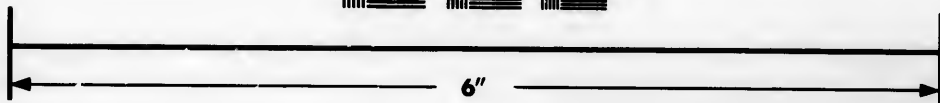
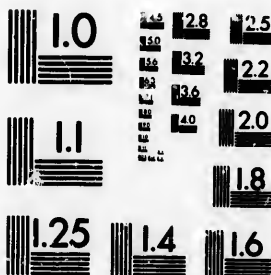


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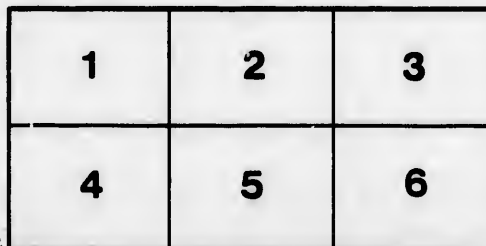
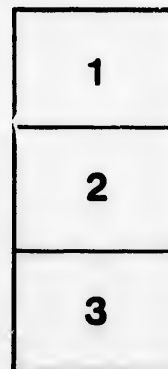
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B

THE
BATTLE OF LAKE ERIE,

BY

JOSEPH BLYTH ALLSTON.

[U.S. Army - S. C. ... +
Cincinnati ... 1897]

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To the
HON. CHARLES H. SIMONTON.

I.

Since first we trod the Campus' sheltered walk,
Near half a century hath rolled away,
And the fresh fervor of our youthful talk
Has cooled before the stern facts of our day,
Yet unabated strength thou dost display,
Guarding the birth-right of our Saxon race,
And with impartial judgment, dost allay
The clamorous zeal of petty men in place,
Who, for a fancied good, would our real rights efface.

II.

Friend of my youth, my manhood, and old age,
Amid more serious duties grant the meed
Of thy approval to this paltry page,
This brief recital of a daring deed,
Wrought by a hero in our country's need.
Though, as a diamond roughly set, may seem
His peerless feat when these rude lines you read,
Heed not the setting of the noble theme,
But let the jewel's worth my feeble verse redeem.

JOS. BLYTH ALLSTON.

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THE BATTLE OF LAKE ERIE.

I.

Impetuous Spirit of the Lake, whose roll
Wakes the World's wonder where Niagara falls,
Inspire my verse, and, on my humble scroll,
Unfold the history which never palls,
In rude log cabins, or in marble halls :
When, England striving to resume her sway,
To meet th' invading host, our country calls,
And, from Cape Charles, to Narragansett Bay,
Men throng unto thy shores, in motley, rude, array.

II.

O'er frozen rivers, and o'er snow-clad hills,
Trained seamen of our youthful navy came ;
Rude fishers from the coast ; from mountain rills,
Keen hunters of the shy Northwestern game,
And tillers of the soil, their humble portion claim.
Men, who ne'er trod a deck, mingle with those
Whose cradle was the ocean : the pure flame
Of patriotism passionately glows
Even in the humblest breast, and strengthens, as it grows.

III.

Where Pennsylvania curbs the rolling tide,
 And Erie nestles by Lake Erie's shore,
 In steady, earnest, patient toil they bide,
 And the dull town grows lively, with the roar,
 And clang, of anvils never heard before :
 The sinewy woodman fells the arrowy pine,
 Which toppling starts the echoes ; axemen score,
 And the keen broad axe hews it to the line,
 Shaping the buoyant keel, which, soon, shall press the brine.

IV.

Primeval forests yield their virgin growth
 Slowly matured, young in a century
 Of gradual increment, to fashion forth
 Masts, spars, knees, gunwales, all the panoply
 And frame of stalwart vessels : o'er the lea
 The laboring oxen toil beneath the yoke,
 Moving stout timbers to the inland sea,
 Where busy craftsmen trim with skilful stroke
 The pines' straight lengths or mould the stubborn oak.

V.

Gray Winter, tottering, veils his wrinkled brow,
 And, 'neath his russet mantle, laughing Spring
 Peeps coyly forth. On every swaying bough
 Swell tender tinted blossoms ; hawthorns fling
 Their fragrance on the air, and gaily sing
 The wild-wood warblers. On the stocks afar,
 Poised, like eagles, ere they spread the wing,
 Rise oak-ribbed skeletons of two brigs of war,
 Greeting the glorious flood from their triumphal car.

VI.

And when young Summer, lavishly bestowing
 Flowers, and fruits, on hill, and dale, and plain,
 Sweeps by the spot, her green robes amply flowing
 With clover blossoms deck'd and ripening grain,
 The brigs complete ready to breast the main
 Slide from the stocks with easy, swan-like motion,
 And glide into the lake without a strain,
 While strident voices cheer, in wild commotion,
 The first armed keels to float upon this inland ocean.

