

## A NAUTICAL EXPLOIT.

(From Chambers' Journal.)

ON the morning of March 18, 1862, the Liverpool ship *Emily St. Pierre* (William Wilson, captain) arrived within about twelve miles of Charleston and signalled for a pilot. She had made a long and tedious voyage of four months from Calcutta, bound for St. John, N.B., calling at Charleston for orders if Charleston was open. If the southern port was blockaded Captain Wilson's orders were to proceed direct to the British port of St. John, N.B. The ship had formerly belonged to Charleston, but since the outbreak of the civil war she had sailed under the English flag. Her nominal owners were Messrs. Fraser, Tunholm, and Co., of 10 Rumford place, Liverpool, a place doing an extensive business, who had very close relations with the Confederate or Southern States, for whom they acted as bankers and agents in this country.

The ship was hailed by a vessel which proved to be the northern cruiser *James Adger*, and in response Captain Wilson hauled up his colours, backed his main-yard and lay to. An American naval lieutenant and a score of other men came on board and demanded his papers. The manifest showed an innocent cargo, 2,000 bales of gunny bags, and the registration of the ship as English was in due order. The captain demanded permission to proceed, Charleston being blockaded, to his destination, the British port of St. John. The lieutenant refused, and referred the matter to his superior in command; and the two vessels proceeded into Charleston roads'ead where they arrived at 2.30 in the afternoon.

Captain Wilson was ordered on board the flagship of the blockading squadron, the *Florida*, where he was kept for two hours in solitude and suspense. At last a flag officer said they decided to seize the *Emily St. Pierre* on several grounds. He asserted that she carried contraband goods of war—namely, saltpetre; that her English registration was not *bona fide*; that many articles on board had been found bearing the name of Charleston, that the same word had been scraped out on her stern and substituted by the name Liverpool; that Captain Wilson had not disclosed all his papers, but had been observed from the *James Adger* to throw overboard and sink a small parcel, probably of incriminating documents.

Captain Wilson protested and appealed to the maritime law of nations, but in vain. He was informed that the law courts of Philadelphia would adjudicate the matter, and finally Captain Wilson was invited to take a passage in his vessel to Philadelphia, and to place at the disposal of the navigator his charts and instruments. The invitation in form was in fact a command. He returned to his vessel to find his crew had all been removed with the exception of two, who were not sailors, the steward, an Irishman named *Matthew Montgomery*, and the cook, a German named *Louis Schelvin*, hailing from Frankfort-on-the-Main. These were merely passengers, and with them was an American engineer who had obtained permission to take passage to Philadelphia.

The prize crew who took charge of the vessel consisted of Lieutenant Stone, of the United States navy, in command, a master's mate, and twelve men—fourteen in all; with the American passenger fifteen. The moment Captain Wilson stepped on board his own vessel he formed a resolution to recapture her and take her home. He was bold enough to think that it might be possible to recapture the ship even against such odds. An unarmed man, aided by the questionable support of an Irish steward and a German cook, was practically powerless against the fifteen of the crew. On the other hand, Captain Wilson was a brawny, big framed Scotchman (a native of Dumfriesshire), a thorough seaman, determined in resolve, cool and prompt in action.

He called the steward and cook to him in his stateroom and disclosed the wild project he had formed. Both manfully promised to stand by their chief. This was at 4.30 on the morning of March 21, the third day out from Charleston. Captain Wilson had already formed his plan of operations, and had prepared to a certain extent for carrying it out. With the promise of the steward and the cook secured, he lost no time, gave them no chance for their courage to evaporate, but proceeded at once in the darkness and silence of the night to carry out his desperate undertaking. He was prepared to lose his life or have his ship; that was the simple alternative.

It was Lieutenant Stone's watch on deck, and the prize master's mate was asleep in his berth. The English captain went into the berth, handed out the mate's swords and revolvers, clapped the gag made of a piece of wood and some marline between his teeth, seized his hands, which *Montgomery*, the steward, quickly ironed, and so left him secure. The lieutenant still paced the deck, undisturbed by a sound. Then across to another state room, where the American engineer lay asleep. He was also gagged and ironed silently and without disturbance. His revolvers and those already secured were given to the steward and the cook, who remained below in the cabin. Captain Wilson went on deck.

