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Commission, &c.

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Pittsburgh Gazette. PUBLISHED DAILY AND WEEKLY BY S. RIDDLE & CO. FIFTH STREET, ABOVE SMITHFIELD. PITTSBURGH, TUESDAY MORNING, FEB. 26.

[For the Daily Pittsburgh Gazette.]

ROCK OIL.

At no time since the first oil well was bored in Venango county has there been more excitement on the subject than at the present time, or more people going into the business. The success that has attended many of these adventurers of late, particularly on the Kenawha, and on the Beaver and its tributaries, has led to this present state of things. But, truly, we know of no enterprise which partakes of the character of a lottery that promises half as well as this. Many fail, to be sure, but the number of those who meet with success is encouragingly large.

Men are beginning to form theories, based upon close observation, upon this subject; but before we shall speak of theories, we shall state some general facts.

The great bituminous coal field, of which Pittsburgh is nearly the centre, is in fact a basin, both topographically and geologically. It is bounded on the East and South-east by the Appalachian or Alleghany system of mountains; on the North-east by a continuous ridge, which branches off from the Alleghany range in the Northern part of Cambria county, and runs a North-west direction to within a short distance of the shore of Lake Erie, dividing the waters of the Allegheny from those of the Susquehanna and Genesseo. There, within less than twenty miles of Lake Erie, the same ridge, or another, as we may choose to call it, continues in a direction South-east, and nearly parallel with the shore of the lake, about to the line dividing Pennsylvania from Ohio. This ridge, or table land, is more than 1,000 feet above the level of that lake, even, some places, within eight miles of its margin. From the last mentioned point this ridge turns Southward, becomes less clearly defined, but still continues on until it re-unites with the broken and confused Appalachian chain, in Western Virginia, between the Monongahela and Kenawha. It is to this long and continuous range of table land, extending from South-western New York to North-western Virginia, that we owe the two noble rivers, which, uniting at this city, form the Ohio. But for it all the upper portion of the Allegheny would have flowed into Lake Erie, and the waters of the Monongahela would have started on their natural South-west course long before they would have reached this point. So much for the phorography of this grand basin.

Geologically the borders of this basin are higher, relatively, than they are topographically. The strata ascends from the centre in all directions, but more rapidly towards the east and north-east. Beaver and Freeport, for example, are geologically about on a level, and both are many feet higher than Pittsburgh. Clarion and Venango are geologically on a level with Lawrence and Mercer, and all these are nearly on the same level as Beaver and the lower end of Lignonier valley. These facts are ascertained by finding the level of certain mineral substances which run in continuous strata throughout the entire valley.

To show the rapid ascent of the strata eastward, it is only necessary to observe that the same stratum of rock which affords our best building stone, sometimes called "Freeport granite," and which lies near the foot of the hills at the mouth of the Kiskiminetas, is also found on the summit of the Allegheny mountain.

In many parts of this basin extensive deposits of cannel coal exist; but the veins are not continuous like those of the bituminous. These crop out in the greatest volume about midway between the lowest and highest geological levels.

Another feature of this basin is that it is traversed in a direction nearly from north-east to south-west by alternate elevations and depressions of the general surface, giving it the appearance, when viewed from an elevated stand-point, of waves. The Allegheny river, from the Clarion to Pittsburgh, and perhaps further up, breaks through one of these elevations every seven or eight miles. None, however, but a close observer, would perceive this feature.

The whole of this region is a coal field, and both coal and oil are found on the western slope of the western ridge before mentioned. In the lower and more central parts, salt water is found in great abundance, by boring from 400 to 900 feet below the surface, and salt has been manufactured successfully and largely since 1813. The manufacture began on the Conemaugh, between where Blairsville now is, and the mouth of the Loyalhanna, where the name of the river is changed (very unwisely) from Conemaugh to Kiskiminetas. These old wells have been abandoned, not because of that their working has been abandoned, and the salt business is now chiefly prosecuted on the Alleghany—some above, but more below, the mouth of the Kiskiminetas. Lately, some of the old wells on the Conemaugh and Kiskiminetas have been found to yield oil in paying quantities; and even on the Allegheny, opposite Freeport, and also several miles below that town, there are several good oil wells; but there the geological strata are high.

What is this oil? What is its origin? Whence does it come? are questions that are exercising the minds of the curious and the speculative. It issues from a perennial source? or is it a fixed and limited deposit, which may soon be exhausted? These are questions which occasion some anxiety, but which are more easily asked than answered. Men are not permitted to penetrate very far into the arcana of nature; and we can only base our speculations as to what lies beyond our reach upon such facts as we have ascertained.

