

THE LIVES OF THE
BRITISH ADMIRALS.

DISPLAYING,

In the most STRIKING COLOURS,

THE

CONDUCT AND HEROISM

OF THE

NAVAL COMMANDERS OF GREAT
BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

WHOSE INTREPIDITY

Has convinced the World, that BRITAN-
NIA is the Sovereign of the OCEAN.

INTENDED

Not only to Instruct and Entertain, but also
to animate the Youth of this Country with
a becoming Ardour, to imitate the glori-
ous Actions of these Heroes, if their Duty
should hereafter call them forth in the De-
fence of their Country.

PART I.

L O N D O N :

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M DCC LXXXVII.

THE LIFE OF
SIR JOHN BALCHEN.

SIR John Balchen was born on the 2d of February, 1669, and during his youth properly instructed in the several arts necessary to form a complete seaman. At his first entrance on board the royal navy, he served several years in very inferior stations, whereby he became a thorough master of every branch of his profession. On the 25th of July, 1697, he was appointed captain of the *Virgin* prize, and thence to the time of his death considered as one of the most active commanders in the royal navy. He never sacrificed the honour of his country to the designs of a party, or his own private interest. The welfare of his country, and the honour of the British flag, were the great motives that influenced his conduct, and to promote these the greatest pleasure of his life. The merchants were highly

sensible of the advantages the commerce of the nation derived from his care and vigilance ; and the privateers of the enemy felt so often the effects of his courage and intrepidity, that they dreaded even the name of the ship which Balchen commanded.

In the year 1718 he commanded the *Shrewsbury*, in the fleet under Sir George Byng, when the Spanish fleet were almost totally destroyed. In this action captain Balchen behaved with the greatest courage and intrepidity. In the year 1728, he was appointed rear-admiral of the *Blue*, and in the year 1731 commanded under Sir Charles Wager, when Don Carlos was placed on the Neapolitan throne. In the year 1734 he was made rear-admiral of the *White*, and commanded a large squadron at Plymouth, which was intended to join the grand fleet under Sir John Norris ; and in 1739, was appointed vice-admiral of the *Red*.

On the 23d of October, 1739, war was declared against Spain ; and in the spring of the succeeding year, the ministry

stry received intelligence, that the Assogue ships were soon expected in Old Spain, under the convoy of admiral Pizarro; this determined them to send a squadron to intercept them. Accordingly Balchen was named, and dispatched with four ships of the line, to cruize for them off Cape Finisterre. He punctually obeyed his orders, and reached his station on the 20th of April, where he was joined by two more men of war. But his vigilance was rendered abortive by an advice-boat sent from Old Spain, which had the good fortune to meet Pizarro, and acquainted him of the danger. On receiving this intelligence, the Spanish admiral altered his course, and instead of standing for Cape Finisterre, steered to the northward till he made the Lizard Point, and from thence directed his course to St. Andro, a Spanish port in the Bay of Biscay, where he safely arrived with an immense treasure. On the 9th of August, 1743, Mr. Balchen was appointed admiral of the White, and soon after knighted by his majesty, and made governor of Greenwich hospital,

tal, as some acknowledgment for the many services he had done his country : a station very proper to a person of his advanced age, and where he expected to spend the remainder of his days in peace, free from the dangers of a sea-faring life. But these pleasing expectations soon vanished ; his country once more demanded his service, and he with alacrity obeyed the summons.

Sir Charles Hardy had been sent with a large convoy of store ships to admiral Rowley in the Mediterranean, who was in the utmost distress, his ships being almost destitute of provisions, and their rigging in a very indifferent condition. Nor were the French either ignorant of this distress, or so careless as not to profit by it. They sent out a fleet under the command of M. Rochambault, to prevent Sir Charles Hardy from joining admiral Rowley, well knowing that the latter could attempt nothing without these stores. Sir Charles however arrived safe at Lisbon, where the French discovered him, and blocked up his fleet in the Tagus. There
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was an absolute necessity for relieving Sir Charles, and consequently of sending an officer, whose courage and conduct could be depended on. In this extremity the ministry cast their eyes on admiral Balchen, who accordingly took the command of a large fleet; and hoisted his flag on board the Victory, one of the largest and finest ships in the royal navy, and, on the 7th of August, sailed from Spithead to relieve Sir Charles Hardy. He arrived at Lisbon on the 9th of September, and being joined by Sir Charles, proceeded to Gibraltar; the French squadron at his approach retiring into Cadiz, and leaving the sea open to the British flag.

This important service being performed, Sir John was desirous of once more shewing the French what they had to expect from a powerful English fleet, and accordingly cruised for some time on the coast of Portugal, hoping to meet at least with some of the Brest fleet; but in this he was disappointed. The French commander taking care to prevent his design, by keeping his whole fleet in the harbour
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of Cadiz. The admiral finding it in vain to wait any longer for the enemy, left the coast on the 28th of September, steering for England ; but on the 3d of October he was overtaken by a violent storm, which dispersed the whole fleet : though all, except the *Victory*, arrived safe at St. Helen's in a shattered condition, on the 10th of October : but that unfortunate ship had a very different fate : she was separated from the fleet on the 4th of October, and driven on the rocky coast of Alderney, where she struck on the *Caskets*. The inhabitants of Alderney heard the guns which the Admiral fired as signals of distress ; but the tempest raged with such uncommon violence, that no assistance could be given. The signal guns were continued during the whole night, but early in the morning she sunk, and every person on board perished. She was manned with eleven hundred of the most expert seamen in the royal navy, exclusive of fifty gentlemen of family and fortune, who went as volunteers. Thus one of the most experienced admirals, together
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with eleven hundred and fifty men, were lost in a moment, and passed together through the gloomy valley that separates time from eternity.

How uncertain are the expectations of mortals! on what tottering foundations do they build their hopes! The gallant Balchen had performed the important service which called him from his retreat, and had entered the British channel on his return. He was retreating for ever from the rage of the ocean, and from the dangers, difficulties and hardships, attending a sea-faring life. But when every danger was in appearance past, and every difficulty surmounted; when he was almost in sight of the harbour of repose, and the end of all his toils; a raging tempest blasted his pleasing hopes, and put a period at once to his life and worldly expectations. The whole nation expressed a deep and generous concern for this terrible misfortune; and his late majesty was graciously pleased to settle a pension of 500*l. per annum* on the admiral's lady during her life; and to perpetuate the
memory

memory of so great a commander, a small, but elegant monument was erected in Westminster-abbey, exhibiting the bust of the admiral, and in basso relievo the unfortunate shipwreck of the Victory.

Sir John married Susannah, daughter of colonel Apreece of Washingly, in the county of Huntingdon. Died October 7, 1744, leaving one son and one daughter; the former of whom, George Balchen, survived him but a short time; for being sent to the West Indies in 1745, commander of his Majesty's ship the Pembroke, he died at Barbadoes in December the same year, aged 28, having walked in the steps, and imitated the virtues and bravery of his good, but unfortunate, father.