# SPIRIT OF THE PRESS.

**Editorial Opinions of the Leading Journals Upon Current Topics—Compiled Every Day for the Evening Telegraph.**

## STEAMBOAT DISASTERS, AND HOW TO PREVENT THEM.

*From the N. Y. Times.*

If there is any circumstance that can add to the ghastliness of our modern steamboat disasters, it is the fact that they are permitted if not provided for by law. After some years of fussing, Congress has at length perfected an act which, however well it may co-operate with care and vigilance on the part of steamboat managers, nevertheless permits careless and reckless officers to blow up boilers, sink and burn steamboats, and make river traveling little less terrible than it was in the early days of Mississippi racing. Steam pressure may be limited, the rule of the road may be defined, and fire pumps may be provided; but so long as boilers explode every day, so long as ships collide and then sink right to the bottom for want of bulkheads, so long as steamboats invariably burn up when well set on fire, the law is practically as inadequate as no law, to reasonable and organized security.

The Stonewall horror is a fearful but not unusual commentary on the state of legislation respecting the safety of life. That a passenger could by any possibility go about among a combustible cargo with a naked candle or a lighted pipe; that the whole thousand-horse power of a burning steamer should be uselessly straining in its boilers, when a fraction of its energy rightly and instantly directed would deluge the decks with water; that a whole ship's company should be drowned in smooth water, within a stone's throw of shore, for the want of boats numerous and well-appointed enough to take them clear of her as fast as they could get over her side; that every single means of safety which reasonable care could suggest, or which known and established arts and inventions could supply, were either wanting or unused; that every single appliance which law had provided, either to prevent disaster or to check it, was utterly abortive: that fire and flood could swallow up a passenger steamer full of power and skill with as little hindrance as an encampment of Indians would offer to a burning prairie, or a den of wild beasts to a mountain freshet, or a South American city to an earthquake;—that this is the net result of all our investigations and commissions of experts, and long-drawn reports and amended laws, is a worthy tribute to our system of legislation on technical affairs, and the crowning glory of our civil service!

If the Stonewall had been filled with tinder; if cotton bales had been piled round her furnaces; if the whole crew had been drunk and playing poker by naked torches; if there had never been a fire-pump nor a bucket on board of her; if every one of her boats had been stove; if life-preservers had not been invented; if there had been no scientific investigations, no mechanical inventions, no legislation; if the Congressmen of the United States had been even less distinguished than at present as experts in engineering and steam navigation; if the doomed vessel had contended with all these perils—she and her company could not have perished more miserably. Of what use is any pretence of legislation on these subjects, when nearly every collision or rupture of machinery or careless lighting of a fire, ends in the broiling, mangling, or strangling of hundreds of human beings?

This last horror is only one, and perhaps the most unfrequent, phase of peril by steamboat. Every few months, from one of numerous and ever-present causes, a vessel gets a hole knocked in her side, and then down she goes, before her people can get out of their berths, when either bulkheads or suitable water-discharging apparatus could save her if she were cut half in two. It requires some coolness to fight fire and tempest, even if the appliances are as they should be, but if a hull is properly constructed, all hands may turn in after any ordinary collision, and let her take care of herself. To build a vessel without bulkheads is a risk that owners will take as long as they are permitted; but for Government to allow clearances to such vessels, is simply a crime against humanity. Bulkheads properly secured are as certain to keep a vessel afloat after a collision as a steam engine is to turn a screw; both may fail, but if the latter is on the whole practical, so is the former. But there is another way to keep a vessel afloat. The engineering periodicals have lately described the results of a sort of mammoth injector, dozens of which may be placed all over the ship, and worked by the whole boiler power of the vessel, with a pumping capacity equal to any known emergency, and this, too, without the intervention of moving parts, but by the simple turning of a cock. If there is any objection to this, the centrifugal pump, that wonderful cataract-maker that attracts so much attention in our industrial fairs, or the ordinary steam pumping engine, may, at a comparatively small expense, be so fitted in ships as to receive the whole power if necessary, and to neutralize a leak through which a coach-and-six might drive. It does seem stupid beyond measure, to let a ship incontinently burn up or go to the bottom, when there is force enough wasting within her to lift her or her weight of water bodily into the air once a minute.

