Caswell, adding that several vessels of the Federal fleet had crossed the New Inlet Bar, and were at anchor in the river almost within hail of him. Maffitt was about to give the order to slip the chain, "not standing upon the order of his going," when his pilot begged for permission to go ashore, if only for ten minutes. He represented the situation of his wife, whom he had left ill and without means of support, in such moving terms, that Maffitt granted permission, upon condition that he would return speedily. The pilot was faithful to his promise, returning in fifteen or twenty minutes. During his absence, steam was raised and the chain unshackled. As the pilot's foot touched the deck of the *Owl,* the boat was hooked on and run up the davits, the chain slipped, and the *Owl* upon her way to sea again.

Another blockade runner is said to have been not so fortunate. She had run the gauntlet safely and come to anchor off Smithville. The tarpaulins had been removed from the hatches, the lamps lighted, and a cold supper spread upon the table, at which the passengers were seated, two or three officers of the British Army among them. A toast to the captain having been proposed, they had just tossed off a bumper of champagne to his health and continued successes, and he was about to reply to the compliment, when the officer of the deck reported that a boat was coming alongside. The captain received the officer at the gangway. The mail-bag, according to the usual routine, was given to the latter for transportation to the shore; and the customary inquiries made after the name of the vessel, cargo, number of passengers, etc. The astounded captain was then informed that his vessel was a prize to the United States ship, then at anchor near him!

Charleston was now the only harbor on the Atlantic coast at all accessible, and that must evidently soon fall; but a cargo might be landed there before that inevitable catastrophe, and, fully appreciating the exigency, I determined to make the effort. Even after the occupation of Wilmington by the United States troops, there would remain an interior line of communication between Charleston and Virginia. The facts of history prove that the importance of carrying in a cargo of provisions was not exaggerated, for the Army of Northern Virginia was shortly afterwards literally starving; and during their retreat from the position around Petersburg, the country adjacent to their line was swarming with soldiers who had left the ranks in search of food.

But it was the part of prudence to ascertain, positively, before sailing, that Charleston was still in our possession. This intelligence was brought by the *Chicora,* which arrived at Nassau on the 30th of January; and on February 1, the *Owl, Carolina, Dream, Chicora,* and *Chameleon* sailed within a few hours of each other for Charleston.

We passed Abaco Light soon after dark and shaped our course direct for Charleston. At early dawn the next morning, while I was lying awake in my room on the bridge, I heard the officer of the deck give the quick, sharp order to the helmsman, "Hard a-port." The steering wheel in all of the blockade runners was upon the bridge and immediately forward of the captain's stateroom, and the officer of the deck kept his watch upon the bridge. As I never undressed at night while at sea in command during the war, I was out upon the deck in a moment; and then I saw, distant two or three miles and directly in our former course, a large side-wheel steamer. From her size and rig I guessed her to be the *Vanderbilt*; and I was afraid that the *Chameleon* had at last found more than her match, for the *Vanderbilt* enjoyed the reputation of great speed. We were around before we were discovered, but as the strange steamer's bow was pointed in our direction a few moments afterwards, it was plain that we would have to make good use of our heels, and that the race would be a trying one. The *Chameleon* was in fine condition for the ordeal, and the usual precaution of cleaning fires and raising the steam had been taken before daylight. My staunch old quartermaster, McLean, who had been with me in nearly all the chances and changes of blockade running, always took his place at the wheel on trying occasions. He had nerves of steel, and would have steered the vessel without flinching against a line of battleships, if so ordered. Upon one occasion, after we had crossed the Western Bar, and were steaming at full speed along the coast, we suddenly discovered a long, low blockader on our starboard bow, and at the same instant distinctly heard the order from the stranger's deck, to "pass along the shell." I called out to my old helmsman, "Port, and run her down," and if the strange vessel had not moved out of our way with alacrity, she would assuredly have been cut in two. We grazed her stern by a hair's breadth as we shot by her at the rate of thirteen knots. Before they had recovered from the confusion on board of her, we had passed into the darkness beyond, and the shell which they sent after us flew wide of its mark.