

Mr. J. W. CUMMING, Marine Surveyor, to Captain RUSSELL.

SIR,—

Port Chalmers, 8th September.

At your request I furnish you with a report of the stowage of gunpowder on board the last vessels that arrived here, and my experience as a marine surveyor of stowing of gunpowder on board vessels arrived at this port the last two years.

On the 19th August, 1875, I surveyed the main hatches of the ship "Knight of Snowdon," Captain Richardson, from London, with 200 kegs of gunpowder on board, and found the kegs in good order, and stowed against a plain $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch bulkhead that divided off the passengers' berths from the cargo, being about twenty feet aft the main hatch, stowed on top of case goods, without any old sail under or over the kegs.

On the 30th August, 1875, I surveyed the main hatches of the ship "Altcar," Captain Harvey, from London, with 400 kegs of blasting powder and twenty cases of canister powder on board. Found the kegs and cases of powder stowed in and around the main hatchway in separate lots. Some packages of other cargo, having got adrift on the passage, broke nine kegs and two cases of powder, completely smashing four of the kegs, and allowing the contents of the whole nine kegs to get mixed with the cargo, and find its way down into the lower hold, there being no old sail under or over the kegs to save or protect the powder.

Some time in 1874—(I forget the name of the vessel) had four kegs smashed, the contents getting down the lower hold for want of an old sail under the kegs; and only in one instance have I seen that precaution taken, but never found them covered over or stowed in a bin.

I have, &c.,

JNO. W. CUMMING,

Marine Surveyor.

Captain Russell.

Captain HARVEY to the SECRETARY, Underwriters' Association.

SIR,—

Ship "Altcar," Port Chalmers, September 17th, 1877.

I deem it my duty to inform you, for the information of the local insurance offices, of the dangerous manner in which gunpowder is put on board and (so called) stowed in London.

It is brought alongside, taken in, and stowed by the shipper's agents, the master and crew of the vessel having no control over it in any way.

Now, the stowing of these parties consists in dropping the various packages into any opening or crevice that presents itself. The powder in my vessel consisted of 400 barrels and twenty-four cases, and was placed in main hatchway and on both sides of same, amongst a general cargo consisting of wines, spirits, oils, paints, matches, rod and bar iron, &c., &c. The hatches were then secured, and nothing more was seen until arrival. We had the usual amount of heavy weather during the voyage. Upon opening hatches in presence of surveyor we found the powder adrift, and some eight barrels and three cases smashed. In consequence, daily during our discharge we have been sweeping and packing up powder from amongst the iron, &c., it (the loose powder) having reached down even to the skin of the ship. Now, any practical man will perceive we have been momentarily exposed to explosion, more especially from the friction of the iron, and have been most mercifully spared from an imminent and deadly peril. In carrying powder for the Government it is placed in a magazine specially prepared, into which not a particle of iron is allowed to enter. I begged for one in London, but was not listened to by the charterers. Powder is not allowed to be carried at all in emigrant vessels, but it is allowed, it seems, to be put on board passenger ships. Surely the lives of these, and of myself, wife, and crew, are as dear to us as to emigrants.

As the Government appear to take no cognizance of these matters, but confine their attention to frivolous and vexatious rules and regulations, my object is to persuade the insurance offices to refuse to underwrite a single package in vessels carrying powder, unless in a proper magazine, which for a few pounds could be erected.

While I am writing we all regret the non-appearance of the "Strathmore," a new vessel, with some ninety souls on board. Being informed she carried thirty tons of powder, and judging from my experience, I (and I shall rejoice to find I am wrong) never expect to see her.

Surely, Sir, under these circumstances the insurance offices will not hesitate a moment to put a stop (as far as is in their power) to this disgraceful and wanton practice, whereby most valuable vessels, their cargoes, and the lives of all on board, are so manifestly imperilled.

I have, &c.,

J. W. HARVEY,

Master of ship "Altcar."

The Secretary, Underwriters' Association.

No. 2.

The Hon. the COLONIAL SECRETARY to the AGENT-GENERAL.

SIR,—

Colonial Secretary's Office, Wellington, 15th June, 1877.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 29th March, No. 326, on the subject of the manufacture of gunpowder, and to thank you for the information it contains.

I should feel obliged by your making inquiries into the whole subject, as suggested in the third paragraph of your letter, and reporting the result to the Government.

I have, &c.,

DANIEL POLLEN.

The Agent-General for New Zealand, London.