THE BUILDING OF THE FLEET.

An Historical Address delivered at Perry Square, Erie, July 8, 1913, on the Occasion of the Perry Victory Centennial Commemoration.

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THE HISTORIC SITE.

The vast rivalry and conflict of nations make this region historic ground. It is now more than four centuries since the Old World projected title to these shores.

England, in 1606, in the Virginia Company, chartered by King James, began a movement which culminated in colonization of the Continent,—one phase of that movement, a century and a half later, the journey of Washington to this region, at this time and for thirty years longer, claimed as part of Virginia; France in 1612, hard on the heels of England, her advance led by the great Champlain, laid claim to the continent from sea to sea, from the mouth of the St. Lawrence to its sources, from the sources of the Mississippi to its mouth, and to all those regions, howsoever vast, drained by these rivers and their tributaries, and following this continental claim came the army of occupation; not alone in panoply of war, but with the banner of the Prince of Peace. For more than a hundred and fifty years devout priests, members of...
ancient orders, explored, described, mapped the vast regions claimed by France; French governors built forts from Quebec to Balize, from Acadia to the Lake of the Woods, and here, naming the place Presqu’Isle, the Lilies of France were flung to the breeze. And it was this flag of occupation which stirred Virginia to send hither the youth, George Washington, to protest against the invasion, and to inform the invaders that this region was by right, not French, but English soil. But by the law of discovery both England and France were trespassers here, for Spain, nearly a century and a quarter before the Virginia Charter claimed this region. “I am before Cabot; I am before Cartier,” said Spain. “I came with Columbus; aye, more, I came with De Soto and explored the Father of Waters and all the region it drains is mine.” Thus the rivalry of the nations for control of this region began, three hundred years ago. It is new Spain, new France, new England. Spain withdrew southward, retaining the Floridas until 1819; France and England warred one hundred and eighty years for supremacy of the continent, the final campaign opening in this region and closing with Wolfe’s victory at Quebec in 1765. Ten short momentous years follow, years of impending civil war. Then “our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” Spain, France, England prepared the way for America.

It was in 1783 that the metes and bounds of America were fixed by solemn treaty between Great Britain and the United States. By that treaty our national area extended from the Atlantic to the Mississippi; from the two Floridas to Canada. Our northern boundary as defined today from Maine to Minnesota, was defined then, so far as knowledge of the line of division made it possible—but in 1783 American occupation had gone no further west than central New York,—and there
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was nominal rather than real; Pittsburgh was as yet a feeble frontier post. It may be said that in 1783 when England made the treaty with us, actual American occupation was no further west than Harrisburg—but England, having won Canada, was in possession of the old French posts of the Northwest,—among them Detroit, Mackinaw, and, generally speaking, was in control of the Upper Lakes, Huron, Superior and Michigan. But the Revolution was scarcely over before a vast migration began from the Atlantic seaboard westward. All the states save Maryland and Pennsylvania, claimed, under their charters, regions of country, each state a region as wide as itself, westward to the "South Sea." Within the boundaries of the states, as we know them now, these conflicting claims, impossible to maintain, were practically abandoned, but west of the original states, and beginning here in what was known then, and is now sometimes called "The Triangle"—the uppermost part of Erie County, Pennsylvania,—the claims of the states to western lands were not made difficult by actual settlement. Thus it was that Massachusetts claimed a broad strip reaching across Michigan; Connecticut claimed a narrower strip, adjoining to the south, and Virginia claimed from this Connecticut strip southward to the Carolina line; the Carolinas and Georgia, each claiming lands, and like their northern neighbors, westward to the "South Sea." But by the treaty of 1783, the United States was bounded on the west by the Mississippi,—not by the "South Sea,"—and all claims of the states must end at that river.

"The Triangle" was claimed by Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York and Virginia—the northern boundary of Pennsylvania was a straight line, thus leaving "The Triangle" to the north, a sort of "No-man's land." Connecticut gave title to lands in "New Connecticut," or "Western Reserve," in the Ohio country. Virginia gave title to lands in her western domain,—
as in Kentucky, but in "The Triangle" no undisputed title could be had. Thus it came about that settlers from the East avoided "The Triangle" and hastened on to "New Connecticut," or, if they settled here, ran the risk of ejectment. The Indians, quick to interpret the situation, roamed in lawless bands over this region, terrorizing both immigrants and settlers.

Finally, Virginia led the way, in 1786, to national order and supremacy by freely giving to the United States all her rights and interests in her western lands, and other states generously followed her example. This made "the more perfect Union," under which we live, possible. "The Triangle" thus became United States soil. New York had ceded her claims to "The Triangle" to the United States in 1781. In 1792, it was purchased from the United States by Pennsylvania for $150,640.25—202,187 acres.

These land transactions lead up to the reason why England and the United States fought the War of 1812 here on Lake Erie. In 1783, when the treaty was made, American occupation by actual settlement scarcely existed west of Harrisburg. But a vast movement of population set in—from the seaboard—westward "over the mountains" and during the thirty years following the treaty of 1783, the American frontier moved westward to Pittsburgh, Marietta, Erie and Cleveland. Wars are always fought along the frontier. England, in 1812, still held Detroit, and Mackinaw, and maintained a fleet on Lake Erie. In the impending struggle, Lake Erie was bound to become the centre of conflict. Was this part of the continent to be English or American? This was the question in 1812. Half a century earlier, the supreme question was whether it should be English or French.

Let us look more closely: "Erie," "Presqu' Isle." What do these names signify? "Erie"—a word as ancient as "Gaul" or "Briton;" prehistoric. The Eries as they called themselves; the "Cat Tribe" as
the French discoverers called them, ruled this region for ages, before the coming of Columbus, or Cabot or Cartier. This fair city, two counties in two commonwealths, and a great Lake perpetuate a name which in the days of the Caesars, of Alfred, of Charlemagne, of Columbus, of Cortez and of the great Condé was heard with terror by Huron or Iroquois. But even savage tribes have their day of empire. When Celeron and Father Hennepin, in 1665, were parting the thicket and seeking to penetrate the mystery of the West, a new Confederacy had been rising to power for fifty years; the Five Nations, which, led by the Senecas,—"Keepers of the Western Fire,"—had quite exterminated the once powerful Eries, who, in the days of their pride, had ruled the world from the St. Lawrence to the Kanawha; from the Hudson to the Mississippi. "Erie"—a few Indian mounds; here and there a vestige of a human skeleton, but to us only a name is left, linking us back to the age of stone; to prehistoric America.*

"Presqu' Isle"—"almost an island," the "Peninsula" at Erie—words which translated in the light of the vast rivalry of nations, mean "almost New France." The Lilies of France once grew in Erie Bay. France led the way to the West and all the world has followed. These broad waters which lave our shores were the pathway which Europe traversed in her search for a passage to Cathay; here was once the en-

*In 1890, on the Porter farm, near North East, the plow accidentally tore away a stone covering over a pit filled with skeletons. It was thought, after as careful consideration as we could give the matter, that the sepulchre marked some final conflict between the Eries and the Five Nations. One of the crania, well preserved, was sent to the Smithsonian Institution. Some account of the Indian archaeology of the Lake Shore country (Erie County specially) is given in Miss Sanford's "History of Erie County" (Edition of 1894, Chapter I). See also "The History of North America," Vol. XIX; "Prehistoric North America," by McGee and Thomas, Chapters XIX and XX; also Vol. II "The Indians of North America in Historic Times," same authors, Chapters VII, XI.
trance to the realms of gold, to the gleaming empire of the sun, to the treasure-houses of an undiscovered country.

Let us look across the Lake, and in our mind's eye watch that strange sail, the first ever furled over its broad expense. It is an early August day in 1679. "Sail Ho!" The Lilies of France are streaming at the mast-head. Who is that noble figure at the prow, shading his eyes with mailed hand, his eager look toward the West? Robert Cavalier Sueur de la Salle, and Father Hennepin, the romancer, by his side. The craft is of sixty tons, The Griffon, first ship built and sailed on these waters—and the arms of France and Frontenac are nailed under the bowsprit. This is Europe in the heart of America; this is the beginning of the new order of the ages. And since that August day, two hundred and fifty years ago, Lake Erie has been plowed by an unbroken line of fleets.

