

G

530

L64H5

UC-NRLF



5B 557 776



A VOICE FROM THE LONDON

AND

ITS ECHOES,

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED AN

ADDRESS

TO THOSE WHO HAVE SUFFERED BY THE CALAMITY, AND TO THE
PUBLIC AT LARGE.

BY

E. GILBERT HIGHTON, M.A.,

BARRISTER-AT-LAW.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

London:

T. C. NEWBY, 30, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.

1866.

Gift of C. A. Kofoid

A VOICE FROM THE LONDON

AND

ITS ECHOES,

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED AN

ADDRESS

TO THOSE WHO HAVE SUFFERED BY THE CALAMITY, AND TO THE
PUBLIC AT LARGE.

BY

E. GILBERT HIGHTON, M.A.,

BARRISTER-AT-LAW.

London:

T. C. NEWBY, 30, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.

1866.

NOTICE.

The letters entitled "A Voice from the London and its Echoes," were originally given to the World through the courtesy of the *Times* newspaper, and were afterwards published, with some additions, in the columns of *Bell's Weekly Messenger*. The reasons which have induced the writer to reprint them in a collective form are set forth in the Address by which they are now accompanied, and he trusts that their recital will awaken fresh interest in the important question which he has attempted to elucidate and discuss.

G 530
L 6445

ADDRESS.

MY FELLOW-SUFFERERS AND FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN,—

In compliance with a widely expressed request I again venture to submit the following letters to your earnest and careful consideration. Written, as they have been, from a strict sense of duty, under a deep feeling of bereavement, and through a peculiar combination of circumstances, their object will be fully attained, if they only prompt that further investigation into the circumstances connected with the loss of "The London" which is so absolutely needed, both for private satisfaction and for public advantage. A variety of causes, to which I cannot shut my eyes, may, possibly, prevent my statements from producing that result which, under happier auspices, they might be expected to achieve. It is useless to conceal that I shall have to contend with the influence of a great and powerful firm, which, though it may not be openly and actively exerted, will yet operate as a dead weight against all action concerning the matter in hand. Next to this, there will, probably, be the indirect opposition of many of their fellow-shipowners to encounter; and, further still, there will, most likely, be a bias on the part of the government in general, and of the board of trade in particular, to support their own officers and to acquiesce in the conclusions of a report which, to employ plain language, has simply "white-washed" everybody responsible for the construction, equipment, lading, and management of the lost vessel. Nor will these be the only, nor, I regret to say, the chief difficulties in the way of now obtaining a more complete and searching inquiry into the case. In this sensational age, when the jaded appetite of a considerable portion of the reading public is ever on the look-out for fresh

stimulants, even the terrible tale of the foundering of "The London" may have already begun to appear stale and insipid. A cynical and indifferent crowd is always prepared to start up and cry "enough" whenever a call is made upon their active sympathies, and a number of wise-acres are ever ready to bow reverentially before anything that wears even the semblance of a judicial verdict. Despite these obstacles, however, there is much to assure me that the cause I advocate will not be pleaded in vain. The shock occasioned by the actual catastrophe was certainly felt throughout these islands in a manner almost unexampled in recent times, and before this address reaches the public eye its reverberations will have come with harrowing effect from the Antipodes. The contemporaneous or subsequent destruction of several vessels, similar in build to "The London," has tended to spread still more widely that feeling of insecurity which its self-provoked fate occasioned. It is acknowledged by all impartial persons, not merely that our credit as a great maritime nation is at stake, but that the obligations which we owe to that vast mass of our fellow-citizens, who—relying upon the soundness of our ships, the good faith of our ship-owners, the skill and discretion of our commanders, and the guarantee of our inspecting officials—daily commit themselves to the mercy of the deep, are but very negligently and perfunctorily discharged. Little, therefore, seems to be wanting but the sound of "A Voice from 'The London' and its Echoes," effectually to awaken and sustain that attention on the part of the reflective and intelligent portion of the community, without which there can be no hope of obtaining either present justice or future reform. Encouraged, therefore, by this conviction, and stimulated, as I have said, by requests from various quarters, I have determined again to place the letters bearing the above designation before the public; and, in doing so, I will ask permission to briefly recapitulate the leading impressions which they are intended to convey.

Starting with the decisive testimony recorded in what I may fairly call the dying words of Mr. H. J. Denis, viz., that the ship was over-weighted, that the engine-room hatch was too slight, that the poop windows were bad, and that the vessel generally was not well-

ordered, I have been enabled, by a mass of information supplied to me from all quarters, to trace the opinion as to the ship, its loading and its management, from the time it left the East India Docks until the very hour when it sank for ever into six hundred fathom water in the Bay of Biscay. A greater unanimity of sentiment than that which exists on the part of all those who can speak independently on the subject, it is impossible to conceive. But one opinion indeed seems to have prevailed amongst all who saw the vessel on her passage from Gravesend to Plymouth, and that was, that she was overladen, too low consequently in the water, and would never rise to a stiff sea. One eye-witness, indeed, states that when she left the East India Docks she was obliged to land forty or fifty packages, for which there was no room, and that, too, after knocking down several cabins to make way for stowage. Beyond this opinion, also, the facts to which it points are further established, both by inference and demonstration; by inference, inasmuch as Captain Martin never dared to navigate "The London" as he would have done a real seaworthy vessel; and by demonstration, inasmuch as according to the measurement of Mr. Gladstone, the Senior Surveyor, the main deck of the ship—a ship, be it remembered, 260 feet long, and only about 30 feet broad—was but 3 feet 6 inches from the surface of smooth water. The defects in her construction, moreover, were of the most dangerous kind. Unlike the great Atlantic packets, "The London" had merely an auxiliary screw, and was practically a sailing vessel, without any of a sailing vessel's good sea-going qualifications. Her rigging was too complicated for her crew to manage; her canvas was too extensive for her to ride with safety in a gale; and her decks were without any sufficient appliances for getting rid of the seas she continually shipped, and without any adequate protection against the effects of the water when accumulated upon them.

Over and above what may be called the physical aspect of the case, there is also much to be said in a moral point of view. "The London" was allowed to sail with a crew badly organised, undoubtedly incapable as a body, insufficient in number, and composed in one-third part of foreigners, who hardly understood an order in

English. She went away in a great hurry, out of her regular turn, and her quick passage was, it is said, the subject of a bet on the part of her Commander. Besides this it has been asserted, without any corresponding denial, that her owners insured her contrary to their general practice, and it has been shown from previous examples, that Captain Martin was likely to drive her on with far too little care for the safety of the passengers.

Touching the Greenwich so-called inquiry, it appears that the nautical assessors were very "ancient mariners" indeed, and had little knowledge of the requisites of modern seamanship; that the principal witnesses could not be held to be free from bias, as they were mostly connected with the "Board of Trade," whose officers had passed the vessel, and in several instances had themselves had but little experience; that outside and independent evidence was not allowed to be given, much less required; and that cross-examination by the counsel representing the relatives of those who perished was altogether prohibited.

