





THE ZUID-AFRIKAAN.

CAPE TOWN, FEBRUARY 9, 1894.

The Report of the Commissioners, appointed to inquire into the circumstances connected with the Wreck in Table Bay, of the Francis Spaight and Diana, on the 7th ult., and the loss of life on that occasion, published in the Gazette of Thursday last, has been copied by us for general information.

If the maxim, that good often results from evil, has ever been fully demonstrated, it has surely been so in the present instance. The various interrogatories to which the Commission felt itself constrained, have proved beyond all doubt, that no one in this colony considers himself, in virtue of his office, under the direct obligation to offer assistance to vessels in danger; and that, if the agents of vessels, from a misplaced economy, might neglect it, valuable life and property may be sacrificed without any proper endeavor to save either.

It also appears from this enquiry that the Humane Society, from which the public had been induced to cherish such fair prospects, was by the most decided mismanagement and consequent confusion which we ever witnessed, totally unable to accomplish those noble objects which were put forth on its establishment. It is therefore of no use whatever, except to be erased, the sooner the better, from the list of our benevolent institutions; and we consequently fully concur in the recommendation of the commission, to place the means for rendering efficient aid in the hands of the colonial government. It is indeed but a very poor attempt at exonerating, to assert, at the eleventh hour, a want of the necessary funds as the cause of not carrying out the original intentions of the Society; though no shadow of proof exists that a single endeavour was ever made to acquaint the public, who so nobly came forward at the outset, with the existing want, and to call for their further support. They are fortunately therefore free from all blame in this respect; and in the midst of the most painful recollections of that truly fatal catastrophe, it must indeed produce matter of sincere gratification, that the wants alluded to have been brought to light, at a season, when they are comparatively little felt, and which gives ample opportunity to make such efficient arrangements for the ensuing winter as will be calculated to spare the Cape public the painful task of witnessing a recurrence of such heartrending scenes, as the stranding of vessels on the shores of our harbour, has often produced.

We cannot concur however, in the recommendation of the Commissioners of Inquiry, to register the licensed boatmen as "beachmen," and to compel them, on pain of forfeiting their licences, to place themselves, in case of danger, under the command of the Port Captain; as, though it is also contemplated to remunerate them for their services, this measure savours too much of coercion, and is in no wise calculated to provide in the actual want—the manning of the life boats—the Commissioners proposing to have this service performed by volunteers from amongst the beachmen or others.

In our opinion it would be more desirable, if a certain number of men were engaged at an annual salary, who would not only be bound, on being called out by the Port Captain, or some other chief officer, to assist at the stranding of vessels, but a number of whom should also bind themselves, to man the boats in case of necessity, and whose services might be ensured by withholding a part of their salary (which should exceed that of the others) either for a time, or until an opportunity arises to call them into action.

By such an arrangement, we venture to say, the services of many of our boatmen would not only be ensured, but also those of a large number of fishermen, (amongst whom there are several bold seafarers), independent of the benefit which would thereby be bestowed on this really poor class, who, in bad weather, have no employment for several days running, and could always hold themselves ready to repair to the place of danger, when called out for that purpose by signals to be made to that effect.

By the Packet we have received English papers to the 6th December last, some extracts from which have been copied elsewhere.

The anticipated scarcity of food had created considerable agitation throughout the United Kingdom. In almost every town public meetings had been held and petitions adopted to press upon the Government the necessity of devising means to avert the threatened danger of "famine and consequent plague;" and, as a first step immediately to repeal the mischievous Corn Laws by which the importation of foreign grain, was so much restricted. This question was now considered as one from which the life or death of many thousands depended, and one of the speakers at a meeting held in Liverpool for the above stated purpose, asserted among others, that the nation paid at present £400,000 a week more for provisions than during the same period of the previous year.

The various proposals submitted to Government had however not been ineffectual, and it will be observed from an extract from the Times of the 6th December, that Parliament would meet in January to take this subject into serious consideration, and there was not the least doubt as to the entire repeal of those baneful restrictions.

The latest intelligence from America was of a more pacific character than that previously received—at least as regards the tone of the journals and the language of the political speakers,—and had given occasion to the most desirable inference that all fear of a conflict between that country and England, had disappeared for the present, and that it would see the necessity of amicably arranging the existing dispute.

The intended expedition to Madagascar was said to be ready for sea, and though some of the French Journals complained bitterly that it would take place in concert with England, we do not find that any preparations are made for that purpose by the latter Power. The squadron will be placed under the command of Capt. Desfosses, Commander of the Bourbon Station,—the services of the Prince de Joinville being most likely required for matters of greater moment.

