

THE NAVY AS I HAVE KNOWN IT

1849—1899

BY

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G.C.B., C.M.G. 1836—

REAR-ADMIRAL OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

WITH PORTRAIT

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CHAPTER XIV.

GIBRALTAR AND H.M.S. "DREADNOUGHT."

Relieved by Captain FitzRoy—Duties of Senior Officer at Gibraltar—Officers of the Dockyard—Lord Napier of Magdala—Anchorage Space—Smuggling—Guarda Costas—Recapture of British Trader—The Dockyard and my Routine—Obsolete Stores—Ammunition and Warlike Stores—Stranding of the "Euphrates" off Tarifa—Sir John Adye—Getting the "Euphrates" Afloat—A Pleasant Three Years—Sports and Pastimes—A Narrow Escape—A Shore-going Berth—Appointed to the "Dreadnought"—A Naval Joke—Stationing the Men—A Temporary Difficulty—More Difficulties—Sailing for the Mediterranean—Arrival at Malta—The Mediterranean—Promotion to Admiral—Cruises and Navigation—The Navigating Officer and Pilot—Independence and Responsibility of the Captain—Eighteen Years on the Captains' List.

I REACHED Gibraltar in the "Invincible," on January 8th, 1881, Captain FitzRoy arrived from England and relieved me on the 10th, and I took charge of the dockyard and naval establishments from Captain W. H. Edey the following day.

I may as well explain here that the appointment of "senior officer at Gibraltar" was a very pleasant one. There was then (1881) a small dockyard under the senior officer's charge, with a victualling yard and coaling wharf. The senior officer lived ashore at "The Mount," a well-situated house with seven or eight acres of ground, and a good garden 300 to 400 feet above the dockyard, his name being borne on the books of a gunboat the "Express," which was commanded by a lieutenant. At that time there was not much work doing in the yard, though ships called occasionally for coals and to make good defects, the Channel Fleet coming in generally each winter and making some stay, when we were busy enough, and once, I think, during my three years as senior officer, the Mediterranean Fleet was at Gibraltar for three weeks.

In June, 1882, the Reserve Fleet, consisting, I think, of ten ships under H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh, paid us a

visit. The Duke's high capacity as a tactician is well known in the navy, but I was never more struck with it than on this occasion. On the Reserve Squadron being signalled I went out in my dockyard launch to meet them, and to give the Admiral any necessary information about the anchorage. As we were standing towards the fleet, I was endeavouring to explain to Mr. Stevens, who was with me, how, if I were admiral, I should endeavour to bring the ships in, though I remarked that, as it seemed rather complicated, I doubted if I should ever see an admiral do it; when on looking again at the squadron, then at some distance, I observed that my idea was actually being carried out by H.R.H.

I don't know if I can make it clear to my non-nautical readers, but I will endeavour to explain. The Straits of Gibraltar of course run roughly east and west, while Gibraltar Bay and the west side of the promontory of Gibraltar run north and south. In approaching Gibraltar from the west, the admiral is therefore heading about east, and if in the usual two lines, he is leading the port division in view of the Pearl rock near the Spanish shore, on which the "Agincourt" was nearly lost in the early 'seventies; but when anchoring at Gibraltar, he will wish to be the southernmost ship and nearest the dockyard for convenience sake, hence some manœuvres are necessary to attain that object, and to anchor the Squadron together.

It was done as follows:

After rounding the Pearl rock, course was gradually altered till the Squadron was steering north up Gibraltar Bay; the signal was then made to "invert the lines," and the Admiral became sternmost ship in the port column; the next signal was to "alter course together eight points to starboard," thus bringing the squadron into two lines abreast heading for Gibraltar, but with the admiral in the rear line. He again inverts the lines, becoming right wing ship of the leading division, and steers for the anchorage in two lines abreast.

This was admirably done; the ships anchored together, the "Hercules" flag-ship being nearest the shore and dock-

yard, and I offered H.R.H. my respectful compliments on the skilful way in which the squadron had been handled.

