DESERET EVENING NEWS.

Published every day except Sunday at 4 p. m. Subscription price, in advance, $10.00 per year; $5.00 for six months, $2.50 for three months, $1 per week, payable or delivered by carrier.

DESERET SEMI-WEEKLY NEWS

Published every Tuesday and Friday. Subscription price, in advance, per year, $5.00; six months, $2.75; three months, $1.50; payable or delivered by carrier.

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A 32 to 40 page Magazine, the cheapest and best in the country, monthly issue on a sheet of newspaper 18x24, 24 pages, per annum $1.50; six months, $1.00; payable in advance.

A NAUTICAL EXPLOIT.

On the morning of March 18, 1861, the Liverpool ship Emily St. Pierre (William Wilson, captain) arrived within about twelve miles of Charleston and signaled for a pilot. She had made a long and tedious voyage of four months from Calcutta, bound for St. John, N. B., filling 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 when the outbreak of the civil war she had sailed under the English flag. Her owners, Messrs. Frazer, Trenholm & Co., of 10 Rumford place, Liverpool, a firm 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 hailed up his courses, backed his main yard and lay to. An American naval lieutenant and a crew of men came on board and demanded his papers. The mention aroused an immediate suspicion. Bills of lading, 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 roadstead, where they arrived at 5:30 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, Captain Goldsborough, came to him and said they had decided to seize the Emily St. Pierre on several grounds. He asserted that she carried contraband goods of war—namely, saltpeter; that her English registration was not bona fide; that many articles on board had been found bearing the name of Charleston; that the case seemed 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, when the James Adger so narrowly overhauled and nine 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 passage in his vessel to Philadelphia, and to place at the disposal of the navigator his charts and instruments. The invitation in form was to feel 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 and an Irishman named Matthew Montgomery, and the cook, a German named Louis Schaefer, 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 that Captain Wilson stepped again 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 escape use the ships 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 heavy, big Prussian Hanoverian, a veteran of Doppelschlacht, a thorough seaman, determined in resolve, and prompt in action.

He called the steward and the 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 the crew against the contingency of carrying it out. With the promise of the cook and the steward 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 to have his ship, that was the simple alternative.

It was Lieutenant Stone's watch on deck, and the prize master's quarters were in his berth. The English captain went into the berth, handed out the master's sword and revolvers, slipped a gag made of a piece of wood and some martian bells into his mouth, secured his hands, which Montgomery, the steward, quickly bound, and left him secure. The Irishman still guard the deck, undiscovered by a sound. Then across to another stateroom, where the American engineer lay asleep. He was also gagged and bound similarly and with no disturbance. His revolvers and those already secured were given to the steward and the cook, who remained on guard in the pantry. Captain Wilson went on deck.

Lieutenant Stone was pacing the deck, and the watch consisted of one man at the helm, one at the forecastle on the forecastle and three others who were about the ship. For ten minutes Captain Wilson walked up and down, remaining on the fair wind and making believe that the ship had just turned out. The ship was off Cape Hatteras, midway of their journey between Charleston and Philadelphia, the most easterly projection of the land on that coast. It is difficult navigation there, abounds 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 if you want to clear Cape Hatteras another two points at least will do no harm. Be but back in my chart; I left it open on the table below. And the wind 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, leading to and pointed to the bunk in an iron bedstead on which he had placed his chart. The younger man went forward to the cabin, where the chart lay open on the table. "Stone!"

He turned at the sudden, peremptory exclamation of his name. His sword unsprung, the heavy iron bolt in his hand, its low, but hard, sharp, quick words, "My ship shall never go to Philadelphia!" said the captain. He did not strike. It was unnecessary. Montgomery had thrust the gag into the young lieutenant's mouth; he was bound hand and foot, bundled into a berth, and the door locked. Three men of the fifteen were thus disposed 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 forecastle, but in a roomy house amidships. The same does not describe its shape. It was an oblong house on deck, with windows and one door in front, the pop at upper deck at the stern over the cabins and staterooms, and the passage before mentioned, there was a companion door 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 cabins through the passage.

In this space behind the poop was the wheel, slightly raised for the steersman to stand on, and behind the wheel was a hatchway leading to the interests hold, a small supplementary hold usually devoted to stores, extra gear, coils of spare rope, and so on. Nothing that might be done in this part of the deck could be seen, therefore, from the waist of the ship, nor the waves, 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 aloof, and, pointing to a heavy coil of rope in the hatchway, ordered them to get it up at once—Lieutenant Stone's orders. They jumped down without demur, but hardly a moment was over 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 noise," said the captain, showing a revolver, "I'll blow your brains out," and they he called all the hatchway man, the lock of the watch on deck. "The man mean sir? 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, for the next moment he was laid low on the deck and handled unceremoniously into the lazarette with the others, the hatchway was finally replaced and secured, Captain Wilson standing on guard at it.

Meanwhile the watch below had been called and was astir. When sailors rouse out they generally do so gradually and by twos and threes. The first two that came all were quickly overpowered, one at a time, and bound. The third man came with a knife and rushed at the steward, who fired, wounding him severely in the shoulder. It was the only shot that was fired. Finally the cook and steward and captain were all armed, the rest of the watch below quickly surrendered and submitted to be locked in the round house, sections of the hold and contrite 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 one of twelve volunteered to assist in working the ship rather than submit to the tedium of imprisonment. The long of last! Not one of them could steer or navigate, and he imperfectly. And the sections are set, and signals, lower and upper, are drawing, and the topgallant sail boys. Prize master this wind may last and be 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 mutiny—he was allowed to come out on the quarter deck. Meanwhile the ship ran on,