

# DON'T GIVE UP THE SHIP!

BY EDGAR LEE MASTERS

“**B**Y GOD,” said O. H. Perry,  
“Here it’s middle February  
With the British at Fort Meigs, at Niagara, Michigan.  
If we had as Secretary  
Of the Navy that contrary  
Andy Jackson, ’stead of Jones, or any first-rate fighting man  
Who would let me at ’em, I’d  
Proceed to tan their hide—  
You bet I’d tan their hide. . . .

“But the Navy’s Secretary,  
William Jones,  
Is too lazy or too wary;  
So my letters fall on stones.  
Mr. Madison don’t hear me  
For this Secretary Jones,  
Though I chattered like a barber.  
So I’ll write to Commodore  
Chauncey up at Sackett’s Harbor;  
For he can’t be any slower  
Than this Secretary Jones.”

So he wrote the Commodore,  
As he swore,  
In the month of February,  
Eighteen thirteen, for a corps  
To build and man some battle-boats to make Lake Erie roar—  
Wrote Lieutenant O. H. Perry. . . .  
And he got the men, and very  
Soon was building battle-brigs,  
Spite of Democrats and Whigs,  
Where the forest leaves were greening and the buds were on the twigs  
With which to drive the British from Niagara and Fort Meigs.

So now ’twas March, and merry  
Was Lieutenant O. H. Perry,  
Building sloop and brig and wherry  
In the woods along Lake Erie.  
How they swung the ax! What singing  
Was the frosted ax’s swinging!  
How they picked the pine and oak!

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How they picked the chestnut, ash!  
How they grunted, stroke on stroke!  
How they shouted at each crash  
Of the branches when they broke!

How they slept in windy tents! How they drank the frosted stream!  
How they swore, how they bawled, how they whaled the oxen team!  
How they ate and fed the fires! How they mauled the stubborn wedge!  
How they sawed, how they hammered, how they planed the splintered edge!  
How the chips fell from the adzes! How the anvils rang the sledge!  
How the bits slushed and crunched! How the drawing-knives crisped  
The shavings round the benches! How the frame-saws lisped!  
How the heavy-booted loggers helped to screw the big augers!  
How they hacked away the frizzles! And the sockets cut with chisels!  
How the crows and jays looked down and saw them hack and hew!  
How the skies were chisel blue where the lonely white cloud flew!  
How the pines were still at midnight! How the April moon was new  
And sheared just like a pruning-hook the mists it struggled through!  
How every single Sunday was just the same as Monday  
Till the sassafrass was green, and the Indian turnip seen!  
How they hurried till great oak-trees standing up at break of dawn  
By the night-fall were in gunwales with the growing twigs thereon,  
With the leaves still sticking on them, and the oozing bark that showed  
All the hull up like a moloch, or a green horned-toad!  
How they boiled the black pitch! How the laughers and the talkers  
Sped the work while all the woodland heard the hammers of the caulkers!

So then Lieutenant Perry  
Took up a voluntary  
Of iron from the farmer, the shopman and the smith.  
Anything met his desires  
From old hinges to old tires,  
Old plates, bolts, scraps, so they could be had forthwith.  
And then he gathered cables, and then he gathered spankers.  
And then he gathered big sails, and gathered ropes and anchors.  
And then he gathered powder, and cannon and flint locks—  
Then slipped his sloops like lizards to the water from the stocks!

“I’m goin’ to whip the British,”  
Said Lieutenant O. H. Perry.  
“I’m goin’ to whip the British,  
And do it in a hurry.  
If they march upon our Capital and burn our army stores;  
And burn the White House too, and our records and our papers,  
I’m goin’ to whip the British to even up the scores.  
We’ll see who is the boss when it comes to cuttin’ capers.  
I’ll drive ‘em from Lake Erie,” said Lieutenant O. H. Perry.  
“I’ll foller ‘em and corner ‘em, and get ‘em on the hip;  
I’ll save New York, Ohio, New England, Michigan.  
Hoist up my banner with the words of ‘Don’t Give Up The Ship!’;  
I’m goin’ to whip the British, and it’s time the fight began!”