Besides these particulars the papers contain little of importance to the colonial reader.

THE POST OFFICE.

We beg to call particular attention to a Government Notice in our advertising columns, for the establishment of Post Offices between the various towns and villages of the colony, the want of which has been a constant source of grievance among our country population, and entirely prevents many from obtaining that information which every civilized person considers an indispensable ingredient to guide him through this life of trouble and misery.

Not to speak of other Districts at present, we are of opinion that the establishment of such a Post Office between Cape Town and Malmesbury, say half-way, would be of great service to the inhabitants of Koeberg and its environs; as, though the present post-rider (as we have been informed) passes several places on his route to Malmesbury, he does not consider himself bound to deliver a single letter or newspaper before he arrives at the place of his destination—the village above alluded to.

OPENING OF THE SCHOOL ROOM AT WYNBERG.

Sunday last, the 1st of February, was one of the most solemn and delightful days ever spent by me, having attended the opening of the School Room to the Dutch Reformed Church at Wynberg.

I leave it to hands more competent than mine to describe the solemnities of that day in every particular, but I am gratified in communicating to the public that the preparations for those interesting proceedings were so appropriate; the procession of about six hundred people to the School Room, so solemn; the inauguration prayer so imposing, and the various sermons so well conceived, as could be expected.

It must indeed have been gratifying to the friends of the Moravian Brethren to hear the Rev. Mr. FAURER bestow his me of praise on the congregation of *Harahut*, as a division of the Christian Church, which above all other church communities, have given and still give a noble example of fidelity and obedience to the commandment of our Lord: "teach all nations" as an injunction which was carried into effect by them in this colony, even before any one of the present prosperous missionary societies were established.

The reverend clergyman directed the attention of his congregation to their example, and to the blessings which the Moravian Brethren enjoyed,—the blessings of simple morals, sincere piety and true brotherly love constantly granted to them by the Lord, whose injunction they so nobly fulfil.

REPORT.

Of the Commissioners, appointed to inquire into the circumstances connected with the Wreck of the Francis Spaight and Diana, on the 7th ult.

It appears by the evidence, that on the evening of the 6th, the weather was unsettled, and the barometer unusually low for this season of the year; but rain rather than wind being expected, the usual preparations for riding out a gale were not made by the shipping in the bay.

During the night the gale increased. At 4 o'clock the top-gallant yards of the Francis Spaight were sent down, the small bower anchor was let go, cable veered on the best bower, to about 100 fathoms, and 30 of the small bower.

Whilst in the act of striking top-gallant masts, the ship parted the best bower; the small bower was then veered out to the clew, and as soon as the chain hauled in, it broke. An attempt, it appears, was then made to make fast to the ship, for the purpose of working her out of the bay, but without success, and she eventually drove down on the strand, which she took nearly abreast of.

It appears that the only means of communicating with the ship at the time of her striking the ground was by a fishing boat, which happened to be on the beach in the neighbourhood, and that the amount of £200 was made to the person in charge of this boat at the instance of the agent for the vessel, as also by himself, to induce him to go off to her, for the purpose of bringing a line on shore, but which, after some delay, he finally declined to accept.

Mr. Taylor's rocket apparatus arrived, and he commenced attempting to throw a line over the ship by means of a rocket. The two first attempts failed, but the third succeeded so far as to bring a line over the fore top-gallant stay, but of which the crew did not avail themselves.

The people on board the Francis Spaight succeeded in veering a line ashore, by means of a brinker, to which a line was bent on from the shore but in hauling it on board it unfortunately carried away.

After this a whale boat, which had been brought to the spot on a wagon, belonging to Mr. Jersey, arrived; she was manned by her own people, and was sent off to the ship, for the purpose of bringing a line on shore. On her getting alongside, a line was thrown into her, and made fast to the boat's thwart. Whilst in this situation, some of the whale boat's crew called to the men on board the ship to jump into her. This they repeated more than once.

The crew then rushed into the boat, with the exception of one man; the boat was then shoved off, and as they were getting their oars to pass, a heavy sea struck her; she filled, and was immediately capsized. With the exception of one man belonging to the Francis Spaight, and two of the whale boat crew, they were all drowned.

The man who remained in the vessel got on shore safe, at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

We are of opinion, that if there had been on the beach a person invested with authority, and furnished with the necessary means for communicating with the ship, at the time she came on shore, no lives would have been lost.

