

POISONOUS Ocean Snakes of our New Possessions

WHERE SHIPS STEAM THROUGH MILES OF WATER COVERED WITH BEAUTIFUL, BUT FEROCIOUS AND DEADLY SERPENTS

WHEN the steamship Oseberg arrived recently in the United States, and Captain Roberts, its master, reported that about 45 miles south-west from Ceylon his vessel had steamed for two hours through masses of snakes, probably most persons suspected the skipper of having drawn a very long bow. But the captain had told only the simple truth, and now that, owing to our new possessions, more and more ships will ply the waters of the Indian and Chinese seas, the world will learn many new and startling things about a feature of animal life that hitherto has been known practically to only a few.

The first scientific and official report that reached the United States of the existence of great sea snakes in numbers up vast as to challenge credulity was made a little less than two years ago by Dr. George F. Becker, of the United States Geological Survey, who saw a wonderful spectacle while passing through the Sea of Jolo, on his way to make geological and mineralogical investigations for the United States Government. Between Cebu and Jolo the ship passed through sea snakes for 100 miles. Dr. Becker computes that there were at least 5000 of them to each square mile, and that if the "school" of serpents was as broad as it was long, there must have been 50,000,000 of them.

Ocean Alive With Them.

In this case, as in the case of the Oseberg, the sea, literally and exactly speaking, was alive with them. Wherever the eye might look snakes were swimming with graceful convolutions, with heads and long thin necks thrust far out of the water, in true sea-serpent style. The Oseberg's master computes that the area covered by the snakes that he saw was fully 45 miles long and 14 miles wide. As in the case of the creatures seen by Dr. Becker, they seemed entirely fearless, and barely swam out of the track of the ship in time to escape death from the bow or the stern. In fact, the Oseberg killed many of them.

This utter fearlessness is a distinguishing characteristic of the sea snakes, and it adds no little to the danger that is to be apprehended from them, for it often leads them to attack fishermen or swimmers, and even to climb up the anchor chains and through the hawscholes of vessels and to attack the crews. And as the bite of every one of the 50 known varieties is absolutely fatal, there is no little fear of them in the great ocean spaces that are inhabited by them.

It is a usual thing, when they are seen at all, to see them in huge numbers, because they are gregarious and swim and hunt in great schools. When there is a particularly tempting form of food anywhere, they appear to be able to discover the fact at once, and they will surround their prey and feed until nothing is left. Being so rapacious, it happens periodically that they are forced to leave a worn-out hunting ground and seek food elsewhere, and under such circumstances it is that they are seen occasionally by ships.

Fifty Known Varieties.

There are 50 known varieties of these dreaded creatures, all classified under the general title of *Thaenophidia*. None of them is able to live anywhere except as ocean water. Even in brackish rivers and estuaries they die after a few days, and when cast ashore they succumb as surely as does a whale. Every variety and sub-variety is as poisonous as the cobra or the bushmaster of Africa. Indeed, with the exception of these two last serpents, there is no snake on dry land that kills so swiftly and as terribly as do the sea snakes.

Owing to their fatal weapons and their ease and celerity of swimming, there are practically no enemies that destroy enough of them to make any impression on their numbers. The great East Indian sea eagle hunts them to some extent, but as the bird knows the danger that threatens from its quarry, the hunting is done deliberately and with so much caution that an eagle does not kill many snakes in a day. It hovers over the swimming serpents until he gets a chance to seize one with his talons just behind the head.

Then he backs like lightning with his bill, aiming to cut off the venomous jaws. If he fails, he drops the snake and flies upward as swiftly as possible. Snakes attack the eagle also. It is supposed that the thick, rough, file-like skin of this fish is an armor against poison. Man is an inveterate enemy to the serpent, but he does not hunt them on purpose. While many are killed by the fishermen each year, there is no systematic fight against the wicked things, and, as they are very productive, their numbers increase annually.

Beautiful as Deadly.

They are as beautiful as they are deadly, and Coleridge made no misuse of poetic license, when he made his ancient mariner say:

Beyond the shadow of the ship
I watched the water snakes
They moved in tracks of shining white
And when they moved they moved like light
And far away the white
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black
They coiled and swam, and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

No snake on land, except the coral, grass and carpet snakes, is clad so beau-

tifully as are almost all the *Thaenophidia*. Banded, striped, speckled, blotched, green, olive, yellow, blue and black, they seem the most beautiful things that the eye can hope to see, as one watches them "swimming and coiling" far below the surface in the glorious transparency of the deep blue Indian Ocean.

