Marine Department

The Standard of Construction for Great Lakes Vessels.

The London, Eng., correspondent of the Toronto Mail and Empire wrote recently as follows: "The heavy losses caused by the November storms on the Great Lakes still forms a subject of discussion in marine underwriting circles here, although the bulk of the liability has had to be borne by the American market owing to the refusal of Lloyd's and the British companies to accept the risks at low premiums. The hope is now expressed that as regards the classification of the steamers employed, the requirements of Lloyd's Register will be adopted as extensively as those for ocean-going vessels, some of the boats at present employed being, it is feared, lacking in longitudinal strength. In fact, the rules of Lloyd's for lake steamers were formulated after a careful investigation of the conditions under which they are usually employed, and it is believed that if they were more generally observed the disasters would not occur on such a large scale again. If not, it is likely that insurances will in future be difficult to effect, on this side at all events."

A Shipbuilder's Opinion.

In reference to the foregoing, J. M. Smith, Manager, Collingwood Shipbuilding Co., Collingwood, Ont., has written us as follows:—

"It is quite true that many of the ships built in the American shipyards on the Great Lakes are not built as strong as Lloyd's requirements call for. There are a number of ships, however, that are built quite as strongly as Lloyd's rules call for, and most of the latter are classed in the Great Lakes Register, which is an offspring of Bureau Veritas, which might be termed French Lloyd's. We have found that the requirements of the Great Lakes Register are very complete, and the given dimensions of materials are very intelligently worked out, and ships built to class in this register are quite up to any requirements of British Lloyd's. There are some ships built on the lakes that are classed in Lloyd's Register, they are good ships, but they are not any better nor any stronger than the ships that are classed in the Great Lakes Register. It would be much better in the long run for the shipowner if all ships were built equal to the requirements of some good classification society. I believe it is true that some of the ships that were lost may not have been built quite up to the requirements of such classification societies, but the majority of them were good ships. Some of the older ships may have been lacking in longitudinal strength, but I think that the most of the ships that have been built on the lakes in recent years are quite strong enough for the requirements of the service.

"The steamer Wexford, which was lost off Goderich, was built to class in Lloyd's Register, and although she was an old ship she had been repaired and rebuilt until she was a good sound ship. I believe that the Regina, which was lost at the same time, was built to class in the British Corporation. The James Carruthers, which was lost somewhere above Goderich, was built to the highest classification of the Great Lakes Register, and was, without doubt, the strongest built freight ship on the Great Lakes, and it was not want of strength that caused any of these three ships to founder. They were all fitted with good machinery, and had plenty of power, but, no doubt, they met a condition out on Lake Huron that could not be compared with ordinary heavy gales, possibly they encountered something of the nature of a cyclone sweeping down the centre of the lake.

"The shipping trade on the Great Lakes has developed a distinct type of ship where large cargoes are carried on a moderate draught of water. The ships are built for a moderate price and are operated at a moderate cost, they are very suitable for the trade, no doubt, however, many little improvements will be added to them from time to time.

"I do not think that the ships that foundered in the storm last November were lost through carelessness on the part of the owners, or on the part of the officers or crews. My own belief is that they encountered an unusual storm, and the high winds, combined with an extremely violent snow storm and zero weather, made a combination that was almost impossible to contend with, and I think all of those ships would have reached port safely if they could have turned around and run before the storm, but, unfortunately, Lake Huron narrows down to about a quarter of a mile wide where it enters the St. Clair River at Port Huron and the waters are shoal for a good many miles before entering the river, and the ship masters knowing this would not dare to run for the river, and, no doubt, they turned to fight it out. Possibly the ships were thrown in the trough of the sea, and if so they would have little chance of recovery.

"We have built over 40 vessels here during the past 12 years, and they were all built equal to Lloyd's requirements. The most of them have been for service on the Great Lakes, and a few for service on the sea coast."

A Vessel Man's Opinion.

One of the best known men interested in the Great Lakes shipping business has written us as follows:—"There is nothing in the statement of the Mail and Empire's London correspondent. So far as I have heard, and I would be certain to hear of it, there has been no question raised yet by the underwriters in connection with the seaworthiness of lake steamers, either Canadian or United States, as they recognize that, with exceptional storms, there is always danger of ships being lost, and it is that risk which enables the underwriters to get business.

"Regarding the question of longitudinal strength, there has been no evidence so far that any of the ships which came to grief on the lakes in the storm of Nov. 9th were lost through lack of longitudinal strength. On the contrary, so far as I can learn, none of the ships failed in this respect while they were afloat, and any ships, when loaded, no matter how strongly they are built, are liable to break if thrown up on the rocks in a seaway, and bearing probably amidships with the two ends hanging, giving the same effect as bending a stick over your knee. Any evidence which has developed so far would indicate that the ships were more likely to have been lost from their hatches, or deck houses, or both, and the evidence would seem to be very strong on these two points, although nothing is known definitely, and never will be known probably, regarding the ships which foundered, but with those which were thrown up on the beach, these are the two points which suffered most.

"Regarding the classification of ships on the lakes, just as on the ocean, they are not classed exclusively by any one classification society. I believe there are eight United States lake freight vessels classed by Lloyd's Register, and it would be very difficult for Lloyd's, or anyone else, if not impossible, to show that any one of these is stronger as far as longitudinal strength is concerned than was the s.s. James Carruthers, which was classed by the Great Lakes Register of Cleveland, a classification society approved of and controlled by the U.S. underwriters. The majority of the vessels on the Great Lakes, especially those built in Britain, were classed by Lloyd's and British Corporation. The balance of the vessels on the lakes, I believe, are in the majority of cases classified by the Great Lakes Register of Cleveland. A great deal of nonsense has been written in connection with these losses by people who do not know what they are writing or talking about, and you can quite understand that Lloyd's are anxious to class all the vessels possible, as there is a fee in it for them, just as the wireless companies have been trying to make capital out of that storm and get more vessels to equip with wireless outfits, but, although I have asked the representatives of one of the wireless companies to give me the name of any ship which received any warning by her wireless of that storm of Nov. 9, and avoided the storm as a result of that warning, they have failed up to date to give me the name of any ship."

Welland Ship Canal Construction Contracts.

In Canadian Railway and Marine World for June, page 286, was given a list of the tenderers for the various sections on the Welland Canal, and in each section the name of the successful tenderer was shown in capital letters. This information was as given by the acting Minister of Railways and Canals in response to questions in the House of Commons. In regard to sec. 3, it was noticed that there was a discrepancy as to the name of the successful tenderer, as compared with that previously announced. and given in C. R. & M. W. for May, pg. 242. This was brought to the Department's attention, and we are officially advised that certain information which was supplied to the acting Minister was incorrect. The contract for sec. 3 was awarded to the lowest tenderers, O'Brien, Doheny, Quinlan and Robertson, Montreal.

The British Board of Trade has issued invitations to the various branches of the Imperial Merchant Service Guild, which represents about 75% of the total British captains and officers, to send representatives to a general conference with the Board of Trade authorities in London, Eng., on several suggestions for alterations to the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea. The suggestions cover the making compulsory of a second mast head light, a fixed stern light, a special signal for motor vessels proceeding under sail and mechanical power simultaneously, a suitable sound signal for a vessel in tow, and an addition to the distress signals by the inclusion of the radiotelegraph distress signal.