It does not appear that blame is justly attributable to any person on the spot, as no one appeared to be able to direct or control the operation. We regret that the sheet anchor of the Francis Spaight was not ready for use, as required by the port instructions. And also that after she had parted, measures were not taken for heaving her on an eligible spot, instead of attempting to work her out, which, in our opinion, would have been impossible for her to have done.

The Francis Spaight did not make any signals of distress. As at about 7 o'clock the port captain made the signal to the vessels in the bay to strike lower yards and top masts, which signal was not obeyed.

It appears that as soon as the port captain observed the Francis Spaight to be drifting, he sent to inform the agents for the vessel, and recommended them to dispatch a surf boat on a wagon immediately with a strong party of seamen (as coolies would be of use) down to the negro barracks; he being at the time too unwell to go himself. He afterwards sent the assistant port-captain to give his advice, and do every thing in his power for the vessel. We find that applications were made to several members of the committee of the Humane Society for the use of their life boat, by the agent of the vessel and others;—but owing, we have reasons to believe, to the want of efficient arrangements on the part of the society, arising from want of funds, and an opinion having been expressed by a natural member of that committee that he was not qualified, delays in launching her took place, until an attempt to do so was stopped by a clerk from the agent's house, informing them it was too late.

The Diana, being very badly found in anchors and cables, was unable to ride out the gale, and was put on shore in a very unseaman like manner by the officer in charge of her. No lives were lost.

In consequence of the Humane Society being unable from want of funds, and other causes, to afford the assistance to vessels wrecked, which the public might be led to expect from such a society,—it is proposed to place the necessary means for rendering efficient assistance in the hands of the colonial government.

It is recommended, that the port captain should be appointed wreck master, or superintendent of such measures as he, as an experienced seaman, shall deem necessary to be resorted to in case of shipwreck, for the purpose of affording in the first instance, the lives of the crews of such vessels as may be, or are likely to be wrecked, whose lives are in imminent danger. And afterwards to render every assistance during the gale which may be necessary towards saving the vessel (if possible) and the cargo.

Every licensed boatman in Table Bay should be registered as a beachman.

They should be divided into two divisions, and under penalty of losing their licences as boatmen, shall be compelled when certain signals are made, which will hereafter be described, to repair to the port office and put themselves under the command of the port-captain during the time their services may be required.

When a gun is fired, and a red flag hoisted at the port office, the first division of boatmen shall repair without delay to the port office, where a gun is fired and a blue flag hoisted, the second division will do the same.

When two guns are fired, and both flags are hoisted, both divisions will do the same. If during the signal is made for either of the divisions, the services of the other be wanted on a gun being fired, and the flag of the division required being hoisted, it will immediately repair there.

At night a red or blue light (lantern) will be hoisted instead of the flag.

If any registered boatman does not attend himself, he should find an able-bodied seaman as his substitute.

When the signal is made for the port office for the boatman, a strong body of police should immediately repair there, or to that part of the beach where the wreck has taken, or is likely to take place.

The person commanding this police force is immediately to put himself in communication with the port-captain, and to afford aid and assistance in preserving order, preventing confusion, and the interference of bystanders with the boatman, who are to look to the port-captain, or his assistant alone, for instructions.

It is recommended that two efficient life and surf boats be immediately procured.

That one life and one surf boat be placed (on separate carriages) under a shed, in the most eligible situation on the western side of the bay. And that the same be on the eastern side. A rocket apparatus should also be placed in each of these spots. These boats, carriages, rocket apparatus, and sheds, are to be under the charge of the port captain.

A steady and experienced seaman should be appointed to act under the direction of the port-captain for the purpose of keeping these boats, their gear, the rocket apparatus, carriage, &c., in proper order, and ready for immediate use.

The port-captain himself is to inspect the whole establishment, monthly at least, and report the result thereof in writing to the colonial secretary.

It is proposed that these boatmen, when called out, either for exercise or active service, shall be fairly remunerated for their services, by tariff to be hereafter established by government.

The life boat will always be manned in case of danger, by volunteers, from amongst the boatmen or others, whom the port-captain, or his assistant, may think fit for the service required, under such conditions as the port-captain may find himself authorized to offer.

CHARLES EDEN, Captain H.M.S. Winchester. MONTAGUE JOHNSTONE, Lt-Colonel 27th Regiment. JOHN FAIRBAIRN.

Extracts from English Papers.

REPEAL OF THE CORN LAWS. The decision of the Cabinet is no longer a secret. Parliament, it is confidently reported, is to be summoned for the first week in January; and the Royal Speech will, it is added, recommend an immediate consideration of the Corn Laws, preparatory to their total repeal. Sir Robert Peel in one house, and the Duke of Wellington in the other, will, we are told, be prepared to give immediate effect to the recommendation thus conveyed.

