

67. Have you heard of any quite recent cases of the heating of wool on ships?—Some of the Wellington shipments have been found heated.

68. Quite recently?—Yes. Since the "Gothic" left. That has been mentioned to me, but the Harbour Board officials could give you more information on that point.

69. Have you theorized as to the cause of the recent fires?—No, I have not.

70. We are not likely to drag anything out of you, then? It is a curious thing that one hears many fixed conversations outside and a great many theories, but when you get that same individual into a witness-box it is a different thing to what has appeared outside?—When this fire occurred in the "Gothic" a great many people theorized. I was asked for my opinion, in conversation, and I then said, "I have no opinion; I will wait to hear more particulars." It was said it was in the flax—in fact, it appeared in the papers at the time that the opinion of some authorities was that it was the flax, and the opinion became general that it was the flax. Now, however, we find that it was not the flax, it was the wool. So that I am really no more reticent now than I have been outside.

71. *Captain Blackburne.*] Was there any flax in the "Gothic"?—I know how the "Gothic" was stowed as regards this port, and, in fact, all ports. The boats nearly all finish up here, and I prepare two cargo-plans of each ship's stowage, one of which I send Home and the other is kept here. As regards her fire, when the first report reached us it stated that the fire had been discovered in No. 4 hold shortly after leaving Teneriffe. Then I heard that she had arrived at Plymouth and that the saloon was burnt out. From that I at once knew that there must have been another fire in No. 3 hold. If there was one in No. 4 hold and at the same time the saloon was burnt, there must have been two separate fires, for No. 4 hold is abaft the engines and the saloon is at the fore part of the boiler-space and over No. 3 hold.

72. *Captain Blackburne.*] You have had no actual information by mail?—Perhaps they may have got the information through the investigations, but personally I have received nothing. I have, in anticipation of its being of some value, made up a statement of the facts as they appeared to me at this end, and have sent it on to London.

73. *Mr. Foster.*] The plans of the holds—would they show exactly where any portion of any consignment was stowed?—No, we cannot do that; only "wool," "flax," or "tallow," or "other cargo," as the case may be. It would show at which port it was taken in.

74. It is not a plan in the sense of a survey plan?—No; the scale of the ship is vertical, showing the different compartments.

75. It would not indicate whether a certain class of cargo was in contact with another description of cargo?—Oh, yes; it would in the case of the "Gothic." The No. 4 hold had wool in the lower hold up to about level with the tunnel. That was put in at Lyttelton, at her first call-port. On first call I put flax into her here in another hold to be shifted at Lyttelton, and it was taken out there and shifted. I remember that when the ship left here finally we put in about three bales of wool and four or five bales of skins, at the very last moment; these came from Napier, and were the last things put in No. 4, and were consequently uppermost, so that when I heard that No. 4 hold was afire I imagined it might be the Napier wool or skins. It seems, however, so far as I can understand, that they took a considerable quantity of cargo out of No. 4 hold the day after leaving Teneriffe. Of course, although No. 3 hold contained a mixed cargo, I should have filled it up entirely with wool if I had it; but the wool was limited in quantity, and we had plenty of flax. We did as we always do—put dunnage mats between the wool and the flax, as we do with all cargoes of different kinds of the bale class. Flax in this hold was not stowed over wool; the wool was put each side of hold and flax in middle.

76. *Captain Blackburne.*] You do sometimes stow bales of flax on top of the wool?—Yes, we have to do so at times; it is imperative when visiting so many loading-ports, and having to receive cargo at each port as it offers.

77. Was that the case with No. 3 hold?—Yes, you may say it was the case; it was stowed with a mixed cargo. But there is no evidence that the flax caught fire.

78. Only that the flax is so very inflammable, and if the wool became heated to a charring state it would catch fire?—It would be a greater conflagration with flax flaming than would be the case with wool alone.

79. *Mr. Foster.*] Captain David was asked as to the possibility of fire getting into the cargo by way of the ventilators or anything of that sort, and he said there was no risk of that?—Considering the number of years ships have been going without fires at sea, and then a number should occur in one season, I think the theory of matches being thrown down the ventilators is a hollow one. I know that in most of our steamers they have a small wire network over the ventilators to prevent matches getting down the ventilators, but there would be nothing to prevent a person deliberately throwing a match down if he wanted to, yet no sane individual would do such a thing.

80. *Captain Blackburne.*] Have you any pretty hot holds?—No, they are all divided with bulkheads; the bulkhead dividing the stokehold would be a harmless part.

81. Are there spaces cased all round about the stokehold?—No; all the spaces would be pretty rectangular. You are referring to recesses. In any case there would be plenty of coal against the bulkhead—that is, in the bunkers behind those bulkheads, and there could not be any heat unless the coal took fire.

82. *Mr. Foster.*] If there was sufficient heat to cause fire in the bunkers, the coal itself would catch before the cargo would catch on the other side of the bulkhead?—Yes. If the bunkers caught fire there would still be the bulkhead between them and the cargo, and although the fire in the bunkers might generate considerable heat, it would not be likely to be sufficient to set the cargo alight.

83. It would have to be pretty well red-hot?—Yes.

84. And the fire would be located before that?—I have seen a bulkhead pretty nearly red-hot with a coal fire which was subdued without injuring cargo or other side.