

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE.

reconsideration, I am sure the Board of Trade will give it their most attentive consideration. A full account of the method of applying the test which is followed in practice is given in the Board's regulations relating to the examination of masters and mates in the mercantile marine, copies of which I shall be happy to furnish to the members of the Conference. The examinations in the sight tests are conducted by the examiners of masters and mates and some of the superintendents, all of whom have passed a satisfactory examination in the sight tests. With regard to their qualifications; here, again, the Board is acting under the advice of Sir William Abney. The work of the Examiners is, moreover, under the continual supervision of the principal examiner, so that there can be no doubt as to their competency to conduct the examination in colour vision. An appeal is allowed in all cases where any doubt arises, to a special examination, which is conducted not in wools simply, but by means of the spectro-scope as well, and it is generally conducted by Sir William Abney, who is, as I have said, a recognised authority upon the subject. It is an exceedingly severe examination, and is as advised by Sir William Abney. It will be seen that the present system of testing for colour blindness is not only based upon undoubted scientific authority, but can claim to be as complete and sound as can well be desired, so far as our information goes at the present moment. I should like to say that, of course, the Board of Trade only have distinct statutory powers for tests to be applied when a candidate comes up for examination for certificates. The candidate for the certificate of a second mate has to pass it, and if he comes up afterwards for the certificate of a first mate he has to pass it, and also when coming up for the certificate of a master. Referring now especially to what has been said here, I may add that, if we have reason to believe that any officer or any master is so colour blind or so deficient in form vision that he is incompetent to perform his duties, we refer the matter to a Local Marine Board, or some qualified court, to deal with his certificate. The Board of Trade have no power to cancel his certificate themselves, but these courts have power. Therefore, the Board of Trade put the scientific evidence before those courts, and those courts can deal with the certificates. The wool test, instituted in this country in 1894, was adopted also by those Colonies which issue certificates of competency recognised by Order in Council to be of equal validity with the certificates issued by the Board of Trade. A list of these Colonies will be found at page 147 of the Board's regulations. I ought to add that every year I present a report to the Board of Trade upon the results of the colour tests. We also go as far as we can in the direction of cautioning boys and persons going into the sea services. We have issued a notice to all the examiners and all the superintendents, indeed, to all our officers throughout the country, instructing them to make it generally known that any boy or man going into the sea service for any time should submit himself voluntarily to this test, and a great number of persons do so. They only have to pay a very small fee, 1s., and the results of the examination of those persons, as well as of that of officers are contained in the report which is submitted to Parliament every year. I hope that nothing that I have said will be construed into meaning "Rest satisfied as you are." If any evidence can be adduced and sent to the Board of Trade sufficient to induce them to consider whether their examination requires to be made more stringent, or less stringent (because many people in this country have said it is too stringent; I do not think so, but they have said so), I am sure the Board of Trade will give it their most attentive consideration.

THE CHAIRMAN: That is with regard to the case you brought before them, Mr. Havelock Wilson.

MR. HAVELOCK WILSON: I did not say it was too stringent.

MR. HISLOP: With regard to this matter the Merchant Service Guild of Australasia are finding fault with the companies in regard to imposing a very severe test. They are not finding fault with the Board of Trade itself; they are finding fault with companies imposing this test. What they would like to see would be a test imposed by the Board of Trade which should be a guidance and a rule to the employers of masters and mates, so as to take this altogether out of the hands of employers, if it is possible to do that. That was their contention. This morning, just a few minutes ago, a letter has come to me on behalf of 14,000 British captains and officers, signed by Mr. W. T. Moore, in which he says: "The present official eyesight tests are quite admirable, in

"fact almost too severe if anything. We have it in our own experience that members one week have passed their official eyesight test without the slightest question, and have also passed their examination for master's certificates. Next week they have applied to certain firms of shipowners who have had these men medically examined in sight tests themselves, with the result that their applications for employment have been rejected on the score of defective eyesight. These expert eye specialists always greatly magnify minor defects which may exist, and do not understand that to judge a man in such a way is to ruin his professional career at sea." That is what the Merchant Service Guild wish to bring forward—that the eyesight test should be established by the Board of Trade and made binding upon the employers.

MR. WALTER J. HOWELL: I think it would be a little difficult to do that.

MR. HISLOP: I quite recognise the difficulty.

MR. WALTER J. HOWELL: We can only lay down rules and say that unless the standard laid down is attained the certificates shall not be issued. Of course, in this country, we must recognise that this question of colour blindness is one on which there are great differences of opinion among medical men and scientists, and if an owner desires to submit the matter to a doctor he is quite at liberty to do so.

MR. HISLOP: Does it not appear to you that there must be something wanting in the Board of Trade examination when shipowners, not only in Australia, but also in Britain, find it necessary to subject a man to some further test?

MR. WALTER J. HOWELL: No, I do not think so at all. In all these matters of scientific opinion, just like technical questions, you will find opinions expressed on all sides. Anyone who reads the "Lancet" and other medical journals will know that this subject is being continually raised. It seems to me that when they cannot find anything else to discuss, they discuss colour tests. The question of division of opinion in such matters was touched upon in a cartoon of "Punch" this week which referred to doctors being divided into two camps, one, I think, calling alcohol poison and another calling it food.

MR. HISLOP: It does seem to me that there is something for the Board of Trade to do in this matter. We have had cases lately in Australia. There was the case of the boat wrecked at Port Philip, where the pilot was blind. He had been going on upon his old sight test. There was a case recently where a man had been master of a sea-going ship; it was necessary for him to go up for some examination, and he was rejected. These men had their certificates under the Board of Trade, and continued to act upon them.

THE CHAIRMAN: I do not want to restrict the discussion, if it is desired to proceed with it, but would this satisfy you: "That the Board of Trade be urged to take into immediate consideration the question of eyesight tests?"

MR. MILLS: No. The Board of Trade officials already say that their eyesight test is more than sufficient. I want a higher standard of efficiency.

THE CHAIRMAN: In that case we will take the short adjournment now.

(The Conference adjourned for lunch.)

THE CHAIRMAN: I understand Mr. Mills is now prepared to agree to Sir Joseph Ward's resolution, as altered, in this form:—"That the Board of Trade be urged to take into immediate consideration the question of eyesight tests with a view to effecting improvements if found necessary."

MR. MILLS: Under the circumstances, I am prepared to accept that, as I have the assurance of the officials of the Board of Trade that they will accept it in the spirit in which it is moved.

THE CHAIRMAN: They will look into the matter; they have promised that. Very well; I will pass it in this form:—"That the Board of Trade be urged to take into immediate consideration the question of eyesight