No man who has not seen them can form even a conception of their grace and agility. When they are swimming at an ordinary rate of speed they appear to undulate all over. They do not wind through the water as does an eel. Their method of progression reminds the beholder rather of the locomotion of a caterpillar, with the difference that it is far more graceful, and that, as their bodies move and twist, colors play over them as they do on the back and sides of dolphins. But when they dash at prey at full speed they move like an arrow, with their heads and necks thrust straight before them, if they are swimming under the surface, or, if they are darting along the top of the water, with their heads elevated just far enough to clear the crests of the waves.

Immense Powerfull Tails. When they are racing along thus their sole means of locomotion is their broad, paddle-shaped tail, which is peculiar to all the sea snakes, and forms the only striking difference between them and the ordinary terrestrial serpent. This paddle is used like a steamer's screw and has immense power. Bent sideways, it will stop the snake instantly, as if the creature had anchored suddenly. Indeed, when dorying or resting over reefs and in the sea caves that are common in the coral banks, they hold fast to rocks or bottom with these broad tails, and will often stay thus for hours in calm weather.

The horror with which they are regarded in all the lands that border the seas in which they dwell has excellent reason, as there are no cases on record of recovery after their bite. Most of the victims are Malay and other native fishermen and shore dwellers, and physicians rarely get to see the victims. Statistics are not kept in that part of the world, so it is not possible to ascertain even approximately how many persons are killed each year. But travelers know that there is hardly a fishing village that has not the tale of death to tell whenever it is visited.

For a time, scientists were inclined to the belief that the deadliness of the bite was due to a venom like that of land snakes, but to some property that caused blood poison, as does the bite of many fishes that are not poisonous in themselves. But the case of a sailor on the British warship *Algerine*, coming, as it naturally did, under the careful observation of medical men, proved that the snakes are directly poisonous, and that they carry fangs charged with venom just like the cobra.

An Unlucky Catch.

The *Algerine* was lying in front of Madras, when a school of brightly-colored snakes suddenly rose almost under

the keel and began to hunt fish.

The sailors caught a big one, measuring about six feet, and drew it on deck. None of them dreamed that the creature was poisonous, but it snapped at its captors so fiercely that luckily they feared to touch it until at last a young gunner seized it. It turned and bit him in the index finger of the right hand. He cut the serpent's head off with his cutlass instantly, and, after examining the bright body for awhile, he gave it to one of the shipmates, who skinned it. The gunner went below and ate his breakfast about half an hour later. For some time he felt no pain or discomfort from the bite, and, indeed, did not give it a second thought, as the flesh had hardly been broken by the fine, needle-like teeth. But he had been on deck again less than two hours when he suddenly became sick and vomited. His pulse began to weaken almost at once, and finally it became intermittent. Still he did not suspect that he was suffering from the effects of the bite and, therefore, did not even mention to the surgeon on who attended him that he had been bitten.

The pupils of his eyes began to dilate and cold perspiration appeared. His face assumed an expression of intense anxiety, and the surgeon became convinced from the symptoms that the man was suffering from a violent poison. He began an investigation and found the snake. A native who happened to come on board identified it as being one of the poisonous sea snakes.

By that time the victim's throat had become paralyzed and the edges of the tiny wounds were swollen and had begun to darken. Soon the swelling extended over his entire right side, and his neck and face became spotted and blotched with dark purple and gray. Twenty minutes after the discoloration had appeared, it had spread over his entire body. Death ended his sufferings four hours after he had been bitten.

Another Case.

The next case to come under the observation of surgeons also occurred in the port of Madras. The captain of a merchant vessel was bitten by some unknown creature while he was bathing. The pain was so slight and the two small wounds were so petty, looking hardly more serious than fly stings, that the man believed that he had been bitten by a small crab and paid no further attention to it. He dressed leisurely and went to the house of a friend for dinner.

After the meal he played with the children of his host and sang songs for the company. Now and then, later in the evening, as time passed, he noticed a prickling, burning sensation, over his

whole body, but it felt rather pleasant than otherwise, and did not alarm him in the least. His friends took occasion several times to remark that he was looking particularly well.

