landsmen readers may not perhaps be aware, that a service of six years is required before a youngster can be made lieutenant. It was to obtain this promotion earlier that the absurd entries in question were doubtless made, as only the years of service, not those of age, were sent up to the Admiralty. Thus we have heard of a *living* admiral who was a commander at fifteen; and who, at his first dinner-party after his promotion, challenged a brother-officer of inferior rank, old enough to be his father, on some slight offence. But the duel did not come off. The young commander's brother followed him to his room with a horse-whip; and after inflicting meet school-boy chastisement, compelled him to beg the old lieutenant's pardon. My own father, afterwards engaging in a fencing-match with the young hero 'for fun,' with naked swords, their being no foils at hand, gave him a straight finger.

But if their youth and position somewhat encouraged boyish arrogance, it is nevertheless a fact, that no age could have exhibited more heroic courage, or more simple and touching self-devotion, than did the boyhood of our naval heroes. The spirit which animated all was manifested strikingly in the following instances:—The family of Thurnham, of Scarborough, had a son of great promise—a fair boy scarcely seventeen, but already a lieutenant of marines. They were looking daily for his return from a long cruise, when, instead—as in the case of poor Metcalf—they received his sword, his coat, and the following letter, affecting from the bold, true spirit shewn in it, and the evident presentiment of doom experienced. We think it equals in simplicity and devotion those which have won all our sympathies for the heroes of the Crimea:—

'Honoured Father—I think it my duty to write, as I am going this evening on a dangerous enterprise—to cut out a Spanish sloop-of-war. If any disaster should happen to me, you must apply to Mr. Mackie for my clothes, to whom I have ordered them to be sent; if they should *not* be sent, application must be made to Captain S. of the *Illustrious*. Do not blame me for *volunteering* my services, as while the blood of the Thurnhams circulates in my veins, I could not bear to have it said that *he is a coward!* Give my love to my dear mother, my brother, and sister. I hope they will not regret what I have done. If I escape, nothing will give me so much pleasure as to think that I have neither disgraced my commission nor my father, and to have it said that I am an honor to the family. If I die, I die an honorable death. God bless you all, and may the next son you have die as honourably as I do! I beseech you to remember me to my cousin, and to all my dear relatives.—I remain, your faithful son,

D. Thurnham.

H. M. Ship Illustrious,
Jan. 9, 1805.'

Faithful, indeed, even unto death! There is something very touching in the struggle, unintentionally expressed, between his desire of glory and his unwillingness to cause possible regret to his mother and kindred; and in the 'beseeching' to be remembered to his cousin—perhaps some boyish love of his. We can well fancy *now* how, fifty years ago, the poor mother wept over the relics of her first-born.

The next anecdote we would relate of these children of victory, is of a pleasanter character. A very worthy, though second-rate, actor at Covent Garden Theatre had a young son, who became a midshipman in the royal navy. He was a fine boy, and had a pleasant andi rather more polished manner than was usual n lads of his profession at that time. At a period when he ought still to have been under the shelter of his parents' roof, he was taken prisoner by the Spaniards, and sent by some chance, with other captives, to Peru, where he remained on parole for some time. There was sorrow in his humble home, and doubtless many a prayer followed the poor little captive. But one evening as they were gathered round their hearthstone, a knock summoned the mother to the street-door. The visitor was a tall lad of thirteen, bronzed by sea and breeze, and dressed in worn and old uniform, long since outgrown. Her love divined that this was her lost son, who had sailed away in 'defence of his king and country' three years ago—a warrior of ten years! It was even so; and seated by their own fireside, the young adventurer related how his baby face ('he was three years younger *then*,' he remarked) had won the pity of a Spanish mother, nearly related to the viceroy of New Spain—how she had clothed and fed and cherished him—and at length, by her influence and entreaties, procured his liberty, and sent him back to his home with many kind and thoughtful gifts; and how he had put on his old uniform again, in spite of its small dimensions and worn-out condition, because he wished to shew he still served the king.