Bearing in mind the peculiar geological formation of this basin; to that adding the ascertained fact, that salt water occupies the space in the rocks below the reach of the surface water; and to this adding the additional fact, that oil is found in the greatest abundance around the margin of the salt basin, the hypothesis is strong and rational—that the oil—being lighter than the salt water—held down by the superior gravity of the latter, and hence found at certain geological elevations. This, as a general fact, is true.

This theory is further strengthened by the fact, that the old salt wells on the Conemaugh river have been exhausted; and the exhaustion having been occasioned by the action of other pumps on the lower levels of the Kiskiminetas and Alleghany, these old wells now yield oil—the oil, doubtless, having followed the salt water in its descent, and probably in the same crevices.

This being admitted, it follows that the prospect of finding oil is good any place around the margin of what may be called the salt basin. Many undiscovered causes may operate to vary these conditions, and thus render one section prolific in oil, while another section on the same level is comparatively destitute of it; yet this seems to be, notwithstanding, the general law.

Now, the question recurs, what is the cause, the origin, the source, of this oil? It is manifestly a natural distillation; but is its origin mineral or vegetable? Some think it has an origin common with our coal—that it was compressed out of the immense deposits of that mineral; but this hypothesis is overthrown by the fact, that oil is found in great abundance near the head of the Alleghany, more than forty miles beyond the limits of the coal field, and on a higher topographical level than where the lowest vein of coal crops out.

Another theory, and a more plausible one, is, that it rises in vapor from profound depths, where the internal heat of the earth is sufficient to convert it into this condition; that it rises through fissures to the region of cold rocks, there condenses, and flows down until it rests, as before remarked, upon the salt water. It may be so.

Mountains, or elevated regions, are, of course, more favorable to the ascent of such vapor from the hot depths of the earth than any where else; for theory, of course, the stratification is more broken up, and thrown into position more or less vertical, and very probably the internal fires there make their nearest approach to the general surface of the earth. Volcanic craters are always found on or near the summits of mountains and mountains, and not mere accumulations of lava and scoria. We may therefore conclude that all mountains partake in a greater or less degree of the same character.

If this hypothesis be sound, then these springs will prove to be perennial. In Burmah, there are petroleum springs, or wells, from which hundreds of thousands of barrels have been taken annually for two hundred years, without showing any signs of exhaustion; and in one of the Grecian Islands—Zante, I think—there is said to be a well that has yielded petroleum for 2,500 years. These facts favor the hypothesis, that there is some inexhaustible internal supply.

How wonderful are the provisions made by the Creator for the wants of his creatures! It is not on the surface of the earth only that he "openeth his hand liberally and supplieth the want of every living thing," but he opens his "third treasure" just when they are needed; and who can say what stores are yet in reserve? J. O.

[From Forney's Philadelphia Press.]

A Noble Northern Man.

The brother of the Hon. John Sherman, chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, in the House of Representatives, Gen. W. T. Sherman, has for many years past occupied the position of superintendent of the State Military Academy, at Alexandria, La., where his enlarged experience, thorough education, and high character, made him a universal favorite, and contributed greatly to the prosperity and popularity of the institution. When it became apparent that Louisiana contemplated following the fatal example of South Carolina, by withdrawing from the Union, Gen. Sherman addressed a letter to Gov. Moore, announcing his resignation in the event of the secession of Louisiana, and asking to be relieved from the performance of the duties of a position upon which he had reflected so much credit. We have been permitted to make the following copy of this letter:

JANUARY, 18, 1861.

GOV. THOMAS O. MOORE, Baton Rouge—Sir: As I occupy a quasi-military position under the laws of this State, I deem it proper to acquaint you that I accepted such position when Louisiana was a State in the Union, and when the motto of the seminary was inscribed in marble over the main door, "By the liberality of the General Government of the United States." "The Union—Esto perpetua."

Recent events foreshadow a great change, and if Louisiana, with most of the other States, should draw from the Federal Union, I prefer to maintain my allegiance to the old Constitution as long as a fragment of it survives, and my longer stay here would be wrong in every sense of the word. In that event, I beg you will send or appoint some authorized agent to take charge of the arms and munitions of war here, belonging to the State, or direct me what disposition should be made of them.

And, furthermore, as President of the Board of Supervisors, I beg of you to take immediate steps to relieve me as superintendent, the moment the State determines to secede, for on no earthly account will I do any act or think any thought hostile to or in defiance of the old Government of the United States. With great respect, &c.,

W. T. SHERMAN.

Although it will be seen that the tone of this letter is alike patriotic and fearless, this fact did not induce Gov. Moore to withhold from Gen. Sherman the expression of his regret at the loss of the services of so valuable an officer and his high sense of his distinguished abilities. Gov. Moore accepted the resignation in a letter of which the following is an extract:

"BATON ROUGE, Feb. 2, '61.

