

# A NATIONAL NAVAL MUSEUM.

## TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—The present year, which has witnessed the celebration of the centenary of Trafalgar, should, I venture to suggest, witness also the inauguration of a permanent national memorial of the Navy that Nelson knew and adorned, of all the naval past out of which it had come, and of the developments which have followed. The time has arrived when this nation, which has existed by virtue of sea power, and which cannot exist without it, should not be behind France, Spain, or any other country which glories in a distinguished naval past, in possessing a visible presentment of its naval history, located where all men may see and study it. What is required is a Naval Museum, in which shall be brought together everything that will throw light upon the material character, the life, and the occupations of the Navy at every period. Each year that goes by renders more difficult the establishment of such a museum, because valuable pictures and prints, which might be permanent possessions of the nation, are being bought up in the United States and even in Germany, while relics, which would, in many cases, be presented to a truly national collection, pass sometimes into careless hands on their inevitable course towards destruction. This country is extraordinarily rich in illustrations of the Navy of the past and of all that concerns it, but its treasures are scattered far and wide, and are perishing, except in certain cases, year by year.

To many who, like myself, have devoted much attention to naval history, the value of such a museum must have suggested itself. The dispersed state of our naval collections must at times have distressed and even alarmed them. Many treasures are at Greenwich, not a few at the Royal United Service Institution, some in the British Museum, and others at South Kensington, to name no more of their numerous repositories, some of which, unfortunately, are unknown at the present time, and therefore cannot be named. Let any one open the catalogue of the Royal Naval Exhibition of 1891, and he will discover that many of those who exhibited their treasures are dead, and that it would be no easy matter to trace the objects they then enabled the public to examine. Some years ago I handled a walking stick which one of the Spanish admirals at Trafalgar presented to Collingwood. I hope it is still in existence, and is known to be what it is; but a letter which I wrote to its possessor at the house where it was preserved was returned from the Dead Letter Office, that possessor probably having died, so that I am no longer able to trace it. This is merely an illustration of how treasures of which there may be at one time public or private knowledge are lost to sight, and may often be undiscoverable.

It may be objected that one or other of the public museums I have mentioned might answer the purpose I have in view ; but Greenwich is too far from the heart of the metropolis, besides being inadequate, the admirable museum in Whitehall has neither the space nor the suitability for a great naval museum, and the British Museum and South Kensington seem to be out of the question altogether. If we are to associate the proposed museum with the memory of Nelson, to make it worthy of this great naval nation, and to place it in the very centre of national life, I can conceive no position so suitable as Trafalgar-square, under the very shadow of the Nelson column, and at the opening of the avenue which is to lead through the Mall to Buckingham Palace. On this chosen site a distinguished building might be erected, in the near neighbourhood of the Admiralty, which would do honour to the British Navy and to Nelson, and at the same time add much to the imposing character of Trafalgar-square.

I believe it would not be long before such a museum would come to be considered as necessary to the nation and the student as are the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, and other galleries of the metropolis. It would not necessarily be exhaustive in any part, but would, above all things, be completely representative and, therefore, abundantly instructive. Some objects might appropriately be removed from Greenwich, including the Nelson relics, and some, perhaps, from South Kensington. Neither of these places would, however, be denuded of what naval interest they possess. Doubtless many who own naval treasures would in the course of years greatly enrich the proposed museum.

I conceive that there should be a complete exposition of the material of the Navy in ships, armament, and equipment from the earliest times in the form of selected models and pictures. It will illustrate my meaning if I say that the models should be as few as possible, not one being included that did not represent a type or a step forward in naval construction, or was not in itself a specially interesting example. Every aspect of naval life would have its place in the museum. There would be a great series of naval portraits, doubtless many of them paintings, but the vast majority fine mezzotints and other engravings, all grouped and arranged historically. Relics of famous officers might be expected ultimately to furnish an important section. The social life of the Navy would be represented by the hands of great naval artists, satirists, and caricaturists of former times. The occupations of the Navy would be illustrated by paintings and engravings of battles; and hydrography, surveying, and discovery would have their place. Such collections already exist in this country, many of them in private hands, but no doubt in some cases procurable for the nation. It might be thought suitable, moreover, that documents of naval interest should be preserved in the library which should be attached to the museum.

The Naval Museum should not be a collection merely. It should be a centre of instruction. Special loan exhibitions should be arranged from time to time in celebration of famous victories, in honour of great naval commanders, or in illustration of particular periods of naval history. Students should be encouraged to use the museum, and courses of lectures should be arranged for their instruction. The very *catalogue raisonné* of such a museum would be an invaluable contribution to naval history. I hope the Prince of Wales, who possesses a magnificent collection of "nefs," would consent to be the patron of the movement suggested, and there must be many collectors and students like Admirals Sir Cyprian Bridge and Sir Wilmot Fawkes, also Sir Charles Cust, Professor Laughton, Commander Robinson, Mr. J. R. Thursfield, and others who would lend their aid. No doubt, a considerable sum of money would be required, but the Office of Public Works should have a kindly feeling for the proposal, and those whose lavish munificence is displayed in the founding of libraries and other institutions might be depended upon, I think, to help in the creation of an institution which would be more interesting than any of them, and would certainly lie nearer to the pulses of our national life. The centenary year of Trafalgar would be worthily honoured by the inauguration of a movement to bring about the foundations of the Naval Museum which is suggested. I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

JOHN LEYLAND.