

## THE ESCAPE OF THE REBEL STEAMER PLANTER.—

The exploit of the negro pilot Small in successfully running out of Charleston harbor a valuable tug-boat laden with a heavy armament, and surrendering it to the blockading squadron, is one of the most daring of the war. The following are the particulars of the affair:—

This steamer had been formerly a tug, and was subsequently fitted up as a gunboat, with a rifle gun forward and a siege gun aft. Being a swift sailer, with a pilot well acquainted with every part of the harbor, she was generally engaged in proceeding nearly within reach of our blockading fleet, and had often gone out to sea to reconnoiter and "take stock of the Yankee ships." After returning from one of those cruising expeditions on the 11th instant, the Planter was moored to the wharf at Charleston and her officers landed, and were subsequently scattered throughout the city. Small had no especial love for the "chivalry" or their cause, and he resolved to steam out to the offing, past the rebel batteries, to the blockading fleet, and present his craft a prize to the officers. In order to make the hazardous enterprise successful he had a consultation with the firemen—all of whom were slaves—and they seconded his proposition with alacrity, in order to obtain freedom. At quarter to four on Saturday morning, the lines which fastened the vessel to the dock were cast off, and the ship quietly glided into the stream. Here the harbor guard hailed the vessel, but Small promptly gave the countersign and was allowed to pass. The Planter then was moored to an adjacent dock, where the families of the crew came on board. When off Fort Sumter the sentry on the ramparts hailed the boat, and Small sounded the countersign with the whistle, three shrill sounds and one hissing sound. The vessel being known to the officers of the day, no objection was raised, the sentry only singing out: 'Blow the d—d Yankees to hell, or bring one of them in.' 'Aye, Aye,' was the answer, and every possible effort was made to get below. Hardly was the vessel out of range, when Small ran up a white flag, and went to the United States fleet, where he surrendered the vessel. She had on board seven heavy guns for Fort Ripley, a fort now building in Charleston harbor, which were to be taken thither the next morning. Small had at the beginning of the rebellion taken passage in the steamer Marion from Charleston for New York; but the rebels, knowing he was the best pilot they had, sent a tug after the steamer and compelled him to return when he was several miles from the city. The accession of this contraband pilot to the Union cause is most important, as, besides his intimate and minute knowledge of every inlet and river on the South Carolina and Georgia coasts, he has given full particulars of the manner in which the rebel vessels have run the blockade, and those which are now preparing to do so. This information cannot fail to throw many prizes into the hands of the fleet. The vessel and guns he brought to the blockading officers are worth about \$35,000.

Com. Dupont in his official despatch says of the Planter:—

She was the armed despatch and transportation steamer attached to the engineer department at Charleston, under Brigadier-General Ripley, whose barque a short time since was brought to the blockading fleet by several contrabands. The bringing out of this steamer, under all the circumstances, would have done credit to any one. At 4 o'clock in the morning, in the absence of the captain, who was on shore, she left her wharf, close to the government office and headquarters, with the Palmetto and "Confederate" flags flying, passed the successive forts, saluting, as usual, by blowing the steam whistle. After getting beyond the range of the last gun she hauled down the rebel flags, and hoisted a white one. The Onward was the lead ship of the blockading squadron in the main channel, and was preparing to fire when her commander made out the white flag. The armament of the steamer is a 32-pounder, or pivot, and a fine 24-pounder, howitzer. She has besides on her deck four other guns, one seven inch rifled, which were to be taken, on the morning of the escape, to the new fort on the "Middle Ground." One of the four belonged to Fort Sumter, and had been struck in the rebel attack on the fort on the meridian. Robert Small, the intelligent slave and pilot of the boat, who performed this bold feat so skillfully informed Com. Dupont of this fact, presuming it would be a matter of interest to have possession of this gun. This man, Robert Small, says Com. Dupont, is superior to any who have come into our lines, intelligent as many of them have been. His information has been most interesting, and portions of it of the

most important. The steamer is quite a valuable acquisition to the squadron by her good machinery and very light draft. The officer in charge brought her through St. Helena Sound and by the inland passage down Beaufort river, arriving here at 10 o'clock last night. On board the steamer when she left Charleston were eight men, five women, and three children. Com. Dupont says he shall continue to employ Small as a pilot on board the Planter for inland waters, with which he appears to be very familiar.