THE LAST DAYS OF BLOCKADE RUNNING.

By Captain John Wilkinson, C. S. N.

In the early part of December, 1864, I was summoned again, and for the last time during the war, to Richmond. There now remained to the Confederacy only the single line of rail communication from Wilmington, via Greensboro and Danville, to Richmond. The progress of demoralization was too evident at every step of my journey, and nowhere were the poverty and the straits to which the country was reduced more palpably visible than in the rickety, windowless, filthy cars, traveling six or eight miles an hour, over the worn-out rails and decaying roadbed. We were eighteen hours in making the distance (about one hundred and twenty miles) from Danville to Richmond. As we passed in the rear of General Lee's line and I saw the scare-crow cattle there being slaughtered for the troops, the game seemed to be at last growing desperate. We were detained for perhaps an hour at the station where the cattle were being slaughtered. Several soldiers who were on the train left us there; and as soon as they alighted from the cars, they seized portions of the offal, kindled a fire, charred the scraps upon the points of their ramrods, and devoured the unclean food with the avidity of famished tigers.

It was arranged in Richmond that I should take command of the *Tallahassee* and proceed with all dispatch to Bermuda for a cargo of provisions, my late experience with the governor of the island rendering it quite probable that he would prevent the *Chickamauga* from even discharging her cargo as a merchant vessel. That steamer (the *Tallahassee*), of so many aliases, had just returned from a short cruise under Captain Ward, of the Confederate States Navy. She was now christened again, and bore, thenceforward, the appropriate name of *Chameleon.* Her battery was dismounted, her officers and crew detached, and she was ostensibly sold to the navy agent at Wilmington. A register and bill of sale were prepared in legal form, the crew shipped according to the laws relating to the merchant service, and regular invoices and bills of lading made out of her cargo of cotton. The vessel, indeed, was so thoroughly whitewashed that she subsequently passed a searching examination in Bermuda; but my recent experience there had convinced me of the necessity of adopting every precaution, and I was left to my own discretion with regard to all the details; the instructions under which I was acting requiring me only to bring in a cargo of provisions with all dispatch.

The *Chameleon* was in nearly all respects like the *Chickamauga,* only a few feet longer, and drawing a few inches more water.

On the afternoon of December 24, the United States fleet opened fire upon Fort Fisher, the heavy cannonading continuing during the two following days. The booming of the heavy guns could be distinctly heard in Wilmington.

There was a complete panic there; the non-combatants moved away and fright and confusion prevailed everywhere. The co-operating land forces, under General Butler, had almost completely invested the fort, and the communication between it and Wilmington was at one time interrupted, so that it was impossible to ascertain the condition of affairs below. In the midst of the turmoil, we cast off from the wharf about two o'clock in the afternoon of December 26 and anchored off Smithville after dark, the tide not serving for crossing the bar that night.

Next morning the *Agnes Fry,* an inward-bound blockade runner, was discovered aground on the Western Bar. Towards evening two or three of the blockading fleet stationed off that bar steamed in and opened fire upon her. The bombardment of the fort was still in progress. A little after dark, just as we were weighing our anchor, General Whiting, who was then in Fort Fisher, telegraphed to us that the United States land forces were embarking, the attack upon the fort having been abandoned. We were under way in a few minutes, closely followed by the *Hansa,* Captain Murray, and parting from her just as we crossed the bar. I had known the captain for many months, under his assumed name, and it was quite generally understood that he held a commission in the British Navy. While I was living in Nova Scotia, some years afterwards, the card of Captain A., commanding H. B. M.'s ship *J——n,* was brought to me, and I was surprised to find in the owner of it my old friend Murray. Several British naval officers of rank and high character were engaged in the same exciting and lucrative occupation of blockade running; among them the gallant Captain Burgoyne, who commanded afterwards the unfortunate ship *Captain,* of the British Navy, and who perished together with nearly the whole crew when she foundered at sea.

We crossed the bar under such favorable circumstances that