CHAPTER XXX.

CURIOUS TARGET PRACTICE—ATTACK ON THE MONITORS IN TRENT'S REACH, JUNE 21, 1864—THE CONFEDERATE IRON-CLAD "ALBEMARLE" AND HER ENGAGEMENTS—CAPTAIN JAMES B. COOKE—LIEUTENANT W. B. CUSHING—THE ALABAMA AND THE KEARSARGE—THE FLORIDA AND THE WACHUSETT—ATTEMPT TO GET OUR IRON-CLADS TO CITY POINT—ITS FAILURE—BLOWING UP OF THE GUNBOAT DRURY—GENERAL JOSEPH E. JOHNSTON AND PRESIDENT DAVIS—VICE PRESIDENT STEPHENS—THE CONFEDERATE GOVERNMENT—STATE OF AFFAIRS IN RICHMOND AND ON JAMES RIVER IN MARCH, 1865.

ABOUT this time I accompanied Commodore Mitchell several times to General Beauregard's headquarters. The commodore was in constant communication with the general; but I am unable to say what their plans were. On the 19th of June our squadron got underweigh from the anchorage at Chapin's Bluff and proceeded down the river. At 2 P. M. we anchored off upper Howlets, which I suppose is in an air line two miles from lower Howlets; but by the river much farther. A reference to the map will show that the James river pursues a very circuituous course between City Point and Richmond. It is indicated by the names, such as Curl's Neck, Turkey Bend, Dutch Gap, &c. In some cases a distance by land of a mile requires eight or ten to accomplish by water. From our anchorage at upper Howlets nothing could be seen of the monitors in Trent's reach—in fact we were anchored under a bluff on the right bank of the river. General Butler had erected a tower of wood at Trent's reach perhaps 120 feet high, as a post of observation. It gave him a very good one. Our artillery officers were prevented from trying to destroy it by the scarcity of ammunition. We could see the top of this tower from our anchorage, and of course the masts of our gunboats were visible

from it, but not the hulls. We had been at anchor an hour or two not expecting a movement of any kind—indeed I was sitting in an arm-chair on the shield of the *Richmond* reading—when a shell was fired from one of the monitors in our direction. It exploded just at the river bank and scattered the pieces about the forward deck of the *Virginia*, wounding three men. Whilst we were wondering at this, another shell came and exploded just after it had passed over us, and again another. As we could not return the fire, and there was no necessity to remain and be made a target of, we got underweigh and went back to Chapin's Bluff. As the guns had to be pointed by directions from those in the tower I have mentioned, I thought this the most remarkable shooting I had ever seen or heard of; but happening to mention this circumstance after the war to a naval officer present at the time on board one of the monitors he informed me that they were not shooting at us at all. He said that some officials had come from Washington on a visit, and they wishing to see a large gun fired, the monitors had obliged them. In those days they were not particular as to where they fired, and the result was as I have mentioned. A curious incident certainly, but the facts were precisely as I have stated them.

The authorities in Richmond now became very anxious that the navy should make some demonstration on the river in order to relieve the great pressure on the army. Commodore Mitchell held a council of war; and it was decided to attack the monitors lying in Trent's reach, at long range, in connection with the heavy guns we had by this time mounted at Howlets. Our vessels could not go fairly up to the obstructions and face the monitors, for we knew that the *Richmond* and *Fredericksburg* could not stand the 15-inch shot. We thought then that the *Virginia* could, but were afterward undeceived.

