

a number of important stations. The Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific has increased the pay of passenger brakemen on certain branch lines from \$45 a month to \$47.50, & a similar advance is granted to brakemen on work trains. The request of switchmen at certain cities to have their pay put on a parity with the rate at Chicago has been denied. The Central of New Jersey has dispensed with the services of brakemen (flagmen) on helping engines used on mountain grades, & on certain freight trains the number of brakemen has been reduced from two to one.—*Railroad Gazette*.

THE ST. LAWRENCE ROUTE.

A St. John's, Nfld., correspondent writes:—It will be a matter of exceeding regret to every well-wisher of Canada that the opening of navigation in the gulf this season should have been marked by a serious misadventure—the loss of the Elder-Dempster Line steamer *Montpelier*, near Cap Ray, on May 4. The steamer was inward bound from the Canary Islands for Montreal, in ballast, & went ashore on Duck Island in a dense fog at 4 a.m., she going at half speed, & the captain supposing himself 15 miles to sea. The ship became a total wreck, but the crew escaped with their lives. A strong current, varying in its force & direction, & in this instance likely setting in on the land, is assigned as the cause of this shipwreck, & is probably the correct solution.

The disaster is regrettable for many reasons, but chiefly because the enemies of the St. Lawrence route will seize upon it as another argument in support of their contention that the gulf waterway is unsafe, & because the marine insurance underwriters will use it as an excuse for still further increasing their tariff of rates, already almost prohibitory. It will be remembered that when the *Scotsman* was lost in the Strait of Belle Isle last Sep. the catastrophe was made a peg on which to hang all sorts of adverse criticisms of the route, & it was openly threatened that any attempt to navigate that channel during the season of 1900 would be followed by an advance in the rates of insurance for ships & cargoes which would oblige steamer-owners to abandon the Belle Isle channel altogether. The Dominion Line, stricken by two losses, the *Labrador* in the spring & the *Scotsman* in the fall, did decide to abandon it, & use Cabot Strait, the southern waterway, instead, & it was thought the other leading lines would follow their example. The *Montpelier* shipwreck in Cabot Strait may now be held to prove that as dangerous an entrance as the other, though it should need but little argument to demonstrate the fallacy of any such reasoning.

There is no comparison between Belle Isle & Cabot Straits as to their relative degrees of safety, & people who use the one as an argument against the other show a very lamentable lack of knowledge of the subject. As a matter of fact, there are very strong and conclusive reasons against the use of Belle Isle; there are none whatever against Cabot Strait. Belle Isle Strait possesses every disadvantage possible to such a route. It is a channel between 40 & 50 miles long, & not more than 10 to 15 miles wide. Its narrowness is accentuated by the fact that the approaches to

it are by long and gradually converging coasts, creating tempestuous currents, which sweep into it from each end, & cause such a conflict of waters that there is no charting them. The region is almost constantly enveloped in fog, the rugged shores are but insufficiently lighted, the charts & sailing directions are necessarily imperfect, & the width of the waterway does not allow room for shipping to manoeuvre properly, nor for navigators to make the allowances essential to a safe passage of such a land-bound channel. Furthermore, the Strait is altogether unsuited for the high speed which transatlantic steamers have to maintain, the jealousies of rival lines, & the desire to make record passages spurring shipmasters to disregard precautions which would otherwise be taken, for besides the dangers from the fogs & the currents there are the no less serious risks from collisions with bergs & floes of ice, which are ever found floating in the Strait of Belle Isle & adjacent waters. These, indeed, constitute an even greater danger to shipping there than any other cause, for to the one ship which goes on the rocks two or three are damaged or sunk by collision with ice, as not a year pas-

