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ORATION,

ON THE OCCASION OF CELEBRATING

THE FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY

OF

THE BATTLE OF LAKE ERIE;

DELIVERED

ON THE TENTH OF SEPTEMBER, 1853,

IN NEWPORT, R. I.

BY

GEORGE H. CALVERT.

—
SECOND EDITION.
—



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NEWPORT, September 14th, 1853.

G. H. CALVERT, Esq. —

DEAR SIR,— At a meeting of the Committee of Arrangements on Monday evening, 12th, it was voted unanimously that a copy of your very able and eloquent discourse on the 10th be requested for publication.

Very respectfully,

H. E. TURNER,

Secretary.

NEWPORT, R. I., September 16th, 1853.

DEAR SIR,—

I acknowledge with much gratification the receipt of your note of the 14th, requesting, in behalf of the Committee of Arrangements, a copy for publication of the address I delivered on the 10th instant.

It will give me much pleasure to comply with this request, and so soon as I shall have written out the address I will transmit it to you.

Most respectfully yours,

G. H. CALVERT

DR. HENRY E. TURNER, *Secretary.*

ORATION.

FELLOW-CITIZENS: —

We have met to commemorate a glorious national event. And we of Rhode Island and of Newport have so met, because the leader therein, and many of the agents therein, were our fellow-citizens, our fellow-townsmen. Patriotism, thankfulness, and an honorable pride bring us together to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Battle of Lake Erie.

For a people overflowing with prosperity, already colossal in power, it is a privilege, as it is a most grateful duty, to do honor to those who, at a time of poverty and weakness, by the wealth of their individual resources, by the power of strong arms and strong hearts, performed deeds that were at once the prophecies and the sources of national wealth and national power. The secure comforts of our countless American homes, the millions of happy hearths that send up their smoke to-day, over our blessed land, all draw some of their warmth from the warm blood that was shed on the decks of the Erie fleet. The strength of the arms that, through the iron hail of the enemy, bore Perry in his boat from a shattered to a fresh ship,—that strength has multiplied itself upon the nation. A brave battle is a national fortification for ever. High deeds of arms, done in a just cause, are creative: they live not in the memory only, they live too in the heart.

But from the beginning of our history, the military has been entirely subordinated to the civil power. Therefore it is, that that history is so significant, so instructive, so elevated. We achieved our independence by a war for principles; we preserved and confirmed it by a second war; for the war of 1812 was but the finishing of that of 1776.

Into the second, as into the first, we entered reluctantly, forced into it by the righteous necessities of self-preservation; after we had for years borne assumptions and insolences, a fraction whereof would now fire the whole country into instantaneous war. But in 1812 national spirit was not, and logically could not be, in these United States. Although by a sublime struggle we had rid ourselves of the political supremacy of England, we were intellectually, scientifically, industrially, dependent on her. She ruled over us still, by the unavoidable, and I may say healthy, predominance of the mature mother over the daughter yet in her teens.

When Congress declared war against Great Britain in 1812, the English navy counted one thousand sail; that of the United States, eighteen, nine of them frigates, and nine of a class below frigates. This unparalleled magnitude of naval power, backed too by the prestige of British invincibility at sea, was still further magnified by the general, almost universal, American deference to supposed English superiority. The sense of hopeless weakness, in the presence of such a mighty armament came nigh to be officially embodied in an order from the Federal Government to lay up our public vessels in ordinary, to prevent their being captured by the enemy; an order which it is positively asserted would have been issued, but for the remonstrance of two naval officers, Bainbridge and Stewart, (names that are otherwise dear to the American heart,) who sought an interview with President Madison, and soon convinced him of the folly and wrong of such a procedure; whereupon Mr.

Madison took upon himself against the wish and advice of his Cabinet, to with-hold the order.

These gentlemen, with the small band of their naval brethren, were in advance of the general feeling and knowledge of the country. And needful is it for the well-being of a country that, in the high spheres of thought and action, it always have some men who are in advance of the common knowledge and common conviction. With bold self-reliance these officers went ahead; they spoke out their convictions; they spoke them out in the teeth of the government; and very soon they made good their words by their deeds.

It were a grateful task to dwell for a few moments on our first naval triumphs, especially the first capture of a British frigate, the *Guerriere*, by the *Constitution*, under Hull; the moral effect of which, I might say without an exaggerated figure of speech, was, that it made old England turn pale, while young America it flushed with the glow of a new power. But our own theme is large and rich enough to engross us to-day.

For accomplishing their purpose of protecting the northern frontier, and invading Canada, our government soon perceived that a naval force on Lake Eric was indispensable.

In the winter of 1812 and 1813 there was stationed at Newport a fleet of gun-boats, commanded by a citizen of Rhode Island, our fellow-townsmen, Oliver Hazard Perry, at that time a commander in the navy. Discontented with a duty so inglorious, and "possessing,"—to quote from one of his letters of that period,— "possessing an ardent desire to meet the enemies of my country," Captain Perry applied for and obtained the command on Lake Eric. He immediately sent forward a large body of men, who, having become attached to him while under his orders at Newport, volunteered for this remote service. On the 22d of February he himself set out, and after a long, tedious journey,—part of it through a region which was at that

time almost a wilderness, being detained, too, a fortnight at Sackett's Harbor, with Commodore Chauncey,—on the 27th of March he reached the village of Erie, on a small bay, about half-way up the lake.