On the 21st of June the vessels got underweigh, and stood down. The *Fredericksburg* was to take a station in a bend in the river, about two miles (in an air line) from the monitors, and the *Virginia* and *Richmond*, with the gunboats, were to

anchor on the north side of Dutch gap, about a mile and a half above them. In getting underweigh my vessel, the *Richmond*, parted a wheel-rope and it got wound up round the shaft and disabled her. We got a gunboat to tow us down, but did not get to the *Virginia* until the afternoon. We only fired a few shots. The whole affair, however, was a *fiasco*. We could not see the monitors, and they could not see us. They were not hit once during the day by us, and the reports speak of the firing of our vessels as extremely wild. How could it be otherwise under the circumstances? The battery at Howlet's struck the monitors but once. The fact is we were wrong in yielding to the clamor of the army to "do something." We knew that we could do nothing with the monitors at long range, even if we could see to hit them; we knew equally well that we could not stand the effect of their guns at close quarters. We might have gotten our gunboats through the obstructions, and made a dash at them with torpedoes; but it must be remembered that the enemy had a battery on shore to cover the obstructions. Our army anticipated a great naval engagement that day, and we were expected to accomplish wonders. The soldiers were all on the lookout; they looked to see us run over the obstructions like smoke, and destroy the monitors in no time. The result being so much of a disappointment to them, we were much ridiculed. The whole affair was a mortification to us of the navy. From this time until the close of the summer campaign we remained below Chapin's Bluff, shelling the batteries put up by the enemy on the left bank of the river occasionally, and assisting the army so far as we could. The enemy made no advance on the right bank of the river, but advanced on the north side. On the 19th of September, 1864, the Federals captured Fort Harrison, near Chapin's Bluff.

We were on pretty short rations in the squadron this summer—the allowance was half-a-pound of salt pork and three biscuits per man a day. A permanent bridge was built across the James river about two miles below the city, and just

above Drury's bluff was a pontoon bridge. General Lee had occasion to cross his men from one side to the other frequently during the fall and winter—so I very often saw portions of his army. I well remember the appearance of the poor fellows, half-starved and badly clothed as they were. They were full of fight, though, and showed no signs of giving up. General Grant had crossed to the south side of the James river on the 14th of June, after his bloody repulse at Cold Harbor, June 1st, and had settled down to the siege of Petersburg. All eyes were consequently turned in that direction.

In the squadron we were gladdened by the success of our iron-clad ram *Albemarle*, which vessel, under Captain James B. Cooke, had (after overcoming innumerable difficulties) succeeded in descending the Roanoke river, April 19th, and dispersing the Federal squadron off Plymouth, N. C. She sunk the steamer *Southfield*, and drove the other vessels off; and her presence led to the recapture of Plymouth by the Confederates.

On the 5th of May the *Albemarle* started from Plymouth with the small steamer *Bombshell* in company, on what was called a secret expedition. I think it probable the intention was to destroy the wooden men-of-war in the sounds, and then tow troops in barges to Hatteras and retake it. If this could have been done the *Albemarle* would have had it all her own way, and Roanoke island, Newbern and other places would again have fallen into the hands of the Confederates. Shortly after leaving Plymouth the *Albemarle* fell in with the Federal squadron, consisting of the steamers *Mattabesett*, *Sassacus*, *Wyalusing*, *Whitehead*, *Miami*, *Ceres*, *Commodore Hull* and *Seymour*—all under the command of Captain Melancton Smith, and after a desperate combat was forced to return to Plymouth. Here Captain Cook had to leave her, as his health was much broken by his hard work and previous wounds.

The *Albemarle* was sunk by a torpedo-boat under Lieutenant W. B. Cushing, U. S. N., on the night of the 27th of October,

1864—one of the most dashing acts on the part of Lieutenant Cushing ever recorded in the history of war. Immediately after the *Albemarle* was sunk Plymouth again fell into the hands of the enemy. I had not known Captain Cook in the old navy, but I saw enough of him at Roanoke island and Elizabeth City to know that he was a hard fighter. Few men could have accomplished what he did in taking the *Albemarle* down the river with the carpenters still at work upon her. It was only done by his energy and persistence. He was deservedly promoted for his services.

