THE ROANOKE NEWS.

HALL & SLEDGE, PROPRIETORS. A NEWSPAPER FOR THE PEOPLE. TERMS—$2.00 PER ANNUM IN ADVANCE.

VOL. XVIII. WELDON, N. C., THURSDAY, APRIL 28, 1887. NO. 5.

NEW ADVERTISEMENTS

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A GOOD OLD RULE.

In journeying through this world of tears
Of blighted hopes and wasted chances
With all its failures, doubts, and fears,
And ever varying circumstances,
"To best to keep this rule in view;
"Don't bite off more than you can chew."

The man who's living just to gain,
Who has no earthly thought beside—
Whose greed has reached to such a strain
He doesn't even try to hide it—
Sometimes by crowding much too fast
May overreach himself at last

And so when all looks bright and fair,
And fortune seems to smile benignly,
When opportunities hold rare
And rich are offered to you kindly,
Weigh in. But first I'd say to you:
"Don't bite off more than you can chew."

TALES OF THE WAR.

THE STORY OF THE ALBEMARLE TOLD BY HER BUILDER.

A THRILLING SKETCH READ BY A CONFEDERATE OFFICER BEFORE LOGAN POST.

The open meeting of Logan post, G. A. R., last Monday night was one of the most interesting of the kind ever held in the city. A number of ex-confederate officers were present by invitation, and among other pleasant features was the reading of a paper by Col. Gilbert Elliott, the builder of the ram Albemarle, which caused so much trouble to the federal squadrons in North Carolina waters. This paper is of genuine historic value, and the *Republican* is glad of the opportunity to present it among the "Tales of the War."—St. Louis *Republican*, April 16th.

STORY OF THE ALBEMARLE.

Shortly after the commencement of hostilities in 1861 the confederate authorities fortified Hatteras inlet by the construction of Forts Hatteras and Clark, and works were also erected at Oregon inlet. There is a long, narrow strip of land extending almost from Cape Henry to Cape Lookout, along the Atlantic coast, and between this strip and the main land in Eastern North Carolina there are two large bodies of water, called Pamlico and Albemarle sounds. Hatteras and Oregon inlets afford the only means of entrance for large vessels into Pamlico sound from the ocean, and hence herculean efforts were made to defend these important positions. Albemarle sound is connected with the Pamlico by a pass called the "Narrows," about one hundred yards wide and leading into Croatan sound which washes the southern boundary of Roanoke island, and here also fortifications were erected and troops stationed. After the fall of Hatteras, which gave the federal forces control of Pamlico sound, the confederates concentrated their strength at Roanoke island, and a gallant resistance was there made by both land and naval forces, but the fortunes of war were not with the Southern soldiers and sailors in this event, and the battle of Roanoke island has to be counted as a victory for the boys in blue. To show the

IMPORTANCE OF ROANOKE ISLAND

as a strategic point I quote from the report of the confederate Gen. Henry A. Wise, who was unfortunate enough to have been assigned to the command only a short time before the island fell:

"Roanoke island was the key to all the rear defences of Norfolk. It unlocked two sounds, Albemarle and Currituck; eight rivers, the Northwest, Pasquotank, the Perquimans, the Little, the Chowan, the Roanoke and the Alligator; four canals, the Albemarle and Chesapeake, the Dismal Swamp, the Northwest canal and the Suffolk; two railroads, Petersburg and Norfolk and the Seaboard and Roanoke. It guarded more than four fifths of all Norfolk's supplies of corn, pork and forage, and on the command of Gen. Huger off from all its most efficient transportation. It endangers the subsistence of his whole army, threatens the navy yard at Gosport, and to cut off Norfolk from Richmond and both from railroad communication with the South. It locks the enemy in a safe harbor from the storms of Hatteras, gives them a rendezous and large, rich, range of supplies and the command of the seaboard from Oregon inlet to Cape Henry. It should have been defended at the expense of 20,000 men and of many millions of dollars.

