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OLIVER H. PERRY.

THE success of our naval warfare with England in the revolutionary struggle, and in the war of 1812, has given a greater impulse to the patriotic feelings of our nation than a hundred battles on land would have produced, however victorious they might have been. In justice to this feeling, and to keep it alive, the general history of our navy should be familiar to every one in the nation.

There are many of our naval heroes who deserve much from their countrymen, and who should be grouped in our history, as well as separated for distinction in our biography. From among these we have selected, for this number of our work, a name dear to all who have at heart their country's honor.

OLIVER HAZARD PERRY was born at Newport in August, 1785. He was early destined for the navy by his father, then in the service of the United States. He was entered a midshipman on board of the sloop of war *General Greene*, in 1798; a period of general excitement on account of our commercial difficulties with France.

He was too young at that time to gain any other laurels than those which are won from friends by polite observances of gentlemanly courtesy and strict probity. These are truly earnest of future fame, and should be prized as things of promise as well as of present value.

Midshipman PERRY was in the Tripolitan war, and secured the affection and respect of all the officers and men in the squadron. By seizing every opportunity to gain information, and showing to all that he was desirous of being instructed, and ready on any occasion to instruct, he became, very early in life, an accomplished navigator and seaman.

In 1810, he was a lieutenant commandant in the schooner *Revenge*, a vessel attached to the squadron under Commodore Rodgers at New London, and employed in Long Island Sound to prevent infractions of the embargo laws. In this vessel, in the spring of 1811, he was wrecked in a fog near Stonington. He demanded a court of

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inquiry on his conduct. The court acquitted him of all blame, and reported that it was owing to his coolness and intrepidity that the guns and other property, with the crew of the *Revenge*, were saved. Such a misfortune often tries an officer's character more than several ordinary battles.

The nation not only responded to the report of the court of inquiry, but Mr. Secretary Hamilton wrote Lieutenant PERRY a very complimentary letter on his admirable conduct under the calamity. It is seldom that an officer gains by his misfortunes, but this was distinctly the case with PERRY.

This time of peace and restrictive system was trying to our naval commanders; they hated to be made spies upon smugglers, and overseers of little matters; and many of them resigned their commissions.

In 1812, Lieutenant PERRY was promoted to the rank of master and commander, and appointed to the command of the gunboats in the harbor of New York; but he was soon disgusted with this service, for it was dull and inactive, and did not afford any chance of gaining distinction, or of improvement in naval tactics. Every sailor under his command imbibed the same impressions; and when, at his solicitations, he was ordered to Lake Ontario to reinforce Commodore Chauncey, his men volunteered to go with him. On his arrival at Sackett's Harbor, Commodore Chauncey ordered PERRY to Lake Erie to superintend the building of vessels, in order to meet the force the British had on those waters. He commenced his labors with extraordinary zeal, and gave animation to every heart and hand engaged in increasing the naval power on Lake Erie. On the 4th of August he got his squadron over the bar, and swept into the deep waters of the lake. The enemy did not molest him while in this unpleasant situation, although they were daily watching his movements. He sailed in pursuit of the squadron, but soon returned, not being able to meet them. Being reinforced by a considerable number of men, on the 12th he sailed again; on the 15th he arrived at Sandusky; then cruised about Malden, and offered battle to the enemy's fleet at anchor under the guns of the fort, but the challenge was not accepted.

On the 10th of September the American squadron were lying at Put-in-Bay; at sunrise the British squadron were discovered by PERRY, making towards him. PERRY's force was two twenty-gun brigs, and several small vessels, carrying in all fifty-four guns, and manned with about six hundred persons; sailors, landsmen, and boys. The British

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force was superior in men and metal, being six vessels, carrying sixty-three guns. At eleven o'clock, A. M., the British were formed in line of battle; but the wind now changing, PERRY had an opportunity to bear down upon them as he chose. The commodore, in the *Lawrence*, led. From her mast head was displayed the last words of the gallant Captain Lawrence, who fell in the action between the *Chesapeake* and *Shannon*: "Don't give up the ship." At a few minutes past twelve, the British commenced firing, and some damage was done to the *Lawrence* before PERRY could make his short guns bear upon the enemy. At length he opened his battery, and stood the fire of the enemy's force for two hours. The other part of his own fleet did not come to his assistance. The *Lawrence* was become unmanageable; her decks were strewn with the dead; her guns were dismounted. At this moment PERRY conceived a bold and most admirable design. It was no sooner conceived than it was put in execution. Giving the command of the *Lawrence* to Lieutenant Yarnell, he took his flag under his arm, jumped into his boat, and amidst a shower of shot made his way to the *Niagara*, the second ship of his squadron. He went off from the *Lawrence* standing up in his boat; but the seamen, seeing how much he was exposed, seized him with affectionate violence, and pulled him down to a seat. His flag was now seen flying from the mast head of the *Niagara*, comparatively a fresh ship. This was a moment full of peril. The youthful hero was as calm as adventurous. He brought his ship in a position to break the enemy's line of battle. He gave two ships a raking fire with his starboard guns, poured a broadside into a schooner from his larboard tier, and lay his ship alongside of the British commodore. The effect of his fire was terrific, and the enemy's battery was silenced in a very short time. The small American vessels were soon brought up, and the contest decided, which had now lasted for nearly three hours. The enemy was not only entirely subdued, but all his vessels were taken, and brought to the American side of the lake. Never did a warrior fight with a braver or more skilful foe. Commodore Barclay, who commanded the British squadron on that day, was a man of no ordinary fame. He had gained laurels at the battle of *Trafalgar*, and other sea-fights, where Englishmen had bled and won the victory; but this day his experience did not avail him—he was forced to yield. The loss was great on both sides, but much more severe on the part of the British. They had two hundred killed and wounded; the Americans about one hundred and twenty-three.