Three hours afterwards he returned to his ship, and he had hardly touched the deck before his limbs became unaccountably stiff and his tongue grew so thick that he could not make himself understood. He took some brandy and when that failed, the ship's doctor prescribed medicine for him. When this produced no effect, a Burman sailor suggested that perhaps the captain had been bitten by a sea snake. On examination the doctor found that the two tiny wounds were angry and purple, and he instituted drastic treatment at once, but the victim died within 71 hours after being bitten.

Young Kanaka Next Victim.

Near Raine Island, in the Torres Straits, a young Kanaka, while diving for pearl shells on a reef, was bitten in the forefinger by a banded snake that shot up from the bottom as he plunged in and attacked him without provocation. He died within 48 hours, after having suffered torment.

In Sigavi Harbor a black-and-white banded snake bit a Fortuna Island boy who had leaped on a submerged rock where the creature had been lying. The boy jumped into the water at once and swam ashore to be treated by a native snake doctor, but he died before morning.

Sir Joseph Fayer and Professor Russell permitted a five-foot sea snake to bite a bird. It died in four minutes. A second bird, bitten by the same snake, immediately afterward, died in 10 minutes. An-

other snake killed a bird within seven minutes.

Then the investigators teased a sea snake till it bit a soft-shell turtle in the mouth. Five minutes afterward the turtle began to scratch the bitten spot. Sixteen minutes after that it was paralyzed completely, and in 14 minutes more it died. A second turtle succumbed in 45 minutes. A tree snake died in 30 minutes after being bitten, and a toad fish was killed within 15 minutes.

The sea snakes live entirely in the open ocean. They do not even ascend rivers. Their favorite hunting grounds are the wide and deep arms of sea that separate the islands of the China, Indian and South Pacific seas. They do not often haunt the shores, but remain at some distance from land. Their scale-covered nostrils and immense lungs give them a foremost place as highly organized predatory creatures, and there is probably no fish that can escape them, even though armed with spines and thorns, for they swallow their prey head first and appear to be bothered not at all by any amount of spines or sharp fins.

Being so active and strong, adult specimens are not taken often, and most captures are limited to young ones. Russell and Sir Joseph Fayer found by experiment that oceanic snakes can live only two or three days, as a rule, when away from the open sea. Even in a brackish pool, with plenty of food, specimens died within that time, although they were left carefully undisturbed. One lived 10 days, but none of the others showed such tenacity. The snakes can hardly move on dry land, and, after wriggling around

a bit and biting savagely and blindly in all directions, they lie still until they perish.

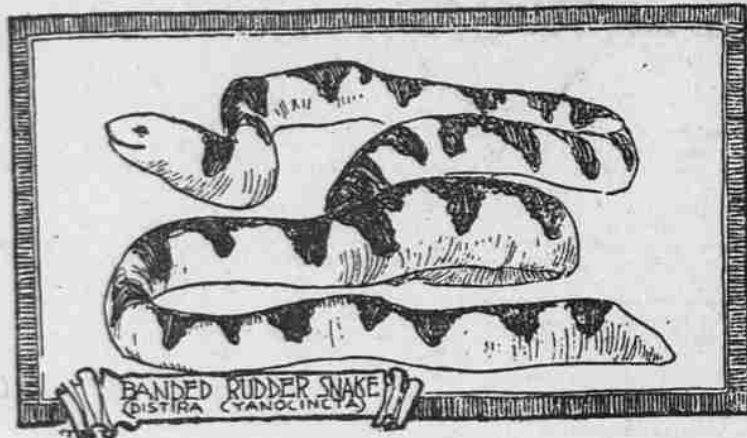
Their range is great. They are found throughout the Indian and Pacific Oceans, from the Cape of Good Hope and Madagascar to the western shore of Panama, and from New Zealand to Japan. They are especially plentiful between the South China and the North Australian coasts, and particularly on the Great Barrier reefs, where they find plenty of fish, and where, consequently, they may be seen almost always.

The waters around the hot Andaman islands are favorite grounds for them, and they add to the delights of that red-hot British settlement for convicts, where degenerate savage dwarfs lie in the bush, patiently awaiting a chance to send a poisoned dart out of their blowguns at any man who strays from the fort, while centipedes, scorpions, land snakes and venomous insects furnish anything in the lethal line that the others have overlooked.

Other waters that are particularly honored by the oceanic serpents with their attendance are the Bay of Bengal and the seas around the Nicobars, Moluccas, Timor and New Guinea.