An announcement of such immeasurable importance, and to the larger portion of the community so unparalelly gratifying, almost precludes the possibility of comment. No pen can keep pace with the reflections which must spontaneously crowd upon every thoughtful and sensitive mind. They who have long desired this change, and have long traced its manifold bearings on the welfare and happiness of the world, will in one moment see the realization of that their prospect; and will hardly endure to be informed of what they already behold.

The approaching event, therefore, which we this day communicate to our readers, must be left to speak for itself.

It is understood that until Parliament meets nothing is to be done. For the Legislature will be reserved the responsibility and the glory of opening the ports. We presume that none will quarrel with this brief appearance of delay, now that the resolution of the Cabinet is known. The moral certainty of an early opening will be equivalent in its operation to an immediate order in Council.

It is enough for the merchant and the capitalist to know that by the end of January at the latest, the produce of all countries will enter the British market on an absolute equality with our own, excepting only those disadvantages which Nature itself has made, and which man cannot entirely remove. Any unnecessary appearance of haste would only create alarm, and might thus defeat, for a time at least, the very object of the measure. Happily there is no occasion for haste, even if haste were not almost certain to interfere with speed.—Times, Dec. 4.

ENGLAND AND AMERICA.—THE OREGON QUESTION.

NEW YORK, Nov. 14.—In respect of Oregon there is within the past week more ground for believing that a pacific solution will be given to this difficult question. At least, such we have reason to think is the impression of the foreign diplomatic corps at Washington, who naturally watch with much interest the shifting occurrences that serve to indicate what is passing around them.

The expression of public opinion, which has been called forth by the possibility that the conflicting claim to Oregon might lead to war, has been so decisive as probably to strengthen the influence of those in and around the Administration who have heretofore dissuaded from hostile language or preparations.

Upon the whole, therefore, we state with some confidence the belief that the present prospects are more favourable than we have hitherto considered them for a peaceful and mutually satisfactory adjustment of the Oregon question. The official paper at Washington, the Union, of Wednesday night, the 12th inst., thus replies to the charge made against the Government, "That it seeks a war with England on the Oregon question?" "What foundation is there for such a charge? Just this, and no more:—The President declared, six months ago, 'Our right to Oregon is clear and unquestionable.' We put it to every man of honour, has the Administration—or, if they please the Union—done or said anything more? Not one word. On the question of right, nobody staid, the Administration has taken its position. That is all."

The Union then goes on to show that all previous Administrations had taken the same ground, and notably that Mr. Clay, when Secretary of State, had declared in equally strong terms our absolute right to the whole of Oregon, in the very despatch in which instructions were given to offer to the British Government the 49th parallel of latitude as a compromise.

The inference from all this seems fairly to be, that notwithstanding the positive claim of right to the whole territory, this Government does not mean to shut the door to any expedient compromise.

We extract the following from the Washington Union.

"The whole of Oregon or none—this is the only alternative as an issue of territorial right. We wholly deny the break in the American title as before 49 degrees. We hold that our title from 42 degrees to 54 degrees 40 minutes is one title, and as we believe, a perfect title, against all the world. As the question has been discussed for a quarter of a century between us and England, we are not aware of any argument of one phrase purporting to be a precedent—which carries us back to 49 degrees and there rests. We claim as a matter of right the territory drained by the Columbia River. In view of the law of nations, the territory being unoccupied, has its distinctive character and only as one region, in the fact that it is so divided; and in one region we either own it or we do not own it."

"Away, then, once for all with such nonsense as 'the claim of England north of 49 deg. is better than our claim.' Let us at least know clearly, and state accurately, what we do in this matter. If it has ever been deemed expedient (as a matter of compromise, and to finish up a dispute) to give away to England a certain portion of that land, all of which we consider ours; or if from any other motive of high national consideration, it may have been deemed wise to concede the question of possession, let us say so, and put our past action on that ground. But let us make no attempt to cloak our policy under a pretended inferiority of our title to the land so sacrificed. No such pretence can save us."

The whole piece is in the same temper—an appeal to the democracy to stand by the President, and the article thus concludes—

"Meaning, the question must come up in the next Congress. What shall we do in relation to our citizens in Oregon? And we have no doubt that the patriotism of Congress will answer in view of all the facts—recognize them, protect them, establish communication with them, and extend to them a participation of our own free Republican Government."—Times, Dec. 1.

RUSSIA AND THE UNITED STATES.