The work Captain Perry had to do was, first to create a fleet, and then, with that fleet, to beat the British fleet,—work enough for a young man of twenty-seven. The American fleet was still growing on the shore of the lake. Little had been done: of the materials and stores needed, scarcely any had been provided. Not half the mechanics had arrived. Not a cannon was yet on the ground, nor iron, nor cordage, nor canvas. Everything required to equip and arm a fleet had to be brought long distances over bad roads. There was not even a cartridge in the place for defence of the ship-yards. Against obstacles and difficulties, against delays and disappointments, through chagrins and mortifications, Captain Perry worked with such rapid and intelligent energy, that by the 24th of May all his vessels were launched,—two twenty-gun brigs and three gun-boats.

On the 23d of May, learning that Commodore Chauncey had come up to the western end of Lake Ontario, for the purpose of making a combined attack by land and water on Fort George, Captain Perry set out at nightfall in a boat to join him. According to previous agreement between him and Commodore Chauncey, he had command of the sailors and marines employed in the attack, to the success of which he, by his military judgment, promptness and courage, largely contributed. His services, were, in the official report, warmly acknowledged by Commodore Chauncey, who, in concluding, said: — “He was present at every point where he could be useful, under showers of musketry, but fortunately escaped unhurt.”

One of the first fruits of this victory was, that it liberated five small vessels belonging to our government, which had been

blockaded at Black Rock, by the enemies' batteries on the Canada shore. These Captain Perry dragged, with great labor, against the rapid current of the Niagara River, into Lake Erie; and, setting sail with them from Buffalo, by boldness and skill he eluded the British squadron, and reached Erie with his flotilla on the 18th of June. The equipping of the vessels was now pushed forward as fast as it could be. By the 10th of July the guns were all mounted. The great want was men. Here the government had failed in its duty. On the 15th of July there were but 120 fit for service, just enough to man one of the twenty-gun brigs. The British squadron was cruising off the harbor, as if to beard the Americans; the Secretary of the Navy and General Harrison were writing letters, urging Captain Perry to action. How galling must have been, under these circumstances, enforced inactivity, to an eager, manly spirit, burning with desire to grapple with the enemy, and fully conscious of the importance of the part intrusted to him, and of the hopes of the country! * At last, on the 2d of August, having received several dribblets of reinforcements, he took advantage of a temporary absence of the British squadron, to get his two brigs over the bar; and immediately, although himself, his officers and men, were exhausted by forced work and loss of rest, he cleared his decks for action, and with a fleet hardly more than half-manned, weighing anchor before daybreak, on the 6th of August, stood out in pursuit of the enemy. The next day, after a fruitless cruise, the wind being unfavorable, he returned to Erie.

On the 9th, Captain Perry received from Commodore Chauncey a most welcome addition of one hundred men and officers; and having taken on board military stores for the army, and ranging his vessels in battle order, so as to engage the enemy should he fall in with him on the way, he set sail on the 12th

* See Appendix A.

of August for the upper end of the lake, there to co-operate with General Harrison.

With the liveliest joy, the army hailed the arrival of the American squadron off Sandusky. General Harrison, with a numerous suite of officers and Indian chiefs, hastened on board to greet him. From General Harrison Captain Perry received his last reinforcement, in a draft from the ranks of the army of about forty-five volunteers, chiefly Kentuckians. These brave fellows, though till then they had never seen a man-of-war, were ready, after a few days drilling at the guns, to do excellent service on the 10th of September. A country that is so strongly braced by freedom, as to rear independent, self-reliant citizens, will never in time of need lack fighters.

In the mean time the British squadron was lying sheltered in the harbor of Malden, waiting for the Detroit, its largest ship, built for this occasion, and not yet fully equipped. Sailing over to Malden, Captain Perry returned the visits which Captain Barclay had paid him at Erie, running on the 1st of September very close in, and continuing all day off the harbor with his colors set. The enemy showing no disposition to accept his offer of battle, he bore away again.

On the 9th of September, the American squadron lay moored in Put-in Bay, near the mouth of the Sandusky. In the evening, Captain Perry summoned on board his vessel the commanders, to receive final instructions for their guidance during the expected battle. To each of them he gave a written order, which concluded as follows: "Engage each your designated adversary in close action, at half cable's length." And on parting, he further enforced this order with words quoted from Nelson: "If you lay your enemy alongside, you cannot be out of your place."

At sunrise on the 10th, from the masthead of the American flag-ship, the British squadron was descried to the northwest,

bearing down towards Put-in Bay. Captain Perry instantly ordered signal to be made "to get under way," and in a few minutes the whole squadron was beating out of the harbor with a light breeze from the southwest. The wind being light and unsteady, beating out was slow and tedious. Growing impatient, Captain Perry directed the sailing-master of the *Lawrence*, Mr. W. V. Taylor, to wear ship. Mr. Taylor (who is present here to-day) remarked, that they would then have to engage the enemy from to leeward. To this Captain Perry replied: "I don't care, to windward or to leeward, they shall fight to-day." Happily the wind suddenly changed to the southeast, and by ten o'clock the American squadron had cleared the islands, still keeping the weathergage. When the wind shifted, the British squadron hove to, distant six or seven miles.

The American squadron consisted of nine vessels, carrying fifty-four guns. These were, the *Lawrence** and the *Niagara*, brigs, each carrying twenty guns; the *Ariel*, schooner, of four guns; the *Caledonia*, of three; the *Scorpion* of two; the *Somers*, of two; and the *Tigris*, *Trippe*, and *Porcupine*, each of one gun. The crews of these nine vessels counted (including officers) barely five hundred men, one hundred of whom, were, the day of the battle, on the sick list.