This then being the state of the case, I do think that, both on behalf of those immediately interested, as well as for the satisfaction and future protection of the public at large, a more thorough, searching, and impartial inquiry is imperatively demanded. Such an inquiry can now only take place before a Parliamentary Committee, and to aid me in obtaining that Committee, I do most earnestly beseech the co-operation of the public.

To you, indeed, my Fellow-Sufferers and Fellow-Countrymen, I now solemnly and emphatically appeal. The cause is yours no less than mine, and the obligation to be up and doing lies upon you equally with myself. Can you be absorbed in the stir and bustle of life,—mingle in the gay and thoughtless throng, go to and fro to your ordinary avocations, or even sit patiently brooding over the recollection of your irreparable loss whilst a whole hecatomb of your relatives and friends have been sacrificed to the God of Mammon, and have miserably perished to satisfy the craving of a reckless and insatiable cupidity? Has it, indeed, come to this, that our boasted reverence for human life, our time-honoured institution of inquests, our cherished determination that not one drop of British blood

shall be spilt throughout the world without the offender being brought to a reckoning, should all have become a figment of the past, and that destruction need only be wholesale in order to secure impunity for its authors? You mulct the railway company in heavy damages, which, through the carelessness or negligence of its servants, injures the persons whom its trains convey,—you have been accustomed to hold the coach proprietors responsible, who, through the overloading of their vehicles, have endangered the lives of the passengers who travelled therein,—but the ship-owner, who first shields himself from risk, by insuring his vessel, by exacting the last penny of passage-money, and by filling every available foot in her with cargo, and then wantonly exposes not his own property, not even his own hirelings, but hundreds of precious and innocent lives to the uncovenanted perils of the ocean in a ship which has no reasonable chance of weathering a storm—him you allow to go scot free, to walk “clothed in purple and fine linen, and to fare sumptuously every day.”

In the face of so grievous an inconsistency, of what avail is it to talk of our impartial administration of justice?—of our free press, and of our representative constitution? Our ancestors held, and justly held, that protection to life and limb was the first duty of a Commonwealth, and the supreme office of a Government, and all the Electoral Reform and amendment in the world will be but a hollow legislative mockery if this leading principle of state-policy is to be disregarded and despised.

By every sense, then, of honour and of patriotism,—by every remembrance of the wrongs which your virtually murdered relatives, friends, and countrymen have suffered,—by every frightful image which that last sad scene of horror and despair upon the sinking vessel may have left in your minds,—by that common bond of human sympathy which unites our destinies and our race,—I do beseech you, my Fellow-Sufferers and Fellow-Countrymen, to join me in one resolute effort to obtain justice in this case. Our friendships, our affections, our hopes may have been shipwrecked in “The London,” but let us not voluntarily suffer that last and worst shipwreck of all—the shipwreck involved in purposeless and un-

availing regret, in drawing no adequate moral from her story, and learning no permanent lesson from her fate.

Trusting then that you will speedily join me in petitioning both Houses of Parliament upon the subject,

I am, your obedient humble Servant,

E. GILBERT HIGHTON.

42

~~45~~, Bedford Square, London,

May 12th, 1866.

LETTERS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—For three long and weary days I have waited in anxious expectation to see whether the metropolitan press, and yourself at their head, would editorially notice that remarkable “message from the sea,” which appeared in all the journals of Thursday last, and which was so wonderfully preserved to us from the wreck of the “London.” No sign or sound of comment having yet—so far as I can discover—been made, I feel that any further silence on my part would be in the highest degree culpable. As a near connection, indeed, of one who not merely went down in the ill-fated ship, but “whose voice, though dead, yet speaketh,” and as having myself both thought much and written carefully upon the destruction of the vessel, I do think that I am entitled to draw attention in the most emphatic manner to one or two of the leading circumstances in this terrible calamity, especially under the new and ghastly light which has just so unexpectedly been thrown upon them. I need scarcely say then, sir, that I allude to the testimony of my lamented brother-in-law, Mr. H. J. Denis, for that alone, of all the messages preserved, contains matter of any material interest to the public at large. Be-

fore, however, I quote his evidence, I may perhaps be pardoned for endeavouring to enhance its value by referring for a moment to the character of the person who gives it. Mr. H. J. Denis, as all who knew him will agree, and as this very message amply proves, was a man of no ordinary kind. For many years past he had been accustomed to a variety of travel and adventure. He had visited many remote regions, had lived among savages, and faced the dangers of the chase in South Africa, and, moreover, as the public have lately been informed, was officially declared by the United States' Government to be the first Englishman who ever grew cotton by free labour in the slave districts on the Mississippi, and that, too, at a time when civil war was still raging on the American continent. Further than this, he was on board the Marco Polo, when about four years ago, she suddenly, and in the middle of the night, struck an iceberg in the Southern Ocean, 2,000 miles away from land, and when for some hours all on board expected every minute to go down. Upon this trying occasion he evinced extraordinary calmness and presence of mind, and I have frequently heard from his own lips the precautions he adopted with a view to at least temporary preservation. Familiar, then, with peril, acquainted with nautical affairs, and singularly observant of small details, I have a right to assert that his evidence, given as it was in the very jaws of death, is of the utmost importance, and has a claim to the serious consideration of the Board of Trade, even though they may have endorsed and published a formal report. What, then, is his brief, but precise language?—"Bay of Biscay, Thursday, ten o'clock. Ship too heavily laden for its size, and too crank. Windows stove in, and water coming in everywhere. Storm not too violent for a ship in good condition." Surely, sir, language like this, coming from such a man at such a time, does not deserve to be slighted as of no account, or to be placed even in the same category as the opinions, scientific soever as they may be, formed by persons far away from the scene of the catastrophe, and when all material proof as to its causes has been for ever removed. And when, sir, in addition to this, I have to tell you that I had an opportunity of seeing and examining the Quartermaster, Daniels, on the very day after he had landed—that same man, whose evidence

was said to be so confused at the inquiry that nothing could be made out of it—and when I am enabled to affirm that nothing could be more clear than the replies he gave to my questions, and that one of the very first statements he made to me was that he felt certain the vessel was too heavily laden from the moment he saw her go down the river; that the consequence of her being so was that she shipped such heavy seas, that at last the hatchway of her engine room was carried away; that the natural result of this was that her engine fires were extinguished by the flood of water which poured in, and that thus not only was the ship rendered a log, but the great means upon which they relied for pumping out the water—viz., their steam power—was unavailable, I do consider, sir, that I have made out a case which calls for the most serious explanation on the part of her owners. It is said that the bustle and routine of commercial life are apt to deaden the sympathies of the human heart, and even to render callous the instincts of natural affection, but I can scarcely yet think so meanly of our great merchant princes, of those men whose ships are on every sea, and who carry our trade to the ends of the earth—as to suppose that they would for the sake of some miserable gain risk invaluable lives, and, so that they may only expedite the transport of their merchandise, care not whether they make parents childless, turn wives into widows, and suffer happy children to become lone and desolate orphans.