Roanoke island having been surrendered, the confederate fleet, under command of Flag officer Lynch, retired from Elizabeth City on the Pasquotank river, where a stand was made and a battle fought, but owing to the overwhelmingly superior equipment of the federal navy the contest was soon over. Lynch's command consisted of eight gunboats, while Commander Rowan opposed him with twenty war vessels, having an armament of over fifty guns a number of which were of 9-inch calibre and only twelve less than thirty pounders. Capt. James W. Cooke, a native of North Carolina, commanded the confederate steamer Ellis in the engagement and

DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF

by his wonderful bravery and heroism. After every one of his officers and men had abandoned the ship, throwing themselves into the water, swimming for their lives to the shore, not very far distant, Cooke remained on the forward deck loading and firing the bow gun, unaided and alone. One of the federal vessels bore down upon him and engaged at close quarters. She was commanded by an old friend of Cooke's, who had sailed with him before the war and seen him crowd on the canvass when it was blowing a half a gale of wind. He knew that Cooke would stay there, on his forward deck, and fire that gun as long as life and his ammunition lasted, unless overpowered. Breathless with anxiety, lest his old friend should be sent to his home beyond the skies by one of the shots raining upon the side of the ship, the commander gave the order, "Capture him! Lame him but don't kill him." A bullet sped on its way and found its lodgement in Cooke's right arm, which fell powerless at his side, and the battle was over. Cooke was taken aboard his friend's ship and nursed and cared for with the utmost tenderness and kindness. Under skillful surgical treatment his shattered arm was restored and his love for his old friend was made doubly sincere. The commander took him right into his own cabin, gave him his own bed, entertained him rather as an honorable guest, than a prisoner of war.

These victories enabled the federal troops and naval forces to take possession of a large part of Eastern North Carolina, and later on Norfolk was evacuated and southern Virginia also abandoned. At this time your humble servant who had burned three gunboats on the stocks at Elizabeth, and only half completed an ironclad at a point on the Elizabeth river near Norfolk, was constrained to rejoin his regiment in the field and give up gun-boat building as an unpromising employment. While stationed at Drury's Bluff, however, my colonel sent me to Richmond on regimental business and I did myself the honor to call on the honorable secretary of the navy, who at once seized upon me and insisted upon my returning to North Carolina to build an ironclad gunboat for the purpose of

REGAINING, IF POSSIBLE,

the control of that rich section of country so vitally necessary to the support of the army of Northern Virginia. He calmed the fears I expressed of the danger of losing my commission as adjutant of my regiment, the Seventeenth North Carolina, by giving me a letter to the secretary of war (father by the way, of our distinguished citizen, Judge Seddon, of the circuit court), and the secretary provided me with a leave of absence, on full pay, too, for two years, probably the longest leave of absence granted to any officer during the war, at least, I have yet to hear of one of such duration.

Much to my gratification, Capt. Cooke was the officer assigned by the navy department to supervise the construction of, and afterwards command the ironclad ram Albemarle, which I succeed in building under my contract with the government at a point on the Roanoke river known as Edwards ferry, about twenty miles below the town of Halifax. Of course, I had the warm sympathy of the citizens of the neighborhood, who rendered me all possible assistance, together with the support and aid of the government, and yet the difficulties with which I had to contend were so great as to seem almost insurmountable. However, after twelve months unceasing labor with a force averaging 200 men, but few of whom were skilled mechanics but all working with an eye single to the end in view, I had the pleasure of delivering the ship into Capt. Cooke's hands and she went into commission just in time to take a leading part in the expedition organized by command of Gen Lee for the recapture of the town of Plymouth and the surrounding country.

THE ALBEMARLE

was 152 feet long and 45 feet wide over all. She drew about eight feet of water. Her armament consisted of two rifled Brooke guns, mounted on pivot carriages. The shield or house was octagonal in shape, with three port-holes at each end. The shield was built up with timber about fourteen inches in thickness and covered with two courses of flat iron two inches thick and eight inches wide, making eighteen inches of wood and iron as protection against shot and shell. She carried a crew of seventy-five or eighty men. The plans and specifications were drawn and prepared by Naval Constructor J. L. Porter, who also planned the conversion of the man-of-war, Merrimac, into the ironclad Virginia at the Gosport navy yard, and as the Virginia was the first vessel ever covered with an ironclad shield, it may truly be said that to John L. Porter largely belongs the credit for the revolution in the naval architecture of the world, exemplified in the construction of that ship. The Albemarle was built on the same general idea, but she was intended for an ironclad and built from the keel up for that purpose, while the Virginia was a frigate, with her upper works cut down or razed.