The family rejoicings over this lost one found were great, as we may suppose. The Spanish lady's name became a beloved and hallowed sound in the English household; the mother's heart blessed her; but not even thus had she her full reward. The boy returned to his profession, and served on board the ship which proved of all others most successful in taking Spanish prizes. The lad so providentially restored to his country was no common spirit; ever foremost in boarding, and ready for any freak of perilous adventure or boyish fun, he became a favourite with his captain, and was detached by him—after a hard sea-fight—to hold possession of a valuable prize just taken. On boarding the ship with his seamen, he beheld to his utter astonishment, the friend and protectress of his childhood—his 'Spanish mother,' as he loved to call her. She was returning to her native land with all the wealth acquired and saved in New Spain, when this misfortune befell her. She did not at first recognise the child-captive in the young man begrimmed with smoke and blood who suddenly presented himself before her; but when his words and voice revealed the secret, she shed tears of joy. Now, it was his turn to become benefactor. He told the story of her goodness to his comrades and his shipmates; and with the generosity of British seamen, both officers and crew immediately agreed to restore her private property to the illustrious captive. All her large and beautiful vessels of pure gold, an immense quantity of the most valuable jewels, her costly furniture and property of every description, were restored to her by these chivalrous fellows, in acknowledgment of the gentle deed which had given them back a comrade. The happy midshipman took her, on their arrival in port, to his own home, and she remained with his family till her restoration to freedom. His share of prize-money, even after the resignation of her private property, was between L.4000 and L.5000.

It is singular, when one glances back at the past—in so many instances a prototype of the present—to find that the last naval battle fought off Cronstadt was won *for* Russia by an English admiral. Let us accept the omen as a pledge that British valour will again be triumphant on those waters. In the war between Russia and Sweden, 1780, English officers received permission to engage in either service as they thought fit. Admiral Creuse, Sir Frederick Thesiger, Captain Elphinstone, and several other distinguished men, entered the Russian service, and off Cronstadt, in the May of 1780, defeated the Swedes. It is interesting to learn how the autocrat of those days estimated the consequences of a naval defeat in the Baltic. Catherine was, at the time, residing at the palace of Zarsko Zelo. For four days and nights before the action, she took no rest, and but little refreshment During its continuance, she paced the beautiful terrace near the Baths of Porphyry, listening with terrible anxiety to the thunder of the cannon, which was so tremendous that several windows in St. Petersburg were broken by the concussion. It is said that, anticipating defeat, her carriages and horses were waiting in readiness to convey her to Moscow. One of the English boy-lieutenants, Elphinstone, the admiral's nephew, at length brought her the tidings of victory. His dispatches were carried to the empress, who ordered her attendants to give the bearer refreshments and a bed. The gallant boy took advantage of the permission, and slept till the dawn was far advanced, during which period Catherine sent three times to know if he were awake. Starting at length from sleep, he was immediately conducted, in his soiled and war-stained gear, to the royal presence. The empress received him with gracious kindness, called him 'my son,' and desired him to give her a description of the battle, marking on the dispatches, as he obeyed, the position of the different ships. She then gave him her orders for the commander-in-chief; presented him with a beautiful little French watch, a rouleau of ducats; and in spite of his extreme youth, conferred on him the rank of captain.*

