

ADAM DUNCAN

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Adam Duncan by H. W. Wilson

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THE WESTMINSTER BIOGRAPHIES

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PREFACE.

In this brief sketch of the great commander who can be ranked after only Nelson amongst his contemporaries, a certain amount of space has been devoted to the social condition of the navy during the time of his service. This is necessary, even within such narrow limits of space, as otherwise misleading ideas might be formed concerning Duncan's character. His refusal, for instance, upon two occasions to go to the West Indies, when the Monarch and Blenheim were ordered there, might lead men to conclude that he was an officer who spared himself. It is not till we understand under what sanitary conditions he had passed his early years at sea that we, who are accustomed to regard life in the navy of our own day as healthier, if anything, than life on shore, can realise that in the middle of the eighteenth century most constitutions were wrecked by it, not till we turn to the lurid pages of Smollett or the

dustier records of Beatson that we learn what West Indian service meant. It could be faced by only the young or healthy, and even by them rarely with impunity. Not until quite the close of the eighteenth century was there a real and sensible improvement in the matter of sanitation on ship-board.

A few details, as yet unpublished, from the navy records in the Record Office, have been embodied in the account of the Nore mutiny, though this work makes no pretence at originality. The author must acknowledge his great indebtedness to the Earl of Camperdown's admirable biography of his great ancestor, where is collected all the material that remains for a biography of the admiral, with the exception of the logs, journals, and correspondence which are to be found in the Record Office. These have been examined, but they yield little that is new or important. Unfortunately, in Duncan's case, no such correspondence is preserved as fills the seven volumes of Nicolas's