

the wars of the time, Behring was entrusted, in 1725, with a scientific expedition to Kamtschatka. It was while thus engaged that he verified the fact that Asia and America were separated by water. In 1741 he made a second voyage to the same waters and made some further discoveries. This expedition proved disastrous, however, for Behring and his crew, being disabled by sickness and trying in vain to make their way to Kamtschatka, were wrecked on the island now called Behring, and there the great explorer breathed his last.

The Hon. Mr. Abbott, whose mission to Australia we were glad to announce some weeks ago, will leave England on the 22nd inst. for his destination via Canada. It is satisfactory to know that Mr. Abbott's negotiations with the agents of the Australian colonies in London were in every way encouraging and that he will start on his journey with good hope of fulfilling the important objects with the attainment of which the Government has entrusted him.

THE BEHRING SEA DISPUTE.

While the account of the great naval review at Spithead is calculated to arouse patriotic pride in the heart of every loyal citizen of the Empire, it is impossible to ignore the coincidence that at the very moment when "the most magnificent naval pageant of modern times" was eliciting the admiration of thousands, a British sealing vessel was fleeing for refuge to the harbour of Victoria. The seizure of the Black Diamond by United States revenue men did not happen without warning. The authorities of Washington had announced their intention of dealing strictly with any foreign craft that should infringe on their pretended rights in the waters of Behring Sea. There was, indeed, a degree of vagueness as to the exact purport of the President's proclamation and the character of the claims that it implied. It was known, however, that Congress had passed a law extending to American waters in Behring Sea the same protection over the seal and other fur-bearing animals as that which was accorded to the waters of Alaska. Certain comments in the American press seemed to indicate that the interdict thus proclaimed had the sanction of Great Britain. But the whole question was involved in such obscurity that the most hazy notions prevailed on both sides of the border as to the aim, character and extent of the prohibition. One thing, however, was clear enough: the effect of the proclamation on the sealers of British Columbia was embarrassing and injurious. They felt themselves menaced by seizure, confiscation and other penalties in the pursuit of their calling, and though they were assured again and again that the powers of intervention arrogated by the Washington Government had no foundation in any treaty or in international law, they could not rid their minds of apprehension in undertaking their usual operations. Some of them were deterred from venturing within the pale of the controverted sealing grounds, thus losing the chances of sharing in the season's best catch. (Of the comparatively few who determined to test the sincerity of the American pretensions, the captain of the Black Diamond was the most fearless and the most successful. According to his sworn affidavit, Captain Thomas entered Behring Sea on the 3rd of July, and, after an interval of unfavorable weather, he and his crew found themselves on the 11th right among the seals, with every prospect of a good catch, when they saw the

revenue cutter, Rush, bearing down on them. In the afternoon the Black Diamond was boarded by Lieutenant Tuttle, with three officers and ten men. Captain Thomas refusing to hand over his papers, the aggressors took them by force, as well as 76 salted skins, and the arms and spears used in sealing. The commander of the Rush then placed an able seaman on board the schooner, with written instructions to take it to Sitka and deliver it up to the Customs officer there. Captain Thomas first tried to find the British men-of-war so as to secure their protection; but failing to discover them, he sailed out of Behring Sea on the 15th ult., and (after some delay in searching for sea otter), made for Victoria, which port was reached on the 7th of August. On the way to Ounalaska, while looking for the British men-of-war, Captain Thomas passed within sight of the Rush, which, however, took no notice of him. After he had directed his course for Victoria, the blue jacket in charge made a demur, but, the Indians aboard assuming a menacing tone, he made no further objection.

The news of the seizure naturally caused a good deal of excitement and discussion. The press of the United States, Canada and Great Britain made such comments as their respective sympathies and the interests involved suggested to the respective writers. The Washington authorities evidently found themselves in a quandary. Now that the vague pretensions of control over Behring Sea had been affirmed in such a high-handed manner, no member of the cabinet seemed desirous of taking the responsibility in his own person. Inquiries being referred to the Treasury Department, the acting Secretary, in view of its admitted gravity, declined to make any explanation until Mr. Windom's return. In England the seizure caused intense indignation, as well as the wanton outrage as at the apathy on the part of the Government, which had encouraged the Americans in their audacity. Lord Salisbury and his colleagues have, of course, had their apologists; but there is really no excuse for the procrastination of which the Premier and Lord Knutsford were guilty in the face of the repeated appeals for protection of the British Columbia press. It is well to know that the Mother Country has at last awakened to the grave consequences of permitting absurd claims to remain for months undisputed until, taking silence for consent, the pretenders resorted to violence in supporting them. Even, before 1867, when Alaska and the chain of islands that links its peninsula with Asia were in possession of Russia, neither Great Britain nor the United States conceded to that power territorial rights in Behring Sea. That our neighbours should now regard it as a *mare clausum* is, therefore, inconsistent with their own past contention, as well as with common sense. Surely, if Russia, with territory on both continents, had no exclusive rights there, neither, *a fortiori*, can they claim such rights. In fact, a misunderstanding on the question could never have arisen had Great Britain been faithful to the only true principle of Imperial unity and looked upon the interests of British Columbia, as she would look upon those of Kent or Northumberland, of Argyle or Galway. Still it is satisfactory to know that the vexed problem is at last about to have a definite and final settlement, and we hope that, in the negotiations, the losses of the persecuted sealers will not lack consideration.

