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AN INTERESTING CONTRIBUTION TO HISTORY. THE ADVENTURES OF A MIDSHIPMAN AS TOLD IN A RARE BOOK —THE DEATH OF SIR PETER PARKER—BYRON'S EPITAPH.

Old books, like old men, are often full of information—a fact which may be verified by the perusal of "The Life of a Sailor," originally published in England, and republished in Philadelphia in 1833. The book purports to be an autobiography. The name of the author is believed to have been Chamier, though he speaks of himself as Mr. F. He was a gentleman's son, and when a lad of thirteen years of age entered the British navy as a midshipman. After suffering many hardships and meeting with a great variety of adventures, which he narrates in a sprightly and sparkling manner, the author found himself on board the Salsette when that vessel carried Lord Byron from Smyrna to Constantinople. His lordship took a liking to the lad because the latter was able to supply him with some oranges, which his lordship craved, while on the voyage. When Byron landed, the lad, at his request, was allowed to accompany him to the shore, and spent a few days in seeing the sights of Stamboul and vicinity. In this way he happened to be present, and was one of the crew of the boat which accompanied Lord Byron and Mr. Elkinhead when they swam across the Hellespont—a feat which no other person, except Leander, had accomplished. The book contains a graphic account of the feat, and also many curious and quaint allusions to incidents and occurrences which have been immortalized by being incorporated in Lord Byron's poems. After meeting with many other adventures, both at sea and on land, the author of the quaint old volume shipped on board the frigate Menelaus, Capt. Peter Parker, and arrived in

CHESAPEAKE BAY

a short time before the battle of North Point and the bombardment of Fort McHenry. A chapter of the book is devoted to an account of the ravages of the British along the shores of the Chesapeake bay and the death of Sir Peter Parker, who was mortally wounded at the battle of Caulk's Field, in Kent County, about two and a-quarter miles east of Tolchester Beach. Sir Peter Parker was about twenty-four years of age. He was a first cousin of Lord Byron, and belonged to a family which, like the forefathers of the poet, had distinguished themselves by their bravery in the service of their country at sea. He is said to have been the handsomest man in the "King's navee," and by his gentleness and kindness seems to have made himself the idol of his officers and men.

The squadron in the Chesapeake was in command of Sir George Cockburn, and with him was General Ross, afterwards killed in the battle of North Point. The first exploit of the British after the arrival of the Menelaus, was a raid upon the eastern shore of the Potomac river, and the burning of a factory on the mainland just back of St. George's Island. What kind of a factory it was, we have no means of ascertaining, but it was probably a building devoted to the storage or manufacture of tobacco, or a warehouse for the storage of salt fish. It is described as "being not only the abode of innocent labor, but likewise the resort of some few militiamen guilty of the unnatural sin of protecting their own country." After destroying the factory the marauders made their way back to their vessels, stopping on the shore long enough to burn the family mansion on a plantation which they found in the possession of three young ladies, whose father they had learned was a colonel of militia. The

DEFENSELESS GIRLS

besought the admiral to spare the house, but he, with relentless cruelty, refused to listen to their entreaties. They then sought the aid of Sir Peter, who, much to his credit, it is narrated, would have interceded in their behalf, had he not been prevented by the Admiral, who frowned upon him with a demoniacal stare, and ordered the torch to be applied to the house, which, together with its contents, was quickly consumed. To the credit of Sir Peter, though a gallant soldier, he is said to have wept like a child. After this exploit was accomplished the major part of the fleet proceeded up the Potomac, and after levying a heavy contribution upon the citizens of Alexandria, co-operated with General Ross in the capture and destruction of Washington. Sir Peter Parker and the Menelaus, accompanied by a few smaller craft, were sent to ravage the eastern shore of the bay, in order to prevent the militia of that section from going to the aid of Washington. With this object in view, the Menelaus reached the vicinity of Seven Points some time in August, 1814, and soon afterwards raided the shores of Wharton Creek (Worton creek was evidently meant) and Fairlee, which seems to have been a successful prelude to the battle of Caulk's Field, which, though only a moonlight skirmish of small importance in itself, was notable for the death of the commander of the Menelaus, who was mortally wounded in the fight.