Young Cushing had been a pupil of mine at the Naval Academy in 1861. He was rather a delicate-looking youth; fair, with regular, clear-cut features, and a clear, greyish-blue eye. He stood low in his classes. He was first brought to my notice during the war by my happening to get hold of his report of the loss of the U. S. steamer *Ellis*, under his command, at New River inlet, Nov. 24, 1862. I was impressed with this part of his official report (the italics are mine): "and the only alternatives left were a surrender or a pull of one and a half miles under their fire in my small boat. The first of these was not, *of course*, to be thought of." Knowing him to be at that time but 19 years old, I comprehended his heroic qualities and was not at all surprised to hear more of him. Immediately after the war I went to San Francisco, and my first visitor was Cushing. He was the hero of the hour, and the citizens made much of him. Under the circumstances I thought he conducted himself with much modesty. He died in 1874.

But if we were gladdened by the success of the *Albemarle* we were depressed by the news of the capture of the *Alabama* by the *Kearsarge* June 19, 1864. This action has been described by the two commanders, and by English and French spectators, so that we now know all about it; but the Hon. Secretary of the Navy in his report for 1864 says in relation to Captain Semmes and his surrender: "when beaten and compelled to surrender he threw overboard the sword that

was no longer his own." "Having surrendered, he cannot relieve himself of his obligations as a prisoner of war until he shall be regularly exchanged." As the captain of the frigate *Congress* acted precisely in the same manner, and as he served without being regularly exchanged one might consider this a little strained. But the Hon. Secretary was a tremendous fellow with his pen, as we shall see in his account of the capture of the *Florida:*

> "He could distinguish and divide
> A hair 'twixt south and south-west side."

Captain Semmes in his report of the combat finds fault with Captain Winslow of the *Kearsarge* for "faking" his chain cables up and down his ship's sides so as to protect the machinery and boilers. I can see no reason in his complaint. He might as well have objected to his slinging his yards in chains, or making any other preparation for battle. We are told that at the battle of Fontenoy there was some altercation between the commanders of the English and French "guards" as to which should take the liberty of "firing first;" *mais nous avons changé tout cela!* Captain Winslow was fortunate in having for his executive officer Lieutenant Commander James S. Thornton; a fighting man every inch of him. I could never understand why he was not made a commander for his great services on this occasion.

Not very long after the loss of the *Alabama* we heard of the capture of the Confederate man-of-war *Florida* by the U. S. steamer *Wachusett*, October 7, 1864. The circumstances as is well known were these: The *Florida*, Captain Charles M. Morris, entered the port of Bahia, Brazil, and found there the *Wachusett*, Captain Napoleon B. Collins. Being in a neutral port Captain Morris took no more precautions against an attack than he would have done if commanding a vessel in time of peace. He gave his men liberty, a watch at a time, and kept on watch only the usual harbor sentinels. On the night of October 7, he himself with many of his offi-

cers and half his crew being on shore, and the crew on board being in the usual condition of men who have just returned from liberty, his vessel was unexpectedly attacked by the *Wachusett*, and after a slight resistance captured. The *Florida* was taken to Hampton Roads, and upon a demand being made for her delivery by the Brazilian Government, she was designedly run into by a vessel appointed for the purpose and sunk. I have heard an account of this whole affair from Captain Morris, his executive officer Porter (who was on board at the time she was captured), and from an officer who was on board the *Wachusett*. I have reason to believe that Captain Collins' action, and the subsequent course of the U. S. authorities, were not generally approved of by the officers of the U. S. Navy. It is understood that Captain Collins' course was prompted by the American Consul at Bahia. He probably lived to regret it.

The following is the account given of this affair by the Hon. Secretary of the U, S. Navy, in his report for 1864. As it is not to be found in Disraeli's "Curiosities of Literature," I must give it a place here: "Subsequently, entering the Bay of San Salvador, she (the *Florida*) encountered the steamer *Wachusett*, commanded by Commander Collins, to whom she surrendered, and by whom she was brought in a leaky and dilapidated condition to Hampton Roads. Here, while at anchor, an army transport came in collision with the shattered vessel, which sunk a few days after near the wreck of the *Cumberland*."

Shade of Sir Percie Shafton!