The British squadron consisted of six vessels, carrying sixty-three guns. The *Detroit*, of nineteen; the *Queen Charlotte* of seventeen; these two were ships, and although carrying three guns less than the *Lawrence* and the *Niagara*, were stouter, and had more long guns. Now observe, that in enumerating the American vessels, next to the two largest, come two of four and three guns; whereas, next to the two largest British, are two of thirteen and ten guns, the *Lady Prevost* and the *Hunter*. These

* While she was on the stocks at Erie, news came of the heroic fight of the *Chesapeake*, in honor of whose commander she was named, by order of the Secretary of the Navy.

four carried fifty-nine guns, being five more than the whole American squadron, besides the advantage of concentrating them on a few vessels. The Little Belt and Chippewa carried two or three guns each. The number of men in the two fleets is estimated to have been about equal. The commanders in the British squadron were generally of higher grade than those of the American, and of more naval experience. Their gallant Commodore, Barclay, had been with Nelson at Trafalgar. Captain Perry had never before even witnessed the movement of vessels combined in a fleet ranged for battle.

Captain Perry now made a final inspection of his ship. Coming to some men who had been in the Constitution, he said to them; "Well, boys, are you ready?" "All ready, your honor." "But I need say nothing to you," he added, "*you* know how to beat those fellows." Recognizing some of his townsmen, he exclaimed, "Ah! here are the Newport boys; they'll do their duty, I warrant." Then, taking from his state-room a large flag, he mounted on a gun, and calling his crew around him, he addressed them: "My brave lads, on this flag are the dying words of Captain Lawrence! Shall I hoist it?" "Ay, ay, sir!" And in a moment, from the masthead of the Lawrence floated the flag, on which in large letters, as the battle-cry of the day, were inscribed the words,—"**DON'T GIVE UP THE SHIP!**" As the crews of the other vessels caught sight of them, they sent up an enthusiastic shout. And the sick below, learning the cause of the shout, many of them came up on the decks, to offer their feeble services;—such life is there in the dying words of a hero. To one of those on board the Lawrence, Mr. Taylor said, "Go below, Mays, you are too weak to be here." "I can do something, sir." "What can you do?" "I can sound the pump, sir, and let a strong man go to the guns." He sat down by the pump, and sent the strong man to the guns; and when the fight was ended, there he was found

with a ball through his heart. He was from Newport; his name was Wilson Mays.

The solemn suspense was at last broken, at a quarter before twelve, by a bugle sounded on board the *Detroit*, and answered by cheers from the whole British squadron. This, their concerted signal for action, was quickly followed by a shot from the *Detroit*, aimed at the *Lawrence*, which did not take effect. A second shot passed through her bulwarks. At five minutes before twelve, the *Lawrence* returned the fire, and then, the *Ariel* and *Scorpion* on her weather-bow, and the *Caledonia* and *Niagara* astern, opening with their long guns, and all the British vessels doing the same, the engagement became general at noon, but at long distance, the two squadrons being on an average, about a mile apart.

Captain Perry finding, that, from the superiority of the British in long guns, he was suffering more damage than he could inflict, passed the word by trumpet to the other vessels to close up, and, crowding sail on the *Lawrence*, bore down to within three hundred feet of the *Detroit*, where he opened a rapid, destructive fire. The *Ariel*, commanded by Lieutenant Packet, the *Scorpion*, Mr. Champlain, and the *Caledonia*, Midshipman Turner, had closed in company with him, the *Caledonia*, with her three guns, diverting from the *Lawrence*, in so far as she could, the fire of the *Hunter*, with ten guns. The *Queen Charlotte*, when she saw that her carronades did not reach the *Niagara*, filled her main topsail at about half past twelve, passed the *Hunter*, and placing herself astern of the *Detroit*, opened fire upon the *Lawrence*. For two hours did Captain Perry and his ship stand the brunt of the battle; for, although he was gallantly supported, and as vigorously as could be with their small armaments by the *Caledonia*, Lieutenant Turner, *Ariel*, Lieutenant Packet, and the *Scorpion*, Mr. Champlin, the batteries of

the Detroit, the Queen Charlotte, and the Hunter were, during all that time, chiefly leveled at the Lawrence.*

At half past two o'clock, out of one hundred and one sound men, wherewith the Lawrence had gone into action, twenty-two were killed, and sixty-one wounded, a slaughter unprecedented in naval warfare! Her rigging was shot away, her spars were splintered, her sails torn to pieces, her guns dismantled; she lay a helpless wreck on the water. Captain Perry had himself just assisted to fire her last gun. He ordered the boat to be lowered; and, saying to his first lieutenant, Mr. Yarnall,—who, though severely wounded, refused to stay below,—“I leave to your discretion to strike or not, but the American colors must not come down over my head to-day,” he took the battle-flag under his arm, and descended into the boat.

My fellow-citizens, we who live near the sea know, that, after a short experience on water, every one conforms to the universal practice of sitting down the moment he enters a boat, having learned by a few trials that this is necessary always to the trimming of a boat, and often to its safety. Captain Perry stood erect in the stern as the boat pushed off, and it was only upon the urgent entreaties, and finally, it is said, even threats of the oarsmen, that he sat down. Now this standing up proceeded from neither thoughtlessness nor design; it was simply the unconscious emphatic expression of the unconquered, unconquerable spirit of the man.

