

CHAPTER III.

IN February, 1801, the 49th was ordered from Jersey to ~~H~~ ~~s~~ ~~h~~ ~~a~~ ~~m~~ ~~h~~ ~~a~~ ~~m~~ in Sussex, the recruiting parties receiving instructions to join it on the march from Portsmouth.

"Arrived at Horsham barracks, it was generally understood we were to be stationed there some months and much of the unpacking was done. An express, however, arrived the following morning from the Horse Guards, ordering our immediate return to Portsmouth. At Chichester an order met us to be on the south sea-beach at nine o'clock the following morning.

"During the two days' march conjectures were rife as to our ultimate destination. Some said we were intended for Ireland to quell a rebellion there; others for Manchester to put down a riot there, but it was soon ascertained that we were to be embarked at Spithead on board a man-of-war to serve as marines in the Baltic.

"The grenadier company to which **I** belonged, was taken on board the *St. George*, a three-decker of ninety-four guns, bearing the flag of Lord Nelson, and pleased and gratified was I at finding myself on the same ship with him. The ships at Spithead intended for the Baltic sailed to Yarmouth, and there,

greatly to my disappointment, we were transferred to the *Monarch*, 74.

"The fleet sailed on the 12th of March, and anchored below Elsinore on the 29th.

"On the 30th, the ships passed in single line before the Castle, which opened a heavy fire upon them. The *Monarch* led the van, and in passing fired 230 shot. Having passed beyond range the reports were collected, and to everyone's surprise not a shot had touched the ship, all having fallen short. Lord Nelson's ship followed, and he ordered that not a shot should be fired from his guns, the others following his example. Yet, a few days after the battle of the 2nd of April, a Danish account of the operations stated that several men were killed and wounded and some damage done to the walls by the shot from the *Moncirch*.

"This appeared to me unaccountable—that the constant fire from two or three hundred guns did no damage to our fleet, while that from one ship should in so short a time affect the castle walls and its defenders.

"In 1806, at Quebec, when sent on board a merchant ship to superintend the landing of some army clothing, I entered into conversation with one of the passengers, a Dane, who had served on board a Danish vessel on April 2nd, 1801. He told me that Governor Stricker, who was in command at the time in the Castle, was brought before a court-martial of enquiry, when he suggested that the powder lie had

must have been damaged, it having been there during the long peace of seventy or eighty years, then just concluded, and asked leave to try the effect of newly purchased powder. Permission being granted, the shot told with considerable effect upon the Swedish shores at the opposite side of the Strait.

" On the 1st of April the fleet was divided into two divisions, one to anchor at each side of the shoal in front of the city of Copenhagen, that division in whose favor the wind was on the following morning to go in and fight the battle. The wind favored Lord Nelson's division, so it fell to his lot to achieve the victory. The *Monarch* was in Nelson's division, and had 53 men killed and 155 wounded—the greatest number ever killed or wounded on board any one British vessel.

"The battle lasted four hours and ten minutes. The shattered condition of the *Monarch* necessitating her being sent home ; the survivors of the marines were transferred to the *Elephant*. In a few days the damaged ships were refitted and the fleet, with the exception of the *St. George* sailed up to Kiorge Bay.

"Sir Hyde Parker's ship, the *London* had her lower deck guns taken out in order to lighten her sufficiently to enable her to pass through the shallow entrance to the Baltic. There not being sufficient transports to take the guns of the *St. George* at the same time, she had to remain before Copenhagen until their return from the *London*.

" A hint, however, being given to Nelson thtd,-,Mi4

Hyde Parker intended to sail at once and attack the Swedes at Carlsrona, without waiting for him, lest he might again take the lion's share of the laurels to be won in a second engagement, he ordered his barge and started for Kiorge Bay.

