

CHAPTER XXV.
Stephen Decatur

1779-1820

DURING the first term that Thomas Jefferson was President, the United States was engaged in a naval war with Tripoli. This small nation, on the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, demanded that the United States should pay her a large sum of money; if we would not, Tripoli proposed to capture our merchant vessels wherever she could find them.

The United States refused to pay this tribute, and for four years our navy was employed in fighting these pirates. When peace was made, the United States had won for her navy a place among the navies of the world.

This naval war gave training to many sailors who, a few years later, were required to meet the navy of Great Britain, then called "The Mistress of the Seas." Many heroic encounters took place in the war with Tripoli, which showed the bravery of the sailors of the young nation formed by the thirteen States.

Among them was one incident which caused the Congress of the United States to present a sword to the young lieutenant, its hero.

One of the largest and best of the American men of war, the *Philadelphia*, had been accidentally run aground in the very harbor of Tripoli. The sailors had been compelled to abandon it, and in a short time the people of Tripoli had taken possession. This was a great loss to the American fleet; a double loss, for it meant one less vessel for them and one more vessel for the enemy.

The abandoned ship was directly in range of the guns of the forts and war vessels of Tripoli. To try to recapture it would have been unwise; many lives would have been lost in an attempt that doubtless would have proved a failure. However, the daring lieutenant, one dark night, took the *Intrepid* and sailed slowly into the harbor.

This small vessel had been captured from the enemy and still had the appearance of being one of the Tripolitan boats. The *Intrepid* was brought directly to the side of the *Philadelphia*, and the lieutenant and his men leaped aboard. The Tripolitan crew fled in their boats to the shore; the American seamen set fire to the *Philadelphia*. Though the guns from the forts opened on them at once, yet the *Intrepid* sailed out of the harbor without losing a man.

Lieut. Stephen Decatur thus won for himself a place among the great American heroes.

Decatur was born in Maryland during the Revolutionary War. His father also was an officer in the American navy, and Stephen took his first voyage with him when he was but eight years of age. Before he was twenty he was a midshipman on board the *United States*. Young Decatur labored hard to make himself master of his profession, and he soon became an excellent sailor and a good officer. When but twenty-five years of age, because of his exploit at Tripoli, he was made a commodore in the American navy.

One day, as his ship was sailing in the open sea, the cry suddenly rang out, "Man overboard!" Sailors sprang to launch the boats, but Decatur instantly sprang into the sea and in a few moments succeeded in reaching the drowning man. He held him above the waves until the boats reached the spot, and both men were pulled aboard.

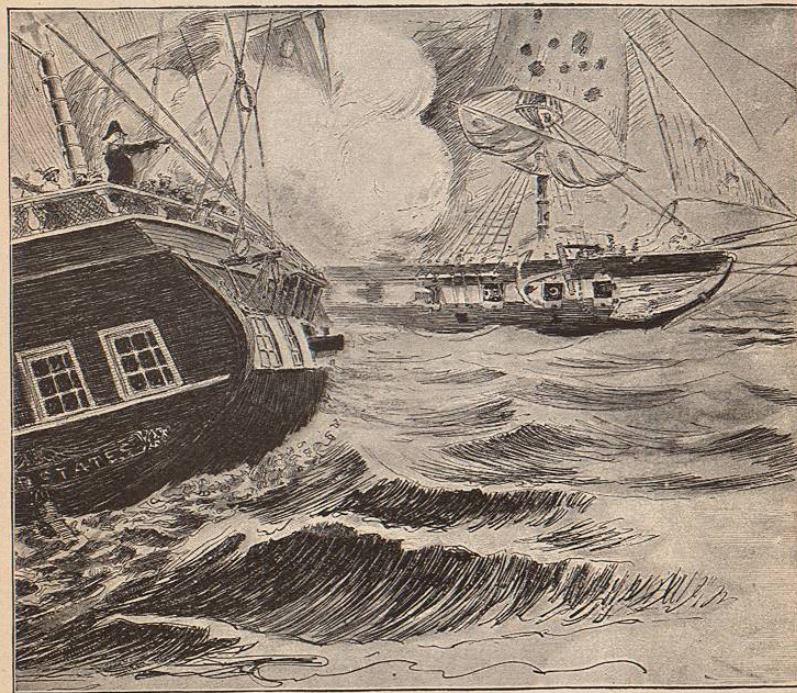
When the war with Great Britain, called the "War of 1812," broke out, Commodore Decatur was in command of the frigate *United States*. Soon after putting out to sea, Decatur fell in with the British frigate *Macedonian*, commanded by Captain Carden. The two vessels cleared their decks for action. Just before the battle commenced, little Jack Creamer, a lad of ten years, who had been allowed to make the cruise, though not old enough to be enlisted as one of the crew, started forward toward Decatur, touched his hat, and said to him: "Commodore, will you please to have my name put down on the muster roll?"

