

Tuesday, May 8, 1866.

BIG BEND.

Our news from Big Bend is up to the 26th ult., making the journey at even this early season of the year, and before the steamer has commenced to run on the lakes, but nine days to Victoria. In another month the distance will be traversed in little more than half the time. This is exceedingly gratifying, especially when we are assured the steamer Marten will commence to run on the Shuswap on the 15th instant—but a week from to-morrow. The Columbia steamer Forty-Nine has already made her first trip, and an arduous one it was, occupying ten days from Colville to Death Rapids. The ice in many parts of the river was so thick that the steamer became jammed on several occasions for nearly a whole day. When she got extricated her progress was exceedingly slow and Yankee ingenuity was taxed to the utmost to bring her up to Death Rapids. The trip was, besides, merely a trial one—the steamer carrying no freight and therefore drawing but very little water. Every facility was consequently afforded her, and the tediousness and difficulties of the journey only show how much inferior is even the steamboat part of the American line of travel to our own. It is now quite evident that the British Columbia route, to say nothing of its cheapness and its shortness, is a month ahead of its southern rival. The fact will be but little use to us this year, but when the reputation of the mines shall have been fully established it will bear its fruit. In the meantime we can only hope, with our New Westminster contemporary, that the Forty-Nine may prove a success. We shall be indebted to it largely the present year for the transportation of miners from the adjoining American territories to the diggings at Big Bend; and as things stand at present it would seem that the great bulk of our mining population will have to come that way. Our Labouchere misfortune, and the raising of the passage money on the steamers plying between this and California, have thrown for a time a damper on our prospects of having a large travel via Victoria and the Fraser—have in fact injured the growing reputation of the British Columbia mines. As the season rolls on, however, we shall witness, from the very nature of things, a reaction set in against the overdone rush to Montana, and the news from Big Bend, if it only corroborates a fraction of what has been said about the country, will fasten on the duped Blackfoot miner and lead him to the British Possessions. We have no hesitation in predicting that before July shall have expired thousands will be rushing from overcrowded Montana to any place for the time being that will offer a prospect of success. Without the Forty-Nine, however, they would have small chance of reaching Big Bend, and while British Columbia would be lost to them their enterprise and industry would be lost. Colville, from which place or vicinity the Columbia steamer starts, is but little farther from the Montana mines than from Portland. From Idaho the distance is even less. It will, therefore, be seen how much we may be indebted, before the season expires, to the little steamer which has just threaded its way through the ice, and pushed up the dangerous riffles of the Upper Columbia river. It may be regretted that the first trip was made use of by the American garrison at Colville to desert their posts for the mines; but the circumstance shows how intense must have been the feeling of confidence around Colville in the new diggings, when a number of soldiers were induced to run away with their country's weapons in their hands to try their fortune in the mines. Among the many gratifying assurances in the news from Big Bend is the fact that no dread of a scarcity of provisions is felt. It is rather amusing, however, to hear that some parties at Seymour are annoyed at the circumstance, and that the press is very much censured for encouraging men to take up their own provisions. A few minutes' consideration will convince any reasonable being of the fact that had those parties who have gone up taken no supplies with them the demand at Seymour would have been so great as to have raised the price of articles from 40 to 60 per cent. higher than they are at present. Had the numbers arrived from California which were calculated upon there would by this time, unless the miners had taken up their own provisions, have been nothing less than a famine. As it is, a large number of the men who left Victoria packed their supplies with them—some may have found that when they got to Seymour prices were ruling at a lower figure than it had cost them to bring up their own provisions, but this as we have said was incidental to the fact that by the miners becoming their own packers the demand was decreased, and the storekeepers obliged therefore to sell at a low figure. The circumstance is rather a subject for congratulation than for regret; for whoever, if any, may be the loser, cheapness is just now the great essential at the mines.

Where is paper money first mentioned in the Bible? The dove brought the green-back to Noah.

Loss of the Labouchere.

COURT OF ENQUIRY.

[Before Chief Justice Needham, assisted by Captain Price, and Sailing-master Townsend, H. M. S. Scout.]

FIRST DAY.

FRIDAY, May 4th, 1866.

Yesterday at 10 a.m. a Court of Enquiry under a Commission signed by His Excellency the Governor, was opened in the Supreme Court by His Honor Chief Justice Needham, assisted by Capt. Price and Lieut. Townsend, of H.M.S. Scout, to enquire into the loss of the Hudson Bay Company's steamer Labouchere, her cargo and Her Majesty's mails off Point Reyes, 28 miles north of San Francisco, on the night of the 14th of April, while on a voyage from that port to Victoria, V. I., under a subsidized mail contract with the colonial Government. The enquiry excited considerable interest, the Court House being crowded throughout the day.