The town of Plymouth is situated on the South side of the Roanoke river, about eight miles from its mouth, where it flows into Albemarle Sound. The river is very much like our Mississippi, subject to overflow, and when there is a freshet the current runs with great swiftness. On April 18, 1864, the Albemarle dropped down the river stern foremost, with a long chain paying out at the bow by means of which she was steered, it being impractical to proceed down the stream with the bow to the front owing to the rapidity of the current, the freshet at that time being

THE HEAVIEST

in the memory of the oldest inhabitant. Capt Cooke kindly allowed me to accompany him as a volunteer aide. Indeed, I took with me a force of men and some portable blacksmith forges, and we put the finishing touches on her armor only a few hours before she went into action. There was a federal battery at Warren's Neck, on a considerable elevation, some three miles above the town of Plymouth, commanding Thoroughfare gap, where the river divides into two streams, and piles, sunken vessels and other obstructions, with a plentiful supply of torpedoes, had been placed here to prevent our further descent, or to accelerate our possible descent to the bottom of the river, but, thanks to the high water we floated safely over the obstructions and passed on down the river, paying no attention to the Warren's Neck fort, although a well directed fire was played upon us as long as we were in range. We were much comforted, however, to find that the shot and shell did us no harm, and this was the case in all the engagements with the ram. Her shield was built at an angle of 45 degrees, and in time of action was well covered with a greasy substance we called "slush," to facilitate the outward course of the shot and shell striking against the roof. As a rule, the shot would scoop out a little place in the iron about as large as a tablespoon and then ricochet over the ship and go on its way harmless. The Albemarle was struck hundreds and hundreds at times, and yet no one was hurt on her except a young sailor, who had the curiosity to put his head out of a port hole to see what was going on outside and was at once shot with a pistol from the steamer Miami lying alongside, and engaged with us at the time. Very early on the morning of the 19th day of April, 1864, the Miami and Southfield, lashed together with spars, and with chains festooned from their sides, hove in sight, and so approached us coming up stream. The design, evidently, was to run the Albemarle down, but the pilot was equal to the occasion, and, at Cooke's command, signalled the engineer to open the throttle-valves, and with all the steam the engines would bear and the immense current with which we were sailing, he put his helm hard down and dashed the prow (or ram) of the Albemarle

INTO THE SIDE

of the Southfield, sending her to the bottom of the Roanoke river with a suddenness that seems awful to contemplate. The Miami was a fast side-wheeler. There was a brief engagement with her, in which her commander, Lieut. Flusser, lost his life. A shell fired by his own hand struck our ship, exploded, and a fragment rebounding, killed that gallant officer. The Albemarle was then making ready to ram the Miami if possible, but discretion was considered the better part of valor by the commanding officer of the Miami and he backed his ship down stream for a mile or two, then turned and kept on his way. The Albemarle followed in pursuit, but the race was to the swift that day and the chase was soon abandoned. Plymouth fell as the result of next day's battle, the Albemarle holding the river front and rendering invaluable assistance in the bombardment of the strongly fortified town.

Later on, May 5, 1864, a most memorable engagement took place in the waters of Albemarle Sound, when for the greater part of a day the Albemarle contended with eight heavily armed federal war vessels, some of them carrying 100-pound Parrott guns. Time does not permit me to describe this battle at length. Her assailants moved around her in a circle, discharging broadsides as they passed. Shot and shell rained down upon her like hail on the roof of a house. Her smoke-stack was riddled with holes and almost shot away. In consequence, the flues would not draw, and no steam could be made. Propellers could not turn over, and she lay like a log on the water. The Sassacus, a large heavy double-ender, ran into her and jumped on her forward deck, hoping to sink the ram with this additional weight, but our gunner put a shot through one of the boilers of the Sassacus, and she was glad to haul off with the steam made by the other. Two of the ships attempted by towing a large seine to entangle the propellers, "but in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird," and Capt. Cooke was able to raise a little steam and so manœuvre his ship as to escape