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Commodore Barclay was severely wounded, having lost his remaining hand in the fight; the other had been shot off in some previous battle.

In this fight PERRY's conduct was marked with skill, bravery, and perseverance. He omitted nothing, did every thing he should have done, and no more. He was as humane as brave, and as modest as humane. He took special care of the wounded of the enemy, as well as of his own gallant crews, and did all that could have been done to assuage the wounds of person and of feeling of Commodore Barclay, while he was a prisoner in his power.

The effects of his victory were felt in every part of the country. It silenced those who had clamored against the war, and who, among other things, had ventured to prognosticate that our officers could not manage a fleet, however well they might fight a single ship. Those who had opposed the war now united with the friends of it in wreathing garlands for our victorious seamen. The whole story had an epic effect, national pride was kindled up, and the people in every part of the country celebrated the victory with enthusiasm.

For this action PERRY was made a captain in the navy, and received the thanks of congress, and other marks of distinction, particularly from several of the state legislatures; but he did not repose upon his laurels, or rest satisfied with what he had done. Finding no more hostile fleets to subdue, he offered himself as an aid to General Harrison, then in pursuit of the enemy, and participated with that gallant officer in his dangers and honors at the battle of Moravian Town, on the 5th of October following his own victory.

The president of the United States, in his message to congress, speaks of the conduct of Captain PERRY in the highest terms of praise, as reflecting honor on this nation; and Mr. Madison was never given to flattery.

At the time of the invasion of Virginia and Maryland by the British under General Ross and Admiral Coekburn, Captain PERRY had a command on the Potomac, but not in sufficient force to do any thing effective. Washington was taken, but no naval officer suffered any diminution of his fame from this act; the fault must rest among others if there was any fault in the affair.

At the conclusion of the war Captain PERRY was appointed to the command of the *Java*, a frigate of the first class, and sailed with Commodore Decatur to chastise the Dey of Algiers, who had, during our difficulties with Great Britain, thought it a favorable time to plunder our commerce. Decatur reached the Mediterranean in June,

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1815, and in a few days captured an Algerine frigate, under the command of Admiral Reis Hammida, who had been styled "*The Terror of the Seas*." Decatur then proceeded to Tunis and Tripoli, and speedily adjusted matters with those powers, who had likewise thought it a favorable time to make unjust demands of our government.

After PERRY had returned to the United States from the Mediterranean, and while the *Java* was lying at Newport in midwinter, information was received by him that a merchant vessel was on a reef, about five or six miles from that place, and that the crew were still on the wreck, at the mercy of the winds and waves. He manned his barge, and said to his rowers, "Come, my boys, we are going to the relief of shipwrecked seamen; pull away." They returned him a look of fearless determination, which seemed to say, where you go we go. The vessel had gone to pieces, but eleven men were on her quarter deck, which had separated from the hull of the vessel, and was floating as a raft on the billows. This act may not be thought to belong to the class of heroic deeds by some, who are attracted only by the blaze of military glory; but the great mass of his countrymen declared that he was as deserving of the civic as of the naval crown.

Such a man as PERRY could not be idle; and in 1819 he was sent in the *John Adams* to the West India station, with sealed orders. He had the command of the squadron on that station. It was a command of importance, for pirates had swarmed in that vicinity, and not only vexed our commerce, but had committed murders of the most horrid character. The utmost vigilance and energy were necessary, but he was not long to be the guardian of those seas. The yellow fever was in the squadron, and of this disease he died on the 23d of August, 1820, just as his ship was entering a port in Trinidad. Thus perished, in the prime of life, and in the midst of usefulness, one of the most gallant officers of this or any other country. He was buried on the 24th, with military honors.

When his death was made known in the United States, every tribute of national grief was paid to his memory. The congress of the United States made a liberal provision for his family, including his mother, who was leaning on him for support. A republic is now and then grateful.

Commodore PERRY had early in life married a daughter of Doctor Mason, of Newport, and was happy in his domestic ties. He was a man of splendid talents, of great tact in his profession, and every way fitted for a great naval commander. His

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intrepidity was at the same time constitutional and acquired. He had in his youth contemplated the beau-ideal of a naval hero—a model of his own creation—whose elements were formed from all the great commanders, from Themistocles to Nelson; and if the Fates were kind, he intended to emulate him; and this before he had heard the whistling of a ball, or seen one drop of blood shed by contending with a foe.

In his whole course of life he had measured means in relation to ends. He never ventured upon any thing that was not feasible, and of course seldom acted without success. His mind was prolific, but well balanced. He never was swayed from his purpose, or “frightened from his propriety;” but in all the business of his profession conducted with a wisdom and gravity beyond his years. His letters prove that he could write with taste and spirit, and had a sense of honor worthy his station in our republic. He was said to have imitated Nelson; but every great man is like some distinguished predecessor. There is a similarity in mighty minds, whenever or wherever they appear.

In person, Commodore PERRY was of the warrior cast, tall and well proportioned; yet not so colossal as to destroy a fine symmetry of limbs, and graceful movement of body. The expression of his face was manly and intellectual, with a greater proportion of refinement than is often found in the countenances of sea-faring men.

The remains of Commodore PERRY have been brought to his native country, and buried in Newport. The legislature of Rhode Island appropriated a sum of money to erect a monument to his memory, and this has been done. From a connection of the deceased a memoir has long been expected. This has not made its appearance; but we do not despair of seeing it, for a land of heroes cannot be wanting in masters of the pen.





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