

CAPT. HOYT'S LAST TRIP.

THE FROZEN COLUMBIA OF 1862—A PERILOUS TRIP TO ASTORIA—REMINISCENCES OF AN OLD STEAMBOAT PILOT.

As a reasonable treat to the numerous readers of the West Shore, we present below the narrative of an old River Pilot, a well known and estimable citizen, who was a participant in the scenes and incidents related. It will not be out of place here to remark that the winter of 1861-2 was the severest in the intensity and duration of the cold weather of any ever experienced in Oregon since its settlement by the whites. At that time the strong and staunch little side-wheel steamer Multnomah, owned and commanded by Capt. Richard Hoyt, of honored memory and one of the pioneer steamboatmen on Oregon waters, was employed upon the route between this city and Astoria. For the information of those who were not residents here during Capt. Hoyt's lifetime we will briefly sketch that sturdy, sterling and noble-souled old commander.

CAPT. RICHARD HOYT.

Was in stature hardly up to standard medium height, but he was powerfully moulded and had a giant's strength. Tough as heart of live-oak, hardy as iron, and possessed of a vigor of body and an uncommon elasticity of step and action, he united with these robust physical qualities the best characteristics and attributes which attest while they adorn superior human nature. Of an indomitable will and the highest order of true bravery, and an unwavering integrity in his dealings with men, he was equally noted and beloved for his innate chivalry and great-hearted generosity. No terror could daunt, no hardship deter him, in the performance of what he felt to be his duty; and yet, such was the unaffected simplicity of his nature, it never occurred to himself that he had in any perilous emergency or desperate undertaking done anything especially worthy of notice or of praise. Ardent in his demonstrations of kindness and charity toward any he deemed worthy, he had nothing of that base alloy which persecutes the object of its dislike and adds to hatred the evil quality of vengeance. The Little Folk were especially proud of him, and when as passengers on his boats with their parents or guardians they were always sure of a glorious mad romp with gallant "Captain Dick," as he was affectionately known to them. His kindly, honest face was ever welcome, and his hearty grip of fellowship was heartily responded to, among his hosts of friends wherever he was known;—and they all still preserve his memory fresh and green, and mingle the joys of pleasant reminiscences with sorrow for his death as they recall and fondly though sadly linger over the recollections which cluster about his name. And now as we resume the thread of the narrative of his last trip on the waters of the Columbia and the Willamette, which he had so long and so successfully navigated.

THE START FOR ASTORIA.

The high water of the "Flood" of December, 1861, was succeeded by unprecedented deep snow in the middle of the month, and by ice in the rivers. Navigation had been suspended on the Columbia, and for more than two weeks no steamship from California had ascended the river, nor had any of the river boats made the trip to Astoria. Capt. Hoyt then owned the line of steamboats which plied upon that route, and of these the Multnomah was best adapted for making headway in or against the ice. He resolved to reopen communication with the mouth of the river, if it were possible. Accordingly, on the morning of January 4, 1862, with a small number of passengers on board and provisions enough for three days, he started for the trial in the stout little steamer. Among the passengers was the daughter of Mr. Alex. Abernethy of Oak Point, brother of

Gov. George Abernethy of this city, who was on her way home from a holiday visit here and at Oregon City. On that eventful and perilous trip the young lady proved herself to be as courageous as she was fair, and as patient as she was amiable and good. The Multnomah encountered no difficulty until after she had passed Willamette Slough and got into the Columbia, where floating ice covered pretty nearly the whole surface of the river. In some places it was frozen solid and stationary. A few miles down the steamer was almost blockaded by the floating masses and was extricated only after a good deal of trouble. In backing her to make space for good headway through the ice right ahead the rudder was badly disabled, and this accident caused much difficulty subsequently, as it deprived Capt. Hoyt of that perfect command of his vessel which was so very essential.

A PROPOSITION TO TURN BACK
Was at that time made by several of the

The steamer's headway was very slow. Snow commenced to fall thick and fast so as to obstruct the vision and make it difficult to distinguish the customary landmarks—the ebb tide bearing down the moving ice with a velocity threatening to the vessel's safety and rendering it next to impossible to keep her to her course, disabled as she was at the helm; and, to add to the discomfort and perils of the situation, the afternoon was fading away into the uncertain gloom of evening. It was all-important to reach Oak Point—not only to land Miss Abernethy, but also there to wood up and to procure good store of provisions for the trip, which already began to show tokens that it would not be finished for days to come; and moreover, it was Capt. Hoyt's intention to run his vessel in the slip there for the night, and to resume the effort to proceed down the river the next morning in the full light of the day. But Oak Point could not be reached, and as the next best, or, indeed, the only