I am, Sir, yours obediently,

E. GILBERT HIGHTON, M.A.

41, Bedford-square, March 3.

ECHOES OF "A VOICE FROM THE LONDON."

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

SIR,—Your speedy and considerate publication on Monday week of my letter, entitled "A Voice from the London," has entailed upon me a responsibility for which I was hardly prepared. No sooner had the letter appeared in your columns than communications reached me

from divers quarters, and from divers classes—including shipbuilders, nautical men, and independent observers, as well as friends of those who had perished, and even survivors of the vessel itself—in nearly every one of which was contained information and encouragement, the materials for enlarging upon the subject, and the expression of hope that I would not let that subject drop. Under these circumstances, I have felt that however painful it might be for me to thrust myself again before the public, there was but one course which I could with propriety pursue, and that was to appeal to your sense of justice to give those persons a hearing through the medium of my pen, who from various causes might be unable, and from various motives unwilling, to commit their knowledge and opinions openly and personally to the press. For convenience, then, of arrangement, no less than for the better understanding of the important question at issue, I propose to divide the evidence in my possession into three heads—viz., first, the opinions of professional “experts” upon the nature and condition of the lost vessel; secondly, the conclusions arrived at by independent observers who had opportunities of witnessing her conduct and appearance as she passed along the river and the Channel; and, thirdly, the sentiments of individuals who actually made the last short and terrible voyage within her fatal lines. Over and above this, too, I propose, with your kind permission, to add a few remarks of my own, suggested no less by a study of the details than by a general consideration of the entire subject.

With respect, then, to the opinions of the “experts,” they are, as might naturally be anticipated, chiefly directed to the form and build of the vessel, to the nature of her equipment, and to the manner in which she was navigated when she had to encounter a gale in mid-ocean. Before entering, however, upon this delicate topic I must cry for mercy from my informants on the one hand, and from your readers on the other, from my informants, lest, as a landsman, I misunderstand their arguments or misinterpret their observations, and from your readers, or at least that part of them uninitiated in seafaring matters, lest I puzzle their understandings by the enforced use of nautical terms, or weary their patience by the

enunciation of doctrines in general only interesting to those who make the sea their profession. Touching the form and build of the vessel, the prevailing idea seems to be that she was too narrow in the beam for her great length—her width in proportion to her length being scarcely 1 to 8. One gentleman, an old sea captain, writes to me, “the centre of gravity in the ‘London’ was too low for a ship of her long, narrow dimensions. Three years ago,” says he, “I conversed with a celebrated shipbuilder on building such long, narrow ships, and he told me he must go with people’s ideas, speed, not safety, being the order of the day.” Another gentleman, also an experienced commander, states that on the first voyage of the “London” to Australia he went with a friend to the Docks, and saw the vessel, and told his friend that she would be most uncomfortable to go out in, as she was so short in beam and over-masted and flat-sided. An eminent shipbuilder on the Clyde expresses the same opinion, and, whether correctly or not I cannot tell, says that this fault of construction is more common in Thames built than in Clyde built vessels. As regards the equipment of the “London,” it is admitted that she went out unprovided with storm sails, a want of foresight upon which my nautical correspondents lay much stress, and which one of them declares he was never guilty of during 30 years of command. Besides this, they blame her, as, indeed, did Captain Stoll, the Plymouth inspector, for putting to sea “with her royal masts end on and top-gallant yards across.” They also find great fault with the want of proper provision for allowing the water which accumulated on the deck to run off, the scupper-holes being either defective or else choked with coal, and the “spur-curtain”—which, as I understand, is the space between the waterway and the port-holes—being too high. Further than this it does not, say they, appear that she carried life-boats constructed on the best and newest principles—as, for example, the tubular, and when they were most wanted no rockets or means of making signals of distress were apparently accessible. In reference to the navigation of Captain Martin, when involved in the tremendous difficulty in which—with a ship so laden—he found himself in the Bay of Biscay, two distinct theories seem to be propounded—the one taking the circum-

stances as they actually existed, the other making the assumption that the "London" was a thorough seagoing sailing vessel. One of my correspondents, well versed in navigation, declares that had he been in the position of Captain Martin when the bad weather commenced, and before the engine-room hatchway was broken down, he would have put the vessel on the starboard tack, sent topmasts and yards on deck, rigged in the jibboom, furlled all square canvas, set proper storm fore and aft sails, and propelled the vessel by screw just sufficiently to give her steerage way, and by these measures have weathered the gale. Another, equally experienced, expresses great surprise that Captain Martin should have been blamed on the supposition—afterwards discovered to be erroneous—that he put his ship before the wind. "What," says this old commander, "could be more natural or more correct than to put a vessel, with proper storm sails set, before the wind? Who ever heard of the well-known East Indiamen—all less by 200 tons than the 'London'—'lying to' in a gale of wind? Did not a small ship of 300 tons burden, loaded with copper ore, pass close under the stern of the 'London' only a few hours before she sank, scudding merrily before the gale?" "*No,*" exclaims he indignantly, "*Captain Martin knew what he was about; he knew he was in a ship which could not 'rise to the seas;' he knew she was too long and too narrow for the waves she had to traverse and the cargo she had to carry; he felt she was overladen, and he did not dare to trust to his sails; he did not venture to put his vessel before the wind, for fear the sea should break over her stern and send her then and there to the bottom.*" But, Sir, I must now pass on to produce another class of evidence—viz., that of independent observers, who witnessed the passage of the "London" along the river and the Channel. The first I shall bring forward is of a singular character, and though apparently trivial, must not for that reason be accounted insignificant. Not far from Purfleet a seaman was overheard to say to his fellow, "The 'London' has just gone down the river; it'll be her last trip." "Why?" quoth the other. "Because," said the first speaker, "she is too low down in the water; she'll never rise to a stiff sea." Again, the captain of a vessel saw the "London" mak-