But the spot for sinking her was ill-chosen. Could the noble men who lay coffined in that gallant craft (the *Cumberland*) have risen from the dead and spoken, they would have protested against the act as a shameful violation of the laws of honorable warfare.

In the fall of 1864 I was ordered back to the *Patrick Henry*, and the exercises of the school were continued during all the exciting scenes of the winter. Captain James H. Rochelle, an

officer of high professional standing, and who had served with distinction during the entire war, joined us as Commandant of Midshipmen and executive officer.

I think it was on the night of the 23d of January, 1865, that an attempt was made to get the iron-clads down the river, the object being to destroy General Grant's transports and stores at City Point. Had this succeeded it would have made a very great difference in the result of the next campaign. City Point was the base of General Grant's supplies, and if they had been destroyed, and we had resumed the control of the river, it is difficult to say what would have become of his army. It might have led to his surrender, and in any event would have seriously crippled him.

The affair was wisely planned. There was but one monitor, the *Onondaga*, on the river, and the design was to push boldly through the obstructions at night and strike for City Point. The gunboats were to go down under the lee of the iron-clads, and sink the captured transports at Harrison's bar, below *City Point*, to prevent any more vessels being sent to Grant's assistance. Upon approaching the obstructions the leading vessel, the iron-clad *Fredericksburg*, Captain Frank Sheppard, passed through safely; but the next vessel, the *Virginia*, got aground and barred the way for the others. The monitor, which had been lying in Trent's reach, retired down the river, but the battery at Howlets opened a heavy fire. Finding it impossible to get the *Virginia* off, Commodore Mitchell pulled down to the *Fredericksburg* in an open boat, and finally recalled her, and the attempt was abandoned. The next morning the monitor returned and opened fire on the *Virginia*, still aground. We here saw the effect of the 15-inch shot upon the strongest of our iron-clads. One of them struck the *Virginia's* shield, bow on, and shattered it very much. We had no vessels in the Confederate Navy that could withstand the 15-inch shot. This was very evident. Fortunately the *Virginia* succeeded in getting off and out of range, otherwise she would have been destroyed. The gunboat *Drury* was also aground. A shot

from Howlet's battery passed through her magazine, and she blew up. Providentially the officers and men had been removed to the *Virginia*.

So ended this affair. It was thought by some that if the *Fredericksburg* had been permitted to go alone to City Point she might have accomplished our purpose, as she had a torpedo on her bow for the single monitor. Her commander was a dashing officer and would have accomplished as much as it lay in the power of any one man to do. I must add in justice to the captain of the monitor *Onondaga*, that he explained that he retired down the river so as to have more room to manœuvre; he said he had no intention of retreating below City Point. Certain it is that, finding he was not pursued, he returned to the seat of action, and opened fire upon the *Virginia*, with the effect I have described. He was, however, relieved of his command and placed on the retired list. General Grant was very much annoyed at his retreating below Trent's reach; and to show the importance the Federal authorities attached to this movement of ours, Admiral D. Farragut was immediately placed in command of the James river squadron, in the absence of Admiral Porter, who was at this time at Wilmington with most of his vessels. Admiral Farragut, however, did not assume it.

After General Joseph E. Johnston had fallen back to Atlanta in the summer of 1864 he was relieved of his command, and General Hood appointed to succeed him. This was a fatal mistake—we all see it now. President Davis has been much blamed for this; but I happen to know that great pressure was brought upon him to relieve General Johnston by the citizens of the south-western states. Many of these gentlemen were very quiet about it afterwards and are now; but when they found General Johnston continually falling back, and even the President could get no satisfactory information from him as to how far he intended to retreat (for Johnston is not the most communicative of men) a clamor was raised to relieve him. General Hood had been a successful colonel, brigadier

general, major general and lieutenant general, so that it was reasonable to suppose he would do well in command of an army. Suppose he had captured Nashville as he could have done had he advanced upon it immediately after the battle of Franklin, how then. I yield to no man in my admiration for General Johnston. I know him to be a soldier born, and his friendship I value. We know now that his campaign of 1864 was a model of tactics and strategy—Moreau's retreat through the black forest did not equal it—but the general belief that President Davis relieved him of his command entirely of his own motion I know to be a misapprehension, and the Southern papers of that day prove it.

