

"There was also an immense waste in the Mercantile Marine from the unseaworthiness of seamen, and it was found that men were shipped as seamen who from their physical condition were utterly unfit to go to sea."

And again, at a meeting of the Associated Chambers of Commerce, held at Newcastle-on-Tyne, on the 21st of September of the same year, Mr. Gray says:—"The question of loss of life at sea was not a question of unseaworthiness of ships so much as of unseaworthiness of seamen."

I consider that report and these statements by Mr. Gray most contradictory. The evidence of the fact of this deterioration is undoubted. I cannot go back fifty years and say, the seamen then were better than they are now. I have to deal simply with the fact that they are now very bad, and also that there are not 25 per cent. of fore-castle hands that know the ordinary duties of seamen. I take it that there are 150,000 hands, all told, in the Mercantile Marine, 16,000 of whom are apprentices. I may mention that these apprentices are generally not in the fore-castle, they are in the round-house, or in the poop, training to be Officers and masters, so that I am dealing simply with grown-up hands. Now, if only 25 per cent. of these fore-castle hands are seamen in the proper sense, we have barely 40,000 A.B.'s in the Mercantile Marine of this country. We have 19,000 foreigners, according to the Board of Trade returns, of these, a few blacks. Lascars are in some of the Suez Canal steamers, and a larger number of them in the Peninsular and Oriental boats—about 5,000. I will mention how this has arisen. The Company's Superintendent stated at a meeting in London last week, that they were obliged, from the insubordination of the men, to abolish all the white fore-castle hands, and to replace them with Lascars. These Lascars I do not include in the number of A.B.'s at all. We have then remaining nearly 15,000 Swedes, Danes, and other white foreigners, in our Mercantile Marine, and, as Mr. Corry says, any shipowner in this country would be delighted to man his ships with them. All A.B.'s are paid alike, and not, as has been stated by gentlemen in the House of Commons, that shipowners take foreigners because they get them at lower wages than British sailors; they are all shipped at the same time at the shipping office, and at the same wages, and these foreigners are the best men in our fore-castles—any shipmaster will tell you this.

Captain WILSON: Are these foreigners plus the 40,000?

Mr. WILLIAMSON: No; of the 40,000 A.B.'s, about 15,000 are foreigners; that gives you 25,000 good English A.B.'s in the Mercantile Marine of this country. Out of these about 11,000 belong to the first-class Royal Naval Reserves; that is what the Navy has to fall back upon in an emergency. Now I would ask Naval gentlemen, how many of those will they get in the first five or six months of a war? It would not be 3,000 or 4,000 at the outside. Mr. Brassey, in his speech, has suggested one or two excellent measures for improving the condition of masters. The whole subject divides itself into two parts, first, the remedial dealing with the existing state of things; and second, the question of supplies. In the remedial part I quite agree with Mr. Brassey, that a compulsory benefit fund for seamen should be established. Mr. Brassey spoke to a large number of respectable sailors in Liverpool last December, and without one dissentient, they agreed to this. He put before them, that no Government would impose upon them a compulsory pension fund,—they must do it of their own accord; and after he had reasoned the thing out in a most able manner, they all agreed to it; and I believe if Mr. Brassey were to stump the country, all the sea-ports would equally agree with the Liverpool men on this point. Then, as to the second remedy, viz., that before being allowed to rate as A.B., satisfactory proof of having been four years at sea should be produced. You find many A.B.'s tell you, that they wish to leave the sea, because they get no protection at all. They do not like to be in the fore-castles with so many incompetent men; they say, the duties of the ship are thrown upon a few, while the others do not do the work, and yet all get the same pay. I may say that all the respectable seamen are unanimously in favour of this protection. I do not believe it would punish the shipowners in any way, the constitution of the fore-castles would be improved. The pay all round I do not believe would be greater than it is now, but you would really improve the condition of the better men; you would raise