The reason why these things are permitted is clear, and the remedy is most simple and most feasible. Despite the indifference of legislators as a class to the subjects that have no immediate relation to politics and politicians, no direct bearing on party ascendancy, no special reference to immediate constituencies, we are unwilling to believe that they would neglect a subject of such vast interest to the whole people if they knew how to cope with it. They are as profoundly ignorant of the remedies for steamboat disasters as they are of medicine, languages, or the evidences of Christianity; it is not in their line; they do not know what to do or whom to consult, or what advice to take or what to reject. If they were satisfied that the details of the whole matter of the public against the transporters could be managed and watched by thoroughly-competent experts, and that laws could be suggested and executed by officers who had no aim in life but to deserve and hold these offices for life, Congressmen would not withhold their votes from strong, comprehensive, and even revolutionary acts to compel the use of reasonable means of safety. Let us have a reformed civil service.

## THE FRIENDS AMONG THE INDIANS.

*From the N. Y. Tribune.*

A committee of Friends, appointed at the yearly meetings of Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York to visit the Indians under the care of their denomination in the State of Nebraska, has recently made a report, in which, with much cause for shame, we see also no little cause for confidence. On all the reservations the complaint seems to have been the same—the whites have swindled the savages and lied to them so often that no more confidence is felt in the civilized race. It was found, for example, that the Iowas had made a treaty (now before the Senate) for the sale of their lands. They "stated emphatically that they did not want the treaty ratified; it was made through a misunderstanding; they had been moved, and moved, and moved, and all they wished now was to remain where they are, have oxen and tools to work with, and a farmer to instruct them how to do for themselves." The Otoes were found in great distress, owing to the failure of the Government to keep faith in the payment of their annuities. Of the Santee Sioux the committee say, "These poor people have been so greatly deceived for many, many years by false professions and unfulfilled promises from the whites, and even from the Government, that the time does not seem to have arrived for them to feel confidence in the assurances we make them." On the Winnebago reservation an Indian asked, "How can we break up our prairie without teams, and how can we work our land or build houses without tools? These have been promised, but not supplied." "In every council we have held with them unfulfilled promises and treaty stipulations, and unsupplied pressing wants, are the great burdens of which they complain." Under the conscientious administration of the disciples of William Penn, we have reason to hope for a reformation. The new agents seem to have entered into their work with Christian enthusiasm and a better purpose than making money out of the theft of beads and blankets. Under their rule we trust we shall never again hear such a remark as an old chief made about a young Indian who was testifying before a commissioner:—"Oh, he tells the truth; he has never seen a white man before!" All the tribes whom this committee visited seemed anxious to pursue an agricultural life, and quite capable of accommodating themselves to habits of civilization if they could only be secured in the possession of their lands. And we are pertinently reminded that in Canada, where the Indians are not pushed back on the approach of white settlers, but permitted to retain their homes while the tide of emigration passes by and surrounds them, we never hear of Indian wars and massacres. Of course to the roving Indians of the Plains this comparison will not apply in full force. But the experiment of treating them with truth and justice has never been tried, and if only for the sake of our own reputation it seems high time to begin it.

## THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS.

*From the N. Y. World.*

In a little more than a month, the Senators and Representatives will be on their way to the Federal capital: and when they have assembled, the popularity of the President will be put to a severer test than it has yet encountered. His annual message, which he must soon begin to prepare, will put no great strain upon his faculties, since there is no necessity for writing it himself. It is not very probable, since the late developments, that he will subsidize the ready pen of his brother-in-law, Mr. Corbin; but if Secretary Fish furnishes the part which touches upon our foreign relations, and Secretary Boutwell the financial part, and the other heads of departments their respective quotas, it will be easy enough to get up a composite message without much interruption of the President's attention to his horses, pups, new billiard tables, and the excursions and journeyings with which he diversifies his favorite amusements. If Miss Anthony, or any other "stateswoman," occupied his position, she would probably discharge its duties with as much ability, and a great deal more attention, zeal, and assiduity, than General Grant is likely to exert; and if required to write a message from her own resources, she would exhibit more intellectual fecundity than our sphinx of a Chief Magistrate.

