

AVENGING THE "NANCY"

BY MARY ADELAIDE SNIDER

To this day you could find at the edge of an island in the Nottawasaga River the bones of the good ship "Nancy," whose fate during the war of 1812 is here recorded. The record embraces also the fate of the United States schooner "Scorpion," whose hull lies in a muddy creekmouth in Colborne Basin, off the harbour of Penetanguishene.

THE last red ensign left on the Upper Lakes flamed from the main peak as the schooner *Nancy* dipped farewell to the mouth of the Nottawasaga River, in the Georgian Bay. 'Twas the first of August, 1814. Eleven months earlier the disastrous Battle of Put-In Bay had given the Americans command of the inland seas above the Great Cataract. The *Nancy* had a close call in the St. Clair River then—fifteen minutes under fire, with splinters flying from the main boom and railing and the mainsail ablaze, while she stemmed the current and worked clear of the treacherous shore. But she had escaped, and with a few other schooners winged to and fro in the service of King George III., piling up profit for her owners, the Northwest Fur Company.

Now the net was closing in. An American squadron had covered Lake Huron, bent on the recapture of Fort Michillimackinac at its north-west extremity. The *Mink* had fallen a prey at the neighbouring island of St. Joseph's, and the *Perseverance* was captured and sent over the falls at Ste. Mary's, where the ravaging invaders even burned the fur company's horses alive in their desire for destruction of all things British; and now, though her crew knew it not as yet, the *Nancy* alone was left—one little trading schooner pitted against a fleet—the twenty-

gun sloops *Niagara* and *Lawrence*, the brig *Hunter*, of eight guns, four armed schooners and five gunboats.

At Fort Michillimackinac, 220 miles away, stout Lieutenant-Colonel Robert McDouall, with 550 men, was holding out against two foes—hunter and American sailors and soldiers who outnumbered him three to one. The *Nancy* had already made two runs between the island and the mouth of the Nottawasaga to load the supplies stored there after a long haul across Upper Canada from York or Kingston. When she left Michillimackinac on this last trip the blockade had not yet been established, and she was now homeward bound, loaded to the sheerstrake with 300 barrels of flour for the King's soldiers, fifty bags of the same precious article as private merchandise, besides powder and shot, clothing and salt provisions for the needy garrison. Her freight was precious, for flour was worth \$60 a barrel and salt pork fifty cents a pound.

She was an inspiring sight as she stormed along, stretching ever stitch of canvas to get her cargo under the guns of the Gibraltar of the north. A square topsail and top-gallant sail swelled on the foremast like the bursting breasts of racers of the clouds. Her masks raked aft at a sharp angle. Her mainsail, cut low in the peak and loose on the foot, bellied in the following wind like