

Contradictory Statements of Rodgers and Bingham.

The Testimony.

Indignation of the American People.

in respect to the most essential fact, namely, as to the aggressor. Rodgers stated positively that he hailed twice, and his words were repeated by the stranger; that she first fired one shot, which struck his vessel, then three shots, and immediately



*In Rodgers*

afterward the remainder of her broadside, before he opened his guns upon her, except the single one which one of the deserters declared was discharged by accident. This account was fully corroborated, before a court of inquiry, by every officer and some of the subordinates who were on board the *President*, under oath. On the contrary, Captain Bingham reported that he hailed first, and that his words were twice repeated from the *President*, when that vessel fired a broadside, which the *Little Belt* immediately returned. This statement was fully corroborated before a court of inquiry, held at Halifax on the 29th of

May,<sup>a</sup> by the officers of the *Little Belt*, and two deserters from the *President*, under oath. Bingham and his supporting deponents declared that the action lasted from forty-five minutes to one hour; while Rodgers declared that it lasted altogether, including the intermissions, not more than fifteen minutes.<sup>1</sup>

Bingham also intimated in his dispatch that he had gained the advantage in the contest.<sup>2</sup>

When intelligence of this affair went over the land it produced intense excitement. Desires for and dread of war with England were stimulated to vehement action, and conflicting views and expressions, intensified by party hate, awoke spirited contentions and discussions in every community. The contradictions of the two commanders were in due time made known, and added fuel to the fires of party strife. Each government naturally accepted the report of its own servant as the true one. Not so with all the people of the United States. The opposition politicians and newspapers, with a partisanship more powerful for a while than patriotism, took sides with the British; and, eager to convict the administration of belligerent intentions, while at the same time they inconsistently assailed it because of its alleged imbecility and want of patriotism in not resisting and resenting the outrages and insults of Great

<sup>1</sup> John Rodgers was born at Havre de Grace, in Maryland, in 1771. He entered the navy as lieutenant, on the 9th of March, 1798, and was the executive officer of the *Constellation*, under Commodore Truxtun, when the *Insurgente* was taken. See page 103. He was appointed captain in March, 1799, and he was in active service during the naval operations in the Mediterranean until 1805. He was the oldest officer in rank in the navy at the time of the occurrence narrated in the text. He was the first to start on a cruise with a squadron after the declaration of war in 1812. His efficient services during that war will be found detailed in future pages. From April, 1815, until December, 1824, he served as president of the board of Navy Commissioners, and from 1824 until 1827 he was in command of a squadron in the Mediterranean. On his return in 1827 he resumed his place at the board, and held it for ten years, when he relinquished it on account of failing health. He died at Philadelphia in August, 1838. The portrait above given was copied from an original painting in the Navy Department at Washington.

<sup>2</sup> "The action then became general, and continued so for about three quarters of an hour, when he [the American] ceased firing, and appeared to be on fire about the main hatchway. He then fled. I was obliged to desist from firing, as the ship falling off, no gun would bear, and had no after-sail to keep her to."—Dispatch to Admiral Sawyer, May 21, 1811.