

THE STORY OF THE STEAMSHIP

BY

SIR SANDFORD FLEMING, LL.D., K.C.M.G.

Reprinted from the Transactions of the Canadian Institute, 1911.

UNIVERSITY PRESS: TORONTO

THE STORY OF THE STEAMSHIP.

BY SIR SANDFORD FLEMING, LL.D., K.C.M.G.

(Read 11th February, 1911.)

In January of the present year I read in the "Evening Star" published in Dunedin, New Zealand, an interesting article on the history of Steam navigation. The article is illustrated by a plate of the "British Queen" which is set forth as the *first steamship to voyage across the Atlantic*.

The subject was brought to the consideration of the Canadian Institute many years ago and I felt warranted in advising the editor of the "Evening Star" of Dunedin, and in setting right the readers of that publication in the Dominion of New Zealand. I alluded to the facts stated in the Transactions of the Canadian Institute for 1891-92 when they offer a note on Ocean Steam Navigation (page 165) and on early steamboats (page 174). I further communicated with the highest authority known to us viz, Mr. James Croil, author of *Steam Navigation*. Mr. Croil confirmed all the facts submitted and enabled me to mention to our fellow citizens in New Zealand that a Canadian built ship, "Royal William" was six years ahead of the British Queen and that it is quite a mistake to award to Fulton of New York the credit of having in 1803 solved the problem of propulsion by steam on lake or sea.

Among the early efforts to propel vessels by steam, the most successful were those of Patrick Miller, on Dalswinton Loch in Scotland, in 1788 and of Symington on the Forth and Clyde Canal, in the years following. In 1801 an experiment in steam navigation was made on the Thames, and in 1802 under Symington's supervision the "Charlotte Dundas" was put in operation on the Forth and Clyde Canal; in the latter case it happened that Robert Fulton of New York and Henry Bell of Glasgow were both present. The latter afterwards made successful efforts in establishing steam navigation on the Clyde, as also did Fulton on the Hudson at New York. Mr. Bell's memory is perpetuated in an obelisk erected by the city of Glasgow on a picturesque promontory on the Banks of the Clyde. Fulton constructed in 1807 at New York the "Clermont"; the following winter she was enlarged, renamed the "North-River" and for a number of years plied on the Hudson as a passenger boat. In 1809 the first steamboat appeared on the St. Lawrence. The "Accommodation" was built by the Hon. John Molson, the

father of steamboat enterprise in Canada. The "Accommodation" made her maiden trip from Montreal to Quebec, in the year mentioned 1809.

The first vessel to cross the Atlantic under steam power was undoubtedly "The Royal William". This vessel was built by a joint stock company at Quebec in 1831. The hull when constructed was towed to Montreal to receive the machinery; and on being fitted for sea, her first voyage was to Halifax. Before setting out for England she traded for two years between Quebec, Halifax and Boston. The "Royal William" left Quebec for England August 5th, 1833, called at Pictou, Nova Scotia, to be replenished with coal. She re-started from Pictou August 18th. The passage from Pictou to Cowes, Isle of Wight occupied nineteen and a half days. The "Royal William" did not return to Canada, she entered the service of Dom Pedro as a troop ship, was sold to the Spanish government, converted into a war steamer and renamed the "Isabel Secunda." After an eventful service she was laid up in Bordeaux where her Canadian hull remained. The machinery made in Montreal was transferred to a new hull and formed a second "Isabel Secunda" which afterwards was wrecked on the coast of Africa.

The record incontestably goes to establish that the Canadian built "Royal William" was the pioneer of Atlantic Ocean Steamships.

Bearing on the subject and vouched for by Mr. Croil, the following facts are submitted in chronological order.

In 1833 the "Royal William"—363 tons, made the voyage from Canada to England in less than twenty days, the first ship to cross the ocean under steam.

In 1838 the "Sirius"—700 tons, crossed from London to New York in seventeen days.

In 1838 the "Great Western"—1340 tons, from Bristol to New York, in fifteen days.

In 1839 the "British Queen"—1863 tons, from Portsmouth to New York in seventeen days.

In 1840 the "Britannia" first of the Cunard line, from Liverpool to Boston, in fourteen days and eight hours, including detention at Halifax.

In 1845 the "Great Britain" the first to introduce screw propulsion 3270 tons, crossed to New York—was stranded the following year in Dundrum Bay, Ireland. The "Scotia" of the Cunard line in 1862 (withdrawn in 1875) was the last of the ocean paddle wheel steamers.

In 1849 the "Atlantic" of the Collins line, from New York to Liverpool.

In 1850 the "City of Glasgow" of the Inman line—1610 tons, Liverpool to Philadelphia.

The first steamers to enter the St. Lawrence after the "Royal William" from Boston and Halifax were the "Unicorn" in connection with the Cunard line; later on the "Genova" in 1853—the "Cleopatra" in 1854—the "Canadian" of the Allan line in 1854.

In 1905 the turbine engine was adopted by the Allan Line in the "Victorian" and "Virginian" with excellent results.

In 1896 the "Parisian" 5365 tons, made the voyage from Moville to Ramouski in six days and thirteen hours.

In 1909 the "Victorian" made the voyage from Liverpool to Quebec in six days and twenty eight minutes

The Lusitania and Mauritania of the Cunard line are both fitted with turbine engines.

The "Empress of Ireland" of the Canadian Pacific Railway line, made the voyage from Halifax to Liverpool in January of the present year 1911, in five days and sixteen hours.

The "Royal Edward" of the Atlantic Royal line, made the passage between August 4th and August 10th, 1910, from Bristol to Quebec in 5 days, 20 hours.

The same steamer made the passage between November 23rd and November 29th, 1910, from Bristol to Halifax in 5 days, 12 hours.

The Royal Edward, accordingly, holds the record up to date for the fastest westbound passage between Great Britain and Canada.