ing bad weather off Beachy Head, and the sea rolling in and out of her waist; and, further still, an eye-witness—whose thorough independence and nautical knowledge make his testimony of great weight—states that he saw the “London” as she turned back for shelter under the Isle of Wight, and noticed her very deep in the water and wanting in seaworthy buoyancy—in fact, looking more like a barge than a ship, and seemingly, also, overmasted. Apart, however, from mere opinion, there is a demonstrative proof that the “London” was too heavily loaded. Mr. Gladstone, shipwright surveyor to the Board of Trade and senior surveyor to the port of London, in his evidence at the inquiry, says, supposing the vessel drew 20ft. 9in. aft, the sill of the poop-cabin windows would be about 8ft. from the water-line. Now, this sill could not have been more than 4 feet high from the poop-cabin floor, which was on a level with the main, or upper deck, and consequently this deck itself could only have been 4 feet from the water aft diminishing to 3 feet in the fore, and this in a ship some 250 feet in length. Well might she “look like a barge.” And now, Sir, I will briefly allude to the direct evidence coming from persons on board the ill-fated vessel itself. I am assured by one of my correspondents, a gentleman of the highest respectability, that one of her chief officers wrote home from Gravesend to his father saying “he did not like his ship, and feared she would be his coffin.” I am assured by another, equally reliable, and upon equally authoritative testimony, that, “before the ship left the docks, the stevedore was distinctly informed by the chief engineer that the sliding-doors in the bulkheads, which formed the lower portion of the vessel into water-tight compartments, were not closed, but were actually open when the ship sailed; and so far from any regard being paid to so serious an omission, the engineer was told to mind his own business.” It should be noted, too, that in the “London” these so-called water-tight compartments only reached as high as the lower deck, which was open to the top of the engine-room, so that, as the rush of water came from above, and could sweep right through the space between the decks, they were really no safeguard at all. Had cross-examination been per-

mitted at the inquiry these important facts would probably have been elicited. I have the authority of my brother-in-law himself, in a letter he wrote from Plymouth, for saying that the ship there took in coal to replace what she had burnt in her voyage from the Thames, and, in fact, waited for it specially. Mr. Munro, one of the survivors, and himself an old sailor, in his recorded evidence, says "that on the Tuesday morning, when the weather freshened, he thought that the ship was very slow in rising to the sea, and not so buoyant as other vessels he had been in." He also mentions that the coals were rolling about tremendously, and had never been in bags, and that the flying jibboom was lashed to the main stanchion of the after-hatchway, and at nine o'clock on Wednesday evening was striking against the engine-room hatchway with great violence—a careless mode of securing the broken spar, which, perhaps, contributed to the eventual disruption of the latter hatchway. Mr. D. G. Main, another survivor, says he saw the ship at Melbourne, and did not like the look of her, or he should have come to England in her; that recently when he went on board at Gravesend he thought the vessel was not what she should have been for such a voyage, the deck being wet and the water coming up the closets on to the deck; that water came down the second cabin during Divine service on Sunday, and that after her jib-boom was carried away she frequently pitched her bowsprit under the water. Further than this I have in my hands a letter just written to me by the third surviving passenger, who, without reserve, declares it to have always been his conviction that the ship was too low in the water, and that, as to any particular or tremendous sea breaking down the engine-room hatchway, anything of the kind was quite unknown to him, and he fully believes it to have occurred, not from one sea, but from many continually breaking over the vessel on that fatal evening, in consequence of her lowness in the water. He makes also the startling announcement that a barrel containing letters and papers was thrown overboard, which, if it ever turn up, will be found to contain revelations somewhat unpleasant to the ears of the owners. Thus, Sir, in the most concise and cursory manner that I was able have I gone

through the evidence which was so profusely and unexpectedly poured in upon me. Were I not afraid of taking up too much of your valuable room I could quote still more, both in the way of opinion and of testimony. As it is, I have only extracted what I deemed most interesting or most material. Let it be remembered, however, that this evidence has sprung forward, as it were, by itself, unasked for and unsought. It is not the reluctant and equivocal evidence of persons more or less connected with and dependent upon the owners of the unfortunate vessel. It proceeds from no witnesses who have so many guineas a day for their attendance; it is being used by no pleader who receives a large "refresher" for his advocacy. Still less is it the evidence of surveyors and inspectors paid and employed by the Board of Trade, who too often, I hear, drink their glass of sherry and have a pleasant chat with the captain, and then declare all to be right, make their bow, and depart. Upon one vital point, too, I must emphatically add that my correspondents, without a single exception, are agreed—viz., that the ship was overladen, and that all her disasters are primarily attributable to that cause. For my own part, so far as I may be allowed to pronounce an opinion, I should say that through a carelessness, which can hardly be deemed other than culpable, "The London" was allowed to take out 200 tons of "kentledge," or in plain language pig-iron ballast, when she had already more weight in iron, coal, merchandise, &c., than with her build she could safely carry in bad weather; and when, as nautical men declare, her own machinery ought to have sufficed for ballast; that this over-weighting made her ride so low that, on the one hand, she was too stiff, and so, by not "listing to the wind," took all its force on her rigging, and consequently lost it piece-meal; and on the other, on account of the narrowness of her build, was most dangerously "crank" and shipped continuous "green seas," that the unabating fury of the elements to which she was so fearfully exposed at last wrought its fell work, proved too much for her misapplied strength, discovered, in short, her weak points, and ended in bringing about that awful catastrophe which has rung like an ocean knell throughout the world. In the face, Sir, of that catastrophe, and in the face of the evidence which can and ought to be produced—

nay, demanded—as, for instance, the letters from Captain Martin to the owners, from Plymouth—is it reasonable that the public, is it endurable that the relatives of the lost, should acquiesce in the tame, colourless, and, as many do not hesitate to call it, halting and farcical report which has, I regret to say, been issued under the authority of the Board of Trade—a report which is not merely founded upon insufficient testimony, but which actually, as in the example of Sir Daniel Hooper, ignores some of the most important statements made before its authors? Is this a case for a general amnesty, a wide and inconsiderate absolution? To us, Sir, whose trembling vision rests upon the familiar form of our gallant relative as he pencilled the last sad “message from the sea,” and committed it and its frail tenement to the mercy of the rude and boisterous waters; to us, who can gather in those few brief, but impressive, lines the concentrated energy and resolution, agony and passion of a life, who can behold in them a stern sense of public duty prevailing over even the strongest and deepest feelings that can agitate the human breast, and who can read in them the determination which, refusing to listen to fear, could, in the midst of roaring waves and howling winds, calmly write “Storm not too violent for a well-ordered ship;” to us, I say, it is impossible that the report should appear aught else than “a mockery, a delusion, and a snare.” How many there are who share with us in this sentiment, how many there are whose woes and whose losses far transcend our own, I dare not imagine! “Their name, alas, is Legion.” I, at least, have the consciousness that I have done my duty. It remains for my fellow-sufferers, for the public, for the press, and for Parliament to do theirs.

Apologizing for the length into which I have of necessity been drawn, and subscribing myself somewhat more fully than before, partly in order to rectify some mistakes which have occurred as to my position, and partly to stop a curious impertinence, which, in one case, has gone so far as to doubt my good faith and even my identity,

I have the honour to be, Sir, yours obediently,

E. GILBERT HIGHTON, M.A., Cantab.

Barrister at Law.

41, Bedford-square, W.C., March 15.