La Salle—the discoverer of the great West—was the first to visit Presqu' Isle. He was our discoverer. Let us again, in our mind's eye, watch him as he surveys this noble harbor. How quickly he discerns its strategic importance. Here France shall build one of her chain of forts by which to hold the continent against the English and the whole world. And here a French fort was duly built and here France remained for a hundred years.

But, Chevalier La Salle, what vision had seared your eye-balls could you have seen what fleets shall sail these waters? Can you make out the names, Scorpion, Ariel, Caledonia, Trippe, Somers, Porcupine, Tigress, Niagara, Lawrence? Can you see their commanders too? They are passing out of the bay, fresh from the stocks,—these brigs and sloops, armed, crowded with men, a strange flag at the peak—the "Stars and Stripes." Chevalier La Salle, you cannot understand, but we know why the flag is not the Lilies of France. Things have happened, Chevalier, and your beloved France,
like old Rome, has failed for lack of men, and, shall we say it,—at times for lack of race, ideas, liberty, justice?

And that slight, supple youth on the Lawrence, my Chevalier, we know him, but you cannot understand. He is not French. He is not English. He is of the New Nation, born since you were at Presqu' Isle, my Chevalier, so long ago. Then, Chevalier, when you were here, it was France, but ever since the fleet, led by the Lawrence sailed forth from Erie Bay, it has been America. La Salle, discoverer of the West, you are looking forward more than a hundred and thirty years; we are looking backward a century. A hundred years ago! Yet some whom we ourselves knew, my kinsmen and yours, who hear me today, watched the building of the fleet here in Erie Bay. Here at this confluence of historic streams, Spanish, French, English, American, the historic fleet was built—a Homeric fleet, the mere catalogue of whose ships is an American epic.

Sail on, Chevalier La Salle, and enter the great West! Part the thicket! Follow the Great River to the sea! Claim all its lands for your master and give the lands his name. We also have Louisiana, but only as part of our empire. In your day America was Louisiana; in ours Louisiana is a noble Commonwealth in "an indestructible Union of indestructible States." Sail on, La Salle, sail your ship toward the setting sun. You will remember Presqu' Isle. You will mark it the key and centre and hope of France in America. And yet, my Chevalier, the greater is behind. Here at Presqu' Isle shall men witness the building of the fleet which shall forever found the empire of these inland seas. Nor, great Frenchman as you are, shall your beloved France weep because this fleet is built, nor shed one tear at news of its great victory. This Erie fleet, hastily built by house-carpenters, here, at the edge of the world, in a shallow creek, shall carry, on its crowded decks, the fortunes of the ages, the hopes of millions yet unborn, and its deeds shall be held in pious
remembrance so long as time shall last,—so long as shall endure "government of the people, by the people, for the people."

THE FOREST-FLEET.

Today we celebrate the building of the fleet. It was finished on the 10th day of July, one hundred years ago. Why was it built here at Erie? Why built at all? Who built it? What was its service? Who commanded it? It all happened long ago. What can it mean to us?

Of the millions of sailing craft, built since the world began, these six small sloops of war, might today be easily swung to the deck of an ocean liner and be taken for life boats. Three small craft join them, making a fleet of nine manned by less than five hundred men. One of our warships today, carries a crew more than five times greater. The Niagara and the Lawrence were each 110 feet long, 30 feet beam, 9 feet hold, and pierced for twenty guns. The whole flotilla whose keels were laid in these waters, together with the three sloops that were added, carried in all fifty-six carriage guns and two swivels whose aggregate weight of metal, in one discharge, was less than a thousand pounds, and the farthest reach of whose guns was less than a mile,—their effective range, less than one-fourth the distance. Today the effective range of our naval guns is more than twenty miles, with a weight of metal, in a single discharge, more than four times heavier than that of all the guns on this fleet of 1813.

Today an American fleet is officered by men technically trained at Annapolis; this fleet built in Erie Bay sailed forth to victory thirty-two years before Annapolis was founded. Its officers had learned all they knew in the harsh school of experience. Today Congress appropriates for a new warship not less than $10,000,000 and in ten years this naval citadel of steel, which may consume three years and more in building and outfitting, is consigned to target service and is sunk, a scrap heap, to the bottom of the sea—hurled to its
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The fleet was built here in Erie Bay, the whole cost did not exceed $8000. and the ships were built and equipped in less than three months. Moreover, it may be added, one of them, the Niagara, rescued from its burial for a hundred years at the bottom of the bay, is restored before our eyes, today. When, now, Congress orders a new warship, all the enginery and equipment of unlimited capital and professional skill, regulating cunning machinery, which lacks only a mind to make it human, promptly convert countless tons of ore into a warship. When the fleet was built in Erie Bay, every detail was wrought by hand. Not so much as a mill or a forge existed here. Erie had only whip-saws and a blacksmith shop—and men. The primeval forest grew to the water's edge. Oaks, chestnuts, walnuts, pines were felled on the spot and transformed into brigs and schooners by men whose chief knowledge of tools had been gained in building log houses. Not a fathom of rope, or sail, or a gallon of paint or oil, or a pound of iron or copper, or resin or tow was to be found at Erie. This forest-fleet was extemporized at Erie.

In 1813 this settlement was the frontier, the home of less than three hundred people. Not fifty houses were yet standing, nor any of them more than half a mile from the beach of the lake. Scarcely a road pierced this western country. The way toward the East, Black Rock and Buffalo; toward the South, Pittsburgh was little more than an Indian trail. The Lake was the highway from civilization and continued to be for nearly half a century when the age of railroads began. A few vagabond Indians roamed over the Lake Shore country; immigrants were arriving from New York and New England and Central Pennsylvania. General Anthony Wayne's body had not been removed by his son from its first resting place at the foot of the flag-staff near the historic block house. To visit Pittsburgh and return with supplies
was the labor of a fortnight; the journey from New
England was the work of months. Cleveland was six
years old; Erie itself, only eighteen. The county had
been created in 1800, only thirteen years before.

"A strange place, indeed, in which to build a fleet,"
you say, "here at the frontier where timber and timber
only could be had." Every other supply must be
brought on horseback over the mountains: rope and
sail and pitch and tow, resin and oil, from Philadelphia;
bolts and cannon, powder and balls from Pittsburgh.
Why build the fleet here? Because Captain Daniel
Dobbins, the most experienced sailing-master on the
lakes then living, dispatched by General David Mead to
Washington, and summoned by President Madison to
a Cabinet meeting, had convinced the government that
Erie Bay was the only place on the Lake suitable for
building the fleet, and the hand of Fate pointed sternly
to Lake Erie as the theatre of war where the decision
must be fought to a finish whether the West was to be
English or American.

Let us pause, here, and honor the men who built the
fleet. We have all our lives heard of

"The tenth of September
The day we remember."

But let us not forget the man who made the victory
of that day possible: Captain Daniel Dobbins. He it
was and he alone, who, during that bitter winter of
1812, here, at the American frontier, while terror of
Indian massacres and British invasion filled the hearts
of thousands of settlers scattered along the fringe of
America, from Albany to Erie, from Erie to Cleveland,
from Cleveland to Marietta, and over the lonely
stretches of the Ohio valley,—he it was, and he alone,
who saw a victorious fleet in the oaks, the pines, the
chestnuts and the walnut trees standing before his eyes
in the primeval forest which hedged in the feeble settle-
ment of Erie, as a wall.
I do not know of another instance in all history of a fleet built, extemporized from the primeval woods, within the short space of a few months, at the very edge of the civilized world, and sent forth on a course leading promptly to a just, an undying fame. The fleet that Cortez built within the Forbidden Empire, and, carrying piece meal down from the mountains, launched upon the Lake of Mexico, and thus conquered the sacred city, lacks the noble motive of this fleet built in Erie Bay. If there be a parallel is it not that of Ericsson and the Monitor, built half a century later? And the simile runs the more easily on all fours because Captain Dobbins' wooden ships, and Ericsson's Monitor were dedicated to the same lofty service, fought the same good fight, were victorious in the same glorious cause, and won more than mere victory; they won name and place and opportunity for the "New Nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." We, who, this day assemble to commemorate the building of the fleet here in Erie, are not so far from the days of the Monitor that we cannot understand the meaning of the days of the Lawrence and the Niagara.

