

# The Nation.

[Vol. 94, No. 2443]

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## THE TRAGEDY REVEALED.

Contradictory as are the narratives of the survivors of the Titanic in many details, the essential facts stand out clearly enough. There was no panic; the crew as a whole behaved admirably, although but recently brought together. The passengers were unusually self-possessed, owing to the belief, at first held, that the taking to the boats was merely a precaution. The proportion of women saved is notably high, only about 13 in the first cabin and 25 in the second having been lost. Many of those in the steerage were also rescued, as well as 20 stewardesses. Had the boats been fully laden there would have been room for all the women and more men than were rescued. As in many another wreck, these victims of criminal neglect and carelessness paid the forfeit of their lives bravely enough. If there were exceptions, they merely proved the rule.

Beyond this, however, two terrible, damning facts stand out—the first, that the ship was speeding through an ice-field of the presence of which its officers were fully aware; the second is that every life could readily have been saved had there been boats and rafts enough to keep people afloat in a clear, starry night on an exceptionally smooth Atlantic sea. Both of these facts are indisputable. Whether the ship was making eighteen or twenty or twenty-one knots, or more, may never be known precisely; but the exact figure is of no importance. Everybody thus far reported testifies that there was no decrease noticeable in the vibration of the engines as the ship surged ahead. Every seaman knows that at night an iceberg takes the color of the ocean; but that made no difference. Whether it was the desire to make a record on the maiden voyage, or whatever the motive may have been, the ship drove on. A smaller ship might perhaps have turned quickly enough as soon as the berg was sighted, but the Titanic changed her course only so as to inflict a fatal wound; a head-on collision would probably have been less disastrous. As it was, the ship tore her bottom out, and the rest is known. The captain was not on the bridge when she struck, although less than three hours before the accident the Titanic acknowledged with thanks the warning of the Mesaba that, dead ahead, were “much heavy packed ice and great numbers of bergs.” For this reckless-

ness Capt. Smith paid not only with his life, but, à las! with those of at least 1,500 others; the responsibility for being so far north is of course not his.

As for the lifeboats—these expensive affairs that cost the large sum of \$425 apiece—there were but twenty of them in addition to a few rafts. Only fourteen of these were large boats, two were smaller, and four of the collapsible type. These were all that the Board of Trade certificate called for, and far be it from the White Star Line to spend \$425 in providing one more than the law required. Its officials were aware that fully half of their own steamer Republic's passengers would have been lost had there been no rescuing Baltic at hand. They knew, too, that ships are sometimes sunk on their maiden voyages, for their own big freighter the Naronic was never heard of after leaving New York on her first return trip. They were—so the excuse now runs—so deluded by the naval constructors' theory that the Titanic was "practically unsinkable" as not to think about this matter of lifeboats at all. The absurdity of this attempt to avoid the terrible guilt charged upon them is perfectly apparent if one but considers that the Majestic, Teutonic, and other ships of the line not pronounced the "last word in marine construction" are inadequately equipped—precisely like virtually every other liner, American or foreign, that leaves this harbor.

Fortunately, the time-worn falsehood that there was not room enough for more lifeboats has been abandoned for once. That the Titanic, a sea-monster 882 feet long and 92 feet broad, could not carry more boats than did this same line's Britannic in the late seventies is preposterous. If one-third of the souls on board the Titanic were saved by less than twenty boats, for some are supposed to have sunk and one is known to have turned over, it would only have taken sixty boats to accommodate all. As if an eleven-deck liner could not find room for sixty boats! As for these little craft, they appear to have been lowered by block and fall precisely as was done nearly 200 years ago; there was no motor in any one of them. Nor was one of them, we venture to say, of the self-righting type, now in use by the Lighthouse Service. Naturally, there was no water on board of them, much less provisions; had their passengers

been compelled to float about for a day or two instead of from five to six hours, additional tortures must have been added to this most distressing of tragedies, and the roll of deaths would have been further increased.

We are glad to note that the Hamburg-American Line promised immediately that henceforth there should be a seat in a lifeboat to every passenger. Moreover, its agent, Mr. Boas, is asking the President to call an international conference to try to bring about uniformity in the matter of boiler inspection and the question of life-saving devices. We congratulate the line upon this action, which is being followed by other companies.

Meanwhile, before this session of Congress adjourns, without waiting for international agreements, or referring the matter to The Hague, Congress should give notice of its intention to insist that every ship entering American waters shall provide a seat in a lifeboat for every living being carried by it. This is a simple proposal, requiring the plainest of statutes, and only honest inspection by the Government official charged with that duty. Besides, there must be prompt orders to take less dangerous routes, at the dangerous season of the year.