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SHIPOWNERS: THE FEW AND THE MANY.

THE Haytians have a proverb that “combination is stronger than witchcraft.” A writer in an American contemporary observes thereon that “only good motives and purposes will combine. The selfish, which are the sinful and predatory motives, are all distrustful, and therefore incapable of acting in concert.” Again, Lord Lytton observes in “Kenelm Chillingly” that “it is a wonderful proof of the wisdom of Providence that whenever any large number of its creatures forms a community or class, a secret element of disunion enters into the hearts of the individuals forming the congregation, and prevents their co-operating heartily and effectually for their common interest.” And Curran, when speaking on the subject of the absence of co-operation, observed that “if all the spiders in this commonwealth were to attack me in a body I should fall a victim to their combined nippers.”

The above array of quotations is intended to draw the attention of our readers to various aspects of combination. Seeing, as we may now do, in this country many combinations of an exceedingly questionable character, we are unable to agree with our American contemporary that “only good motives and purposes will combine;” but, on the other hand, indeed, we have daily evidence of the truth of Lord Lytton’s words as to the power of “secret elements of disunion” in many classes. For ourselves, we are disposed to agree with Curran as to the mighty power of combination when properly organised, and its purposes properly executed, without regard as to whether those purposes are good or bad.

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There are sufficient proofs all over the world that unity is strength, no matter whether the units have good or bad objects in view. To insure success it seems to be only necessary to root out, if possible, from the combining association the secret elements of disunion referred to by Lord Lytton.

Perhaps the evil effects of secret elements of disunion can nowhere be found more fully developed than in the commercial class which is employed in the conveyance of passengers and goods. Our experience of these interests is large, and we have often found one member or one section that has had something very bad to say against other members and sections. The sections are numerous, and we may enumerate a few of them as follows:—First, there are competing lines of ships in the same trade; then there are the long voyage interests careless of the coasting interests; again there are the steamship interests careless of or opposed to the sailing ship interests; the railway interests as opposed to the ships, and various other smaller interests opposed to each other.

The recent agitation about which shipowners have so bitterly complained would, we venture to say, have been combated and put down by force of reason and truth, if there had been anything like unanimity among carriers. Instead of unanimity we find that owners of coasting steamships are silent in regard to the proposed breaking up of many sailing coasting craft; for does it not mean more carrying to be done by the coasting steamer? The sooner the coasting sailing carrier can be ruined and run off the sea the better it will be for the interest owning coasting steamers. Again, the carrier by railway looks on placidly, and is, perhaps, rather pleased than otherwise, while the ship of the steam coast carrier is detained, hampered, or in any other way rendered unremunerative, for he knows that every ton of goods and every passenger driven from a coasting steamer means a ton of goods and a passenger gained to the railway. The carrier by rail and the steam coast carrier by sea are both well represented in the House of Commons, and they are able in a measure to speak for themselves against any proposed legislative interference which is likely to be prejudicial to their interests; but the little sailing coasting and short voyage carrier has no one to speak in his behalf, and he, poor honest little fellow, the “costermonger of the sea,” as he has been aptly called, the backbone of our marine reserve force, is being first wept over by the humanitarian, then inspected and legislated for, and then “moved on,” till his little vessel finds rest in the ship-breakers yard or under a foreign flag. “Humanitarians” will not allow him to expose himself to the rough competition of carrying goods on the sea coastwise and on short voyages; and other carriers of goods coastwise, viz., the steam carriers by land and by sea, applaud the humanitarian. In doing so in this case they can satisfy two yearnings at once—they can indulge in a little comforting sentiment, and

at the same time do something towards increasing their own gains. To Dives the shipowner, probably nothing could be more gratifying than this, but it would be impossible if Lazarus the shipowner, were regarded by Dives in the light of a brother.

There are other instances we could mention of the evil effects of the absence of co-operation, but we wish now to refer to one or two special instances which at the present moment deserve some attention.

By an Act passed during the last session, and following on the Acts of 1871 and 1873, power has been given to the Board of Trade to detain unseaworthy ships, and owners are required to state in the articles of agreement with their crews the amount of freeboard they intend each ship to have for the voyage, and the contract with the crew is to be made visible and unmistakable by a disc and deck-lines marked on the side of the vessel, the disc being intended to show the "maximum load-line in salt water to which the owner intends to load the ship for that voyage," and the deck-lines to show the height of the deck or decks above the said load-line.