"It is with the deepest regret I acknowledge the receipt of your communication of the 18th inst. In the pressure of official business I can now only request you to transfer to Professor Smith the arms, munitions, and funds in your hands, whenever you conclude to withdraw from the position you have filled with so much distinction. You cannot regret more than I do the necessity which deprives us of your services, and you will bear with you the respect, confidence, and admiration of all who had been associated with you."

FROM WASHINGTON.

WASHINGTON, Feb. 22, 1861.

The "Peace" Convention opened its proceedings to-day, by reconsidering what it did yesterday, and extending the time for discussion to 10 minutes. This determination opened the whole field of debate, and there was a general rush for the floor, as in Congress.

Mr. Seddon moved that the Cherokee Treaty Grant, which is South of 36° 30', shall be included in the recognition of Slavery.

An amendment was offered to exclude it, which was adopted, 11 to 9. Then the amendment, as amended, was rejected.

Mr. Reid, of North Carolina, afterward proposed the distinct recognition and protection of Slavery, which was defeated by 17 to 3.

Subsequently, Mr. Curtis, of Iowa, moved to substitute the Missouri line, pure and simple, for the section reported by the Committee relating to Slavery in the Territories.

Mr. Guthrie, of Kentucky, moved to strike out the Committee recognition of the principle of abrogating Slavery north of the line, it was only fair that the legal status of Slavery, as decided by the Supreme Court, south of it, should be acknowledged. The people of the Border States required that much.

No vote was taken, and it is believed a division will be postponed till Monday or Tuesday, in the hope of receiving some encouragement from Mr. Lincoln.

Some controversy in regard to the admission of Mr. Stone from Kansas occurred. Mr. Cleveland and others contended that as his credentials came from the National Legislature, he was not entitled to a seat in the Convention. On a motion to recommit, the delegate withdrew.

But little interest has occurred here to day outside of the wretched military display. Business was entirely suspended, the departments being closed and only the Senate in session. The day was mild and beautiful. The city was gaily decked with flags from one end to the other.

It was anticipated that all the volunteer and regular forces here would join in the procession down the avenue and be reviewed by the President, but as the government troops were about ready to march, the President countermanded the order, somewhat on the Brooklyn principle, and consequently the whole thing was thrown into confusion.

The military then marched around by separate companies, much to their own disgust, as well as that of the citizens, and finally withdrew.

In the afternoon the President relented somewhat, and the heavy cannon of the artillery was dragged through the Pennsylvania avenue, followed by a company of sappers and miners, without music for either.

The recent rumors of mediated attack on Fort Sumter are discredited. No such attempt would be made without the consent of Mr. Davis, and he is decidedly adverse to that experiment, knowing, as a military man, its inevitable consequences. A portion of the force at Morris Island has been withdrawn, and this is regarded as the signal for a general dispersion of the troops, and the abandonment of unnecessary defenses, which have practically closed Charleston harbor.

It there should, unfortunately, be any contest between the Federal and State authorities, in regard to the collection of revenue, or other questions, it is more likely to occur at the mouth of the Mississippi than elsewhere. Louisiana has assumed arbitrary control of the Mississippi river, by only admitting conditional privileges, which the Northwest will never consent to tolerate, and the largest revenue of any Southern port is received at New Orleans. It is time that Mr. Slidell and his confederates, who planned the whole scheme for overthrowing the Government, were brought to account.

Mr. BUCHANAN seems to have the happiest faculty of muddling everything he puts his hands to. A well arranged programme for the celebration of Washington's Birthday at the capital had been prepared, including a military parade. The President's fears were so played on that he countermanded the order for the appearance of the troops. Then an indignant protest was made from the other side, and he revoked the countermand. The consequence was an upsetting of the arrangement, and disjointed a parade.

The President addressed Mr. Tyler a letter last night inquiring whether it would be prudent for Government troops to parade to-day. Of course he replied in the negative, and that option decided the action of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy.

Illinois Central.

The Chicago *Times* says the business of this road during the past few weeks has been almost without a parallel in the railroad history of the West, and is but a fore-runner of what its business will be a few years hence should the country enjoy ordinary prosperity. It will give some idea of the immense business which the road is doing, from the fact that about four hundred are delivering from two hundred to two hundred and fifty car loads of freight at Cairo per day. The company could also do a much larger business if it had an adequate supply of rolling stock, to enable them to do the business which is crowded upon it. The business of the road at this end is also huge, and increasing.

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