



A Chat with an Old Salt.

Captain Wheeler, whose portrait we publish above, is a native of England, having first seen the light of day in Cornwall. He early showed a predilection for a seafaring life, and having received an excellent education, first entered the mercantile marine service by accepting employment with the firm of T. and W. Smith, whose vessels were then running between London and Madras. He remained with them for five years, during two of which he acted as officer. On leaving this firm, he engaged as second officer in the country trade between Bombay and China, and finally went to Australia as second officer of the *George Marshall*, arriving in the colonies in 1854 from London. He subsequently traded on the Australian coast, sailing out of Melbourne for about three years, returning at the ending of that period to England as chief officer of the *Lord Ashley*. He acted as officer in the first steam mail service between Australia and New Zealand, and also in the coastal service. After the lapse of twelve months he was tendered the command of the *Lord Ashley*, and shortly afterwards transferred to the command of the *Prince Alfred*, then belonging to the Pierson and Coleman line, which had been merged into the Intercolonial Royal Mail Company. After leaving the I.R.M. Co. he joined the Panama Company, with which he remained until its failure, when he took service with Anderson and Martin, then the old New Zealand Shipping Company, whom he finally left in 1874 to join the Union Steamship Company, with which he remained until his superannuation a few months ago.

Captain Wheeler, who is at present in Wellington, was met by one of our representatives a few days since, and, naturally, a conversation as to his severance with the Union S.S. Company ensued.

"What is the real reason of your leaving the Union Company, captain?" was the first question put by the reporter.

"Ostensibly, my age."

"But surely you are as hale and hearty as ever, and your long experience must have given you an intimate knowledge of the Australian and New Zealand ports that is invaluable?"

"Yes; that line of argument seems plausible, and is one that I had counted upon myself to ensure me a longer period of service, but it seems that it is not to be so. I said, in answering your first question, that age was ostensibly the reason, but I fancy there must be something behind that I don't quite understand. The Union Company never gives any explanation for dispensing with its officers. They are simply told to go, and that is all."

"But what else could there be? You have never been unfortunate with any of the vessels you have commanded, have you?"

"No; I have had uniform good luck throughout my service with the Union Company. The only thing approaching an accident which ever occurred was when some twelve or fourteen years ago my vessel grazed a rock off Jackson's Head. The rock was not down on the chart, and no damage was done."

"Have you ever had any dispute with any of the management, or has there ever been any ill-feeling between you and any of the company's servants?"

"Well, now you speak of it, there was a little difference of opinion between one of the Australian managers and myself some years ago, but I should never have spoken of it had you not asked me a direct question on the subject. It was in reference to my giving some orders concerning my vessel while she was in port, which he thought trespassed upon his prerogative. We had some words, but the matter was eventually settled without difficulty. Still, I think that gentleman bore the matter in mind, for our relations afterwards were somewhat cool. My opinion on this matter was to a certain extent confirmed later on by noticing that '*The Land and Sea*,' a journal virtually conducted by the Union Company, published the portraits of nearly all the captains in the service but myself, and now that I have been retired I can't help but think that some influence must have been at work to my detriment. Still I may be wrong in my surmise, for it is nothing more than that."

"I suppose you had offers from other companies while you were in the service of the Union, captain?"

"Yes; some years ago I received a very good offer to take command of one of Huddart, Parker, and Co.'s steamers, and I regret now that I did not accept it. At the time I reported the offer to the Union Steamship Company's officials, and consulted with my friends on the subject."

"What answer did you get from the Union?"

"That they did not wish to stand in the light of any of their captains bettering themselves, but they would give no advice on the subject, as they had done so once before, and the result had been unfortunate for the officer who left them."

"What was the opinion of your friends on the matter?"

"Similar to mine, that the general tenor of the reply was that the Company desired to retain my services. I, therefore, reported to the Company that I should refuse the offer and remain in their service, and from the words that passed between us I understood that I should be retained for the rest of my life."

"Your retirement then came as a surprise?"

"It did, indeed; although I am among those who have