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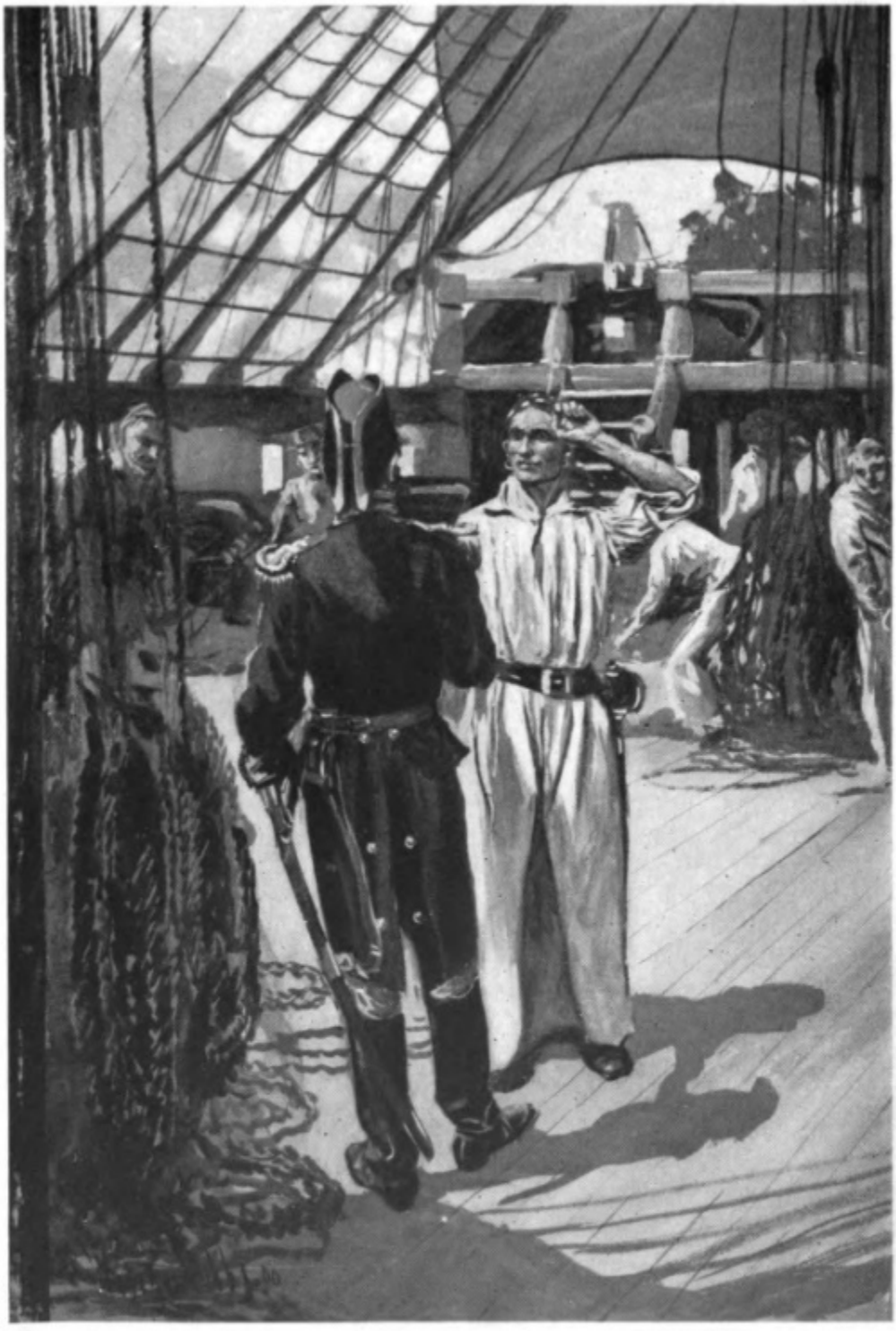

"You knows we allus shakes hands afore we git into a fight."

(See page 127.)

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REUBEN JAMES

A HERO OF THE FORECASTLE

BY

CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

AUTHOR OF
COMMODORE PAUL JONES, FOR LOVE OF COUNTRY, FOR
THE FREEDOM OF THE SEA, STEPHEN DECATUR, ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY GEORGE GIBBS AND OTHERS

NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1900

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TO MY BOYS,

CYRUS TOWNSEND, JR.,
SIDNEY GUTHRIE, AND
ESMOND BARRETT,

THIS BOOK

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

BY THEIR FATHER.

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PREFACE.

AMONG the famous characters treated of in The Young Heroes of our Navy series, the plain name of REUBEN JAMES may seem at first glance sadly out of place. He was nothing but a common sailor; a common sailor he was born, a common sailor he remained, a common sailor he died. He never even learned to write his own name. He had all the faults and failings of his rude class, and most of its virtues as well. I dare not claim that in any sense he ever became an uncommon sailor. No; he was just a type of the plain American blue jacket of the beginning of our navy.

Though better known than most of his class in that he almost alone, among the many brave sailors who fought our battles on the sea, is mentioned in the pages of history, I am sure there were many others like him, equally brave, equally devoted, equally skillful. When he saved the life of his great commander by his heroic sacrifice, he preserved to his country an officer who lived to render her splendid service. Therefore the victories and achievements of that officer belong as well to Reuben James as to himself.

Nearly all individual greatness stands out against a

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bright background of high endeavor on the part of unknown men, and rests upon a vast, if forgotten, amount of popular effort. In other words, the man on the quarter-deck can do little without the aid and co-operation of the man before the mast. It seemed good to me, therefore, when I was asked to write a sketch of some naval worthy, to include among the officers and gentlemen of this series the story of the man behind the gun, REUBEN JAMES, A HERO OF THE FORE-CASTLE.

He belongs with them all, for the sailor made them all.

CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY.

PHILADELPHIA, PA., *April, 1900.*

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The publishers desire to acknowledge the courtesy of Edgar Stanton Maclay, Esq., who has consented to the use of certain cuts and diagrams from his well-known History of the United States Navy.

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REUBEN JAMES.

CHAPTER I.

UPON a summer evening near the close of the last century, a sturdy, fair-haired lad, about sixteen years of age, dressed in a soiled and tattered suit of home-spun, without coat or shoes, was walking down the river front of the city of Philadelphia, near the wharves. In his left hand he carried a small bundle; with his right he held a piece of coarse bread, begged from a house on Market Street a few moments before, which he was eating ravenously. His face and hands were grimy and soiled. He looked altogether friendless and lonely, as he shambled along with the awkward gait of a countryman. He had walked from Wilmington, Delaware, during the past two days, sleeping in the fields, and subsisting on scanty charity by the way. It was evident that he was very tired and very hungry. There were marks of tears around his dull eyes, and his whole appearance was utterly forlorn.

His uncouth, rude aspect attracted the attention of some of the ruffians from the purlieus of the little city, who were accustomed to congregate on the

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wharves on the river front in the cool of the evening, and as he continued his aimless saunter he was met here and there by jibes and sneers. Presently one or two of the boys about his own age, or older, fell in line and walked along with him, mimicking his awkward gait and ravenous eating, and creating great laughter among the idle bystanders. To all the remarks he vouchsafed no answer, nor did he deign to notice the antics of his tormentors, until one of the largest lads, grown bolder by a fancied immunity, by a quick motion knocked the crust of bread from his hand. It fell into the street. The boy's face flushed and his eyes filled. Stooping, he picked up the bread, wiped it off carefully, and stowed it away in the pocket of his tattered breeches. The act was greeted with roars of laughter, and cries of "Pig! pig! Gutter picker!" etc., rang in the air.

The boy clinched his hand in the most deliberate manner, and then, with a quickness not expected in one of his loose-jointed appearance, he struck the lad who had knocked the bread in the street full in the face. The hulking fellow went down as if he had been shot. Without a second's hesitation the countryman followed up his blow by springing into the midst of the crowd and striking right and left vigorously. The suddenness of the onslaught took them by surprise and they gave ground a little, but in a moment they furiously returned, and sprang at him with cries and ejacu-

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lations and rude oaths. The very number of his assailants gave the countryman a certain immunity, for they crowded about him so closely as to be unable to strike him with effect.

The first boy, however, had by this time risen to his feet, and, filled with fury, roughly cleared a passage for himself through the crowd until he caught the young countryman by the throat.

"Stop it, the rest of ye!" he cried. "He's my game now. Git back there, will ye? Leave him to me. You, John, ketch him by the legs. Gus, take him by the hands. Now, then, down with him! Hard!"

Suiting the action to the words, with the assistance of the two or three boys mentioned, the lad was thrown violently to the ground, where three or four others held him securely in spite of his frantic struggles. Somebody produced a few fathoms of line, and he was soon bound hand and foot.

"Now, ye country hobbledehoy, tell us who ye are an' wot yer doin' here, afore we throw ye in the river," said the large boy. "Wot d'ye mean by hittin' a gentleman like me? Wot's yer name?"

The little country boy said nothing. He still writhed and twisted and strove to release himself from his bonds, and vouchsafed no reply to the persistent questions. Infuriated by his silence, the large boy deliberately kicked him in the side, and was proceeding to administer an-

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other kick, when he was jerked violently backward, thrown to the ground with great force, and viciously kicked a half-dozen times before he could rise. As he struggled to his feet he saw standing over him, with clinched fists, flashing eyes, and flushed cheeks, a tall, handsome, well-dressed, distinguished-looking lad, younger and slighter than he, but with such a spirit and intensity of purpose gleaming in his eyes that, after one glance, he backed away muttering fiercely. The rest of his force rallied around the bully and grouped themselves opposite the young gentleman who still faced them.

"You cowards!" he said contemptuously, "a dozen to one! Shame on you!" Whipping a knife out of his pocket as he spoke, he quickly stooped down, cut the lashings, and the country boy at once rose to his feet.

"Now stand here beside me," said the other lad, "and if you have the spirit for it we'll fight it out together."

"I've got the spirit to fight, master," responded the boy. "Yon big one bears my mark on his face there, an' t'others too. It took all on 'em to throw me down."

"Who are ye, anyway, ye popinjay?" said the biggest boy. "Comin' here an' interferin' with our fun? Ye young aristocrat!"

"I'll show you who I am!" cried the young man, moving forward, apparently undaunted by the number

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of his enemies, his eyes flashing. He was closely followed by the slow but stouter country boy.

Confident in their numbers, the wharf rats closed around the two. But the impending outbreak was stopped by the opportune arrival of a brawny sailor.

"Avast there!" he shouted in the gruff voice of the sea. "Get a move on ye, ye dogs!—It's all right, Master Stephen," he said, interposing his huge bulk in front of the young gentleman.—"You, be off with ye," he added, turning to the abashed ruffians. "Shake a leg! Up anchor with ye! Lay yer course for another port, an' bear a hand too!" He made a step or two toward them, and not liking the appearance of the man, they turned and fled jeering.

"All safe now, Master Stephen, I think," said the sailor, smiling.

"Yes, thanks to you, Tucker. I don't know what they would have done to us if you had not happened along. Not that we were afraid of them, though," he added. "Hey, boy?"

"No, sir. Leastaways I know you wasn't, an' as fer me——" His face flushed again and his teeth clinched. Then, as his hand fell to his pocket, he hauled forth the soiled piece of bread and began gnawing it greedily as before.

"Haven't you anything better than that dirty crust to eat?" exclaimed the other boy, looking at it with disgust.

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"No, sir. Ain't eat nothin' since mornin', an' 'tain't no dirtier than I be, anyway."

"What's your name?" asked the first boy.

"Reuben James, sir."

"Where do you live?"

"Nowhere, sir."

"Well, where did you live? You lived somewhere once, didn't you?"

"I lived on a farm near Wilmington, down in Delaware, till yesterday."

"Why don't you live there now?"

"Well, sir, mother died last week, an' father was lost to sea w'en I was a baby, an' I didn't seem to have no place to go to, so I thought I'd come up here an' maybe I could git somethin' to do. Ain't nobody to care fer me," he said, and then, with the recollection of his loss, he leaned against the piles of the wharf and burst into tears.

"Goodness!" said the other boy, with youth's intolerance of tears. "Don't cry. Here, now," searching impetuously through his pockets and finally bringing forth a dime; "here, take this. It's all I have just now. You can get yourself a cup of coffee and a plate of meat over there at the tavern."

"Thank ye, sir, thank ye kindly," said the boy, brightening. "W'ich is the tavern, sir?"

"Why, there! That brick house. Can't you read that sign?" answered the other boy.

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"Read, sir? No, sir, I can't read."

The first boy gave a long whistle of astonishment.

"Well, what are you going to do after you get something to eat?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Where are you going to sleep to-night?"

"I don't know that, nuther."

"Tucker, can't you take him on board the Ariel?" asked the other boy, turning to the old sailor, who had remained an interested spectator of the little conversation.

"No, sir, not 'less he ships reg'lar," replied the latter, touching his cap. "Cap'n he don't allow no wisitors on board his wessels, but if I mought make so bold, sir, we're needin' a ship's boy. If this youngster ain't got no place fer to go, an' wants to go a-cruisin' with us, I guess we could ship him. Though he does look more like a haymaker than a sailor boy, I calkilate we could lick him into shape," he said to himself, after a deliberate inspection of Reuben.

"Good!" exclaimed the young man, brightening, and turning to James. "How would you like to be a sailor?"

"I mought as well be that as anythin' else, I guess," answered the lad indifferently.

"As well!" cried the other boy. "Why, I am dying

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to be one, only father won't let me; but I'll be one yet, you see! Then we might get on a ship together, perhaps.—Isn't that so, Tucker?"

"Y-yes, y-yes, sir," said the old sailor, "though, as a rule, there ain't much wisitin' betwixt the fore-castle an' the cabin on most ships. The officers ain't too sociable with the men."

"Oh, we'll see about that. It won't be that way on my ship when I get one," said the boy lightly, with a boy's indifference to the distinctions of rank. "So you'll go, will you?"

"Yes, sir," assented Reuben, after a moment's hesitation; "I will."

"All right," answered the other; "you'll never regret it, I'm sure. That's my father's ship out there, and I'll speak to him about you."

"Lord, sir!" exclaimed young James, filled with amazement at the idea that the beautiful ship which lay gently swinging to her anchor with the slow flood, should be the possession of the father of his new friend. "Do he own it all, sir?"

"He and some other gentlemen do," was the answer. "Well, I must be getting along for supper. Good-night. I'll see you when the Ariel gets back from Bordeaux. She goes out in the morning with the flood. I made a cruise on her when I was only eight years old. It was great fun. Good-by," said the lad, holding out his hand.

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"Mought I be so bold, sir, as to ax yer name, sir, before we parts?"

"Certainly you may," was the answer. "It's Stephen—Stephen Decatur."

"I'll never fergit wot you've done fer me to-day, sir," said the other boy gratefully, shaking the proffered hand.

"Oh, that's all right. Good-by again."

"Good-by, sir." The young countryman stood gazing wistfully after the boy, following the lithe, graceful figure of young Decatur as he ran rapidly up the street until he turned the corner.

"Now, you boy!" said the sailor, using a very different tone of voice from that when addressing Decatur, "have ye got any kit?"

"Any kit, sir? Mother had an old cat down at Wilmington, but I didn't bring her along."

"Cat!" roared the boatswain's mate, breaking into loud laughter; "we don't want no more cats on board our ship than them we've got. Say, sonny, it's got nine tails, that cat has, an' every one o' them cuts like—whew-w-w! W'ich I means, have ye got any close, or anythin' else?"

"Nuthin' but this, sir," said the lad, lifting the bag.

"Wot's that?"

"It's a pair o' shoes, sir."

"Well, go over to the public, there, and git somethin' to eat, an' come along. Look sharp about it, too,

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'cause I won't wait here all night. Bosun's mates ain't not in the habit o' waitin' fer ship's boys, noways."

"Poor little chap!" said the man gruffly, as the lad ran across the street and entered the eating house. "He's got a hard time afore him, sure."

In a few moments the boy, looking considerably refreshed, came slouching across the street, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Well, ye got somethin' to eat, did ye?" asked Tucker.

"Yes, sir," was the answer.

"All right. Now we'll go aboard."

"Yes, sir," said the boy, as before.

"Can ye swim?"

"No, sir," he replied, opening his eyes widely. "Be we got to swim?"

"Well, not this time," answered the boatswain's mate with another laugh. "I can't swim nuther. It's a singilar thing," he added reflectively, "how many sailors can't swim. Seems as if they've got such an awersion to water, an' specially to gittin' into it, that they don't never learn. Give me a deck plank, or a foot rope, or a yardarm, an' I'm all right; but as fer water, I hates it!"

This was very astonishing doctrine to young Reuben, but with rare discretion he made no comment. The two walked down the wharf and found a man sitting in a small boat alongside, who agreed to put

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them on board the Ariel for a nickel apiece, which Tucker paid.

The sun had set and the night was coming on when they reached the side of the ship. Tucker seized the manrope and climbed nimbly up the battens to the gangway, the accommodation ladder having been unshipped in view of their early departure. Reuben followed him slowly and timidly. When he reached the deck he found the boatswain's mate waiting for him, and, in obedience to a signal, he followed him aft to the mainmast. An officer was walking the quarter-deck. The boatswain stopped and saluted. As the officer turned toward them he remarked:

"Come aboard, sir."

"Very good," replied the officer, taking a small book from the roof of the cabin and running his eye over the lines until he came to Tucker's name, after which he scribbled two initials, "C. S." It was not until long after that Reuben, who had been an interested observer, learned that the two letters stood for "clean and sober," and that the initials "D. D. D.," which appeared more frequently than the others, stood for "drunk, dirty, and disorderly," and denoted the condition of the returning seamen.

"This yere's a small boy, sir," said Tucker.

"So I see," returned the officer drily. "What did you bring him here for? This is no lodging place for wandering vagabonds."

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"I ain't no vagabond, sir," replied Reuben, entering the conversation abruptly. "I come to——"

"Silence!" roared the astonished mate, as soon as he could get his breath. "Good heavens! Are you presuming to address me on the quarter-deck of the ship without my speaking to you first? If you belonged to my crew, I would give you a good dose of the rope's end. As it is, your boat is alongside. Get in it and be off!"

"If ye please, yer honor, sir," said the old boatswain's mate, "he does belong to the crew. Leastaways he's offered to ship as boy fer the v'yage, an' knowin' the need o' one, I took the liberty o' bringin' him off. He don't know nuthin', sir. He's lived in the country all his life. He's never been off land before. He's awful ignorant, sir."

"Oh!" said the mate, somewhat mollified, "that's how it is, is it? Well, take him forward, and stow him away below somewhere, and in the morning he can sign the papers, and we'll try to lick him in shape."

"Ay, ay, sir," said the old sailor. "An' that rope's endin' you spoke about, sir?"

"Oh, we'll let that go for to-night, anyway," answered the mate with a little laugh.

"Wery good, sir," replied old Tucker, smiling. "Come along, youngster."

The man and the boy walked forward. When they

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reached the fore hatch, before they descended it, the old seaman laid his hand upon the lad's shoulder.

"Ye mought as well git yer first lesson right here an' now," he said impressively. "Never answer nobody back, specially if he's yer superior officer; an' remember, as long's yer ship's boy, everybody on the ship is yer superior officer, includin' me, unless maybe it's the cap'n of the head, an' he's a nigger. No matter wot they calls ye, or does to ye, don't answer back! Jist do wot yer told. Obey orders if ye break owners. Keep yer eyes open fer all ye can see, an' anythin' you don't know about, ax me, an' I'll tell ye." With this sweeping claim to omniscience, the two started below.

"Well, I'll ax ye somethin' now, then, Mr. Tucker," said the boy, pausing on the ladder: "Wot's a rope's endin'?"

"Now, don't be too curious about that," said the old man; "you'll find out early to-morrow mornin', I'm thinkin'; though there never was a good sailor man made without a deal of rope's endin' in the beginnin'. Seems to me it's in Scriptur, 'Spare the rope's end, an' a landlubber'll never get to be a bosun's mate.' You know Scriptur, boy?"

"No, sir. I can't read," answered the boy.

"Nuther can I," said the old sailor, "but I've got a Bible. It's a mighty comfortin' thing to have around."

As the two descended the ladder they found them-

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selves in a narrow, low-ceiled, gloomy, ill-ventilated apartment in the very eyes of the ship. A dim lantern hanging from the foremast shed a flickering light and a very bad smell in the apartment. Depending from hooks above were stretched a number of soiled, grimy hammocks.

"Here's one you can have," said Tucker, pointing; "this one's mine. T'other one belongs to Jones, but he's overstaying his leave an' won't be off, fer certain."

"Thank ye," said James politely. "What'll I do with it?"

"Git in it, boy! It's yer bed," answered the sailor.

"Bed!"

"That's wot it is, an' a wery good bed, too. Now lemme see ye try it."

The boy laid his little bundle on the deck, seized the edge of the hammock in his hands, and made a wild spring at the swinging piece of canvas. How it came about he did not know: when he gathered himself from the deck the next moment, feeling very sore and bruised, Tucker greeted the performance with a Homeric laugh.

"This is the way to do it," he said. "Take hold of that hook in the deck above there with yer right hand; put the hook of yer other elbow in the middle o' the hammock; give a jump an' a pull an' a swing. So! There ye are!"

Following these instructions, after one or two

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futile attempts Reuben mastered the trick and stretched himself out in the hammock, which he found, after all, to be a rather comfortable bed. Nightgowns were luxuries then and thereafter on the sea, and the boatswain, kicking off his shoes, removing his jacket, and loosening his jumper, followed his example. Wearied and tired as he was, the boy was soon fast asleep. He was awakened by the sound of a shrill whistle, followed by a hoarse, bawling cry:

"All hands up anchor! Turn out! turn out! Show a leg there! Shake it up, men! Lively, boys! All hands up anchor!"

Somebody hit him a vigorous thump in the back from beneath and unceremoniously tumbled him out of his hammock.

"On deck there!" shouted a rough voice, and, though scarcely awake, he followed the others. It was about three o'clock in the morning. The tide was already on the ebb, and the captain was about to get under way. Reuben was utterly ignorant of the orders and of their purport, but he was willing and anxious, and he pulled and hauled with the rest. When the capstan bars were shipped, he caught hold of one of them and pushed away with all his might. When the anchor was aweigh, and the sails sheeted home, he joined the others of the crew in swaying away on the three topsail halyards in succession. To go aloft was beyond his power at the time, but he found plenty to

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do in other directions until the ship, catching the slant of the down-river breeze, slipped noiselessly through the water, leaving the sleeping town far behind. Presently, as he felt very drowsy, and as nobody paid any attention to him, he slipped below and clambered into his hammock again, where he soon fell asleep. He was awakened some time after by his friend Tucker.

"Well, dash my wig!" said that old barnacle, shaking the hammock, "if yere ain't this young gentleman takin' a snooze, w'ile the rest on us are workin' like the slaves we is to git the ship goin'! You've mistook yer callin', youngster; you'd ought to be aft, livin' with the captain; but even he's awake. Now, break out o' here in a hurry! Mess call has been sounded and breakfast is ready."

It was broad daylight and the sun was flooding the gloomy interior of the fore peak with its radiance, as the boy dropped from his hammock and stumbled on deck. The men were clustered in a little group about the galley forward, where the cook, supreme in his station, was serving out steaming bowls of coffee and pieces of ship's bread. That was the breakfast. Not a very luxurious affair, but the boy, with the healthy appetite of a young animal, made voracious inroads upon his allotment. After he had finished his rude meal he was called aft to the captain. The commander of the ship was a well-bred, fine-looking man, of prepossessing appearance. Reuben thought that there

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was a curious likeness in his face to that of the young lad who had befriended him the day before.

"Well, sir, who are you?" said the captain shortly, but not unkindly.

"I guess I ain't nobody pertickler, sir," answered the boy doubtfully.

"That is quite evident," said the captain, smiling. "What is your name, why are you here, and what do you want?"

"My name is Reuben James, yer honor. I met a young gentleman last night, w'en the town boys had me down an' was kickin' me, an' he stepped in an' pushed 'em off, an' then he axed me wot I was goin' to do, an' he axed me how'd I like to be a sailor, an' Mr. Tucker he took me along with him, an' here I am, sir."

"Oh, you want to be a sailor, do you? Well, you don't look very promising," said the captain surveying him calmly. "What is the name of the boy who helped you and sent you here?" he added.

"His name was Stephen, sir. I disremember the last part of it, but he looked like you, sir."

"It's that young scapegrace Stephen, I'll be bound," said the man to himself, evidently not displeased with his conjecture. "Very well," he continued aloud, "we need a ship's boy, and I guess you'll do, though your feet do look more fitted to the plow furrow than they do for the footropes of the light yard.—Tucker!"

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"Ay, ay, sir!" responded the old sailor, springing forward, knuckling his forehead and giving a sea scrape.