Roderick Finlayson, Esq., Lloyd's agent, was present to watch the proceedings on behalf of the insurers.

The commission from His Excellency having been read

Capt. William H. Mouat was sworn and examined by the Chief Justice.

I am a master mariner and chief trader in the Hudson Bay Co. I was postal agent under a commission from His Excellency the Governor. I have no Trinity house certificate. I have not passed an examination at Trinity House. I was brought up to the sea and served three years as an apprentice, and since then as an officer. I was made a master in 1850. I left this port for San Francisco on the 3rd March, and arrived there on the 8th, and commenced alterations to the value of about \$24,000. I was ready for sea on the 14th of March. I had about 60 tons of cargo on board. I do not recollect there being any ironware amongst the cargo; I had one bag said to be letters and about 50 or 60 bags of newspapers, for which I gave a receipt; I had instructions from Mr. Young, Colonial Secretary, that I was to get the mail sorted before I arrived here.

His Honor—Have you the instructions? Witness produced written instructions.

His Honor—These instructions are most explicit.

Witness—I had 93 passengers, 23 cabin, 47 steerage, 13 seamen for the Princess Royal; my own crew numbered 33, (witness agreed to furnish names of passengers and crew to the court) I was master, Mr. Chambers chief officer, engineer Mr. Elliott, 2nd do Mr. Stephens, 3rd do Mr. Ross, 2nd officer Mr. Smith. We started at about 8 p.m. on the 14th March; The vessel before leaving, and after repairs, was not swung to adjust her compasses; I don't think it is usual to do so in the merchant service with a wood built vessel; in the navy I believe it is invariably the rule to swing the ships, whether wood or iron; I have never swung a ship to adjust compasses before going to sea; I think as a measure of precaution it would be better to do so. I had 2 bower, 1 stream, 2 kedges and 3 boat anchors on board; two bower chains of 100 fathoms each; from 30 to 45 fathoms of stream or mooring chain; the position of the anchors or chains had not been changed; the steering apparatus had been shifted from dead aft to the fore part of the hurricane deck; the ship's compass was shifted with the shifting of the steering apparatus to the pilot house in front of the steering wheel; the anchors and chains on deck were in the usual place, in the bows about 40 feet from the compass; when the compass was dead aft, the distance would be 150 feet; I should not think that the shifting of the compass would alter the deviation, the distance from the anchors and chains being so great, and there being other iron work used for securing the pilot house nearer; that, with the quantity of iron nails in the pilot house and the wheel chains, all of which had been placed there in consequence of the alterations, might cause a deviation; I don't think the compass would be affected, it was too far aft; it never occurred to me, after these alterations that might affect the compass, to swing the vessel; I do not know that she ever was swung; I had the compasses in use at the time we got ashore, there were eight compasses for certain on board, two were in front of the wheel and were subject to the same influences, the third was in the captain's room about 12 feet further aft, and was not used at all by the helmsman; practically for the purposes of the voyage the two compasses in the wheel house were alone used, unchecked by any other; I observed about half a point difference between the two compasses and the third one, about half an hour after we got clear of the heads; I did not observe it before, until I discovered this I had not looked to see whether there was any deviation; I attribute that deviation to the iron work in the pilot house, especially the wheel chains which were about two cwt each; I made an allowance of half a point for the deviation when I discovered it; I began to lay my course at about 7, after passing the Golden Gate and clear of the sands; the deviation would place the vessel's head in shore, and the tendency would be to place the vessel on Point Reyes, where I finally ran ashore; after the vessel was struck I compared the three compasses with another in the main saloon in after part of the ship, not so likely to be affected by local attraction, and found that all three were in error; I placed this 4th compass on the table in order to see if it would agree with the other compasses, there was a point and a half difference between this compass and the two steering compasses; the deviation being in the same direction. My course, when I laid out my course, was south west by south by compass. That is not the usual course for a heavy ship drawing more water than we did; mine was not a heavy ship; she was drawing 11 feet 2 in. even keel. I call a vessel drawing 16 feet a heavy ship; she would I imagine steer two points more to the south; south-west by south was not my true course, it was west south-west, I took the former course to get

