



THE BATTLE OF THE ESSEX AND THE PHŒBE.

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CAPTAIN PORTER AND THE ESSEX; OR, THE FIRST BATTLE OF ADMIRAL FARRAGUT.

BY S. G. W. BENJAMIN.

THE *Essex* was a small frigate, built on Winter Island in Salem harbor in 1799. She was rated as a thirty-two, though mounting in reality forty thirty-two pound carronades and six long twelves. After various noteworthy cruises, in one of which she first carried the pennant of a United States ship-of-war beyond the Cape of Good Hope, she was placed under command of Captain David Porter, a young officer who was first lieutenant of the *Philadelphia* at Tripoli, and was already distinguished for his daring and skill. She was assigned in the Summer of 1812 to the squadron of Commodore Bainbridge, who had been appointed to the *Constitution* after her famous fight with the *Guerriere*, and had made her his flagship. In pursuance of his orders, the *Essex*, Captain Porter, sailed October 28 from the Delaware, with a full crew of three hundred and nineteen souls, and a large supply of stores which made her deep and impeded her speed. She was to meet the Commodore at Porto Praya St. Jago, in the Cape De Verde Islands, but failing to reach there in season, then continued on to the second rendezvous at Fernando de Noronha, off Brazil.

During this long cruise, the *Essex* had fallen in with but one of the enemy's vessels, the brig *Noctau*, which surrendered at the first fire. The prize was sent to the States with a prize crew, but was recaptured; however, \$55,000 in specie found on board of her had luckily been transferred to the *Essex*.

At Fernando de Noronha, Captain Porter re-

ceived a letter from Commodore Bainbridge directing him to lie off Cape Frio to the southward for the *Constitution*. But he was disappointed again, and after beating against violent head winds and chasing some of the enemy's merchantmen, the *Essex* put into St. Catherine's for a supply of water. As it had now become useless for Captain Porter to search farther for the *Constitution*, he was obliged to devise some new plan of action for his further movements. As the English influence was so great in the ports of South America as to make them hostile to American ships, he was unable to revictual on that coast, and, apparently, would be forced to return to the United States. But with enterprise and courage characteristic of his ardent nature, Captain Porter resolved, instead of returning to the States, to weather Cape Horn and ravage the Pacific, destroying the whale-ships of the enemy and living on the stores with which he knew they would be abundantly provided.

It was a daring, but, as the event proved, a practicable scheme. The voyage around the Horn was of the roughest sort. The spirit of the black, rocky, inhospitable Cape gave the adventurous little frigate a rude greeting. For many days she buffeted adverse seas, and when, after the weary voyagers thought themselves at last clear of the land and that the violence of the winds was abated, a gale of tremendous fury suddenly arose, and the exhausted crew were again clinging to the slanting yards, furling and reefing the flapping sails. But an ocean current setting to leeward obliged them

to keep a press of sail on the laboring vessel in order to claw off the land, and about midnight she plunged her head into a sea which swept the decks, and rushed below in such floods that all on board thought she was foundering; but, staggering under the blow, the *Essex* retained her buoyancy, and her bow lifted once more on the surge. It was a narrow escape, and had the force of the gale not blown itself out soon after, the ship must have been lost.

On the 15th of March the *Essex* ran into the port of Valparaiso and cast anchor. To the surprise and joy of the crew, Chili had lately revolted from the rule of Spain, and was therefore friendly to the United States, so that a very cordial reception was given to Captain Porter and his crew, and all facilities were afforded them for laying in the stores of which they were in such pressing want. After obtaining considerable valuable information from American whaleships in port concerning the English privateers and whalers in the Pacific, Captain Porter put to sea, heading northward.

The first prize taken was the Peruvian privateer *Nereyda*, cruising after American whalers. Her guns and ammunition were thrown overboard, and she was then released. After recapturing the American whaler *Barclay*, the *Essex* gradually cruised to Charles Island, where was a box among the rocks, called "a post-office," in which the whalers left accounts of their luck and future movements. A curious post-office was this in mid-ocean, without post-master or postage, whose contents could be read by all whether friend or foe, and foe did sometimes read the "Pacific mail," for Captain Porter found in it information that proved of much value. Continuing his cruise among the Gallipagos Islands, he chased and captured three large whalers, which made considerable show of resistance. They were all well armed and provisioned. Of these, the *Georgiana* was turned into a cruiser; guns from the other ships were put into her, which, with those she had, made a battery of sixteen guns; she was manned by a prize crew from the *Essex* of forty-one men, and was then sent off to capture whalers in her turn. After taking two more prizes, the *Essex* put in at Tumbes, on the coast of Ecuador, with six prizes in company, where she was soon joined by the *Georgiana*, which in her independent cruise had captured three of the enemy's ships. At Tumbes the largest of the prizes was turned into a sloop-of-war, twenty guns were mounted on her deck, a crew of sixty men manned her, and she was named the *Essex, Junior*. After a general salute, the *Essex*, with all her prizes,—quite a fleet,—put to sea, when the *Essex, Junior*, with five of the prizes in company, sailed for Valparaiso.