"Take this lad down to the supercargo, and have him entered on the books of the ship as ship's boy. Keep him in your watch and look after him, and if he does not do what is right, give him a dose of the rope's end now and then—it'll do him good."

And in that manner young James entered upon a long and adventurous seafaring life, in the merchant-ship Ariel, owned by Messrs. Gurney and Smith, of Philadelphia, in conjunction with her captain, Stephen Decatur, the father of the great commodore, and himself a distinguished privateersman, and subsequently a commodore in the navy as well. It was a hard, rough, brutal life. He had not been an hour in the larboard watch before his curiosity as to what a rope's ending was had been entirely satisfied. Indeed, the demonstration had been so ample and adequate as to leave absolutely no obscurity or doubt in his mind as to what it was; and for weeks he was not allowed to forget the lesson. For the first period of his life on shipboard it seemed to his dull imagination that the principal function of a ship's boy was to afford a convenient object for the rope's end, on any and all occasions, for any and everybody. If the persistent application of the end of a rope in the hand of a stout seaman to his youthful anatomy tended to develop the man, he felt no doubt but that in the end, if he survived the

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process, he would eventually become a lord high admiral! The labor was unceasing, the hours long, the exposure severe. The food was plain, not to say coarse, and there was not too much of it, such as it was. A daily tot of grog was the most prized portion of the ration. In extra heavy weather they got more grog and less cooked food. Work went on day in and day out, with Sunday the worst day of all.

As soon as they struck the open ocean Reuben became dreadfully seasick, and remained so for several days. When he had lived on the farm he had loathed the plow, but as he felt the pangs of seasickness it seemed to him that Heaven itself could present nothing more inviting than the long furrow turned by the shining share. No one had the slightest sympathy for him, not even his best friend Tucker, but every means that a coarse imagination and long practice could dictate was used to aggravate his malady. Among the loathsome things presented to him were dishes of fat pork swimming in hot gravy, which drove him to despair. But even this finally had an end, and one day he staggered to the deck, weak, faint, trembling, and shaking, but having at last regained command of his stomach. It was the one solitary thing on the ship that he could command. The words of old Tucker were literally true. He was under the orders of everybody; even the big negro captain of the head, whose admo-

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nitions he had been told he might disregard, treated him more or less like a dog.

He was not a very bright boy, but slow and stolid, and it took him a long time to get even a reasonable working knowledge of the intricate mass of cordage in the ship. It was a longer time still before he could go aloft with any confidence. The first time he tried it he was in such terror as he had never been before. It was a calm, pleasant day, and there was but little roll on the ship, but he felt every moment as if he were about to fall off, and either be dashed to pieces on the hard deck beneath him, or drowned in the deep blue water alongside. There was a certain dogged courage about him, however, that kept him up to the mark in this and other things. In spite of the jeers of the men, who watched his first aërial performance with cruel interest and cutting comment, to the effect that he would squeeze all the tar out of the shrouds if he did not relax his grasp, he managed to get over the main topmast crosstrees and come down safely on the other side.

It was a longer time still before he could learn to run like a cat up the shaking shrouds, and, disdaining the safe lubber's hole, swing himself over the perilous futtock shrouds and into the top, and finally swarm up the slender stays to the royal yard. He did not lack practice in that quarter, however, for he was often mastheaded for infractions of discipline or drill, which

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were due more to his slowness and unfamiliarity than to any viciousness or unwillingness on his part. That very absence of receptivity and alertness gave him a certain solidity. When he learned a thing, he knew it. When he had mastered a detail, he was able to keep it in mind forever. When he had thoroughly learned to perform any part of a seaman's duty, the knowledge remained with him.

The discipline was maintained in a fearfully brutal manner in those days, especially in merchant ships. It was the rule of the loud voice, the cursing mouth, the strong arm, and the iron belaying pin, which trained and beat the young lad into some sort of efficiency. The Ariel was a paradise compared to most ships, though nowadays we should characterize her by a different word. Reuben and the rest made no complaints, however; they were used to it all, and expected it. They met the usual luck of cruising ships, passed through storms and tempests, periods of calm, reached Bordeaux, were allowed scant liberty on shore, which they put to the worst possible use in the line of dissipation, and finally completed the round voyage and dropped anchor in Philadelphia once more.

The first person to board the ship as the cable rushed through the hawse pipe was young Stephen Decatur. After dutifully greeting his father with the dignity and respect enjoined by the custom of the age and the importance of the quarter-deck, and after in-

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forming him of the continued good health of his family, Decatur raced forward. Recognizing his young friend leaning over the rail looking toward the town, he tiptoed softly toward him and struck him soundly on the back. It was no new thing for James to be struck soundly on the back, or anywhere else—he was used to it; nevertheless he turned about until his eye fell upon the gallant figure of young Stephen Decatur. His face brightened at once.

"Hello!" cried the young gentleman. "I'm so glad to see you," he added, shaking him by the hand, a performance which scandalized Tucker, who thought that such familiarity was disorganizing to the service. "How well you're looking! You don't look as if you had ever seen a plow. Have you had a good cruise? Did you have any shipwrecks? Did you have any exciting adventures? Did you see any sharks or whales? Did the ship catch fire? Did you have any storms? Were you sick? Do you like it? Tell me all about it!"

Secure for the nonce from the omnipresent rope's end by his juxtaposition to the captain's son, young Reuben detailed in his slow way the story of the cruise. By the favor of the captain, who was most indulgent to his son, Reuben spent a great deal of the time in port with Stephen, whose devoted admirer and henchman he speedily became.

On the next cruise, and the cruise after that, he remained one of the crew of the ship. With each return

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to Philadelphia the acquaintance between Decatur and James continued, while the affection of the humble sailor for his protector deepened with each visit. There was not the slightest presumption on the part of the older lad upon the condescension and familiarity of the younger. Differences in station were too definitely marked at that time to suggest the possibility of such presumption, though the differences in rank and station, as is the habit of boys, were not marked by Decatur in their intercourse. On the fourth cruise, however, when the Ariel dropped anchor in the Delaware, James was missing. Captain Decatur reported to his disconsolate son that James had deserted at Bordeaux, and thereafter they saw no more of him.

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CHAPTER II.

THE facts were, that, persuaded by some older sailors, who thought it an amusing thing to make a boy drunk, he had, while deeply intoxicated, been shipped aboard a British bark plying between Liverpool, Bordeaux, and Halifax, and, when the Ariel sailed, was miles away in the other direction. His after life was that of a common sailor of the day. He made several cruises in different ships and developed into a fine, splendid seaman, an "A. B." in every particular. He was a daring and gallant light yard man. He could take his trick at the wheel with the best of them, and there was not a nicety of the delicate art of steering a ship which he had not mastered. He could pull a skillful oar in the ship's cutter, and manage a small boat as well. He could heave the lead with any old shellback afloat. There was not a rope, brace, sheet, nor halyard which he could not find instantly on the darkest night. He could pass the weather earring of the topsail in a gale of wind like a veteran.

Mentally, he was the same rather slow, stolid lad as before. Reading was an accomplishment he never mastered to the end of his life. Physically, he was en-

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tirely different. On the land his gait had the awkwardness of the sailor, but on the heaving deck or the swaying yard it was grace and lightness itself, and for a lad he was of uncommon strength.

The fall of the year 1798 found him an able seaman in a Baltimore clipper, the Morning Star, making a round voyage to China for tea. The ship was returning from Canton, after a quick passage, and was booming along for home in about the latitude of the Bermudas when a strange thing happened.

Early one morning, the wind being light and the sea smooth, they raised a large schooner, which, favored by a slant of wind, they rapidly overhauled. As they drew near to her they saw the American flag fluttering from the gaff, Union down, as a signal of distress. In the face of this mute appeal for help the captain of the clipper changed his course, ran down to windward of the schooner, and hove to a short distance away from her. It had been blowing furiously a few days before, and there was a wrecked, broken look about the schooner which excited their compassion. Her fore topmast was gone, and she appeared to have been badly stove in on one side. There was something suspicious in her appearance, however, but the captain, trusting to the known speed of his ship, and entirely ignorant of the existence of war between the United States and France owing to the depredations of the French cruisers, unsuspiciously assumed his present condition.

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There was a man at the wheel, and one or two other men were visible on the stranger.

"Schooner ahoy!" cried the captain of the clipper. "What's the matter with you?"

A red-capped figure, wearing a cutlass, sprang upon the rail of the schooner, upon which they were slowly drifting down.

"Ve are in distress," he cried, spreading out his hands; "ve have no watair! Ve lose our boat in ze storm! Ve die for drink! Sends a boat to us!"

It was the work of a few moments to clear away one of the quarter boats, pitch a couple of breakers of water into it, and row toward the schooner; but the cutter had scarcely left the side of the ship when a change came over the schooner. As if by magic, a row of ports was thrown open, and a tarpaulin, which had covered a long, irregular mass forward, was jerked aside, revealing a long twenty-four-pound gun. The American flag came down with a run in the twinkling of an eye, and the French tricolor flapped in the breeze from the mainmast head. A command rang out on the decks of the schooner, which was instantly crowded with men. A moment later, the little vessel was enveloped with smoke, out of which came lurid flashes followed by the deep boom of the guns.

At close range the broadside of the heavily armed schooner did great execution on the clipper. A heavy round shot hit the boat on its errand of mercy and

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sank it; a grapeshot struck the captain of the clipper and instantly killed him. A shot from the long tom hulled her, and drove a cloud of splinters on board. Two or three of the other men in the unprepared American ship were hit, and fell groaning to the deck. From the lee side of the schooner, a boat filled with heavily armed men dashed around the stern and made for the clipper. Before the startled men, who were utterly unprepared for such an attack, could receive the orders of the scarcely less startled officers, the boat was hooked on forward, and a swarm of men, cutlass or pistol in hand, clambered on board over the bows. There was a show of resistance from one or two of the officers and men, but the fighting was over in a moment, and the clipper was in the possession of a French privateer, Sans Culotte. The chief American officer remaining alive protested vigorously against the capture to the captain of the privateer, on the ground that there was peace between the United States and France, but his protests, which were technically correct, were unheeded. The Sans Culotte had been so badly injured in the storm a few days before, and the Morning Star, which she had captured by such base tactics, was so speedy and graceful a ship, and of so much value besides, on account of her cargo, that the captain of the privateer determined to transfer his flag and his equipments to the latter vessel. His men, elated with their successes, and delighted with the

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great value of their prize, worked assiduously for several days, turning the honest clipper into a predatory war vessel.

At the end of that time the American seamen, who had been well treated, on the whole, by the privateers, were put on board the schooner, which was given in charge of a small crew and was ordered to Martinique. The American officers remained on the clipper, which continued on a privateering cruise. The situation of the prisoners on the little schooner was very different from what it had been on the clipper. There were fourteen prisoners on board, including Reuben, in charge of but six Frenchmen, including one officer. On account of this disparity in numbers, the prisoners were stowed below in the hold, and only allowed to come on deck one at a time. All the hatches were battened down except one, which was left open, and which was guarded day and night by one of the Frenchmen armed with a cutlass and two pistols. Another man was, of course, always stationed at the helm, and two more seamen, all heavily armed, remained on deck, while the remaining two took short rests in the cabin. It was not natural for fourteen Americans to submit tamely to six Frenchmen, however heavily armed they might be, and the hold was filled with discussions and plans as to what should be done.

By the kindness of the French officer, who remained almost constantly on deck himself, the Americans were

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allowed about one half hour each for exercise on deck during the day. The men were always carefully watched during this period and compelled to keep their distance, but Reuben, being a lad, was allowed during his half hour to go pretty much where he pleased. He was a favorite with the guards, as he had picked up a fair smattering of bad French during his successive visits to France—an unusual accomplishment for one of his station, by the way.

The plan finally determined upon depended upon the immunity he apparently enjoyed. It was a sultry afternoon in the second dogwatch, in spite of the lateness of the season, when his half hour of exercise came around again. The four men, as usual, were on deck; one man had the wheel, another stood aft looking over the taffrail at a threatening bank of clouds rising rapidly in the west, the precursor of a squall apparently; and the smallest of the group happened to be on guard at the hatch at that moment. Forward, the remaining man was leaning over the knightheads, looking aimlessly ahead.

Reuben paced up and down the gangway, drawing nearer and nearer to the hatch with each succeeding moment. His sailor's eye told him that the squall was about to break on the ship, which was favorable for his purpose. So he waited for it, praying that it would strike before his half hour expired. The Frenchmen, indifferent seamen at best, appeared to pay but

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little attention to the threatening cloud, save the helmsman, one of the best of the lot, who cast anxious glances from time to time in the direction of the horizon. The officer happened to be asleep below. As the clouds grew blacker, Reuben judged that the moment of action was approaching. Stopping in the gangway, he whistled a bar or two of The Yankee Man-of-War, a favorite sea song in those days, and broke into a few steps of the sailor's hornpipe, clicking his heels loudly on the deck.

At this signal, which had been agreed upon, the men below quietly assembled around the hatchway, carefully withdrawing themselves from the sight of the unsuspecting sentry on the deck above. The man was standing lazily near the hatch, his cutlass in one hand, a pistol in the other. He was smoking a cigarette. Suddenly the squall struck them with tropic intensity. The ship heeled over under the force of the gale until the water trickled along her lee side. The man aft ran to the mainsheet to ease it off. The man at the wheel put the helm a-lee to throw her up into the wind. In obedience to a sharp command from the oldest seaman on deck, the man forward sprang to the halyards.

At this moment Reuben leaped upon the man at the hatchway and struck him fiercely in the face with his fist and then grappled with him. He staggered, dropped his pistol, which fell through the

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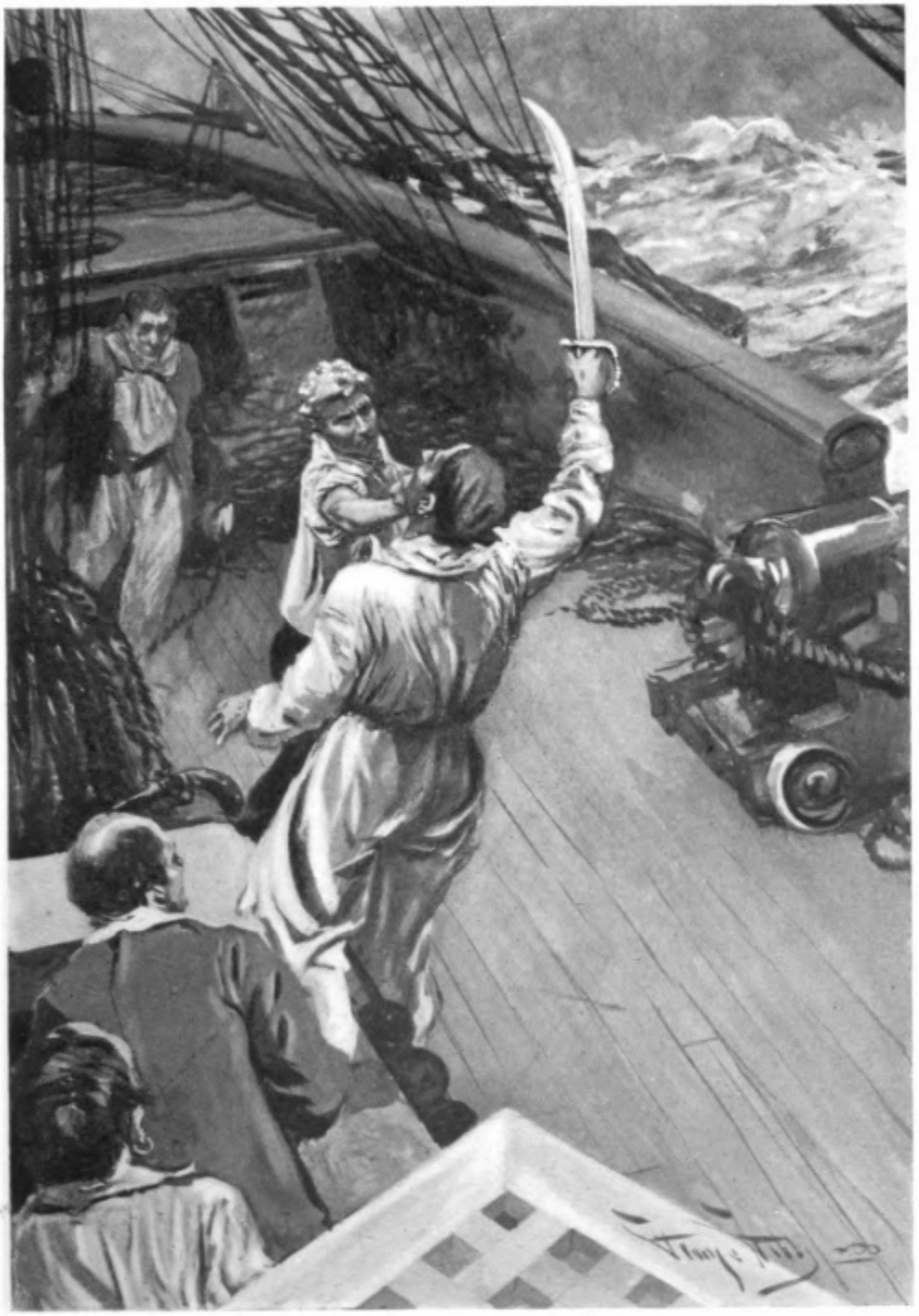

Reuben leaped upon the man.

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hatch, and, unable to use his cutlass for the moment, struggled desperately with the frantic boy on the careening ship, screaming loudly for help. The men below instantly sprang up the ladder. The first man caught the falling pistol. To wrench the cutlass from the hand of the guard and to release Reuben was the work of a moment. Two or three of the men, snatching belaying pins from the rail, rushed forward toward the man at the halyards. The man aft at the sheet whipped out his pistol and fired into the mass of Americans, killing one of them. Before he could draw his cutlass two of the sailors sprang upon him and disarmed him.

At this juncture the two remaining Frenchmen, pistol in hand, sprang out from the cuddy. A ball from the pistol captured from the guard struck the first man, the officer, in the breast and instantly killed him. The captured cutlass in the hand of another American dispatched the other of the two. There only remained the man at the wheel. With the instinct of a sailor he had clung to the spokes. The squall had been blowing upon them in wild fury. To let go the helm meant the broaching to of the schooner and the loss of them all, so with a white face he held on. In the midst of the confusion the main topmast carried away and crashed over their heads. There were good seamen on the vessel, however, and they soon cleared the wreck and got the ship before

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the wind, which died away as suddenly as it had sprung up.

The men were jubilant over their success, though their situation was by no means devoid of peril, and their escape still to be effected. In the first place, the only navigator among them, the French officer, had been killed. They were a rude, unlettered lot. Scarce one of them could read. As to studying the mysteries of the chart, it was utterly beyond them. They had a general idea that the West Indies lay in a westerly direction, so they shaped their course to due west by the compass, the wind permitting it, in the hope of making a landfall, though what land they might reach was a problem to them all. It certainly would not be America. Had they possessed more skill or had more knowledge they would have endeavored to reach the coast of the United States. The schooner was not a very rich prize. She had been stripped of everything of any value before her capture, but she would be worth something handsome to a lot of poor sailors could they bring her in, so they resolved to do the best they could under the circumstances. They divided themselves into watches, and appointed the oldest seaman to take charge.

The day after the cutting out, however, it fell a dead calm, and for several days they drifted aimlessly about until a light breeze sprang up during the night, and in the morning they found themselves within easy

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distance of a large ship. The long line of black muzzles protruding from a row of ports proclaimed her a ship of war, and the tricolor fluttering from the gaff told them that she was a Frenchman. They turned to escape, but a shot across the bows convinced them of the futility of the attempt. In obedience to orders the schooner was thrown up in the wind and hove to, while the great ship swept down upon them at an extraordinary rate of speed. A boat was sent off and the schooner boarded, and Reuben and his companions found themselves once more prisoners of war. They were at once transferred to the ship, which proved to be the famous frigate L'Insurgente, thirty-eight guns, commanded by Captain Barreault.

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CHAPTER III.

Fate had certainly been unkind to them. Their dashing attempt at escape was rendered entirely useless. They had the misery of seeing the little schooner, which they had so gallantly regained, sent off under another prize crew, while the great frigate, which now held them prisoners, resumed her course. The situation of the captured Americans was infinitely less agreeable than when they had been on the privateer. Of course, the surviving Frenchmen had told the story of the recapture, and they were rightly regarded as a desperate body of men. They were kept rigorously confined in the lower hold, a place so gloomy and uncomfortable that the forecastle of the merchant vessel was a palace beside it. Their rations were mainly ship's bread and water. Only at rare intervals were they allowed to come on deck for a breath of fresh air. Most of the men gave way to despair, and resigned themselves to a long confinement in a French prison when they should be landed from the frigate. Their numbers were augmented from time to time by other Americans from crews of different merchant ships captured by the Insurgente, but any hope of their capturing the frigate was, of course, out of the question.

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On several occasions Reuben had been sent for by Captain Barreault, a kindly, well-meaning man apparently, though not much of a seaman, to interpret between him and the American prisoners. The marines guarding the prisoners, therefore, had become used to seeing the young man passing and repassing from the hold at unusual hours. Reuben determined, if possible, to turn this familiarity to account, but the most assiduous watching never seemed to reveal an opportunity for escape, until one day early in January, 1799, when an unusually large number of prisoners had been allowed on deck for exercise. The prisoners were grouped in the starboard gangway forward.

Reuben had been sent for by the captain that very day, and while idly standing by the after cabin windows, waiting the commander's pleasure, he had noticed a small boat, retained from one of the prizes for what purpose he knew not, trailing astern. He had looked at it with longing eyes, and when he had gone below, with some half-formed ideas of escape in his mind, he managed to fill an empty flask, which one of the men had given him, with water, and had secreted his daily allowance of hard bread in his jumper. It was evening when the party were allowed on deck for exercise, and Reuben gradually separated himself from the rest, edging along in the shadow of the bulwarks toward the fore shrouds. He had taken some of the men of the clipper into his confidence, and was relying upon them.

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He was popular with all, and they were perfectly willing to help him all they could. To attract attention to themselves, the men edged aft and began some sort of a scuffle. The guards came running toward the commotion. In the midst of it Fate gave Reuben an additional happy chance. A thin column of smoke was observed trickling out of the after hatch, the companion way. There was an instant cry of "Fire! Fire!" and the decks were immediately filled with excited men.

The discipline of the ship was not good. It never was good on French ships at best, but in the early days of the French Republic, when the ordinary seaman addressed his commander as "Citizen Captain," and the captain replied to him in a similar strain as "Citizen seaman"; when every orator in France was drumming into every stupid French peasant's head the idea that he was as good as a lord—which meant that he was a shade better—discipline was largely subverted, especially on men-of-war, where principles of equality have absolutely no place. Consequently the alarm of fire created the greatest confusion, and the men fairly tumbled over each other in their excitement.

Reuben, watching his chance, sprang upon the rail abreast the fore shrouds, dropped quietly down into the fore chains, and slipped noiselessly into the water. Unlike most sailors, he had learned to swim like a fish by this time, but in a moment the rapidly moving ship swept by him, and only by a desperate effort was he

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able to catch the stern sheets of the boat trailing astern. He cautiously clambered into the boat and crept forward to the bows. If any one looked over the rail he would be discovered and captured. Lying at full length in the boat, in a desperate hurry he tore out, with his teeth and finger nails, the eye-splice of the painter, by which it was fastened in the fore sheets, and in a few moments the boat was free. The ship was still full of confusion, and in the excitement no one had noticed his escape. The breeze was fair, and the Insurgente, one of the fastest sailers in the world, rapidly drew away from him. He lay motionless, however, in the bottom of the boat, not daring to look around, his heart beating with hope and exultation.

On board the frigate, the fire, which was not serious, was soon put out, and when order was restored, the prisoners on deck, who had been promptly forced against the rail by a cool-headed officer and some veteran marines, were mustered and marched below. The absence of Reuben was of course discovered, but one of his friends, when his name was called, answered promptly enough that he had been sent for by the captain and was in the cabin. The prisoners were then passed below, and nothing further was said about Reuben.

At eight bells, when it had grown quite dark, the sentries were relieved, and the marine on watch reported that all the prisoners were below except James, who was

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in the cabin with the captain. The citizen lieutenant of marines, who was present at the relieving of the guards, had dined with the citizen captain that night and knew it was a mistake. The alarm was instantly given and the prisoners mustered again. Reuben was, of course, not found among them. A rapid search of the ship did not discover his presence, and it was not until some time after that a casual glance over the stern, the trailing rope and missing boat, revealed the method of his flight. The Insurgente immediately put about, and during the whole night beat to and fro over her previous course. When morning broke, lookouts on every masthead eagerly swept the horizon. There was not a sign of the small boat on the ocean. Reluctantly the frigate resumed her course; the poor prisoners were treated with greater rigor than before, and the few privileges they had enjoyed were denied them.

