

For several years a war cloud had been gathering over this country and England. Napoleon 1st, was then convulsing the nations of Europe with the rapid strides he was making toward dominion and power. As early as 1806 Napoleon had acquired control over nearly all the kingdoms of Europe. England alone, unsubdued and undaunted, waged incessant war against her ancient rival, and though France was victorious on land, the navy of England was triumphant on every sea. In May, 1806, England, for the purpose of injuring the commerce of her enemy, declared the continent from Brest, a town on the north-west extremity of France, to the Elbe, in a state of blockade. And numerous American vessels trading to that coast were captured and condemned. Bonaparte soon retaliated by declaring the British Isles in a state of blockade, and numerous American vessels trading there became a prey to French cruisers; and between the two powers the foreign commerce of the United States was almost ruined. France soon modified her restrictive measures in part, but England refused to do so. England had also announced the doctrine that whoever was born in England always remained a British subject, and had long claimed the right and exercised the power of searching American ships, and taking from them those who had been naturalized in the United States and who were therefore, claimed as American citizens. On the 22nd of June, the American frigate Cheasapeake, then near the coast of the United States, having refused to deliver up four men claimed by the English as deserters, was fired upon by the British ship of war, Leopard. Being unsuspecting of danger at the time and unprepared for the attack, the Cheasapeake struck her colors after having three of her men killed and eighteen wounded.