After this digression, referring again to the appointment it certainly could be made an easy berth of; on the other hand, when an emergency arose, such as the Egyptian Campaign, in 1882, much was demanded of us, for my only officers were a chief engineer, who was in charge of the workshops of the yard, a master of yard craft, who acted as harbour master and pilot, and a clerk of the works. Fortunately, my two chief engineers, Mr. Woods, succeeded by Mr. James Melrose, were specially able and zealous men, while Mr. Stevens, the master of the yard craft, who is, I believe, now harbour master, was invaluable to me in every way, and had quite a genius for handling ships of all classes. There was a considerable amount of naval property at Gibraltar, over which I was guardian, but at that time our store houses were half empty, and Gibraltar, if not quite "a little military hothouse," as Byron called Malta, was equally pervaded by the military spirit, so that in the defence of naval rights I was looked upon as rather a dog in the manger by my friends of the sister service. However, I stood to my guns, resisting encroachments, which had already gone too far, I thought, as even the Naval Hospital had been handed over to the military, though only temporarily; and now that Gibraltar, with its new docks and a rear-admiral, is resuming its importance as a naval station, it will be seen that I had good cause to insist on possible naval requirements in the future, in which I was always supported from home.

The Governor, when I took charge, was Lord Napier of Magdala, a great man, and my *beau idéal* of a patriotic soldier. On one occasion and one only, I think, we differed in opinion, when, although he was not unnaturally somewhat annoyed, I was struck by his kindly and generous appreciation of my motives and intentions. The question was a simple one: Gibraltar Bay, the anchorage ground of which is very limited, was full of coal hulks—the port was a great coaling station—and the demand for more coal hulks from merchants who paid the Colonial government for each fresh hulk was constant, so that gradually the whole avail-

able space for sea-going ships arriving was being occupied. From a naval and nautical point of view this was inadmissible, so I raised the question with the Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean, and with the Admiralty, the result being that some licences which had been granted for hulks had to be cancelled, and beacons were put up to mark the "man-of-war anchorage," which, of course, was available for merchant ships when no men-of-war were in port.

One great trouble at Gibraltar always had been the smuggling, as Gibraltar was a free port, although a part of Spain, where tobacco is, or was, a government monopoly. It was a grievance no doubt, but the Spanish authorities often winked at the smuggling, and it was even said that Spanish regiments were sent to Linea, the Spanish lines opposite Gibraltar, so that they might make a good thing out of it! One instance, at least, occurred of a Spanish smuggler, who was embarking some tobacco which had been left on the neutral ground by a Gibraltar smuggler, being fired at by the British sentry in accordance with his orders, on which the Spanish picket turned out and deliberately fired several shots at our sentry! This occurred in Sir John Adye's time as Governor.

However, usually the smugglers were British, or "rock scorpions," the ordinary custom being to run the tobacco round the rock in fast boats after dark, evading the Spanish revenue boats or *Guarda Costas*.

Of course, no one could be a smuggler so long as he was in our waters, but the *Guarda Costas* often had information as to intended smuggling and occasionally made a dash for the smugglers while they were preparing for a start. Lord Napier had no wish to encourage smuggling, and the orders were strict against boats lying close to the rock waiting for an opportunity, and thus tempting the *Guarda Costas* to commit what he termed "an outrage." To prevent this breach of our jurisdiction, he wanted to have a steamboat always ready to run out at short notice, but we had only one steamboat attached to the gunboat, and though the Port Office had another, difficulties had been raised about our using it, and I think there may have been some reluctance as to

having an officer and crew always available. I was told by my predecessor that the Governor had pressed this upon him, and when we called upon him together he spoke to me about it. The only real difficulty was about our having the Port Office boat every other week, which he promised I should have, so I told him I would arrange about it at once.

There was always great excitement over a *Guarda Costa*, and as I was going down to the dockyard a little before 7.0, the morning after I had taken charge, the signal-station at the top of the Rock made the signal, "*Guarda Costa* in possession of British trader," at the same time firing a warning gun. I ran down to the dockyard, and was just in time to see our steamboat moving out in chase. The chase was successful, and she returned in about three-quarters of an hour, having captured the *Guarda Costa* and released the "trader."