February 3d, 1865, Vice President Stephens accompanied by two commissioners went to Hampton Roads and met President Lincoln and Secretary of State Seward in the hope of arranging terms on which to make peace. Here again President Davis has been most unjustly criticised since the war. It has been said that we could have made better terms than we finally got. I suppose we could; but what I mean to say is that the majority of the army and navy would not have been satisfied with any terms that Mr. Lincoln was prepared to offer us at that time. Nothing would have convinced them that the cause was hopeless but exactly what happened. I speak for myself, and it is reasonable to suppose that thousands felt as I did, and say that my wish was to fight it out to the bitter end. It has been also said that President Davis and the Confederate government were harsh and intolerant. There was never a greater mistake. Treason stalked triumphant o'er the land, and many a man was spared who should have had his neck stretched. While every man had a right to his opinion before the war, yet after war was actually declared every man should have been made to stand by the Confederacy or leave the country. Perhaps if we had had something like Mr. Seward's "little bell" it would have been all the better for us. The Confederacy had "set its life upon a cast." I think our statesmen failed to fully appreciate this

fact. War is an unequal thing at best; but why some men should have been expected to give up everything for the "cause," and others permitted to reap money by the war, is something I fail to understand. My observation during the war was that the generals in the field did not have that strong support from the government which was so necessary to them. It is a singular fact that while the war produced many generals it produced absolutely no orators or statesmen.

Charleston was evacuated February 18, and Wilmington was captured February 22, 1865. The naval officers and sailors arriving in Richmond from these and other places were organized as a naval brigade under Commodore Tucker, and sent to man the various batteries below and in the neighborhood of Drury's Bluff. Admiral Raphael Semmes, who had returned from Europe, landed in Texas and made his way to Richmond, was put in command of the James river squadron February 18, 1865.

During the winter we were visited in the squadron by the Secretary of the Navy and the naval committees of the two Houses several times. I remember that on the occasion of one of these visits the chairman of the Naval Committee in the House fell to me to escort. While ascending the hill at Drury's Bluff I expatiated upon the value of the ram and torpedo as defensive weapons. I said that even if the Confederate Navy had done nothing else but to develop these two great weapons, it would have immortalized itself, etc., etc. At the lunch which Mr. Mallory gave on the bluff that day, this gentleman upon being called on for a speech, "stole my thunder;" but as I am not much given to public speaking myself perhaps it did not very much matter.

Affairs were looking very badly for us about this time—the winter of 1865. Men were deserting in large numbers from General Lee's army and from the James river squadron. The cause of the large desertion in the army was the march of General Sherman through Georgia and South Carolina. The letters received by the soldiers from their wives and families

describing their sufferings, maddened these poor fellows, and they could not resist their appeals to return for their protection. In the squadron, where very few of the men were "to the manner born," the scanty ration was the principal cause of their leaving. A man shut up in an iron-clad with nothing to do after the morning drill, broods over his hunger—it is not like being on shore, where a man can move about and forage a little. Still the sailors, with all their sufferings, were better off than General Lee's soldiers, inasmuch as they were well-clothed and had always a dry hammock at night.

One of my officers, who was remarkably neat in his dress, told me that coming on from Charleston he had a seat alongside a soldier who was returning to his regiment in the field. The soldier was very badly clad and looked haggard and careworn. Eyeing my friend critically and earnestly, he asked him a number of questions: "If he was a general?" (we wore silver stars on our straps, as the brigadier-generals did); "if he was returning to his regiment;" "where it was stationed," etc., etc. My friend finally told him that "he belonged to the navy." After some reflection, the soldier said, confidentially: "I tell you what it is, if things don't soon look better, I'll be dogged if I don't try to navy it a little too."