Reuben had waited until darkness enshrouded him. He had then stepped the little mast lying in the boat and set sail, running off at right angles to the course taken by the frigate. The breeze was fresh, and the little boat slipped through the water at a rapid rate. Indeed, as the breeze grew stronger it would have been prudent to have reduced sail, but Reuben was desperate, and he skillfully held the boat up to it through the long night. Toward morning the lights of the frigate, which of course had been in view though receding hourly, gradually disappeared below the hori-

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zon. When morning broke, with anxious eyes he eagerly scanned the sea. There was not a sail in sight. Once more he was free.

Taking a bite of the bread and swallowing a little water from his precious bottle, he carefully examined the boat. It was well provided with oars and sails, but the water breaker forward was entirely empty. There was not a thing he could eat. There was no compass, nor any other supplies. He did not have an idea where he was nor what was the nearest land. There was nothing for him to do but sail on as long as he could control the boat, and trust to God that he might arrive at land or be picked up by a passing ship. The points of the compass, of course, were known to him as long as the sun shone or the stars were out. He knew, too, that by sailing west long enough he would reach the Caribbean Sea or the coast of America, but in that direction lay the Insurgente, and he had too vivid a recollection of his sufferings to desire to cross her path again.

The wind was fair for the east, however, and as it was gentle and pleasant he lashed the helm amidships, boomed out the sail, and lay down in the shadow of a piece of spare canvas and went to sleep. He was very tired, but had not yet been deprived of food long enough to suffer the pangs of hunger. The little boat rocking to and fro in the placid sea had a soothing effect upon him, and he slept until late in the afternoon.

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When he awoke there was still nothing to be seen from his place of shelter. He had never been adrift before in a small boat, and, in fact, had suffered very few of the hardships and vicissitudes of the sea in the way of shipwreck heretofore. He took another small modicum of food and water—scarcely a bite or a swallow—and roughly calculated that at his present rate of consumption his supplies would last about four days. Long before that time he hoped to be picked up by some passing vessel. He was floating in frequented waters, he judged, but he did not take into account that French privateers and English and American war ships had largely swept peaceful commerce out of these latitudes.

When night fell he composed himself to sleep again, but he lay awake for long hours. The wind had almost died away, and the sea was very calm. The little boat rocked through it lazily, scarce making a ripple in the water. The stillness about him was horrible. The loneliness oppressed him frightfully. Once or twice he lifted up his voice and sent a hail ringing out in the darkness, but his single human cry seemed so little and inconsequent in the great immensity that he sank to silence and lay still, watching the bright starry heaven.

He was not like a modern boy, who, having read and studied, would have store of reminiscences and recollections in his mind to dwell upon in similar circumstances. He was only a poor, ignorant, unschooled

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sailor. His knowledge of things alien to his profession was of the very slightest; even God was to him scarcely more than a name. When he was on shore, as long as his money lasted he usually indulged in some wild carouse, from which, like a sodden animal, he was carried on board his ship. He knew nothing and cared for nothing, and nobody particularly cared for him, he thought. Stop! He did know the duties of a sailor, and he had a rude pride in performing them in the most seamanlike manner. He was always among the smartest and best men in any ship in which he sailed, and while he was still somewhat slow and stupid mentally, yet on occasion he had shown that he could be alert enough. He had a bulldog courage in his make-up, too, which, added to his great strength, made him a dangerous antagonist.

There was one person he remembered fondly, and that was young Stephen Decatur. He had never forgotten the boy's kindness to him when they first met, and though he had not seen him for several years, his heart frequently reverted to him, especially in these long, lonely hours. It had become a sort of a habit to think upon him. He recalled every line of his face, his bright, flashing eyes, dark complexion, brown curling hair, his erect, well-knit figure, his eager, dashing way, his dauntless courage. He lay there wondering if Decatur had realized his long-cherished desire to become a sailor.

"It's a poor kind of a life fer a man," he said to

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himself softly, lying upon his back, his head pillowed upon his hands, his face upturned in the night. "Look at me! I'd 'a' done better if I'd 'a' stayed on the farm an' follered the plow. Leastaways, I couldn't 'a' been worse off nor this. Adrift here in this little dingey, with only a bite o' food an' a drop o' water betwixt me and hell—or heaven! Heaven! I wonder if it's up there? Well, I don't reckon foks'l jackies'll git much chance o' findin' out. A sailor! I'd ruther be a dog than a sailor! If I ever git outen this alive I'll go back on a farm!"

With this sapient reflection, which is common to sailors of whatsoever degree, he finally fell asleep. The sun striking him in the face woke him again. The day was a duplicate of the other. When the morning broke on the third day the sky was lowering and overcast and the wind rising, and it was not long before a gale was howling over his head. The sail was promptly doused, and only the most determined effort at the oars prevented the boat from broaching to and swamping. During a lull he lashed the sails and all the oars but two, and some of the thwarts, which he prized up with an oar handle, into a great bundle, which he threw astern at the end of the halyards. This made an excellent sea anchor, and kept the boat's head to the waves. It was necessary for him to bail her out constantly, however, so there was neither sleep nor rest for him all the night.

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When morning broke he was wet, tired, hungry, and exhausted. With reckless improvidence he ate all the remaining portions of his hard bread and drank all the water. During the morning the gale subsided, and the sun came out and beat down upon him with pitiless heat. The burning rays seemed to penetrate his brain. He was starving, worn-out, sick, burning with fever. He forgot where he was, what had happened. He laughed, shouted, sang, held imaginary conversations with phantoms who peopled his boat, rehearsed thrilling scenes in his life, called upon Decatur.

When the night fell again, the cool fresh breeze which blew across his fevered brow brought him some respite, but the pangs of starvation and thirst were almost unbearable. A gentle breeze sprang up again next morning, but he had no mast nor sail left and no longer the strength to row, so the boat drifted at random. His sufferings were horrible. He gnawed the leather of his shoes in vain effort at relief, chewing them into a hopeless pulp. He lay long over the side of the boat looking at the cool blue water rippling about him. He plunged his hands into it, and bathed himself again and again. In spite of himself he tasted it, but the result was nauseating and frightful.

As the sun came out once more the delirium returned. Like Falstaff, he "babbled o' green fields"—a habit of men in similar circumstances. Enchanted islands covered with fronded palms lifted themselves be-

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fore his disordered vision in mirage. Round about him bounteous tables were spread; sparkling fountains made merry music in his ear. So the long day wore on. Merciless consciousness returned with the nightfall, and the next morning, when he looked over the side, the water was cleft by the long triangular fin of a shark. There was another, a third, pitching and gliding about him. The sight of the frightful monsters filled him with horror. Summoning all his resolution and force he struck at one of them with his remaining oar. He lost his balance and nearly fell over the side. His arm struck the water. Quick as a flash one of the hideous butchers turned over on his back to seize the prey. There was a flash of white belly through the water, a snapping of gleaming jaws, which he scarcely avoided by an herculean effort which used up the last remnant of his strength. He lay back in the boat, faint, sick, and exhausted. The watchful sharks still swam about him; they would get him presently. If they did not go away he would leap overboard and end it. What mattered it? Only a poor sailor! Who would care? God!

For the first time he thought to pray. Half-forgotten aspirations of childhood mingled vaguely and brokenly with scarce-remembered words of God. "Our Father . . . which art in Heaven . . . now . . . now . . . now I lay me . . . thy name . . . bread . . . daily bread . . . O God! give me bread, only a mor-

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He struck at one of the monsters with his oar.

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sel, and water, a drink, Lord . . . lay me down . . . to sleep . . . to sleep . . . the sharks . . ."

What was that on the horizon? There! A black spot against the clear sky. A sail! The topsails of a ship! He raised himself upon his elbow and gazed. The light blinded his eyes. He lost it. Now it came again. Was it a vision? The sun rose higher in the heavens. He found it once more. It was nearer—coming toward him—nearer still. They had seen him! He tried to cry, but a hoarse whisper was all that came from his parched throat. But they had seen him—that prayer! She was heaving to. Heavens! There on the gaff end the Stars and Stripes! He knew no more.

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CHAPTER IV.

When he came to himself he was lying on a cot in the sick bay of a great ship. A kind-looking man was bending over him and pouring down his throat from a spoon something which tasted like all the sweets of memory and anticipation rolled into one. He tried to say something, but the man above him bade him be quiet. They gave him something more, and with a sigh of contentment he turned over again and went to sleep. When he awakened he felt like a new man, emaciated, but happy at his salvation. He was informed that he had been picked up by the United States ship Constellation, 38, Commodore Thomas Truxtun. The doctor forbade him to talk much, however, and it was not until several days after that he was sent for by the captain. A marine assisted him along the deck until they reached the door of the captain's cabin. As the orderly knocked at the door they heard

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sounds of a commotion within. A deep, rich voice roared out an oath or two, and another voice could be heard in deprecating expostulation. The first voice was heard again, followed by the sound of glass or crockery smashing against the bulkhead. A moment after the door was thrown violently open, and a colored man in livery, scared almost white, sprang through the opening and darted forward. A second later a stout, red-faced little man in blue uniform coat, red waistcoat, knee breeches, silk stockings, and buckled shoes, wearing a little old-fashioned naval wig, appeared in the doorway. His face was as red as fire, his eyes flashed with anger, his fists were clinched as if to strike. Reuben and the marine recoiled before his threatening appearance. For a moment or two his eyes followed the fleeing servant, and then they fell upon the other two.

"What are you doing here?" he shouted irascibly.

"Ordered to report to the captain, sir," nervously answered the orderly, touching his hat. "Here's the lad we picked up t'other day, yer honor."

"Well, why don't you report, then? Why do you stand there blinking like an idiot at my door? Don't dare to answer me back, sir, but just tell me, sir, why, when you are ordered to do a thing, you don't do it? It's rank disobedience! Not a word! not a word, sirrah! Is it for you to bandy words with the captain? Come on!"

Fretting and fuming like an old turkey cock, the

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captain, limping a little from a touch of the gout, which accounted for his irritability, led the way into his cabin, followed by the other two. The marine stood at attention and saluted as the captain sat down before a large table in the center of the room. Reuben endeavored to do likewise, but he was yet so feeble from his exposure that he staggered and nearly fell with a sudden pitch of the ship.

"Bless me!" said the captain, looking at him closely for the first time, then turning to the abashed soldier, "what do you mean by bringing a walking corpse into this cabin?" he roared. "No, don't answer me! Silence is the first requisite of proper subordination. —Sit down there!" he cried sternly to James, pointing to a transom. A moment later he sprang from his chair and darted into the next cabin.

Reuben sank into the designated seat and whispered weakly to the marine:

"Ain't he awful! Is he allus like this?"

"His bark is worse nor his bite," answered the marine hurriedly. "We're used to him, an' we don't mind. An' he's got the gout, too, which is awful. W'en he really means business he's as cool as an iceberg. Look out for him then! He's an awful hot-tempered man, is the commodore."

At this moment the captain reappeared with a bottle and a glass. He poured out a glassful of rich Madeira wine and handed it to the sailor.

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"Here, drink this," he said roughly. "There never was an officer so poorly served. What does the doctor mean by letting you get into this shape, I wonder? —Orderly, go forward and bring my man back again. Take a file of men with you; if necessary, take a squad —take the whole company!"

"Yes, sir," said the orderly, saluting and going out of the cabin.

The captain fretted and fumed for a moment or two, cursing his gout the while, until the orderly opened the door again and thrust the negro servant into the cabin.

"You black rascal!" shouted the captain ferociously, "what do you mean by leaving my cabin without my orders? Don't answer me! I won't have any of your landlubberly insolence! How dare you go away before I send you? Silence! How often have I told you never to reply to anything! I'll have you flogged at the gangway for another such offence, as an example to the men—and they need it, too. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, sah. Yes, sah, I hears you, Mars Trux'n!"

"Well, pick up that broken glass, you sable fiend!"

"Yes, sah," said the negro, who did not seem to be so much afraid of his master, after all, rolling his eyes, smiling, and showing a grinning row of white teeth.

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"And you may give the orderly a glass of rum, and take one yourself, you worthless vagabond! Don't answer me!—Now, sir, for your story. No, you needn't get up," he remarked in a kinder tone, his fit of passion passing from him apparently as quickly as it had come; "sit there. You look as if you had a hard experience. What's your name?"

"Reuben James, sir."

"What ship were you on?"

"Well, sir, I was an able seaman on a Baltimore clipper called the Mornin' Star."

"You are a young-looking lad for an able seaman," commented the captain suspiciously.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, go on, go on! Why don't you tell your story without all this digression?"

"About a month ago, sir, we was captured by a dirty trick. Well, sir, we was put on to a privateer schooner, an' watchin' our time, we riz agin 'em."

"How was that?" said the captain.

"Well, sir, there was fourteen o' us, an' only six o' them, an' we was allowed on deck one to a time. A squall struck the schooner one night w'en I was on deck, an' I jumped at the sentry over the hatch an' grappled with him; one o' his pistols fell down the hatchway, our men came swarmin', and we killed three on 'em, an' the rest give up. Then we put fer the United States as near as we could judge, none o' us

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bein' navigators, but a few days later we was overhauled by a French frigate called the Insurgenty——"

"Whereabouts, my lad?" cried Truxtun eagerly, leaping to his feet.—"Orderly, present my compliments to Mr. Rodgers, and tell him I want him at once. —You have done well—splendidly, my boy! Have another glass of wine?—Ah, Mr. Rodgers, sit down, sir," continued the captain, as a stern-visaged man of herculean build entered the cabin and saluted. "This fine fellow here has been a prisoner on the Insurgente. You know we have been watching for her for nearly a year.—Now, my lad, go on with your story."

"Well, sir, there's not much more to tell. We was passed below in the French frigate an' kept strictly guarded, only allowed to come on deck once in a w'ile, an' a few at a time. The frigate made several prizes of American merchantmen——"

"Cursed frog-eaters!" ejaculated the commodore.

"I had more chance than the others," continued Reuben, "'cause I knowed a little French, an' the cap'n he sent fer me to try to talk to the prisoners."

"Where did you learn French?" asked the captain.—"Rather unusual for a foremast jack, eh, Mr. Rodgers?"

"Quite, sir," answered that functionary with a saturnine gravity.

"I learned it at Bordeaux, w'en I was on the Ariel."

"Ariel?" questioned the captain.

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"Yes, sir. From Philadelphy."

"He means Captain Decatur's ship, sir. He commands the new frigate Philadelphia now," explained Rodgers.

"Decatur! Why, of course," ejaculated Truxtun. "Did you sail with him?"

"Yes, sir; an' I knows young Master Stephen Decatur well, sir; him an' me's friends, sir," said Reuben boldly.

"He's a reefer on the frigate United States," remarked Rodgers.

"Yes," said Truxtun, "I wish we could have him on the Constellation.—Well, go on with your story, lad. Bless me, how long-winded you are!—Regular sea lawyer, eh, Mr. Rodgers?" he added petulantly.

"One night I crept into the main chains, yer honor, an' dropped overboard without bein' noticed on account o' an alarm of fire, got into a boat w'ich was trailin' astern, cast her adrift, an' here I am, sir."

"How long were you in that boat?"

"About a week, I think, sir, though I don't rightly remember."

"Did you have nothing at all to eat or drink?"

"I had a pint bottle o' water an' some hard bread, sir."

"You did not get along on that alone?"

"I didn't git along very well, sir. I was 'most gone w'en you picked me up."

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"Now try to tell me, if you can, whereabouts the French frigate was when you left her, and where she was going."

"I can't rightly tell you, sir. She was nearly due west o' w'ere you found me, as near as I can remember, an' once I heerd the cap'n say he was goin' to Basse-Terre, or St. Kitts, in a short time, sir."

"That will do for us—eh, Rodgers?" said the captain genially. "Let me see. If he were going to Basse-Terre, or St. Christopher's, it ought to be easy to find him off the island now. Suppose we lay a course for St. Kitts and see if we can not overhaul him? They say the Insurgente has the heels of everything on the ocean, but we have never tried her with the Constellation. I'll lay a month's pay, if we get sight of her she'll never get away! I should like to give our young gentlemen a little serious work to do. When you go on deck, send me the sailing master, and we will lay out a course.—As for you, young man, you have done very well. Here's a half eagle for you," continued the commodore, pitching him a gold coin. "So long as you have lost your own ship, are you agreeable to a cruise under the Stars and Stripes? I will rate you an able seaman, though you are rather young for it, and if you do anything worthy of mention I will promote you. You may have a chance to get a blow in on your captor, the Insurgente. What say you?" The commodore spoke quietly and kindly now.

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"Yes, sir, I'll be willin' to go with you," answered Reuben. "Thank ye kindly, sir, fer the half eagle. I drinks yer honor's health, an' yours, too, sir," he added, as he turned to Rodgers. Having drained the glass, which he carefully deposited on the table, he then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, knuckled his forehead, and made a sea scrape.

"That will do.—Rodgers, see that his name is entered on the muster roll, and let him be excused from duty until the doctor says he is able to be about. You might put him in the foretop, under young Porter, two dare-devils together; and when you go on deck, pass the word that we are heading for a French frigate, and that there is an eagle in the cabin for the first man that sights her."

As Reuben walked forward, word of their chase was passed among the men and received with delighted cheers. In spite of his occasional roughness, the old captain and the new ship were intensely popular with the men.

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CHAPTER V.

In a short time Reuben was sufficiently restored to health to perform the varied duties of his new station. A very pleasant friendship, so far as one could exist between an officer and the sailor, soon sprang up between him and midshipman David Porter. Indeed, there was something winning about the frank honesty and kindliness and sturdy courage of Reuben James which made him a general favorite with all his superior officers, and, boylike, Porter and he soon became great friends. Reuben was stationed in the foretop which Porter commanded, and in general exercises, by his superior's favor, he remained aloft as top keeper. In answer to Porter's questioning at different times, James had gradually told that young officer the whole history of his life, and in return had received many reminiscences of thrilling adventures and hairbreadth escapes, such as have rarely fallen to the lot of any human being, from the lad who was afterward to be the hero of the famous cruise of the Essex.

One afternoon in the second dogwatch the two were aloft together. Reuben was on the lookout, and Porter had joined him. The two lads sat on the top-

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sail yard in the gentle weather engaged in pleasant conversation.

"Have you ever been in a real downright fight, sir?" asked Reuben respectfully of his young superior.

"Yes, once, I have," answered Porter. "About two years ago I was third mate on a merchant ship commanded by my father, Captain Porter. It was a small bark called the Eliza. We were anchored at San Domingo, and one night a boat from a British man-of-war, which was anchored some distance away, approached us, and the officer of the cutter hailed us and told us he was coming on board to search the Eliza for deserters from his ship. Father answered his hail himself, first quietly directing the crew to get their arms at once. We had a good supply of small arms on board—for pirates were plenty in the West India trade, and are yet, for that matter—and father told the British officer that he was armed, and if he set foot on his deck he would do it at his peril. We had no deserters, and he didn't propose to allow any British officers to search his ship. The Englishman laughed at the idea, swung his boat in against our side —we were a small ship with a low free board—and gave the order to board. Father was as prompt as he. He shouted out, 'All hands repel boarders!' and we made a rush at them as they came clambering over the rail. He shot the first man who stuck his head above the deck, but they came swarming

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over the side, and we had a hand-to-hand fight for a few minutes."

"Was you in it all, sir?" asked Reuben, with breathless interest.

"Yes, I was right in the middle of it. The man next to me was instantly killed; he was shot. Two or three men were killed or wounded on both sides, but we finally drove them overboard. We got under way in a hurry, too, and that was the last we heard of the British deserters."

"Did ye kill any on 'em yourself, sir?"

"I don't know," answered the midshipman gravely; "there was blood on my cutlass, though."

"Did ye never have no more trouble with 'em, sir?"

"Not with that ship, but we had with another, a year after," answered Porter. "It was a brig engaged in the West India trade. I was first mate then. Father stayed at home, and the master of the brig was a coward. We were boarded one night at San Domingo again, and all hands on the brig, except the skipper, pressed on a British man-of-war. Some of us refused to turn to and work, I among the number, and the captain ordered us up to the gangway to be flogged. Have you ever been flogged, Reuben?"

"Not yet, sir," answered James cautiously. Flogging was a very common practice then, and long after in all services.

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"Well, I determined I'd rather die than be flogged," continued Porter, his dark face flushing at the recollection, "so I broke away, ran below, and stowed myself in a dark corner of the hold under a pile of dunnage. The men were friendly to me, and the captain did not press the search for me. It's a good thing he did not," said the boy fiercely. "I'd have killed him, sooner or later, if he had laid a cat on my shoulders." Porter was a very slender, delicate lad, but the spirit which looked out of his flashing black eyes was great enough for a giant. After a pause he continued: "He said I'd keep until another time, and he'd wait until I got hungry enough to come out. I came out that night and clambered over into the main chains, and let myself down into the water and swam to a Danish brig I had seen near by. No one saw me, or, if they did, no one told on me. The English hunted high and low for me the next day, but I was lying snug in the hold of the Danish brig, and presently the brig got under way for Europe."

"Did ye go with her, sir?"

"Yes; I had nowhere else to go, so I worked my passage across, and glad enough I was, too, to get away from the English. I remember that when I got to Copenhagen I didn't have a cent of money and scarcely any clothes, and it was winter. I shipped on a Swedish brig for the United States, however, and finally got home."

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"Did ye ship before the mast, sir?" asked Reuben sympathetically.

"Of course," answered Porter; "where else? I had an awful time of it, too. I only had the things I had on my back, and nearly froze in the North Atlantic in the bitter winter weather. Oh, yes, my lad, I have been before the mast in my time, and I have reached my present rank through the hawse pipe, and not by way of the cabin windows. That's what gives me so much sympathy with you fellows."

"Did ye ever have any more fights with the British, sir?" asked Reuben, who found this recital of the deepest interest.

"Yes; I had the ill luck to be impressed on another British frigate. I was ironed, and treated like a dog, but I managed to escape again. I have stored it up in mind, my lad," said the boy, a deep frown spreading over his sallow face, the black eyes flashing with that remarkable brightness which to the day of his death they ever maintained. "I have stored it all away. I am going to pay it all back, some day. This country will not lie quiet forever under the insults of Great Britain, and then we'll have our chance. I had enough of the merchant service by this time, so I asked father to get me a midshipman's warrant, and here I am. I wish we were hunting for an English frigate instead of a French one," he exclaimed bitterly.

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"Have you ever been in a real fight yourself, Reuben?" he asked.

"Not yet, sir, unless that little scrimmage w'ere we recaptured the privateer counts," answered James. "But I'd like to be," he continued eagerly.

"Well, you shall be before we get through with this cruise, or I am no prophet. The commodore is an awfully severe man, but he's as brave as a lion, and he will fight anything or anybody if he has the chance."

At this moment eight bells was struck, and at the hoarse cry of the boatswain's mate, "All the port watch!" the two friends separated, Porter descending to the deck, and Reuben following after when he was relieved. Porter, though he was possessed of a delicate physique, was a lad of the highest possible spirit. He chafed bitterly under the rude, bullying treatment of the day, which was thought necessary to the breaking in of officers and men. There was one officer on the ship who was of an ill-tempered, nagging disposition, who took advantage of his superior rank to aggravate the boy nearly to death. Porter, who had been well trained by his own father, a very strict disciplinarian, bore the insults of his ill-tempered superior as best he could. A night or two after the conversation between the two lads, during the first night watch, this officer, who was slightly intoxicated at the time, sent Porter, who was one of the midshipmen of the watch, below on some trifling errand. When the reefer reached the

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deck he was met with a shower of abuse for a supposed delay in his return. The boy bit his lip, but remained perfectly silent before his superior. Infuriated by the midshipman's self-command, the words of the officer passed all bounds. He swore at him, and applied to him the most abusive epithets.

"Stop, sir!" cried the boy at last, "I can not permit it. I know no duty which obliges me to stand here and hear such insults. I beg you to——"

"You dare to bandy words with me, you young hound!" cried the officer, springing forward and giving Porter a blow in the face with his open hand.

Quick as a flash Porter sprang at him like a young tiger. He struck him full in the face, and, half drunk as the man was, he knocked him at full length on the deck. It happened to be James's trick at the wheel, and he alone heard the whole occurrence. The lieutenant scrambled to his feet and sang out for the sergeant of the guard to arrest the midshipman, who stood before him glowering with indignation. As the other midshipmen of the watch and the sailors came running to the quarter-deck, the lieutenant whipped out his sword and in frantic rage made a pass at Porter to cut him down. In the midst of the excitement Captain Truxtun came on deck.

"What's this? what's this? Fighting on the deck of the ship! What does it mean, sir?" cried the captain.

"This young dog struck me in the face and knocked

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me down, sir," answered the officer, partially sobered by the occurrence.