VII.

Imperial Britain, from the northern coast,
 Sends forth her fleet to conquer, and subdue,
 Manned by trained sailors, who may truly boast
 Of victories won where'er their colors flew,
 Or in the Baltic, or by famed Corfu,
 Where steep Gibraltar checks the Atlantic's foam,
 Or far Calcutta rises into view,
 Rulers of every sea, where'er they roam,
 And pointing to their flag, as symbol of their home.

VIII.

Ours once the flag, and ours still the race,
 England's is part of our history,
 Nor past, nor future triumphs may efface,
 A common heritage of ancient glory ;
 To which, we, now and then, append a story
 Not quite unworthy of the ancient one,
 Of good King Arthur and his comrades hoary.
 We share the fame Alfred, and Henry won,
 And, for ourselves, keep that of Washington.

IX.

'Tis a hard fight, when those of the same blood,
 Sire, and son, in deadly conflict meet,
 Or, on the tented field, or on the flood,
 As now on Erie, when the summer's heat
 Is cool'd by Autumn, and the hostile fleet
 On the horizon's distant verge appears:
 The rattling drums of either squadron boat,
 Each crew the deck, for action, promptly clears,
 And, loud, the welkin rings, with hoarse, resounding, cheers.

X.

Six vessels constitute the British fleet,
 With near eight hundred men, guns sixty-three;
 Two brigs and seven smaller craft, complete
 Our squadron, beating towards them, on the lee,
 Carrying six hundred men, of whom the sea,
 Had known scarcely the half; guns fifty-four;
 Which were distributed in this degree,
 The seven smaller craft just fourteen bore,
 And each of the two brigs mounted a score.

XI.

A bright, clear, day, a breeze that softly soughs
 Through the taut rigging with a balmy breath,
 A limpid flood, that laps the gliding prows,
 And, rippling, flows the buoyant barks beneath;
 The yards are hung in chains, swords, from the sheath,
 Leap flashing: by each gun on every ship
 Are piled the iron messengers of death,
 The decks are sanded, lest, in gore, men slip,
 And, with a proud salute, each flagship's colors dip.

XII.

They shorten sail to top sails, jib, and spanker,
 Like Athletes, stripp'd for combat, ere they join,
 And, the breeze shifting, lo! as though at anchor,
 Upon the wind the British form in line;
 Ours bear down upon them, at a sign
 Shown from the flagship; she, no risk denying,
 Leading the van, the foremost of the nine,
 Sweeps into action, with her colors flying,
 To all the hostile guns, undauntedly, replying.

XIII.

Then Battle rides, triumphant, on the air,
 The great guns flash, and bellowing thunders roll.
 For two long hours, ruin, and grim despair,
 Seize upon mast, and spar, and human soul;
 Cannon, dismounted, ring as they would toll
 Dirge for the dead, in deep, resounding tone,
 The Lawrence swims a wreck beyond control;
 Her deck is stained with blood, her power is gone,
 Hemmed in by hostile ships, unaided and alone.

XIV.

For at long range her tardy consorts ply
 A desultory fire of shot and shell,
 And all the burden of the fight doth lie
 On her alone, and she hath fought so well,
 But now, nor guns nor men remain to tell
 Her proud defiance to th' exulting foe.
 On swarthy cheeks the bursting tear-drops swell,
 And blanched, dazed faces, voiceless, feeling show,
 Powerless to fire a gun or strike one answering blow.

XV.

Scarcely a dozen men, and scarce a gun,
 Whose brazen throat its tongue of flame may pour
 None to complete, what's been so nobly done ;
 No voice to answer to the cannon's roar,
 Whose balls with deadlier aim crash in once more,
 So near success, and yet, perforce, to fail
 From sheer supine inaction ! while a score
 And more of guns are almost within hail,
 Shall yon blue pennant its stern motto vail.

XVI.

It is a bitter thought, and one to which,
 Upon the instant, must the answer come.
 In life there are some moments which are rich
 In priceless opportunity ; 'mid the hum
 Of the world's marts ; or when the stirring drum
 Bespeaks armed hosts, and a yet doubtful day
 With some, such moments every sense benumb,
 Leaving them powerless, to the few a ray
 Of light supernal comes, to guide them on their way.

XVII.

Brave Lawrence' dying words float from the mast,
 And they are lowered, but 'tis not to yield ;
 The boat is lowered too, and to it passed
 All of the crew who yet are fit to wield
 Cutlass or oar : erect as though a-field
 With sword in hand, and flag flung to the breeze,
 Whilst, at close range, muskets and cannon peal'd
 Bullets, and grape, th' heroic Perry flees
 To win the final chance, which he, alone, may seize.

