

The Capture of the Packet Ship Tonawanda—Journal of the Voyage and Incidents of the Capture—Five Days in the Meshes of the Pirate—The Pirate Seizes a Colored Boy from the Tonawanda—His Captures one of the Describers from the Sumter—A Full Description of the "290."

[From the New York Herald.]

The following highly interesting letter from one of the passengers of the Tonawanda will be perused with more than ordinary interest. The ship sailed from Philadelphia on the 30th of September, with a crew of thirty five men and seventy five passengers—four of whom were in the cabin, viz:

F. A. Calhoun, of St. Louis.
W. T. Hacker, of Philadelphia.
W. L. Walker, of Philadelphia.
Henry McKay, of New York.

The Tonawanda arrived at Liverpool at three o'clock on the afternoon of the 27th of October.

The following is the letter from one of her passengers:

ACCOUNT OF THE SEIZURE OF THE SHIP TONAWANDA.

The ship Tonawanda, Captain Theodore Julius, is the largest vessel of the well known line of Cope Brothers, of Philadelphia. Her measurement is 1,240 tons. She sailed from Philadelphia on 30th of September, at half-past 2 o'clock P. M.

October 9.—We had most favorable weather, nothing of consequence transpiring until to-day, which opened with a very light west wind, almost a calm, increasing slightly and gradually until four P. M., when in latitude 40 degrees 30 minutes longitude West 54 degrees 30 minutes, we espied to the southwest, making for us, a suspicious steamer, exchanging color signals when two or three miles apart. She displayed the "British white cross of St. George," we running up the Stars and Stripes, whereupon she immediately fired a blank cartridge to bring us to. After laying to it was not long before we discovered her true colors, the stars and bars, (which were suddenly run up amid the smoke of her gun,) divulging her a rebel steamer. She was soon alongside, and lowering a boat, containing two officers and four sailors, uniformed much the same as our own United States officers and sailors, each armed with a cutlass and pistol, boarded and declared us a "prize to the Confederate States man-of-war Alabama, (290,) Capt. Semmes."

Captain Julius was ordered aboard with his papers, where he was detained several hours, the Tonawanda remaining in charge of the officers who boarded us. In the meantime another vessel hove in sight, to which she (the Alabama) gave chase, we following in her wake. The vessel was soon brought to and boarded, but proving to be a British brig was not molested, but permitted to proceed on her course. Captain Julius was temporarily released, and returned to his ship by authority of Captain Semmes, to resume command, the officers and men returning to the privateer. We are ordered to keep alongside and follow her; the next American vessel overhauled we expect to be transferred to, and the Tonawanda burned. Captain Julius, however, gave a ransom bond, payable at the end of the war, which Captain Semmes took only on account of the women and children passengers, about fifty in number, which are evidently a puzzle for him. He considers our vessel too valuable a prize to let off, and if he decides to burn her promises to return the bond. The necessary bond and all the ship's papers being in possession of the privateer, we may possibly be allowed to proceed in the morning.

October 10.—The privateer still to the windward, keeping a sharp lookout after us. We have been in hopes to lose her in the night, but no such good luck was in store for us.

At twelve o'clock M. we were signaled to close up, as she desired to send a boat to us. The summons was promptly obeyed, and two officers boarded us with instructions for Capt. Julius to again report immediately on board the privateer, with a change of clothing and blanket. He therefore returned in the officer's boat with them, very much to the grief of all on board the Tonawanda. We were also ordered to launch our quarter boats to bring off the prisoners from the privateer. This was immediately done, and the prisoners were soon transferred to us. They consisted of Capt. Harmon and twelve men of the bark *Way Crest*, from New York to Cardiff, eight days out, burned at sea by the privateer on the 7th instant; also Captain Johnson and seven men of the brig *Dunkirk*, from New York to Lisbon, eight days out, burned at sea by the privateer on the same day. These men were all held as prisoners on board the Alabama, being confined in a small space of about twenty feet square on deck, all heavily ironed—officers and men alike. The poor fellows, mostly respectable men, were very glad of their release, which, as we are still in tow of the privateer, may be only temporary. Soon after we were boarded by another boat's crew, bringing the Captain's clerk of the privateer, who, before returning to his vessel, paroled all on board the Tonawanda except the passengers, with whom no interference as yet has taken place. This operation over, she immediately headed to the westward, with a fair wind and full head of speed under sail, ordering us to follow close after, which, as they held our fine captain as hostage, we did with a perfect looseness, crowding the Tonawanda with sail until she fairly bounced through the water, the sea being quite heavy.