nel of the river, and Capt. Hoyt resolved to make an effort to cut the steamboat clear of the pack just about her, then to force her through into the open channel way, and from that to push for the most feasible landing place where wood could be got. The passengers, together with the crew—fourteen persons in all—willingly and with alacrity went to the work, and after considerable exertion they cut the steamer loose in an hour or two. Steam was up, and the channel was successfully made, but not without great danger two or three times of being encompassed and crushed or wrecked by the large floes of thick and sharp cutting ice which rushed down with the rapid-flowing tide. But it was almost dark when this much had been accomplished, and the hopes of nearly all on board began to sink at the dismal and threatening prospects before them. Capt. Hoyt, however, showed neither lack of confidence in his ability to battle his way to safe haven at Cathlamet—then the only place it seemed possible the steamer could reach,—nor anything beyond that proper anxiety which a commander ought to have for those under his care and protection. With buoyant spirits and stout heart, and by words of cheer and comfort to his passengers, and inspiring commands to his crew, he maintained good feeling and thorough discipline on board. Good fortune attended his unceasing efforts, and just at night-fall, with the last stick of fire wood fed to the boiler and the diminishing steam at low gauge, the Multnomah made a landing, not at Cathlamet, but at a point eight miles above.

THE THIRD DAY—WOOD UP—OFF AGAIN.

At the earliest light of day next morning, all passengers and crew alike, started to get a supply of wood. An old scow upon the beach was seized on and speedily chopped into fuel, and yielded about two cords. In an abandoned cabin covered with snow—which was fully four feet deep—were found several sacks of damaged flour, and, underneath the floor were two small pigs nearly starved, thin as famine could reduce them, but still alive, and as it was ascertained, as lively and vigorous of foot in trying to escape as wild rabbits. But their pursuers were in the predicament of the boy who was desperately hunting the woodchuck—it was not a question whether they could catch the animals; it was simply imperative that they had to capture them; and they did; though not without a long hunt and tough chase, for the little porkers would dive into the deep snow and emerge feet away in a direction opposite to that they had headed, quite as porpoises dive and sport at sea. By the time the wood was put on board and the prizes for the larder safely stowed, the day had gone, and there remained nothing to do but to tie up again for the night, and await whatever Fate or Fortune should the next day compel or cheer them to do.

THE FOURTH DAY—NO CATHLAMET YET.

The morning broke with discouraging portents, yet all on board felt a better degree of confidence than had possessed them the morning of the preceding day. The snow-fall continued without abatement, and the frosty surface of the river, with the snow became so thickly crusted that it offered serious obstruction to the steamer's headway, as Capt. Hoyt labored to get her through the floating ice to Cathlamet. The effort proved fruitless. All that day the battle with the elements was stoutly, persistently, desperately maintained, with all the odds so much against the brave little steamer and her strong-willed, unflinching commander; but at last he had to succumb, and, disappointed and regretful, but not disheartened nor dismayed, again he had to seek the inhospitable landing-place of the night before, from which he had started that morning; and again it was made with not another stick of wood left unburned for steam.

A DREARY EIGHTH OF JANUARY.

Once more at early daybreak all



PEETS.

passengers to the Captain, but the sturdy old commander responded,—that he had left Portland to make the trip to Astoria; that he still felt convinced he could get the steamer there; and that he should not abandon the trial nor turn her head on the return trip until he found he could not accomplish his purpose. His resolute, firm, yet quiet manner, dispelled the doubts and fears of all and inspired them with full confidence in his ability to do what he proposed and with hope for the best. But, as it proved, determination and hope were for men to persist in and cling to; yet Nature could interpose obstructions impossible to overcome—or, if at all, only by means of the invincible resolution to surmount every obstacle, and by the skill and patience and perseverance commensurate to the daring and difficult adventure.

TROUBLES AND DANGERS BEFALL.

After battling for hours with the floes of thick ice, at last Coffin Rock was passed,

thing to do under the circumstances, a landing place was found a few miles further down at the foot of a small island on the Oregon side, where the river was free of moving ice and the only thing to fear was to be frozen in during the night.

FROZEN IN—ANOTHER DAY OF TOILS.

It was a fearfully inclement night. The cold was intense and the snow storm raged with increased violence. As the fast falling flakes fell upon the water they froze with the rapidly forming ice, and when morning dawned the Multnomah was frozen fast all about, and from shore to shore, a mile across, the ice-bridge stretched with only the small openings known as air holes here and there.

The situation was critical and somewhat alarming. The wood was nearly all consumed, the stock of provisions would serve for only two days longer, and the weather signs were anything except favorable. During the morning the strong ebb tide caused the ice to break away in the chan-