And why build a fleet? These waters of the Great Lakes are land-locked from the sea. America and England by solemn treaty, in 1783, a treaty which traces the hand of Franklin and King George III, agreed upon an international boundary along the Canadian line. Here were no great ports, no cities, no commerce that might tempt a hungry government to spoliation. Here were the prairies and the western lands. Here for nearly two centuries England and France had contended for the control of a continent. Here Wolfe had won and Montcalm had lost. Then ten years of discontent; then Lexington, Saratoga, Yorktown; the making of the Constitution; the inauguration of Washington; four administrations of the new government;
Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and at last war—the second war for American independence.

Historians, who now presume to interpret the thirty years which follow Yorktown and American independence, assure us that the War of 1812 was not a mistake, but a blunder. The world is ever looking for someone whom it can blame for its blunders. Of late years we are told that Napoleon is the man: No Napoleon, no War of 1812. Possibly someone may protest: not Bonaparte, but a vicious industrial system; that the great soldier sleeps beneath the dome of the "Invalides;" that the vicious industrial system yet lives. Mighty warrior, the Cyrus, the Sardanapalus, the Alexander, the Cæsar of your time, you it is who are arraigned in the forum of history as compelling, by your ambition, by your selfishness, by your genius, the War of 1812!

Can there be then a mysterious relation between the building of the fleet here at Erie and Waterloo? You, Emperor of a hundred days, lost at Waterloo. We, building a forest fleet, in a hundred days, won at Put-in-Bay. Oh, Chevalier Robert de la Salle, could you have seen from the low decks of the Griffon the panorama of the centuries: the Lilies of France becoming the Tri-color; the Tri-color becoming the Eagle and the Bee, and going down at Waterloo before the Cross of St. George, and the Cross of St. George and the Union Jack going down before the "Stars and Stripes" at Put-in-Bay; confess to me, now, I say my Chevalier, would you assert that your Napoleon both caused and won the victory at Put-in-Bay? Was it not this same Napoleon, who, for a trifle, ten years before the building of the fleet here in Erie Bay, sold all Louisiana,—your Louisiana, all that was left of New France in America to this people of the "Stars and Stripes?" Had he refused to part with that imperial domain, I say, Chevalier, think you the great West, which you discovered,—our great West, had not
been England’s greater Canada? I think I hear you say,—my Chevalier: “Farewell, New France; farewell my beloved Louisiana, which I found and gave to the grandest of Monarchs, so long ago,—Farewell! Presqu’ Isle, Le Boeuf, La Belle Riviere, Duquesne, and the broad prairies,—all farewell; you at least are not British, though once you were French. You are American. My Country, my beloved France gave them to you rather than suffer them to become English soil.”

But in 1812, England and America, though bound by solemn treaty relations, had not as yet proved by actual test of power their title to the far West. Were the regions from Albany to the great Ocean and southward to the Ohio to be British or American? This was the western question in 1812. The eastern question was essentially commercial and linked itself to the western. Then, too, there was the international question, the right of the new nation, America, to free use of the high seas; to free participation in the trade of the whole world. England claimed the monopoly of the world’s trade by land and sea. America had broken into the British preserve. War was inevitable. Napoleon for sixteen desperate years fought to compel England to share with him the trade of the world, and the end of this titanic struggle was,—Waterloo.

America all these years attempted neutrality, but was at last forced into the conflict, and the end of the struggle was the victory of the fleet built here in Erie Bay and the victory of Jackson at New Orleans. France never gained the trade she coveted and for which she so long waged war. America, the new nation of the West, compelled England to recognize “free trade and sailors’ rights” in every quarter of the globe, in every activity and enterprise known to man. We fought the War of 1812 and won a century of peace,—a peace with England which we trust shall continue unbroken for a century of centuries.

The fleet built here in Erie Bay settled forever the
question of national supremacy over the regions in dispute, a hundred years ago, between England and America. This is the immense meaning of Captain Dobbins' forest-fleet. Here at Presqu' Isle was the pith and center of contest. This Lake Erie was by force of events the theatre of the conflict—that power which should control these Upper Lakes,—Erie, Huron, Superior, Michigan, should be master of this continent. The great West was the prize of war. Here was the cause of the War of 1812, yet it was only an aspect of the supreme issue: Who shall control or shall share in the control of the trade, the commerce, the civilization, the government of the whole world? I do not suppose that Captain Dobbins, or his shipwright, Ebenezer Crosby, or any of his carpenters, or helpers, toiling here, over the keels they laid, a hundred years ago, were thinking as we are now thinking. We see their world in the perspective of a hundred years—we come after the event. The world was all before them. Were they to permit the British to possess themselves of the Northwest? Michigan as we know it,—Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Dakotas, Montana and the Oregon country,—Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and California? Were our kinsmen and forerunners of a hundred years ago to stand inert, and suffer countless hordes of savages to overwhelm and ravish the frontier, and, in the words of the fearful Pontiac, spoken but a few years before,—let Red Coats and Indians "wipe the Americans from the face of the earth?" It was fight or perish a hundred years ago, here on the Lake Shore. We boast a century of peace; in Captain Dobbins' day America had known only war, the French and Indian; the Revolution, and the ceaseless conflict with savagery along the frontier.

The fleet was now on the stays and Captain Dobbins and his men were hurrying their work to completion. The ice had long since gone down the Lake. The fleet had been promised for early summer. Its builders
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were in hourly fear lest the British fleet, sailing down from the Niagara River, should suddenly appear and Commodore Barclay, land at Presqu’ Isle and burn the forest-fleet while yet it is on the stocks. To protect it, Colonel Thomas Forster had sixty men under arms and every citizen of Erie, sharing the common anxiety, held himself ready to fight. Colonel Forster, the collector of the port, had under his official care, the water line from Buffalo to Cleveland, and through his trusted agents had for months before the outbreak of war been gathering information from all quarters and sending it on to the government at Washington. He was the eyes of the administration at the front.*

The Niagara, the Lawrence, brigs,—and the Ariel, a pilot-boat, were built at the mouth of Cascade Creek, a little west of the settlement at Erie, where a block house was erected. The Porcupine, the Tigress, and the Scorpion, gunboats, were built at the mouth of Lee’s Run, between Peach and Sassafras streets, known in later years as “the navy-yard.” Nearly opposite the mouth of the Run, on the south shore of the Peninsula (Presqu’ Isle), there were erected at the time, a block house, a hospital and a government store house. All the timber for the fleet except possibly the

* President Adams appointed Colonel Forster, of Philadelphia, Collector at Presqu’ Isle, in 1799, and he held the office thirty-eight years. In 1888 his son, then a well-known merchant of Erie, presented me with all the Forster MSS. These I deposited, along with a mass of MS. material by P. S. V. Hamot, in the library of the University of Pennsylvania. There was no organized public library in Erie at the time. Two MS. volumes I retained: Colonel Forster’s “Letter Book,” comprising his autograph copy of his letters to the Secretary of the Treasury, and his record of the Harrisburg and Presqu’ Isle Population Company, formed August 13, 1796, with a constitution and plan of the city of Erie with price of lots. Also a plan of Waterford, a MS. “Diary” kept by Colonel Forster during an official tour eastward to Salina (Syracuse) in 1825 was reserved. A few years ago, I sent both the “Letter Book” and the “Diary” to the late Benj. F. Whitman, then president of the Erie library to be by him deposited in it. The “Letter Book” is doubtless the oldest MS. record of Erie.
pine which may have been cut at Waterford (Le Bœuf) and drawn through the woods thither, was cut within the present city limits,—indeed within easy hauling distance of the spot where the keels were laid. A sharp watch was kept, on the bluff, to descry Barclay's approach. Indeed, Captain Dobbins had purposely laid the keels within this harbor, trusting to the shallow water to prevent Barclay's fleet from making an attack. He had also planned, how, when his forest-fleet was completed, he should bring it into the Lake across the bar. In brief, the government had authorized him to build the fleet in Erie Bay because of the natural security of the place.

Meanwhile, on March 27th, Oliver Hazard Perry had arrived by land, in a sleigh, from Buffalo, and established himself at Duncan's "Erie Hotel," or "Tavern," as then called. This youth of twenty-seven had come on from Newport, R. I., eager to serve his country. In November, he had offered his services to Commodore Chauncey, in command at Sackett's Harbor, the most important naval post on the Lakes. There was that about Perry's letter which led Chauncey to reply,—as time proved, in the spirit of prophecy: "You are the very person that I want for a particular service, in which you may gain reputation for yourself and honor for your country." It must have seemed a remote, an obscure service, to have command of the naval force on Lake Erie,—the frontier of America. Looking backwards a hundred years, we see plainly enough that it was one of the opportunities of the ages. If hereafter there shall fade from our language promptness, vigor, efficiency, devotion, we have their synonyms,—Oliver Hazard Perry.