The message can easily be manufactured by deputy; but as soon as Congress is fairly in session, the President will be constantly consulted by members, and cannot avoid disclosing his deficiencies. Even the brief extra session which followed his inauguration did a great deal to "disillusionize" his admirers. He lost popularity every day. The very first request he made of Congress was so absurd as to fill both houses with surprise and contempt; and after disregarding his earliest recommendation, they had no hesitation in treating him as a cipher throughout that brief session. What has taken place during the recess has no tendency to raise him in their estimation. His frivolity during the summer months; his failure, in all his journeyings among the people, to utter one inspiring word or put forth a single idea on any subject of public interest; his indecisive dallying with the Cuban question, and underhand coquetting with the insurgents while blasting their hopes by his public course; his imbecile want of a policy on the Alabama claims question; the scandalous complicity of his near relative in the late gold-gambling operations, and the taint which has been cast upon his appointee for Assistant Treasurer in this city, form a web of unfavorable circumstances which give a great handle to those members of his party who may have motives for belittling his influence. Vice-President Colfax, who is a busy, intriguing, salvy politician, and aspires to be General Grant's successor, will practise all his arts to reduce the President to the proper level of his extremely mediocre abilities; and Congress, unrestrained by any respect for his influence, will treat him with quite as little respect as was manifested for President Johnson, if, like President Johnson, he should be bold enough to oppose its policy.

According to present appearances, the executive branch of the Government will be dwarfed into absolute insignificance during this administration. President Johnson was hated and feared; President Grant will only be ignored and despised. Unlike most party chiefs, he has no large body of attached personal followers; and he has no power of acting on public opinion and arraying it against Congress, if Congress crosses his wishes. He has neither ideas, nor eloquence, nor personal magnetism, nor capacity for political intrigues. He lacks all the means and instruments by which men in high stations exert influence, and subordinate other wills. His imbecility was exhibited in the short extra session at the beginning of his admintration; and next winter, when Congress is in full blast, he will be a conspicuous example of how little official station can do for a man who does not bring to it adequate abilities.

The natural resources of a weak President is a strong cabinet. If General Grant had gathered around him the ablest and most experienced statesmen in the Republican party, his administration might have commanded the respect of Congress; just as in England a strong administration is possible, although the Queen is a person of weak intellect. But General Grant fears or undervalues politicians; he took none of them into his confidence in the interval between his election and inauguration, and his Cabinet when he announced it moves the astonishment and disgust of his own party. But the politicians of Congress contrived to get the better of him and constrained him to fill the most important places with men of their own stamp. After the series of blunders he perpetrated in relation to Mr. Stewart, they had no difficulty in forcing him to put a radical politician at the head of the Treasury, an office which has more patronage and influence than any other in the Government. They also forced him to put a radical politician at the head of the Post-office Department, which, next to the Treasury, ranks highest in patronage and influence. The patronage of the other departments is politically of little account. The Attorney-General has none; the Secretary of State can only influence the appointment of officers serving in foreign countries; the Secretaries of War and the Navy deal with officers who generally keep as much aloof from politics by choice as the foreign ministers and consuls do by distance and necessity; and the Secretary of the Interior has almost as little patronage as the Attorney-General. The politicians, in spite of General Grant's dislike of them, were dexterous enough to get control of the only offices which are of much value as a source of influence in the elections. The revenue officers and the postmasters comprise the great bulk of the servants of the Government; in getting control of these, the politicians took the oyster and left the President the shells. He has been circumvented, without perceiving it, by the very politicians whom he so ostentatiously ignored, and of whom he meant to be independent. Mr. Boutwell and Mr. Creswell understand their power, and do not hesitate to use it. They alone, of all the officers of the administration, interfered in the Tennessee election; and Mr. Boutwell has just begun a similar interference with the election in Texas, by ordering the removal of all officers who support Hamilton for Governor. General Grant dares not check this activity, for he knows that Congress will approve it, and that he could not get rid of Boutwell and Creswell without the consent of the Senate. All the effective patronage of the administration is in the hands of the politicians, in spite of him. In the latter part of his term, when the question of the succession looms into prominence, he will find how powerless he is to promote his own interests and aspirations. If Congress, during the coming session, shall find him subservient and servile, he may have two years of insignificance and peace, with liberty and leisure for the junketing to which he is so much addicted; but if he manifests any symptoms of resistance, he will be reduced to a humiliating sense of his dependence.

