

CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARIES OF THE
WAR OF 1812.

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VII.—DEFEAT AT SEA.

December 29.—When military operations ceased on the Niagara frontier, in the beginning of December, the Canadians had learned self-respect and self-reliance. They had learned that a soldier is not made by arms and ammunition, but by training and discipline; and that a few trained soldiers may hold in check an army composed of untrained officers and untrained men. The fortunes of war had been in their favour because they had good leaders and were well prepared.

But while the land forces of the United States, superior to their antagonists in numerical strength, had met with an unbroken series of humiliating defeats through lack of preparation and efficient leadership, the opposite was true at sea. No great battle had been fought by the fleets; but there had been three notable encounters between single ships, in each of which the United States vessel won; and to these the people of the United States still look with pride, forgetting the defeat of their armies in the renown of their navy.

The sea fights of the War of 1812, as distinguished from the battles on the lakes, do not belong to Canadian history; but as Britons we have at least as much interest in them as we have in the battles of the Peninsular War—perhaps more, inasmuch as we more often hear them mentioned.

Without exception, the most famous ship in the history of the United States navy is the "Constitution." She was one of the three larger vessels of the little navy, in 1812, which were rated as forty-four gun frigates, though they actually carried a larger number of guns. Very small vessels they were, compared with the mighty warships of to-day; and small in comparison with a first class British battleship of that time. So far as there was any difference between them, the "Constitution" was the best of the three; and two of the three victories of 1812 were won by her. In August, she encountered near the banks of Newfoundland a much smaller British ship, the "Guerriere," which she captured and destroyed. In October, a similar action took place off the island of Madeira, between her sister ship, the "United States," and a still smaller British vessel,

the "Macedonian," in which the latter was defeated and taken as a prize. The third combat was off the coast of Brazil; where, on the twenty-ninth of December, the "Constitution" met the British ship "Java" on her way to India, having on board the newly appointed Governor of Bombay. In this case the vessels were more nearly equal in size, and the "Java" was the faster ship; but the crew of the "Java" were newly shipped for the voyage, and the crew of the "Constitution" were thoroughly trained. The commanders were equally intrepid and equally skilful. Victory went to the better crew. The "Java" was captured and destroyed; or was so completely destroyed before she surrendered that she was not worth saving.

These were not the only naval engagements during the year. There were similar duels between smaller ships, in some of which the British were victorious; but the loss of the "Java" was the only occurrence at sea that we can consider of much importance, and its importance was but sentimental. As an American writer says, "Very little was attempted and nothing done by the American navy that could materially affect the result of the war." This is the conclusion of Roosevelt, (now ex-President Roosevelt,) whose history of the war is regarded as the standard history of the naval conflict. Referring not to the events of 1812 only, but to the sea fights of the whole war, he continues: "The material results were not very great, at least in their effect on Great Britain, whose enormous navy did not feel in the slightest degree the loss of a few frigates and sloops. But morally the result was of inestimable value to the United States. The victories kept up the spirits of the people, cast down by the defeats on land." That they were not without a corresponding effect in England is evident from the published letters of the Duke of Wellington. If the conflict must go on, he saw the need of our controlling the lakes, so that we might continue to hold the west, and to repel the invasion of Upper Canada; but he believed that if we could only stop the depredations at sea, by taking one or two of the three large cruisers, that would end the war.

Canada's \$35,000,000 to provide three first class dreadnoughts for the British navy is some return for the protection we have enjoyed from the Mother Country since our birth.