In all these places it is an unwritten law that a sea snake must be killed whenever possible. But, as the fishermen usually go out in extremely narrow and cranky craft, they more frequently are glad to escape alive themselves, when they happen to find a lot of serpents in their nets, instead of fish.

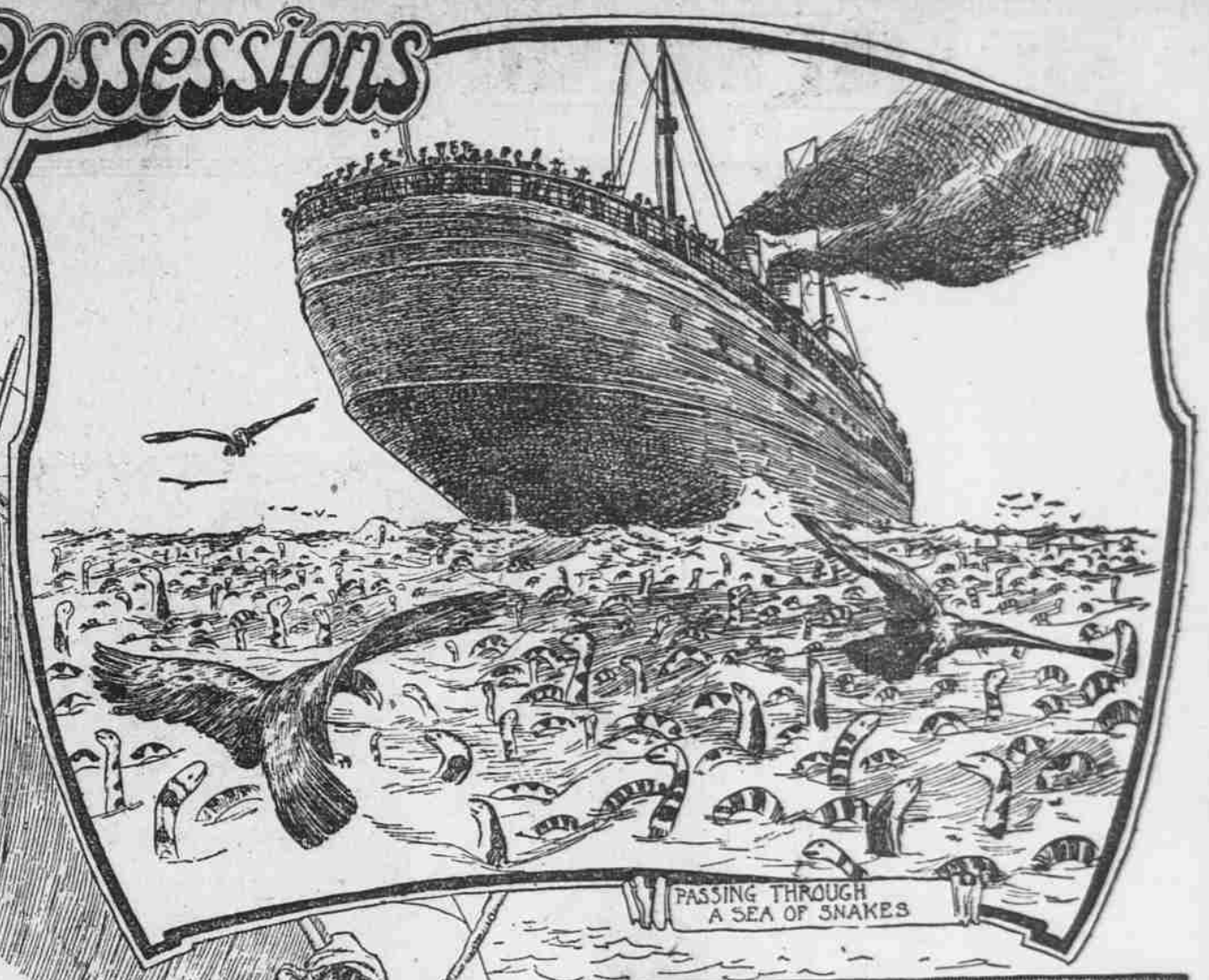
The creatures have been known to surround fishing-boats that attacked them



BANDED RUDDER SNAKE (DISTRICA YANOCINCA)



MULTI-COLORED SEA SNAKE (CENTRURUS BICOLOR)



PASSING THROUGH A SEA OF SNAKES



MULTI-COLORED SEA SNAKE (CENTRURUS BICOLOR)

and to kill every man in them. When they are enraged, they appear to have no fear of anything. The fishermen say that in such circumstances they will not only bite, but try to kill their enemies by constriction. It is certain that some varieties hold fish by virtue of their constrictive powers, while waiting for the poison to do its work.

