

THE TWO "TITANIC" INVESTIGATIONS

A **INTERESTING** comparison of the American and British official investigations of the *Titanic* disaster is published by *Engineering News* (New York, August 15). The conclusion is reached that altho the American investigators were practically an "avenging" body and the English a "vindicating" one, the recommendations made by the two come to very nearly the same thing. Contrary to general expectation, says the writer, the two reports are essentially the same in effect, tho differences in national temperament lent a somewhat different hue to the conduct of the two inquiries and to the manner of expressing the opinions of those who had them in charge. He goes on:

"The American investigation was in charge of politicians. The statesmen may possibly be the more respectful term. For the most part, the investigators were lawyers, and outwardly at least they did not deign to call into consultation any expert on marine matters. The inquiry was started when the horror of the disaster was fresh in the minds of every one, and assumed at times more of the character of the much-despised coroner's inquest than a dignified, sober investigation. Ignorant questions and spectacular oratory played a very important part in the investigation proper, and the public soon came to discredit the committee and its possible findings even before these findings were brought in.

"The British Commission, in contrast, was made up of a commissioner who had long experience in maritime affairs and five assistants who were either members of the navy, the naval reserves, or experts on naval design. The inquiry was held after the first wave of horror of the accident had passed and was conducted under the most dignified conditions. In addition to the expert character of the court itself, a great effort was made to bring before it a number of engineers and seamen who were expert in the design and operation of ocean-going vessels.

"Finally the one great moral difference in the two commissions lay in the fact that the greater percentage of those lost were Americans, while the laws and individuals responsible for the catastrophe were for the most part British. Tho none of the gentlemen concerned would probably admit it, the one was an avenging body; the other a vindicating.

"In spite of these great differences in make-up, procedure, and intent, the final recommendations of the two commissions—and we wish to emphasize the word 'recommendations'—were about the same, place them side by side. Senator Smith's commission recommends lifeboats for the whole complement of the ship, frequent lifeboat drills, a wireless man always on duty, a double skin for the hull, longitudinal bulkheads and water-tight decks. So does Lord Mersey's court. . . . In only one minor detail is there a difference: the American committee recommends the compulsory use of search-lights, presumably to detect icebergs; the British court, on testimony of experts, rejects them as of no value for that service. On the other hand, the English court emphasizes the lack of sufficient lookouts on the *Titanic*, which is not made a point of comment in the American report."

So much for the technical features of the reports. As regards the construction of the ship and the circumstances of the accident the two reports agree in details, tho the writer considers the British report more concise. Finally, in the matter of responsibility, the reviewer finds marked dissimilarity. The American commission avoided all reference to the question in its report, and after noting the negligence of the captain of the *Californian*, severely condemned the wireless transmission of news subsequent to the disaster. The British court spread, in the writer's words, "an enveloping coat of whitewash over all the persons concerned," except the master of the *Californian*, and rebuked the Board of Trade somewhat mildly for its conservatism in not revising its rules in eighteen years. To quote again:

"In fact, the result of the reams of testimony on both sides of the ocean simmers down to the ancient verdict, 'Nobody's to blame, but don't do it again.'"

"It now remains to be seen to what degree the concurrent judgment of a body of American lawyers and a body of English marine experts, based in each case on comparatively brief investigations of one marine disaster, will be confirmed by the technical experts of the British Board of Trade in application to the vast number of vessels sailing under the British flag."