

First consequences of the meeting of unequal forces. Loss of the *Guerrrière*.

of the difference of size and armament of American vessels, and of undervaluing their opponents' strength, was experienced by the frigate *Guerrrière*, commanded by Captain Dacres, which, on August 19th, lat.  $40^{\circ} 20' N.$  and long.  $53^{\circ} W.$ , was brought to action by the American frigate *Constitution*, Captain Hull.

The respective force is thus officially stated, —*Guerrrière* forty-eight guns, throwing one thousand and thirty four pounds of shot: crew, two hundred and forty four: tons, one thousand and ninety-two; —*Constitution* fifty-six guns, throwing fifteen hundred and thirty-six pounds of shot: crew, four hundred and sixty: tons, fifteen hundred and thirty-eight. Even this statement will fail to convey an adequate idea of the real inequality that existed between the vessels, as it should be also borne in mind that the *Guerrrière* was on her return from a long cruise with foremast and bowsprit sprung, and in absolute need of the refit for which she was then hastening to Halifax.\*

The *Constitution* was seventeen days from port, and in all respects as well prepared for an engagement as the greatest care could make her. At half-past four the frigates came to close quarters, and by half-past six the unequal contest was ended by Capt. Dacres lowering his flag, the *Guerrrière* being, by this time, an unmanageable wreck, rolling her main deck guns under, with her three masts gone by the board.

No imputation can be attached to Capt. Dacres on this occasion, he fought and handled his ship well, and he with his crew yielded only to the irresistible superiority of physical

strength. So heavy indeed had been the fire\* that after removing the officers and crew it

\* *Sir*,—I am sorry to inform you of the capture of His Majesty's late ship *Guerrrière* by the American frigate *Constitution*, after a severe action on the 19th August, in lat.  $40^{\circ} 20'$  N. and long.  $55^{\circ}$  W. At 2 P. M. being by the wind on the star-board tack, we saw a sail on our weather beam, bearing down on us. At 3, made her out to be a man-of-war, beat to quarters and prepared for action. At 4, she closing fast, wore to prevent her raking us. At ten minutes past 4, hoisted our colors and fired several shot at her: at twenty minutes past 4, she hoisted her colors and returned our fire, wore several times to avoid being raked, exchanging broadsides. At 5, she closed on our starboard beam, both keeping up a heavy fire and steering free, his intention being evidently to cross our bow. At 20 minutes past 5, our mizen-mast went over the star-board quarter, and brought the ship up in the wind; the enemy then placed himself on our larboard bow, raking us, a few only of our bow guns bearing, and his grape and riflemen sweeping our deck. At forty minutes past 5, the ship not answering her helm, he attempted to lay us on board; at this time Mr. Grant, who commanded the fore-castle, was carried below badly wounded. I immediately ordered the marines and boarders from the main deck; the master was at this time shot through the knee, and I received a severe wound in the back. Lieut. King was leading the boarders, when the ship coming too, we brought some of our bow guns to bear on her, and had got clear of our opponent, when at twenty minutes past 6, our fore and mainmast went over the side, leaving the ship a perfect unmanageable wreck. The frigate shooting ahead I was in hopes to clear the wreck, and get the ship under command to renew the action, but just as we had cleared the wreck, our spit sail yard went, and the enemy having rove new braces, &c., wore round within pistol shot, to rake us, the ship lying in the trough of the sea, and rolling her main deck guns under water, and all attempts to get her before the wind being fruitless, when calling my few remaining officers together, they were all of opinion that any further resistance would only be a needless waste of lives, I ordered, though reluctantly, the colors to be struck.

The loss of the ship is to be ascribed to the early fall of her main-mast, which enabled our opponent to choose his position. I am sorry to say, we suffered considerably in killed and wounded, and mostly while she lay on our bow, from her grape and musquetry; in all, fifteen killed and sixty-three wounded, many of them severely; none of the wounded officers quitted the deck until the firing ceased.

The frigate proved to be the United States' ship *Constitution*, of thirty 24-pounders on her main deck and twenty-four 32-pounders, and two 18's on her upper deck, and 476 men: her loss in comparison with ours is trifling, about twenty: the first lieutenant of marines and eight killed; the first lieutenant and master of the ship, and eleven men wounded; her lower masts badly wounded, and stern much shattered, and very much cut up about the rigging,

\* "The *Guerrrière* had nearly expended, not only her water and provisions, but her boatswain's and carpenter's stores; her gunner's stores were also deficient: what remained of her powder, from damp and long keeping, was greatly reduced in strength; her bowsprit was badly sprung, her mainmast, from having been struck by lightning, in a tottering state, and her hull, from age and length of service, scarcely seaworthy. No one then will deny that this rencontre was rather unfortunate; in fact, such was the state of general decay in which the *Guerrrière*, at this time, was, that, had the frigate gone into Portsmouth or Plymouth, she would, in all probability, have been disarmed and broken up."