At eleven o'clock P. M., clear moonlight, the privateer brought to a ship bound eastward, which, proving to be a German vessel, was allowed to pursue her course. We retired very late, being fagged out with anxiety and uneasiness about our fate.

October 11.—This morning finds us still in the wake of the privateer, who continues to hold our captain as hostage, nothing of consequence transpiring beyond following her up on her westward course until three o'clock P. M., latitude 41 25, longitude 55 50, when we fell in with a sail which proved to be the splendid full-rigged ship *Manchester*, Capt. Landecker, from New York to Liverpool, six days out, loaded with grain and cotton, the whole valued at nearly \$300,000.

The usual treacherous form of seizure was gone through with, and she was soon a prize to the "Confederate man-of-war Alabama." After being condemned, which occupied only about thirty minutes, her captain and crew, consisting altogether of twenty three men, were transferred to us with their baggage, and about nine o'clock P. M. she was consigned to the flames. The privateer then signaled us to "wear ship" and follow him which we did, losing sight of the ill-fated *Manchester* about half-past two A. M., which at that time continued to illuminate the horizon.

We have been somewhat encouraged as to our fate by a letter from Capt. Julius, on board the privateer, to his son, first mate, and in charge of this vessel, stating that we will probably be released in a day or two after they take a few more prizes and load us up with a few more crews.—The female passengers have been the means, thus far, of saving us from a similar fate to that of the *Manchester*. We are all very much depressed and shocked at the wanton manner in which this noble vessel has been sacrificed. Until we fell in with the *Manchester*, this afternoon, we were in terror all day of being landed on Sable Island, as our course for some time had been exactly in that direction.

October 12.—The day opened as usual, finding us still in the wake of the privateer. While the Tonawanda rides the tremendous heavy sea so gracefully the Alabama is thumping up and down, looking as if every moment she would go under. Steering due west, we are on the lookout for more victims, and until we get some more we must expect no change in our monotonous and humiliating situation. This is Sunday; but all days are alike on this unfortunate cruise of the Tonawanda. The day closes without anything in particular transpiring, but increased anxiety. Not another sail has been in sight all day, although we are in the track of outward bound vessels.

October 13.—This is a continuation of the bad weather of yesterday, but much worse. A series of squalls from the south have hunted us all day, making it very rough and disagreeable, particularly so as the privateer continues her scourging course to the westward, unremitting in his

determination to fire and destroy everything he meets American. At twelve o'clock M. he signaled to wear ship, signifying that he sees a sail, which we soon discovered from our mast's head to be coming from the southwest, most probably from New York. We got around and joined him in the chase, during which a most fearful squall struck us and the atmosphere became so thick with rain we would often lose sight of the privateer. Clearing away somewhat, we found the privateer lying to as if in distress, and the vessel—which was a large, full rigged ship—rushing into his arms for the purpose, no doubt, of helping him. Suddenly the ship put about, "smelling a rat," as we supposed, and steered for the north. To our surprise the privateer, instead of giving chase, bore straight down for us, where we were hove to awaiting the result. Coming within a short distance she hove to, launched a boat, and at five o'clock P. M. returned our captain to us, with orders to set sail and be off on our course. This occurred and we left the Alabama in latitude 40 deg. 30 min., longitude 53 deg. 33 min.