We much fear that some shipowners by their action with regard to these provisions are in danger of calling down on the whole body some more severe legislation than now exists. For instance, it appears that when some ships have been duly detained, the owners or their agents and servants, instead of appealing to a court of law as by statute provided, have taken the matter into their own hands and carried off to sea the customs' officers put on board as Her Majesty's representatives to enforce detention. We hear that in a recent case a ship so detained sailed defiantly away on a long foreign voyage with two customs' officers on board. It is not possible to suppose that action of this sort by individuals of the shipping community can benefit the whole body in any way; but it is quite possible to see that this disunion by which some members break the law and defy authority will be thrown in the teeth of the whole body, bringing them into closer bondage and under more rigorous statutory penalties. There are also owners who have been defying the law by colorable transfers of their ships to foreign flags. Some of these transfers have been so bungling, so transparent, and above all so obviously for the purpose of retaining the ship as a British ship, and sailing her so as to avoid British liabilities, that the report of such doings brings odium upon the whole body of shipowners, and suggests to the public that a necessity exists for more severe legislation and perhaps of criminal prosecution.

Again, as regards the marking the load-line discs, the action of some owners has already been of such a character as to create elements of disunion in the shipowning body. The clause in the Act of 1875, respecting the load-line, is very distinct. It says that the centre of the disc

“shall indicate the maximum load-line in salt water, to which the owner *intends* to load the ship *for that voyage*, and when the disc is put on in the United Kingdom its place cannot legally be altered until that voyage is completed, or the agreement with that crew is ended. When the agreement entered into with the crew before clearing outwards from the United Kingdom ends, and another voyage under a fresh agreement is entered into out of the United Kingdom, then, of course, under the Act, the load-line disc may be removed, and need not be remarked; but our concern is with the marking of foreign-going ships on leaving the United Kingdom. Evidence was given before the Royal Commissioners, and has since been publicly admitted by more than one shipowner, that the owner of a ship, who knows anything of his business, is well aware of what is a safe and proper load-line for his ship. And even if he does not know this himself, he can employ experts who do know, and would be glad to tell him—the register societies, the club surveyors, naval architects, and surveyors in private practice, for instance. If an owner should be ever so unwise as to say that he cannot fix, or get some one to fix for him, a safe load-line for his own ships, it is equivalent to admitting that he does not understand his business, and is a person dangerous to passengers, seamen, owners of goods, and underwriters. It is obvious that the Act, of 1875, proceeds on the assumption that an owner ought to know, does know, or at any rate can know if he pleases, what that line is; that he can know it, and ought to know it, without the assistance of a Government surveyor; and that, knowing it, he can and shall mark it on his ships so that the crew may know it too. It is well known to everybody possessing the most elementary information that outward-bound ships, as a rule, go to sea lighter than homeward bound ones. It is therefore right to expect that an owner shall so mark the disc that his ship may load to her proper depth homeward. It is reasonable to say the owner so *expects*, and, therefore, that he so *intends*, to load her during that voyage, and everyone must understand that foreign-going ships may be expected to leave the United Kingdom with their discs out of the water, and return with them down to the water. But instead of this reasonable proceeding, we unfortunately find in some cases that the owner's disc is intentionally so misplaced that to load up to it would often mean jeopardy to ship and crew; and the load-line legislation, even in its present very mild and reasonable form, is, when carried out by some shipowners, an absolute source of danger, and a trap to the crew. It is such owners as these who ridicule just legislation, and who raise a cry of “harassment” when they are interfered with. It is true, that if a ship with a load-disc so placed were to disappear, the position of the disc (which is carefully recorded) would be most damning evidence against the owner, and would probably lead to a forfeiture of