A few minutes later, the Lawrence, not having a gun that could be fired, nor men to work it if there had been one, hauled down her colors. As the American colors came down, there went up from the British ships a shout of triumph; and the wounded in the Lawrence learning the cause of this shout, their hearts sank within them; they refused to be tended by the sur-

* See Appendix B.

geon, crying out in their anguish,—“ Sink the ship! sink the ship! Let us all sink together!” There was a crew worthy of their commander, and a commander worthy of his crew.

Unscathed by the shower of grape and bullets that followed him in the boat, Captain Perry, in ten minutes from the time that he quitted the *Lawrence*, mounted the sides of the *Niagara*, which vessel he found untouched in her spars or rigging, and with but three men wounded on her decks. He quickly hoisted out the signal for close action, which, as the answering pendants went up, was greeted with hearty cheers throughout the line, showing the revived hope and spirit of the whole squadron.— He put up the helm of the *Niagara*, bore directly down upon the enemy, broke through his line, and, passing at half pistol-shot between the *Lady Prevost* and *Chippewa* on his larboard, and the *Detroit*, *Queen Charlotte*, and *Hunter* on his starboard, poured in, right and left, from double-shotted guns, terrific broadsides; then, ranging ahead of the ships on his starboard, he rounded to, raked the *Detroit* and *Queen Charlotte*, that had got foul of each other, and continued to deliver a close and deadly fire.

As the *Lawrence* fell out of the line to windward, her place against the *Detroit* had been taken by the *Caledonia*, commanded by our townsman, Mr. Daniel Turner, while her place, was filled by the *Trippe*, a fast sailor, commanded by Mr. Holdup Stevens; and these gallant young men had exchanged signals to board the *Detroit*, when they perceived the *Niagara* bearing down to break the British line. In that grand movement, so closely was Perry followed by Turner, that the jib-boom of the *Caledonia* touched the stern of the *Niagara*.

Meanwhile, the freshened breeze had brought up the vessels astern, the *Somers*, Mr. Almy, the *Tigris*, Lieutenant Conklin, and the *Porcupine*, Midshipman Senat; and now, for the first time during the action, the whole American squadron, except

the disabled Lawrence, was, at the same moment, actively engaged. In eight minutes from the time that Captain Perry broke their line, the British colors came down.

The battle ended at three o'clock. The cannon hushed.— The deep silence of nature, so long banished from the lake, suddenly returned, broken only by the cries of the wounded and the dying. As the wind bore away the intermingled smoke, the British squadron was discovered to be nearly inclosed by the American. This was the first American fleet that ever in line of battle encountered an enemy. The British fleet was the first fleet, since England had a navy, that had been captured.

At four o'clock, when the most pressing needs of the moment had been supplied, Captain Perry withdrew to the cabin, to communicate the victory to General Harrison. This he did in the following words:—

“DEAR GENERAL :

“We have met the enemy, and they are ours. Two ships, two brigs, one schooner, and one sloop. Yours, with great respect and esteem,

“O. H. PERRY.”

At the same time, he wrote to the Secretary of the Navy:—

“U. S. Brig Niagara, off the Westernmost Sister,
Head of Lake Eric, Sept. 10, 1813, 4 P. M.

“SIR :

“It has pleased the Almighty to give to the arms of the United States a signal victory over their enemies on this lake. The British squadron, consisting of two ships, two brigs, one schooner, and one sloop, have this moment surrendered to the force under my command, after a sharp conflict.

“I have the honor to be, Sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

“O. H. PERRY.”

These despatches, brief, clear, modest, penned without deliberation, in the moment of victory, have a deserved celebrity.

Captain Perry now returned to his own ship, to receive on her deck, in presence of the small remnant of her noble crew, the commanders of the captured fleet. As he came over the side of the *Lawrence*, he was met by her surviving officers.—Not a word was spoken,—the moment was too solemn for speech. Around them, the bodies of their slaughtered comrades lay, where they had fallen, on the deck that was slippery with their blood; and the ship resounded with the groans of the wounded. Standing on the after part of the deck, Captain Perry received the British officers, who, in approaching him, picked their way over the slain. In a low voice he spoke words of dignity and kindness, and requesting them to retain their side arms, which, with hilts towards him, they had proffered, he inquired with unaffected interest for Commodore Barclay and his wounded officers.

This proud ceremony over, and the British officers having retired, he said to Mr. Taylor, about sunset: “I am very weary, and should like to sleep. Shall I be safe here?” In the centre of the deck was a crowd of prisoners, guarded by Mr. Taylor and two or three of his men. “Have no fear, Sir,” Mr. Taylor replied; “I insure your safety.” And overcome by the great day’s work, which he had entered on still feeble from fever, with his arms crossed on his breast, and his drawn sword in his hand, he lay down on the deck beside the slain, and slept.

One last sad duty remained,—the burial of the dead. According to usage, the men were committed to the deep that they had reddened with their blood, the officers were carried on shore. The surviving officers of both nations—in the reversed order of their rank, Captain Perry bringing up the rear—followed them in procession, and to the music of minute guns, fired by turns from either squadron, and a dirge by their united bands,

the bodies were laid in their graves, side by side, Briton and American alternately, and over them was read, in the language common to both, the impressive burial-service of the Anglican Church.

The number of killed and wounded in the British squadron was, according to Captain Barclay's official report, 41 killed and 94 wounded; in the American, 27 killed and 97 wounded, whereof 22 of the killed and 61 of the wounded were in the *Lawrence*.