" Coming on the poop the following morning at five o'clock," writes FitzGibbon, " I saw the admiral's flag flying at the fore, and asking the signal midshipman what it meant, was told that Lord Nelson had come on board at two o'clock, and was then asleep on the sofa in the cabin, Captain Foley not yet knowing he was there. Immediately I was all ears and eyes, the cabin being directly under the poop. Presently I heard Captain Foley's voice at the door, rebuking the servant for not letting him know that Lord Nelson had come on board, and in a sharp tone from within, I heard a thin, rather feeble voice call out, Foley, Foley, let the man alone; lie obeyed my orders.'

" For many weeks while he was on board, I had an opportunity of seeing Nelson every day. He appeared the most mild and gentle being, and it was delightful to me to hear the way the sailors spoke of him. True, I was only at sea during the summer, but my greatest wish then was that I had been a sailor rather than a soldier."

While in the Baltic an incident occurred which might have interfered with FitzGibbon's career as a soldier.

The detachment of the 49th on the *Elephant* was commanded by Lieut.-Colonel Hutchinson, an impa-

tient, hot-tempered man. One morning, very early; he sent for FitzGibbon to come on deck. While the ships were at anchor, both watches were in their hammocks at night The hammocks being hung, all occupied, press closely together, and a man turning out singly must go down on his knees and there, with difficulty, put on his clothes. When FitzGibbon reached the deck, he found the colonel in a towering passion.

" How dare you not come quickly, sir, when I sent for you ? You are an example of laziness to the men, and if the like of this occurs again, I will bring you to a court-martial and reduce you to the ranks."

Then giving him the order for which he had been called on deck, the colonel left the ship with Captain Foley to spend the day in another vessel.

Mortified by the publicity of the rebuke, administered as it was in the presence of not only the soldiers and sailors on deck, but of two of the midshipmen who had treated him with the kindly courtesy and tact of one gentleman to another, a consideration he was not entitled to by his rank as sergeant ; hurt and indignant at its injustice, and naturally impulsive, FitzGibbon determined not to wait for his colonel to carry the threat into effect, but at once, voluntarily, to retire to the ranks.

Upon Colonel Hutchinson's return to the quarter-deck that evening, FitzGibbon met him, saluted, and said : "As I cannot discharge the duties of a sergeant, sir, without incurring such censure as I received thit3

morning, I desire to retire into the ranks as a private."

The Colonel's face flushed with indignant surprise as he replied : " Very well, sir ; from this moment you are no longer a sergeant. Go, sir, to your duty as a private, and remember I don't forget you. Take that with you."

A short turn on the deck brought him again in contact with the irrepressible soldier as he went below. Shaking his fist at him, he repeated his last words with greater vehemence, "*Remember, I don't forget you. Take that with you.*"

On the following morning the colonel again sent for FitzGibbon and asked if he remembered what had occurred the previous evening, and if he was still in the same mind ?

FitzGibbon replied that nothing had since occurred to alter the opinion he had then expressed.

" Very well, then, join your company as a private." He then paraded the company on deck and informed the men that FitzGibbon, having found himself unequal to the performance of the duties of a sergeant, had resigned and retired into the ranks, closing his speech by advising those who might thereafter be promoted not to follow " the foolish example set them by FitzGibbon."

For three months FitzGibbon remained in the ranks. He was happy because answerable for no one's conduct but his own. Strict in enforcing obedience to duty when a sergeant, he was yet much

beloved by his men, as many anecdotes told of him both then and in later years go to prove. He never allowed that any man could be wholly bad, but that there must be good in him somewhere, if one could but touch the right chord to reach it. Believing this, he looked for it, and though the result was often long delayed, the good was generally found.

In the battle of Copenhagen, where the loss was so severe, one of the most reprobate and unruly of the men in the regiment was terribly wounded in the lower part of the back. When carried into the cockpit, the surgeon bade FitzGibbon take him away—there was no use in dressing such a wound, it would only cause great pain. "Take him away," he said, "and tell him he will be in a better condition to be seen to to-morrow. Poor fellow, he will probably be dead by the morning."