P.S.—The identical message from my brother-in-law has this morning come into my possession, and as I find that—owing, I suppose, to the mistakes of the French copyist—its wording differs somewhat from the version hitherto given to the public, and tends more strongly to confirm the views I have expressed, I trust that you will allow me to append it *verbatim*. Though dated only two hours before the vessel went down, and when all hope was lost, it is nevertheless written in firm, clear characters, not distinguishable from his ordinary handwriting, and he even displays a little peculiarity he had of spelling his name with one “n.” Hardly, as it may well be supposed, perceiving the flight of time, he also calls Thursday the 10th inst., instead of, as it really was, the 11th :—

“H. J. Denis to Jno. Dennis, Esq., Great Shelford, nr Cambridge. —Thursday, 10th January.—Farewell, father, brother sisters, and my Edith” (his little daughter, now entirely an orphan). “Ship London, Bay of Biscay, Thursday, 12 o’c. noon.” “Reason,—Ship over-weighted with cargo, and too slight a house over engine-room all washed away from deck. Bad poop windows. Water broken in.—God bless my little orphan— . . . Storm, but not too (violent?) for a well-ordered ship.”

A VOICE FROM “THE LONDON” RE-ECHOED.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

SIR,—So far from the “Echoes of a Voice from ‘The London’” remaining silent, after the expression which you kindly gave to them in your columns of Wednesday last, they have, on the contrary, been caught up in a variety of fresh quarters, and have been repeated with the utmost emphasis of tone and circumstance. In fairness, therefore, towards myself as the responsible representative of the chorus, no less than for the further and more complete satisfaction of the public, I trust that you will allow me briefly to adduce some of the material corroborative evidence which I have received, as well as to bring forward a few new and important

facts bearing upon the case, and otherwise to elucidate and explain certain parts of my statement which have either been misunderstood or impugned. Following, then, the order in which I previously set out, I will simply remark that as to the form and build of the lost vessel, my nautical correspondents still agree that she was too long and too narrow to carry a heavy cargo in bad weather. Strange, indeed, to say, this fact, as generally applicable to the construction of modern merchant steam vessels, has been for several years, I find, frequently brought under the notice both of Lloyds' and of the Board of Trade, especially in relation to the packets which ply across the North Sea and the Baltic, and several of which have during the last few winters foundered under circumstances differing but slightly, if at all, from those which caused the loss of "The London." While referring to this part of the subject, I would moreover call especial attention to a point which has hitherto escaped the notice it deserves—viz., the great difference which exists between such vessels as "The London" and the steamships which continually traverse the Atlantic, and which are equally, if not in a greater degree, long and narrow in construction. These latter are essentially steam vessels—steam is their sole motive power, and they are built of sufficient strength and with sufficient deck protection to face any gale, and to be driven through any sea. Over and above this, too, they consume such a quantity of coal—often 50 to 80 tons per diem—that their load is rapidly lessened *en voyage*, and such care is taken as to their weighting in this respect that a pendulum is daily and almost hourly consulted, in order to determine whether the coal for the engine fires shall be taken from the starboard or the port bunkers. "The London," on the other hand, had merely an auxiliary screw, was, in reality, rather a sailing than a steam ship, and never carried, therefore, enough coal to make its consumption a matter of much moment in lightening or adjusting her load. Her build also was, I am assured, by no means so strong as that of the Atlantic steamers to which I have alluded, and one of which, the "City of Baltimore," actually remained six weeks at sea with two compartments stove in, and her engines rendered useless, and returned home with "jury masts," after everyone

imagined she had long gone to the bottom. When people talk, therefore, as Mr. Samuda the great ship-builder did, about "The London" not being so long as other modern steam iron merchant ships, they ought to recollect that in perhaps three cases out of four the conditions are not the same. Touching the question of navigation, I will not further go into it than to say that, viewed in whatever light it may be, the circumstances go to prove that Captain Martin had no real confidence in his ship, and was afraid to handle her as he would have done an ordinary sailing clipper like "The Suffolk," which he previously commanded, in bad weather, and this partly from her "crankness," and partly from her overloading. *And here I will revert for a moment to the term "crank," and to the use I made of it in my last argument. Properly speaking, then, "crank" signifies a liability to overset, or, in nautical language, "list over" on one side or the other. Now this in well constructed and adequately loaded vessels, especially sailing ones, is within certain limits an excellent quality, since it diminishes the strain of the wind and water both upon the hull and the rigging. If, however, a ship be so heavily laden and lie so deep in the water as "The London" did, and besides carry such an overplus of canvas, it must strike the most superficial observer that any exhibition of "crankness" would prove of the most dangerous consequence. Admitting, indeed, that her load prevented her from being so "crank" as she otherwise would have been, it yet rendered more fatal the amount of "crankness" which still existed, and this will be more clearly shewn when I mention that one of the survivors declared to me that in "listing over" she actually "scooped up the water" in a heavy sea. One word, too, as to the "spur-curtain," a term often corrupted into "spircketting," which is generally denominated "covering boards" in a merchant vessel. This, in "The London," was made of iron, and was fully 15 inches in height. Owing therefore, to its material, it could not easily be knocked away, and owing to its height, and the choking of the scuppers which went through it, and which, indeed, it is said, were often level with the water, or under it in a rough sea, a vast quantity of fluid accumulated on the deck and poured at once into the engine-room, when*

the hatch was washed away. That the sliding door in the bulkhead of the engine-room was left open, even when the vessel sailed, is now confirmed to me by the testimony of a gentleman who, in order to see the last of some friends, made the voyage from London to Plymouth, and who himself walked through the opening in question into the "screw-alley" shortly before the ship left harbour. But, sir, I hasten to fortify my statements in reference to the appearance of the vessel as she went down the river. Most assuredly they do not rest upon the mere gossip or hearsay of casual spectators. I have received the strongest assurances that the universal opinion of all who saw her on her passage from London to Plymouth was that she was over-weighted and too deep in the water. It was the collective opinion, I am told, of a number of pilots assembled in a room not far from Gravesend; it was the opinion openly stated to one of my correspondents by the pier-man at Woolwich, who, in the presence of three assenting seamen who saw the vessel pass, affirmed that he would not have gone out in the ship if £100 had been given him, since she was far too deep and would never make a rise; it was, and is, the opinion of the very gentleman whom I have already mentioned as having made the voyage from London to Plymouth; it was the opinion of a commander of experience, who writes to me that he visited "The London" in the East India Docks ten days before she went out, and then found that she looked like an "elongated collier," on account of her depth in the water, and yet, shocking to relate, was still taking in cargo. Nor is this simply a matter of opinion, for an eye-witness of undoubted authority—a merchant of long standing in the City—assures me that before leaving the dock she was so choked up with cargo as to be obliged to land 40 or 50 packages, and that, too, after several cabins had been knocked down to make more room for stowage. Have I not, then, sir, good reason upon such testimony to ascribe all her disasters to the primary evil of overloading? There are, however, other and, if possible, more painful circumstances to which, at the imperative call of duty, I feel compelled to draw attention. Glad indeed should I be to adhere to the old and recognised maxim, "*Nil nisi bonum de mortuis,*" the more especially in the case of a

