

How this M. C. Delivered the Pilot Into the Hands of the Union Men,

[From the Washington Chronicle.]

Hon. Robert Smalls, of South Carolina, who bravely defended his race against the mean attack of Sunset Cox, a few days since, in the House, is one of the best representatives of the colored race in official position, and has quite an interesting history. While he can not boast of having had a grandfather in Congress, as does Sunset, yet his record during the war is an honorable one, and not tinged with copperheadism, as was that of Tammany's clown, the gentleman from Ohio, who carpet-bagged to New York.

Mr. Smalls was born at Beaufort, South Carolina, April 5, 1839. He now lives on the very place where he was born. He lived in Beaufort, leading the monotonous life of his race, until the year 1851, when he went to Charleston and worked at the rigger's trade, and also led a seafaring life in sailing along and about the coast of his native State and Florida. It was here that he acquired that knowledge of the bars and harbors of the sea coast which he afterward used to such signal advantage to the Union cause. For two years he was a stevedore in Charleston, and in July, 1861, went on board the steamer Planter, then a Confederate transport, plying between that city and Fort Sumter, and other points in Charleston harbor. This craft was also the special dispatch boat of General Ripley. After being on his vessel about two months he was made wheelsman. [At that time it was not in accordance with coastwise nautical etiquette to call a colored man a pilot.]

In this situation he continued, until the 13th of May, 1862. The captain, chief engineer and mate of the Planter, all white men, had gone ashore up into the city, the previous night, where they slept, leaving on board a crew of eight men, all colored, among whom was Smalls. A consultation was held, and it was resolved by these eight men, Smalls at their head, to seize the boat and carry it out to the United States fleet, outside the harbor. The design was hazardous in the extreme. The little boat would have to pass beneath the guns of the batteries in the harbor. Failure and detection would have been certain death. Fearful was the venture, but it was made.

The daring resolution had been formed, and, under command of Robert Smalls, the wheelsman, steam was put on, and with her valuable cargo of guns and ammunition, intended for Fort Ripley, a new fortification just constructed in the harbor, about 2 o'clock in the morning, the Planter silently moved off from her dock, steamed up to North Atlantic wharf, where the wife and two children of Robert Smalls, and the wife and children of another of the crew were awaiting to embark. Noiselessly the vessel approached the wharf, and in silence and haste received the waiting women and children on board, and then started down the river out to sea. The regular signal was given as Fort Johnson was passed, and was answered, and so at Sumter. As soon then as the boat was out of range of the guns of these grim guardians of the city the white flag of truce was raised, and out for the ocean she steamed.

In the misty morning a frigate was despatched off the bar. The Planter approached her. In the mist the white flag was not seen, and to the terror and surprise of the Planter's crew, the strange ship bore round and presented her broadside and opened her ports. The command had already been given, "ready," and the captain was about to speak the "fire," when one of the officers on the quarter-deck discerned the flag of truce. The vessels were now within hailing distance, and the captain of the Union ship asked what boat that was, and what she wanted. The reply was given, and the Planter's errand explained. The Captain ordered her to come alongside, but his order was not heard by Smalls and his men, who proceeded to go around the stern of the ship, when they were brought to a standstill by the captain's thundering tones as he called out: "Stop, or I'll blow you out of the water." The Planter then came alongside, the movement of her was explained, and an officer named Watson and four men were put on board.

The strange ship proved to be the sailing frigate Onward, and the officer, Captain Nichols. Smalls was transferred to the gunboat Augusta, the flagship off the bar, under command of Captain Parrot, whence he afterward proceeded to Port Royal to Commodore Dupont, then in command of the Southern squadron, where the Planter was received, and Robert Smalls was entered upon the navy list as a pilot.