My fellow-citizens, it is our privilege to meet here to-day, six survivors of that renowned battle, three officers and three men. The officers are, our townsman, Captain W. V. Taylor, whom, as master of the *Lawrence*, we have already several times had occasion to mention; who, although wounded, never left the deck of that devoted ship, and who, promoted for his gallantry and services on the 10th, is now, and has been for many years, a post-captain in the navy.—Another officer of the *Lawrence*—directly before me—is Dr. Usher Parsons, now of Providence, who with alacrity and marked skill attended, not only the wounded of his own ship, but—his two colleagues being ill—these likewise of the whole squadron. Being himself weak from recent illness, he had, after the battle, to be hoisted in and out of the other vessels; and in his own, he performed during the conflict his humane duties, exposed like the rest of the crew to the shot of the enemy; for so shallow was the *Lawrence*, that her cockpit was not below water, and one or two of the wounded whom Dr. Parsons dressed, were killed at his side as they passed from under his hands.—The third officer present here is our townsman, Mr. Thomas Brownell, second in command of the *Ariel*, who, being lame from a recent accident, went into battle on crutches, which the increased warmth of his blood during the fight enabled him soon to throw aside, and whose future it was

to witness the British flag pulled down seven times on the Canada frontier. Mr. Brownell, who, like Mr. Taylor, was promoted after one action, retired for a number of years from the navy, in which he is now a lieutenant, instead of being, as but for that voluntary retirement he would be, a post-captain. The men are Mr. Reuben Wright, of Providence, who carries with him as a memento of that day, a scar from a bullet through his wrist; our townsman, Mr. George Cornell, who was also wounded, and was one of the few spared on the Lawrence; and Mr. Isaac Peckham.

These our fellow-citizens, who now modestly face this assemblage, the objects of its deep interest and sympathy, it is by the watch just forty years to an hour since, each one at his post, doing there his brave duty, they faced on Lake Erie the cannon of the enemy. For us, it will be for the rest of our lives a grateful remembrance, that, preferred before all others, we have been permitted here to behold these brave men, and for ourselves, and for all the twenty-five millions of our countrymen for whom they fought that strong fight, to greet them and to thank them.

Rhode Island has claimed this victory as belonging to her.—When Captain Perry obtained the command on Lake Erie, he took with him from Newport, as we have seen, a large number of men and officers. By them the fleet was, first, chiefly built, and then largely manned. Our townsman, Mr. Daniel Turner, the undaunted commander of the Caledonia, and whose decease, as Commodore in the Navy, his numerous friends, his native State, and the whole country have so recently mourned, was the commander in the squadron by whom Captain Perry set most store, and it was he and Mr., now Captain Taylor, who, under the direction of Captain Perry, superintended the rigging, equipping, and arming of the fleet. Four of the nine commanders, including the chief, were from Rhode Island, and from our

town,—Perry, Turner, Almy, and Champlin; and five of the other officers,—Taylor, Brownell, Breeze, Dunham, and Alexander Perry, brother of the Commodore and with him in the *Lawrence*, a midshipman twelve years of age. Further, Captain Perry, after he had fought the *Lawrence* until she had neither men nor guns to fight with, transferred himself to the *Niagara*, still almost untouched by the enemy; and then, bringing her for the first time into close action, by a movement illustrious in naval annals for its boldness and brilliant success, decided in a few minutes the battle, he having thus commanded in person the two large vessels successively; so that, instead of four of the nine commanders, it may be said that five out of the eight were Rhode-Islanders; and these five commanded *forty-seven* of the fifty-four guns of the squadron. Surely, when all this is considered, we may confidently expect that History will ratify the high claim put forward by Rhode Island.

In the early history of our country is found the cause why Rhode Island should have earned such an honor. Few, probably, even of this company, are aware that in Rhode Island originated the idea of a national navy, and the first official act for its establishment.* In the session of the General Assembly of Rhode Island held at East Greenwich in August, 1775, it was voted, that their delegates to the Congress be instructed “to use their whole influence for building, at the Continental expense, a fleet of sufficient force for the protection of the Colonies.”—Accordingly, on the 3d of October following, these instructions were laid before the Congress, Assembled in Philadelphia, and on the 22d of December, Congress passed resolutions for the organization of a fleet, and appointed a “Commander-in-Chief,”

*For these facts I am indebted to the Preface of the admirable Lecture on the Battle of Lake Erie, by the Hon. Tristram Burges, delivered before the Historical Society of Rhode Island in 1836, and published in 1839.

four captains, five first-lieuténants, and five second-lieutenants. Now, the commander-in-chief, Esek Hopkins, and two of the four captains, Abraham Whipple and John B. Hopkins, were from Rhode Island. And further, three of the five first-lieutenants, and four of the five second-lieutenants, were from Rhode Island. And further, the only man in the United States that ever has borne the title of Admiral was a Rhode-Islander, Esek Hopkins. And under Admiral Hopkins, the first fleet sailed from the mouth of the Delaware, in February, 1776, and on the 3d of March captured New Providence, in the Bahamas, carrying off, and safely landing at New London, a large amount of military stores, at that crisis, a most acceptable booty. Thus, the first American fleet that ever put to sea, was commanded, and mainly officered and manned, by men from Rhode Island. It was then consequent, that the first American fleet that ever overcame a hostile fleet, should be chiefly commanded and largely manned by men from Rhode Island.