commander, who, whatever might be his personal or professional faults, at least had the merit of sticking to his vessel to the last, and of sharing the unhappy fate of the passengers intrusted to his care. Still, however painful it may be, I am obliged to ask the question, —Did Captain Martin exercise that prudence which the grave responsibilities of his position demanded? Did not his interests clash with that vigilance which he ought to have used for the protection of so many valuable lives? Is it true or not that he was a part owner, that he was liable to a fine of £60 a-day for every day's delay at Plymouth; and that he had a heavy bet that he would perform two voyages out and in with the London in the course of a twelvemonth? Of the truth of the first two declarations I fear there is no doubt, on the last I would willingly be sceptical. To another topic of equally serious character I feel also reluctantly obliged to allude, and that is to the assertion made upon authority to myself, and already advanced without refutation by a recent correspondent of your own, that Messrs. Wigram, contrary to their usual practice, at any rate in the case of wooden vessels, had to a large extent insured this identical ship. When to this consideration, too, is added that the charge for freight was double that on ordinary sailing vessels, it does appear that there was a very strong temptation, first to overload the vessel, and then to disregard those precautions which ought to have been employed to insure her safety.

Upon many branches of the subject I refrain to touch, first, because I am afraid of occupying too much of your valuable space, and, secondly, because they are fitter for investigation before that competent Board of Inquiry which I trust will soon be instituted in the shape of a Parliamentary Committee, or otherwise, than for discussion in the columns of a newspaper. I cannot, however, avoid remarking that the chief engineer of the London had not the requisite first-class certificate, and had never served in any other vessel in a similar capacity; and I cannot, further, forbear mentioning, in respect to the value of the Greenwich report, and the evidence on which it was based, that the log of "The London" on previous voyages was never asked for or produced, that the engineer officer of the Board of Trade, Mr. Taplin, confessed, in answer to Captain

Harris, that he had never been to see himself, and Captain M'Lean, chief emigration officer of the port of London, admitted that he had not had much experience in steamships, and that "The London" was the first steam passenger ship cleared by him from the port of London to Australia under the Passengers' Acts. Well, therefore, sir, as a simple citizen of this great maritime nation, as a member of this mighty British community, which, year by year, and month by month, launches its children on the deep and encourages a teeming population to seek new homes and found new empires in the most distant regions of the globe—well, I say, may I, in their name and on their behalf, demand that this terrible calamity shall be submitted to the fullest, freest, and fairest examination—that it shall, in fine, not merely be looked over as an error of the past, but shall be held up as a warning for the future. In my last letter I appeared before you clad in the garb of personal sorrow, I now presume to stand forth sheltered by the mantle of imperial justice. Once more I invoke the aid of a sympathising public, an independent press, and a supreme Parliament; and unless I am greatly mistaken in the character of my countrymen and of their institutions, that solemn invocation will not have been uttered in vain.

I have the honour to be, Sir, yours obediently,

E. GILBERT HIGHTON.

41, Bedford-square, March 24.

THE LOSS OF THE "LONDON."

TO THE EDITOR OF BELL'S WEEKLY MESSENGER.

Sir,—As "The Echoes" not only continue to reverberate, but even to deepen in their tone, I trust that you will still allow me to arrest in their flight a few of the more important, and to give them

public expression in your columns. A correspondent, upon whose authority I can place the most perfect reliance, informs me that as the "London" lay at Spithead, it was remarked by all how low she was in the water; that the pier-keeper in Portsmouth declared that the common report there was that she was 18 inches below her water-line; that as she passed East Cowes, shipwright seamen, boatmen, &c., noticed her, and remarked at the time, "what a brute she would be in a sea-way;" and that one gentleman in particular, a sailor of 50 years' experience, and formerly an officer in the Royal Navy, affirmed that the "London" was not fit to stand a gale of wind, as she appeared from the beach at Cowes. I am further informed, by another correspondent, that a gentleman, who not long ago acted as chief officer in the "London," actually left the service of her owners, and refused to go out in her again, because she behaved so badly in a head sea; and I am enabled to quote *verbatim* from two notes which have been placed at my disposal, and which were written between London and Plymouth by passengers who were afterwards lost in the vessel, and whose words, remembering the time at which they were used, are of course above suspicion. One is dated Ryde, Jan. 3, and speaks as follows:—"You will be anxious to hear how we can get on; you would see us go through the Downs on Monday, under steam, with a fair wind, which gradually increased to a whole gale. We were very glad to get in here last night, and we have been at anchor all night here at Ryde, near Portsmouth—the weather is better, and they are now lifting the anchor for another start, when I hope we shall have better luck. *By what I can see of it, this ship is going to be a regular brute at sea. They have got her so low in the water that she has no life in her, and will consequently be as wet as any old collier.* The second letter is dated from Plymouth, Jan. 5, and in reference to the same topic says, "We had a terrible passage down; if we had not had the steam I don't think we should have been here yet. I don't think much of the 'London,' she is not half the boat the 'British Empire' was." Comment, sir, upon testimony like this is wholly unnecessary, and my object is amply fulfilled if I have only been able

to place in a still clearer light the paramount obligation which lies upon Parliament to institute a further and more efficient inquiry into the causes productive of the loss of the "London."

I have the honour to be, Sir, yours obediently,

E. GILBERT HIGHTON.

41, Bedford Square,
March 30th.

P.S.—Pray allow me, sir, one line of postscript to express my sincere acknowledgments to those numerous correspondents whom at present I have been utterly unable to thank directly and individually.

A P P E N D I X .

The arrival of the Australian Mail, whilst the present pamphlet was in the press, has fully confirmed the fears which I have expressed in my address, touching the terrible sensation which the foundering of the London would create at the Antipodes. No praise can be too great for the out-spoken and independent manner in which the subject has been treated by the Colonial newspapers, and the noble sympathy and indignation which they have expressed might well be imitated by their English contemporaries. It is, indeed, extraordinary, that, with the limited information which they then possessed, they should have so clearly perceived the true causes of the disaster. What will be their feelings and opinions when they learn the real state of the case, and are acquainted with the ridiculous and abortive result of the so-called Greenwich inquiry, it is more easy to imagine than describe!

An article which appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of March 21, entitled "Who is responsible for the Loss of the London"

—is so thoroughly in consonance with the views which I have myself enunciated, and it is so complete a corroboration of them, that I am tempted to print it here *in extenso*, the more especially as it is very important that the British public should fully understand the overwhelming interest which their Colonial brethren take in the matter.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE LOSS OF THE LONDON?