"Struck you in the face!" exclaimed Truxtun, frowning. "Impossible! It's rank mutiny! Why did he do it?"

"I don't know, sir," answered the officer. "I was just rating him for loitering below, where I had sent him on an errand, when without a word he leaped upon me."

"Go below, sir!" roared Truxtun passionately, turning to Porter without asking him a question, "and consider yourself under arrest! I will deal with you in the morning, sir."

Without deigning to answer a word, the boy saluted, turned on his heel, and descended to the steerage. The next morning, before the captain had time to take any action in the matter, Reuben presented himself at the mast and expressed a desire to speak with the captain. The permission was secured, and a few moments later he found himself in the presence of his quick-tempered superior. The captain was suffering from an unusually bad attack of the gout, and was in anything but a good humor.

"Well, sir, what do you want?" he shouted unceremoniously as Reuben approached him. "Aren't you satisfied with your own end of the ship, that you have to continually haunt me, sir? What is it you wish now? Speak out!"

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"Please, yer honor," said the sailor nervously, "it was my trick at the wheel last night, w'en—w'en——"

"When what? Speak out, you blockhead! Tell your story! Heave ahead with it! Limber up your jaw tackle, can't you?"

"Well, sir, w'en Mr. Porter knocked the leftenant down——"

"Well, what business of yours is it, I should like to know? Can't a midshipman knock an officer down, or can't I order the midshipman under arrest, without it being made a matter of inquiry by the whole ship's company, and you in particular?"

"Yes, sir, o' course, sir, but as I stood an' heerd it all, sir, I thought ye mought be willin' to lemme tell ye the truth, sir."

"Don't think too much; and it is most unusual," said the captain, "for foremast jacks to tell the truth about their officers."

"'Tain't with me, sir," answered Reuben boldly.

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed the captain, looking fairly apoplectic with fury for a moment at being thus braved in his own cabin; then the comical side of the situation struck him, and he broke into a laugh, which ended in a groan of anguish at an unusually vicious twinge of the gout.

"Well, what happened?" he said shortly.

"The leftenant sent the midshipman below, sir, an' w'en he come back he begun to ćurse him an' swear

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at him, an' Mr. Porter he saluted an' said nuthin'; then the leftenant called him a wile name."

"What name?"

Reuben told him.

"Humph!" said the captain grimly. "Then what happened?"

"Then he said he wouldn't allow it, an' the leftenant slapped him, sir, in the face, an' then Mr. Porter sprang at him an' struck him down. Then the leftenant got up an' called fer a guard, an' drawed his sword an' then cut at Mr. Porter, an' then you come, an' that's all, sir; an' I begs yer pardon, sir, fer intrudin'."

"This is the truth, is it?"

"Yes, sir, 'tis, so help me, sir," answered James sturdily.

The captain looked at him keenly; honesty and fidelity spoke in every line of his face and figure.

"Orderly!" bawled out the captain. As that official stuck his head through the door, "Request Mr. Porter to come to my cabin," he commanded.

Presently the young man, looking very pale and haggard at the serious difficulty in which he had involved himself, presented himself before the captain. Motioning James to remain where he was, Truxtun turned sharply upon Porter.

"Now, sir, I want to know why you struck your superior officer last night? Didn't you know that it

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was mutiny on the high seas, and punishable with death?"

"Yes, sir," answered the boy; "I did know it, but he heaped abuse upon me unjustly. I obeyed his orders as quickly as any mortal could. He cursed me and swore at me, and when I said nothing he called me a vile name, sir; and when I spoke to him about it he struck me in the face, and then I struck him. I wish to Heaven I had killed him, sir!"

"That will do!" shouted Truxtun. "You are a mutinous young dog, and I ought to dismiss you from the service!"

"I wouldn't care if you did, sir," answered Porter desperately. "I've been treated like a dog, sir, and I think perhaps I'd better go. It's cursing or swearing I get on every hand. I'm not used to such treatment. I can't bring myself to bear it," said the boy proudly, his lips trembling with his feelings. "You can dismiss me if you choose, sir, but I wish I had killed him!"

"There, there," said Truxtun gently, taking him by the hand; "it is a rough school. We were all brought up in the merchant service, where a man's voice and a man's fist were all that he had with which to enforce his authority, and the more prompt he was with the one, and the harder he hit with the other, the better discipline he got. As for your adversary of last night, he is a drunken, worthless reprobate, and shall be dismissed the service, if I can bring it about.

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Meanwhile, my boy, you shall never leave the navy if I can help it. Why, you young dog, every time I abuse you you go up a round in the ladder of promotion, and when Mr. Rodgers blows you up it is because he loves you and don't want you to get conceited. Now go to your duties, both of you; and, Mr. Porter, thank this young lad for his bravery in speaking up for you."

"Thank you, sir," began Porter, bursting into tears of relief at the unwonted kindness and affectionate assurance.

"Not a word! not a word!" roared the commodore in sudden and unexplained fury. "Answering back is the curse of the service. Get out of my cabin at once, both of you!"

The incident made the two lads faster friends than ever, though Porter did threaten Reuben with dire displeasure if he ever breathed a word about his weeping. The offending officer was afterward dishonorably dismissed from the service.

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CHAPTER VI.

Some ten days afterward, at noon, on Saturday, February 9th, 1799, Reuben was sitting on the fore topmast crosstrees. The Constellation was flying along under easy sail in the fresh breeze from the northeast. Reuben had been eagerly searching the horizon for the last hour, when, just as eight bells were struck beneath him, he discovered a sail away off to the southward on the sky-line. The cook and his mate, with a bowl of hot soup and a mess of pork and beans, which constituted the midday dinner of the men on the frigate, had just brought their smoking victuals to the mast to be tasted by the officer of the watch. That functionary, having approved of them, had directed their issuance, and mess call was being shrilly piped along the decks, when the boy's hail, "Sail ho!" floated down from the crosstrees. In a second all was excitement on the ship.

"Where away?" shouted the officer of the deck, Lieutenant Sterrett, in reply.

"Off the lee bow, sir," was the answer.

"Keep a bright lookout aloft there, and let us know when you make her out!" cried the lieutenant.

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"Ay, ay, sir!" answered Reuben, fixing his gaze on the rising spot on the horizon.

"Mr. Porter," said the officer of the watch to his midshipman, "notify the commodore that a sail has been sighted."

"Ay, ay, sir!" replied the young man as he sprang aft to discharge his errand. A moment later Truxtun himself came bursting out of the cabin. He had been in the act of shaving himself, and one side of his red face was still covered with white lather. He made a curious picture of red, white, and blue.

"Well, what is it, Mr. Sterrett?" he cried, flourishing his razor. "Why am I interrupted, sir?"

"It is a sail, sir," answered the lieutenant, saluting respectfully. "We are hoping it may be the French frigate, sir."

"Eh, yes, to be sure," answered the captain. "Who sighted it?"

"James, sir."

"Where is he?"

"On the fore topmast crosstrees."

The captain walked forward to the mainmast, and, lifting up his voice, hailed, "Crosstrees there!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Can you make out that sail now?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

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"It's the topsails of a large ship, sir. She seems to be comin' this way."

"How does she bear?"

"Three points off the starboard bow, sir."

"Point!" roared the commodore, gazing eagerly at Reuben's outstretched arm.

"Port the helm!" he roared a moment later. "Round in the weather braces! So! Steady! How does she bear now?"

"Right ahead, sir."

"That's well," said the captain. "Steady as you go, quartermaster. Mr. Rodgers, call all hands. Cross-trees there?"

"Sir?"

"Let us know when she rises."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

The last order was supererogatory, for all hands were already crowding on deck. As Sterrett, the third lieutenant, yielded the trumpet to Rodgers, Truxtun said to him:

"Get some more sail on the frigate, sir."

"Ay, ay, sir!" replied Rodgers, touching his cap.

The next moment he roared out in stentorian tones:

"All hands make sail! Aloft, the light yard men! Lay aloft, topmen!"

The shrouds and ratlines were soon quivering and shaking under a crowd of eager seamen running aloft like cats, to loose the sails. In a few moments

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the reefs were shaken out, the royals and topgallant sails were set, the men lay down from aloft, and, manning the sheets and halyards, mastheaded the yards and sheeted home the clews of broad canvas.

The wind was coming fresh and strong from the port quarter, and the Constellation, one of the fastest keels that ever slipped through the water, heeled over to the breeze and commenced tearing through the seas. Meanwhile Truxtun had retired to his cabin and hastily completed his shaving. When he appeared on deck once more he cast a careful look aloft and over the side, and tested the force of the wind for a moment, then quietly directed Rodgers to get the studding sails on her. The first lieutenant looked at his commander with astonishment, but he had no option save to do as ordered, and was, indeed, too thorough a seaman to hesitate; so in a few moments the great sheets of light canvas were extended from the weather yardarms on the slender, airy studding-sail booms. "Taking a bone in her teeth," as the sailors say, the great ship fairly leaped through the waves. Her slender bows cut through the waves like a knife, and the water rolled and tossed around her forefoot and rushed away aft from her quarter in broad sheets of glistening foam. The wind sang through the taut rigging until it sounded like a harp, the groaning timbers adding a deep bass note to the music of the chase. They were certainly going twelve knots an hour, at the very least. The pace

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for a ship of that day was a tremendous one. Presently against the wind a thin voice floated down from above:

"On deck there!"

"Yes."

"I can make her out now, sir."

"What is it?"

The men on the decks held their breath, in silence waiting the reply.

"A heavy frigate, sir."

There was a roar of exultation through the ship.

"How is she heading?"

"Close hauled on the port tack, sir."

"Let me have the glass, Mr. Sterrett," said Truxtun, going forward to the forecastle, whence the chase was plainly visible. He gazed at her long and carefully, and then turned and walked aft.

"That will be the French frigate for certain, Mr. Rodgers," he remarked gaily. "Gentlemen," he added, turning to a little crowd of officers grouped on the deck, "I think we shall have a chance to try our mettle before nightfall."

Smiles of grim pleasure reflected the words of the captain on every face.

"Mr. Rodgers," continued Truxtun, "have the watches get their dinner, and then clear for action. Serve out a double allowance of grog to the men. Send young James to me for that eagle I promised him. Gentlemen, I advise you to make your private

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preparations for battle at once. We shall be in range by six bells. Let Mr. Sterrett relieve you of the deck, Mr. Rodgers, and attend me in my cabin."

A few moments later Reuben James was sent for. He found Truxtun and Rodgers in deep conversation in the cabin. As he entered the cabin, Truxtun tossed him a ten-dollar gold piece, and pointed to a bottle on the table and bade him help himself to a draught of rum and water.

"It was a lucky day for us when we picked up this young man—eh, Mr. Rodgers?"

"Very lucky, sir," replied Rodgers, with his usual gravity.

"And his news is worth an eagle—eh, Mr. Rodgers?"

"Quite, sir," answered the other.

"What do you think of the chase, my man?"

"It's the Insurgenty, sure, yer honor," replied the lad. "I'd know her among a thousand, sir."

"What's her force?"

"She's a thirty-six-gun frigate, an' about four hundred men, sir."

"With your permission, commodore, I will ask him a question," interrupted Rodgers.

"Heave ahead."

"What's her main battery, James?"

"I don't know, sir; big guns, though, yer honor."

"As large as those on our main deck?"

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"No, sir; not quite."

"Ah! She will carry eighteen pounders, I think," said Rodgers.

"That gives our twenty-fours an advantage," remarked Truxtun, "but I would they were reversed. We would gain more honor by taking her."

"It will be to our advantage to play at long bowls, then," said Rodgers.

"Not I," said Truxtun; "it's my purpose to lay them close aboard. Our three hundred ought to be able to count for twice that number of frog-eating Frenchmen. Now, get to your station, lad," said the captain to the sailor, "and let us go on deck, Mr. Rodgers."

The wind had risen since the studding sails were set, and the ship was now straining frightfully. A mass of black clouds had gathered on the horizon, and gave every portent of a coming squall.

"Surely," thought the older and more experienced among the officers, "the captain will reduce sail." But the watchful Truxtun, as bold a navigator as ever sailed the seas, had determined to hold on until the last moment. He was gaining on the stranger—who, indeed, did not seem disposed to avoid attack—with every passing second. He stepped to the weather side, therefore, and stood keenly gazing to windward. In moments of stress he entirely lost his wonted irritability, which gave place to a demeanor so cool and quiet

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and confident that the only indication of excitement he presented was in his flashing gray eye. His voice, which had been rude and rough, grew softer and more gentle, until one would have thought him about to enter a ballroom instead of engage in a battle. Just before the squall struck the ship he turned suddenly and faced inboard. The ship was as still as death. Without taking the trumpet, he cried in a clear, powerful voice, "In stuns'ls, royals, and to'gallant s'ls! All hands reef tops'ls! Lively, lads—aloft with ye!"

With incredible speed, the men, working as if for dear life, tore the light canvas off the frigate and took two reefs in the great topsails. Just as they had completed their task the squall was upon them. Truxtun's handling of his ship was magnificent. His calculations had been made to a nicety, and the work of the men had been of the smartest. After a short time the squall, which had been followed by a sudden drench of rain which for the moment obscured the chase, broke, and the rain cleared away. The handsome French frigate was in a sorry plight. Lacking in seamanship on the part of officers and crew, she had lost her main topmast, which was hanging in a great mass over the side. Many men could be seen swarming aloft cutting it away, while the ship itself was getting before the wind and heading for St. Kitts in a vain effort to escape.

The Americans were sent to the yards immediately,

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however, and the Constellation was soon driving forward again under all plain sail, the studding sails not being set, as they were now nearly within range. At a nod from Truxtun and a word from Rodgers, the drums began rolling their grim call to battle along the decks. Men sprang to their stations, the arm chests were broken out, muskets, cutlasses, and pikes were distributed, the magazine was opened, the marines drawn up on the quarter-deck, and for a moment or two the ship presented a scene of apparent confusion, which gradually abated as the men settled themselves at their quarters. They were nearer now. The chase had shown several flags without eliciting a reply from the Constellation, until she finally flung out the French tricolor. Then Truxtun directed that they show their colors, and bright new American ensigns rippled out in the breeze from masthead and gaff end.

"My lads," said the captain, standing on the main deck and speaking in a clear, distinct voice which could be heard all over the ship, "yonder is the Insurgente. We have been hunting her, and now we have found her we'll take her. Remember that this is the first ship of the new American navy to fight a battle on the sea, and let us fight it in such a way that we shall afford a glorious example to all other ships of our country that may come after. They will all be envying our luck, surely. Let there be no firing until I give the order, and no flinching from the guns under pain of instant

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death! Let every officer and man do his duty, and yon French frigate is our prize, and a rich capture she'll be." (There spoke the ancient privateersman of the Revolution.) "There is prize money and glory on yonder ship under yonder flag. Before sunset she must be in our pockets."

With laughter and cheers the men greeted this substantial sentiment, and a few moments of quiet watchfulness supervened. Up in the foretop Reuben James was stationed with the little squad of men under the command of Midshipman Porter. Each man was armed with a new musket, with which he hoped to give a good account of himself. Presently the bow of the American frigate began to lap the quarter of the French frigate. As she drew rapidly ahead the little party in the foretop caught their first glimpse of her abaft the topsail.

"Is it the Insurgente?" whispered Porter to Reuben.

"Sure, sir!" answered the sailor, tightening his grip upon his musket.

At this moment Porter discovered that no charges had been provided for the small arms of his men, through some oversight.

"Off with you," he said hurriedly to James, "and bring up some ammunition for us! Leave your musket here and go down the backstay."

"Ay, ay, sir!" said Reuben eagerly, swinging over

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the rail of the top. He caught the topgallant backstay, and wrapping his legs around it, slipped down like a flash. Nobody noticed him, for all eyes were upon the French ship. The Constellation was now abreast her antagonist, at a distance of perhaps thirty feet. A man from the deck of the Frenchman hailed.

"Fire!" roared Truxtun through the trumpet. "Give it to him, boys!"

A terrific broadside crashed out at once, which was returned from the French frigate.

James was running along the deck toward the magazine hatch. As he came abreast number five gun on the starboard side a round shot came crashing through the side. One of the men at the gun tackle was actually disemboweled by the shot. He lifted his hands in the air, spun around, and fell dead upon the deck. The men nearest him, seeing the frightful catastrophe, shrank away from the gun. There was a moment of excitement in the whole division. It was the first time many of the men had been in action. They seemed on the verge of panic. The men wavered—backed away; a moment more they would have broken. The officer in command of the division promptly met the emergency and checked the flight.

"Back to your stations!" cried Lieutenant Sterrett, springing forward. All the men save one stepped back to their places by the tackles and began to load the guns. The crucial moment was passed; they were

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ashamed. The one man hesitated a second, and then deliberately turned and ran aft. He was white with fear, shaking with terror, as he rushed past James, who stood as if rooted to the spot.

"Come back, you coward!" shouted Sterrett, but the man paid no attention. Before he had taken ten steps Sterrett whipped out his pistol and shot him dead.

"Well done, Mr. Sterrett!" said Truxtun, who had seen the whole affair.

The incident was over; in another moment the deep roar of the gun told that the men were doing their duty once more.

"What are you gaping there for?" cried the lieutenant, noticing James for the first time. "Get to your station!"

Thus recalled to himself, the boy hastened upon his errand. The salutary lesson of the American lieutenant and their returning courage took away all thought of flinching from the other men of the division, and no part of the Constellation's battery was fought like that under Sterrett's command. This incident is solitary in American naval records.

Reuben, putting his precious freight in a cartridge box, clambered to the top again, where he was eagerly welcomed by Porter. In a moment he had charged his musket, and resting it on the rail waited for an opportunity to do good service with it. At this instant the Frenchman, endeavoring to make use of his great

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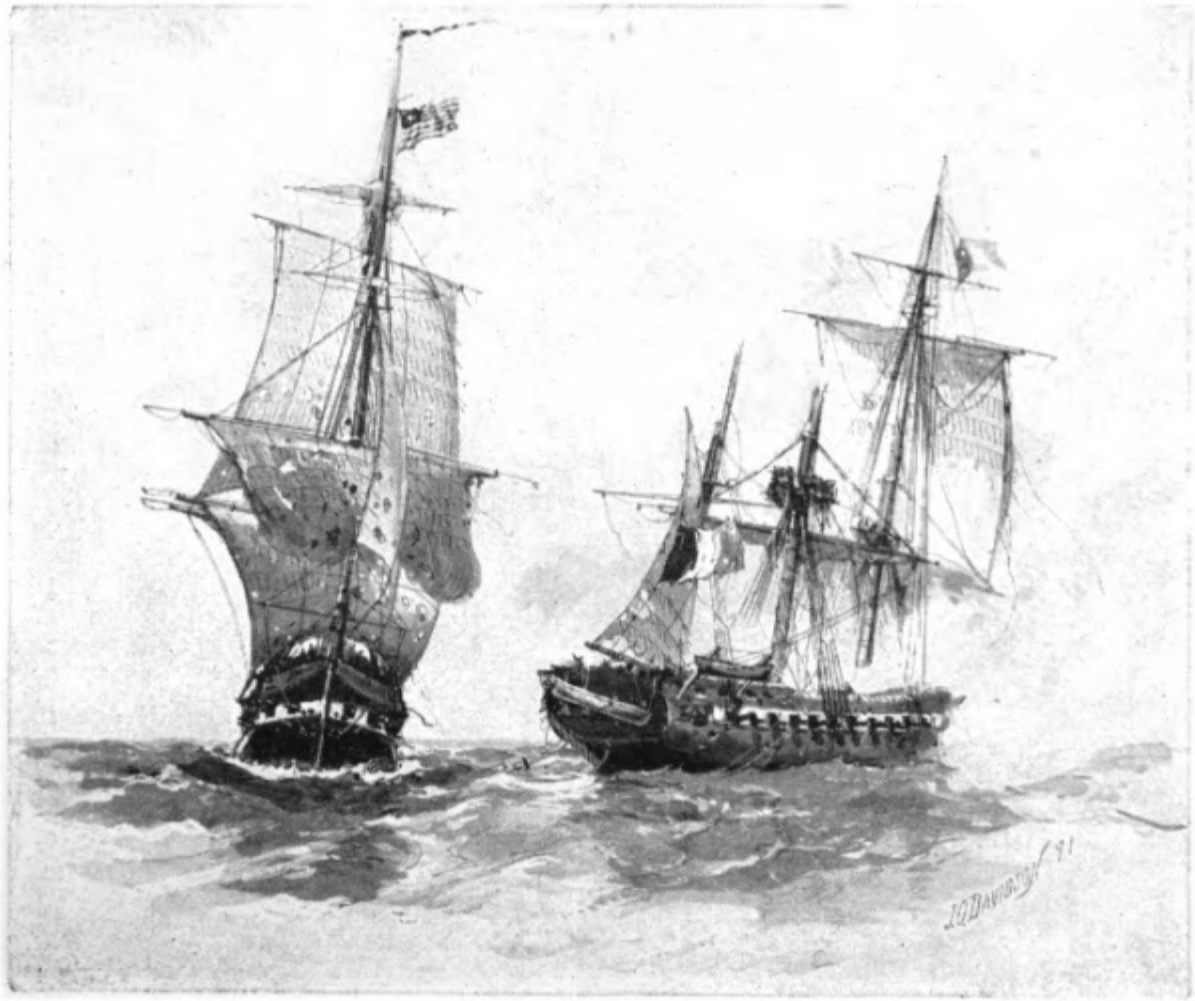

The Constellation raking the Insurgente.

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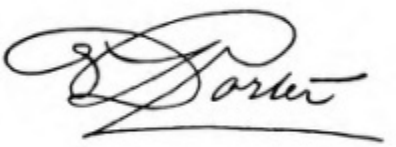
superiority of men, luffed up in the wind to board. The Constellation shot ahead, frustrating the maneuver. As he cleared the smoke Truxtun saw his opportunity, and promptly availed himself of it. Putting his helm hard up, his great ship swooped down across the fore-foot of the French frigate. The guns of the starboard battery were double-shotted, and, when every one bore, the whole broadside was discharged full in the face of the hapless French ship. The bows of the Insurgente were fairly beaten in. All the head stays were carried away, and the ship staggered as if she had struck a rock.



Just before the broadside was delivered, James, taking careful aim at a bold figure erect on the fore-castle, pulled the trigger. The boy was naturally a good shot. The bullet sped straight to its mark. The Frenchman fell. With a feeling of horror Reuben realized that he had struck the man; but he had no time to indulge in reflections. With Porter and his mates he kept up a furious fusillade on the decks of the Frenchman with small arms. Truxtun having cut athwart the Frenchman's course, now luffed up in the smoke, and allowed his enemy to range alongside once more, when he

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opened a terrific fire from his port battery. The French responded furiously, but with execrable aim, most of their shot flying high. The bullets sang and whistled about the ears of the men aloft, cutting stays and shrouds and braces here and there, tearing great holes in the sails, but otherwise doing little damage. For nearly an hour the two ships sailed side by side, the Constellation making excellent practice on her antagonist.

