

Enclosure 2.

PRESERVATION OF LIFE AT SEA.—[Printed for the Use of the Colonial Conference.]

In 1882-83, Mr. J. Wilks, President of the Royal Humane Society of Australasia, visited England, and had interviews with Lord Kimberley, Mr. Chamberlain, and the officials of the Board of Trade. His object was to point out the necessity for an amendment of the laws relating to the mercantile marine in the following direction: "That the provisions regarding the number and capacity of boats to be carried by steamers should be based upon the maximum number of passengers and crew allowed to be carried, and not upon the tonnage of the ships, and should require that a larger proportion of such boats should be lifeboats, and fitted with the most approved patent lowering apparatus; that more stringent provision be made with respect to the keeping of such boats in a position and state fit for immediate use; that, in the case of ships carrying more than a hundred and fifty passengers, life-rafts or other apparatus in addition to boats should be carried; that the number of life-buoys to be carried on board ships should be regulated by a scale according to the number of passengers and crew allowed to be carried by such a ship; that a clause should be inserted requiring the master of every ship to provide a life-jacket for every passenger and sailor allowed to be carried, and that such life-jacket should be placed inside each berth; that proper provision be made that sailing ships carrying passengers should be provided with fire-hose and distress-signals."

On the 27th February, 1884, Mr. Wilks wrote to Lord Derby, expressing gratitude for the announcement made in the Queen's Speech,* and pointing out the necessity for uniformity of legislation upon the subject as between the several Australasian Colonies. "On a former occasion, when, at the instance of this society, the Victorian Parliament attempted to deal with the subject, it was found impossible to do so through the fears expressed that the Act would be evaded by changing the port of registration of the interested shipping to a city in another colony."

On the 25th August, 1884, the Governor of Victoria forwarded a resolution passed at a public meeting held in Melbourne under the auspices of the society. The speakers advocated the amendment of "The Passenger, Harbours, and Navigation Statute, 1865," in the direction above described. They recommended that "representations should be made to the proper authorities in England with a view to similar amendments being made in the Imperial law, in order to prevent any conflict of jurisdiction and laws, and to remove any impediment at present existing against the carrying-out of any of these suggestions by the Victorian Parliament." It was pointed out by the society that the Bill lately introduced into the Imperial Parliament by the President of the Board of Trade, but since withdrawn, did not contain any provision upon these subjects, although it seemed universally admitted that the existing law urgently required amendment. This despatch was referred to the Board of Trade, who replied that the suggestions would receive consideration.

On the 3rd November, 1884, the Governor of Victoria forwarded a memorandum from his Ministers on the subject of this resolution. Mr. Service stated that the question had already received very full consideration, and a Bill had been prepared; but it was considered that, though extensive powers were proposed by the Bill to be given, they could not be exercised in advance of British legislation. He therefore asked the Governor to draw the attention of Her Majesty's Government to the need of legislation by the Imperial Parliament, more especially as the Bill introduced by the Board of Trade did not contain any provision to meet the necessities now brought under notice. This was communicated to the Board of Trade on the 24th December, 1884; but no answer was returned.

On the 10th January, 1885, the Governor of Queensland, in forwarding a letter from the society urging his co-operation, expressed his personal concurrence in their views. The Board of Trade then stated that "the subject would receive consideration;" and the same answer was returned at their request to a similar communication from the Governor of South Australia.

On the 14th March, 1885, the Governor of Tasmania forwarded a correspondence with the society, from which it appeared that the Tasmanian Government "fully realise the necessity for the adoption and enforcement of better provisions for the safety of life at sea, but that the necessary action must, in their opinion, be taken by the Imperial Government in the first place; and when the British Parliament shall have passed the necessary measure the Government will be prepared to submit a Bill to the Parliament of Tasmania to extend its provisions to the colony." The Queensland Government also invited the Secretary of State's attention to the propriety of such an amendment of the law as might "make it compulsory on shipowners to provide their vessels with sufficient life-saving apparatus." The Board of Trade desired that the same replies as before might be sent to these representations.

On the 22nd October, 1886, the President of the society again wrote to the Secretary of State urging that the views of the society might be brought before the Royal Commission on the Loss of Life at Sea which had recently been appointed in England. This was sent to the Board of Trade, who acknowledged its receipt.

From a Reuter's telegram of the 7th instant it appears that the question of the necessity for uniform legislation on the subject in England and the colonies is to be brought before the Colonial Conference by the Victorian delegates. The Board of Trade were therefore asked what should be said on behalf of Her Majesty's Government in reply to the representations that might be made. They have now replied that they see no reason why these questions should not be brought before the Conference, but observe that Her Majesty's Government propose at an early date to direct the attention of Parliament to the subject, and to suggest that the whole matter should be referred to a Parliamentary Committee. Should this Committee be appointed it would of course deal with any representations brought to its notice, whether made by the representatives of the Australian Governments or by such bodies as the Royal Humane Society of Australasia. The Board append a

* "You will be invited to consider Bills relating to the security of life and property at sea. . . ."