insurance or expensive litigation. What can, then, be the motive for this occasional deliberate misplacing of the disc? This question, we think, can easily be answered. The load-disc was advocated on the ground that the sailor could always know for himself how deep the ship is intended to be loaded, and would visit her, and not go to sea in her if the disc were placed too high. This is, of course, a pure delusion. The British sailor, except in rare cases, never does go to see the ship he engages in. All that many seamen care about is their advance-note, and their last hours of drunkenness ashore. The owner then places the disc so high that he never means to load down to it, and he so misplaces it that the sailors may not object to proceed to sea on the plea that it is under water, a short-sighted proceeding to meet a small inconvenience. Another reason why the load-disc is, in some ships, placed high up is that, owing to the action of the register books, an exceedingly dangerous description of ship has been called into existence—we refer to ships of the so-called awning-deck class. If these ships were to be marked according to any recognised principle of safety, their marks would be so low as to take away all chances of remunerative employment. One more reason for misplacing discs is a deliberate intention of challenging a survey, or detention, by Board of Trade officers, for, if an owner wilfully misplaces the disc and parades the fact, and, like the Irishman, invites the Board of Trade to tread on his coat tail, he assumes that he will get the Board of Trade officer to fix the load-line for him, and so relieve him of all responsibility.

Happily, in this matter of misplacing the disc a Nemesis arises out of the consequences of such an act. Some cases coming under our notice have shown that it is more than probable that an owner who resorts to such practices may over-reach himself. If he deliberately overloads his ship, and improperly marks her freeboard, he may be sure that a conscientious officer who understands his duty will not suffer the ship to clear out until she is lightened to such an extent as to remove all chances of doubt as to her safety; and the owner, by his own act, will have forfeited all claim to sympathy, for he will, as it were, have publicly asserted that he knew he ought to be looked after. Again, supposing a ship with its load-disc marked too high is lost. The position of the disc being recorded in the Customs' entries, and in the office copy of the agreement with the crew, it will be asserted and proved that the ship was dangerously loaded, if loaded to it. It will be no answer for the owner to say, "Oh, but I never meant to load her to that, and she was not loaded to it," for the Act says that the disc is to show the line to which the owner does intend to load her for that voyage. The short-sighted owner who places his disc high in order to avoid trouble or to challenge unnecessary interference is thus laying a secure trap for

himself, for he will have to prove in a court of law that she was not so loaded, and that his statement (in accordance with the Act) that he intended so to load her was a deliberate misrepresentation of fact; and as he will afterwards be compelled to assert that he deliberately misstated fact as regards his intentions at the commencement of the voyage, he will scarcely be believed in court when his ship is lost, for the court will naturally conclude that if an owner would make a deliberate misstatement, knowing that it would be placed on record, he would not scruple to make other deliberate misstatements afterwards. In short, he would have to prove that he knowingly told one lie, and then he would have to bring that very fact forward as evidence of his *bonâ fides* as regards subsequent loading.

In the interest of the shipowning community at large we regard it as a duty to point out the existence of such malpractices as those to which we have referred, and, pursuing the text with which we commenced these remarks, to add that there seems to be a want of coherence and concerted action amongst shipowners of all classes to uphold the law, and an absence of high principle in some members which prompts them to deliberately disobey the law. United, the shipping interest would be unassailable; but disunited (and does this disunion arise because, as our American contemporary says, "predatory motives are distrustful, and therefore incapable of acting in concert?"), they are a routed army, distracted and harried by feminine vituperation, and the clamour of an ignorant multitude. We would counsel the shipping community to co-operate in upholding the law, and not to play into the hands of those who desire to subject the Mercantile Marine to restrictions more onerous than those now in force. It is more than probable that a leader, with broad and generous views and accurate knowledge concerning ships and seamen is what is wanted now. Such a man as the late Mr. S. R. Graves would no doubt have been the means of uniting the whole body of shipowners in wise and temperate action, and we are sure it is quite possible to find another such leader at the present time.

Since the above was written, we learn that the General Shipowners Society have issued a circular strongly urging all shipowners to mark their discs in accordance with the spirit of the Act of 1875. This, in our opinion, is a very creditable action on the part of that important body, and we congratulate them upon their discretion. In the interests of the shipping community at large, it is to be earnestly hoped that this recommendation will be generally followed.

THE CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ACTS : OUGHT THEY TO BE
EXTENDED TO ALL SEAPORTS ?