The man lived for three days, and FitzGibbon's comforting prayers and trustful confidence in the mercy of God for the poor sinner soothed his pain, robbed death of its terrors, and won for himself a deeper affection in the hearts of his men.

Upon his reduction to the ranks, this love bore fruit. The companies were divided into messes of six men each, the duty of one of the six, each day, being to perform all the menial offices required, such as washing the dishes, etc. From all these the sergeants were exempt. On the first day upon which this duty fell to FitzGibbon, and he began to gather up the dishes, one of the men stopped him.

"I'll do that, sir."

"No," replied FitzGibbon, "it is my duty, and I did not become a soldier without making up my mind to do all the duties properly belonging to me, and, though greatly obliged to you, I am determined to do this."

"Then, begorra, sir, you'll fight me first."

It is needless to say that FitzGibbon declined such a combat, but during the time he remained in the ranks the menial duties that fell to his share were always done for him *nolens volens*.

The fleet had no more fighting. The death of the Emperor Paul altered the course of events, and after cruising about in the Baltic, putting occasionally into harbor at Dantzic and other ports, the fleet was ordered home in August.

The 49th was landed at different ports, the grenadier company being disembarked from the *Elephant*, at Portsmouth and marched to join the headquarters at Colchester. On approaching the town, Colonel Brock came out to meet them, and drawing his sword marched at their head into barracks.

At parade the following morning, Colonel Brock addressed the men. He thanked them for not only doing credit to the regiment and its officers by their bravery during battle, but for their general good conduct while separated on board the different vessels, the captains of which had written to him in the most favorable terms of the men while under their command,

"He (Colonel Brock) created by his judicious praise, his never-failing interest in his men, both individually as soldiers and collectively as a regiment, a noble spirit, which bore fruit in many a well-won laurel in Canada, in China and the Crimea."

After the regiment was thrown back into column, FitzGibbon noticed his captain in conversation with Colonel Brock, and on the men being' dismissed he received an order to present himself to the colonel. The following conversation is too characteristic of the two men to be omitted :

"Pray, young man," asked the colonel sternly, " Why did you resign your office as sergeant when on board the *Elephant* ? "

" Because, sir, Colonel Hutchinson censured me publicly and in harsh language, when in reality I was not to blame."

" Now, wait it not to insult him you did so ?"

" Positively, sir, such a thought did not occur to me. • I felt mortified to be so publicly rebuked, and, as it happened, in the presence of two of the ship's officers who had from time to time treated me with more than the attention due from men in their position to one in mine. Then, during the whole of the day after I was so censured, and before Colonel Hutchinson returned to the ship, I felt that under such an angry officer I must be always liable to similar treatment, and this consideration, more than any other, determined me to resign."

"Have you any objection to tell Colonel Hutchinson so now ?"

" I have no objection, sir, to tell the truth at any time."

Then I wish you to go at once to his quarters and tell him so. He thinks your object was to insult him by way of revenge."

FitzGibbon obeyed. Colonel Hutchinson accepted the explanation and went himself to request Colonel Brock to reinstate the self-reduced private to his rank as sergeant.

When sent for again, Colonel Brock told FitzGibbon that it was in consequence of " Colonel Hutchinson's request that he was reinstated, and that there having been no returns from the regiment sent in during their service in the Baltic, he had never been officially reduced, and would receive his pay as sergeant as Though nothing had happened." Before leaving the colonel's room the young soldier had something to say. After thanking the colonel for his kindness he asked permission to make an observation without offence. The colonel nodded, " Go on."

" It is this, sir. I think that much harm is done to the discipline of the regiment lay censuring the non-commissioned officers in the presence of the men. It lowers them in the estimation of the privates, and weakens their authority, besides the ill-feeling it creates towards the officer, which a private rebuke would most probably not create at all, but would rather leave the non-commissioned officer grateful for being spared in public."