

# PIRATICAL OYSTER CREWS

## THE DESPERADOES VERY FREE IN THE USE OF THEIR FIRE-ARMS.

THE POLICE BOAT AND A MAGISTRATE'S RESIDENCE SHOWERED WITH BULLETS — BLOODY DEEDS ANTICIPATED.

BALTIMORE, Feb. 14.—A dispatch received here this evening gives some new and interesting developments in connection with the oyster war in the Chesapeake Bay. The correspondent telegraphs from on board the Maryland Oyster Police boat *Lelia*, in Fishing Bay, and his account of the situation indicates that serious trouble and probable bloodshed will ensue before the existing difficulties are ended, if, indeed, the authorities will be able to cope with the pirates at all, the depredations of the latter having grown bolder and bolder as it became evident that the "oyster navy" revealed its utter ineffectiveness to suppress the lawless acts of the piratical crews. The oyster fleet reached Goose Creek yesterday and turned over to Justice Robinson the captured dredger *Maud Muller*. The owner of the boat, Sylvester Cannon, had escaped, but his father, H. P. Cannon, the "Pirate Chief," upon learning that no warrant charging him with any specific offense had been issued came boldly ashore, and with characteristic piratical boldness, walked on board the steamer *Lelia*. He is a man of small physique, has small, piercing eyes, and was roughly costumed in homespun. In his leather belt were four loaded revolvers. Having been at one time a civil magistrate he was familiar with the law, and at once made the legal point that the seizure of his son's boat was illegal as Sylvester had not been captured on it. Justice Robinson was forced to admit the accuracy of his plea. The *Maud Muller* was accordingly released. As Chief Cannon was in the act of sailing the craft out of the harbor his son, who had been concealed on shore, fired shots from two revolvers in the direction of the police-boat. Capt. Mitchell at once ordered a raid on shore, and as the party landed young Cannon continued to fire upon them. As his pursuers neared him he escaped in the dense undergrowth. Subsequently he went to the residence of Justice Robinson, and with drawn weapons intimidated the members of the household. He made a thorough search of the premises, and declared with oaths his intention of killing Robinson on sight. The latter was on board the *Lelia* at the time or he would certainly have been murdered. After terrifying the ladies in the family the ruffian left the house promising to return. In the meantime assistance had been summoned from the neighbors and when Cannon returned he found several armed men in the house, and he withdrew in company with several of his brothers, who had joined him, to the dense forest. From their vantage ground the armed ruffians rained a perfect fusillade of pistol-shots at the Robinson mansion and also at the police-boat. Finally Capt. Mitchell, supposing that there was a riot in progress ashore, sent 10 men, armed with rifles, to the wharf. The stillness of the night enabled the pirates to observe the approach of the boat, and as it neared the shore a volley was poured into it and the assailants escaped to a swamp. The police force landed as quickly as possible and made a thorough search for the pirates, but it was finally abandoned and the men returned to the steamer.

The Cannon boys are desperate characters. Sylvester narrowly escaped death by being shot while pursuing his unlawful work a couple of years ago, and Alexander stripped one of his crew and placed him on deck in midwinter, where his frozen corps was found. Milburn and Charley, the other brothers, have been involved in several shooting cases. Your correspondent had an interview with the pirate chief to-day. He said: "If I am a pirate, I was driven to it by the authorities, who permitted men to work on these beds without rebuke. Within the last two weeks I have seen \$100,000 worth of damage done to the oyster beds of Fishing Bay which might have been prevented if it had not been for the cowardice of Capt. Insley and his crew. The illegal dredgers first descended upon Deal's Island. I wanted them arrested and volunteered to assist Capt. Insley in a night attack. He consented, but when the dredgers began firing he hove to and left me and my own men to brave the brunt of the fight. The firing was so heavy that our sails were riddled and my crew compelled to go down below to escape the bullets. Our men, seeing there was no protection, then dredged wherever we found the best oysters."

A bitter feud exists between the friends of Justice Robinson and Capt. Insley, recognized as the law and order party, and the outlaws, some 200 in number, and intense excitement prevails among the entire population of the Straits district. The recent events promise to develop into a startling climax. All the leaders are heavily armed and openly threaten to shoot their enemies at sight. The Sheriff has summoned a special posse to serve writs on the Cannons, a perilous duty, and the alternative is now left them of fighting or flying. Late last night a volley of shots drew the crew of the *Lelia* ashore, but the outlaws had again escaped in the dense forest. The excitement was heightened by the rumor that Capt. Insley had arranged to fight a duel with Sylvester Cannon, and it was learned at a late hour that he had gone ashore for that purpose but that Cannon had declined to meet him. The *Lelia* will continue her warfare on the pirates to-morrow.