Many are infected with parasites, and old ones often are covered with wonderful growths of algae and barnacles, and other sea forms, so that they look like a patch of weed as they float along. This helps them approach prey, and, in fact, even attracts unsuspecting fish.

But the snakes do not depend on wiles for their food. They hunt like hounds, often forming a great circle of miles in circumference around a spot that is filled with prey, and gradually closing in as they devour the fish. Often such hunting lasts for weeks until the last fish in that part of the sea has been destroyed. It is then that seamen occasionally sight enormous schools, like that seen by Captain Roberts, of the Oseberg.

Of the 50 different species, the hydrophinae are the more common. Like all the other species, they have heads that are comparatively small, with bodies that are heavy in the forepart and laterally compressed toward the end, finishing in the paddle-like tail. Over the nostrils are scales that open and shut at will. The poison teeth are in the front of the upper jaw and are curved and grooved. Behind them are fine, needle-like teeth, and on the lower jaw are the sealing fangs with which the prey is held.

A beautiful species is that of the pelamids. One of this family, *Centurus bicolor*, has a dark brown velvet-like skin, so glossy that the scales hardly show. Along the belly, sharply marked off from the coloring of the back, is a band of vivid lemon yellow, and the tail is marked with glowing spots and blotches of darker tints. This snake occasionally is found along the Pacific Coast of Central America. The pelamids are the only oceanic snakes that have thick necks.

The banded rudder snakes are beautiful, too. There are 14 varieties of them. The predominant color is olive green on the back and a delicate and shining yellow on the belly. From 50 to 75 black bands run along their entire length. Platyrus, the flat tails, are bluish or greenish black on the back and bright sulphur yellow on the belly. They carry from 25 to 30 black stripes that show prominently in the water and make the snakes look monstrous when they dart along far below the surface. They have bright yellow noses and jaws. Over the nose is a deep, black spot, that extends thence backward to the top of the head as if it were a cap.

The sea snakes are permeated with a strong fishy smell, which remains with them even after they have been preserved in spirits.

WHERE GOLD WAS FIRST DISCOVERED IN EASTERN OREGON.

(Continued from First Page.)

selected judges and clerks of election, after which they proceeded to vote for a full set of state officers. The returns were sent to the Secretary of State, as those of Baker County. The votes were, of course, not counted, as the election was held in Wasco County, and no provision had been made for the miners to vote.

Homesteaders arrived during the summer of 1862 from the Willamette Valley, Nevada and California, and they settled along the Powder River. Most of these newcomers from the South had started for the Salmon-River country, and they were surprised to find a settlement on the Powder. Among them were: Hardin Estes, Fred Dill, John P. Bowen and others who became prominent citizens of the county that was subsequently established. Soon afterward, Anthony Webb, Jerry Shee and John and Stephen McLean came. All these men are well remembered by the old-timers. William H. Packwood and Ed Cranston arrived at the camp in June, with a pack of goods, and organized the first store in Eastern

Oregon. Flour and bacon sold for \$5 per 100 pounds, and other things sold proportionately high.

Up to this time no attempt had been made to build a town, with any system or regularity. On June 12, 1862, however, a conference was held by William H. Packwood, Ed Cranston, George Hall and others, and it was resolved to lay out a town, to be called Auburn. A street was located next day, from Freezout Gulch to Blue Canyon. Lots were staked out, and the men then assembled to elect a Mayor. The chairman of the meeting conducted the election. The candidates were William H. Packwood and E. C. Brainard. The chairman said: "Packwood, stand on that log!" Mr. Packwood did so. Pointing to another log, the chairman said: "There's a log for you, Brainard."

An Oregonian started toward Packwood, crying, "Come on, Oregonians. Here's the Webster candidate!" A Californian answered by saying, "Brainard is the candidate for the Tarheels!" and he moved toward his man. The Californians were in the majority, and Mr. Brainard was made the first Mayor of

what was then the only town in Eastern Oregon. The new Mayor was kept busy, and, in less than a year, recorded 150 mining claims in Blue Canyon district.