A week after receiving his appointment, Perry was at Buffalo; on the following day, November 25th, he was inspecting the vessels at Black Rock,—some afloat, some on the stocks. Here he spent the winter, ceaselessly alert, gathering information and learning that
at Erie, not at Buffalo, his opportunity awaited him. Thither he now directed his labors. But Erie,—or as then commonly called, Presqu' Isle,—was reported to be only a barren sand-bank near shore, formed by the currents of Cascade Creek, Walnut Creek, and Lee's Run, and the counter currents of the Lake itself,—creating a small, shallow, land-locked harbor, easily defended from an enemy at sea, but scarcely defensible were he to come by land, for the bluffs of the Lake commanded the entire Bay.

On his arrival in Erie, late in March, he assumed command. He found four crafts on the stocks: the Porcupine, and the Tigress, gunboats, well planked up, and the Scorpion under way,—at the mouth of Lee's Run; at Cascade Creek, the two brigs,—the Niagara and the Lawrence, and the pilot-boat, Ariel. Early in May, the smaller craft were launched, and by the 24th of the month, the Lawrence and the Niagara.

But an empty wooden boat was of no more value to Perry than a canoe. On the 23d of May he set out for Black Rock in an open boat, to take charge of an expedition against Fort George on the Niagara River. He thought little of his all-night ride down the Lake, in angry weather. Captain Dobbins accompanied him as far as Lewiston, where they parted; the energetic captain to go to Fort Schlosser and there to build boats with which to convey seamen back to Erie. From the fort the Captain hastened on to the navy-yard at Black Bock, there to hurry to completion the equipment of several small schooners which he purposed bringing to Presqu' Isle to join the forest-fleet.

Fort George speedily fell into American hands; the British were forced to abandon their entire Niagara lines, and thus the conquering Perry was free to hasten back to Erie. Five vessels were loaded with naval stores: the prize brig Caledonia; the schooner Catherine; the schooner Amelia; the schooner Ohio, and the sloop Contractor, renamed the Trippe. This flotilla was
commanded by Perry, Almy, Holdup, Darling, and Captain Dobbins, and left Black Rock June 6th, sailing from Buffalo on the 13th. Perry on the *Caledonia* was prostrated by a sharp attack of fever. "The fleet," writes Dr. Parsons, surgeon of the expedition, "made twenty-five miles in twenty-four hours." On the 19th it reached Erie, barely escaping interception by Captain Finnis, of Barclay's squadron, who was watching for it in every quarter. But the English captain could sail no faster than the wind and it was not an English wind. But just as the flotilla entered Erie Bay in safety, its pursuers hove in sight of Presqu' Isle Point.

I well remember in my boyhood, standing on a bluff overlooking Lake Erie, on the farm of the venerable William McCord, near North East, and his relating to me how, with fear and trembling, holding his mother's hand, he had stood on that same spot, when a lad of thirteen, and watched the British fleet as it seemed becalmed, yet slowly pursuing the American flotilla which had passed westward but a few hours earlier. It was the 17th of June when Perry brought his little fleet safely to anchor at the mouth of Cascade Creek.

Four days after his arrival in Erie, in March, Perry had gone to Pittsburgh, returning to Erie on the 10th of April after an absence of ten days. Busy indeed had he been in the "Iron City." Ropes and sails and other naval supplies were to be hurried forward from Philadelphia, by way of Pittsburgh, making the long journey in Conestoga wagons. In Pittsburgh he secured anchors, chains and cannon balls,—four pounders,—bolts and ironware generally for the forest fleet; and at Pittsburgh he welcomed a consignment of workmen from Philadelphia, on their way to Erie to assist Captain Dobbins. The captain had secured every available man in the Lake Shore region but was handicapped for skilled ship-carpenters. At last, despite countless difficulties, on the 10th of July, the hulls were complete; the masts were stepped in; the sails
The Building of the Fleet.

were well in hand, and some bent; but, alas, Perry had only men enough to officer and man one of the brigs, and perforce he must hang back in the harbor while the enemy, in the open Lake, was challenging him to action. One brig ready for action, and eight hollow craft without crews! The brig was the Lawrence, so named by the Secretary of the Navy, Paul Hamilton, in honor of the famous captain, who, the month before, had given his life on the Chesapeake for his country.

Perry himself was almost helpless with the fever, and one-fifth of his men were in hospital. The Secretary of the Navy sent him no men but sharp orders to co-operate at once with General Harrison. Almost daily there came to him equally vigorous orders from the General to come to him at once but Perry was powerless. Then came worst news of all,—that the entire British fleet on the Lake was placed under command of Commodore Barclay, a veteran under Nelson, at Trafalgar; and that the fleet was fully provisioned, officered, and manned.

What must have been Perry’s anguish of mind, as now, cooped, cabined and confined within the harbor, he could discern six sails of the enemy challenging him to battle, and himself powerless! “What a golden opportunity, if we had men!” he writes to Chauncey. “We are ready to meet them; I am constantly looking to the eastward; every mail and every traveler from that quarter is looked to as the harbinger of the glad tidings of our men being on the way. * * * Give me men, sir, and I will acquire both for you and myself honor and glory on the Lakes, or perish in the attempt. Conceive my feelings; an enemy within striking distance; my vessels ready; and not men enough to man them. Going out with those I now have is out of the question. You would not suffer it were you here. Think of my situation: the enemy in sight, the vessels under my command more than sufficient, and ready to make sail, and yet obliged to bite my fingers with vex-
ation for want of men." And four days later, when Sailing-master Champlin arrived with seventy men, Perry writes again to Chauncey: "For God's sake and yours and mine send me men and officers, and I will have them all (the British squadron) in a day or two. Commodore Barclay keeps just out of the reach of our gunboats. Our sails are bent, provisions on board, and in fact, everything is ready. Barclay has been bearding me for several days; I long to be at him."

In vain these appeals; only a few men, and these untrained, came to him; the government, seemingly, had abandoned him here in the wilderness. General Harrison, Commodore Chauncey, the Secretary, Hamilton, kept sending him sharp letters complaining of his inactivity. Stung to the quick, helpless, with a meager contingent which he describes as "a motley set, blacks, soldiers and boys," he contemplated retirement and even asked to be relieved, but his rebounding spirit refused to be conquered by prostrating fever or by neglect and happily, at this moment Chauncey wrote him, sending generous words,—though no men; his feelings, if not his necessities, were relieved, and he could reply to the Commodore: "I am pleased to see anything in the shape of a man."

Meanwhile, military operations near Black Rock having favored the British, there was the prospect of immediate concentration of the enemy against Presqu' Isle. It was at this time of anxiety and peril that the block houses were erected near the mouth of Cascade Creek and on the Peninsula, near the Hospital. The forest-built fleet seemed itself in need of protection against attack, and Perry to be forced to the defensive behind the sand bank of Presqu' Isle. Perry, almost desperate, now appealed to General David Mead, of Meadville, for reinforcements. This was in the last week of July. The General sent him some fifteen hundred militiamen to defend the Block Houses and the silent fleet. Happily the British failed to concentrate
their forces at Long Point, as they had planned and no attack was made on Presqu’ Isle. Possibly this failure lost England the control of the Upper Lakes and the Empire of the West. It was while rumors of the British attack on Erie were abroad in the land that the settlers living along the south shore of the Lake, overcome by fear,—for it was said that the British purposed letting loose the Indians upon them,—fled into the deep woods, having first buried their few treasures, against the day of return when danger should be past.*

But in those July days Barclay and the terrible British fleet did not,—indeed, could not, come. Perry quickly read the sign aright. He would wait no longer for men. He would spend no more time building block houses and doing picket duty on the bluffs overlooking his forest-fleet. His blood was up. Despite generals, commodores and secretaries of war, despite landlubbers and green militiamen, who did not know a marlin-spike from a capstan, he would have his fleet out of the Bay, into the Lake, and he would find the enemy.

IN SEARCH OF THE BRITISH FLEET.