The awful calamity announced in our telegram of yesterday, which swept away from this world and all its endearments and hopes so many human beings, will force the colonies, if not Great Britain, to deal with the subject of over-freight as a question of life and death. It is impossible that in a civilised country such dreadful events should pass with a sentimental sigh. We owe, first, our condolence to the bereaved, our admiration to the brave and self-sacrificing, our gratitude to Heaven for whatever alleviations may lessen the sense of desolation; but having paid this homage to worth, and this commiseration to sorrow, we are bound to remember that as this is not the first of these calamities, in its causes and its circumstances, so it may not be the last. The few facts which reach us present the whole case in a clear and intelligible form. The "London" quitted the British coast at a season of storms, to cross a bay where tempests render navigation dangerous in a special degree. All this was perfectly well understood, but it was also known to the hundreds of passengers that a powerful steamer may venture over a troubled sea, and that, if properly prepared, it may, with no

great aggravation of the common peril, make way with tolerable certainty. But the passengers had to confide in the owners, the surveyor, the insurance companies, and others interested in the ship, that she would be properly laden and fitted for contingencies always probable. What is the account? That the "London" was freighted with iron rails so far as to be incapable of rising to the waves; that her deck was burdened with coal, which found its way into the scuppers, and that when the storm had risen to its full fury, the water was up to the waists of the engineers, and the fires extinguished! What was the real state of the weather may be inferred from the course of the small boat that carried nineteen instead of twelve persons, and lived in this sea. Was it possible a good ship, not overladen, could have perished in a conflict in which this small skiff was successful? The freight of railway iron, which has nearly caused the loss of several of our best ships, and the dangerous disposal of the fuel, which has lost many more, were sufficient to account for the disaster, and we need scarcely look further. The seamanship of the officers and men is of course unavailing when they have to deal with a mass of hard and heavy material, which could float only in fair weather. The laws of nature explain the catastrophe, and the rules of navigation were outraged by thus converting a good ship into a log. No doubt, the parties to the dreadful affair meant to send the passengers safely over the ocean; they had many examples of profit in crowding the decks and loading the ship to the point of danger, and they hoped all would be well! The consumption of hundreds would soon lighten the hold, and so, as the voyage drew nearer to a close, the appearance of the vessel would be more in harmony with a proper concern for her safety! So men reason, so they live down conscience and incur the guilt of blood. So far as we can see, the passengers were as much sacrificed by the act of man as they would have been had the ship been run ashore or scuttled at sea. The merchants, who are responsible, are men of reputation. They have large transactions with the world. They stand well upon 'Change. They "leave these things" to their clerks. They insure the ship

and its freight. If these go to the bottom they are safe, and are able to purchase more; and if the gambling with the lives of men be successful, then they may net several hundreds by lading their ships to the water's edge. They can give the captain's widow a five-pound note to make up her loss. And what is murder? Who are those against whom the widow and fatherless cry to heaven? The seaman, who is the unwilling agent, who puts his own life in the venture, and meets his fate with the courage of a brave man, or the millionaire, warm from his wine, who reads in his telegram that he has one risk less in his merchandise, and one large item in his favour at Lloyd's? We wonder if the consciences of men who do such things ever dream at night. Do they see the victims of their covetousness—like the long procession of assassinated kings in Macbeth—march past their troubled couches? Do they see on the wings of the black tempest the apparent spirits, who from out of the dark storm show their dripping forms, and turn upon them their reproachful gaze? Do they, when in their purple and fine linen they fare sumptuously every day, find their feast disturbed by the thought that the stroke that destroyed the husband beggared the widow and the child? It would be a consolation that some remorse, if it did not foreshadow a future retribution, averted it only by the humiliation of a bitter repentance.

These valuable lives have been lost to us to enable the owners to make a few hundred pounds. These kinsfolk of ours had paid for accommodation and safety a large amount. This is the business aspect of the question. And is there no redress in civil courts? We exact from other persons a compensation—from the unskilled surgeon, the careless driver, the incompetent engineer,—and ought there not to be a demand of indemnity for an injury so fearful to scores of families?

When the proper precautions have been taken, and no needless risk incurred, the Act of God must be met with fortitude; but is it not right and just that those who have taken from others the means of subsistence, as well as broken the dearest ties of life, should be compelled to make good the loss of their last farthing? We do

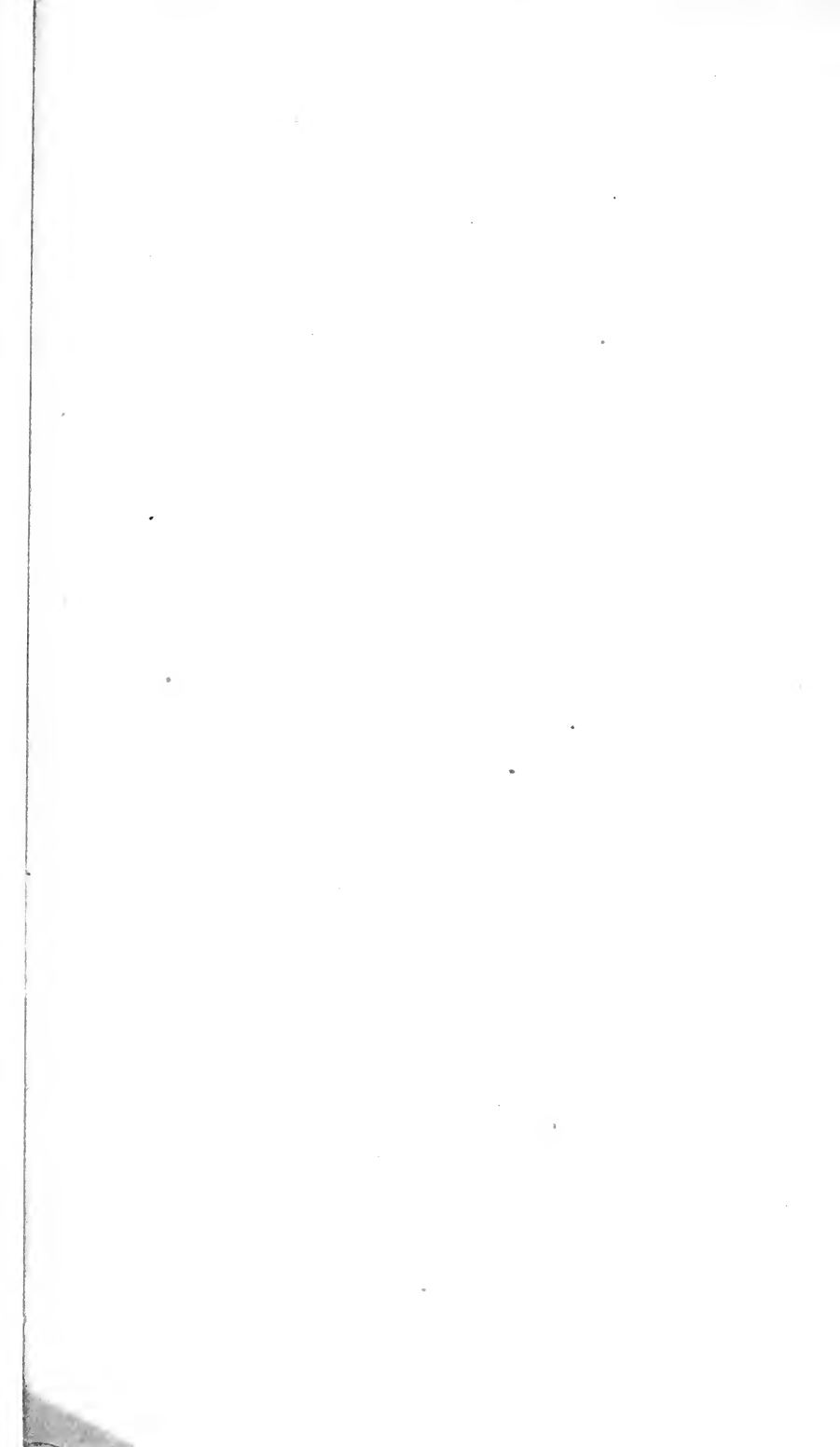
not pretend that money could compensate, or that a sufficient penalty for the wanton sacrifice could be found in gold.