Lieutenant Stone was pacing the deck, and the watch consisted of one man at the helm, one on the lookout on the fore-castle and three others who were about the ship. For ten minutes Captain Wilson

walked up and down, remarking on the fair wind and making believe that he had just turned out. The ship was off Cape Hatteras, midway between Charleston and Philadelphia, the most easterly projection of land on that coast. It is difficult navigation thereabouts, with cross currents and a tendency to fogs, affording the two captains a subject for talk.

"Let her go free a bit, Captain Stone; you are too close to the cape. I tell you, and I know."

"We have plenty of offing," replied the lieutenant. And then to the helmsman: "How's her head?"

"Northeast and by east, sir," came the reply.

"Keep her so. I tell you it is right," said the lieutenant.

"Well, of course I'm not responsible now, but I'm an older sailor than you, Captain Stone, and I tell you that if you want to clear Cape Hatteras another two points east will do her no harm. Do but look at my chart; I left it open on the cabin table. And the coffee will be ready now." And Captain Wilson led the way from the poop to the cabin, followed by the commander.

There was a passage about five yards long leading from the deck to the cabin, a door at either end. The captain stopped at the first door, closing it, and picking from behind it an iron belaying pin, which he placed there. The younger man went forward to the cabin where the chart lay open on the table. "Stone!"

He turned at a sudden, peremptory exclamation of his name. His arm upraised the heavy iron bolt in his hand, in low, but hard, eager quick words, "My ship shall never go to Philadelphia!" said the captain. He did not strike. It was unnecessary. *Montgomery* had thrust his gag into the young lieutenant's mouth; he was bound hand and foot, bundled into a berth, and the door locked. Three out of the fifteen were thus deposed of. There was still the watch on deck and the watch below.

The construction of the *Emily St. Pierre* was of a kind not unusual, but still not very common. The quarters of the crew were not in the fore-castle, but in a round house amidships. The name does not describe its shape. It was an oblong house on deck, with windows and one door. From the poop or upper deck at the stern over the cabins and staterooms, and the passage before mentioned, there was a companion stair on the port side leading to the deck at the waist, while a similar companionway at the stern led down to the level of the deck, which could also be approached direct from the cabin through the passage.

In this space behind the poop were the wheels, slightly raised for the steersman to see clear of the poop, and there was a hatchway leading to the lazarette hold, a small supplementary hold usually devoted to stores, extra gear, coils of spare rope, and so on. Nothing that might be done on this part of the deck, could be seen, therefore, from the waist of the ship, nor *vice versa*, except by the steersman, who was elevated by a step or two above the level.

(Coming on this part of the deck from the cabin Captain Wilson called to the three men who were about, and pointing to a heavy coil of rope in the lazarette, ordered them to get it up at once—Lieutenant Stone's orders. They jumped down without demur, suspecting nothing, as soon as the captain shoved the hatch aside. They were no sooner in than he quickly replaced and fastened the hatch. The three were securely trapped in full view of the helmsman, whose sailor's instinct kept him in his place at the wheel.

"If you utter a word or make a move," said the captain, showing a revolver, "I'll blow your brains out," and then he called aft the lookout man, the last of the watch on deck. The man came aft. Would he help to navigate the ship to England? No, he would not. He was an American. Then would he call the watch? He would do that. And eagerly he did it, but the next moment he was laid low on the deck and bundled unceremoniously into the lazarette with his three companions, the hatchway replaced and secured, Captain Wilson standing on guard at it.

Meanwhile the watch below had been called and was astir. When sailors tumble out they generally do so gradually and by twos and threes. The first two that came aft were quickly overpowered, one at a time, and bound. The third man drew his knife and rushed at the steward, who fired, wounding him severely in the shoulder. It was the only shot that was fired. Finding that cook and steward and captain were all armed, the rest of the watch below quietly surrendered and submitted to be locked in the round house, prisoners of the bold and resolute man who, in the course of an hour, had thus regained possession of his ship against overwhelming odds.

The first thing was to wash and bandage the wounded shoulder of the man who was shot, the next to put all the prisoners in the round house under lock and key. Four of them out of twelve volunteered to assist working the ship rather than submit to the tedium of imprisonment. The irony of fate! Not one of them could steer except one, and he imperfectly. And the courses are set, and topsails, lower and upper, are drawing, and the topgallant sails too. Pray heaven this wind may last and no stronger!

The lieutenant was admitted to the captain's table under guard and on parole. The meal over, he was ushered into his stateroom and locked in. Once a day only—for the captain is captain and crew combined—bread and beef and water were passed to the prisoners in