her off shore on account of thick weather. It was blowing hard from south-west and very thick. I did not see the buoy on the 4 fathom bank; I intended to pass it inshore; I steered south-west by south for an hour; at about 8.30 I altered my course to west south-west by compass. She was going about 7 knots an hour, (Lt. Townsend gave me the course indicated, for the guidance of the Court) I steered this course for half an hour, going 8 knots; we then steered west nothing north from 9 till 10.20 going at full speed 8 knots. She then struck on a rock, I believe on the east point of Los Reyes on the main land. I made no allowance for the strong wind in laying the ship's course; there was a strong wind till we got outside the bar, when it fell light; there was not a strong sea on; when we struck it was very thick; she struck with her stem end on; before striking, I rang the engine bell to stop her, and the engine stopped; I saw at that time a large rock on the port bow—breakers ahead well on the starboard side; the second time, the first time it was with her stern, second and third on the starboard side; after the struck the first time, I rung the bell to back her, she backed off very easily, and when she was backing the first time I saw the land on the starboard beam, very high and very close to, so close that I was afraid of backing ashore; we went ahead twice and backed twice; by that time her head was round to the southward; after standing off for a short time I suppose about ten minutes, I steered south-west, going full speed. The engine pumps and the hand pumps, two single and one double, all going; the engineer could get them fixed; the engineer reported to me that the ship was making water. My object in steering south-west was to keep the ship in the same position until daylight, and I made short stretches of about half an hour north-east and south-west. Three carpenters were at work down in the fore peak, cutting away the skin and caulking pieces, of blanket oakum etc., between the timbers, for the purpose of keeping the water out; the engine and pumps gained on the water until about 1 a.m. on Sunday morning, when the engine pump sucked, we then ceased pumping with the hand pumps, as the engine pump could keep the water out. We went about half speed until about half past 3, in order to lessen the pressure on the bows; the weather was very thick all the time; the leak suddenly increased at 3.30 and we went ahead at full speed; we were heading N. E. at that time, all the pumps at work, and ran for 15 minutes; during that quarter of an hour we were getting a sail over the bow, we stopped her so as to get it under her bottom, we had six men using buckets in the fore hold besides the pumps; about 4 o'clock we saw Point Reyes, distant about 6 or 7 miles; the weather was then clearing up, we were getting daylight; we steered for its full speed, pumps going, but the ship going very slow; at about quarter past 6 the water had risen so as to put the engine fires out; after the fires were put out the ship necessarily stopped; we left off pumping, lowered the boats down, put the passengers into them, and they landed at the nearest land, Point Reyes; this was about 6.30 a.m.; the boats (8 in number) carried away all except about 15; three of the boats belonged to the ship, 5 were freight; we fired guns; at about 7 a.m. a fishing boat came up to us and took all the rest of the wreck myself included. On our passage ashore we met one of the ship's boats coming off; I got into the boat and returned to the ship to try and save all I could especially the mail; I went down in the cabin the water being then over my knees; I examined as many of the mail bags as I could get at; found one with the London post office seal on it; one bag which had been opened by me at San Francisco marked "Supplementary mail"; the rest were newspapers; the rest were done down in the water in the lazarette; I put the two first bags in the boat and brought them away; the wind was then getting up from the westward and a sea rising and it would not do to load our boat too heavily; we then went ashore another boat being with us in charge of the chief mate; she had landed her passengers and returned I presume to render assistance; I told them not to risk both boats against the wreck; so this boat did not go alongside; I saw the ship sink at 8 minutes past 8 a.m. about 8 miles from shore. The ship had been settling from 3 left light; she sank in what was said to be 30 fathoms water about 4 or 5 miles from shore. We landed at the south part of Point Reyes. After seeing the boats hauled up on the beach I left in search of the telegraph office. Messrs. Wells, Fargo had an express on board not under the special charge of any person; their letters were saved in the fishing boat; their newspaper bundles were bulky and were lost I think; I took these letters out of my room; the express was in small canvas cover bags and were in the same in my room; I did not recollect for them; the mate might have done so; I kept the key of the safe; H.M. mails were in the lazarette; they were not locked up when lost; Wells, Fargo pay nothing except freight on their parcels; if valuable, at a per centage; no freight was charged upon these being so small; no freight is charged for their letters; I have never charged any nor received any gratuity; we carry their letters understanding that if we do so they will give us the benefit of any freight they may have to send. I am not aware that there was a Navy mail on board, although it is probable that there was one, as the Southern steamer had arrived at San Francisco before we left. If on board it would be in the lazarette, which it was intended should be locked; I had no way bill whatever describing the mails; the reason why the newspaper bags were placed in the lazarette was because they were so numerous and were lost I think; I took these letters out of my room; the express was in small canvas cover bags and were in the same in my room; I did not recollect for them; the mate might have done so; I kept the key of the safe; H.M. mails were in the lazarette; they were not locked up when lost; Wells, Fargo pay nothing except freight on their parcels; if valuable, at a per centage; no freight was charged upon these being so small; no freight is charged for their letters; I have never charged any nor received any gratuity; we carry their letters understanding that if we do so they will give us the benefit of any freight they may have to send. 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