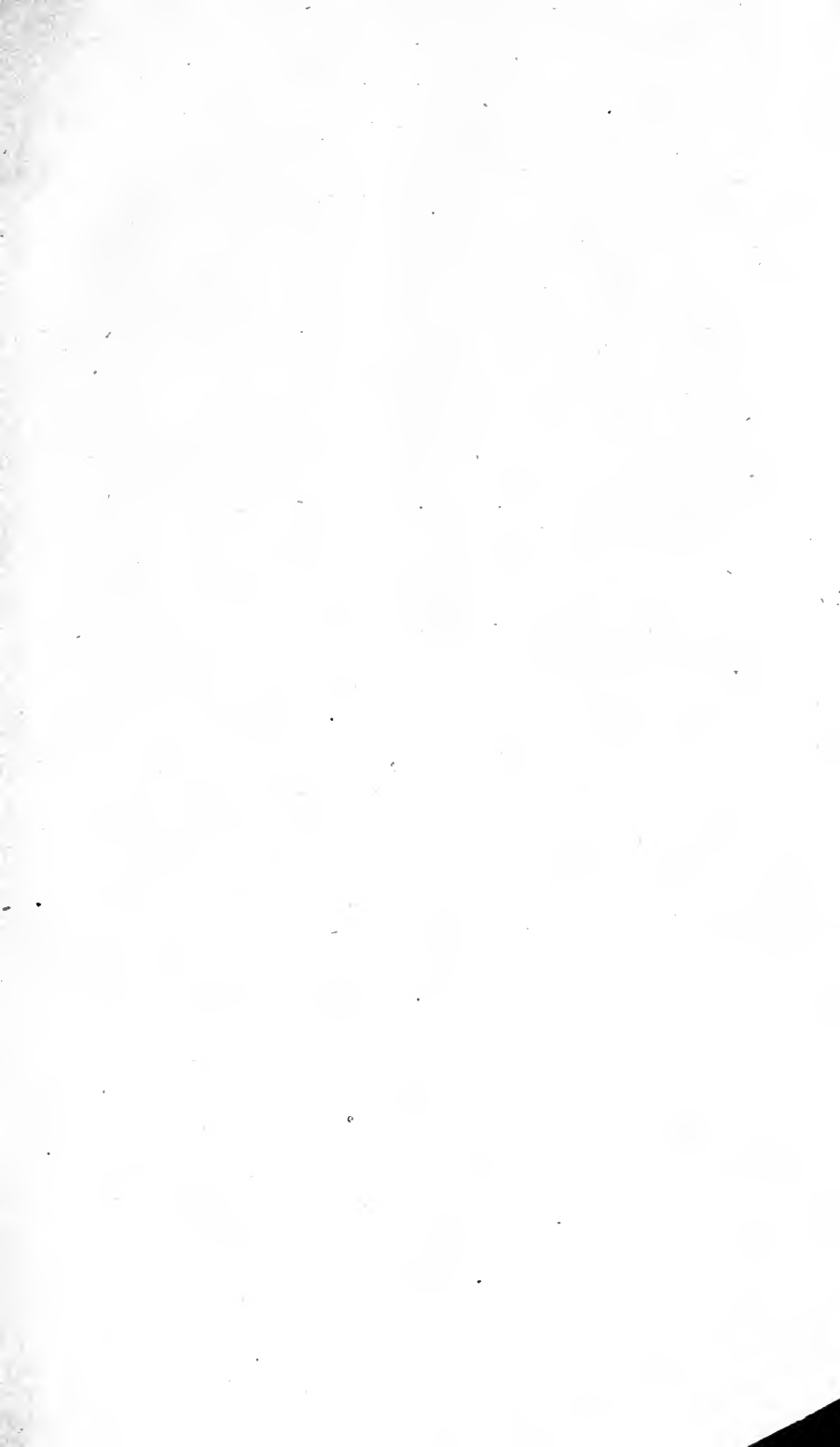
The crime of murder, where there is a wilful disregard of known laws for the safety of life, may be fairly imputed, and a verdict of manslaughter would justly place it only a little way down in the category of penalties. We send an ignorant thief to a long imprisonment for some small offence—for stealing a few articles of little worth; but is it right to permit the safety of multitudes to be imperilled by avarice with impunity, or when death ensues to make no inquisition for innocent blood?

The colonists have the power to do much—by establishing a system of inspection and responsibility, and giving compensation to every passenger whose life has been put in peril by unlawful lading, and especially to the families of those who are lost. It is through the loss of money that the idolators of money may be alone attacked, and by making it more profitable to do right than wrong. We are not aware that a single ship sent out by the Commissioners with immigrants was ever lost through a neglect of proper precautions or overlading. The sea, violent as it is sometimes, rarely engulphs a good ship well manned and in proper trim.

We have neglected the interests of our seamen too long. Their noble daring has given us maritime greatness, and few sailors will refuse to follow the fortunes of their ship. Indeed, the captains of merchantmen are often in a painful strait. They have wives and children looking to them for daily bread—their employment depends on their willingness to run all hazards. They may tremble, if not for themselves, at the probable consequence of going to sea in a bad ship with a bad cargo. Still, go they must, or give up the only profession they know, and consign all belonging to them to poverty. This last alternative they shrink from more than death, and therefore they often go forth to die.

[*Sydney Morning Herald*, March 17.







Manufactured by
GAYLORD BROS. Inc.
Syracuse, N. Y.
Stockt

M315149

