

Oregon Portage Railway.

We are in receipt of a copy of the bill introduced into the Senate of the United States by Senator Mitchell on the 7th inst., and referred to the committee on railroads. From reading this bill we find that it will not be optional with the company to build either upon the state or territory side of the river, unless a corporation organized under the laws of Oregon can build in the territory. It seems to us that this is an error. The Oregon Steam Navigation company already own the land on the Oregon side, and operate a railroad from The Dalles to Celilo. If this bill should pass, in its present form, the best thing that could happen for the country would be to let the Oregon Portage company purchase from the Oregon Steam Navigation company the railway now in operation, and re-invest the money in a narrow gauge from Columbus, or some other available landing on the Columbia above Celilo, to the mouth of the Klickitat valley, twelve miles below The Dalles, thus forming at once a connection from Walla Walla, etc., virtually carrying out the intentions of the act, and at the same time laying the foundation for a system of railways necessary to Klickitat and Yakima, which could easily be carried up to a connection with the proposed Seattle and Walla Walla road across the Cascade range to the north. Observations made upon a journey into that country last summer, teaches us that this is a system entirely feasible. The worst portions of the construction would be found from the lower end of Klickitat valley to the Columbia river, through a rocky canyon, but it is by no means impossible, and through the Klickitat valley, and natural passes in the narrow chain of mountains dividing it from Yakima, a narrow gauge railroad would be profitable from the start. It would develop a region of country more extensive and equally as fertile as the Willamette valley. Dalles city would not suffer any from this system of railway—the locks and canal completed at the Cascades will draw to The Dalles from the boundless resources of Wasco county, sufficient to make her a city of no mean pretensions without any assistance from the surrounding country; but from the very force of circumstances the growth and development of the regions north of her would greatly augment her wealth and increase her business and population, making her in fact the Queen City of the Mountains.

—The report frequently circulated and recently revived that Wilkie Collins was to finish Dickens's story of "Edwin Drood," is denied by Mr. Collins. He was asked to do it, but declined.

—A leader of fashion in San Francisco has had her chairs and sofas, and the cushions of her carriages stuffed with aromatic herbs, in imitation of a practice prevalent among Oriental nations. She lives in an atmosphere of constant perfume.

—"Some entirely disinterested persons," says Judge Virgin of Maine, "cannot tell the real, absolute truth if they try, because they have not got mind enough to comprehend and understand, and then relate it, while others have not got the honesty to do it."

Discriminations Against American Commerce.

Bearing upon the question of unjust discriminations against the commerce of America, to which THE ASTORIAN has previously referred, Capt. J. T. Woodbury, of the ship Valley Forge now in this port, has kindly consented to permit us to publish the following letter, written nearly ten years ago:

CARDIFF, Feb. 15, 1869.

Hon. Freeman H. Morse, London:

DEAR SIR:—With your kind permission, and knowing the great interest you take in the commerce of our country, I beg to trouble you with a few remarks on some of the treaties made by our government with foreign powers. Last summer while I was in New York, a treaty or convention between the United States and Great Britain was published, whereby vessels under the British flag were permitted to arrive and enter at the custom house in the United States, with their tonnage as stated in their British register. Our ships, on the other hand, on entering at British custom houses, to have their tonnage taken as per their American register. This, on its face, would look very fair; but its operation with most American vessels is very unfair. The Norway, for instance, measures in New York 2107 tons; in England, by British measurement, 1984, or 123 tons less than the American measurement. Now, I am obliged to pay my dues on the full tonnage of 2107. This puts me at a disadvantage as compared with English vessels. And our total dues here of every kind, estimated on tonnage, are about 16 pence per ton, and for 123 tons would be £8.4. Here, by an arrangement of our own government, I am made to pay this excess over the ordinary rates that are demanded of other vessels. We may be pretty sure that England, in her commercial treaties, don't give, or intend to give, more than she is to receive. Though the wording may be ambiguous, it is for this advantage only. The instance of the Norway is the rule, and not the exception. The ship Ne Plus Ultra, of New York, that I commanded before the Norway, measured in New York 1534 tons; in Liverpool, 1450 tons. There are exceptions, I allow, but they are so in consequence of errors having been made in the tonnage in the United States. In this last case of reciprocity we are losers, as in the first; as I will endeavor to explain.