Not by any means the least curious thing connected with the various accounts of the

BATTLE OF CAULK'S FIELD

is the conflicting statements of the time the battle occurred. It is repeatedly asserted in "The Life of a Sailor" that the battle was fought on the 1st of August, while Lieutenant Crease, who succeeded Sir Peter Parker in command of the Menelaus, in the official report, which he made to Vice Admiral Cochrane, states that the fight occurred on the 20th of August, and Lieut. Col. Philip Reed, who commanded the Americans, states in his official account to Brig. Gen. Benjamin Chambers, dated at Belle Air (now called Fairlee), on the 3d of September, that it occurred on the 30th ultimo. All the accounts, however, agree that it occurred on a moonlight night, and inasmuch as the almanac shows that the moon was full on the 30th of that August, and for other reasons, the weight of testimony seems to be in favor of the latter date being the correct one. All the published accounts of the battle are also very vague and in conflict with the traditions of the neighborhood concerning the landing place of the British.

Some years ago the writer interviewed an aged citizen of the county, who lived quite close to the battle-ground, who said his father was in the fight, of which he gave a very intelligible and interesting account, which he based on information derived from his parent. According to the account of this venerable man, the Brisish landed at Gresham Hall, which he said was not far from Rock Hall, and not very far below Tolchester Beach, and, guided by a colored man whom they had captured, were trying to find their way to Chestertown, when the negro led them to Caulk's field, which is about two and a quarter miles east of Tolchester.

THE FIGHT

according to his account, occurred upon the opposite slopes of a valley, or depression in the earth. The British not being acquainted with the "lay of the land," fired over the heads of the Americans, who, being better acquainted with the ground, fired with greater precision and more fatal effect. In this way was explained the great disproportion in the loss of the opposing parties. While both accounts agree in greatly over-estimating the numbers of their opponents, strange to say, they also agree in stating that the British lost fifteen killed. The old man pointed out the site of the hole in which fourteen British soldiers were buried, which was marked by a slight depression in the ground. One of the dead Englishmen was known by his uniform to have been a midshipman. His body was buried in a grave by itself, close to the others. Many years afterward the relatives of the midshipman (whose name was probably Sands—for the sailor says that a midshipman of that name was killed there) employed some of their countrymen who were traveling in this country to exhume the midshipman's remains, in order that they might be taken back to England to rest with those of his ancestors. Being unable to find the midshipman's grave they opened the larger one, and selecting the different parts of a skeleton therefrom, took it away with them, no doubt intending to palm it off for the remains of the dead officer.

Notwithstanding the plausibility of this circumstantial account, it is highly probable that the Menelaus anchored a short distance above Tolchester Beach, and that the landing of the marauders was effected a few miles below Fairlee. This view of the case is strengthened by the fact that the British official account is dated "On his Majesty's ship Menelaus, off Poole's Island," and also by the probability that the British were trying to find their way to Belle Air, now the village of Fairlee, where a detachment of the Kent county militia were encamped instead of to Chestertown, as stated in traditional account. According to the account in the "Life of a Sailor," poor Sands, the midshipman, and Sir Peter Parker, both

HAD PRESENTEMENTS

of their death on the morning before the fight. Sir Peter, while leaning over the affrail, lost his gold-laced cocked-hat overboard, upon which he remarked, very thoughtfully and in a very unusual manner: "My head will follow this evening." From that moment he was unusually thoughtful and reserved. He made his will, destroyed his letters, made several allusions to his wife, and spoke like one who had some apprehension of impending fate, while every feature of his countenance indicated some secret foreboding awfully present to his imagination. The British left their ships about nine o'clock, and landed soon after. They intended to surprise and capture the American camp, but encountered a mounted American picket guard about a quarter of a mile from the shore, and, though they approached within ten paces of them when they fired, they contrived to miss horses, riders and all. The Americans, startled into activity by the unwelcome salute, returned the fire with equal precipitation and bad aim, after which they galloped into a wood in the vicinity. Here they fired a single pistol; it was answered by one at some distance and that again was answered at the camp by a field piece. It was now past all doubt, says the narrator, that we were discovered, and a prudent man would have instantly returned. But Sir Peter was not a man to be easily intimidated, and the battalion pressed on. The narative continues: The road which led to

[Continued on Third Page.]

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