On my return to my house to breakfast at 8.30, I got a courteous letter from the Governor, who was always early, beginning, I recollect: "Another outrage has occurred, I can scarcely think that you have yet had time," etc., and I was glad to be able to reply that his orders had been successfully carried out, at which he was much pleased. It was a great piece of good luck, and I was very fortunate thus early to win his confidence. I think that twice subsequently the same thing happened, and the frequent raids were entirely put a stop to in consequence. Naturally, there was much correspondence on the subject of the recapture of the "British felucca 'Angelica,'" as the trader was named, as it was effected in Spanish waters, just out of our jurisdiction, so that the Spanish authorities claimed that we had acted illegally in retaking her; but the curious thing was that in this case she was an honest trader, bound for Tetuan, with a cargo of sundries, though it was generally believed that had she been taken to Algeciras, she would have had some tobacco put on board, and have been condemned as a smuggler. Of course, the *Guarda Costa* was released, but it was extraordinary that they never resisted, though they carried more men than our boat.

My time at Gibraltar was passed very pleasantly. I tried

to make my little dockyard a model of neatness and good order, and I was well supported.

My routine was to be in the yard at 7 a.m., or earlier in the summer time; at 8.0 I had my bathe at the bathing-place in Rosia Bay, at 8.30 I came home to breakfast, and went down again before 10.0. Often in the afternoons there was little to do, and I generally had my two days hunting in the week in the winter time, though I always went into the yard before breakfast, and occasionally returned early and went back to the yard, if there was anything doing.

Two things are worth mentioning: I found the Dockyard full of unnecessary or obsolete stores, which loomed large in the estimates, while, at the same time, when the Channel Fleet arrived we could not supply their wants. Speaking from memory, I believe we had £48,000 worth of stores on charge, and, acting partly on orders from home, I got rid of superfluous stores till it was reduced to between £12,000 and £13,000, though we had far more of the stores really required than before. One very curious thing occurred in my time. There was an economical craze, and undoubtedly work at Gibraltar, owing to higher wages, compared badly with that done at Malta, so, when certain new instructions regulating Dockyard stores were issued, duly signed by the Secretary of the Admiralty, a paper unsigned was enclosed in which it was stated that at Gibraltar it was unnecessary to keep any stores except "a few rivets and cotton waste," with three anchors of certain weights which would have been quite useless. On consideration I decided to ignore this anonymous instruction, and demanded stores as usual, which were duly supplied, after which I wrote to the Admiralty explaining, and I received a prompt reply "entirely approving" of the course I had adopted. It was an extraordinary attempt to dismantle Gibraltar Yard by a side wind, for which I do not know who was responsible.

Whilst on the question of stores, I may mention the case of ammunition, of which there was supposed to be a reserve at Gibraltar. In those days all warlike stores for the navy as well as the army were in military hands, and charged to War Department Votes. At Gibraltar the officer in charge

was the Commissary-General of Ordnance, who supplied the ammunition required. Although I had no authority over these stores, and any inquiry even was resented as an interference, I was asked once a year to sign a paper certifying that the reserve for the navy was correct. I naturally demurred to signing this paper, especially as it was acknowledged that there were deficiencies, though, so far as I could see, the so-called deficiencies were articles which would have been useless to the Mediterranean Fleet. My action caused nearly as much astonishment as "Oliver's asking for more" did to the workhouse authorities. "It had always been signed without question before"; "It was, indeed, a mere form"; "Any deficiencies would be certainly put right before another year"; and so on. I was not convinced, but I was told that Lord Napier, who had signed the report, did not wish it delayed, so I was induced to sign after some correspondence, and I contented myself with communicating with the naval Commander-in-Chief semi-officially on the subject. The next year the report was precisely similar, the bogus deficiencies and all, so I positively refused to sign, and officially reported my action to the Commander-in-Chief, Lord John Hay, who was then in command of the Mediterranean, took it up warmly; but, to obviate delay, I was ordered to sign, and I was amused at hearing subsequently the official excuse, which was that "this reserve was a reserve for an ideal fleet, but that in future the reserve would be a reserve for the ships actually employed on the station!"