At this juncture the fore topmast was seriously wounded by an eighteen-pound shot. Under the pressure of the heavy topsail, which was rapfull in the strong wind, it was a question of but a few moments when the mast would carry away. This would be a serious disaster to the ship. Porter instantly hailed the deck, which was covered with clouds of smoke. He and his men called out again and again. As no one heard him, and as no attention whatever was paid to him, he finally took upon himself the responsibility of cutting the stoppers and lowering the yard, thus relieving the pressure upon the weakened mast. His prompt decision saved the mast, and counted largely in the subsequent capture of the French frigate. The Constellation now drew ahead again, luffed up into the wind once more, and crossed the Frenchman's bow a second time, repeating the former raking. She then took a position on the port bow, and finally dismounted every gun on the main deck of the enemy, leaving only

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the light guns on the quarter-deck and forecastle to continue the combat. Truxtun now checked the headway of his ship, allowing the Frenchman to draw ahead of him in the smoke, and then put up his helm for the last time, to cross the stern of the Insurgente and rake

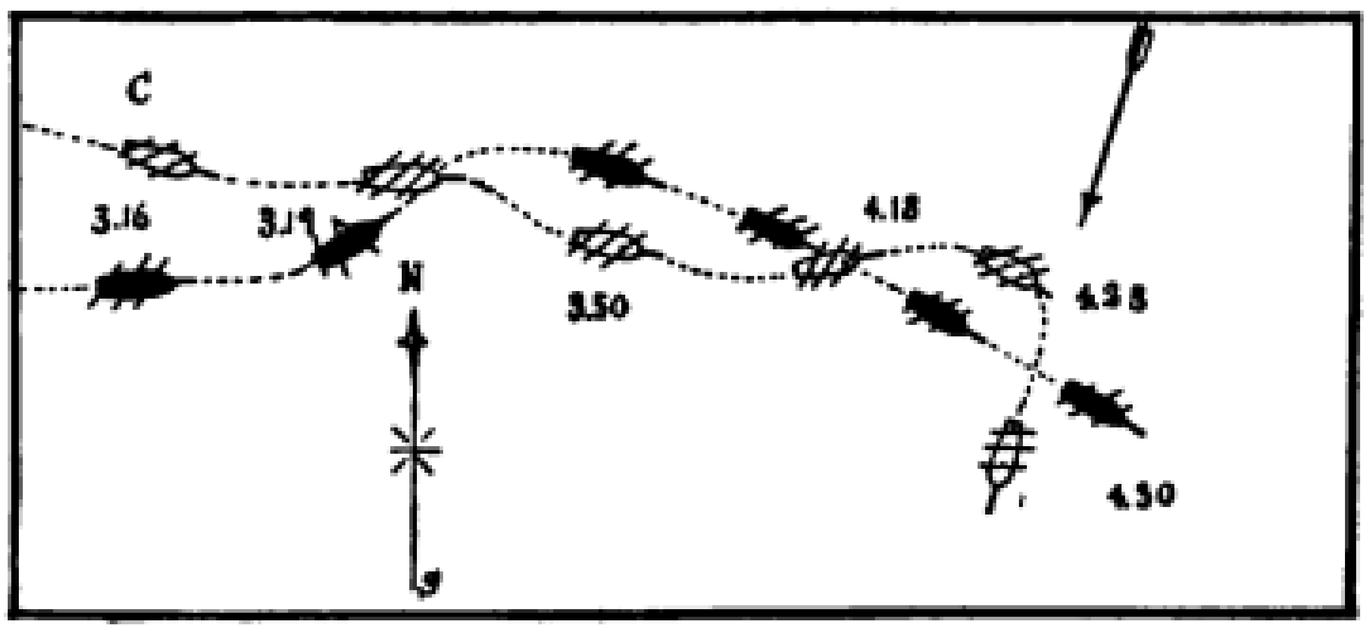

Diagram of the battle. *C*, Constellation.

her, when the French frigate struck her flag. She had fought gallantly, but she had been punished enough.

"Cease firing—they have surrendered!" shouted Truxtun, the high note of triumph in his voice ringing through the ship.

The Constellation ran down to leeward, swung up into the wind, and hove to near her beaten antagonist. A sorry spectacle she presented from the decks of the American frigate. She was smashed and broken by the heavy shot, her main topmast gone, sails hanging in rags, gear trailing in the water, every boat shattered at the davits, her light yards and topgallant masts with their rigging hanging in a tangled mass aloft. From her scuppers bloody water was trickling over the white sides.

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From their position in the foretop Porter and James had a clear view of the deck of the French frigate. It presented a horrible scene of chaos and destruction. Dead bodies were washing around in the scuppers as the ship rolled in the sea; wounded men who had not been carried below were groaning and shrieking with pain. Almost every gun was dismounted, and there was no part of the ship which had not been found by the pitiless hail of iron death. The once beautiful frigate looked like a ruin.

"Call away the first cutter!" said Truxtun. "Lads, we will now take possession of the prize."

The men came running from their quarters cheering and shouting with joy and anticipation. They had won the first great victory of the new navy of the United States.

"Mr. Rodgers," said the commodore, turning to his gigantic first lieutenant, "do you go aboard, sir, and assume command. Take a midshipman with you, and a boat's crew—the first cutter. See that you are all heavily armed. We will transfer the prisoners to the Constellation immediately, after which you will make the best of your way to St. Kitts. We will convoy you in. I look to you, sir, for the safety of the prize."

"If she floats, sir," returned Rodgers, "I will turn her over to you in the harbor."

"Very good, sir. What midshipman will you have with you?"

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"Mr. Porter, sir."

"Very well. Pass the word for Mr. Porter to lay aft."

"You're goin' on board the prize with the prize crew, sir!" eagerly cried Reuben, as Porter, in obedience to the orders he had received, swung his legs over the rail of the top and reached for the futtocks beneath him with his feet. "Take me along with ye, sir?"

"All right. If I go, you shall go!" answered the midshipman, disappearing beneath the rim. A moment later he saluted Truxtun.

"Mr. Porter, you are to go as second officer, by Mr. Rodgers' special request, on the prize yonder. You young scapegrace," he said playfully, "aren't you glad now that I didn't allow you to resign from the service? Not a word, sir, not a word!" he exclaimed, with a slight return to his old manner; "never answer your captain back, not even when he asks you a question!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" said Porter laconically, his black eyes dancing with light at the prospect. He hesitated a moment before the smiling captain and the group of his envious fellow midshipmen, and then spoke up for Reuben.

"Please, sir," he said to the first lieutenant, "may we take Reuben James with us, sir?"

"He doesn't belong to the regular crew of the cut-

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ter, sir," answered Rodgers, looking interrogatively at Truxtun at the same time.

"Oh, let him go," said the little commodore genially. "He has been on the Insurgente before, and this will be a pleasant visit for him, I doubt not."

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CHAPTER VII.

By this time the first cutter had been cleared away and manned by her crew. Every sailor had a cutlass swinging at his side and two loaded pistols thrust into his belt. A dozen muskets were passed on board, the boat was hauled up to the gangway, and James, who had been summoned from the top, followed by Porter and then by Rodgers, dropped into the stern sheets. The wind was rising, and the sea was very rough. Reuben took the tiller and skillfully steered the boat, which, under the impetus given by the long man-of-war stroke from the brawny men, soon reached the side of the French frigate. Rodgers seized the manrope, which the Frenchmen with complaisant courtesy threw him, and clambered up the side, followed by all the others, except one man left to keep the boat, which was dropped astern and fastened to one of the trailing lines. He was met at the gangway by Captain Barreault. Both officers bowed profoundly.

"What ship is this, sir?" asked the American.

"*La frégate Insurgente, monsieur, à vôtre service,*" answered the Frenchman with a sweeping bow. "Vat sheep is zat, monsieur?" he asked, looking over to-

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ward the Constellation gracefully dipping to and fro in the sea, and apparently as fresh and ready for another fight as if she had never been in action.

"The United States frigate Constellation, Commodore Thomas Truxtun, monsieur. I am John Rodgers, her first lieutenant. I have orders to assume command of the prize. Commodore Truxtun directs that the officers and men be sent aboard his ship."

"Ver well, monsieur," answered the Frenchman, shrugging his shoulders, "ve have nuzzing to do but to obey. You are ze master. Give ze command, monsieur."

"Have you any boats left seaworthy?" asked Rodgers.

"*Non*, monsieur," answered the captain. "*Voila!* Everyzing is smash up." He indicated his ruined ship with a melancholy wave of the hand.

Rodgers glanced about him a moment, and then stepped to the lee side of the quarter-deck:

"Constellation!" he shouted, hollowing his hand.

"Ay, ay!" answered Truxtun through the trumpet.

"This is the Insurgente."

Three lusty cheers from the Americans came faintly up against the wind.

"They have no boats left," continued Rodgers. "Will you send some of our cutters to transfer the prisoners?"

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"Presently," roared Truxtun. "Will she float, do you think, Mr. Rodgers?"

After a moment's conversation with Captain Barreault, Rodgers answered:

"Yes, sir. We will take her in, never fear."

By Rodgers' command, Porter led his men forward, and by voice and example started the Frenchmen clearing away the wreck. A rapid survey showed that some seventy of the crew of the French frigate had been killed or wounded. On the Constellation, besides the man shot for cowardice, but two had been killed and three wounded. Many of the French wounded were so seriously hurt that they afterward died.

To Reuben's great delight, they found the American prisoners, his former shipmates, still on board, though dreadfully reduced in health by their severe treatment. They were sent on board the Constellation at once.

Presently two cutters from the Constellation were seen toiling through the heavy sea toward the Insurgente, and the transfer of the French prisoners at once began. It was growing dark, however, and although the Constellation's men had worked with persistent energy and haste, a great deal was still to be accomplished by nightfall. The rising wind made it dangerous to attempt the transfer of any more prisoners, and Truxtun determined to defer the attempt until morning, intend-

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ing to lie by the frigate all night; but in a few hours the wind was blowing a fierce West India gale, almost a hurricane, and the situation of the Insurgente was most critical.

The weakened masts and spars and the cut and torn rigging and sails were subjected to a fearful strain. Throughout the darkness and the rain and wind, all the long night the Americans, aided by some one hundred and seventy-three French prisoners, who had not yet been transferred, labored assiduously to repair damages, strengthen spars, and enable the ship to stand the storm. The French prisoners, imagining that they were still under the guns of the Constellation, worked cheerfully enough. Rodgers, however, had surmised that the two ships would be parted in the gale, and looked forward to the morning with great foreboding. He had communicated his suspicion to Porter, who had shown himself a brilliant second to his great commander, and toward morning the two had quietly assembled their men and had determined upon a bold course of action.

With the gray light of the wet dawn announcing the break of day, they eagerly searched for the Constellation. She was nowhere to be found. In every direction, as far as the gray sky line, nothing was to be seen but the waves. They were alone upon the sea. The French were as quick to perceive the situation as the Americans, and they at once assembled on the spar

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deck in a threatening mass. Porter had rallied his men aft near the wheel, which was intrusted to Reuben James. The ship had weathered the storm, and was still struggling along under a faint show of canvas in the howling gale. The Americans were outnumbered four-teen to one. Though the French had no arms save belaying pins, hand spikes, and pieces of timber gathered from the wreck, the case looked desperate. Any hesitation on the part of Rodgers would have resulted in the recapture of the frigate.

Though Rodgers—afterward Commodore Rodgers—never enjoyed an opportunity to distinguish himself in the naval service such as was vouchsafed to Hull, Decatur, Bainbridge, Stewart, and others, he was one of the bravest and most capable sea officers the United States Navy ever produced. Realizing that everything depended upon the initiative, he whipped out his cutlass and drew one of his pistols—an example which was followed by his men. He pointed to the main hatch, and sternly bade the French descend immediately under pain of death. The American had found during the night that there was not a handcuff or shackle on board; they, with the gratings which should cover the hatches, had been thrown overboard. If he could once get the prisoners below decks, however, Rodgers thought that he could master them. As he pointed to the hatchway with his sword and repeated his order, the French, growling ominously, hesitated. Rodgers

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repeated his command a third time. The Frenchmen made no motion to obey. There was evidently going to be trouble.

"Men," said Rodgers hastily, "let no man fire a shot, except Mr. Porter or myself, until I give the order. Remember, it is for your lives!"

Shifting their cutlasses to their left hands, he and Porter raised their pistols and pointed them full at the mutinous Frenchmen.

"For the last time," cried Rodgers in broken French, "I repeat the command: Go below!"

A big boatswain's mate, followed by two or three others, sprang out from the group and recklessly leaped toward him. Rodgers pulled the trigger. The man went down with a bullet in his brain. Porter accounted for the next man in the same way. The mass, which had surged determinedly forward in the wake of its leader, stopped unceremoniously for the moment. A chorus of yells and curses and Gallic shrieks broke from it.

"Handle your pistols, men!" said Rodgers calmly, drawing his second.

At the word of command, the little line of Americans pointed their pistols at the unarmed Frenchmen, who found themselves confronted by a row of gleaming barrels. Even James, holding the wheel with his foot and left hand, managed to draw his pistol. Rodgers took out his watch.

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"I give you thirty seconds," he cried, "to go below! At the end of that time I open fire!"

Each American had two pistols and a musket. At short range they could do great execution among the French, massed as they were. The noise among the Frenchmen died away. They looked at each other for a few seconds. Their glance fell upon the stern figure of the gigantic American, watch in hand.

"Twenty seconds gone, messieurs," said Rodgers grimly.

The nearest man in panic terror leaped down the hatchway.

"Clear down with you!" shouted Rodgers, following him with his glance—"down to the berth deck—lively!"

Another and another followed, until the whole mass finally poured in a stream down the hatchway. In a few moments there was not a Frenchman left upon the deck. Rodgers put his watch in his pocket with a sigh of relief. Brushing the perspiration from his forehead, pistol in hand he resolutely descended to the gun deck, followed by Porter and the rest of the men.

Reuben was left alone on the deck at the wheel. The control of the prisoners was of more importance at this juncture than the state of the ship. Rodgers was obliged to trust the latter to the young lad grasping the spokes. The responsibility of the moment filled James with delight. It tickled his fancy to think that

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he was the captain for the nonce of the Insurgente, and that he comprised the whole crew as well did not diminish his joy. He watched her never so carefully.

When Rodgers and his party reached the gun deck they found a few bolder spirits among the French had not gone below. The American sternly repeated his order, however, and actually seized the first Frenchman by the collar and threw him beneath the hatches. Temporary battens were improvised forward and aft, which covered the hatches there, but the main hatch was necessarily left open. A loaded carronade charged to the muzzle with musket balls was pointed down the open hatch. Numbers of heavy shot were suspended in nettings over the opening; every small arm in the ship was loaded and placed near at hand.

Porter and five seamen were detailed to keep constant guard over the open hatch, and to see that the obstructions were not removed from the other two. The prisoners were of necessity allowed free range on the berth deck and below. They amused themselves by destroying everything they could get at, and filled the ship with their cursings and howlings. They got their own provisions out of the hold, and soon broke into the spirit room, where many of them became beastly drunk.

Meanwhile Rodgers and the five remaining men with Reuben James managed the ship, and did their best to preserve her for three terrible days and nights.

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None of the Americans got any sleep, and as they did not dare to go below among the maddened prisoners, they had but little to eat or drink. It was an experience and an achievement unparalleled in American naval annals, but their ship was commanded by a hero, and every man was encouraged by the gallant spirit of Rodgers, and determined to bring in the prize in spite of their incredible hardships and dangers. Three days afterward they crept into the harbor of St. Kitts. The Insurgente sat low in the water; she was leaking slowly, as the result of her battle, but the Americans had no strength to pump her out.

Anchored securely in the harbor was the Constellation, which had arrived the day before. Truxtun had been in an agony of anxiety ever since the gale, and his relief when the wounded, battered hulk came sluggishly plodding up the harbor can well be imagined. How sweet, how glorious a picture the Constellation presented to the gaunt, haggard, worn-out, but indomitable Americans on the Frenchman's battered decks! Amid the cheers of the Constellation's men, the Insurgente dropped anchor. Truxtun eagerly hailed her:

"Insurgente, there!"

"Sir?"

"Are all well?"

"All well, sir, thank Heaven!" answered Rodgers feebly.

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"I shall come over to you at once," cried Truxtun. In a few moments he stepped for the first time on board his prize. Rodgers and six men received him.

"Thank God you are safe!" said the commodore. "Where are Porter and the others?"

"They are below, sir, keeping down the prisoners."

"Did you have any trouble with them?"

"Not much, sir," answered Rodgers; "we shot two, and drove the rest below. Mr. Porter and five men have been keeping them down night and day ever since. They have been raising a riot on the berth deck; broke into the spirit room, and have smashed up everything below. I have been expecting every moment that some drunken fool would get at the magazine and blow us all into eternity."

"Cutter, there!" cried Truxtun, looking over the side. "Come aboard, you men, and go below and relieve the men guarding the prisoners. Mr. Sterrett," he said to the lieutenant in the cutter, "you will relieve Mr. Rodgers in command of the prize for the present. Bid Mr. Porter and his men to come to me."

In a few moments the little band of heroes grouped themselves around the captain.

Irascible, hot tempered, gouty, severe, and unsparing as he was, the men all loved him. He was a fighter, and, what was more, a successful fighter, and his bark was very much worse than his bite. He looked at them with gleaming eyes.

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"Men," he said, "you have done a heroic thing in bringing in this ship. Mr. Rodgers, you shall be made a post captain for this, if I have any influence with the department. Mr. Porter, I shall recommend you for a lieutenancy, sir; and as for you men, you shall all have two months' extra pay, and every able seaman among you shall have a petty office. We lost a boatswain's mate in the fight. You shall have that station, James."

"Three cheers for Commodore Truxtun!" shouted Rodgers, lifting his hand, and the stout old seaman never received a more heartfelt acclaim than the feeble cheers from this starving band.

"Take the cutter and go over to the Constellation and get something to eat. See that the men are given a double ration of grog, Mr. Rodgers. Excuse them from all duty until to-morrow at quarters. Give them the run of the ship; yes, shore leave, too, until that time, if they want it. Send over all the cutters of the Constellation, and we will get rid of these prisoners."

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CHAPTER VIII.

JUST one year after the capture of the Insurgente * the Constellation was slowly beating to and fro on her old cruising ground to the southward of St. Kitts, and about fifteen miles west of Basse Terre. On the morning of February 1st a large sail was sighted to the southward, evidently heading in for the land. The wind was very light and baffling, with frequent intervals of calm. Truxtun spread every rag of canvas and at once made for the stranger, which was soon discovered to be a very large and heavy frigate, evidently larger and more powerful than the Constellation. The stranger showed no disposition whatever to engage, and, in fact, made every effort to get away, and the faint breeze dying into periods of calm made it impossible for the Constellation to close with her big antagonist.

For over twenty-four hours the ships drifted about,

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* The Insurgente was taken into the service of the United States, and one summer morning in 1799, while under the command of Captain Patrick Fletcher, she sailed away into the ocean and never came back again. Her fate is one of the secrets of the sea.

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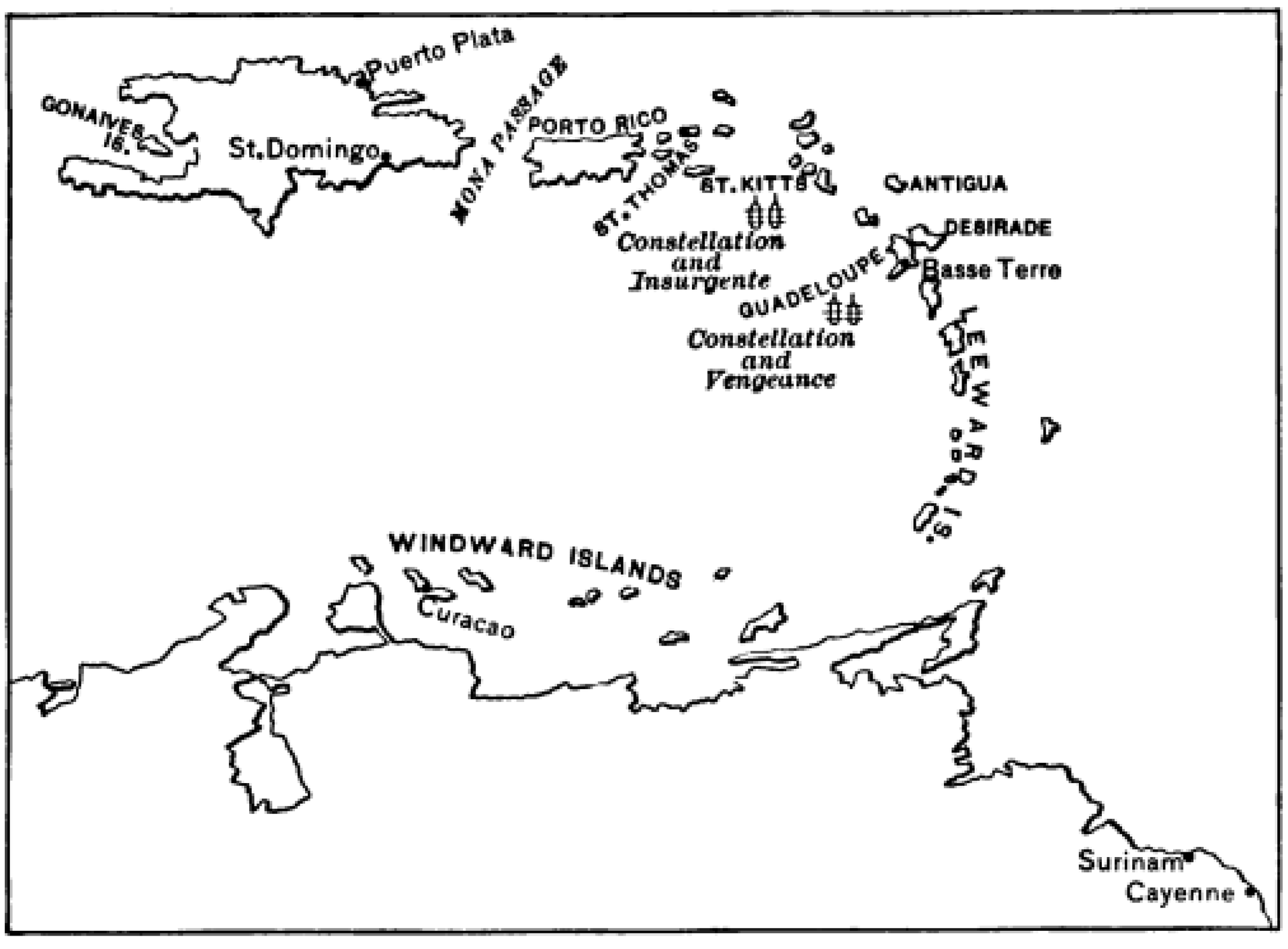
driven hither and thither by furtive cat's-paws of wind, but gradually approaching each other. The Frenchman unavailingly continued his efforts to escape, but his ship was deep in the water and appeared heavy laden, and the Constellation was one of the fastest keels in the sea. Truxtun's seamanship was masterly. He



Map of the scene of the Constellation's battles.

never lost a shadow of advantage, not a breath of wind escaped him. Finally, late in the afternoon of Sunday, the 2d of February, the breeze freshened and grew steadier, and it became evident that the impatient Americans would finally be able to bring their foes to an engagement.

Reuben and his old friend Tucker, who had joined

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the ship during the year as chief boatswain's mate, were standing together on the forecastle at four bells in the afternoon watch, looking toward the chase. The men had been pulling and hauling at the ropes and braces ever since they had raised the French frigate, but now that the breeze was coming steady and strengthening a little there was nothing to do but to wait. Old Tucker improved the shining hour by telling a yarn.

"Ay," he said, in answer to an observation of one of the younger sailors, "bein' a man-o'-war's man's excitin' enuf—'most as much as bein' a privateersman; but fer real downright blood-movin' adwentures, gimme a w'ale ship. Now, I jist remembers that oncet I was harpooner on a New Bedford w'aler, the Polly an' Jane—a fine, full-rigged ship she were, too. Well, we was a-cruisin' 'round the Greenland seas fer sparm w'ales, an' had had a mighty fine run, an' was full to the hatches with ile. Howsomedever, we had a few casks lashed on deck, an' some empty water casks w'ich the skipper he was anxious to fill; so all hands was mighty glad, bein' as we was workin' on shares, w'en we got our irons fast to a big bull sparm w'ale. We killed him arter a hard struggle, in w'ich he stove up one o' the boats an' knocked the boat-steerer into kingdom come with a flap of his tail.

"We towed him alongside an' perceeded to cut him open. I was down on his fat back with a w'alin' spade, an' we'd jist opened the big tank in his head. I s'pose

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there was thirty or forty barrel o' loose ile washin' round there, an' we was jist riggin' a bucket line to pass it inboard, w'en somehow or 'nuther—we never knowed how—somebody must 'a' dropped a light over into that 'ere w'ale's head, w'ich was, as I said, jist like a big tank. The ile took fire to oncet, an' it blazed up as high as the main yardarm in a second, an' I was so skeered that I fell into it. I went in so quick that the flames didn't burn me in passin', an' of course, retainin' my presence o' mind—w'ich is allus a proper thing fer a sailor-man to do—I immejitly duv down in the ile. As I went in I could hear the men on the ship yellin' like mad, an' sez I to myself—an' I done my thinkin' pretty quick, lads, I want to tell ye!—if I go up to the top o' this yere flamin' volcaner to git air I'll git burnt; an' if I stays here I'll git drownded in the ile; so wot'll I do?"

Tucker paused a moment and looked around at the eager men listening to this stupendous yarn. Then he cast a long glance forward at the chase, hesitated a moment, and said reflectively:

"We seem to be overhaulin' her, shipmates, don't we?"

"Hang the chase!" exclaimed the captain of the forecastle; "tell us wot ye done in that w'ale tank."

"Oh!" said Tucker blandly and interrogatively, "the w'ale tank? Of course! Lemme see, w'ere was I?"

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"You was under water—ile, I mean," answered another old shellback, "w'ich it was burnin' over yer head, an' you was a-drowndin' in the ile an' reflectin' on the sitivation. Wot did ye do?"

"Well, shipmates, ye'll hardly believe it, but this is wot I done: I took a-hold o' my w'alin' spade, w'ich is as sharp as a razor—ye know it's a good thing fer a sailor-man, 'specially a w'aler or a man-o'-war's man, never to let go of his weapin—mind that, youngsters; so I braced myself agin' the side o' that w'ale, hooked my feet in some o' his innards, so's I wouldn't rise, an' ca'mly cut a hole right through his head into the water. Then of course I squeeged myself through the hole, an' found out that I'd got myself turned in his head, an' here I was a-buttin' agin' the ship's bottom; so I had to dive an' go down under her keel an' come up on t'other side. There was a rope hangin' conwenient-like over the side, an' I climbed up to the deck.