Next followed the most important step that was ever taken by the people of Auburn—a step that was far-reaching and whose influence is felt in Baker City to-day. It was the inauguration of the celebrated Auburn ditch. This canal is closely allied with all the placer mining that was ever done in the section; it made agriculture possible in Powder River Valley, and for years has been the only source of water supply of hundreds of ranches in the eastern part of Oregon. It was purchased less than three months ago by the municipality of Baker City for \$10,000, and is now the best and most considerable source of water supply for that thriving town.

W. H. Packwood and Ira Ward secured the services of a surveyor named Griffin's Gulch. Goodrich reported a plan and on August 30, 1862, the Auburn Water

Company was organized for the town of Auburn, Wasco County. The stockholders were: G. H. Abbott, Henry Fuller, J. J. Williams, Ira Ward, W. H. Packwood, A. C. Goodrich, Isaac Smith, George Berry and Benjamin Chateau. The history of the Auburn Water Company would make a book in itself, but suffice it to say that the ditch it built has been the most important factor in the development of the country through which it passes.

Deserted Auburn. Little now remains of the town of Auburn but a memory. The hillside is covered with the ruins of old houses, and the few remaining cabins that were once occupied by the goldseekers are now inhabited by the Chinese who work in the placer diggings. Yet, at one time, Auburn was a city of 5000 souls. It has passed into history, and the people have moved away or have died. In its place has sprung up Baker City—the metropolis of Eastern Oregon.

Many interesting stories are told of the life of the miners in Auburn and Griffin's Gulch. Some of these are amusing; others are not. Some are humorous; some

are filled with heart interest, while others are deeply tragic. There were births, deaths, marriages, lynchings and trials, reasonings and eloquent and society weddings. Amid all the hardships of life in a mining camp, romance was not unknown.

Among the first settlers of the town of Auburn was a family named Sykes, which came from Missouri. Paterfamilias Sykes had a daughter, a giantess, a regular Amazon, who wore a low-lined dress and went barefooted in the summer time. A young miner named Bowen was in love with Sykes' girl, and Sykes' girl was in love with him. Sykes, however, had other views for his daughter. Sykes was ambitious and wanted a wealthy husband for his daughter, and he kept a weather eye out for his own interests.

Among the visitors to Sykes' house was a teamster of middle age, hard looks and tough character. But he was the reputed owner of mines of fabulous wealth, and he was in love with Sykes' girl also.

Bowen was told that his visits were no longer desired. He began to pine away,

and "let concealment, like a worm in the bud, feed on his damask cheek."

Boys Take a Hand.

The boys noticed the change and ascertained the reason. A committee was appointed to straighten things out. The spokesman said to Bowen: "Do you love the girl?"

"Yes," came the reply.

"Does she want you?"

"Yes."

"Well, put up 10 gallons of whisky, and you shall have her."

All the arrangements were kept secret, and a marriage license was procured. On the eventful night, two hardy miners picked up the girl at her father's cabin and bodily carried her down the street to the public square, where she was surrounded by 1000 miners and was married to the man of her choice, by a Catholic priest; The Dalles.

The first marriage, however, to occur in Auburn, and consequently in Eastern Oregon, was amicably arranged. The parties thereto were Mr. and Mrs. George Hall. Mr. Hall was afterwards Sheriff of Baker County, and Mrs. Hall is now the

proprietress of a hotel in Broun. The second marriage was that of Mr. William H. Packwood and Miss O'Brien. Mr. Packwood was then engaged in selling goods, as well as in mining, and in forwarding the construction of the celebrated Auburn ditch. Miss O'Brien was the first school teacher in Eastern Oregon, and kept a school in a rude cabin that was erected by contributions of gold dust from the miners.

Witnessed by 1000 People. The marriage was solemnized October 16, just 29 years ago. Father Meserle, the Catholic missionary at The Dalles, coming over to perform the ceremony, which was witnessed by more than a thousand miners.

No account of Auburn, Griffin's Gulch or Baker County is complete without mention of David Littlefield, than whom there was no truer, braver pioneer. He now resides in Baker City, but he has a fine ranch on the Powder River, within a stone's throw of the scene of his early gold-finding experiences.

J. W. HEADEN, Baker City, Or., October 23, 1901.