

The Santiam News

PUBLISHED EVERY THURSDAY BY
L. W. CHARLES

Entered at the postoffice at Scio, Ore.,
as second-class mail matter.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

One year in advance \$1 25
One year, at end of year..... 1 50
Six months in advance..... 75
Three months in advance 50

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OUR PUBLIC FORUM

R. P. SCHWERIN,
On the Seamen's Bill.



The American plowmen are interested in sea commerce. It is expensive and likewise humiliating to have to salute a foreign flag every time a farmer wants to ship a bushel of wheat, a bale of cotton or a pound of farm products across the ocean. The American

farmer is entitled to the protection of his flag in sending his products across the sea, and congress should give such encouragement to shipping interests as is necessary to meet foreign competition in ocean commerce. A recent bill known as the seaman's bill became a law under the president's signature and Mr. R. P. Schwerin, vice-president of the Pacific Mail Steamship company, when asked to define this law and outline its effect upon American steamship lines, said in part:

"The bill provides that no ship of any nationality shall be permitted to depart from any port of the United States unless she has on board a crew not less than seventy-five per centum of which, in each department thereof, is able to understand any order given by the officers of such vessel, nor unless forty per centum in the first year, forty-five per centum in the second year, fifty-five per centum in the fourth year after the passage of this act, and, thereafter, sixty-five per centum of her deck crew, exclusive of licensed officers and apprentices, are of a rating not less than able seaman."

"The overseas trade of the world is competitive; therefore, the original cost of the ship and the operation of the ship have to be reckoned with in the keen competition of these rival nations with one another. The Oriental sailor is obedient and competent and is the cheapest sailor in the world. It is, therefore, manifestly clear that if this law applied to all nationalities in the transpacific traffic, all would be on the same economic basis, but it works a single hardship to all the ships of the world, except the Japanese and American ships, and with the latter it works two hardships. With the European, the cost of constructing a ship is no higher than the cost of constructing a Japanese ship, but if they had to provide European crews, while the Japanese operated with Japanese crews, the condition of competition would be such that they could not overcome the handicap and they would be driven off. But the American ship would have to contend not only with the tremendous increase of cost of wage in the substitution of the European crew for the Chinese crew, but also the greater initial cost of the ship. As the Japanese have now done away with their European officers and Japanese crews, all of whom speak a common language, there is no difficulty for them to comply with all the conditions of the bill and continue their Japanese crews with Oriental wages."

"The law, therefore, instead of assisting the American ship, adds another heavy burden, while it places none whatever upon the Japanese ship, but, on the contrary, turns over to the Japanese the traffic of the Pacific ocean, which the American ship is forced to forego by act of congress of the United States."

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