"Cap'n an' all hands was on t'other side cuttin' away like mad at the tackles w'ich held the w'ale, an' swingin' the yards an' doin' everythin' to get clear, 'cause it ain't pleasant to be standin' on three thousand barrels o' w'ale ile, anchored to a flamin' volcaner; an' jist as I got on deck they got clear. So I walks across the deck. All hands was skeered to death w'en they seen me. An' w'en I touches the cap'n on the shoulder, an' sez to him, 'Come aboard, sir!' they cried an' yelled as if I'd 'a' been a ghost. An' the cap'n, he

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sez to me some time arterward, he sez, 'There's only one thing on earth, Tucker, wot kept my hair from turnin' gray w'en I seed you so unexpected-like poppin' over the side, fer we all thought you'd be burnt up afore you could git into t'other hot place.' An' I sez, salut-in', 'Wot kept ye from turnin' gray, cap'n?' sez I. An' sez he, 'Dash it all, man!' pullin' off his wig, 'I ain't got no hair; I'm bald-headed!'"

"I thought ye oncet told me ye couldn't swim, Tucker?" asked James.

"Swim? Lor, youngster, if you was in a fix like that you'd 'a' swum. You'd 'a' had to swum! Nobody could 'a' helped it; an', mates, the proudest remembrance o' my life is that, in all them adwentures, I brung off the w'alin' spade, w'ich I have it now hangin' in my parlor at New Bedford!"

"That's a pooty good yarn, Tucker," commented another old shellback, "but I kin cap it with a better one. We was off New Zealand oncet, a-cruisin' fer w'ales——"

"Rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat-tat-tat!" came the rolling of the drums along the ship's deck at that moment, beating to quarters.

There was no more time for yarns now. With various opinions of Tucker's credibility, the men ran for their stations. They were near enough now for the ship to be cleared for action. The yards were slung with chains, the standing rigging stoppered, pre-

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venter backstays reeved, splinter nettings triced up, boats covered with canvas to prevent clouds of splinters going inboard in case they were struck by heavy shot, the relieving tackles were overhauled and manned in case the wheel was carried away, magazines were opened, arms distributed, decks sanded, and every possible preparation made.

Most provokingly, however, just when they were about within range the wind died away again and they lay motionless. The men were kept at their stations and allowed to rest at the guns, however, until supper and grog were served out. Toward evening the breeze came up again, and the frigate slowly moved toward the Frenchman. She was a large fifty-gun frigate, at least a third heavier than the Constellation. It was evident to all that the approaching conflict would be a very serious one. Truxtun walked forward and considered his antagonist intently. He had the weather gauge of her, and he determined on his course of action. The Frenchman, seeing escape hopeless, had finally prepared for action. The Americans had heard the drum beating to quarters some time since, and the faint cheers of the men came up the breeze toward them. The battle lanterns on the enemy were lighted, and streams of light came out of every open port, although, as it was bright moonlight now, the ships were plainly visible to each other in any case.

After a long scrutiny of his antagonist, the com-

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modore turned inboard and walked aft through the batteries. The men had resumed their stations in the highest possible spirits. They remembered their glorious success of the year before, and they determined to repeat it in this instance. As they approached the enemy, however, they settled down quietly around the guns.

Truxtun, surrounded by his aids, stopped before the different divisions and said a few encouraging words to the men, ending with the stern injunction that no man was to deliver a shot from his gun until the order was given, under pain of death. Some of those who had been in the last battle knew what he meant. Under no circumstances, no matter what punishment the ship might receive, was there to be a single reply made to the enemy until the commodore himself gave the order. He told them that they were to load as rapidly as possible and fire deliberately, taking careful aim; they were to concentrate their fire upon the hull of the Frenchman. The guns were loaded with solid shot, with the addition of a stand of grape once in a while at the discretion of the officers. No attention was to be paid to the rigging or spars of the enemy. The marines and small-arm men were to look particularly to the French officers and crew. The American officers were charged specifically to allow neither haste nor confusion in the batteries, and they were cautioned to set every man an example of steadiness by their own

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coolness and calmness. Truxtun did not make the mistake of underestimating his foe, especially in view of the latter's preponderance in force, and he determined to leave nothing whatever to chance.

Reuben James had been promoted to the command of number five gun in Lieutenant Sterrett's division. It was the gun from which the man had fled in the battle of the year before. As Truxtun passed by him on the quarter-deck he remembered the incident.

"There will be no flinching from the guns this time, lads, I am sure," he said.

"No, yer honor," answered James; "we're here to stay until we die, sir!"

"Good! That's the spirit, lads!" said the captain, turning around and addressing them all. "Yon fellow is bigger and heavier than we are, but we will make no account of odds. There are cowards on their decks, for they have been trying to get away from us for two days in spite of their size, but we will show them that there are none of that breed on the Constellation."

As the cheers which greeted this doughty sentiment died away, the old man enjoined strict silence and regained the quarter-deck. The men were so still that you could have heard a pin drop on the ship as they slowly crept up on the French frigate. Truxtun, trumpet in hand, was leaning over the lee rail looking forward at the black mass of the French ship. He lifted the trumpet and prepared to hail her, or give an order, when a bright

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flash of light shot out from one of the after guns of the Frenchman, followed by the roar of the discharge. Immediately all the after guns of the enemy opened fire upon the American frigate sweeping slowly ahead. Solid shot and grape from the long eighteens and twelves, and great smashing bolts from the forty-two pound carronades, were hurled upon the Constellation. From her silent decks there came no response.

The French gunnery was execrable as usual, but some of the projectiles met their mark, and men fell here and there on the decks. The dead were carried amidships, and the wounded, heroically endeavoring to stifle their cries, were taken below to the cockpit. The men stood with compressed lips, making no sound. The gun captains were eagerly peering along the guns, keeping them trained upon the French frigate. Officers and men looked anxiously at the little captain standing quiet and impassive on the quarter-deck. The French gun practice was improving with each moment as the Constellation slowly crept up on the other ship. The number of bodies amidships increased rapidly, and the surgeon and his mates had their hands full below. Great Heaven! would the captain never give the order to fire? How much longer could they stand this merciless pounding without making a reply? Nervous lads fingered their cutlass hilts, while the cold sweat stood out on their foreheads, and gun captains blew their smoking matches and trained their guns. They were

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closer now. The bow of the Constellation lapped the larboard quarter of the French ship. Slowly—each passing moment seeming an hour—they overhauled her. The moment was coming. It was at hand.

With a whispered word to the helmsman the captain swung the Constellation up into the wind a little to bring the whole broadside to bear. The French ship was now covered with the smoke and flame of her own guns. The scream of the bullets, the crashing of timber on the Constellation, was heard above the roar of the enemy's battery. As the great American ship swung up into the wind, turning her whole broadside to her huge enemy, little Truxtun sprang up on the taffrail and leaped thence into the mizzen shrouds. He was a target for every French musket on the other ship. The bullets whistled about him but left him untouched. He leaned far out over the black water, and at exactly the proper moment gave the command to fire.

Like a blast from a volcano the heavy broadside of the Constellation was hurled upon the devoted French ship. The American frigate reeled and rocked under the recoil, and the effect upon the Frenchman was terrific. The silence with which the Constellation had received their fire had given the Frenchmen a certain careless immunity, and the tremendous broadside came as a deadly surprise. For the moment the French frigate made but a feeble return. The concentrated broadside at close range had done fearful execution.

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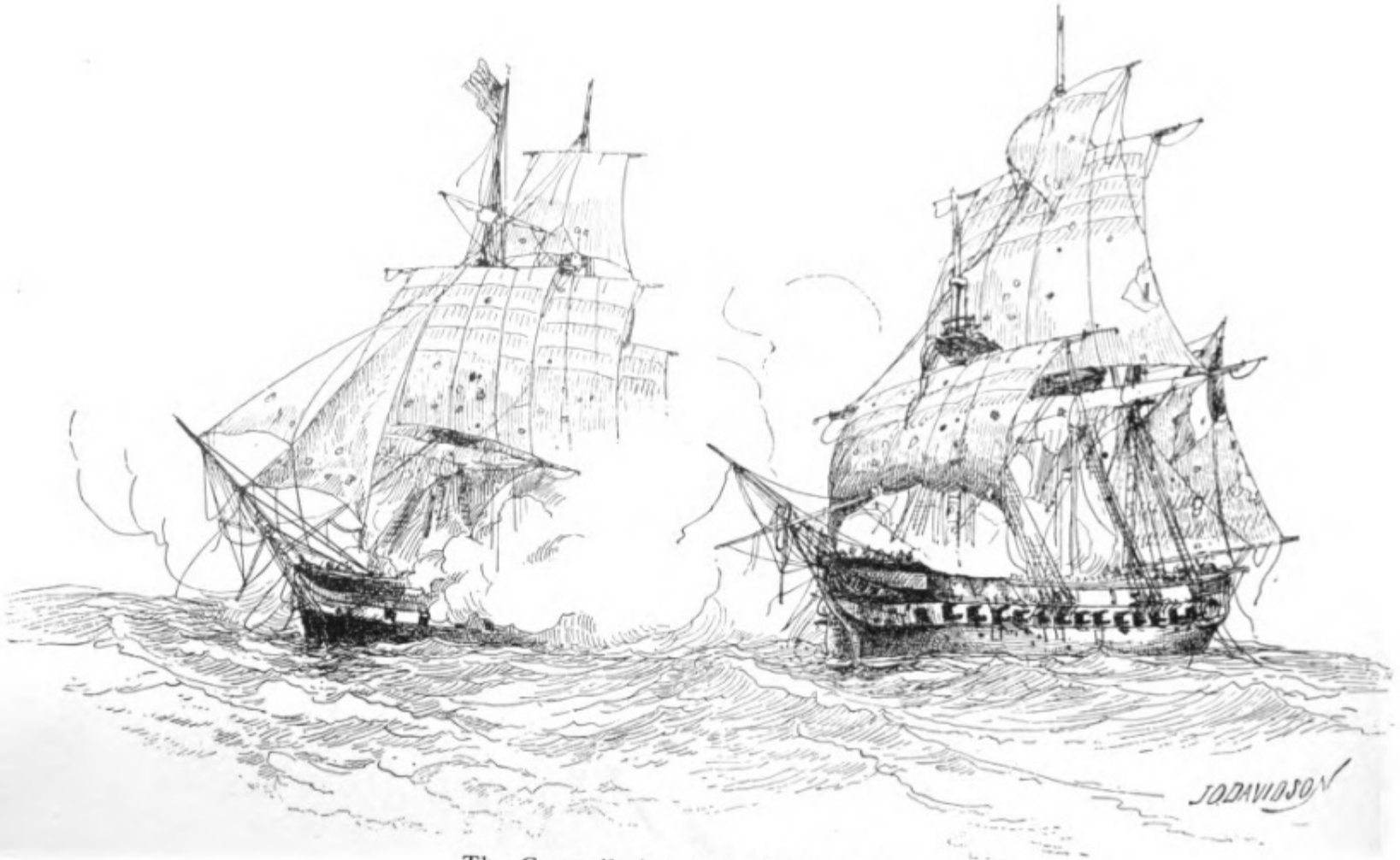

The Constellation and the Vengeance.

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Her decks, which had been filled with cheering men, were now covered with dead and wounded. The Constellation fell off and ran squarely alongside, delivering a second full broadside before the Frenchmen could make any adequate reply. They soon recovered themselves, however, and, rallied by their officers, returned the fire with spirit and effect. Gun met gun, broadside answered broadside through the long night.

The wind being so light there was no opportunity for maneuvering, and the conflict resolved itself into a plain, steady give and take, the two ships slowly drifting along yardarm to yardarm. It was a question as to who could stand the punishment the longest. In accordance with Truxtun's instructions, the fire of the Constellation was concentrated upon the hull of the enemy, while the Frenchman, having had enough of the battle, directed his fire at the spars and rigging of the American frigate, hoping that he might so cripple her that he could escape. A large number of the Constellation's crew were constantly employed, therefore, in reeving new gear, splicing rope, and fishing spars. The remainder kept up their hail of destruction upon the doomed French frigate. So rapid became their fire that many of the guns became so overheated as to compel their temporary disuse. Observing that the fire of the Constellation was appearing to slacken a little, Truxtun sprang to the main battery to see what was the matter.

"What are you standing here idle for?" he shouted

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to James and the crew of number five gun, which chanced to be nearest him.

"The gun's so hot that we can't use it, sir," was the answer.

"Cool it off, then!" returned the captain, pointing to the side.

James immediately crawled through the porthole, straddling the muzzle of the gun, and dropped overboard a bucket on the end of a line, which constituted a part of the equipment of the piece, and then hauled it up and began pouring water down the gun barrel to cool it off. Other men did the like for their guns. The position they assumed was most dangerous. The smoke no longer obscured them, and the Frenchmen directed a heavy fire upon them, but the men were by this time perfectly reckless of consequences; they laughed and shouted, and shook their fists in the direction of the enemy. Presently, having cooled the guns sufficiently for use, they crept inboard and resumed the fire. So the long hours wore away.

About one bell in the mid watch the Constellation finally ranged ahead, and Truxtun took a position on the bow of the French ship and pounded away at her until her fire, which had grown more and more feeble, finally died away. Twice during the night she had struck her flag, but as the Americans had not observed her surrender she had been forced to resume the battle. There was no mistake about the situation now, however, for

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she was not only defeated, but silenced. The last bolt from the French frigate struck the port sill of number five gun; a heavy splinter hurled Reuben James senseless on the deck. One of his men seized the loggerhead and discharged the piece at the Frenchman. That was the last shot of the battle. Their beaten antagonist made no reply. Truxtun put his helm up and headed for the stranger.

The Constellation had scarcely gathered way when the mainmast, whose every shroud and stay had been cut, and which had been badly wounded under the top, crashed over the side, carrying with it Midshipman Jarvis,* a boy about thirteen years of age, and all the men in the top with him except one. He had refused, like Casabianca on the Orient, at the battle of the Nile, to abandon his station, and had preferred to die with his men rather than leave the post of duty. The Constellation, with the great mast hanging over her side, lay helpless in the water, with none of her guns bearing on the French frigate, which took advantage of the delay and immediately made sail and faded out of sight in the black night, the moon having set some time since.

The decks of the Constellation presented a scene of horror. Forty out of her crew of three hundred and ten had been killed and wounded. Including the loss of the mainmast, she had been seriously cut up aloft,

* His story is admirably told in Little Jarvis, by Molly Elliot Seawell, the first volume in the Young Heroes of our Navy series.

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though her hull had not received much damage. When they had cleared the wreck the French ship was nowhere to be seen, and in the morning she was not within the compass of their vision. Pursuit was useless, and after temporarily strengthening the spars, under very little canvas the Constellation slowly made her way to Jamaica to repair damages and refit. She had not learned the name of her midnight antagonist.

Three days later a battered and broken French ship turned up at Curaçoa in a sinking condition. She was the ill-named Vengeance, with which the Constellation had fought. Her hull was nearly cut to pieces, and only the most desperate labor on the part of her crew had prevented her from foundering at sea. She had lost one hundred and sixty killed and wounded out of a crew of three hundred and thirty, and in five hours of deadly night battle she had been beaten to a standstill, and thrice compelled to strike her flag to a frigate less than two thirds her size and of scarcely two thirds her force. She had only escaped by the unfortunate accident to the Constellation.*

Truxtun received a medal from Congress, pieces of plate, prize money, and other rewards, in which the crew shared. The greatest satisfaction, however, that came to any of them lay in the knowledge that they

* Six months after this action the Vengeance was captured by the British thirty-eight gun frigate Seine, after a desperate resistance, in which her loss was over a hundred men killed and wounded. In both instances she was beaten by an inferior force.

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had brilliantly and successfully upheld the honor of the American flag upon the high seas. Little Jarvis, too, was not forgotten. Congress passed a resolution in his honor, and he has remained to this day the only lad so distinguished by the representatives of the nation. James soon recovered from his wound, and when the war was over and the Constellation returned home, he practically forsook the merchant service and remained a boatswain's mate in the little navy of the United States, being attached to the war schooner Enterprise, commanded by the same Sterrett whom we saw shooting the coward on the deck of the Constellation.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE Enterprise had been and continued to be the luckiest vessel in the naval service, not even excepting the Constellation or the great Constitution. She was a small schooner of one hundred and sixty-five tons burden, mounting twelve light guns and carrying from seventy to ninety officers and men. During the French war which had just closed she had captured no less than five armed privateers, and made a prize of the Flambeau, a fourteen-gun private armed brig, much superior to her in force, after a brilliant action. During the Tripolitan war about to begin she captured the Tripoli, the Mastico, renamed the Intrepid, and through the efforts of her captain and crew burned the Philadelphia. To anticipate further, in the War of 1812, when she had been altered to a clumsy ship-rig, she took the British war brig Boxer, of greater size and force, after a severe action, captured the large privateer Mars, and, though under her new rig she had degenerated from among the swiftest to one of the slowest vessels on the sea, she escaped from a large British frigate, after a chase of seventy hours, through the exercise of the

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highest judgment and most consummate seamanship on the part of her commander.

It was a great pleasure for Reuben to find that the present executive officer of the Enterprise was his old friend, David Porter. The little schooner was attached to Commodore Dale's squadron of observation in the Mediterranean. Dale had been sent with a small force to overawe the Barbary pirates, whose corsairs were committing great depredations upon American commerce. His instructions did not contemplate war, however, and, as the result showed, left him and his captains in a peculiarly indeterminate position.

On August 1, 1801, the Enterprise was cruising to and fro in the Mediterranean near the island of Malta, when she fell in with a large Tripolitan cruiser called the Tripoli. The cruiser was a polacre—that is to say, she probably had three single masts, on two of which she carried lateen sails. She mounted fourteen guns and carried eighty men, and was in every respect a heavy overmatch for the little Enterprise. Sterrett was a man of the greatest resolution, as we have seen, and he had no hesitation in engaging. The Tripolitan captain was equally as determined, apparently, for he made no effort to escape, but gallantly headed his ship for the Americans. Among all the rovers who had committed depredations on American commerce, this particular corsair had been conspicuous for his boldness, ability, and success, and he was just the person above all others

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whom the Americans desired to get hold of. There were a number of the old Constellation's men and officers in the crew of the Enterprise, and they went to their quarters gallantly, welcoming the approaching combat with gladness.

At about noon the action began on both sides within pistol-shot range, and was continued for two hours with great spirit. The American schooner was most brilliantly handled. Reuben James, who had been promoted to the position of quartermaster, was stationed at the wheel, and his careful steering of the ship and his prompt obedience to Sterrett's orders enabled every maneuver to be carried out with accuracy and success. It was the first time he had been a noncombatant in action, and he soon found that it was not altogether a pleasant thing to have to stand up and be shot at without being able to make any reply. There was a relief to the situation when you were discharging your small arm or great gun at the enemy who was firing upon you, which was denied him in this instance as he stood grasping the wheel. Fortunately, however, the nice duty of steering and the constant stream of commands from the captain left him but little time for reflection on the situation.

The gunnery of the Turks was as poor as their courage was high, and their courage was only surpassed by their treachery. About two in the afternoon they struck their flag. The Americans left their guns at

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once and began cheering, and the schooner was headed for the polacre, when, to the astonishment of every one, the Tripolitan flag was rehoisted and the rover poured in another broadside on the Enterprise. The Americans sprang to their guns and resumed the conflict. After a short interval the Tripolitan struck his flag a second time. Sterrett ordered the Tripolitan to come under his quarter, and kept his crew at their guns. The Tripolitan slowly and reluctantly assumed the desired position, and Sterrett called away a boat and sent it off to take possession of the prize. There seemed to be no doubt as to the issue this time, although from motives of precaution Sterrett kept the remainder of his crew at their guns. He was therefore astounded when the Tripolitan commander suddenly poured in another broadside, sheered his vessel over toward the Enterprise, and attempted to board her—an attempt easily frustrated by the watchful Sterrett. The boat was at once recalled, and the now thoroughly enraged American, taking advantage of his superior mobility and seamanship, took position off the bow of the corsair, and subsequently crossed the stern, in both cases raking her repeatedly, pouring in at close range so severe a fire that the decks of the enemy became a perfect slaughter pen. Two of her masts were cut away, and finally the treacherous Tripolitan captain appeared at the gangway, carrying his flag, which he threw into the sea, and then prostrated himself in the

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presence of the Americans, imploring that mercy which, by all the laws of warfare, should have been summarily denied him.

The Americans were filled with rage and indignation at the perfidy and treachery of their piratical foes, and while Sterrett's orders did not permit him to capture the corsair, he determined to make her convey a lesson to the Bashaw of Tripoli which would be more emphatic than if he had made a prize of the vessel; so Lieutenant David Porter, with Reuben James and a boat crew, were sent on board the prize. The polacre was completely dismantled by the Americans. Guns, equipments, provisions, ammunition, everything movable, were thrown overboard. The pirates were left with but a single spar standing, and a single sail with which to make the best of their way to Tripoli, with a message from Sterrett to the Bashaw that thereafter American tribute would be paid in the same manner. On the Tripolitan, out of a crew of eighty, twenty had been killed and thirty wounded, including her commander, making a total loss of over sixty per cent of her complement—a terrible proportion indeed! On the Enterprise none had been killed or wounded, and she had not suffered materially in any way.

Some days after, the dismantled and wrecked schooner did succeed in reaching the harbor of Tripoli. When the scoundrelly captain, Mahomet Ṣous, told his equally scoundrelly master, the Bashaw, the story of the

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conflict, not even the fact of his undoubted treachery in behalf of his chief, and the additional fact that his own severe wounds bore testimony to his personal gallantry, served to mitigate the wrath of that tyrant. He paraded the unfortunate rais through the streets tied to the tail of a jackass, the most bitter disgrace which could happen to a Mussulman, and then had him bastinadoed with five hundred lashes on the soles of his feet—to encourage the others, it was said. However, the punishment worked the other way, for the Tripolitans, knowing that they would be beaten by the Americans if they were caught at sea, and bastinadoed by the Bashaw when they returned home, could not be induced to enlist in the Bashaw's navy.

Sterrett was promoted to the rank of master commandant, and received a sword from Congress. A month's pay was given also to the officers and men for their gallantry.

In the years that followed, Reuben James remained in the Enterprise, which took an active part in the various movements for the protection of American commerce, until war was formally declared and Commodore Preble arrived in the Mediterranean to take charge of the active operations.

One morning in November, 1803, the little American squadron lying at anchor in the harbor of Syracuse observed a strange sail making up the harbor. As she drew near she proved to be a smart man-of-war

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brig flying the American flag. She dropped anchor, and after properly saluting the broad pennant of the commodore, a boat pulled away from her side, in the stern sheets of which sat a young officer. He was rowed over to the Constitution, and after a short interval he was brought to the Enterprise, then under the command of a short, stout, energetic young seaman named Isaac Hull. When the boat brought to at the starboard gangway of the Enterprise, the young officer, wearing the single epaulet of a lieutenant, sprang over the side and saluted Captain Hull, who had stepped forward to receive him.

The newcomer was a delightful specimen of manhood. His tall, slender, graceful yet muscular figure presented the greatest possible contrast to the stout commander of the schooner. The two men met with evident friendship and appreciation of each other, and for a short time engaged in earnest conversation, at the end of which the younger man exhibited a paper which the older man perused. After he had read it, Captain Hull turned to the chief boatswain's mate, who happened to be none other than Reuben James. That gallant sailor, since the advent of the young officer upon the decks of the schooner, had been in a fever of expectation and impatience. He had not presumed, of course, to break in upon the conversation of the two officers. Such a thing could never be imagined even for a second in the naval service, but he had approached

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as near to them as he dared, and stood on tiptoe, fingering his whistle in a tumult of excitement such as he had rarely ever experienced before.

"Pipe all hands on deck, bosun's mate!" said Hull.

As Reuben blew the shrill call—and it seemed as if he had never blown it so shrilly before—he kept his eye fixed upon the young officer standing beside Hull, and for the first time that young officer observed him. He fastened his gaze upon the sailor intently for a moment, and then broke into a broad smile of affectionate greeting. Forgetting all the differences of rank and station, and reverting only to their past friendship, the young officer stepped forward and grasped the astonished and delighted seaman with both hands, much to the surprise of Captain Hull.

"Why, it's Reuben James!" shouted the young man, with a laugh like a boy's. "I haven't seen you for near seven years. The same brave, honest, faithful sailor lad you always were. It does my heart good to see you, man!" And the crew, tumbling up from below, witnessed in wonder the unusual spectacle of their boatswain's mate and a young and handsome officer hand in hand, smiling upon each other like children.