One cannot look back on the past without a comforting assurance that better days *have* come. The press-gang, for instance, would not be endured in the present age. It is one bitter herb the less; *how* bitter, they only who suffered from it could perhaps tell. We can scarcely conceive the agony of those whose home was thus robbed of its chief treasure; who watched and waited long hours in vain for *his* coming who was never more to bless their sight—the father or the son who had left them for his daily toil, and met the spoiler ere nightfall. How men who had been thus injured *could* fight as they did, is marvellous, and speaks volumes for the generous nature of the race. In one instance, this misery was spared by a singular intervention. A West Indiaman arrived at Gravesend, and was almost instantly boarded by a press-gang. The mates of these vessels were always sure of being impressed; and the young man who now anticipated such a fate was the more pained, because his old mother a very poor widow, who relied on him wholly for support, was, he had heard, dying. She had, the pilot assured him, watched every sunrise and sunset, with the constantly deferred and sickening hope of bidding her boy a last farewell. With a sinking heart and angry spirit he watched the party ascend the side; and in his agony, murmured a prayer for help. Help came! The crew of the West Indiaman were brought on deck; and whilst the lieutenant was examining them, a health-boat arrived. As no clean bill of health was found on board the West Indiaman, or at least none deemed satisfactory, the vessel, with the lieutenant of the man-of-war and all his gang, was ordered to Stangate Creek, to perform quarantine together for forty days! The mate blessed the thraldom he would have execrated an hour earlier, since it enabled him, by a little daring and cunning, to escape on shore, and avoid the fate impending. His mother lived to bless her son once more.

But there were few such escapes as this—broken hearts and bitter tears generally followed the steps of the press-gang. A young man of decent parentage, the son of a substantial farmer, was walking, on his bridal-eve, near the shore of Dartmouth harbour. Doubtless happy thoughts were lending a new charm to the still evening, and rendered him somewhat absent, for he never heard the press-gang till they had come close behind him and pinioned his arms. As usual, entreaties and threats were vain. He was carried on board a man-of-war, which instantly put to sea; and for years and years afterwards no tidings of him reached his family. His mysterious disappearance caused a sorrow beyond all expression. His father never held up his head again, neglected his farm, and died a poor, broken-hearted old man. The bride-expectant sorrowed for a time, and then became the wife of another. Time drew its cruel veil of oblivion over his fate, and few ever named his name, save the aged mother, who still prayed for him, and would never believe that he was dead.

And this loving faith had its fruition. A sailor with a wooden leg at length returned to call her 'mother,' and explain the past—a weather-beaten, maimed creature, set free because he could no longer be of use—penniless and unfit to earn his bread in any other way; but even thus he was welcome. The old woman awoke to new life and energy since her lost was found; she struggled to make his home comfortable, and earned his and her own bread by washing. It was pleasent to see his devotion to her, and the handy way in which he helped her to make everything what he called 'shipshape' about them; but often, in the midst of her patient and meek content, a cloud would come before her eyes when she thought of the past—of the fair home, the dear husband, the brave, handsome youth, the promised bride, and the long, long sorrow.

We may indeed be thankful that, in so far as the press-gang is concerned, we

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There is probably no mere human evil without its mitigations. Some of these pressed men had, by their enforced fate, 'greatness thrust upon them.' My mother knew three distinguished admirals who had been pressed from the merchant-service, one of whom was accustomed to relate, with much glee, his return to his home when a post-captain, after a another mysterious disappearance. The post-office—at least so far as seamen's letters were concerned—must have been in a singular lethargy in those days, for Admiral M—— had written repeatedly without receiving an answer, and found, on his return to his native village, that not a single letter had ever reached his home. In the light of our present civilization, those appear dark days indeed, when men still serving under 'our ancient ensign, fair St. George,' should have been as those dead to their countrymen, and few could answer for a day's freedom on shore.

The second of these involuntary admirals commanded, as captain, a ship on board which my father served as a young lieutenant at the battle of Copenhagen, and was guilty of a most extraordinary freak in conjunction with the latter. The British fleet came off Copenhagen on the 30th of March. The battle did not begin till the 2d of April. Meantime, the ships anchored about seven or eight miles from the city; a frigate, a lugger, and a brig, much nearer, The Danish fleet, batteries, and people awaited the nearer approach of the enemy. The first day passed quietly on board the *Mosquito;* on the second, Captain Jackson agreed with his favourite lieutenant, that the shore looked very inviting, and proposed a walk. And they actually landed, and coolly prepared to take pedestrian exercise on the enemy's soil!

*From Carr's *Northern Snmmer.*