THIS INGENIOUS CONTRIVANCE

for her destruction. If the seine had been twisted around her propellers the two ships could have towed the ram around at their pleasure and would doubtless have been pleased to land her hard and fast aground. A bold effort was made to throw kegs of gunpowder down her smokestack, but that scheme failed also. One of her two guns was disabled early in the action, the muzzle being shot away. Night put an end to the conflict, and with the aid of a quantity of lard and bacon which was used for fuel enough steam was got up to take the ship back to her wharf at Plymouth, and comparatively uninjured, although each one of the other combatants was seriously damaged, and some of them sunk. Capt Cooke was as cool in action as he was brave and determined. In the midst of this severe naval battle, which has, I suspect, no parallel in history, Capt. Cooke missed his old straw hat. He fancied that the engineer had used it for fuel, as everything combustible was being levied upon. Going to the hatchway looking into the engine-room he called to the engineer, whose name was Robinet. Capt. Cooke, like all officers of the old navy, was versed in French and chose to pronounce the engineer's name Robinay. He said: "Mr. Robinay! have you burnt up my hat?" There was no answer, and the captain repeated the question, still using the French pronunciation. Still no answer, and the captain concluded as time was rather precious to call him Robinet, whereupon the answer came promptly from the brave and faithful engineer, "No, sir," and all this time the battle was raging without with unabated fierceness, but Cooke was always self-possessed, calm and serene. He did not know what fear meant, and it has often been said of him that he would "fight a powder magazine with a wad of fire." For his gallantry

COOKE WAS PROMOTED

and placed in command of the department embracing all the naval defences in Eastern North Carolina, necessitating his frequent absence from Plymouth. Another officer was placed in command of the Albemarle. She lay alongside of her wharf at Plymouth, and by Cooke's command a raft of logs had been placed around the ship as a precaution against attacks from torpedo parties, but Lieut. Wm. B. Cushing of the United States navy was bold enough and brave enough to successfully contend against all obstacles, and on the night of October 27, 1864, he left the squadron anchored in the sound and came up the Roanoke in a small torpedo boat specially constructed for the purpose he had in hand. The boat was very fast—exceedingly fast—for a mile or so, having large engines and boilers capable of making a great deal of steam, with the exhaust emptying in the water beneath the boat, thereby preventing any noise from escaping steam. Silently, and with the speed of the wind, she came up the stream passing unnoticed the guards stationed on the sunken wreck of the Southfield, about half a mile below, and the first intimation the Albemarle's watch had of the approach of the enemy was when Cushing rushed his little steamer up against the logs. With wonderful bravery and heroic self-sacrificing zeal and reckless exposure of his own person to the bullets already whistling around his ears, he leaped upon the logs, and with his own hands managed the torpedo boom or pole, so as to get the deadly charge down under the side of the ram below the water-line some four or five feet, and then pulling the line, exploded his torpedo, and in the twinkling of an eye the Albemarle had received her death wound. She slowly sank to the bed of the river and her officers and crew abandoned her. Plymouth was again evacuated and given up to the federal forces. The torpedo boat and all her crew were captured with the exception of Cushing, who, when he heard the explosion and thereby knew his work was done, threw himself in the water, dived and swam across the river on the bottom, reached the opposite shore in safety, and, after wandering in the swamp, without food or shelter for two or three days, finally succeeded in finding

A RANGE,

and made his way to the fleet, hailed by his companions with great joy, for they had given him up as lost or dead. His name will go down to history as one of the most gallant of the bold and brave heroes of the war between the States. And so I have tried to tell you to-night something about two men who distinguished themselves as brilliant beyond words, and sublimely brave and bold in performing what they conceived to be their duty. All honor to the memories of James W. Cooke and William B. Cushing. And you, my friends, who wore the blue and gray, now merit the praise and applause of all good men, for though you were once honest enemies, now you are honest friends, for all the animosities of the war have been blown away and sunk in a river so deep that no man shall find a line whereswith to throw the lead and sound the bottom.

I sincerely appreciate the compliment extended me by this body of veteran Union soldiers, in your cordial invitation to address you upon the topics I have discussed to-night, and thank you all for the attention with which you have honored my remarks.

I regard the cordial relations which exist in this community at best between the survivors of the Union and Confederate armies and navies as a happy augury for the future of our common country, and as a guarantee during the present generation of the immunity of our goodly city from dangerous appeals to arms by that element which relies upon violence for success, rather than the calm judgment of the people as expressed by the ballot. My confederate friends who are present will agree with me that we are in duty bound and it is a pleasure and gratification to be able to commemorate the valor and devotion of the brave and gallant soldiers and sailors with whom we have been associated and I am sure our friends who fought for the Union will heartily sympathize with us in this feeling. The brave deeds of our gallant men, whether federals or confederates, will forever adorn the annals of our country's history. Both sides could not be victorious, and you remember

To not the grapes of Canaan that grew
But the high hills that failed not by the way

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