

**STEPHEN DECATUR AND
THE SUPPRESSION
OF PIRACY IN THE
MEDITERRANEAN, NO. 3**

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Stephen Decatur and the Suppression of Piracy in the Mediterranean, No. 3 by Charles Henry Smith

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C. H. Smith

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MEDITERRANEAN”

BY
CHARLES HENRY SMITH, LL.D.

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STEPHEN DECATUR

AND THE SUPPRESSION OF PIRACY IN THE
MEDITERRANEAN

AN ADDRESS AT A MEETING OF THE
CONNECTICUT SOCIETY OF THE ORDER
OF THE FOUNDERS AND PATRIOTS OF
AMERICA, APRIL 19, A.D. 1900

BY

CHARLES HENRY SMITH, LL.D.

STEPHEN DECATUR
AND THE SUPPRESSION OF PIRACY IN THE
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The recent achievement of Admiral Dewey which has so greatly enhanced the prestige of the United States in the Pacific, furnishes a suitable occasion for recalling the equally important similar service rendered by Commodore Decatur in the Mediterranean in the early part of the century. When we consider their work, and its effect upon the standing of the United States in distant parts of the world, there are certain resemblances in the careers of these two men which attract attention. All our naval conflicts have been in American or European waters, with the exception of those in which Decatur and Dewey gained distinction. One of these was in African, the other in Asiatic waters. Both of these conflicts had connected with them certain operations on land which involved political questions of a serious nature, and violent differences of opinion as to the right and proper course for our government to pursue. As a result of both, the importance of the United States was greatly increased in the eyes of those who had held us before in light esteem. It is not my intention to trace very closely these resemblances. Let it suffice to mention them, and then, with the added interest of mental comparison with recent events, let us trace in part the career of a true man who in an

earlier period served his country well. As we proceed, we can hardly fail to note the contrast between the United States of 1800, cringing before the pirates of the Mediterranean, and the United States of 1900, an acknowledged master power in the world.

On the northern coast of Africa, there appeared toward the close of the Middle Ages the four Barbarian States of Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli, which were ruled for the most part by chieftains of a singularly ferocious temper. Of one of these it is related that he prided himself on an accomplishment in which practice had given him great skill. It consisted in leaping onto his horse, and at the same instant, with a single blow of his scimitar, cutting off the head of the groom who was holding the bridle. There was nothing malicious in this. It was simply an eccentric way of releasing the horse for the ride. Under such rulers, piracy was adopted as a State institution, and regarded as a legitimate source of revenue. Said the Dey of Algiers on one occasion, "If I were to make peace with every nation, what should I do with my corsairs? My soldiers cannot live on their miserable allowance."

During more than three centuries, the pirate ships of the Barbary powers were the scourge of the Mediterranean, where they sometimes cruised in fleets of seventy or eighty sail, defying the strongest European navies of the time. Not content with booty secured at sea, they would swoop down on the coast villages of Southern Europe and carry off the inhabitants into