While, on the 10th of September, the cannon were thundering in deadly conflict on the lake, all along the American shore hundreds of mothers, with groups of children clustered round their knees, stood listening, with such terror in their countenances as only mothers can know ; ready, should the day go against us, to flee before the tomahawk of the savage. As the news flew inland, fear was changed to joy, danger to security. The victory of Perry released the whole northwest territory from dread of the scalping-knife ; it broke up the confederacy of Indian tribes ; it wiped out the stigma of Hull's surrender ; it enabled General Harrison immediately to invade, by help of the American fleet, the British territory, driving out or capturing their army, where again good service was done by Perry, as volunteer aid to Harrison ; it led to the overthrow of British power in Upper Canada and on the upper lakes ; and the immense northwest

territory of the United States it secured against British invasion and Indian depredation then and for ever.

Nor was the effect of the victory upon the country at large, less brilliant. It came at a time of depression, to reanimate the whole land. As from town to town the news spread, crowds gathered in the streets, to utter the universal joy and exultation. The despondent took fresh hope, the weak grew strong, the strong stronger: the spirit that had kept the body of Perry erect in his boat lifted up the whole country.

My fellow-citizens, between a people and its heroes there is an intimate sympathy. Its heroes and its men of genius are the richest product of a people. Springing out of its soil, they, in the affluence of their creative force, throw back upon the soil whence they have sprung the seeds of new forces. A free people generates leaders, to strengthen and enlarge freedom.—As we have seen in the Erie fleet, the captain and the rank and file are worthy one of the other.

A people who have so nobly wrought their innate capacities, that they have achieved the right and the power to move and speak and act with self-dependence and independence,—and who by habitual watchfulness and action, keep themselves liberated from the unmanning, belittling pressure of irresistible, irresponsible power above them,—wherewith all the rest of Christendom is more or less cursed,—such a people carry into war all the requisites of victory, with a fulness of possession which no discipline of despotism, no bribes of glory, can ever bring about.—Their sight is keener, their blows are quicker, their judgment is cooler, their aim is surer; their resistance is more steadfast, their assault is irresistible; there is more life in them, there is more manhood in them. In war, as in peace, men are efficient in proportion as they are free; and the freest nation will be the only one that is invincible. At this moment, when Europe is a

boundless camp, with embattled millions equipped for destruction, the most formidable military power on the globe is that nation which, with its twenty-five millions, has but ten thousand soldiers, and a little, half-disorganized navy. Ay, my fellow-citizens, among the lessons which we are teaching the world is this great one,—that not soldiers, but *men*, constitute the bulwark of a nation. And we are teaching it, too, the method of producing in countless multitudes these self-reliant men.

So long as we continue to be self-governed, we shall abound in civil strength and manhood, and therefore in military strength and manhood. Military strength does not create civil ; it saps it, and thus finally itself ; but civil strength does create and perpetuate, without loss to itself, military strength. Guard we, then, as the most precious birthright ever possessed by a people, our inestimable, our most sacred liberties. And then no fear but that, in a war for principles and right, unconquerable thousands, nay, hundreds of thousands will swarm to our flag ; and the sick will again, as on Erie, crawl up from their beds to the battle ; and no fear but that, from the bosom of a people thus inspired, there will spring up to lead them other Decaturs, other Perrys.

APPENDIX A.

The following letter to Commodore Chauncey, written about the 20th of July, vividly depicts the wants and the feelings of Captain Perry at that period :—

“ DEAR SIR :

“ The enemy’s fleet of six sail are now off the bar of this harbor.— What a golden opportunity if we had men ! Their object is, no doubt, either to blockade or attack us, or to carry provisions and reinforcements to Malden. Should it be to attack us, we are ready to meet them. I am constantly looking to the eastward ; every mail and every traveller from that quarter is looked to as the harbinger of the glad tidings of our men being on their way. I am fully aware how much your time must be occupied with the important concerns of the other lake. Give me men, sir, and I will acquire both for *you* and myself honor and glory on this lake, or perish in the attempt. Conceive my feelings ;—an enemy within striking distance, my vessels ready, and not men enough to man them. Going out with those I now have is out of the question. You would not suffer it were you here. I again ask you to think of my situation ;—the enemy in sight, the vessels under my command more than sufficient, and ready to make sail, and yet obliged to bite my fingers with vexation for want of men. I know, my dear sir, full well, you will send me the crews for the vessels as soon as possible ; yet a day appears an age. I hope that the wind, or some other cause, will delay the enemy’s return to Malden until my men arrive, and *I will have them.*”

Two days after this letter was despatched, the British squadron being becalmed off the harbor of Erie, Captain Perry pulled out with his gun-

boats to attack it. After a few shots had been exchanged, a breeze springing up, the enemy stood off.

On the 23d of July, he received a reinforcement of seventy men and officers from Commodore Chauncey, to whom he immediately wrote as follows :—

“ MY DEAR SIR :

“ I have this moment had the very great pleasure of receiving yours by Mr. Champlin, with the seventy men. The enemy are now off this harbor, with the Queen Charlette, Lady Prevost, Chippeway, Erie, and Friend's Good-Will. My vessels are all ready. For God's sake, and yours, and mine, send me men and officers, and I will have them all in a day or two. Commodore Barclay keeps just out of the reach of our gunboats. I am not able to ship a single man at this place. I shall try for volunteers for our cruise. Send on the commander, my dear sir, for the Niagara. She is a noble vessel. Woolsey, Brown, or Elliott I should like to see amazingly. I am very deficient in officers of every kind.— Send me officers and men, and honor is within our grasp. The vessels are all ready to meet the enemy the moment they are officered and manned.— Our sails are bent, provisions on board, and, in fact, every thing is ready. Barclay has been bearding me for several days; I long to have at him.— However anxious I am to reap the reward of the labor and anxiety I have had on this station, I shall rejoice, whoever commands, to see this force on the lake, and surely I had rather be commanded by my friend than by any other. Barclay shows no disposition to avoid the contest.”

