

CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARIES OF THE
WAR OF 1812.

J. VROOM.

XII.—THE LOSS OF FORT GEORGE — THE BATTLE
OF SACKETT'S HARBOUR — THE CAPTURE OF
THE "CHESAPEAKE"—THE BATTLE OF STONEY
CREEK.

May 27.—In accordance with their plans, Dearborn and Chauncey sailed from York to the mouth of the Niagara River, where the next invasion was to be attempted. The capture of York was but a raid. At Niagara they hoped to begin the permanent occupation of Upper Canada.

General Vincent, the British officer in command at Fort George, had about two thousand five hundred men, including his outposts along the river; and General Dearborn, including the reinforcements he had brought with him, had between twice and three times that number. Dearborn's plan of attack was well laid and well executed. His landing was made on the lake shore just out of reach of the guns of Fort George, on the morning of the twenty-seventh of May. It was at first stoutly opposed, and the British lost heavily. Seeing that it was hopeless to continue the fight, Vincent fell back to Queenston; where he was joined by the British commanders from above the falls, with all their forces; and whence he retreated by an inland route towards the head of the lake, leaving the enemy to take possession of the whole Niagara frontier.

May 29.—The absence of Chauncey's fleet gave the British a favorable opportunity for an attack on Sackett's Harbour. On the twenty-seventh of May, the day on which Fort George was abandoned, an expedition for this purpose left Kingston, under Sir James Yeo, the British naval officer who had taken command on Lake Ontario. The attack, which was to have been made next day, was deferred; and when it began, on the twenty-ninth, it was not well supported by the fleet because of an unfavorable wind. The advancing British troops, however, had set fire to the barracks, and the defenders themselves, with the intention of abandoning the place, had set fire to their storehouses and to a new ship on the stocks, when General Prevost, who had accompanied the expedition, assumed command and ordered a retreat. The British loss was already great; and he seems to have come to the tardy conclusion that the victory, though so nearly won, would not be worth the cost.

June 1.—The story of the "Shannon" and the "Chesapeake" is thus told in Archer's history:

"One Sunday morning in June, the people of Halifax saw two frigates sail into the harbour, sails and rigging in the most beautiful order. From the topmast of one floated the British ensign above the "Stars and Stripes." All to outward view was fair; but in their cabins one captain lay wrapped in his deathshroud, the other raved in the agony of a desperate wound. People visiting the frigates saw a fearful sight—decks clotted with gore. Five days before, on the first of June, a pleasure party had sailed out of Boston harbour in the wake of the United States frigate "Chesapeake" to witness a sea fight and another triumph; for bold Broke of the British "Shannon" had challenged the gallant Lawrence to single combat. In fifteen minutes from the time when the frigates were locked in combat, two hundred and thirty men lay dead or fearfully wounded and mangled on their decks, and the "Chesapeake" was a prize. A week after Lawrence had sailed so confidently forth to fight, British soldiers lined the streets of Halifax as all that was mortal of the hero was borne to its resting place with funeral pomp, followed by many who had been his deadly foes."

Unless the log of the "Chesapeake" is misleading, the meeting of the frigates was not prearranged; but it was expected, and the stage coaches that reached Boston that day were crowded with passengers coming to join in the anticipated triumph. The feeling aroused on both sides was out of all proportion to the real importance of the result. In the British provinces, we may well suppose, the rejoicings were as great as those which in later days followed the news of British victories in South Africa; and the figure of a full rigged ship on the old coinage of Nova Scotia is said to represent the "Shannon."

June 6.—On the Niagara frontier, a large part of the invading "army of the centre" followed up General Vincent's retreat towards Burlington Bay; and on the fifth of June they encamped at Stoney Creek, seven miles distant from the British encampment at Burlington Heights. They were under General Chandler, with General Winder second in command. At Burlington, with General Vincent, was Lieutenant-Colonel Harvey, (afterwards known as Sir John Harvey, Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick at the time of the Aroostook War, and later Lieutenant-Governor