After this the reserve was really made suitable. I have said that the nominal deficiencies would have been useless to the Mediterranean Fleet; and, though I write only from memory, I remember that two of the *deficiencies* were a gun carriage for the "Northampton," then on the Australian station, and a slide for the "Raleigh," not then in commission. These are, no doubt, old stories, showing that we were not ready or efficient in the early 'eighties; but especially since Lord George Hamilton had the courage to charge the naval ordnance to naval Votes, matters are much improved, and I believe the naval reserve of ammunition and warlike stores now to be complete on every station.

These are my service reminiscences of Gibraltar, to which I may add a good deal of responsibility and work during the Egyptian expedition in 1882 : fitting out ships for and embarking mules, providing transports with water and other necessaries at all hours, and so on. Also, in December, 1883, shortly before I left Gibraltar, the "Euphrates," on her way to India with 1,300 troops on board, got badly aground off Tarifa, and I was fortunate enough to get her off with the help of two merchant steamers I chartered. The "Euphrates" had had bad weather, and thought that she had got through the Straits, when she suddenly grounded about 8 p.m., going about eleven knots. She had, fortunately, escaped the outlying rocks, the Cabezas and Bahetas, and had picked out a smooth, sandy beach ; so that, after discharging a good deal of coal and stores, and sending the troops to Gibraltar, she was floated undamaged, and was able to continue her voyage.

The then Governor of the Rock was the late Sir John Adye, who was much troubled about this danger to a troopship, and he was very angry with me for going off at once to the "Euphrates'" assistance in my gunboat, which, fortunately, had steamed up, and chartering two steamers without consulting him.

I have a very friendly recollection of Sir John ; but I mention this here, as in the navy we are accustomed to prompt action ; and, occasionally, are not careful of forms, while in the army there is often delay caused by a disinclination to act for fear of hurting someone's susceptibilities. In the case of the "Euphrates," I heard of her being ashore soon after noon. Two merchants, who had received telegrams on the subject, were then in my office, from whom I chartered steamers. I ordered lighters to be sent, I wrote a private letter to the Governor, acquainting him with my action, and I was off in half an hour. We reached Tarifa, some sixteen miles, about three. The steamers arrived between four and five, and by nine o'clock the "Euphrates" was afloat. Personally, I thought we had been very successful, and I failed to see that anything would have been gained by delaying to consult a military officer as to how to get a ship off. However, Sir John thought differently, and resented my action, so that it was referred home, on

which I will only say that the Admiralty entirely approved of my conduct.

I have mentioned this chiefly to show the difference between naval and military systems. When I left Gibraltar for England the Governor kindly sent his carriage to take my wife and myself to the dockyard, where we embarked.

And now I have done with Gibraltar, where I spent a very pleasant three years. I was much gratified recently at hearing from a good judge, who spent some months at Gibraltar one winter, that he always looked upon the dockyard there during my command as a model of efficiency in a small way; and I can fairly claim that, whilst we rendered our returns punctually and accurately, we avoided red tape as far as possible.

I enjoyed the hunting immensely, and I got some shooting occasionally at Tetuan, and at the head of Gibraltar Bay. On one occasion, when coming back from the head of the bay in a levanter, or strong easterly gale, in a steam pinnace, she shipped so much water, getting some of her watertight compartments full, that she was in much danger of foundering. I had my son (then in the "Britannia") with me, and a sub-lieutenant, now a post captain.

It was a bad time, but we just kept afloat, and eventually landed at Algeciras at 10.30 p.m., after being seven hours going three or four miles. I wired to Gibraltar, and a steamer was sent for me the next Sunday morning; so we landed, in rather shipwrecked mariners' condition, just as people were going to church. However, we were none the worse, and it was a mere ordinary episode in a sailor's life, but I was anxious for my son, and our failure to return on Saturday night caused much apprehension at Gibraltar, where the gates were kept open for us all night, a most unusual relaxation of the severe rules, which ordered them to be closed at 9 p.m., after which entry into the fortress was impossible, so that if one was out after that hour, one had to sleep in the lines on the neutral ground.

