

the prosperity of our lake navigation that there should be some proper system for securing the safety of life and property engaged in it. For this purpose it is not necessary that we should shut out the Americans from joining us if they are disposed, but I think it is the duty of the Government to see that we in Canada are not left to the mercy of the Americans in a duty which we should be prepared to do ourselves.

Mr. BOWELL. If I caught the remark made by my hon. friend who has just sat down, it was that, not only the late Government, but the present, had neglected their duty with regard to these wrecking laws. If he had informed the House in what respect, I should have been better able to reply to him as far as the present Government are concerned. I do not think the Government have reason to regret that this question had come before the House, as we have thereby obtained the views of the representatives of the people upon it. It has been the desire of the Government in the past to carry out the law, and to enforce as far as possible the regulations issued, both before and after their accession to office, with the view of protecting the interest of the wrecking and towing companies in this country; not, I can assure the House at the expense of life or property. In order that this question may be fairly understood, I will read to the House the different orders that have been issued—two by my predecessors, and one since I have had the honor of administering the affairs of the Customs Department, and after they have been read I think it will be seen that the conclusions which have been drawn by my hon. friend from the County of Prince Edward (Mr. McCuaig), or my hon. friend from Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) are not borne out by the fact. I do not propose, at present, to enter into the question of reciprocity, or to refer to the contents of the papers which have been moved for, and which will soon be laid before the House; but I may say that the Government, in its correspondence with the authorities at Washington, has always expressed a willingness to enter into any arrangement of equitable reciprocity which they might propose, or which they would accept at our hands. On all occasions, however, they resisted any proposition made to them except on one condition, viz: that the American wrecking companies and American tug owners should have the right to come into Canadian waters to save the property not only of their own vessels, but of Canadian vessels whenever the opportunity presented itself. Well, the position taken by the Government was this: that this was a one-sided reciprocity from the simple fact that the larger number of vessels plying on the upper lakes, and on that particular part of the north coast where wrecks mostly take place, are American bottoms, and such an arrangement would be giving almost a monopoly to the American tug owners. I can easily understand that the letter read by the hon. member for Prince Edward should have been written by the secretary of the Board of Trade. We are constantly receiving complaints from that section of the country, and I think I can safely say that 19 out of 20 of these complaints have emanated from parties interested in the wrecking companies, that in fact the underwriters and the tug owners are the men who have the most to gain by doing that kind of work in our waters. The case to which my hon. friend from Hamilton referred was that of a vessel which had been stranded on our shores, and from the coldness of the weather some of the passengers and crew had been frozen to death. It was represented to the American Government, by those interested in the case, that on account of the order which had been issued by the late Government, the wrecking tugs of the United States were prevented from going to the rescue of these unfortunate people. What is the fact? The papers laid before the House proved that this vessel was wrecked, and that these lives were lost months before my predecessor issued the Order. Besides, the people and property saved from that vessel were saved by my hon. friend from Monck (Mr. McCallum), and those who owned

the tugs which he at that time controlled. I do not hesitate to say that the great majority of the charges brought against the Government of this country were just as baseless as that. My hon. friend from Prince Edward, from his large experience, must know that vessels might be wrecked along the south shore of the county in which he lives, and that it would be utterly impossible to save life, particularly where there are no tugs nor other vessels to go to the rescue: and it is in cases of that kind that complaints have been made against the Government. The first order that was issued by the Customs Department in reference to this matter was on the 1st December, 1877, and was as follows:

"Pending instructions expected by this department from the Minister of Justice, you are reminded that, no vessel, foreign or Canadian, has legal right to interfere with wrecked vessels, on the Canadian shore, unless permitted by the Collector of Customs at the nearest port, after reporting to him, and no foreign vessel should receive such permission, as it is contrary to Customs law, and should be placed under detention in case of violation.

(Signed), "J. JOHNSON."

Now, it seems to me that both the newspapers and a good many members who have discussed this question, do not draw a distinction between a wrecked vessel and a vessel that had gone ashore, and may be wrecked unless assistance comes to her. The interpretation of the Customs laws, and all laws relating to wrecked vessels, is simply this: A foreign vessel may be wrecked on your shore, she may contain thousands of dollars worth of property subject to customs duty; and unless that is looked after by the customs officers, at any moment it may be scattered all over the country, and the revenue is defrauded. That is the only object, really, that that first order had in view. Now, on the 8th March, 1878, a second order was issued, as follows:—

"CUSTOMS DEPARTMENT,  
"OTTAWA, 8th March, 1878.

"Sir,—I am instructed by the Minister of Customs to call your attention to the bearing of the Customs law upon the treatment of wrecked vessels or property in Canadian waters, which provides in effect that, no vessel, foreign or Canadian, has legal right to interfere with wrecked vessels or material in Canadian waters, unless permitted by the Collector of Customs at the nearest port, after reporting to him. And as foreign vessels should not receive such permission, as it is contrary to Customs law, they should be placed under detention in case of violation.

The Collector of Customs } "I have the honor to be, Sir,  
Port of } "Your obedient servant,  
(Signed) "J. JOHNSON."

This is the Order which gave a good deal of offence to our American neighbours, and which, I think, induced the writing of the letter which was read by the hon. member for Prince Edward (Mr. McCuaig.) A misapprehension having arisen on that point from the misrepresentations which had been and are constantly being sent to Washington, induced Mr. Secretary Evarts to enter into correspondence with the Canadian Government on the subject. In almost every case brought under the notice of the Government, we have proved, after a thorough investigation, that the charges have been as groundless as those to which I first referred. Explanations have been repeatedly made by myself in this correspondence, on behalf of the Canadian Government, to the United States authorities, that there was no intention nor should such an interpretation be given to the order issued in 1878—of preventing in any case, or under any circumstances, a vessel going to the relief of any other vessel, no matter what her nationality, if there was the slightest danger of her being wrecked, or of the loss of property; and on that principle we have acted ever since the present Government was formed. I have no reason to doubt that that was the intention of the late Government also, when they issued that Order. But for fear difficulties should arise, and any of our collectors misunderstand the true intent and meaning of that Order, and the intentions of the Canadian Government, I instructed an explanatory Order to be issued on the 19th September, 1879.