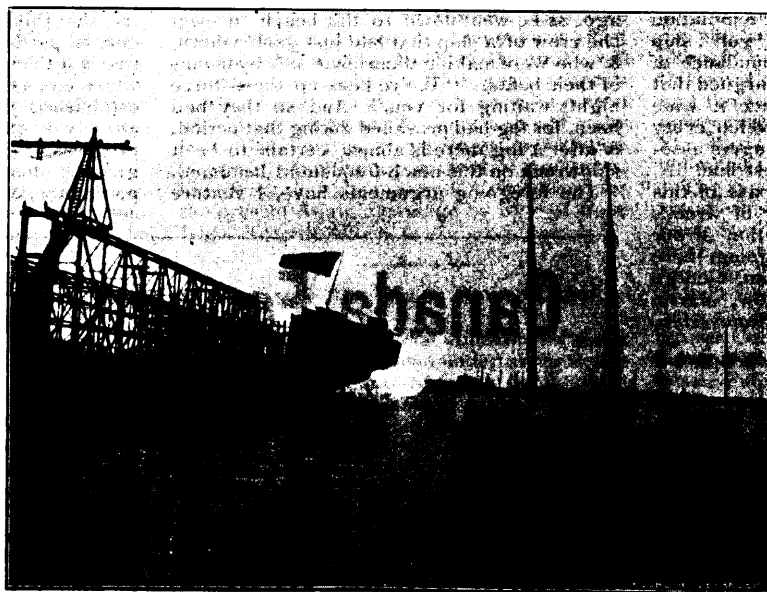
proaches & compare them with Cabot Strait, & you must be convinced of the strength of the foregoing contentions, as well as of the one which follows, viz., that there is such an expanse of ocean east of Cabot Strait, & the trend of the coast is so easy & gradual, that there is less danger to the mariner in making a landfall than on any other part of the American continent. This is explained by the fact that almost everywhere else along the Atlantic seaboard a ship runs head on to the land, & if her speed is miscalculated the first thing known may be her telescoping her bows on the rocks, but in the case of Cabot Strait, the Newfoundland & Cape Breton coasts run almost parallel with her course, & should be sighted abeam, under all ordinary circumstances, & any deviations from the course rectified before she could possibly go ashore, unless the navigation was inexcusably deficient.

Analyzing now the matter of wrecks, it is our experience in this island that 90% of the shipping disasters on our south coast is in shipping plying to & from U.S. ports, & not Canadian ports, as is popularly supposed. The percentage of losses via Belle Isle is large, it is true, but we will disregard that route for the purposes of this argument, the writer's view being that Canada, to uphold her commercial supremacy, should abandon Belle Isle altogether & utilize Cabot Strait. Therefore, it is stated definitely that the shipwrecks via Cabot are very few, all things taken into account. In five years only two laden east-bound steamers have gone ashore, the *Texas* in St. Mary's Bay, which became a total loss, though most of her cargo was saved, & the *Arcadian*, which took the ground near Codroy, but was got off after a week's pounding on the rocks. Other ships have stranded, but were refloated with little damage, & it may be said that for ships coming out the gulf this route represents the maximum of safety.

For ingoing steamers the risk is little, if at all, greater. The *John Knox* some years ago, the *Prudence* later on, the *Montpelier* the

other day, are the most conspicuous examples. The reasons before cited as showing the difficulty of striking the shore if ordinary precautions are taken must have applied, for disasters only occur when the currents, always variable, acquire an accession of force which sets at naught the best calculations of the most skilful navigators. In the case of the *Montpelier* the captain had sighted St. Pierre-Miquelon at noon the previous day & corrected his position accordingly, but the force of the current was so great that in a few hours it had set him in on the rocks, whereas the course he had laid should have brought him 15 miles south of Cape Ray & well towards the middle of the strait. This shipwreck is only one such as is reported daily from some part of the world, & implies no reflection of necessity on either captain or ship, not to say the route.

Most of the wrecks on our coast occurs on the southern spits of Avalon peninsula, the land-mass forming the south-east portion of this island, & of which Cape Race is the best known point. All transatlantic shipping makes Cape Race a base for sighting or departure, & as the gulf stream sweeps round this headland on its way to the north it has a



LAUNCHING OF THE CANADA ATLANTIC TRANSIT CO.'S STEAMER OTTAWA
AT TORONTO, MAY 23.

ses without one or more making this port to effect repairs from collision with bergs, while the crews of others which have gone down reach our coast in their boats & relate an all too familiar tale of disaster.

But with regard to Cabot Strait no such arguments hold good. To put forward an isolated case of shipwreck within its confines as an evidence that it is unsafe, is about as senseless as to argue that the English Channel is unsafe because the *Elbe* sank through a collision, or the *Mohegan* was lost on the Manacles. As a matter of fact, in point of sea-room & navigability Cabot Strait is superior to that of any of the approaches to the leading British commercial seaports. The width of Cabot Strait is 60 miles, greater than the average width of the English Channel, much greater than that of the St. George's Channel, & very much greater than the North Channel, & it is by these passages that we westerners obtain access to London, Liverpool & Glasgow. The neck of Cabot Strait is 54 miles across; from Dover to Calais is but 28, yet nobody ventures to question the safety of the latter passage in spite of all the British & Baltic trade which goes through it. Take a map of the United Kingdom, study the ap-