IT has often been said that one half of the world does not know how the other half lives and dies, and, making due allowance for the errors which must always exist in assertions of so sweeping a character, it must be admitted that there is great truth in such saying. It is capable of great and comprehensive application. Thus it applies to those who live in extraordinary and isolated localities, where, being cut off from the great world, their lives must be altogether peculiar ; and as an illustration, we may give one that will be familiar to readers of the *Nautical Magazine* ; the inhabitants of lighthouses situated on the lonely islet or barren rocks, and the crews of light-ships riding at anchor in a wild waste of waters. Again, the saying applies to persons whose occupation requires them to turn night into day and day into night, such comprising a very large class of useful persons : railway employés, compositors, policemen, night watchmen, nurses, and others too numerous to mention. But more frequently the remark is intended to apply to those who live in poverty and filth in the haunts of crime, in the courts and alleys of towns ; some the victims of poverty, others of drunkenness and crime. That half of the world which is ignorant is no doubt fully aware that in this case “ignorance is bliss,” and that the knowledge when gained would be very far from gratifying. And there is a class which till recently was scarcely known and certainly little cared for : we mean those females called in newspapers “unfortunates ;” in polite literature seldom alluded to at all. Only this year has Anthony Trollope done so, than whom probably no one knows the British public better, nor with what sort of literature they should be provided. In his preface to this recent work, he says :—“I have introduced in the ‘Vicar of Bullhampton’ the character of a girl whom I will call—for want of a truer word that shall not in its truth be offensive—a castaway. I have endeavoured to endow her with qualities that may create sympathy, and I have brought her back at last from degradation at least to decency.” . . . “It is not long since—it is well within the memory of the author—that the very existence of such a condition of life as was hers was supposed to be unknown to our sisters and daughters, and was, in truth, unknown to many of them. Whether that ignorance was good may be questioned ; but that it exists no longer is beyond question.” He proceeds in a most humane and touching strain to show how such a girl may be allured to the life by the false glitter which surrounds it,

and how very difficult the return to decent life in the present state of society must be.

In the *Nautical Magazine* for December, 1874, is an article, entitled "Unseaworthiness Ashore—The *Saucy Lass*," by L.R.C.P. Lond. In this the writer shows some of the benefits which have accrued to soldiers, sailors, and the "unfortunates" with whom they consort, by means of the Acts of Parliament passed in 1864, 1866, and 1869. If we may venture on a word or two of friendly criticism on our professional brother's literary work, we would remark that his article, written as it is in a pleasant, humorous, lively vein, is somewhat apt to be misunderstood, and now that the Contagious Diseases Acts have existed for eleven years and effected an enormous amount of good—physical, moral, and social—in that interval, it becomes desirable that we should speak plainly, and ask why are they not extended to all seaports where the diseases they are intended to cure and prevent are rampant? Again, L.R.C.P. Lond. fell into the error of supposing that the Acts were, on passing, subjected to strenuous opposition. This is not so, as we shall presently see. Let us first glance at what previously occurred. In 1862 a Special Committee was appointed by Government to enquire into the prevalence of venereal disease in the Army and Navy; their report concludes as follows:—"Your Committee have refrained from entering into the painful details which have come to their knowledge of the state of our naval and military stations at home as regards prostitution. These facts are so appalling that they feel it a duty to press on the Government the necessity of at once grappling with the mass of vice, filth, and disease which surrounds the soldiers' barracks, and seamen's homes, which not only crowds our hospitals with sick, weakens the roll of our effectives, and swells the list of our invalids, but which surely, however slowly, saps the vigour of our soldiers and our seamen, sows the seeds of degradation and degeneracy, and causes an amount of suffering difficult to over-estimate." It is well known to those whose business it is to know it, that the above sentence will apply now, almost word for word, to most of our large seaports which are not protected by the Contagious Diseases Acts, of which Liverpool, Hull, Bristol, Cardiff, Pembroke, &c., are notable instances. To proceed: the Committee recommended that Lock hospitals should be established on the voluntary principle at the seaports for the treatment of infected women, and improved sanitary conditions in the barracks and on shipboard, with greater facilities for private personal ablution. Hospitals had already been provided on a small scale for such patients, and were subsequently increased, but as the women could only be got in on their own application, little good was effected, and though before the first Act was passed in 1864, 108 beds had been provided by Government for females at Portsmouth, Devonport, and Chatham, the