One of the prizes captured by the *Essex* was taken in a calm by means of drags invented by Captain Porter. They were triangular pieces of canvas stretched on a frame, weighted on one side, and were dropped in the water from the sprit sail-yard on the bowsprit. By pulling on them from the stern, then dropping them again ahead, the ship was forced through the water at the rate of two miles an hour. At Banks Bay the frigate was joined by the *Essex, Junior*, which brought the important information that the Chilian Government was becoming hostile toward the United States, and that the British Government, alarmed by the news of Captain Porter's depredations among their shipping, had dispatched several ships-of-war to the Pacific in pursuit of the *Essex*. Accordingly, he concluded to refit at the Marquesas Islands, and anchored in the bay of Nookaheevah with all his fleet. Up to this time the *Essex* had taken fourteen vessels, several of which had letters of marque, comprising in all four thousand tons and about four hundred prisoners; and a year after sailing from the Chesapeake, she was lying safely in a beautiful island port in the Central Pacific surrounded by a fleet of her prizes, attended by a consort, and well provided with all the needful stores.

The long cruise was now varied by a stay at Nookaheevah, where the crew luxuriated in its lovely valleys, under its groves of cocoas, and mingled harmoniously with the naked, tattooed islanders, who swam off in crowds to meet the ships as they entered the harbor. One adventure gave a temporary excitement to the crew. The natives were divided into rival tribes, *Typees* and *Happars*, who dwelt in separate valleys, and were often at war with each other. The *Happars* being enemies to the *Typees*, who had received the *Essex* with such hospitality, showed hostilities toward the Americans in so decided a manner that Captain Porter was obliged to send a large detachment on shore to chastise them. Joined by their manly but savage allies, the sailors, after a severe fight, succeeded in entering the hostile district, and inflicting such injuries on the *Happars* as secured themselves from further molestation.

After lying some weeks at Nookaheevah, the *Essex* and the *Essex, Junior*, sailed for Valparaiso, where Captain Porter was desirous of meeting the English frigate *Phœbe*, which had been sent in search of him; but when that vessel at last appeared off the port, she was, most unexpectedly to Captain Porter, accompanied by the *Cherub*, a sloop-of-war, of twenty-eight guns and one hundred and eighty men, while the *Phœbe* carried forty-six guns and a crew of over three hundred men.

The *Phœbe* dropped into the harbor with a light

breeze. Captain Porter had ranged his men at quarters in full preparation for an attack, as he was aware that, although Valparaiso was a neutral port, the English would not hesitate to open fire if it were of advantage for them to do so. An exciting episode now ensued, for as the *Phœbe* glided to her anchorage she passed very near to the *Essex*, and, as her commander hailed the American ship and inquired after Captain Porter's health, the latter replied that he would not answer for the consequences if the vessels should come foul of each other. Captain Hillyar replied that he did not intend to attack; but just at that instant the wind took the *Phœbe* aback, and she fell aboard of the *Essex*, her bowsprit swinging over the quarter-deck of the latter. Captain Porter called away his boarders, and would have been perfectly justified in raking the English ship with his guns, but Captain Hillyar warmly protested that the collision was purely accidental, and by trimming his sails succeeded in backing his ship out of her awkward position. Had Captain Porter opened fire at that critical moment, there is little doubt that he would have achieved a result entirely different to that which befell him in the fight that afterward followed.

For six weeks the hostile ships maneuvered in and around the port of Valparaiso, the *Essex* being found to outsail the enemy, so that she could easily have escaped, but Captain Porter preferred instead to fight the *Phœbe*, if he could engage her singly; this, however, Captain Hillyar carefully avoided, being evidently under orders not to engage the American ship except with the aid of the *Cherub*, a fact which shows with what respect English seamen now regarded the American navy, for never before this war had such a thing been known as that an English ship should avoid a fight with an enemy of equal force. But in this case the importance of capturing the *Essex*, and the doubtful result of meeting her with a single ship of equal force, were so apparent, that the enemy showed a wariness very rare in the English marine.

After waiting several weeks for a fair fight, and learning that a number of English men-of-war were daily expected at Valparaiso, Captain Porter finally concluded to sail; but before he was quite ready to put to sea, a heavy wind from the south made the *Essex* drag her anchors to the mouth of the harbor, which runs north and south. Nothing remained but to make sail, with the hope of clearing the enemy's ships, which were lying near the point of angles at the western extremity of the port. But this is a very dangerous headland, squalls often coming off in heavy puffs, and just as the *Essex* was shortening sail when passing the

bluff, a squall struck the ship, carrying away the maintopmast, throwing a number of the crew overboard, and effectually crippling the vessel.