The price asked for Dickens' house, near Rochester, is £7,000.



The work of photographing the stars of the Northern Hemisphere has been commenced at Mount Vincent with the Harvard thirteen-inch photographic telescope.

Paper has long been made from wood pulp, but it is now manufactured from the sawdust refuse of mills. When tarred and dried it makes an admirable sheathing for houses.

A French chemist has spun nitrated cellulose into artificial silk more wonderful and more beautiful than the well known spun glass. It is coloured at pleasure while in solution, and, after drying, is unaffected by acids, alkalies, hot or cold water, alcohol or ether.

Canada has not been able to make much of its mineral oil deposits, owing to the presence of sulphur in the oil, which caused a disagreeable smell, and fouled the lamps when burning. A means has now been discovered of removing the sulphur, so that the Dominion will no longer require to import great quantities of oil every year from the States, and may even begin to export on its own account.

In regard to the natural soap mines of Owens Lake, California, it is said by one of the company now working there that the waters of the lake contain a strong solution of borax and soda. In these waters there breeds a grub that becomes a fly. The flies die in the water and drift ashore, covering the ground to the depth of a foot or more. The oily substance of the flies blends with the borax and soda, and the result is a layer of pure soap. These strata repeated from year to year form the soap mines, where large forces of men are now employed.

An association has been organized in Boston to assist Dr. A. DeBaussett to construct a steel air ship upon the vacuum principle. The ship is to be constructed entirely of thin steel plates of the strongest possible tensile strength, and thoroughly braced inside to resist the pressure of the atmosphere when a partial vacuum is obtained. It is expected to lift 200 passengers and 50 tons of mail or other matter, and also carry all the machinery and apparatus with electrical power sufficient to give the ship a speed of 70 miles an hour. A national subscription is being made to secure the necessary funds—\$250,000. DeBaussett claims his plans are approved by eminent scientists and engineering experts. An attempt was made to get him an appropriation from Congress last year, but failed.

A NEW TEXTILE.—M. Vincent Solis Leon says, in the *Revista de Merida*, that a new textile plant has lately been attracting some attention in Yucatan. The natives recognise it under the name of *xtuc*. The *xtuc* grows on the hillocks and in the waste grounds at Yucatan, which are called *cuyos*. The owner of the Xcanhacan *hacienda* has sent several pounds of the *xtuc* fibre to a New York firm, which immediately gave an order for 2,000 bales, offering the price of 15 cents per pound. The fibre, it appears, can be substituted for flax, or be mixed with linen yarn for the manufacture of fine tissues. The *xtuc* grows like the henequen (sisal hemp). In growing, it successively loses its lower leaves, and forms a trunk which grows to a height of four metres and sends out branches in the manner of a tree. It produces, till its decay, several thousands of fibrous leaves averaging 62 centimetres in length.—*Industry*.

FUTURE OF THE STEAM ENGINE.—It has been thought that the sphere of the steam engine would be greatly circumscribed in the future by the growing development of electricity, but Prof. Thurston, of Cornell University, in an article in the *North American Review*, is inclined to the view that this invention is capable of vast improvement, and that it has not yet begun to exhaust its inherent powers. On the basis of the greater developments in the application of inventions to the steam engine, Prof. Thurston predicts that the next generation will see it consuming one pound of fuel per hour for a single horse-power; that ships of 20,000 tons will be driven at the rate of forty miles an hour; that the American continent can be spanned by flying trains in two days, and that transportation between the cities of the Atlantic and those of the Pacific coasts will be so cheap that the general average of living will be vastly improved upon what exists to-day.

THE DEVIL CAST OUT BY SCIENCE.—Conscientious men still linger on who find comfort in holding fast to some shred of the old belief in diabolic possession. The sturdy declaration in the last century by John Wesley, that "giving up witchcraft is giving up the Bible," is echoed feebly in the latter half of this century by the eminent Catholic ecclesiastic in France who declares that "to deny possession by devils is to charge Jesus and his Apostles with imposture," and asks, "How can the testimony of apostles, fathers of the Church, and saints who saw the possessed and so declared, be denied?" And a still fainter echo lingers in Protestant England. But, despite this conscientious opposition, science has in these latter days steadily wrought hand in hand with Christian charity in this field, to evolve a better future for humanity. The thoughtful physician and the devoted clergyman are now constantly seen working together; and it is not too much to expect that Satan, having been cast out of the insane asylums, will ere long disappear from monasteries and camp meetings, even in the most unenlightened regions of Christendom.—*Dr. Andrew D. White, in the Popular Science Monthly*.