surface of the evil had been barely scratched. The Act of 1864 passed with very little opposition, and though only very partial in its application, an enormous amount of disease was got at, isolated, and cured. Thus, in two years at Portsmouth, 1,141 patients had been treated in hospital, and 1,084 discharged cured ; at Devonport 567 had been admitted into hospital and 478 discharged cured ; at Sheerness 160 women had been sent to hospital. At Plymouth and Devonport more than 600 women had quitted the district or abandoned prostitution, and at Portsmouth the reduction had been on a similar scale. In 1866 a new Act was passed enlarging the area of operations, and with new and stringent clauses (providing, amongst other things, for the regular periodical medical examination of all women known to be practising prostitution). The districts it applied to were twelve in number, Portsmouth, Plymouth and Devonport, Woolwich, Chatham, Sheerness, Aldershot, Windsor, Colchester, Shorncliffe, the Curragh, Cork, and Queenstown. It was also enacted, that every hospital should make adequate provision for the moral and religious instruction of the women detained therein under this Act. The beneficial results may be gathered from what followed. Firstly, an Association consisting of many of the most eminent members of the medical profession, many clergymen of high position, the leading educational authorities at the universities, and many well-known philanthropists, was formed for promoting the extension of the Acts to the civil population. Their object is thus briefly defined in their first report :—“To eradicate, as far as possible, a contagious disease of the gravest character, which is constantly transmitted from parent to offspring, by removing those affected with it from opportunity of propagating their disorder, and to induce the moral and social improvement of a numerous and degraded class.” Then, in 1868, a Committee of the House of Lords was appointed to consider whether the Acts should be extended, and reported in favour of the cautious extension of the Act of 1866 to all naval and military stations, and to any locality the inhabitants of which may apply to be included in its operations. Then, and not till then, arose that opposition of which we have heard so much, and which, though fortunately not by any means successful, has been exceedingly mischievous. One good result has followed—all efforts have failed to bring to light any case of oppression on the part of the special police employed under the Acts, who have been placed under the strictest scrutiny. The late Mr. Acton, the eminent surgeon of London, whose long labours on behalf of this unfortunate class entitle his memory to the greatest respect and praise, thus speaks of a protest signed by 130 ladies against the Acts :—

“I must thank the 130 ladies who signed this protest for having come forward in defence of their sex. Now that they have taken up the cause

of their fallen sisterhood, no doubt can exist that the future of the woman called 'unfortunate' will command that attention which hitherto has been denied to her. I beg to assure these ladies that the medical profession has ever treated these unfortunate women with the most signal and marked tenderness and sympathy. If surgeons are left to deal with questions and to remove evils, the cognisance of which comes peculiarly within their province—if the ladies and the clergy, and all who have at heart the well-being of the race, will deal with those evils which they can severally remedy—and if all will unite in the common cause, not magnifying their own peculiar provinces, nor depreciating that of others, but, gaining and giving mutually all the help and strength they can, we may hope to see, not the extirpation of prostitution, for this can only come to pass when poor humanity ceases to be frail and sinful, but a considerable diminution of the number of prostitutes, and a great amelioration of their condition."

In 1869, a Select Committee of the House of Commons was appointed to consider whether it would be expedient to extend the operations of the Act of 1866. They report:—"Prostitution appears to have diminished, its worst features to have been softened, and its physical evils abated." They recommended some changes, among which were that Gravesend, Maidstone, Winchester, Dover, Deal and Walmer, Canterbury, Dartmouth, Ivy-Bridge, and Southampton, should be included in the schedule of the Act. In spite of the continued opposition, the Act of 1869, as thus suggested, was passed; and when, in the following year, the first motion for the repeal of the Acts was brought before the House it was negatived by a large majority, and a Royal Commission was subsequently appointed to inquire whether the Acts should be amended, maintained, extended, or repealed. They recommended certain amendments, but reported favourably as to the amount of good which had been effected. This may be judged by a concise summary contained in a dissent from the above by seven of the most influential of the Commissioners (Sir John Pakington, Viscount Hardinge, Sir J. S. Trelawny, Bart., Drs. Paget and Wilks, Mr. Timothy Holmes, and Mr. Hastings), who considered that the Acts of 1866 and 1869 should be fully maintained. They thus sum up the results of the Acts:—

(a) Religious and moral influence has been brought to bear upon large numbers of women, a great portion of whom had been from infancy familiar only with scenes of debauchery and vice.

(b) Towns and camps have been cleared or nearly so of the miserable creatures who were formerly to be found in their streets and thoroughfares.

(c) A considerable number of abandoned women have been reclaimed and restored to respectable life, and in many instances married.