

Now, Sir, have the words in the foregoing answer—*i.e.*, “not altogether,” “in substance,” “not impossible,” and “might,” an imperative sound? Do they not rather tend to show that the same doubt appears to exist in the mind of Sir C. Adderley that is to be found in ninety-nine minds out of a hundred that attempt to get at the meaning of the several Acts so often cited by the President of the Board of Trade as being amply sufficient to prevent improper stowage of explosives—namely, the Passengers Act of 1855, the Act of 1873, the Explosive Act of 1875, and the Merchant Shipping Act of last session?

The efficacy of an Act of Parliament should be judged by the power it has shown to produce the effects intended; and I am at a loss to understand how Sir C. Adderley, in the face of the gross cases cited, can still persistently adhere to his first statement, that the law is efficacious.

The first thought that must strike all with amazement, is how these vessels could have cleared and put to sea in the teeth of these four Acts of Parliament and of the Board of Trade instructions. If the law is sufficient to prevent such a monstrously outrageous state of things, it is high time that the public take the matter up and bring those whose duty it is to prevent these outrages upon common sense to a proper sense of their duty.

In his answer to Mr. McLagan on the 23rd of March, Sir C. Adderley stated that “one hundred and forty-eight harbour authorities had applied for confirmation of their by-laws; of these only eighty-six had had them confirmed, and in thirty-four of these the loading and unloading of explosives in harbour were prohibited. There were fifty-two codes still under consideration.” What has been the fate of the remaining ten the right honorable gentleman did not say. Pending the settlement of the fifty-two codes still under consideration, it would be interesting to know what is being done at these fifty-two harbours for the protection of passengers and seamen. He further stated “there was no power to compel harbour authorities to issue these codes, and he was not prepared to bring in a measure containing a general code for adoption by all harbour authorities.”

As the Explosive Act of 1875 is simply so much waste-paper, so far as the stowage of explosives in vessels is concerned, without these by-laws, I fail utterly to comprehend how Sir Charles Adderley can say the Act is effective.

The plain fact of the matter is, the whole law upon the subject is nothing more nor less than a jumbled mass of contradictions and absurdities that no one can understand or work.

One Act would seem to give power to an owner to crowd any quantity and variety of explosives in his hold with impunity. Another, the Passengers Act of 1855, limits the number of passengers that may be blown up at any one time to “not more than thirty persons or a greater number than in the proportion of one to every fifty tons of the registered tonnage of a sailing ship or to every twenty-five tons of a steamer.” This Act, however, only extends its protection to passengers on ships bound to some place out of Europe, and not bound to any port in the Mediterranean; in such cases the number is not limited.

The Act of 1873, as I have before stated, provides in no way for the safe stowage of explosives. “The Explosive Substances Act, 1875,” is abortive, for the reasons I have given. But, even were there power to compel harbour authorities to issue codes, it is quite possible some might consider, with the Liverpool authorities—judging from the “No Name”—loose kegs of powder dropped indiscriminately into a hold with coal and paraffin oil a proper and safe mode of stowage; whereas another might require that the explosive should be separated from the remaining portion of the cargo by means of a well-worn sail or some such sieve-like arrangement.

In short, this ponderous Act leaves it entirely to harbour and local authorities to decide (or not decide) what is a proper mode of stowage.

Finally we come to the Merchant Shipping Act of last session, which, to quote Sir C. Adderley’s answer to Mr. Ashley, “requires the Board of Trade to detain any ship improperly loaded,” and it gives power to the Board to issue instructions to their officials at the different ports for the purpose.

It would be manifestly unfair to assume for one moment that the Board would allow so long a time to elapse as from the passing of the act to the 15th February last (the date of the sailing of the “No Name”) without issuing the instructions in question; and therefore we are reduced to the choice of three surmises: (1) That the instructions favour the indiscriminate huddling of paraffin, spirits, coal, iron, and gunpowder as a proper mode of stowage; (2) that, if the instructions do not favour this system, the officials at Liverpool have been guilty of the grossest neglect of duty; or (3), if the instructions leave it to the discretion of the officials to decide what is a proper mode of stowage, then the wide divergence of opinion between the Liverpool Board of Trade official who allowed the “No Name” to proceed to sea and the Cardiff official who detained her on the ground that a light being taken into the four-foot would probably have caused the destruction of the ship and all on board, shows how necessary it is that imperative and distinct regulations should be issued to all Board of Trade officials, instead of long unintelligible and contradictory quotations of certain clauses of the various Acts in question, and which tend only to leave the poor official after reading them in a sea of doubt and bewilderment, hardly knowing, unless he be an analytical chemist, whether a loaf of bread may not contain one of the prohibited constituents of the various compounds classified under the Explosive Act.

It would be an easy matter to appoint a Committee of scientific men to inquire into the different modes of stowage, and to select the best. A short Act would then be all that would be necessary to settle once and for all upon some uniform system of stowage, instead of leaving it to harbour, local, and Board of Trade authorities.

Surely the inventive genius of the country cannot have fallen so low that no better plan of stowage can be devised than that adopted in the hold and four-foot of the “No Name.”

I had just finished this letter when my attention was drawn to the account in your Saturday’s edition, under the head of “Disasters at Sea,” of the supposed loss of the “Cairo,” and of some wreckage seen by the master of the “Strathdon,” and supposed by him to belong to her. The impression seems to prevail that she has stranded on one of the Tristan d’Acunha group of islands, as the risk of loss by collision in that quarter is infinitesimal.