One Sunday morning, in early August, he took his fleet over the bar. The smaller craft were lightened and easily got over, but the two brigs, the Niagara and the Lawrence drew too much water—nine feet! Finally, by means of “camels” the two brigs were floated over and lay at anchor in deep water. But in lightening his ships he had stripped them, made them defenseless, and had Barclay appeared at this critical moment, Captain Dobbins’ forest-fleet would have been

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*I well remember an old apple tree, which was standing until three years ago, at the foot of which the silver spoons and some keep-sakes were buried at this time. Miss Fanny Robinson, who was present at the time her father, Cyrus Robinson, deposited them, pointed out the place to me in my boyhood. She related many incidents of those anxious days. Other “old settlers” I have heard relate similar experiences.
built in vain. Too late the British Commodore discovered that his opportunity was gone, and he bore away down the Lake. On the evening of August 5th, Perry weighed anchor and stood for Long Point. He had extemporized crews from the militiamen, determined that "anything in the shape of a man" must suffice. It was his first cruise. His fleet must find itself. The way to learn how to be a sailor is to be a sailor, and into sailors these worthy militiamen must be transformed without further delay.

The militiamen sent him by General Mead were mostly farmers and day laborers, and all were eager to get back to their wheat fields and their work. All who had not been taken to man the ships were now discharged and Erie was left,—a deserted village.

Perry, by utmost exertion, and—I may say,—by no little use of his imagination,—had moved his ships rather than manned them. But at least they were now in deep water and necessity is also the mother of sailors. The British fleet was, as yet, far stronger than the American. Opportunely, on the 9th, Captain Elliott arrived from Black Rock with some hundred and more men and officers. Perry at once distributed them over his fleet and decided to report to General Harrison; so, on the 12th, the squadron, in regular battle order, in double column left Erie for Put-in-Bay, which had been reported to Perry as an excellent harbor. The full force of the squadron, officers and men, was nearly four hundred men. Perry, in the Lawrence led the way; Captain Elliott followed in the Niagara; then the Caledonia, Purser McGrath; the Ariel, Lt. Packet; the Somers, Sailing-master Almy; the Tigress, Master's-mate McDonald; the Scorpion, Sailing-master Champlin; the Porcupine, Midshipman Senot; the Ohio, Sailing-master Dobbins,* and the Trippe, Lt. Smith.

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* Captain Dobbins had been commissioned by President Madison, sailing-master, when assigned to build the fleet.
The Building of the Fleet

Reaching Port Clinton, on the 13th, the fleet came to anchor. Perry expected to find the enemy in these waters, but seeing none he weighed anchor and sailed for Sandusky Bay. The British fleet was reconnoitering, and one of its schooners, the Ottawa, was out feeling the American line. Champlin, in the Scorpion, Perry sent in pursuit, and himself followed with the fleet, but the Ottawa escaped along the islands in Put-in-Bay. Evidently Perry was amidst the enemy. The Scorpion grounded, the scouting British schooner was blown ashore, and amidst rain and darkness and a gale of wind, the forest-fleet anchored for the night. Next morning, soon after dawn, the fleet made the point off Sandusky Bay. By agreement with General Harrison, Perry fired signal guns. A detachment of troops were at Camp Seneca, nearby, and that evening Colonel Gaines, with a few officers and an Indian guard, came on board the Lawrence and informed Perry that General Harrison, with some 8000 troops,—regulars, militia and Indians, was encamped about twenty-seven miles distant. Despatches were sent to the General and on the evening of the 19th, amidst a downpour of rain, Harrison arrived accompanied by his aides,—among them Colonel Lewis Cass, destined to a long and distinguished public career,—and by twenty-six Indian chiefs of tribes in the region whose friendship the General considered of importance. Harrison remained on board the flagship two days, during which the two commanders planned the campaign.

General Harrison was at this time in his forty-first year and in the prime of his powers. He had been in the public service nearly twenty years. In the whole Northwest he was the most important personage. His military career came to an end with the victory at Tippecanoe, in the following October; a victory which gave peace from Indian uprisings and attacks to the western settlers. After his retirement from the army, he
served in the Ohio Legislature, in both Houses of Congress, and as Minister to Columbia, from which service he was somewhat summarily recalled by President Jackson because of a conflict of opinion concerning Panama. Suddenly, while living in retirement on his farm, at South Bend, Indiana, in 1840, he was nominated for President by the Whigs, whose brief platform was its eulogy of him as "the stern patriot, the man of the type of Washington." And such a campaign as America has seen, never before and seldom since, caught up "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too," "Coon skins and Hard Cider," and with a whirlwind of whoop and hurrah landed "the stern patriot" in the White House. A month later he died, leaving an unsullied record of a public service of fifty years. Fate was kinder to Harrison than to the Whigs.

It was this man of destiny whom Perry now conferred with on the deck of his flagship, the *Lawrence*, these sunny August days—a hundred years ago. Together they made careful reconnoissance of Put-in-Bay and planned two of the most brilliant campaigns in our history. The War of 1812 brought immortal fame to three men: Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison and Oliver Hazard Perry.

On the 21st, General Harrison returned to camp and Perry sent Captain Dobbins, in the *Ohio*, back to Erie for additional stores—cannon balls from Pittsburgh and supplies brought on from Black Rock. The Commander himself, eager for battle, turned his flagship and his fleet toward Malden and discovered the enemy at the mouth of the Detroit River. Commodore Barclay was waiting for an additional vessel for his fleet and Perry decided to strike him at once. But the wind, which at this season of the year on the Lakes is wont to be fickle and fierce, made an attack perilous even if possible, and fortune, as if favoring head winds and the enemy, suddenly struck Perry down through his old enemy, the fever. His young brother, Alexander,
a lad of thirteen, who was with him, and also the surgeon, were desperately ill. Even the assistant surgeon, Parsons, prostrated by the disease had to be carried about on a stretcher to minister to the stricken crew. Thus again Perry was forced to abandon his plans to strike the enemy and must lose his opportunity. Early in the evening of the 27th the fleet again weighed anchor and returned to Put-in-Bay. Here Perry received from General Harrison a reinforcement of thirty-six men to serve as marines in the places of those on board incapacitated. For a weary week, Perry was burning with fever. At last his indomitable will refused longer to tolerate adversity, and on the 1st of September he gave orders to weigh anchor and to turn the fleet toward Malden. There he found the enemy under the protection of the shore batteries, and challenged Barclay to come out and fight. His challenge was ignored. Disappointed, yet elated, Perry, next morning, sailed back to Sandusky Bay, reported the situation to Harrison, and, returning to Put-in-Bay, the whole fleet cast anchor. The hour had not yet come.

THE LAKE SHORE COUNTRY IN 1813.

While the young Commander, sick, fretted by fortune, impatient, is walking the deck of his flagship, despising the enemy, yet unable to drag him into battle; while the forest-fleet is at anchor in Put-in-Bay, and its overworked officers are unweariedly attempting to transform farmers and militiamen into marines and, if possible, to get all things ready for the fast-approaching day of battle,—let us look about us and see for ourselves what sort of a world was our America here in the Lake Shore Country, in these September days, a hundred years ago. Could we from lofty height have looked down upon the region over which the war was then raging, we would have been able with difficulty to locate the obscure centers of military and naval activity. All was woods and wilderness,—the
forest primeval, threaded here and there by gleaming rivers; spotted here and there by a silvery lake amidst the waving green. And here and there a thin column of smoke lazily climbing the air, marking the camp, the settlers cabin or the hidden fire of some Indian band. Buffalo, a hamlet of less than a hundred houses, strung along a single, main street; Erie, a cluster of tents, huts and houses, hugging the shore of the Lake; Cleveland, a dozen cabins and a lighthouse under construction; Detroit, a palisaded fort, with Red Coats and naked Indians stalking about; Meadville, a roof in the woods; Franklin, Warren, mere clearings among the trees; Waterford, a block house; Pittsburgh, a block house on a forest-clad point of land between two noble rivers; Marietta, a fort, a log church and a flag flying from the hilltop; and all the remaining scene, forest on forest to the far horizon.