In a former chapter I said that I would spin a yarn about quarantine when I came to my Gibraltar days, so I must redeem my promise. I must premise that in our quarantine regulations we were much hampered by the

necessity for keeping on good terms with Spain, as our mails came over land, and an isolated Gibraltar would be intolerable; and this accounts for much of our obsolete regulations. But to my story. It was in the summer of 1881, I think, that there had been a collision in the Straits between a steamer and a sailing vessel, the latter being dismasted. Both ships had arrived at Gibraltar, and, the case being before the Courts, they were under embargo not to sail, an officer of the Court, with one or two men, being put on board. It was hot weather, and most of the principal officers were on leave. The Governor was, I think, away, the Chief Justice and Attorney-General were both away, and the captain of the port, a retired naval officer, was on leave, his post being temporarily taken by a major in the army. Now for the quarantine regulations. The dismasted sailing ship had come from Venezuela, and, according to some ancient regulations—dating, I think, from 1829—a ship arriving in summer months from Central Africa or America is ordered “forthwith to quit the port” on pain of being fired into and sunk. It is true that there was a saving clause which allowed the captain of the port to use his own discretion as to the meaning of the word “forthwith,” and this generally meant three weeks’ quarantine, which seemed to be considered necessary to make sure that the ship had not got the plague or the “yellow jack,” which the regulations seemed to think normal. In the instance to which I am referring the ship had been seventy days at sea and was perfectly healthy, but the agents, or, rather, the agents’ clerk, for the agent was away, wishing to get the ship to sea, approached the acting captain of the port, who had just taken over the duties, and, pointing out the regulations, he got an order to send the ship to sea immediately, and she was towed to Malaga, taking with her the Court’s officers. For acting thus he was had up for contempt of court and, I think, imprisoned and fined £2,000.

It is a curious story, illustrating somewhat the absurdity of our quarantine regulations.

Another case was that of H.M.S. “Bittern” in 1883, which her Commander, now Rear-Admiral Mann, will no doubt recollect. There was cholera in some part of the

Sultan of Turkey's dominions, and ships coming from Turkey were quarantined. On the "Bittern's" arrival at Gibraltar from the Mediterranean it was found that she had not got a "clean bill of health," and for six months no one had landed from her, as she had communicated with the British fleet off Valona, a Turkish port, though no one had been ashore there, but she had since been cruising about, in accordance with the Admiral's orders, to Malta and various places on the coast of Italy and Sicily, never stopping long enough anywhere to purge herself from the taint; so that at each port she had a "foul bill of health." This was explained to me, and I duly informed the sanitary Board at Gibraltar of the circumstances, but it was only by a personal appeal to the Governor that I was just in time to get her pratique and stop the order which had been issued for three weeks' quarantine. As she was only to make a stay of a few days at Gibraltar, and was bound to Sierra Leone, it was most important that she should be allowed free communication with the shore, and, as I told the Governor, her quarantine promised to be interminable, though she had no sickness on board, and in all probability she had not been within 500 miles of a case of cholera!

Such cases as those to which I have referred above are apt illustrations of the absurdity of ancient quarantine regulations.

My stay at the historic rock (1881-84) was probably the most pleasant service of my naval career, but I felt that I had been on shore long enough, and I was quite ready to go home when my three years expired.

I arrived in England in February, 1884, and at once applied for a ship, as, though I was nearing my flag, I wanted to go afloat again, and be up to date in all respects when my turn came to be promoted to rear-admiral.

From February to August I was on half-pay, when I was appointed to the command of the "Dreadnought," at Portsmouth, a powerful turret ship, armed with four thirty-eight-ton guns, which, at that date, were muzzle-loaders. She was the largest ship in the service at that time, except the "Inflexible," which we were to relieve in the Mediterranean, and