"Lads," said Captain Hull, touching his young companion on the shoulder to recall him to the situation, and then addressing the crew, "I am transferred to the brig Argus, and from to-day you have a new captain,

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Lieutenant Stephen Decatur, who has just come aboard to take command."

"Three cheers for Captain Stephen Decatur!" sang out Reuben James, his eyes filled with tears of joy over the unexpected meeting.

During the remainder of the Tripolitan war Reuben James saw hot service, and manifested on several occasions the most conspicuous personal gallantry, performing, indeed, in one instance, that act of devoted self-sacrifice which has rescued his name from the oblivion which usually attends the work of the common sailor, however faithful and devoted he may have been. He was one of the crew of the Enterprise which followed Decatur in the Intrepid when his young captain made that bold sweep up the harbor of Tripoli to burn the Philadelphia.* He was by the side of his captain when they boarded that great frigate, and no one wielded a stouter blade in the fierce attack than he. When the men sprang on the rail of the Intrepid, after the Philadelphia had been set on fire, to cut the fastenings which held the ketch to the burning frigate, while the flames played upon them and roared over the powder stored upon the deck, he was one of the men who stood with Decatur in the midst of the fire, and, reckless of their personal danger, hacked away at the hawser until it parted and they got free.

* See Decatur and Somers, by Molly Elliot Seawell, in the Young Heroes of our Navy series.

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Subsequently, when Preble sent his gunboats, under the command of Decatur and Somers, to take the Tripolitan gunboats, he was again in his favorite position by the side of his captain when they captured gunboat No. 1; and when, to revenge the cowardly murder of his brother, who had been shot by the captain of the surrendered gunboat, which had then endeavored to escape, Decatur's boat pursued the Tripolitan and boarded him, James was again by his beloved captain's side. In the fierce mêlée which took place between the handful of Americans and the desperate, murderous corsairs, he was wounded in both arms so that he entirely lost the use of them for the time being. When his commander, who was struggling with the Tripolitan captain, whom he presently dispatched while both were lying upon the deck, was about to be stricken down by another Tripolitan, Reuben, with reckless gallantry and devoted consecration, sprang between Decatur and the descending scimiter, and received the blow intended for his captain upon his own head, which he had so bravely interposed.

The tie of affection which had subsisted between the rude, unlettered, and common sailor and his great officer was so deepened and intensified by this act of affectionate bravery and devotion that thenceforth nothing could break it, and the two men really loved each other thereafter. It was a friendship as strange and lasting as it was unusual. Decatur himself nursed

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Reuben back to life with the most assiduous care, and when he asked him what reward he could give him for what he had done, the modest sailor could think of nothing he desired except to be relieved of an irksome petty detail connected with the handing out of the hammocks when they were piped down, which did not properly belong to his station. He was as modest and simple-minded in his way as Hervé Riel.

In the years intervening between the close of the Tripolitan war, Reuben, now a confirmed man-of-war's man, made many cruises in different vessels, at one time crossing the Atlantic in a gunboat commanded by Lieutenant James Lawrence. He was a seaman gunner on the Chesapeake when she was so pusillanimously surrendered to the Leopard after a severe bombardment from the latter ship, to which the only reply made was from Reuben James's gun, the priming of which was ignited by a live coal carried in the hand from the galley by Lieutenant Allen. When Decatur was given command of the Chesapeake, with Allen as his junior officer, James remained with the frigate, and thereafter, as long as Decatur was afloat in any ship, Reuben never left him.

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CHAPTER X.

EARLY in the morning of Sunday, October 25, 1812, just at sunrise, the frigate United States, 44, Stephen Decatur captain, Reuben James chief boatswain's mate, was lumbering along on the port tack at the junction of the 29th parallel of north latitude, with the 29th meridian of west longitude, a few days' sail from the Canary Islands, when the lookout sighted a sail forward and to windward, hull down on the horizon. The day broke clear and bright, and the wind was coming strong and steady from the south-southeast. The men were routed out at an early hour, and Decatur made all sail toward the stranger, which was soon discovered to be a large frigate close-hauled on the other tack. She changed her course as they watched her, and came lasking down toward them.

Contrary to the usual run of American vessels, the United States was a slow and somewhat unhandy frigate at that time, though afterward, by trimming her deep by the head, she developed those amazing qualities of rapid sailing and steady going which caused her to be known for years after in the navy as the "old wagoner." This necessary trim had only been discovered

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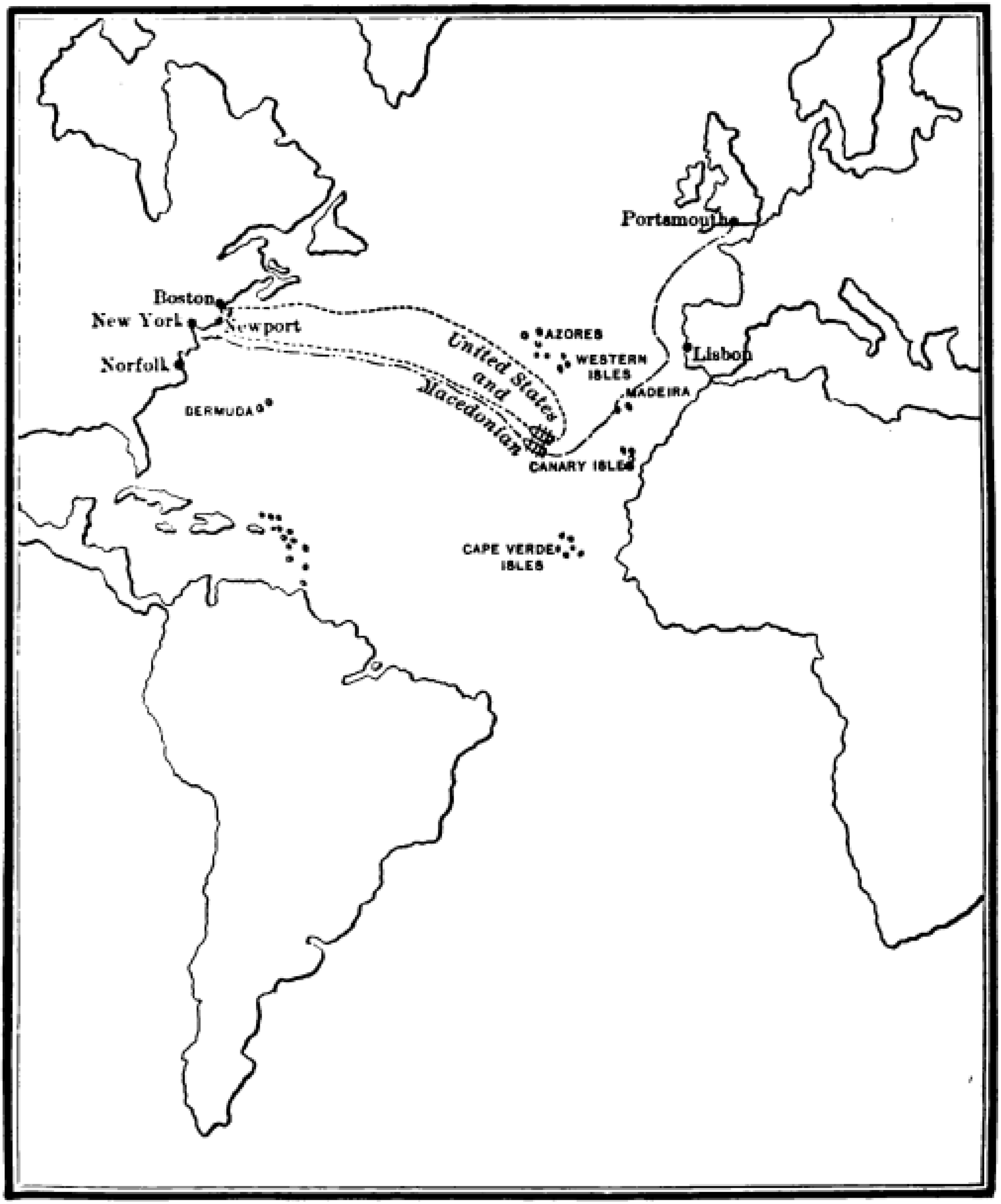
by an accident, and was not known during the War of 1812; consequently, in spite of all the efforts the Ameri-



Scene of the action between the United States and the Macedonian.

can made—and Decatur was conspicuous for his able and brilliant seamanship—he could not succeed in gain-

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ing the weather gauge of the approaching frigate, which was not less ably handled than his own ship. Now to hold the weather gauge means to possess the ability to fight in your own way. The unfortunate man who has the lee gauge must necessarily allow his opponent to choose his own time and his own tactics. It was therefore a matter of much regret to the Americans that they found themselves unable to outpoint, outmaneuver, and outsail the speedy frigate so gallantly swooping down upon them. The bright red flags fluttering from the masthead and gaff end of the stranger proclaimed her to be an English ship. It was evident, however, from the daring manner in which the enemy approached them, that she was as anxious to fight as the Americans were, and both sides therefore made ready for the combat, the Americans calmly waiting until it should please the English to begin the game.

Decatur made his preparations with his usual coolness and deliberation. The different watches were allowed to get their breakfast, and then the ship was cleared for action and all hands went to quarters. Before the battle was joined Reuben James appeared at the mast and desired to speak with the captain. He had a nervously squirming small boy with him, whom he grasped firmly by the collar. Receiving the desired permission, Reuben and his young charge walked aft to the quarter-deck, where Decatur stood, surrounded by his staff, looking at the chase.

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"What is it, Reuben?" said the captain kindly, as the sailor made a sea scrape and knuckled his forehead.

"Please, Master Stephen, w'ich I means Cap'n Decatur, yer honor," said the brawny seaman, hastily striving to recover that slip of the tongue of which, by the way, he was often guilty —"yere's a youngster as wants to speak with ye, sir."

Stephen Decatur

"Well, my lad," said Decatur kindly—he was a severe disciplinarian, but personally a very kind and gentle man, especially to those who served under him—"what can I do for you?"

"Please, sir," said the little boy, who was about ten years old, "I'm Jack Creamer, sir, an' my father he died just after we left New York, sir, yer honor remembers——"

"Yes, I remember," remarked the captain. "I am very sorry for you, Jack. Go on."

"Please, sir, I wants to have my name put down on the muster roll, sir, w'ich it ain't on now, sir."

"Oh, the muster roll, eh? Well, what do you want your name on the muster roll for?"

"So's I can draw my share of the prize money, yer honor, w'en we takes that ship yonder."

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Decatur broke into a loud laugh, in which the officers standing near by joined.

"You're cocksure of taking her, are you?" he asked.

"Of course, sir," said the boy confidently. "Ain't you, sir?"

"I think so," replied Decatur, laughing again. "Very well.—Reuben, take him to the first lieutenant and have his name put on the muster roll as powder monkey.—And come to me, Jack, after the action, and I will see what I can do for you."

"Thankee, sir, thankee," said the delighted boy, touching his cap and running forward.

James, trusting to old acquaintanceship, stayed to speak with his beloved captain.

"Well, Reuben," said Decatur, turning to him, "what do you think of that fellow?"

"I think more o' him now than I will arter we've turned a couple o' broadsides on him, Master Ste—Cap'n Decatur, yer honor, I means, sir."

"Think there is no doubt about the result, do you?"

"Not with you on the quarter-deck, sir, an' me in the batteries," modestly remarked the veteran seaman.

"Go forward, you old braggart!" laughed Decatur.

"Ay, ay, sir. You knows we allus shakes hands afore we git into a fight," said Reuben, presuming audaciously on his commander's friendship.

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Decatur laughed again, and taking the sailor's outstretched hand, raised his voice so that it was perfectly audible through the ship, and said:

"Very well, Reuben. Through you I shake hands with the whole crew, and we'll shake hands in another fashion when we have captured yonder ship. Now, get to your station.—Remember, all, no firing until I give the order, and then pour it in like mad!"

While the men, who had been with Decatur on this very ship for nearly five years, were cheering these doughty sentiments, and Reuben was swaggering back to his station, the envy of the whole ship's company for his awful familiarity with the captain, a puff of white smoke broke out from the side of the English ship, followed a few moments later by the deep boom of a heavy gun.

It was 9.20 in the morning. The shot fell short. Several other guns were discharged without taking effect, and presently the roar of a broadside came rolling over the water. At 9.45 the United States opened fire from her long guns, the two ships passing each other on opposite tacks at a distance of about a mile. As four bells (ten o'clock) was struck in the morning watch the English ship, which proved to be the frigate Macedonian, 38, wore and ran along parallel to the United States, which was luffed up close to the wind in an endeavor to get near. The two ships ran side by side within easy range, and the firing was rapid

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and continuous. The English captain had made a serious mistake. He thought he was dealing with the American frigate Essex, which was armed with lighter guns than his own, and that the most advantageous thing for him to do was to keep at a long distance and knock the Essex to pieces with his main deck battery of long eighteen-pound guns. The United States was armed, however, with long twenty-fours, and in playing at long bowls the Englishman was simply giving to Decatur every advantage he had gained by holding the weather gauge.

The gun practice of the Americans was simply magnificent. They had been trained and drilled in gun firing and target practice again and again by Decatur and Allen, his efficient first lieutenant, during their long period of service. A better crew probably never manned a ship. Many of them, like James, were veterans of two wars, and there were a number of the old Constellation's men on the frigate. Bolt after bolt went crashing into the hull of the Macedonian. Presently the mizzen topmast was carried away; in a little while the main topgallant mast went over the side, and soon after the fore topmast went crashing down with the rest. The English kept up a spirited fire upon the Americans, but with little or no effect, and the United States delivered two shots to every one from the Macedonian.

The slaughter on the decks of the Macedonian was

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appalling. Man after man was stricken down. The surgeons could not begin to keep pace with the wounded, and those who were so desperately hurt as to present no possibility of being saved were actually thrown overboard alive by their comrades. There were a number of powder boys on the Macedonian who behaved with the utmost gallantry, and the execution among them was frightful. A very few minutes of this showed the captain of the Macedonian that he was not dealing with the lightly armed Essex, but with a ship heavier than his own. He therefore endeavored to repair his previous mistake by boldly heading toward the United States and coming into close action with her. But when he tried to do this he found that he lacked the power, on account of the loss of so many of his spars, for the continued firing of the American ship had finally carried away the mizzenmast, cut the main topmast off above the cap, carried away the fore topmast, and severed the main yard in two pieces, so that the sail was useless. The jib boom was hanging by a single stay.

The English captain shifted his helm, however, and under the foresail alone, which was the only sail left, the Macedonian swung recklessly down the wind toward the United States. The captain massed his decimated crew forward, in the hope that he could carry the American ship by boarding, if he could get in touch with her. About this time, on account of the rapidity

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of her fire, the United States was so enshrouded in her own smoke that Decatur gave orders to cease firing for a few moments. As the smoke blew away the Americans saw the shattered remains of the Macedonian grimly heading toward them. They were brave, those English in that ship, there was no doubt about that. The faint sound of their cheering was distinctly heard. Decatur was more than ready for them; he calmly hove to and poured in a tremendous raking fire on the approaching English ship. Carden would luff to bring his broadside to bear, return the fire as best he might, run off again, luff and return, and so on for fifteen minutes.

Before he could close, however, the foresail was cut to pieces by the fierce American fire. The English ship was no longer under command. She broached to and lay rolling in the trough of the sea. There was hardly a gun on her left fit for action. Decatur filled away and crossed the Macedonian's bow; she was helpless and at his mercy. Every gun on the United States was double-shotted, and the powder-blackened men were standing grimly waiting at their quarters. It was Decatur's intention to rake the Macedonian at close range and end the battle. As he slowly drew up and ranged across the latter's bow, at half pistol-shot distance, not a gun was discharged from the beaten British frigate. The Americans could have blown her out of the water, but Decatur, with char-

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acteristic mercy, seeing the exact state of affairs, with held his fire.

He rounded to a little distance away from the Macedonian, rove some new gear, bent several new sails, and sent aloft a new mizzen topgallant mast to replace the one which had been carried away in the battle, and then ran down under the stern of the Macedonian,

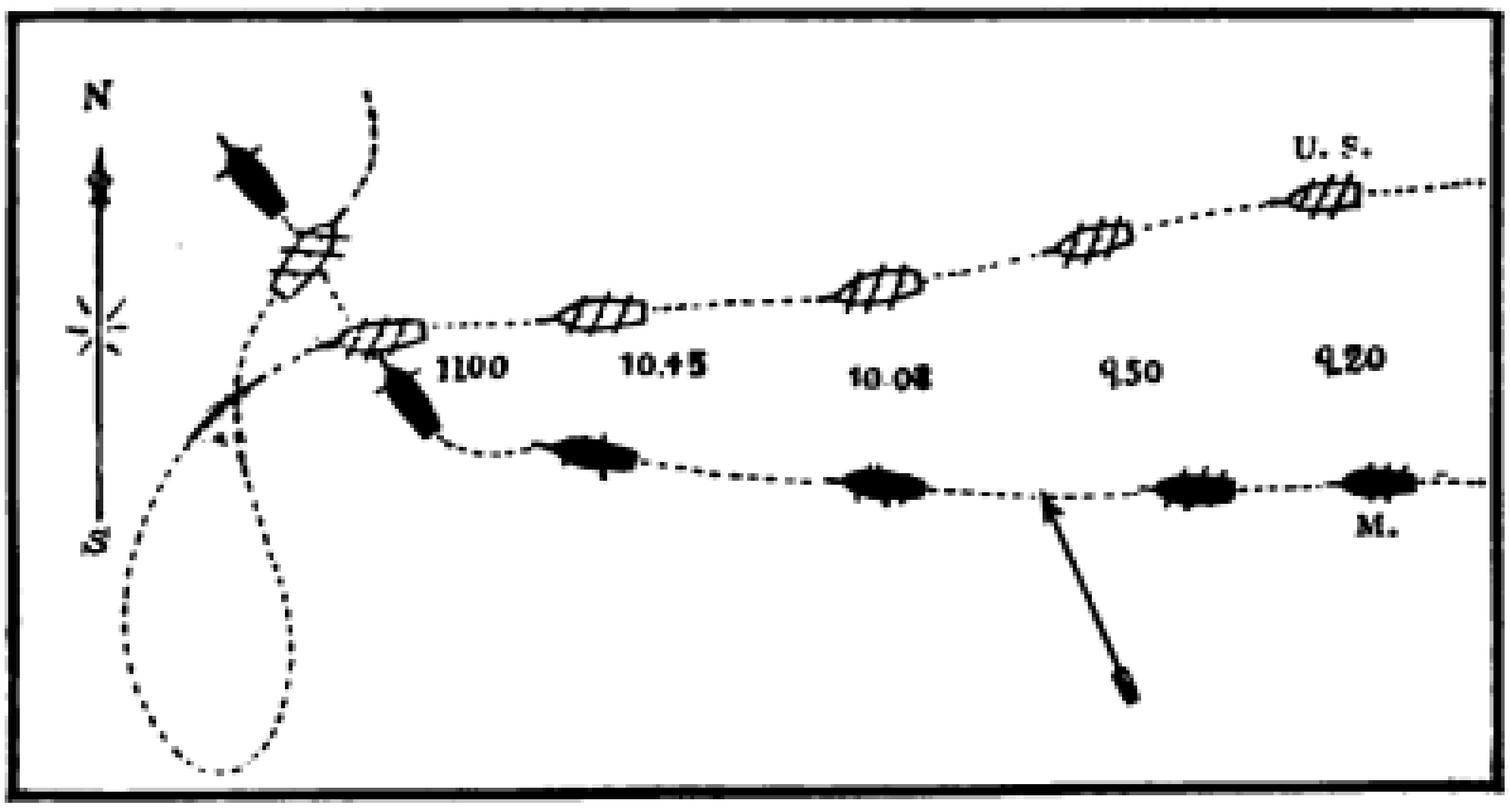

Diagram of the United States-Macedonian action.

the men at quarters again. A flag which the English had hoisted in the main rigging when Decatur had gone off to refit was instantly hauled down when the summons to surrender was received, and the Macedonian was prize to the United States.

On board the Macedonian, of one hundred and four men killed and wounded, only fifteen recovered from their wounds, making the total number of killed eighty-nine. On the United States, five Americans had been killed and seven wounded. Two of the wounded afterward died. The Macedonian was commanded by Cap-

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tain John Surnam Carden, who was a personal friend of Decatur's. He came on board the American frigate and handed his sword to Decatur. The brave sailor returned it to the mortified, heartbroken Englishman with these kind words:

"Sir, I can not receive the sword of a man who has so bravely defended his ship."

This was better treatment than Carden deserved. Though an officer of high personal bravery and great merit, he had been a most brutal and tyrannical captain. The cat-o'-nine-tails had been in use on his ship, and his men were flogged terrifically on the slightest provocation. Among his crew were seven Americans, who had been treacherously seized and compelled to serve under the British flag. They had asked Carden to allow them to go below during the battle, and begged him not to compel them to fight against their own flag and their own countrymen. He refused their request, and had sent them forward to their quarters, in the most ruthless manner commanding the officers and marines to shoot down the first one of them who left his station. Among the killed on the Macedonian were two of these brave American sailors.

Reuben was among the men who went with Decatur when he boarded the prize. In the confusion that followed the surrender some of the British sailors had broken into the spirit room, and the ship was filled with dead, dying, and drunken men reeling and rolling to

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and fro upon the blood-stained decks. Such a scene of horror as the Macedonian presented scarcely ever comes before human eyes. From between decks came a continuous scream of pain from the suffering men. The beautiful frigate looked like a wreck. The Americans stopped the drinking, did everything possible for the wounded, buried the dead, and then proceeded to refit the ship.

The weather proving fine, the two ships lay side by side for nearly two weeks, until the Macedonian was partially refitted to enable her to cross the Atlantic and reach the United States. She was put under the command of Decatur's brilliant first lieutenant, Allen, and, convoyed by the United States, finally reached America in safety. She was the first and only one of the great frigates which were beaten by the Americans during the war to be brought to the United States as a prize. She was taken into the United States Navy, and performed long and efficient service in after years.

A great banquet was tendered the crew of the United States by the city of New York, and Reuben James had the privilege of replying, on behalf of the men, to Captain Decatur's address on that occasion. It was the proudest moment of his busy life. Little Jack Creamer had borne himself bravely in the fight, and by Decatur's influence he received a midshipman's warrant in the navy.

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CHAPTER XI.

About two years after the events described in the last chapter, on the evening of the 14th of January, 1815, the weather being bitter cold, with a fierce off-shore gale of wind blowing snow and sleet in broad sheets over New York harbor, the United States ship President, 44, weighed anchor from her station off Staten Island, and stood down the bay in an attempt to pass the English blockading squadron and get to sea. The flag of Commodore Decatur had been transferred from the United States to the President, and Reuben James, as usual, had followed the commodore. The President for some months had been waiting an opportunity to get away. A heavy British blockading squadron, however, which was stationed off the harbor, made this an impossibility under ordinary circumstances. The off-shore gale, which was then blowing for the first time in a long period, would undoubtedly scatter the blockaders and drive them to sea. They could hardly hope to maintain their position in the face of this winter storm. Therefore Decatur elected to attempt to run the blockade on that night.

It was his intention to take the frigate to the British

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East Indies, to strike terror to the enemy's valuable commerce in those waters, and perhaps pick up another frigate for his country. The ship was deep in the water, being laden with stores and provisions for a long cruise. Though it was crowding her a great deal in the strong wind, Decatur was so anxious to gain time that he was sending the President along under single reefed topsails with the fore and main topgallant sails set above them. The lighthouses on the coast, of course, had been extinguished when war had been declared, and the captain and the pilot were forward on the forecastle, picking their way through the darkness as best they could by means of the buoys which had been placed to mark the channel. Reuben James was in the starboard main chains heaving the lead, and another experienced seaman was in the port main chains doing the same thing. The men were at their stations for taking in sail; hands were stationed by the sheets and halyards with instructions to pay sharp attention to every order. The tops were filled with topmen standing by to take in the topgallant sails, or reef the topsails, if it should become necessary.

There was perfect silence on the ship, broken only by the scream of the wind, the beat of the sleet upon the decks, and the crash of the waves as the great ship smashed through them. Above all these sounds could be heard the long-drawn mournful cry with which Reuben James and his companion, according to custom, an-

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nounced the depth of the water as they hove the lead in the darkness. The water had been shoaling for some time, and Decatur was in an agony of apprehension. He had called the attention of the pilot to it several times, but the man was evidently doing his best, and seemed perfectly sure of himself. The channel was marked by buoys which they could scarcely see until they were upon them. It was a dangerous and risky thing to be rushing through the night in these narrow waters at the high rate of speed the ship then maintained, but it was a risk which had to be taken. There was nothing to be done but to trust to the pilot and the buoys; the latter, indeed, played them false. The pilot, an experienced man, made no mistake, but, either shifted by the gale or having been carelessly placed, the buoys pointed away from the channel directly upon the bar.