At Detroit a squadron of five is floating in the river, the decks alive with men, and there are puffs of smoke and the echoes of target practice. Amidst the forest, south of Sandusky, a military camp—and fluttering "Stars and Stripes," headquarters of General Harrison, and there is assembled a greater company of men than may be found elsewhere in the whole Lake Shore country, from Albany to Detroit, from the Lake to the Ohio. And here and there, everywhere, skulking forms in the thicket,—savage beasts, and more savage men. And just beyond, toward the setting sun, the endless, endless plains and herds of deer and elk, and skulking wolves and eagles wheeling overhead.

And this little squadron in Put-in-Bay,—how small the ships, and rudely built; the decks heaped high with stores; the shallow holds crowded with awkward men, and here and there a negro ducking his head beneath the rafters of the deck.

Here at the edge of savagery is civilization in arms, —Briton and American in cockle-shells, a thousand men to settle a vast issue; a thousand men ignorant
of the pressure of events at large; ignorant of Lon-
don's commercial greed; ignorant of Washington's
timid politics; ignorant of rights on the high seas
and of the land hunger of rival nations; a thousand
men, speaking the same language, praying to the
same God, reading the same books, born in the same
traditions: Americans from the wheatfield, the wagon
shop and the smithy, odds and ends from Buffalo,
Erie, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, vagabonds from the
highways and hedges, but, like their commander,
young, restless, blood in their eyes, and life not worth
a purchase, every lad confident that though some may
be struck down, he surely will have the luck to escape.

Look again! Can you discover villages along the
Lake Shore, or on the river banks? Not a settlement
of a hundred souls from Syracuse to Detroit; from
the Lake Shore southward beyond the reach of the
eye,—save these beginnings at Buffalo, Erie, Warren,
Franklin, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh. The rest is
forest primeval.

But look eastward! There the gleaming Hudson
flows through a noble valley as yet quite untouched
by man. New York is a town of 30,000; Boston, of
18,000; Albany, of less than 4000; Baltimore, of 13,000;
Philadelphia, of 42,000; Pittsburgh, of scarcely 1000.
These are our large cities a hundred years ago,
when in all America there was not a dozen towns of
more than 8000 people. The Delaware, the Susque-
hanna, the Potomac, the Allegheny, the Monongahela,
the Ohio, and the majestic rivers of the South flowed,
as for ages they had flowed through the silence of the
wild. All the people calling themselves Americans,
on that day when Perry's fleet cast anchor in Put-in-
Bay, were fewer than may now be found within the
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

To Erie and the Western Reserve, the journey from
Connecticut was longer than a trip today around the
world. A few bridle paths, an occasional road running
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a brief distance, might be found connecting North and South. New England and the North, Virginia and the South, migrated straight away to the West,—to a greater New England, to a greater Virginia. The far West was the Ohio country and Kentucky—and beyond, the great River, the wandering prairie tribes, the fierce Sioux, the Kanzas, the Osages, and all that world of savagery of which Parkman writes in the most fascinating of American histories.

And yet, on the September day when Perry, chafing under fever and restraint, was holding back his squadron in Put-in-Bay, the United States stretched from the Atlantic to those shores

"Where rolls the Oregon,"

to the land of the undiscovered gold, to Mexico, a continental country ours, in 1813,—as yet quite unknown to white men: a primeval wilderness from the Green to the Stony Mountains; from the Spanish Floridas to the disputed Canadian border.

Look again! Let us enter this store which the Frenchman, Hamot, keeps in the village of Erie. Here for trade and barter are dry goods and wafers, dyestuffs and sand boxes, quills and hardware, drugs, medicines, boots and shoes—neither rights nor lefts,—molasses and whiskey; loaf sugar at three shillings a pound, hyson-skin tea at fourteen shillings; pins at two and six the paper; powder at eight shillings a pound, shot at two, and pistols at $7.00; unbleached cotton at fifty-five pence per yard; satinet at twenty-seven and six pence; maccaboy snuff at eight shillings a pound; writing paper at four shillings a quire; whiskey at twelve shillings a gallon; Webster's spelling books at three shillings each; ginger at six shillings a pound; flour at $18.00 a barrel; salt at $22.00, brought all the way from Salina, but from Buffalo by boat; cheese at two cents a pound; butter at seven; pork at two; wheat at three shillings a bushel; oats at
one; calico at six shillings and six pence the yard, and 
broadcloth at $10.00. And from Hamot's ledger we 
may learn that a common laborer was paid forty cents 
a day, a carpenter, $1.00; an ox team and the driver, 
$1.60; and that gold and silver were curious rather than 
current throughout the country.

Colonel Forster, the Collector of the Port at Presqu’ 
Isle, records the clearing of the Prince, the Tulip, the 
Neptune, the Dauphin, the Wilkerson, enters duties 
paid at the Erie Customs House, and dips his quill 
to inform the Secretary of the Treasury of smuggling 
at Black Rock, at Freeport (North East), and at Ash-
tabula, where a very poor man is reported to him as 
wearing a broadcloth suit. Yes, there was a tariff, a 
hundred years ago, and smuggling was never more 
active along the Lake Shore than during the War of 
1812. But the Collector repeatedly informs the gov-
ernment that all lawful business of importation has 
been at a stand since the war began.

In Erie County, in those days, money was a curi-
osity. Barter was trade and commerce. The settler’s 
house, crushed in among the underbrush, was of logs, 
saddled and notched; the roof of bark, kept down by 
weight poles. The square chimney of sticks, cobbled, 
was plastered on the inside with mud, mixed with 
chopped straw. The “door cheeks” were puncheons, 
and the door swung on wooden pins. Many a cabin, 
like Lincoln’s home at this time in Kentucky, had only 
blanket doors. The windows were of paper, or, rarely 
of panes of glass four by six inches. The bedstead 
was of poles,—the table, a chest, brought from “down 
East.” A few teacups and saucers, wooden and pew-
ter plates, a “spider,” a cotton dip, a rude shelf for 
the Bible, Pilgrim’s Progress, or Baxter’s Saints’ 
Rest; a gun across two pegs; skins tacked to the logs 
to dry; a few three-legged stools; a gourd dipper—this 
was the home. And children, children, children; the 
frontier always runs to children; and the patient
mother; the alert, muscular father; vigorous boys and girls,—clear, bright eyes; a brave, clean, active people,—building a new nation: my kinsmen and your kinsmen,—some of whom in their old age and in our childhood, we knew.

Fires are burning, the land is clearing,—vast logs of walnut, chestnut, oak, ash, cherry, and butternut are smouldering into pearl-ash for taxes. What immeasurable wealth did these settlers of a century ago send up in smoke—a forest primeval in ashes,—to clear the land for a living.

The loom stands there in one corner of the room, for the flax has been heckled. Have we now any of the linen sheets and counterpanes and handkerchiefs the good wife then wove? And the butternut suit, of linsey-woolsey which boys and men wore,—spun, wove, dyed, cut and made by the mother of the house? And leathern clothes! Read the last wills and testaments and the devises from father to son! Yes, they were giants in those days of pioneering, and doing a gigantic work they dressed accordingly. One must wear leather clothes when a nation is in the making.

Churches? Yes, here and there a log church in the forest,—Upper Buffalo, Conewango, Chartiers, Meadville, Erie, Franklin, Cleveland; itinerant Presbyterian preachers from Connecticut and Dauphin County—rare services, sermons two hours long and a people hungry for more.

Armed with his Bible and his rifle, the preacher traversed the wilderness, and passed his years in a life of rude romance. Overtaken by night and storm, he stopped at some friendly cabin, or, turning his horse loose, slept for safety in the crotch of a tree. He brought news of the world with him. From a stump he discoursed on earth and heaven and judgment to come. Fires were kindled; kettles swung; food unpacked, rude tables spread; a hum of voices; for the worshippers had gathered for miles. The hymns were
lined off by the preacher, for books were few; the sermon was as long as a book,—the Power of Conviction; then the leaden tokens were distributed, and there followed the solemn communion in the forest. Yes, all this goes on while Perry is chafing over Barclay's sullen indifference to his challenge to come forth and fight and settle forever who shall be king and lord of the West.