Much comment has been excited by a declaration in the Washington Union (Government official), to the effect that the Emperor of Russia, "desirous of affording efficient protection to the Russian territories in North America against the incursions of foreign vessels, has authorized cruising to be established for this purpose along the coast by the Russian-American cruisers." The United States Government therefore recommends, through the Washington Union, that American vessels "be careful not to violate existing treaties between the two countries, by resorting to any point upon the Russian-American coast where there is a Russian establishment, without the permission of the governor and commander, not to frequent the interior seas, gulfs, harbours, and creeks upon that coast, at any point north of lat. 25 long. 40." This course on the part of Russia is deemed very significant, especially towards this country, and it is supposed, naturally enough, to have been called forth by the constant publications that have been made in the journals, of the policy of acquiring, by annexation or otherwise, the entire continent of North America. Be the cause of the imperial movement what it may, it is evidently a new and startling feature arising out of the Oregon difficulty.—Col. Gazette, Nov. 8.

THE FRENCH EXPEDITION TO MADAGASCAR.

"It seems," says the Constitutionnel, "that the Government is seriously meditating a new expedition against Madagascar. A naval division is upon the point of being formed for this purpose; the number of vessels it will embrace is not yet known, but Government, it is said, intends to employ several of those at present upon the Bourbon station, and that the division will be completed by a squadron from the ports of France. The troops to be employed will be composed of detachments of infantry, together with the marines of the squadron, having naval artillery with them; but the War Department will likewise furnish its contingent, namely, a company of engineers."—Times.

"The Madagascar affair, in which Great Britain and France act conjointly," as the Courier Francais says, is referred to at considerable length in the papers before us.

The Moniteur publishes a Royal ordinance granting promotion and decorations to the officers, non-commissioned officers, and seamen who distinguished themselves in the attack against Tamatave, at Madagascar.

Abbe Coqueron, chaplain to the Prince de Joinville in the expedition against Morocco, had asked to be attached in the same capacity to the squadron about to depart for Madagascar.

The Courier Francais states, that the instructions to be given to M. Romain Desfosses, commander of the expedition against Madagascar, had been agreed upon in council. "England," it says, "will interfere at Madagascar, in conjunction with France, and both Powers, after exhausting the Ovas, will confine themselves to demand for the merchants of all nations the right of settling on the coast, possessing lands, and trading. The only advantage they intend reserving to themselves will be the exemption for their respective countrymen from all customs and navigation duties, both Governments pledging themselves to employ an equal force and treat on the same conditions." If this were true, the Cabinet would have done more than adjourn the recognition of our rights of sovereignty over Madagascar, which have been established for ages—it would have annihilated these rights with the stroke of the pen.—Times, Dec. 6.

BIRTH OF A FRENCH PRINCE.

The Princess of Joinville was at one o'clock on Wednesday morning safely delivered of a prince, who has received the title of Duke de Penthièvre. Colonial Gazette.

FRANCE AND ALGIERS.

We read in the Courier de Marseille—"We believe we may announce positively that the Government has decided it is necessary to send further reinforcements to Africa, and that, instead of 12,000, it will send 20,000 men before the month of February. This leads to a supposition that our troops will not enter Morocco before the spring, and that between this and then our military operations will be confined to restraining the population of Algeria. In the meantime negotiations will be opened with the Emperor Abderrhaman, in the hope of inducing him to carry into execution the principal clauses of the treaty of Tangier."—Ibid.

FRANCE AND MOROCCO.

The Journal de Toulouse announces that M. Hamond, attached to the Foreign Office, has been despatched with a note addressed to the Emperor of Morocco. It is said that the French Government in that note apprises the Emperor Abd-el-Kader into the Moorish territory. The Emperor is reminded of the terms of the treaty concluded with the French Government, and it is demonstrated to him that those terms have not been executed.—Times.

THE EMPEROR OF MOROCCO AND ABD-EL-KADER.

The Constitutionnel publishes a letter from Tangier of the 15th ult., stating that on receipt of intelligence of the massacre at Djennam Ghassouss by Abd-el-Kader, the Emperor of Morocco had held a grand council, at which it was resolved that he should forthwith leave Fez for Morocco, in order to move remote from the Coasalar body, and thus avoid replying to the note that might be addressed to him by France. The Emperor, accordingly set out in all haste for Morocco, but, reaching Rabat, he found a messenger of the French Consul, the bearer of dispatches of such much importance that the Emperor thought proper to stop there, and to reply to the Emperor, in which he expressed his desire to respect his promise. 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