"By the deep, six; by the mark, five—and a quarter less four—and a half three——" came from Reuben in the chains.

That meant about one foot of water under the keel. Decatur looked nervously at the pilot, who was peering eagerly ahead at the dark water. "We can't be mistaken, sir," said the man, in answer to the mute appeal, "if the buoys are right. There's No. 5, the last one set, and ten feet beyond is deep water for all the world."

"By the mark, three!" screamed Reuben James, who well knew the significance of this indication of the lead line.

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"I can't stand this any longer," said the captain decisively; "something must be wrong." It was a serious thing to take over the command of a ship when she was in charge of a pilot, but the keel of the President must be fairly touching the bottom now.

"Stand by!" shouted Decatur, his voice ringing through the ship like a trumpet, his anxiety plainly evident in his tones, but before he could finish the order, with a terrific shock the President struck. Casting a glance at the astonished, terrified pilot, Decatur instantly mastered the situation. The masts were quivering and shaking like gigantic reeds in the fierce wind under the tremendous pull of the sails, and as the ship slowly continued to forge higher and higher upon the sand, unless the pressure upon the masts could be relieved instantly they would be torn out of her and the frigate would be left a hopeless wreck. The shock of the sudden stop had severely strained her as it was.

"In with the topgallant sails!" shouted Decatur. "Settle away the topsail halyards! Hands by the sheets! Clew up, clew down! Lively, lads! Aloft there! Lay out and furl the topgallant sails!"

As the well-drilled men sprang with astonishing celerity to obey these orders, the fore and main topgallant sails came up with a run. The topsail halyards were settled away, and the yards soon sank to the cap, relieving at once the tremendous pressure upon the masts. Such was the discipline of the ship that there was not

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a moment of confusion. The orders were given as accurately and carried out as promptly as if it had been an everyday matter. When the pressure upon the masts had been relieved, the yards were braced aback so that the wind struck them forward, and an attempt was made to back the frigate off, which proved absolutely futile. In fact, the wind was coming in such a way that if she had backed off her position would have been scarcely less dangerous than before, on account of the narrow channel. There was nothing to do but to lighten ship and try to go ahead. Fortunately, it was not yet flood tide, and while their position was desperate it was not altogether hopeless. They trusted that with the increased depth of water over the bar—and, so far as the pilot could judge, they had struck on the very edge of it—they might possibly get the old frigate to sea.

Preparations for lightening ship were at once begun, and the work proceeded vigorously, all hands laboring with splendid energy. A great quantity of water was pumped out of her, and, sure enough, after an hour and a half of straining, buckling, and wrenching, the flooding tide finally enabled the ship to get over.

The wind had grown fiercer and fiercer, and a return to the harbor for an examination of the injuries the ship might have sustained would have been the wisest course, but under the circumstances it was utterly impossible. No ship could beat up the channel at night in the face

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of that gale. There was nothing left but to run for it. It was impossible to find out the exact nature of the injuries which the President had received through grounding on the bar. It was evident, however, that they were serious. She was a very fast ship, but her rate of sailing was found to be very perceptibly diminished after the accident. It was learned long after that a large part of the false keel had been torn away, and the ship's back so strained and twisted as to be practically broken, though not badly enough to wreck the frigate, but just enough to turn her from a fast, handy ship into a slow, unwieldy plodder.

At ten o'clock, therefore, after getting clear of the harbor, Decatur headed eastward, and crowding on every breadth of canvas the ship could carry in the gale, in order to increase her speed, he ran parallel to the Long Island shore for about fifty miles. Then the frigate was headed to the southward for the open ocean.

The reasoning of the American captain had been entirely correct. He had supposed that the blockaders would necessarily endeavor to beat up against the offshore gale to resume, or retain, their regular blockading station. This would be the natural and logical course, and therefore when he had gone about fifty miles from the mouth of the harbor he would find no one in the way when he turned to the southward.

But the commodore of the British squadron had done some reasoning himself, and he had supposed that if any

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American vessel attempted to escape with the favorable wind, her captain would do just what Decatur had done; consequently he had not made a very violent effort to get back to the harbor, which the wind would have rendered of little avail, at any rate, and he was, at the very moment Decatur turned to the southward, cruising with his squadron off the eastern end of Long Island.

When the day broke the Americans found themselves within sight of five English war ships. The wind had moderated considerably, and was now scarcely more than a whole sail breeze. When he saw the English ships Decatur acted with his usual promptness and decision. He brought his ship by the wind on the port tack, and prepared to make a stern chase of it, hoping to get away from the British squadron, or, if he found he could not do that, either to seek shelter in Long Island Sound, or else, as a last resort, run his ship ashore and set her on fire to prevent her from falling into the hands of the enemy. The men, as usual, worked with a will. The yardarms were soon covered with clouds of canvas; the sails were wetted down; by clapping tackles on the halyards and on the sheets the last inch of stretch was applied to the canvas. The boats were cut adrift and scuttled, anchors thrown overboard, the balance of the water pumped out, provisions sacrificed, in a desperate effort to get away, but all to no purpose. The poor old President, with her

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broken back, limped along like a wounded animal, the British ships slowly but surely creeping up on her. The officers and men of the President were in a fever of impatience, and nothing that could possibly be done to increase her speed was left undone; but in spite of it all there was a steady gain on the part of the pursuer.

At four bells in the afternoon watch the leading ship of the enemy had reached a position within gunshot range on the lee quarter, from which she opened fire on the President with her bow chasers. The ship was the new fifty-gun frigate Endymion. She had been built especially to fight the United States, the President, and the Constitution. The fire of the Endymion was accurate and rapid, and the heavy shot from her long twenty-fours did much damage on the American ship. Decatur returned the fire with his after guns, but with little effect. The Endymion was beautifully handled, and she finally took a position off the quarter of the President, from which she delivered a very rapid damaging fire. Her position was such that the American frigate could make no advantageous return. Unless something changed the situation the President would be forced to strike without firing a gun. Of course, Decatur could have shifted his helm and brought the Endymion to close action long since, but that would have enabled the other ships to catch up with him, so he was forced to hold on grimly and take the pounding as

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best he could, biding his time. So the afternoon wore away.

Even though the President had been going much more slowly than usual, she and her tenacious pursuer, the Endymion, had now drawn a long distance away from the other ships, and the American commodore judged it a good time for him to attempt a maneuver which he had been contemplating for some time.

He actually made up his mind to put his helm hard up, run down on the Endymion, throw his men on her decks, capture her by boarding, sink the President, and escape on the swifter sailing English ship. It was a conception of unparalleled audacity. Decatur briefly explained the situation and his plan to the officers and men in the following speech:

"My lads, that ship is coming up with us. As our ship won't sail, we'll go on board theirs, every man and boy of us, and carry her into New York. All I ask of you is to follow me. This is a favorite ship of the country. If we allow her to be taken we shall be deserted by our wives and sweethearts. What, let such a ship as this go for nothing! 'Twould break the heart of every pretty girl of New York!"

It was the kind of a speech that immediately appealed to the men, and they greeted the bold project with shouts of approbation and delight.

At six bells in the second dogwatch, the President, which had been carefully working over toward the En-

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dymion, suddenly turned upon her heel and ran down before the wind, heading straight for her. Captain Hope, the English commander, was an excellent seaman, however, and he simply followed the President's maneuver, so, instead of running the Endymion aboard, the two ships swept off toward the southward side by side. The plan had failed, but the maneuver had brought the frigates into such a position that the broadsides of each bore upon the other. The Americans had been chafing under four hours of inaction, during which they had received the fire of the Endymion. They now poured in a terrific fire from their long guns on the British frigate, which was returned with equal determination. For two hours the two ships sailed side by side, keeping up their dreadful battering upon each other at short range.

The losses on the President were very severe. Mr. Babbitt, the first lieutenant, was standing near the hatchway when a bolt from a thirty-two pound carronade took off his leg and threw him down the hatch to the main deck, breaking the stump of his wounded leg in two places. A few moments after Decatur walked over to Reuben James' gun, which was being beautifully served, and stepped up on an empty shot box to look over the rail at the English ship. A twenty-four pound shot struck the rail near him, sending a cloud of splinters inboard, one of which struck him in the breast and hurled him violently to the deck, upon

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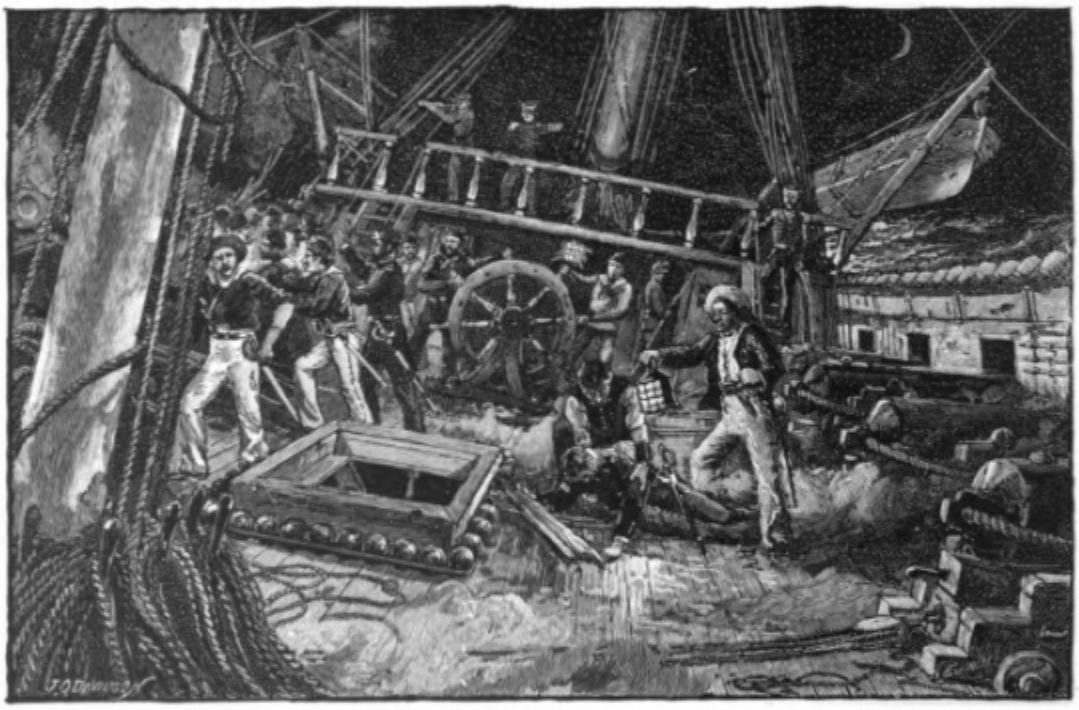

Captain Decatur wounded.

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which he lay senseless. Reuben was wounded at the same time. The anxious men ran from their quarters and gathered about him, filled with anxiety for their captain. Under the surgeon's ministrations, however, he soon recovered consciousness and refused to go below for treatment. Later in the action he was struck by another splinter, which cut a deep gash in his face and covered him with blood. Archibald Hamilton, another lieutenant, was killed by a grapeshot. Midshipman Dale had his leg taken off, and died from his wound. Many of the petty officers and men were killed or wounded, among the latter being our friend James, a second and a third time, the last seriously. With a devotion equal to that of the captain, Reuben refused to allow himself to be taken below, but insisted on remaining at his station until the last wound rendered him completely helpless, and, in fact, jeopardized his life.

The fire of the Endymion had been directed almost altogether at the hull of the President, which had been badly punished, but incidentally much damage had been done to her spars and rigging. Decatur's effort being to get away, he had devoted a large part of his fire to the masts and rigging of the English ship. So effectual had been the fire of the President, that after two hours of hard fighting every sail had been stripped from the yards of the English ship, and her spars had been cut to pieces, in addition to which most of the guns in her port battery had been silenced. In fact,

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the ship had been beaten to a standstill. Had the two vessels been alone upon the sea, Decatur could have chosen any position at will and pounded the life out of the helpless English ship at his leisure.

It was half after eight o'clock at night by this time, when the President bore up to get away from the other ships, which were still coming on. This maneuver compelled Decatur to turn the stern of the President to the battery of the Endymion at short range. A beautiful opportunity to rake the American was presented, but it shows the condition of the Endymion that not a single shot was fired. The last shot had come from the English ship some time before, and had killed the junior lieutenant of the President, a young man just nineteen years old, named Howell. The President had lost twenty-four killed and fifty-five wounded, the English ship eleven killed and fourteen wounded. The latter lay like a helpless log in the sea as the President sailed away from her.

In spite of the severe damage the frigate had received, and the loss of so many of her officers and men, the Americans were wildly exultant. They had whipped a larger English ship than their own in fair fight, and they thought they now had a fair chance of escaping. The night was cloudy, and as every light on the President was instantly extinguished and her course changed frequently, they had great hopes of getting free; but the moon shone fitfully through the rifts

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in the clouds from time to time and discovered the presence of the President to the pursuers, who were drawing nearer with each passing moment. At eleven o'clock at night the breeze, which had freshened, blew away the clouds, and the President found herself in the midst of her enemies in the bright moonlight. Close aboard the port bow was the Pomone, 38; on the starboard quarter lay another ship, the Tenedos, of the same size; and across the stern a 56-gun razee, the Majestic, was about to open fire. There was a sharp hail from the Pomone, followed by a crashing broadside on one side; the Tenedos opened fire upon the other, and the broken-hearted Decatur had nothing left to do but to surrender his ship.

The short and eventful cruise was over. The Majestic, flying the pennant of Captain John Hayes, the commander of the squadron, soon ranged alongside. Decatur was rowed over to the latter ship, and proffered his sword to the commodore. With kindly courtesy the English captain returned the sword to the American commodore, with a similar remark to that which Decatur had made on a former occasion to Captain Carden.

Two hours after the battle was over, the battered and shattered Endymion, having set some new sails, came limping along to join the rest of the squadron.

The next day there was a sad little funeral service on the deck of the President. The three officers who

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had been killed, with many of the men, were buried. Each body was sewed up in a hammock, weighted with heavy shot at the foot, placed on a grating, one end of which rested on the rail and the other was held inboard by several seamen. At the appointed signal the grating was lifted and the body glided into the sea. Decatur himself, pale and ill from his wounds and from the exposure and strain which he had undergone, read the funeral service, and the British marines did the honors of the occasion.

Everybody on the American ship was completely beaten out. For thirty hours, in the midst of a winter gale, they had sailed and fought their ship in a most gallant, splendid manner, only to be captured at the end. The President and the Endymion were sent to the Bermudas. Both ships encountered heavy weather on the voyage, during which the Endymion lost all her upper-deck guns, and all of her masts as well. The President also lost her masts and a few of her guns.

The war, however, was now over, and Decatur, attended as ever by Reuben James, who had nearly recovered from his wounds, soon returned home. He landed at New London on Washington's Birthday, February 22, 1815. He was still sad and heavy-hearted from the loss of his ship and the death of so many of his officers and men, and he was not prepared for the demonstration of love and confidence with which he was greeted by his countrymen. The horses were unhar-

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nessed from the carriage which he had entered, and the eager citizens of the town themselves drew it through the streets. It is hard to say which was the happier over these manifestations of sympathy and affection—the commodore, who sat in the carriage, or Reuben James, who had a post of honor on the front seat.

There remained yet some further sea service for our hero and his great commodore, and that took them back to their old fighting ground, the Mediterranean. Decatur was given command of a heavy squadron, with the frigate Guerrière as his flagship. The Barbary pirates had been amusing themselves at the expense of the Americans, under the impression that the English would sweep the American flag from the ocean. Decatur made short work of them with his squadron. On the 17th of June the squadron captured the Algerine frigate Mashouda, forty-six guns, under Admiral Hammida, the commander in chief of the Algerine navy. The Mashouda fought until her captain was cut in two by a forty-two-pound shot from one of the Guerrière's carronades, when she surrendered. Three days later the squadron captured the Algerine war brig Estedio, of twenty-two guns. On the 28th of June the squadron arrived off Algiers, and by the 30th of June a treaty, which Decatur himself dictated on the deck of his ship, was signed, sealed, delivered, and carried out. On the 26th of July similar peremptory dealings evoked another satisfactory treaty with a heavy indemnity from

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the Bey of Tunis, and on the 7th of August the Bashaw of Tripoli paid royally for his fun, and signed a treaty as the rest had done. Ten weeks after the squadron had set sail from New York the war was over.

Reuben afterward served on many vessels and under many captains. Whenever his ship returned to a home port he always obtained leave of absence to go down to Washington and pay his respects to Decatur, then acting as one of the navy commissioners; and there was nothing that gave the great commodore more pleasure than these periodical visits of his old, faithful, and humble friend. One day when Reuben reached Washington he found that the commodore was no more. He had been shot in a duel with Commodore Barron, and died in great agony after lingering a few hours. The sailors everywhere were broken-hearted over the death of the commodore. As Reuben said, in his taking off "the navy had lost its mainmast."

The old sailor made many cruises thereafter in different ships, and attached himself in his old age to the fortunes of his early friend—whom he loved next to Decatur—Commodore David Porter. Late in life he received a pension from the Government for his long and faithful services. He retired from the sea, and spent his last days at Washington in the Naval Hospital. His leg which had been wounded when the President had been taken had been amputated a short time before, and the queer figure of the old sailor was

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often seen stumping around the streets of the capital. He was known everywhere as the man who had saved Decatur's life, and when he died, at a ripe old age, many people remembered his long and faithful services and his intimate association with the great seamen of his time. Many of the old veteran commanders with whom he had served, and some of the officers whom he had known as boys, saw that he was decently and reverently laid away to his rest.

II

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NOTE.

ABOUT all that is really known of the career and services of Reuben James is set forth in three places: An appendix to the first volume of Maclay's A History of the United States Navy, Vol. I, pages 659, 660; a note in McKenzie's Life of Stephen Decatur, Sparks' American Biography, Volume II, pages 361–363; and an anecdote worthy of mention on page 307 of Admiral Porter's Memoir of his father, Commodore Porter.

In addition to these, attention is called to a subjoined copy of a letter from the commissioner of pensions, which, with a brief medical record of the treatment he received when his leg was amputated, comprises all the official information concerning Reuben James in the possession of the Navy Department or Pension Office.

Therefore, in writing a sketch with Reuben James as the hero, the author has been compelled of necessity to draw upon his imagination for details of events in which he took part. It is believed, however, that a true picture of the historical incidents referred to from the point of view of a common sailor has been presented, and the incidents themselves have been accurately described.

C. T. B.

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I.

Appendix to Volume I, A History of the United States Navy, by Edgar Stanton Máclay, pages 659, 660.

REUBEN JAMES.

"Reuben James was a typical American tar. He was born in Delaware, entered upon a sailor's life when a boy, was captured in 1797 by a French privateer, and suffered great hardships. On his liberation he shipped in the Constellation in 1799, and was in the battles between that frigate and the Insurgente and the Vengeance. In 1804 he sailed for the Mediterranean in the forty-four-gun frigate United States, and was one of the first to volunteer under Lieutenant Decatur when he destroyed the Philadelphia in the harbor of Tripoli, and he remained under Decatur's command in all the fierce hand-to-hand encounters off Tripoli. When he recovered from his wounds, Decatur asked him what he could do for him. At that time Reuben was a quarter gunner, and taking off his hat, he said, after a pause, 'Nothing, sir, but to let somebody else hand out the hammocks to the men when they are piped down.'

"He followed Decatur from the Enterprise to the Constitution and to the Congress. He crossed the Atlantic in a gunboat commanded by Master-Commandant James Lawrence, when he again joined his old commander. He was in the United States during her action with the Macedonian, and was in the President when she was captured by a British squadron in January, 1815, on which occasion he was three times wounded before he would allow himself to be carried below. He followed Decatur to the Algerian war in 1815, and was in the new forty-four-gun frigate Guerrière when she captured the Mashouda off the coast of Africa. In the long peace that followed he was constantly cruising in United States vessels in the Mediter-

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ranean, the West Indies, and the Pacific Ocean, and, to use his own expression, he had seen 'ten fights and as many scrimmages.' In the autumn of 1836 he went to Washington to get a pension, and as he was suffering from an old musket-ball wound, his limb was amputated in order to save his life. With characteristic indifference to danger or suffering, the old tar, when informed that the operation was about to be performed, merely remarked that it was not quite shipshape to put him under jury masts until in harbor; and the day after, when his symptoms became alarming, his only request was that the surgeon, Dr. Foltz, should 'ease him off handsomely.' Reuben was a heavy drinker, and when it became necessary to administer stimulants he was asked whether he preferred brown stout or brandy toddy, he replied, 'Doctor, suppose you give me both.' But Reuben's time had not come yet. He survived several years, although his body was riddled with bullets and scarred with saber cuts."

II.

Note from McKenzie's Life of Stephen Decatur.

"Reuben James, the heroic young American who interposed his own head to protect that of Decatur, and saved the life of his commander without losing his own, was born in Delaware. When a boy he entered the navy, and was with Truxtun in the Constellation in the actions with the Insurgente and Vengeance. He was with Decatur in the capture of the Philadelphia, as well as in that of the two gunboats.

"After he recovered from his wounds, Decatur asked him what situation there was within his gift which he could confer on him, and what he could do to advance his fortunes. Reuben was a quarter gunner at the time.

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Taking off his hat, he said, after a short pause, 'Nothing, sir, but to let somebody else hand out the hammocks to the men when they are piped down. That is a sort of business that I do not exactly like.'

"He followed his commander and friend from the Enterprise to the Constitution and to the Congress, and continued by his side throughout the last war, assisting in the capture of the Macedonian and in the noble defence of the President against the British squadron which captured her. In this last action he received three wounds before he would suffer himself to be carried below. Following Decatur to the Algerine war, he assisted in the capture of the Mashouda.

"The writer is aware that the act thus ascribed to Reuben James has been sometimes ascribed to Daniel Frazier, another favorite follower of Decatur. After examining all the testimony on the subject, and having recently conversed with officers who had the particulars of the encounter from Reuben James himself, and who saw the deep wound in the head which he received on the occasion, the writer is convinced that he was the real actor in this memorable scene of heroic self-devotion."

III.

Anecdote from Admiral Porter's Memoir of his father, Commodore Porter.

"On board the John Adams was an old boatswain's mate named Reuben James, who had saved Decatur's life at Tripoli, and who would occasionally get very drunk, in which condition he was insubordinate. Captain Dallas became tired of the old sailor's pranks and determined to punish him; and one day, after the boatswain's mate had indulged in a frolic, all hands were called to witness pun-

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ishment. Captain Dallas, addressing the culprit, said: 'Reuben James, you are a troublesome old rascal, always getting drunk, and I am going to make an example of you. You are herewith disrated from the position of first boatswain's mate to that of seaman.' 'Thank you, sir,' said Reuben, 'for your high opinion; but, if your Honor pleases, I was only celebrating the day when I saved Captain Decatur's life, and I will promise not to get drunk again, except when I go on liberty.' 'Who will go your security, sir?' said the captain. Commodore Porter, who was walking the quarter-deck and had heard the conversation, stepped forward to the mast, and said: 'I will go his security, Dallas; a man who saved Decatur's life is entitled to get drunk occasionally.' So Reuben escaped punishment, and in the outburst of his gratitude assured the commodore that he would do as much for him if the opportunity ever offered."

IV.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BUREAU OF PENSIONS,
WASHINGTON, D. C., *February 16, 1900.*

SIR: In reply to your recent inquiry, you are advised that in a letter written from the United States Naval Hospital, this city, March 8, 1837, Reuben James, then sixty-one years of age, states that he had "just undergone the painful operation of amputation of the leg"; that he was with Decatur in the war with Tripoli, and that he had served thirty-three years in the United States Navy, without giving any details.

The records of this bureau do not show any particulars of his service, such as date of enlistment, vessels on which he served, and length of service, beyond his own statement mentioned above. The date of his death is not

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shown, but the last payment of pension was to July 1, 1838, and a letter from the United States Naval Hospital, dated September 6, 1838, states that he had just presented himself for admission. It is probable he died at this hospital, and, if so, the records of that institution may show the precise date of his death.*

He was pensioned as a boatswain's mate for long, faithful, and gallant service, at the rate of $9.50 per month from January 27, 1836. It is possible that the details of his service may be obtained on application to the Secretary of the Navy.

Very respectfully,

[Signed] H. CLAY EVANS, *Commissioner.*

REV. C. T. BRADY, 6347 WOODBINE AVENUE,
STATION W, PHILADELPHIA, PA.

* They add nothing to the facts given above save a medical record of the case.

THE END.

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CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

AUTHOR OF
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THE FREEDOM OF THE SEA, STEPHEN DECATUR, ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY GEORGE GIBBS AND OTHERS

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