Shoemakers and tailoresses, schoolmasters, peddlers, and doctors are the traveling population of that far-distant time. Somewhere, down East, in some practitioner's office, or on the way to Ohio, or in his own imagination, had the new doctor learned his mystery. He bled, he purged his patients—and then the settlers buried them,—waiting patiently till again the preacher might come and preach the funeral sermon. Our forebears were a vigorous people, quite immuned against calomel and castor oil; hearing, fearing naught of bacteria and microbes and all the uncanny brood of diseases of our day. Fever in myriad forms stalked through the country. We have seen how it conquered Perry and his men. Smallpox and typhus were frequent epidemics,—and such trifles as burns and bruises, toes cut off by awkward choppers, tumors, ear-ache, and a thousand other pains,—what were they compared to a sudden visit by Red Coats and Indians? May we not humbly inquire: "Would we have quite so many troubles had we not had a hundred years of peace?"

The schoolmaster also was abroad, waging perpetual battle with the larger boys. His kingdom was a fireless "lean-to" of logs, built beside the church. He set copies with a goose quill; he did sums, he heard the classes in Webster's Speller, the English Reader and Daboll's Arithmetic, and he managed to read at law or medicine between times. His large function was to "board 'round," to amuse the children, to carry news and to sleep in a frosty bed.
As early as 1805 the quarterly returns at the Erie Post Office were $16.28. Mails were carried by John Gray once in two weeks from Buffalo to Cleveland, in 1811, and John was paid $950 a year. Meadville, Oil Creek, Warren, Mayville, had no mail route until three years after Captain Dobbins built the fleet at Erie.

When Perry was impatiently pacing the deck of his flagship, in Put-in-Bay, eager to fight the enemy to a finish—we could not have found in all the Northwest, a musical instrument other than a fiddle—and that among the troops,—or children's books, or a framed picture, or games or toys among the plain people. Life was a serious business. Women were grandmothers at thirty-five, and in caps at forty; men were old men while yet in middle life. Perry, only twenty-seven, did not seem young to his crews. In war times it is the young men who form armies, make long marches, fight heavy campaigns, and win victories that astonish the world. Napoleon fought Waterloo with boy soldiers; and most of the men in Perry's fleet were younger than himself.

MEETING THE ENEMY.

"Sail ho!" The words rang out from the masthead of the Lawrence, on the morning of September 10th. Perry had long been awaiting the signal.

"Enemy in sight," "Get under weigh!" The squadron is quivering with life. "All hands up anchors; ahoy!"

The British fleet was visible along the western sky line. The hour had come.

"Sail ho!" Perry sprang from his sick couch. He forgot the fever. He was impatient to fight. His Sailing-master Taylor told him that the wind was in the wrong quarter. "I don't care," he shouted back; "to windward or to leeward, they shall fight today."

At ten o'clock his line was formed, the Niagara in the van. "Clear for action!" The Lawrence was
made ready. "Don't give up the ship" — the battle flag from the peak was seen by the whole squadron and its famous words were answered back by thundering huzzas. The men hardly could hear Perry's words, — "Shall I hoist it?" — amidst the outburst of cheer after cheer.

Perry bethought him that at noon the men would be amidst the fight; so he ordered dinner served and extra grog, as did Dewey nearly a hundred years later, at Manila Bay. Then they wetted the decks and sprinkled sand over them. Blood is slippery and the time was at hand. Every man knew his place.†

Commodore Barclay swept down in fine order, the Chippewa; the Detroit, the flagship; the Hunter; the

* This flag was prepared by Samuel Hambleton, purser of the Lawrence, privately, at Erie. Large, while muslin letters on a blue ground. It is preserved at Annapolis.

† British squadron, Commodore Robert H. Barclay:

Ships—
   Detroit, 19 guns, 238 T.
   Queen Charlotte, 17 guns, 260 T.
   Lady Prevost, 13 guns, 96 T.
   Brig—Hunter, 10 guns, 71 T.
   Sloop—Little Belt, 3 guns, 60 T.
   Schooner—Chippewa, 1 gun, 35 T.
   63 guns, 35 being long. 32 officers, 470 seamen, total 502.

American squadron, Commander O. H. Perry:
   Lawrence, 20 guns, 260 T.
   Niagara, 20 guns, 260 T.
   Caledonia, 3 guns, 85 T.
   Ariel, 4 guns.
   Scorpion, 2 guns.

Dull sallers—
   Somers, 2 guns, 65 T.
   Trippe, 1 gun.
   Tigress, 1 gun.
   Porcupine, 1 gun.
   54 guns. Officers and men, 490, of whom 116 were on sick list, — 48 of bilious fever.

   Officers, young men from R. I., mostly fellow townsmen of Perry, of the merchant marine.

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Queen Charlotte; the Lady Prevost; and the Little Belt. At precisely a quarter to noon the bugle sounded on the Detroit, the signal for action, and all the British bands struck up "Rule Britannia." The two fleets were yet a mile and a quarter apart. A twenty-four pounder from the Detroit was booming over the water but the shot fell short of the Lawrence. Barclay's strength lay in his long-range guns; Perry's solely in his short range. Perry pressed to close quarters. A shot went crashing through the Lawrence, working havoc. Perry held on his way. He had designated for each of his squadron its particular antagonist. His plan of action was, closest possible quarters and each ship of his fleet to destroy its designated enemy. This was Lord Nelson's tactics all over. What strange paradox that Perry, now fighting Nelson's captain, the brave Barclay, should follow his great admiral's tactics,—and Barclay forgetting Trafalgar! Barclay's long-range guns were becoming useless, but for a time they worked terrible destruction. Barclay maneuvered for distance; Perry, for closing with the enemy. This was the fight. If Barclay could blow his enemy out of water, or send him to the bottom before he could come to close quarters, then—"Rule Britannia!"

The British fire was concentrated on the Lawrence. There the carnage was horrible. "Of 103 sound men that composed her officers and crew when she went into action, twenty-two were slain and sixty-one were wounded." Perry's little brother, Alex., was struck down by a splinter. In a few minutes Lieutenant Yarnall reported that his officers were all cut down. "I have no more to furnish you," replied Perry; "You must endeavor to make out by yourself." He did this, though wounded three times.

What is this? The guns of the Lawrence silent? A floating hulk of wounded and dying men? No signals from her mast—the flagship? Barclay saw vic-
Many in both fleets believed that Perry was dead. The flagship *Lawrence* was helpless, silent, floating with the wind. By supreme effort, with the help of the purser and the chaplain, Perry loaded and fired his last gun. Only fourteen men on board remained unhurt, and these were spent with labor. Would he surrender? From the masthead there floated his flag: "Don't give up the ship." His mind was instantly made up. He would make the *Niagara* his flagship—and she was more than a mile away.

"Yarnall,"—said Perry, "I leave the *Lawrence* in your charge, with discretionary powers. You may hold out or surrender, as your judgment and the circumstances shall dictate."

The boat was lowered; the pennant taken down—but not the "Stars and Stripes,"—which still flew bravely over the battered hulk. Then, taking the pennant, his little brother at his side, and four men at the oars, he started for the *Niagara*,—standing upright in the boat. The wind folded the pennant about his lithe form, standing there, in the midday sun,—a target for the enemy, and watched anxiously by the officers and crews of our fleet. Barclay, already badly wounded, but confident of victory, his own flagship almost dismantled, his glass turned toward the open boat and Perry, knew well that if that man reached the *Niagara*, victory too would go with him. He ordered all the guns of the British fleet, big and little to bear on that little boat: cannon balls, grape, canister, musket shot—a shower of death, hurrying upon that upright figure and his companions; oars splintering, bullets piercing the boat, spray enveloping the men. Perry stood unmoved, his eye on the distant *Niagara*, his soul already winning the fight.

"Sit down or we will not row," said his men tersely, and he sat down. A quarter of an hour, this "baptism of fire," and they reached the deck of the *Niagara*, not a man having suffered harm.
Then Perry rearranged his line; closed yet closer with the enemy, pouring in a raking, a smothering, a continuous fire.* The smoke was impenetrable; the Americans fought by sense rather than sight. Eight minutes by the clock; the Detroit has struck her colors. Every British flag is down and white pennants are flying to the wind. Some of the British fleet turn to flee, but the would-be fugitives are quickly overtaken and brought back. The flag of the Detroit is hauled down at three o’clock; then the silence of victory. The Lawrence, helpless, had struck her colors too, but the British could not take possession of her. Lieutenant Yarnall and her exhausted crew, seeing the turn of battle, succeeded in raising the “Stars and Stripes” again and flinging them from the masthead to the quickening breeze.

Perry, coolly drawing an old letter from his pocket, and with his navy cap as a rest, wrote a despatch to General Harrison:

“’We have met the enemy and they are ours; two ships, two brigs, one schooner and one sloop.

