

served in the Revolution both in the army and navy. In the latter service he sailed with Captain Manley in the *Hague*, formerly the *Deane*, frigate, on a cruise among the West India Islands. His first ship-yard was within the limits of the present government yard, and here he began to set up vessels as early as 1795. Later, he removed his yard to a site near the state-prison. While naval constructor Mr. Barker built the *Independence*, *Virginia*, and *Vermont*, seventy-fours, and the sloops-of-war *Frolic*, *Marion*, *Cyane*, and *Bainbridge*. Thatcher Magoun, the well-known shipbuilder of Medford, received his instruction in modelling from Josiah Barker.

Before the *Constitution* was taken out of dock, a brand-new ship, a figure-head of President Jackson had been fixed to her prow by Commodore Elliott, who then commanded the yard. If it had been desired to test the President's popularity in the New England States no act could have been more happily devised. A universal shout of indignation went up from press and people ; for the old ship was little less than adored by all classes, and to affix the bust of any living personage was deemed an indignity.

In that immense crowd, which had witnessed the re-baptism of *Old Ironsides*, stood a young Cape Cod seaman. His father, a brave old captain in the 3d Artillery, had doubtless instilled some strong republican ideas into the youngster's head, for he had accompanied him to Fort Warren * during the War of 1812, and while there the lad had seen from the rampart the doomed *Chesapeake* lift her anchor, and go forth to meet the *Shannon*. He had heard the cannonade off in the bay, had noted the hush of the combat, and had shared in the anguish with which all hearts were penetrated at the fatal result.

Old Ironsides was moored with her head to the west, between the seventy-fours *Columbus* and *Independence*. The former vessel had a large number of men on board, and a sentinel was placed where he could keep the figure-head in view ; another was posted on the wharf near at hand, and a third patrolled the forecastle of the *Constitution* ; from an open port

* Now Fort Winthrop.

of the Columbus the light fell full upon the graven features all these precautions were designed to protect.

On the night of the 2d of July occurred a thunder-storm of unusual violence. The lightning played around the masts of the shipping, and only by its lurid flash could any object be distinguished in the blackness. Young Dewey — he was only twenty-eight — unmoored his boat from Billy Gray's Wharf in Boston, and, with his oar muffled in an old woollen comforter, sculled out into the darkness. He had reconnoitred the position of the ships by day, and was prepared at all points. At length he found himself alongside the Independence, the outside ship, and worked his way along her big black side, which served to screen him from observation.

Dewey climbed up the Constitution's side by the man-ropes and ensconced himself in the bow, protected by the headboards, only placed on the ship the same day. He extended himself on his back, and in this position sawed off the head. While here he saw the sentry on the wharf from time to time looking earnestly towards the spot where he was at work, but the lightning and the storm each time drove the guard back to the shelter of his box.

Having completed his midnight assassination Dewey regained his boat, to find her full of water. She had swung under the scupper of the ship and had received the torrent that poured from her deck. In this plight, but never forgetting the head he had risked his life to obtain, Dewey reached the shore. We can never think of this scene, with its attendant circumstances, without remembering Cooper's episode of the weird lady of the Red Rover.

If this act proves Dewey to have been a cool hand, the one we are to relate must cap the climax. After the excitement caused by the affair — and it was of no ordinary kind — had subsided, Dewey packed up the grim and corrugated features he had decapitated and posted off to Washington. At Philadelphia his secret leaked out, and he was obliged to exhibit his prize to John Tyler and Willie P. Mangum, afterwards President and acting Vice-President, who were then investigating

the affairs of the United States Bank. These grave and reverend seigniors shook their sides as they regarded the colossal head, now brought so low, and parted with Captain Dewey with warm and pressing offers of service.

The Captain's intention to present the head to General Jackson himself was frustrated by the dangerous illness of the President, to whom all access was denied. He however obtained an audience of Mr. Van Buren, the Vice-President, who at once overwhelmed him with civilities after the manner in which that crafty old fox was wont to lay siege to the susceptibilities of all who approached him. Upon Dewey's announcing himself as the person who had taken off the Constitution's figure-head Mr. Van Buren gave a great start and was thrown off his usual balance. Recovering himself, he demanded the particulars of the exploit, which seemed to afford him no small satisfaction. Captain Dewey wished him to receive the head. "Go to Mr. Dickerson," said the Vice-President, "it belongs to his department; say you have come from me." To Mahlon Dickerson, Secretary of the Navy, our hero accordingly went.

The venerable Secretary was busily engaged with a heap of papers, and requested his visitor to be brief. This hint was not lost on the Captain.

"Mr. Dickerson, I am the person who removed the figure-head from the Constitution, and I have brought it with me for the purpose of returning it to the Government."

The Secretary threw himself back in his chair, pushed his gold-bowed spectacles with a sudden movement up on his forehead, and regarded with genuine astonishment the man who, after evading the most diligent search for his discovery, now came forward and made this voluntary avowal. Between amazement and choler the old gentleman could scarce sputter out,—

"You, sir! you! What, sir, did you have the audacity to disfigure a ship of the United States Navy?"

"Sir, *I took the responsibility.*"

"Well, sir, I'll have you arrested immediately"; and the Secretary took up the bell to summon a messenger.

"Stop, sir," said the Captain, "you cannot inflict any punishment; I can only be sued for a trespass, and in the county where the offence was committed. Say the word, and I will go back to Charlestown and await my trial; but if a Middlesex jury don't give *me* damages, my name's not Dewey." The Captain had explored his ground: there was no statute at that time against defacing ships of war, and he knew it. Mr. Dickerson, an able lawyer, reflected a moment, and then put down his bell. "You are right, sir," said he; "and now tell me all about the affair."

The Captain remained some time closeted with the Secretary, of whose treatment he had no reason to complain.

All these incidents, recently related by Captain Dewey to the writer, stamp him as a man of no common decision of character. He resolved, deliberated upon, planned, and executed his enterprise without the assistance of a single individual, — one person only receiving a hint from him at the moment he set out, as a precaution in case any accident might befall him. Though approximating to the Scriptural limit of human life, Captain Dewey shows little sign of decay. A man of middle stature, his sandy hair is lightly touched with gray, his figure but little bent; his complexion is florid, perhaps from the effects of an early seafaring life; his mouth is expressive of determined resolution, and an eye of bluish gray lights up in moments of animation a physiognomy far from unpleasant. He is not the man to commit an act of mere bravado, but is devoted to his convictions of right with the zeal of a Mussulman. We may safely add that he was never a Jackson Democrat.

The names of several of the vessels constructed by Mr. Barker have become historical. The Frolic was captured in 1814 by H. B. M. frigate Orpheus and an armed schooner, after a chase of sixty miles, during which the Frolic threw her lee guns overboard. She was rated as a vessel of 18 guns, but was built to carry twenty 32-pounder carronades and two long 18- or 24-pounders. At the time of her capture she was commanded by Master-Commandant Bainbridge.