XVIII.

On the Niagara's deck, unhurt, he stands,
 His dauntless pennant to her mast-head flies,
 And his brave spirit speaks to willing hands.
 With filling sails the gallant vessel lies,
 Like a roused falcon, on her enemies ;
 A sudden thrill her onward motion checks ;
 A double broadsides' sulphurous flames arise,
 Raking, at pistol range, the hostile decks,
 Which, soon, drift idly on the tide,—dismantled wrecks.

XIX.

There is a power in those who nobly dare,
 A latent sparkle of divinity
 Which forces those, who follow them, to share
 Its subtle and contagious energy.
 As by one impulse roused to bravery,
 With sudden onset all assail the foe,
 And, from what seemed defeat, wrest victory.
 The British flags are one, by one, laid low,
 Struck to the Stars and Stripes with action sad, and slow.

XX.

Then 'DON'T GIVE UP THE SHIP' again floats free
 From the recaptured Lawrence' shattered mast,
 Fluttering adown the wind in merry glee,
 As 'twere a thing alive, and fain would cast
 To the four winds its tale of dangers past :
 Proudly it floats o'er rifted sails and spars,
 The tangled cordage whistling in the blast,
 Proudly it floats, while maimed and bleeding tars
 Greet it with cheers which echo to the stars.

XXI.

He, who hath snatched from perils utmost verge,
 Surcease of danger, and assured success.
 He who hath felt his ebbing pulses surge,
 In healthy, vigorous action, must confess
 Humbly a sense of his unworthiness,
 Deep gratitude to Him, who ruleth all,
 And to the conquered foe true kindliness,
Vœ victis may befit the vulgar thrall,
 The truly great feel ever tenderly for those who fall.

XXII.

Perry, who ne'er before had held command,
 Adorns an admirals' post without display,
 And shows the breeding of the Newport strand
 Not more by vigorous action in the fray,
 Than by his effort loyally to pay,
 Honor to those o'ercome with manly grief,
 Especially the veteran Barclay,
 To others timely cheer he gives and prompt relief;
 But, with an almost filial care, attends the wounded chief.

XXIII.

Wild Erie with tumultuous acclaim,
 Voices his praises in the cataracts foam,
 'The youthful hero who has writ her name,
 And the staunch timber of her fruitful loam,
 Link'd with his own in Honor's deathless tome,
 Bursting the cloud which o'er the country lowers.
 With the terse phrase which gladdens every home
 From bleak Penobscot, to the Land of Flowers,
 "We've met the enemy—and they are ours."

XXIV.

The Nation has grown grander since that hour,
 By inter-necine strife awakened more
 To sense of strength, and consciousness of power,
 That smiling Peace with her abundant store
 Could bring in fifty years: to the inmost core.
 Men have been stirred until with passion fraught,
 The tranquil tenor of the life before,
 Its infant triumphs, and its quiet thought,
 Seem tame to those, who, on a larger field, have wrought.

XXV.

And yet Thermopylæ still fires the blood,
 And Tell, defiant, on his native hills,
 And all who, in heroic mood, have stood
 The strain of conflict, or the weight of ills ;
 And Perry's daring hardihood instills
 Faith in the future of our guiding star ;
 With pride triumphant every bosom thrills
 At thought of him disaster could not bar,
 Who conquered, upon Erie's flood, the tars of Trafalgar.

XXVI.

That star points on to union, and to peace,
 By strenuous contest, rendered yet more strong
 Throughout the world, to cause all war to cease,
 Assuage all suffering, and redress all wrong ;
 The speech which Shakspeare molded into song,
 Heard by the still depths of the Nile's dark source,
 Or echoing the Andes' heights along,
 Shall carry Peace and Good-will in its course,
 Bringing God's Word to man with more than mortal force.

XXVII.

Rejoice ye sons of Britain's burly race,
Who curb the Indies, and confront the pole ;
Whose auburn locks and genial, ruddy face,
Betoken generous heart and steadfast soul ;
Ye who Columbia's mighty realm control,
And carry Albion's flag over the main,
Ruling the deep where 'er its currents roll ;
Rejoice that on our banners ne'er again
Shall rest the blot of kindred peoples slain.

XXVIII.

Where'er our native tongue salutes the ear,
Or on Alaskan or Australian seas,
Where palms their crowns of tropic verdure rear,
Or horrent ice-bergs chill the Northern breeze ;
Whether in Texan hammock, stretched at ease,
Or stoutly laboring in the tempest's roar,
Which sweeps around the cloud-capped Hebrides,
We greet the thought which speeds from shore to shore,
The English speaking peoples war no more.

