

April 2, 1873

### THE ATLANTIC DISASTER

**Mr. TOBIN** desired to call attention to a matter of recent occurrence before the business of the House was further proceeded with. It was well known to the House, and by this time throughout the length and breadth of the Dominion and the greater portion of the world, that at about one o'clock yesterday morning one of the most heart rendering cases of shipwreck ever recorded had occurred on the coast of Nova Scotia, within twenty-five miles of the harbour of Halifax, resulting the loss of the steamship *Atlantic* and 750 lives.

Under these circumstances, he wished to ask whether the Government had received any official notification of the disaster, and whether they had instituted any enquiry into the circumstances attending it. A few days ago he had asked a question with regard to the placing of a light-ship, for which provision was made in the estimates last year, and he had been answered that the ship would be placed in position during the present summer. The disaster had occurred almost on the very spot where the ship was to be placed, and he must say, with all due deference to the Government, that he thought so important a matter should have been attended to before. (*Hear, hear.*)

Today the eyes of all Europe and American were upon the spot and causes of the dreadful occurrence, and it could not but exercise a very serious effect upon the character which our coast must bear in the estimation of the world. He would take this opportunity of saying that while the Government had done a good deal for the coast of Nova Scotia, there yet remained much to be done. If this light-ship had been established, this lamentable catastrophe might have been averted. It would be a sad lesson to the Government, and would surely awaken them to the necessity there existed for the protection of our coast, and that a light-ship should be placed there as speedily as it were possible, as well as at several points between Halifax and Yarmouth. It was a matter which required to be attended to instantly.

He would beg to ask if it was the intention of the Government to make any provision for the relief of the sufferers who had been saved off the wreck. The people in the vicinity had rendered every assistance in their power, having made gigantic efforts to save the lives of those who were still on the wreck. He was informed by telegram that the first officer and his wife were still clinging to the rigging and that owing to the roughness of the weather it was so difficult as to be almost impossible to reach them in their fearful position. He would ask the Government if they were going to take any steps to relieve the sufferers or to reward those who had endeavoured to save and were still caring for the sufferers.

**Hon. Mr. MITCHELL** was rather pleased and glad that the hon. gentleman had taken the opportunity to put the question to the Government, and that he had gone into the details of the occurrence so far as his information allowed him, even though in his remarks he appeared to reflect in some measure upon the conduct of the Government.

He was glad of this because it had given him (Hon. Mr. Mitchell) an opportunity of informing the House that the Government had received information within the last twenty hours of the occurrence of this great disaster. The first information was received by himself in a telegram last night, just after the House adjourned. It was as follows:—"Steamer *Atlantic*, White Star Line, from Liverpool to New York ashore this morning on Meagher's Island, near Prospect. The ship is probably a total loss. It is feared the loss of life will be very great. The captain and first officer are reported lost. The *Delta* from the Cunard Line, and the *Lady Head* go to-night to render assistance." He believed that this place was twenty-two miles south of Halifax.

The next message he received on the subject was from Mr. Johnson, agent of the Department at Halifax, which was as follows:—"The third officer of the *Atlantic*, who swam ashore, reports the captain and about 250 saved. Seven hundred and fifty perished. The first officer and lady are in the rigging, but cannot be got off." The next despatch he received was from Mr. McDonald, Collector of Customs at Halifax, which said:—"It is suggested here that an enquiry should be made into the wreck of the steamship *Atlantic* at Prospect yesterday with such dreadful loss of life. Shall I hold an investigation?" To this he (Hon. Mr. Mitchell) replied:—"Yes, hold a searching preliminary investigation under 32 and 33 Vic., Cap. 38."

He also received a fourth communication, this time from the telegraph operator at Halifax:—"Steamship *Atlantic*, from Liverpool, March 20th, for New York with a full cargo and over 800 steerage and 50 cabin passengers, struck on Meagher's Rock, 22 miles north of Halifax. (This should be south of Halifax.) She went down with the loss of 750 passengers. It being about midnight, most of the passengers were in bed. Two steamers left this morning for the scene of the disaster at one a.m.; nothing more can be heard until they return."

After having read the above, the following telegram was handed in by the Hon. Mr. Howe (Secretary of State for the Provinces) which he read:—"The accounts vary concerning the numbers lost and saved. The latest news confirms the statement that over 700 went down with the ship or were afterwards swept away and drowned. The rescued are now reported to be about 200 men and one child, principally German emigrants, and the crew. As there was no time to save the ship's papers or other documents, the list of the lost cannot yet be obtained. The steamer *Delta* has just arrived this afternoon with the survivors from this wreck, and arrangements are made to have them all cared for. She reports that the *Atlantic* has not broken. The cargo which is large and valuable, was, therefore, not adrift, with the exception of that on deck, which was very little. Several vessels with diving apparatus had arrived at the wreck, and commenced operations for the removal of the dead bodies and cargo. The sea was still rough, but the wind has gone down so that they can approach the locality without danger. The *Carlotta*'s passengers, who got in early yesterday morning, say the night was very dark, rainy and windy, and they were very anxious. They saw nothing of the *Atlantic*. It is not known yet what are the