How expressive is this letter! Here he proposes to Commodore Chauncey to take command himself, hoping thereby to get his fleet manned. For the general good, he offers to sink himself into a subordinate, and forego the present hope of glory. Goaded again by another appeal from General Harrison, he again writes to Commodore Chauncey :—

“ SIR :

“ I have this moment received, by express, the inclosed letter from General Harrison. If I had officers and men, and I have no doubt you will send them, I could fight the enemy and proceed up the lake. But,

having no one to command the Niagara, and only one commissioned lieutenant, and two acting lieutenants, whatever my wishes may be, going out is out of the question. The men that came by Mr. Champlin are a motley set,—blacks, soldiers, and boys. I cannot think you saw them after they were selected. I am, however, pleased to see any thing in the shape of a man.”

APPENDIX B.

THE DISCOURSE on the Battle of Lake Erie by Dr. Usher Parsons, being written by an eyewitness of high character and intelligence, is the most authentic history that we have of that day. From this Discourse, delivered before the Rhode Island Historical Society, in 1852, I extract the following passage, as giving a graphic picture of what was going on in the Lawrence :—

“When the battle had raged an hour and a half, I heard a call for me at the small sky-light, and stepping towards it I saw it was the Commodore, whose countenance was as calm and placid as if on ordinary duty.— ‘Doctor,’ said he, ‘send me one of your men ;’ meaning one of the six that were to assist me, which was done instantly. In five minutes the call was repeated and obeyed, and, at the seventh call I told him he had them all. He asked if any could pull a rope, when two or three of the wounded crawled upon deck to lend a feeble hand in pulling at the last guns.

“When the battle was raging most severely, Midshipman Lamb came down, with his arm badly fractured. I applied a splint, and requested him to go forward and lie down. As he was leaving me, and while my hand was on him, a cannon-ball struck him in the side, and dashed against the other side of the room, instantly terminating his sufferings. Charles

Polrig, a Narragansett Indian, who was badly wounded, suffered in like manner.”

“ There were other incidents less painful to witness. The Commodore’s dog had seated himself in the bottom of the closet containing all our crockery. A cannon-ball passed through the closet, and smashed crockery and door, covering the floor with fragments. The dog set up a barking protest against the right of such an invasion of his chosen retirement.

“ Lieutenant Yarnall had his scalp badly torn, and came below with the blood streaming over his face. Some lint was hastily applied, and confined with a large bandanna, with directions to report himself for better dressing after the battle, as he insisted on returning to the deck. The cannon-balls had knocked to pieces the hammocks stowed away on deck, and let loose their contents, which were reed or flag tops, that floated in the air like feathers, and gave the appearance of a snow-storm. These lighted upon Yarnall’s head covered with blood, and on coming below with another injury, his bloody face covered with the cat-tails, made his head resemble that of a huge owl. Some of the wounded roared out with laughter, that the Devil had come for us.”

CELEBRATION OF THE DAY.

SATURDAY, the 10th of September, 1853, was the fortieth anniversary of the Battle of Lake Erie. The occasion had been annually celebrated for many years by the Newport Artillery, a corps organized in 1741; which paraded and visited the widow of Commodore Perry, in honor of the day rendered illustrious by his most seasonable, important, and noble victory. During the last two or three years, his son, who is engaged in the practice of the law at Newport, has commanded the company; and motives of delicacy thus interfered with the usual observance of the day. The members of the Newport Artillery, cherishing with honest pride the memory of Perry, and attached from patriotic feeling and personal associations to the anniversary of his great achievement, were desirous of a more emphatic and general commemoration than had yet marked its return. The lapse of time had already thinned the ranks of the survivors of the battle, although most of those engaged were young men; and it was not to be hoped that either the family or comrades of the hero would long be spared to participate in the ceremonies of such an occasion. These considerations led them to propose to their fellow-citizens a civic and military celebration worthy of the occasion. Accordingly, committees were appointed, the soldiers of the State invited, an orator chosen, and all the participants in the battle that could be discovered, courteously urged to be present. These arrangements were carried into effect with much zeal and unanimity; the town was decorated with flags, flowers, and mottoes; an ample collation was served up at the Ocean House, a large procession organized, salutes fired, and all the usual demonstrations incident to a national holiday provided. Notwithstanding a copious shower which fell at the hour specified for the *cortege* to start, with the exception of abridging its route, these arrangements were fully carried into effect. Numerous strangers came from a distance, and many of the summer visitors at Newport attended the ceremonies. George H. Calvert, Esq., of Baltimore, for many years a resident there, kindly acquiesced in the wishes of his fellow-citizens, and, at a few days' notice, undertook to address them. The band from Fort Adams and the Newport

and Pawtucket Brass Bands were in attendance ; the officers of the army garrisoned here, the State and municipal authorities, the professional men of the city, the fire companies of Newport. and one from New Bedford, as well as the Kentish Guards and Warren Artillery, occupied the body-pews of the church ; the galleries were appropriated to ladies, and the platform to the survivors of the battle. Altogether, the scene thus presented was effective and memorable.

