

CHAPTER XI.

HEROES ON LAND AND SEA.

1812-1815.

THE war of 1812 was not a struggle for power and supremacy on the part of the United States of America. It was waged wholly for the protection of its rights on the high seas. Great Britain and France had for five years been engaged in a contest which had not only harmed the commerce of the United States but had caused an open disrespect to be shown the government by Great Britain. Finally so violent was the character of the offenses of this last-named power, that the committee on foreign relations made them the subject of a report to congress presented on the twenty-ninth of November, 1811, in which the committee said in behalf of the United States :

“ If it be our duty to encourage the fair and legitimate commerce of this country by protecting the property of the merchant, then, indeed, by as much as life and liberty are more estimable than ships and goods, so much more impressive is the duty to shield the persons of our seamen, whose hard and honest services are employed equally with those of the merchants in advancing, under the mantle of its laws, the interests of their country.

“ To sum up, in a word, the great cause of complaint against Great Britain, your committee need only to say, that the United States as a sovereign and independent power claim the right to use the ocean, which is the common and acknowledged highway of nations, for the purposes of transporting in their own vessels the products of their own soils, and the acquisitions of their own industry to a market in the ports of friendly nations, and to bring home in return such articles as their necessities or convenience may require, always regarding the rights of belligerents as defined by the established laws of nations.

“ Great Britain, in defiance of this incontestable right, captures every American vessel bound to or returning from a port where her commerce is not favored; enslaves our seamen, and, in spite of our remonstrances, perseveres in these aggressions.

“ To wrongs so daring in character and so disgraceful in their execution, it