

meeting of Missions to Seamen Society, held at the Mansion House on the 28th April: "The report also complains that in some ports abroad, and in Crown colonies, especially Hongkong and Singapore, the crews are compelled to do unnecessary work in transshipping cargoes on Sundays, which causes much discontent and discomfort to the men, and puts a stop to all religious observances, whereas in the Australian and self-governing colonies such unnecessary working of cargoes is rigidly forbidden. I understand that the Secretary of State for the Colonies has called the attention of some colonial Governors to this grievance of seamen;" and whether the practice complained of had been prohibited, so that the men might enjoy their Sunday rest in port in common with other of Her Majesty's subjects. He said he would argue this question not on the religious ground, but on the ground that every working-man had a right to one day's rest in the week. He did not see why a seaman should be obliged to work on Sunday if he went to one of our Crown colonies, while he would not have to do so if he went to Australia, where Sunday labour was forbidden, because the working-men had votes and could make their influence felt. He could not say that Her Majesty's Government were not responsible for the state of things existing in the Crown colonies. The people there had no votes, and consequently it was the duty of Her Majesty's Government to see that no injustice was done to the working-classes. He was not one of those who thought that work should under no circumstances be done on the Sunday, but he was of opinion that great necessity should be shown before work was carried out on that day. Unless some satisfactory reply were given to his question he should move next session for papers on the subject.

Lord KNUTSFORD said his attention had been called to the remarks of the Duke of Edinburgh to which the noble earl had referred, but the question had been brought under his notice last year, when he received a letter from the Rev. Mr. Bowyer, and he communicated the contents of that letter to the Governors of Hongkong and the Straits Settlements. The Governor of Hongkong expressed his desire to see Sunday labour diminished at the port, but, after full inquiry into the subject and consideration of the difficulties of compulsory legislation, he came to the conclusion that such compulsory legislation on the Sunday labour question was not desirable, and, although he (Lord Knutsford) was not prepared to assent to all the Governor's reasons in support of that decision, he regretted to say that he was obliged to concur in the decision itself. The same decision was arrived at by the Governor of the Straits Settlements, who expressed himself very warmly in sympathy with the desire of those who wished to see Sunday labour diminished. He had himself taken steps towards diminishing Sunday labour, because in all Government contracts a provision was now inserted that work under those contracts should not be carried on on Sunday, except in very urgent cases and under special authority. But after communicating with the Chamber of Commerce, the leading merchants, and the unofficial members of the Council, the Governor of the Straits Settlements came to the conclusion arrived at by the Governor of Hongkong, that compulsory legislation was not desirable. The answers that were received by him from the Chamber of Commerce and the leading merchants were certainly not of an encouraging nature. He consulted both the Governors when they were in England, in order to ascertain whether any compromise could be effected, but he regretted to say that he found no compromise was possible. He was distinctly opposed to compulsory legislation on this point—viz., forcing against the views of the unofficial members legislation by an official vote. The case of Australia, which had been referred to, was very different. In the first place, as in other colonies where there was a Customhouse, Sunday labour could be prevented indirectly by closing the Customhouse, but in Hongkong and Singapore Customhouses did not exist. He was not aware that in Australia any Act prohibiting Sunday labour was in force. The working-men themselves had declined to work on Sunday, and indirectly secured for themselves freedom from work on that day; but he was not aware that there was any direct legislation on the point. He did not think anything could be done in this particular branch of labour unless it could be obtained by the voluntary unanimity upon the subject of the members of the Chamber of Commerce and the leading merchants in the colonies and of the leading merchants here who had partners or agents in the colonies. In that way pressure might be put on local Legislatures, and ultimately some measure might be introduced which would put an end to Sunday labour. But at present he did not think there was that feeling in the colony which would justify compulsory legislation.

The Earl of HARROWBY said that he did not see why legislation on this subject should be possible in Australia and not in the Crown colonies. He would suggest to his right honourable friend that he should address inquiries to the Governors of all the colonies, Crown and self-governing, as to the existing practice. The feeling among the seamen was rising very high on the question of Sunday labour.

Lord KNUTSFORD said that he should have great pleasure in adopting the suggestion of the noble earl.

The subject then dropped.

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No. 20.

(Circular.)

SIR,—

Downing Street, 16th August, 1890.

I have the honour to transmit, for the information of the colony under your government, a copy of a letter from the organizing committee of the projected International Congress on Hygiene and Demography which it is contemplated to hold in London in 1891, together with a preliminary statement issued by the committee.

I have, &c.

KNUTSFORD.

The Officer Administering the Government of New Zealand.