"Why, my lad?" replied the captain, surprised at the courage and confidence the little fellow manifested.

"So that I can draw my share of the prize-money, sir." Decatur gave the order that he should be enrolled, and Jack returned to the gun of which he was powder boy.

Then the carnage began. The guns of the *United States* were fired with such rapidity that the whole ship seemed to be one mass of flame and smoke from stem to stern. A shot soon carried away the mizzenmast of the *Macedonian*. One of the gunners exclaimed: "Ay, ay, Jack, we have made a brig of her." (You must remember that a ship has three masts, all square-rigged, while a brig has two; one of the ship's masts having been shot away, of course but two remained, and the gunner called it, therefore, a brig.) Decatur, who was standing by, immediately replied: "Take good aim,

my lad, at the mainmast, and she will soon be a sloop." (The sloop has but one mast.) Soon her fore and main topmasts went over the side, and her bowsprit, foreyard, and both remaining masts were all badly crippled.



DECATUR ON THE "UNITED STATES" CAPTURING THE BRITISH "MACEDONIAN."

A gunner saw his comrade desperately wounded at his side, and exclaimed to him: "Ah, my good fellow, I must attend to the enemy a few minutes longer; then I will look out for you. His colors must soon come down." "Let me live till I hear that," replied the wounded man, "and I shall

want care from nobody." In seventeen minutes more the *Macedonian* struck her colors, a complete wreck.

Soon after the action was ended, Decatur sent for Jack Creamer and said: "Well, Jack, we have taken her, and your share of the prize, if we get her safe into port, will probably be two hundred dollars. What will you do with it?"

"I will send half of it to my mother, sir, and the other half shall pay for my schooling."

"That is noble!" exclaimed Decatur.

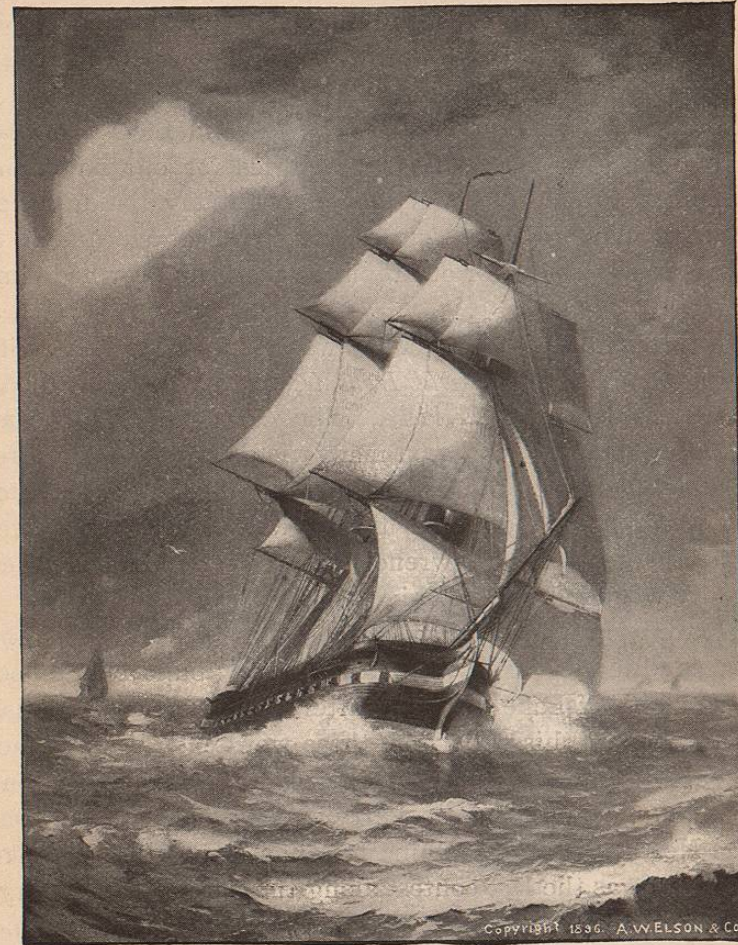
The commodore now received Captain Carden on board the *United States*. That officer extended his sword to the victorious Decatur, but the brave commodore said to him:

"Sir, I cannot receive the sword of a man who has so bravely defended his ship." In a private letter to his wife the commodore wrote: "One-half of the satisfaction arising from this victory is destroyed in seeing the mortification of poor Carden, who deserved success as much as we did who had the good fortune to obtain it. I do all I can to console him."

But what a terrible thing such a naval battle is! While on the *United States* only seven were killed and five others wounded, on the *Macedonian*, out of a crew of three hundred, more than one-third of them were killed or wounded.

One of the officers who was sent by Commodore Decatur on board the *Macedonian* after the surrender, described the horrible scenes that he witnessed in the following words: "Fragments of the dead were distributed in every direction; the decks covered with blood; one continued agonizing yell of the unhappy wounded; a scene so horrible of my fellow-creatures I assure you deprived me very much of the pleasure of victory."

We have seen in the war with Spain how, by the vast im-



THE FAMOUS UNITED STATES VESSEL "CONSTITUTION" (OLD IRONSIDES).

From the painting by Marshall Johnson.

provements which have been made in warlike implements, the destruction of life to-day is immensely greater than at that period. It is to be hoped that the time is near when the leading nations of the world will agree to settle their disputes peacefully and make war impossible.

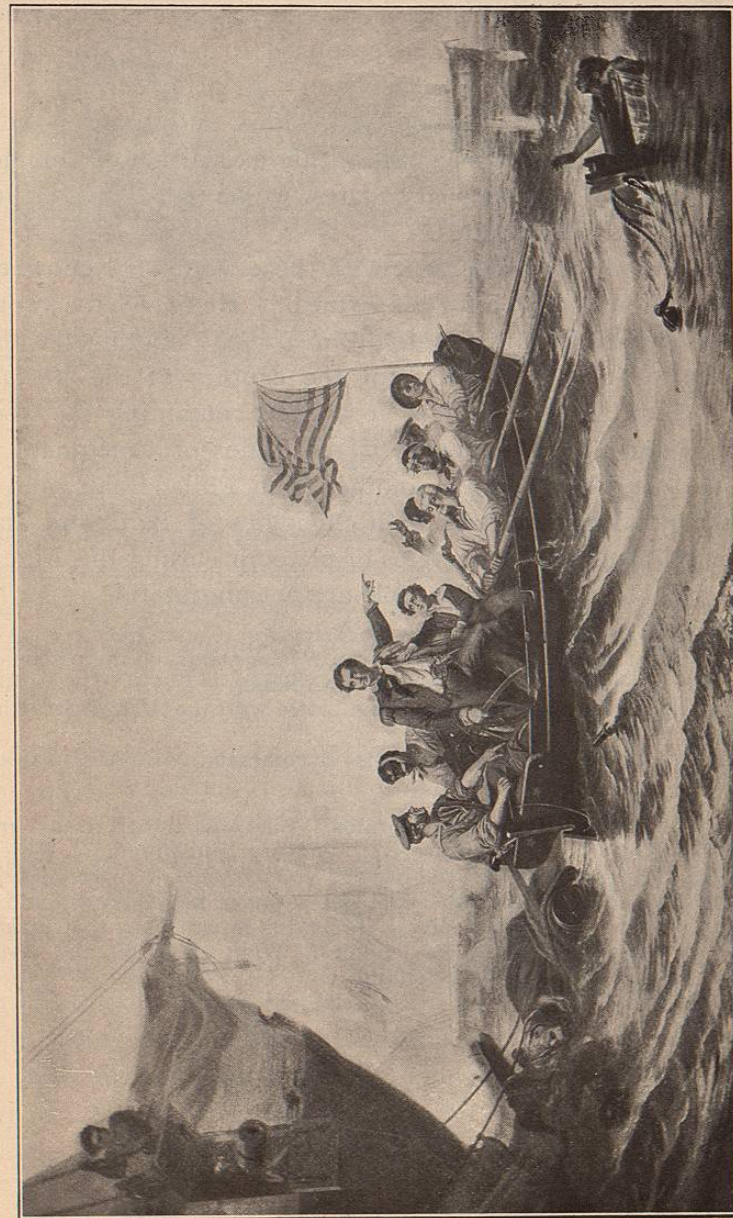
The battle between the *United States* and the *Macedonian* was but one in a long series of victories for our navy, and Commodore Decatur was only one among many distinguished naval commanders who brought the British government to show greater respect for our republic than she ever had done before.