Yours with great respect and esteem,

O. H. Perry.’”

And to the Secretary of the Navy:

“U. S. Brig Niagara, off the Western Sister, Head of Lake Erie.

September 10, 1813, 4 P. M.

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

* There lingers a tradition that the American guns were filled to the muzzle with old iron, nails, bolts and scraps saved in building the fleet.
The Building of the Fleet.

"I have the honor to be, Sir, very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
"Honorable William Jones,
Secretary of the Navy."

O. H. PERRY.

The story of the victory is told in two verses of a ballad of the day written by some unknown soldier and sung at the camp fires along the Lake Shore, a hundred years ago:

"Perry with flag and sails unfurled,
Met Barclay on Lake Erie;
At him his matchless thunders hurled,
Till Barclay grew quite weary.
He gained the victory and renown,
He worked them up so neatly,
He brought old England's banners down,
And swept the Lake completely."*

Here on the edge of civilization and savagery, Perry and his brave men, in the fleet built here at Erie, a squadron of nine wooden vessels in all, defeated Barclay, and his equally brave men, in a fleet of six vessels, the squadrons equally matched in men and armament, after a fight of three hours: the only instance in history of the total defeat of a British fleet, and more, the only instance of the surrender of a British fleet to an enemy.

"We have met the enemy and they are ours!"—writes Perry.

"Don't give up the ship!" murmurs Lawrence, dying on the deck of the Chesapeake.

"A little more grape, Captain Bragg," is the quiet order of General Taylor.

*This ballad of the War of 1812, in 34 verses, was written out for me in 1887, from memory by Lyman Wright, of North East, Pa., a veteran of the Civil War and a son of a veteran of the War of 1812, who was under General Harrison and in active service at the time of Perry's victory. I transcribe from his MS. The ballad is entitled "Old England," and was sung to the tune "The Girl I Left Behind Me."
"Unconditional surrender!" writes General Grant. "Fire when you are ready, Gridley!" remarks Dewey to his officer when he enters Manila Bay.

Have you ever heard of these words? Do they mean less, in human history, than Cæsar's, "I came, I saw, I conquered," or Wellington's "Up guards, and at them!"?

So long as memory keeps her seat, so long as the "Stars and Stripes" flutter to the wind, so long as America remains America, men will use in their everyday speech Perry's immortal words: "We have met the enemy and they are ours."

The battle is done; the victory won; the English colors are down; the British officers, picking their way among the slain on the *Lawrence*, have presented their swords to the victor. The only instance, in the proud history of England, of the surrender of a British fleet. Perry had returned to his flagship, determined there, on its battered deck, to receive the formal surrender of the British officers. Not a sound of exultation; the silence of bravery, high courtesy, unaffected kindness, such bravery, such courtesy, such kindness, as America witnessed half a century later at Appomattox. The dead were buried with honors of war,*—the living lately foes, now mingling their tears. Great as was Perry in battle, he was yet greater in peace. Fitting, indeed, it was that such a man as he should usher in, by one of the world's decisive battles, a century of peace, which we trust and believe shall glide into centuries of centuries of peace and good will between England and America.

On the morning after the fight, the two fleets sailed into Put-in-Bay and the slain officers, of both sides, were buried,—Americans: Brooks, Laub and Clark;

*In this battle the Americans lost 127; 27 of whom were killed. The British, 135; 41 of whom were killed. Barclay had lost an arm at Trafalgar; he was here wounded in the thigh, and so severely in the shoulder as to make his other arm useless.
and British: Captain Finnis, Lieutenant Stokes of the Queen, and Lieutenant Garland, of the Detroit. The crews of both fleets united in the services. Never before, in the history of our race, had such a sight been seen.

A week later, Perry dispatched the Lawrence to Erie, with the wounded on board, and later, on the 22nd October, himself arrived here on the Ariel. The little frontier town was enthusiastic. With Perry came Commodore Barclay, General Harrison and other officers, and they made their headquarters at the McConkey House, also known as Duncan’s Tavern, at the corner of Third and French streets. In the evening the town was illuminated. Many transparencies were displayed, among them:

"Com. Perry, 10th September, 1813."
"Gen. Harrison, 5th October, 1813."
"Free Trade and Sailors’ Rights."
"Erie."

The Niagara arrived from Cleveland the next day and thus the two flagships of the squadron were home again at the place of their building. On the 23rd, Perry and his party, on board the Ariel, sailed for Buffalo—and to a succession of receptions by his enthusiastic countrymen, in the East.

"We have met the enemy and they are ours,"—this means in American history that the West was to be forever American. No other victory won by civilized man west of Saratoga equals Perry’s victory in importance. Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, the peninsulas of Michigan, the country we call Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and great Commonwealths stretching yet westward to the Pacific, are some of the fruits of

* The title of “Commodore” commonly given to O. H. Perry was one of courtesy. When in command of the fleet on Lake Erie he held the rank of Commander. After the battle he was given a commission of Captain in the U. S. navy to date back from September 10, 1813.
that victory. Erie County and its people along the Lake Shore never again should fear an Indian massacre or a foreign foe. And since that September day, the "Stars and Stripes" have floated at every post in the Northwest, where, until that victory, the British flag had fluttered in the breeze.

And Oliver Hazard Perry—who is he? Few victors in our annals have won so vast a fame, and no other victor, while yet so young. Sprung from the blood of William Wallace and a sire of noble character, with whom he learned, in daily service, the art of war; brother to a Perry scarcely less famed than himself, father of an honorable posterity, all of whom have adorned private life, and some of whom have nobly served their country, this brave patient boy—for he was in years but a boy when he won the great victory, though in thought he was a Nestor among men—this youthful Perry must ever stand forth in American annals the model of virtue, the inspiration to patriotism, the hard fighter, the calm, cool-headed victor, the affectionate friend of the vanquished.

It is difficult, doubtless impossible, for us to feel now as the people of the Lake Shore Country felt when they heard of Perry's victory. Captain Dobbins' forest-built fleet performed one service,—the victory in Put-in-Bay—and then separated, never again to fire a hostile gun. It was a militia-marine, extemporized as a crew; a temporary forest-fleet serving as a navy on the Lake. Having served its high purpose, the fleet vanished—sunk in Misery Bay at the order of the Government; later, some of its members were raised to become transports in the commerce of the Lakes for a few years. But no other squadron in our history has performed a larger service. It is well, on such an occasion as this, to put ourselves as completely as we can in the state of mind of the time. It is well to reflect on some of the vast results of Perry's victory—that the West is American, not English, and that we the people of the
United States, largely because of that victory, share in the work of the world, and are a sovereign power among the nations of the earth.

My principal authorities for this address are:

Lossing's *Pictorial Field Book of the War of 1812*, which remains the chief treasury for homely incidents. My own *Constitutional History of the American People*, Vol. I, whose chapters on the Lake Shore region are based on documentary matter largely from the Erie Custom House; the Forster MSS. and communications with persons who settled or lived in the Lake Shore country in an early day. For the essential history of the Triangle and Western lands, see Donaldson's *Public Domain*; a map showing these lands is given in the author's *Government of the People of the United States*, together with the statistics of acreage and prices. Miss Laura G. Sanford's *History of Erie County* (either edition) contains compilations of valuable information. Perry's descent from William Wallace rests on a statement by O. H. Lyman, in his *Oliver Hazard Perry and the War of the Lakes*. Of peculiar interest and value to students of the Lake Shore country's history is S. J. M. Eaton's *History of the Presbytery of Erie, embracing in its Ancient Boundaries the whole of Northwestern Pennsylvania and Northeastern Ohio*, 1868. Much of the local color I have gained by visiting the localities mentioned. Of course, no one will presume to write of the French occupation of North America without consulting Francis Parkman. Those specially interested in the early history of the Lake Shore country will turn to Parkman's *La Salle and the Discovery of the New West; Pontiac's Conspiracy; Montcalm and Wolfe; The Jesuits in North America, and A Half Century of Conflict*. R. G. Thwaite's *The Jesuit Relation*, reprint the "Reports" and "Correspondence" covering the French régime in America. The international aspects of the War of 1812 are fairly set forth in John Bassett Moore's *American Diplomacy; the Spirit of its Achievements*; and in John W. Foster's *A Century of American Diplomacy*. 