It appears while the privateer was waiting for the ship and she neared him, it was taken for a United States man-of-war in disguise, all hands were called to quarters, the guns shotted, steam put on prepared to give her a broadside and run. The white cross of St. George was run up as usual by the privateer, when the vessel immediately ran up her flag, proving her to be a Spanish merchantman. Although this fellow is very bold when alongside a poor unfortunate and helpless merchantman, yet we are inclined to think he would much rather run than stand before one of our war vessels of much less calibre.

It is almost unnecessary to say that our captain was received aboard with great joy, and to-night has been one of congratulation and rejoicing, in which the other three captive but paroled captains, their officers and crews, poor fellows, met heartily joined. On account of the heavy appearance and thickness of the atmosphere they were impressed with the belief on board the privateer that it would be foggy and heavy all night, and that the two vessels could not be safely kept together. Being inexperienced in the peculiarity of this northern latitude, Capt. Semmes concluded to release his hostage, which he had scarcely done when it cleared away a beautiful and lovely night, finding us under a full press of canvas once more on our way to Liverpool. Capt. Julius gave his word and honor to the commander of the privateer that he would proceed directly on his course—one of the principal conditions of our premature release. Unlost, therefore, we speak a homeward bound vessel, all the crews taken from the other ships will have to go with us to Liverpool.

With the best of nautical skill at our disposal—viz: four captains, eleven mates, and about seventy-five sailors, including the regular crew of this ship—we hope, with a fair wind, to make up for lost time. From all we could gather from the officers and crews of both ships Captain Julius became quite a favorite on board the privateer, the best evidence of which is they did not put him in irons, but, on the contrary, so little was he restrained that he almost had the freedom of their ship, they viewing him in the light, we suppose—he being captain of a cartel for prisoners—of an accomplice. Besides, while there he was the only prisoner on board. At any rate, it is quite certain had it not been for Captain Julius we would still be aiding and abetting the privateer by our constrained presence. Our captain is already busy doing his utmost to make the officers and crews of the three vessels which were burned comfortable.

The only levy made on the Tonawanda by the privateer was to take a little colored boy from us—an assistant in the galley—because he was unprotected by free papers. He is an apprentice under the laws of the State of Delaware, and would be free when of age (twenty-one). This has been truly a day of congratulation, and one of a series which all of us at present on board the Tonawanda shall never forget.

I omitted to state that early on the morning of the 11th we desecrated a vessel to the eastward, but which, for some unknown reason, the privateer did not chase. It is supposed she was going too fast for him, and so put on the necessary speed to catch her he might lose us. I also omitted to mention the singular fact that, out of Captain Johnson's crew of the brig *Dunkirk*, consisting of nine men, two joined the privateer, they having been formerly with Captain Semmes on the *Sumter*. One of them, being a deserter from the *Sumter*, he is now under severe punishment on board the Alabama therefore.

When the two officers of the privateer came aboard of the Tonawanda, on the day of seizure, one of our cabin passengers immediately recognized one of them as an old classmate of his at college in Philadelphia. We had considerable intercourse with some of the officers of the privateer—mostly very young men—which was pleasant and agreeable, they behaving to and treating us very gentlemanly.—They expressed a good deal of sympathy for our situation, but kept us encouraged by their opinion that on account of the women and children our vessel would be spared. Numbers of the sailors of the privateer were recognized by our men as old acquaintances in Liverpool. They are nearly all Englishmen, as are some of the officers. There are also some Charleston and Savannah pilots acting as master's mates, all of whom were at once recognized by some of the captains.

The Alabama (290) is a screw steamer, bark rigged. They call her 225 feet long, 35 feet breadth of beam, drawing fifteen and a half feet of water in her present condition, and of about 1,000 tons. Since the beginning of this cruise, she has not used her steam, but keeps under sail, saving her coal, of which she has about 300 tons on board. They, however, keep the fires banked up, ready to put on steam in twenty minutes.

Her armament consists of six thirty-two pound broadside guns, three on each side, one sixty-eight pounder, and one one hundred pounder, rifled. The two latter are pivot guns. Her officers and crew number something over one hundred, about twenty-five of whom are officers. They seem anxious to get recruits, soliciting the crews of the prizes they take to join them, but in which, I think, they have been most unsuccessful.