After appropriate music, the Rev. Henry Jackson offered up a prayer which he prefaced by the following passages of Scripture :—

“The Lord wrought a great victory that day. We will rejoice in thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners. Some trust in chariots and some in horses ; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise ; be thankful unto him and bless his name. For the Lord is good ; his mercy is everlasting ; and his truth endureth unto all generations. By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation ; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are far off upon the sea ; which stilleth the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people. The Lord bless thee, and keep thee ; the Lord make his face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee ; the Lord lift up his countenance, and give thee peace. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. His right hand and his holy arm hath gotten him the victory. Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. Fear God, who made heaven and earth, and the sea. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

“The orator,” says the Newport Mercury, “spoke with clearness and force. He seemed to have drawn strength from his subject, and was sustained and borne along by the patriotism that stirred every heart on that occasion. His narrative of the battle was as clear and concise as though he had participated in the exciting scenes he described, and those best able to judge of its correctness, at its conclusion gave him their hearty approbation. Repeatedly he was interrupted by the plaudits of the audience ; and when he addressed the survivors, collectively and individually, and told of their deeds of daring in their country’s cause, forty years ago that

very hour, the feelings of his hearers found vent in the most enthusiastic applause. And on the close of the address, forgetting the place, lost to every thing but the excitement of the moment, they arose as one man, and gave three hearty cheers. Then came congratulations on all sides, every eye bespeaking pleasure, every familiar hand extended to grasp that of the orator; all were happy, all burned with the patriotism enkindled in their hearts.

“The ceremony over, the procession again formed. The rain had ceased to fall, the clouds were breaking away, and in half an hour the sun was shining brightly. The procession moved north to the Liberty Tree, down Thames Street, to Howard Street, up Howard to Spring Street, up Spring to Turo Street, and so round to the Ocean House, where a collation had been provided for the company. Hon. Robert B. Cranston presided at the table. On his right hand sat the orator and the clergyman, the survivors, officers of the army and navy, and others; and on the left, the Governor and suite, and invited guests.

“The Hall of the Ocean House was tastefully decorated with flags, shields, and mottoes, and the tables were elegantly furnished, and we heard but one expression on the part of the guests,—numbering about six hundred,—that of satisfaction.”

SURVIVORS OF THE BATTLE OF LAKE ERIE.

POST-CAPTAIN WILLIAM V. TAYLOR.

LIEUTENANT THOMAS BROWNELL.

DR. USHER PARSONS.

MR. GEORGE CORNELL.

MR. REUBEN WRIGHT.

MR. ISAAC PECKHAM.

 COMMITTEE OF ARRANGEMENTS.

COLONEL C. G. PERRY.

LIEUT.-COL. THOMAS B. CARR.

MAJOR WILLIAM H. STANHOPE.

CAPTAIN BENJAMIN MARSH, 2d.

C. W. TURNER. *Clerk and Quartermaster.*

J. ALFRED HAZARD.

PELEG CLARKE.

R. B. CRANSTON.

WILLIAM B. SWAN.

R. J. TAYLOR.

H. E. TURNER.

GEORGE C. MASON.

THOMAS B. SHERMAN.

JOHN ELDRED.

ORDER OF ARRANGEMENTS

FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE 10TH OF SEPTEMBER.

THE public are cordially invited to unite in the celebration of the Fortieth Anniversary of the Victory on Lake Eric, on the 10th of September, 1813, in the city of Newport, according to the arrangements published below.

A salute will be fired by the Artillery Company, on the arrival of the Governor and suite, who will then be escorted to the State House, and the invited guests will occupy the Representatives' Hall.

The procession will be formed on the Parade at 10 o'clock, under the direction of

Chief Marshal

WILLIAM B. SWAN,

Assisted by Messrs.

John Eldred,

William H. Greene,

Charles Devens, Jr.,

C. C. Van Zandt,

James F. Stevens.

Military of the State.

Fire Department.

Chief Marshal and Aids.

Orator and Chaplain.

Survivors of the Battle.

Officers of the U. S. Army, Navy, and Revenue Marine.

Surviving Officers and Men of the War of 1812.

Sheriff of Newport County.

Governor of the State and Aids.

Major-General and Aids.

General Staff.

Brigadier-Generals and Staff.

Civil Officers of the United States.

Civil Officers of the State.

City Marshal

Mayor, Aldermen, and Common Council.

Marshals.

Invited Guests.

Citizens and Strangers on foot.

Citizens and Strangers on Horseback.

The procession will move up Broad Street to the Hay Scales, down Spring Street to Howard, down Howard to Thames, up Thames to Marlborough, up Marlborough to Farewell, up Farewell to the North Church, where the following order of exercises will be observed :—

Music by the U. S. Band.

Prayer by Rev. Henry Jackson.

Music by Newport Brass Band.

Address by GEORGE H. CALVERT, Esq.

Music by the U. S. Band.

Benediction.

Voluntary on the Organ.

Returning, the procession will move up Farewell Street to the Liberty Tree, down Thames Street to Washington Square, up Touro Street to the Ocean House, where a collation will be served by JOHN G. WEAVER, Esq., to the military, firemen, and invited guests.

A sufficient number of police will be in attendance, to enforce order throughout the day.

By order of the Committee of Arrangements.

HENRY E. TURNER, *Secretary.*

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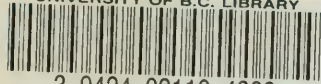
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