## MR. BOUTWELL'S LAST MONTHLY STATEMENT OF THE PUBLIC DEBT.

*From the N. Y. Herald.*

The country has reason to be gratified with the official exhibit of the national finances as given in the November statement of the Treasury Department. A steady diminution of the debt continues. Every month shows a decrease, and for the last month that amounts to over seven millions of dollars, according to the way in which the Secretary arrays his figures. We say according to the way in which he arrays his figures, because he excludes the Pacific Railroad bonds or debt as a part of the public debt, which Mr. McCulloch always included. Still the debt has been actually diminished, including the bonds issued to the Pacific Railroad and the interest accrued thereon. We cannot see why Mr. Boutwell does not include these as a part of the public debt. There is little doubt that the Government will have to pay the Pacific Railroad bonds in the end, and it now has to pay regularly the interest on them, notwithstanding the enormous grants of land to the company and the vast earnings of the road. The amount of interest paid and that accrued is upwards of six millions of dollars, while the drawback on this for transportation of mails and other services is less than two millions. Of course the company has paid no money, and, we suppose, never will pay any. Though a great and necessary work, it is a stupendous job, and the people will have to pay both principal and interest, while the managers and stockholders become wealthy from the proceeds. The Pacific Railroad bonds should be included in our national indebtedness.

There is within a fraction of ninety millions of gold in the Treasury, exclusive of gold certificates. There is sufficient to buy up and cancel over a hundred millions of five-twenties, which if so applied would save six millions in gold a year in interest to the Treasury. Why, then, keep this vast sum locked up and unproductive? The hoarding it does not facilitate specie payments. Selling it gradually might bring down the premium on gold considerably. Although the Secretary continues to sell eight millions a month in the market, the accumulation in the Treasury goes on. If Mr. Boutwell's vaults were empty to-day he would have a surplus at the end of the month, for the revenue receipts in gold come in steadily and faster than the demand for paying coin interest on the debt. It must continue to be so from the very nature of our trade and the increasing demand all the time for foreign importations as population, wealth, and commerce increase. There is no necessity for hoarding gold in the Treasury. The Secretary only needs a few millions on hand at any time as a check upon the gold speculators. All the rest—nearly the whole of the ninety millions now on hand—is dead capital and a loss to the country of six millions of gold a year. If the reserve of the precious metal in the Treasury could have the effect of facilitating specie payments, or of being the representative of our currency, as the reserve in the Bank of England is, there would be reason in holding it for that purpose; but it has no such effect. The consequence is the interest on this vast amount of dead capital is lost to the country. Will Mr. Boutwell consider this, and adapt his financial policy to the laws of political economy and common sense?


LEGAL NOTICES.

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE, WASHINGTON, D. C., October 23, 1869. On the petition of WILLIAM W. HUBBELL, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, praying for the extension of a patent granted to him on the 23d day of January, 1856, and reissued on the 19th day of January, 1858, for an improvement in ECCENTRIC EXPLOSIVE SHELLS, it is ordered that the testimony in the case be closed on the 18th day of December next, that the time for filing arguments and the Examiner's report be limited to the 28th day of December next, and that said petition be heard on the 3d day of January next. Any person may oppose this extension. SAMUEL S. FISHER, Commissioner of Patents. 10 28th3w

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LOST CERTIFICATES.—NOTICE IS HEREby given that application has been made to the City Treasurer for the issue of duplicates of the following described certificates of the Six per Cent. Loan of the City of Philadelphia (free of taxes):— No. 4,65, $1000, dated October 5, 1864. 4966, $500, " " 5, 1864. 4960, $4500, " " 26, 1864. 5271, $2500, " November 30, 1864. $8500, in name of JOHN H. B. LATROBE, in trust. AUSTIN & OBERGE, 9 9 ths26t No. 313 WALNUT Street.

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