Many years ago, there was a rule laid down by our government that we would enter into treaties of reciprocity in foreign navigation with any foreign country that would extend to us the same privileges. Nearly every nation in Europe has availed itself of this treaty. The free cities of Hamburg and Bremen were among the first to reciprocate, but in wording those treaties, the flag was made to cover the vessel. Until within a few years, this made no difference, but within the last ten years a great change has taken place. Nearly every nation in Europe allow their subjects to naturalize any foreign bottom they may buy; whereas the American can only naturalize a vessel built in his own country. A citizen of Hamburg can go to England and buy an iron steamer, place her under the North German flag, and sail her between any foreign country and the United States on reciprocal terms with an American ship. The American, on the other hand, is prohibited by his own laws from doing this. Iron is now the only material of which ocean steamers can be profitably built, and at the present time they can be built much cheaper in Great Britain than in any other country, and the effect of our reciprocity treaties is to drive all foreign trade into the hands of foreigners. Not only is iron the only material that sea-going steamers can be profitably built, but it is getting into very general use for sailing ships; and now great advantage is given to iron vessels in the rate of insurance, so that iron sailing ships can command 5s per ton over wooden ships in Calcutta and Bombay; and as the number of iron vessels increases, greater will be the difference in freights. The excessive duties that we have, on all the materials that enter into ship-building, make our wooden ships cost higher, and act as a prohibition to the building of iron vessels, whether for sail or steam, to be used in ocean navigation; and, naturally, foreigners with cheaper ships can take cheaper freights, even in our own trade. The effect is, that the great foreign trade between New York and Europe is by steam, and in the hands of foreigners. The depreciation of our commerce, and its present state, is owing to this more than to the war. As by the action of our own treaties we have placed foreigners in this position. We owe it to our own subjects to place them on the same footing, which can only be done by repealing the navigation laws, and permitting them to buy (and naturalize) ships wherever we find them cheapest.

I don't know as I have placed all this so you can understand it; I hope I have. Should you have time to write me, please do so, and perhaps I can explain what is not clear. I feel this subject very much, and wish to see it thoroughly ventilated. As things go on, ten years will drive us from the ocean; for in that time most of the ocean navigation will be made of iron, and propelled by steam.

With much esteem, I remain respectfully,  
J. F. WOODBURY,  
Ship Norway.

Circumstances and the Congress of the United States have not very materially altered the case since the writing of the above letter. Capt. Woodbury there refers back ten years to the hardships attending the commercial fleet of America and predicted fully what may be seen to-day. Let us look back over the past ten years. There has been no perceptible improvement.

Statistics of the mercantile marine of the different nations have lately been published. The following table shows the present condition of the leading merchant navies:

SAILING VESSELS.			
	Number.	Gross Tonnage.	Net Tonnage.
British.....	17,765	18,384	5,526,930
United States.....	6,207	6,090	2,146,731
Norwegian.....	4,135	4,157	1,332,949
Italian.....	4,402	3,135	1,296,865
German.....	3,149	3,001	875,844
French.....	3,300	2,972	698,767
STEAMERS.			
British.....	8,133	3,216	3,283,910
United States.....	542	516	674,036
French.....	272	275	319,179
German.....	220	220	250,785
Spanish.....	224	199	176,349
Dutch.....	110	111	112,879

The total tonnage of the sailing vessels has decreased 581,058 tons, while that of steamers has increased 87,476 tons, which leaves a net decrease during the year in the tonnage of the world's mercantile marine of 493,582 tons, the combined tonnage of steamers and sailing vessels being 19,813,247 in 1878, against 20,306,829 in 1877.

The ship builders of Maine have not done more than half the work last year they did in either the three years preceding. Only eleven ships were built in the state, and not one of these on the Penobscot or to the eastward of it. The average tonnage of the ninety-six vessels constructed is about 425 tons, the total 41,060. In 1877 the total was 76,308, in 1876 it was 73,573, and in 1875 it exceeded 75,000 tons. When the ships are taken out the average tonnage is less than three hundred tons. In Bangor district, where many large ships have been launched, they turned out last year two vessels, one of nine tons and the other of 203. In the York and Saco districts nothing was built. In the Wiscasset, two schooners were built which footed up the amazing amount of forty-six tons. The prospect now is that this year's work will be less than 1878. A Bath ship builder says:

Unless there is a sudden and very unexpected improvement in the freight market, which is not at all likely to occur, the amount of tonnage built in Maine in 1879 will be less than has been built in any of the last thirty years. Although materials and labor are so cheap, there is no inducement to build. At present rates of freight, vessels are absolutely of no value, for there is no port in the world where sufficient freight can be obtained to pay expenses and insurance and leave any profit to the owner.

It is time that the press of this country spoke out on this subject, and turned the attention to things than the scramble for office. In this article may be found the whole secret of the trouble to our commerce. How many politicians will read it. Not one, perhaps; as it may not make for him votes which is paramount, in his mind, to the grandeur of this nation upon the high seas.

—"Over the Hills to the Poorhouse" was the title of a new play to be produced in Battle Creek, Mich., by a traveling theatre company. The leading actor got so drunk that he could not perform, creditors seized the baggage, and one of the unpaid employees actually did go over the hills to the poorhouse.

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Besides a choice lot of  
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Now allow me to tell you, for experience I've had I'm sure,  
Nothings worse for the stomach than when you're yeast powder's not pure.  
Oh, then be careful in future, you know what's at stake,  
Let me advise you (for I know now) what brand to take.  
Let your grocer give you no other kind for this is guaranteed.  
You use Domestically's Yeast Powder and of good health pure and light bread you're sure.

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Net Cash received for Fire Premiums in 1877.....\$355,511 04

Assets, Jan. 1, 1878.....\$578,066 86

Liabilities—  
Losses unpaid.....\$3,638 37  
Dividends ".....1,907 00  
Surplus for Property Holders.....\$572,470 47  
Losses paid in Oregon in six years.....\$114,516 72  
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Lots 2 and 4, in Block 120; and Lot 5, in Block 132;

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