Under these severe circumstances, Captain Porter could only stand before the wind to the north-eastern side of the harbor, where he cast anchor within half-a-mile of a Chilian battery, thus being in neutral water and protected from attack, as one would think, by the law of nations. But Captain Hillyar, entirely regardless of this circumstance, or of the honor shown by Captain Porter in not attacking him on a similar occasion, at once took advantage of the disabled condition of the *Essex* to place his vessel astern of the American frigate, where he could pour in a terrific raking fire, and at the same time be scarcely touched by her guns. The *Cherub* also hauled across the bow of the *Essex*, but finding that the forward guns of her antagonist could play upon her, took up a position near the *Phœbe*. The most Captain Porter could do was to run three long twelves through the stern ports, and these were trained with such effect on the enemy, that in half an hour they were obliged to move out of range to repair the injuries received. Three times during this first fight the *Essex* was veered around by springs or hawsers drawing on the cable from the stern, with the purpose of getting her broadsides to bear, but in each case the *Essex* was shot away, and the batteries of the *Essex* proved of little use.

After repairing, the English ships sailed down and took position on the quarter of the *Essex*, where she could not get any of her guns to bear. To stand their fire without making any return was very galling, and although, such were the injuries she had suffered in her rigging, the flying-jib was the only sail that could be hoisted on the *Essex* to make her pay off before the wind, it was spread, and the ship gradually bore down to board the *Phœbe*. The American crew, under the perfection of discipline, and not in the least disheartened, now opened a tremendous fire, which soon drove the *Cherub* out of range of her guns and forced her to remain at a distance. The *Phœbe* also kept out of reach of the *Essex*, having a leading wind and content to blaze away with her long eighteens, which wrought great execution on the decks of the American ship. Fifteen men fell in succession at one of the guns of the *Essex*.

Every expedient for saving the vessel had now been tried in vain. She was helpless before the tremendous fire of the *Phœbe*, unable to return the fire on account of her position, and, in addition to all these horrors, the flames were bursting from her hatches. Captain Porter, still unwounded and resolute to fight it out to the last, finally listened to the entreaties of his crew, who represented that

further resistance was worse than useless, and he reluctantly ordered the colors to be struck.

No more desperate and bloody combat is recorded in the annals of modern naval history. The battle was fought by the Essex against great odds, for not only did she have to combat two ships, one her superior and the other a respectable antagonist, the Essex, Junior, being altogether unfit to engage in such a conflict, but during nearly the entire contest she could make only six of her guns available, besides having all her top hamper so damaged as to render it next to impossible to work the ship. How great were the disadvantages under which she was fought is evident by the losses she sustained. In the naval actions of that war the losses of the English ships were almost always greater than those of the Americans, owing, among other reasons, to the superior gunnery of the latter. But in the fight off Valparaiso, the Essex, out of a total of two hundred and fifty-five souls on board, lost one hundred and fifty-two, while the enemy's crews, numbering just five hundred men, sustained a loss of only fifteen killed and wounded! This fact alone, considering the length, skill and desperation of the battle, shows conclusively under what disadvantages Captain Porter fought, and what credit he deserved for maintaining the unequal contest so long.

Captain Hillyar permitted the Essex, Junior, to be turned into a cartel-ship, or vessel for carrying prisoners destined to be exchanged, and allowed the surviving crew of the Essex to sail in her for

the United States. Off New York, the Essex, Junior, was overhauled by an English frigate, and for fear he should be detained by her, Captain Porter, while still thirty miles from shore, made his escape in a whale-boat, being assisted in the attempt by a fog which concealed him from the English vessel. However, the Essex, Junior, was soon allowed to proceed, and the gallant survivors of the crew of the ill-fated but glorious frigate Essex once more stepped gladly forth upon their native land.

Captain Porter afterward published an account of his famous cruise, in two volumes, which contains many interesting details, and is well worth perusal. Among other matters he mentions the circumstance that there was on board a young midshipman who was very desirous of engaging in the foray in the Marquesas Islands, but was prevented on account of his youth; he afterward distinguished himself for his unflinching courage during the trying scenes of the fight at Valparaiso, and would, for his conduct at that time, have been recommended for promotion if his extreme youth had not hindered such a reward of merit, he being but little over twelve years of age. This young hero lived to our day, and won immortal fame in the naval operations of the late war, being no other than David C. Farragut, who, for some time before his death, held the highest position in the American navy. He went to school in his profession early, and, although it was a rough training, its results proved invaluable to the country.

BUSY SATURDAY.

BY FANNY PERCIVAL.

WHAT a busy day for little May
 Every Saturday is!
 There's so much to do, enough for two,
 And how she ever can get through
 Is one of the mysteries.

You'd think she'd desire some help to hire,
 But times are hard, you know,
 And she hardly knows how to get the clothes
 For her two dollies, Lou and Rose—
 Her bank funds are so low.

The washing comes first, and that's the worst—
 The clothes for Rose and Lou;
 She puts them in tubs, and hard she rubs,
 And with her little fist she scrubs
 Till she thinks that they will do.

Then she ties a line of stoutest twine
 From the door-knob to a chair;
 Then quickly wrings the tiny things,
 And in a little basket brings,
 And hangs them up with care.