## THE AMERICAN MERCURY

Then waited Captain Barclay,  
 A hero of Trafalgar.  
 Then waited Captain Barclay,  
 A-smokin' a cigar.

Then waited Captain Barclay with a sneer and very jocular—  
 But waited but a little for the Perry flag-ship *Lawrence*  
 A-comin' with the wind now, and a-belchin' forth of torrents  
 Of canister on the *Hunter* and the *Chippeway*, the *Charlotte*;  
 And a-rakin' the *Detroit* with flames of blue and scarlet . . .  
 Till the battle went contrary and Lieutenant O. H. Perry  
 Was sinking with the *Lawrence*. So he left the waves to curse her,  
 And rowed to the *Niagara*, assisted by the purser;  
 And boarded her and brought her up, and opened up her guns  
 Upon the *Lady Prevost*, the *Little Belt* and *Chippeway*,  
 Starboard and port guns with metal by the tons;  
 Until they fouled and foundered; and then to gain the day  
 He ended it with pistol shots and took the British fleet.  
 "Now," said Lieutenant Perry, "there's nothing half so sweet  
 As crow-meat to the fellow who the same don't have to eat."

"By God I've licked the British,"  
 Said Lieutenant O. H. Perry.  
 "I've taken 'em or sunk 'em where the deep wave devours.  
 And so to tell 'em what I've done  
 I'll write to Jones and Madison:  
 We have met the enemy and the enemy are ours!"

## EDITORIAL

**D**ESPITE the gallant protests of those learned and unpurchasable men, the Washington correspondents, and the heroic affidavits of such impartial experts as Judge Elbert H. Gary, Andy Mellon and Charlie Schwab, it must be as plain as mud by now that the Coolidge myth has blown up. What remains of it is only a sort of superstition, lingering in the minds of incurable romantics. Good Cal has been walloped too hard and too often to have any dignity left, and the wallops have been too manifestly deserved to get him any sympathy. His statecraft, once viewed as so subtle as to be fathomable only to adepts, turns out on examination and review to be nothing but a bag of ancient tricks, most of them transparent and all of them disingenuous. The political science that he mastered as a petty jobholder in Northampton, eager only for a pat on the head from Murray Crane, is the science that he practises as President of the United States. It has, as everyone should know by now, but one purpose: to maintain its practitioners in their jobs. There is no room in it for anything else, not even for fine words. Dr. Coolidge, speaking or silent, says precisely nothing, and he says nothing because he has nothing to say. There is not the slightest evidence that he harbors anything even remotely describable as a rational idea about any of the great problems that confront him. There is not even any evidence that he is interested in them. They impinge upon him, obviously, only as impediments to his single aim of sitting tight and letting the other fellow worry. He sees them simply as sinister menaces to his security, and to that of his tatterdemalion guard of numskull confidants and consultants. Thus he gets rid of them, when he can, by ignor-

ing them, and when ignoring them becomes impossible he tries to dispose of them by obfuscating them, and making them bores. In his speeches there is only bilge, and it is not even good bilge. Far better is brewed by the editorial writers of the New York *Herald-Tribune*.

Long after the rest of us have begun to forget it the Washington correspondents will awaken to the dreadful fact that he cannot be renominated in 1928. He has been their favorite in that running since Harding went to bliss eternal, and their favorites always come to grief. That so preposterous a little man should hold the throne longer than Washington or Jefferson did not appear to strike them as strange when it first came into talk: they liked the idea, as they like all nonsensical ideas. But strange or not, it now turns happily into an impossibility. For if anything can be plain in so murky a matter as politics, it is plain there will be a large and violent party of anti-Coolidge men in the next Republican national convention, and that it will get a great deal of help from Coolidge men with wounds upon their surfaces and knives hidden in their bootlegs. Which party hates Cal worse: the anti-Coolidge men or the Coolidge men? It would be hard for any enlightened Washingtonian to decide. If the Brookharts have bruises below the belt, then the McKinleys and Peppers have both bruises and lacerations. In dealing with friends and foes alike, the White House has violated all the immemorial rules of political decency. Such things, in politics, are not complained of openly. It is against the code to protest in wild and mournful words, even against violations of the code. But you may be sure that they are not forgotten.

I do not profess to be privy to the identity