

I earnestly hope that all the suggestions contained in the letter of Dr. Roe may be adopted.

The system of making advances of wages to seamen is a subject closely connected with the general question of the rate of pay. I cordially concur with the Royal Commission in their unhesitating condemnation of the advance note. Seamen are the only class of working men who are paid in advance for labour that has not been performed. It may be urged that it is hard to deny a small sum in advance to a man who is about to embark on a ten months' voyage. It may be said that he has an outfit to provide and expenses to pay for his board on shore while seeking an engagement. The answer is, that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the money paid in advance is consumed in debauchery; that the man comes on board destitute of clothes, but minus the month's wages. He has discounted his advance note at a usurious rate of interest, and has probably been paid not in money, but in the most deleterious liquors. The crimp alone has derived a profit on the transaction.

Some shipowners have strongly opposed the abolition of the advance note. They have been accustomed to rely on the co-operation of the crimp to get their men on board before sailing, and they apprehend that the abolition of the advance note will lead to a small rise of wages.

For the reasons I have stated, I disagree with the objections to the reform proposed by the Royal Commission. Until a seaman is taught to depend upon his past earnings, to be sufficiently careful of the large sums often received on paying off, so as to be able to provide therefrom the kit required for the next voyage, you cannot look for improvement in their moral character.

The delay in paying off is at least as fruitful of evil as the payment of wages in advance. If a delay of forty-eight hours occurs after the arrival of a ship in dock, the seamen are necessarily thrown into the hands of the crimps. True it is that sailors' homes have been established at the large ports, and they have done great good; but, after all, the sailor's home bears a close resemblance to an embellished prison, and is not the genial and attractive hostel, to which a sailor would naturally resort, who has been cribbed, cabled, and confined under tight discipline for many months on board ship. Captain Dawson has enlarged in a recent paper in such sympathetic language on the necessity for an immediate settlement of wages after the arrival of a ship, that I need not insist further on this point.

I would offer one more suggestion connected with the question of wages which ought not to be omitted in a general review of this subject, although it is not within the province of legislation to remedy the evil which I seek to point out.

Surely it is a mistake in the Merchant Service to pay every seaman before the mast at the same rate. By preserving this unbroken uniformity, you may, it is true, avoid the risk of exciting envy and jealousy among the crew; but on the other hand, you give no encouragement under such a system to special exertion and good conduct. You draw no distinction between efficiency and utter