



GEN'L. ROBERT SMALLS,
Congressman from South Carolina.

A SHORT SKETCH

Of the Military and Political Career and Public Services of General Robert Smalls of South Carolina.

He was born at Beaufort, S. C., on the 5th of April, 1839. He now lives on the very place where he was born. He lived in Beaufort until the year of 1851, when he went to Charleston and worked at the rigging trade, and also lead a seafaring life in sailing along and about the coast of South Carolina and Florida. It was here that he acquired that knowledge of the bars and harbors of our seacoast, which he afterwards 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 the city and Fort Sumter, and other points in Charleston harbor. This craft was also the special dispatch boat of General Ripley. After being on this 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 had gone ashore up into the city the previous night while they slept, leaving on board a crew of eight men, all colored, among whom was General Smalls.

A consultation was held and it was resolved by these eight men 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 be 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 two 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 waiting to embark. Noiselessly the vessel approached the wharf, and in silence and in 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 flag of truce was raised and out for the ocean she steamed.

In the misty morning a frigate was descried 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 hove round and presented her broad side, 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 was wanted." The reply was given and the Planter's errand explained. The Captain ordered her to come along-side, 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 will blow you out the water." The Planter then came along-side, 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 gun-boat Augusta, the flag-ship off the bar, under the command of Captain Parrot, whence he afterwards proceeded to Port Royal to Commodore Dupont, then in command of the Southern squadron, where the water was received, and Robert Smalls was entered upon the navy list as a pilot. The Planter was put under command of an officer from the ship Wabash, named Phenix.

It was found that although the services of General Smalls would be invaluable as a pilot, yet he could not receive pay as such, there being some regulation in the service requiring these officers to have been graduates of some

naval school. This difficulty was easily obviated, however, Mr. Smalls being commissioned. He received a commission as second lieutenant of Company B, First South Carolina Volunteers, under command of General Rufus Saxton, which was afterward called the Thirty-third Regiment United States Colored Troops, and which was then being formed and was then detailed to act as pilot. General Smalls was soon afterwards ordered to Edisto to join the gunboat Crusader, Captain Ryan. He then proceeded in the Planter, in company with the Crusader to Simmons' Bluff, on Wadmalaw Sound, where a sharp battle was fought between these boats and a Confederate light battery and some infantry. The Confederates were driven out of their works, and scampered away from the shells that fell thick and hot around and after them. The troops on the Planter landed and captured all the tents and provisions of the enemy. This occurred sometime in June, 1862.

General Smalls continued to act as pilot on board the Planter and the Crusader, and as blockading pilot between Charleston and Beaufort. He made repeated trips up and along the rivers near the coast, pointing out and removing the torpedoes which he himself had assisted in sinking and putting in position. During these trips he was present in several scrimmages and battles, at Adams' Run, on the Dawho river, where the Planter was hotly and severely fired upon, also at Rockville, John's Island and other places. Afterwards he was ordered back to Port Royal, whence he piloted the fleet up Broad river to Pocotaligo, where a very severe battle ensued. General Smalls was the pilot on the monitor Keokuk, Captain Ryan, on the memorable attack on Fort Sumter, on the morning of the 7th of April, 1863. In this attack the Keokuk was struck ninety-six times, nineteen passing through her. She retired from the engagement only to sink on the next morning, near Light House Inlet. General Smalls left her just before she went down, and was taken on board the Ironsides. The next day the fleet returned to Hilton Head.

When General Gillmore took command, Smalls became pilot in the quartermaster's department in the expedition on Morris Island. He was then stationed as pilot of the Stono, where he remained until the United States troops took possession of the south end of Morris Island.

Upon one occasion while the Planter, then under command of Captain Nickerson, was sailing through Folly Island creek the Confederate batteries opened a very hot fire upon her. Captain Nickerson became demoralized and left the pilot house and secured himself down in the coal bunker. Smalls was on the deck and finding out the Captain had deserted his post entered the pilot house, took command of the boat and carried her safely out of reach of the guns. For this conduct he was promoted by the order of General Gillmore, commanding the Department of the South, to the rank of Captain, and was ordered to act as Captain of the Planter, which was used as a supply boat along the coast until the end of the war. In September, 1865, he carried his boat to Baltimore, where she was put out of commission and sold and her gallant Captain received his honorable discharge.

It should have been mentioned in its proper place that when the Planter was delivered to the United States authorities she was appraised at the value of \$9,000; one half of which was turned over to the crew of eight men that captured her; of this one-half Smalls received \$1,500.

After his discharge General Smalls returned to Beaufort. He was, of course, received with great *acclam* by the colored people, who never wearied of hearing of his gallant services and the dangers through which he had passed. To most people his experience seemed like a romance and he himself a hero. He was associated with that struggle which had resulted in freedom, and hence was identified with that freedom. He at once became a recognized leader, and guided and directed their sentiment and opinion in their endeavors to put into practical operation the results of their emancipation and enfranchisement.

General Smalls was a prominent member of the Constitutional Convention and was one of its Finance Committee.

At the first general election of 1868, he was chosen a member of the House of Representatives from his county, where

he took an active part in the discussion and actions of that body. He manifested a deep interest in the homestead act and was the introducer of the Civil Rights bill that finally passed the House.

In 1870 he was elected to the Senate of the State. He was re-elected in 1872, and served until March, 1875, when he resigned to take his seat in the Forty-fourth Congress to which he had been elected at the general election of 1874. He was elected to the Forty-fifth Congress in 1876, and re-elected in 1878 but was counted out by tissue ballots. He was again elected to Congress in 1880 and again counted out by tissue ballots.

He was a delegate to the National Republican Convention at Philadelphia which nominated General Grant for his term; was a delegate to the National Republican Convention at Cincinnati which nominated for the Presidency R. B. Hayes, and also to the Chicago Convention of 1884.

He was also re-elected to the Forty-eighth Congress, and has been returned to the Forty-ninth Congress.

General Smalls' home in Beaufort, S. C., is one of the most charming mansions in the South. While in Washington attending the sessions of Congress he lives unostentatiously, taking room at a private boarding house on L street.