In the first naval battle of the war, Capt. Isaac Hull, with the frigate *Constitution* (*Old Ironsides*, as it has been called), defeated the British *Guerriere*. The *Essex*, under the command of Captain Porter, won many victories and made a remarkable voyage on the Pacific Ocean. The United States frigate *Chesapeake* yielded to the British *Shannon* only after the death of Captain Lawrence, who had exclaimed, when mortally wounded, "Don't give up the ship!"

Not only was our navy successful on the ocean, but on the lakes as well. Capt. Oliver Hazard Perry built a little fleet on the shores of Lake Erie, and after a fight with the British fleet announced his victory in these words: "We have met the enemy and they are ours: two ships, two brigs, one schooner, and one sloop." Perry's victory ended the war in the Northwest, and Captain McDonough's victory on Lake Champlain was the last contest along the northern boundary.

In December, 1814, the treaty of Ghent was signed and the last war with Great Britain came to an end.

This war with Great Britain encouraged Algiers and the Barbary States to make war again upon our vessels in the Mediterranean. Commodore Decatur was sent in 1815 with



PERRY TRANSFERRING HIS FLAG AT THE BATTLE OF LAKE ERIE.
(From a Photograph of the Painting in the Capitol at Washington.)

a fleet to demand satisfaction. The frightened Algerines promptly signed a treaty and promised to pay for the ships which they had captured and to stop their privateering. Decatur sailed away to Tripoli and Tunis, and those powers agreed to the same terms. Since this expedition of Commodore Decatur to the Barbary States, we have had no further trouble from those pirates.

Baltimore toasted Decatur with these words: "Renowned for his action; beloved for his virtues." He received a sword from Congress for burning the *Philadelphia*; another for the attacks on Tripoli; a medal for the capture of the *Macedonian*; from the city of New York a box containing the freedom of the city; the medal of the Order of Cincinnati; a sword from Pennsylvania, another from Philadelphia, and a third from Virginia; and both the cities of Baltimore and Philadelphia sent him services of plate for closing the Algerine war. The American people are not ungrateful.

Explain the cause of the war with Tripoli.

Tell the story of the burning of the *Philadelphia*; of the rescue of the "man overboard"; of the boy, Jack Creamer.

Describe Decatur's early life; the battle with the *Macedonian*; the conquest of the Barbary States.

Give accounts of some of the naval commanders in the War of 1812.

Why do we call Tripolitans pirates? Why was it better to burn the *Philadelphia* than to capture it? What is a midshipman? Which required the more bravery, to burn the *Philadelphia* or to rescue the drowning man? Why did Jack Creamer suppose that there would be prize-money that he might share? Why did Decatur say that Jack's proposed use of his money was "noble"? What effect did the naval War of 1812 have upon Great Britain?



CHAPTER XXVI

Andrew Jackson

1767-1845

IN the Revolutionary War, after the surrender of General Lincoln at Charleston, the whole of South Carolina was overrun by the British army. Among those captured on one of these raids was a small boy, thirteen years old. He was carried prisoner to Camden, and nearly starved. While in Camden a British officer, with a very imperious tone, ordered the boy to clean his boots, which were covered with mud.

"Here, boy! You young rebel, what are you doing there? Take these boots and clean them, and be quick about it, too!"

The boy looked up at him and said:

"Sir, I won't do it. I am a prisoner of war and expect proper treatment from you, sir."

The enraged officer drew his sword and aimed a blow at the boy's head, which would doubtless have killed him on the spot had he not thrown up his left arm to protect himself. As it was, he received a severe cut on the arm, the mark of which he carried to the day of his death.

His brother, for a similar offence, received a deep cut upon the head, from the effect of which he died a few days later. Some weeks afterward, his mother, worn out by grief,