We knew in February, if not before, that everything depended upon General Lee's being able to hold his lines about Petersburg. I was in constant and confidential communication with the Secretary of the Navy, and knew, how very anxious our authorities were. It was strange how Mr. Mallory clung to the idea of keeping up the Naval School, even if Richmond had to be abandoned. By his direction I sent Lieutenant Graves into North Carolina and Georgia to select buildings, with a view to our leaving Richmond and establishing ourselves inland. Graves made two or more trips for this purpose, but we could not settle upon any locality. What with Sherman and Wilson to the south, and Stoneman to the west—to say nothing of other commands—it was difficult to hit upon a quiet spot. What we wanted was "a pleasant cot,

in a tranquil spot, with a distant view of the changing sea;" but it was hard to find. I did not take much interest in this search myself, having long before considered our success hopeless; and I felt sure that the loss of Richmond involved the fall of the Confederacy.

After the capture of Fort Harrison by the Federal troops, the *Patrick Henry* was ordered up to protect the bridge above Wilton. The enemy were making demonstrations on the north side of the river the entire winter, and not a day passed that we did not hear the booming of great guns and the rattling of musketry; yet the midshipmen pursued their daily routine. We had at this time sixty midshipmen, and these with their officers constituted a force of about seventy men, armed with rifles and extremely well disciplined and drilled. We had among them representatives of the best families of the South. I need not say that, under the circumstances, the care of these young gentlemen gave me many anxious moments.

Towards the end of March the *Patrick Henry* was moved up the river near Rocketts, and I was directed to prepare her for sinking in the obstructions. I commenced getting her ready, and rented a warehouse on shore to which to remove the midshipmen and stores. Many families were now leaving Richmond, among them the President's and Mr. Mallory's. The squadron under Admiral Semmes was at anchor between Chapin and Drury's bluff, and the naval brigade under Commodore Tucker was distributed among the batteries near by, as I have before said. Such was the position of affairs on the river on the evening of April 1st, 1865.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE EVACUATION OF RICHMOND—ORDERED TO TAKE CHARGE OF THE CONFEDERATE TREASURE—THE CORPS OF MIDSHIPMEN—THE NIGHT OF APRIL 2D—SCENES AT THE DEPOT—DEPARTURE OF THE PRESIDENT AND CABINET—ARRIVAL AT DANVILLE—GO ON TO CHARLOTTE, N. C.—GENERAL STONEMAN AT SALISBURY—RESOLVE TO CARRY THE TREASURE FARTHER SOUTH—MRS. PRESIDENT DAVIS AND FAMILY—LEAVE CHARLOTTE—PASS THROUGH CHESTER, NEWBERRY, ABBEVILLE AND WASHINGTON—ARRIVAL AT AUGUSTA, GEORGIA—THE ARMISTICE BETWEEN GENERALS JOHNSTON AND SHERMAN—DETERMINE TO RETRACE MY STEPS—LEAVE AUGUSTA FOR WASHINGTON, GEORGIA.

On the afternoon of Saturday, April 1st, 1865, I went up to Richmond—not having left the ship for some little time before—intending to pass the night there. Wishing to learn the latest news I drove direct to Mr. Mallory's house. It was then near sunset. I found Mr. Mallory walking to and fro on the pavement in front of his house, with a revolver in his hand. I presumed he had been perhaps shooting at a mark, though I did not ask him. In reply to my question Mr. Mallory informed me that the news that day from General Lee was good, and that affairs about Petersburg looked promising. I told him I had proposed spending the night in the city, if nothing was likely to happen in the river requiring my presence on board the *Patrick Henry*. He said he knew of nothing to prevent, and after some further conversation I left him. I passed the night in the city. If I recollect aright our Home Guards were out on the Brooke turnpike to repel a threatened raid in that direction—but the night passed quietly.

The next morning I walked down to Rocketts, and went on board my ship. We had the customary Sunday muster and inspection, and as we piped down I observed a company of