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## THE GREAT DISASTER

It is a picture of heroic self-restraint and disciplined chivalry in presence of imminent death which the narratives of survivors of the Titanic present. There is no incident in history nobler or more moving than the behaviour of that throng of three-and-twenty hundred human beings crowded on a doomed ship, in orderly fashion filling the all too few lifeboats with the women and children, while the men calmly awaited death and the bandsmen who were to share their fate played a tune associated with one of our most deeply devotional hymns. There was little of the Puritan in many of that throng, who spent the Sabbath at the card table, and we presume also in roller skating and racquet playing; but the solemn shadow of a great calamity revealed a reserve of moral outrage that made the scene worthy to stand beside any in either Puritan or Spartan annals. But why should such a terrible sacrifice of human life have occurred? Several disquieting questions are raised by the inquiry. The manner in which the ship sustained her injury is pretty clear. An iceberg standing two or three hundred feet out of the water bore down upon her and floated past so near that the submerged mass of ice - probably seven or eight times as huge as the visible berg - cut like a knife right through the stout metal of the ship's side and ripped it up as a can-opener would do the lid of a tin of compressed meat. The rent extended so far aft as to render the bulkhead system ineffective; and the watertight compartments which had been reckoned on to make the ship unsinkable only served to buoy it up for between three and four hours, and thus gave time to bring into operation such life-saving apparatus as had been provided. The iceberg, it is reported, was sighted when only a quarter of a mile away, and the shock of the collision was almost simultaneous with the operation of the levers which stopped the engines and closed the watertight doors in response to the warning of the look-out. It was known that the ship was travelling a course studded with icebergs. She had been warned from another ship of their presence, a dozen of them appear to have been sighted from her own decks in little more than a day. So familiar had the sight become that card-players scarcely lifted their eyes to see one passing. Under such circumstances one would expect a very moderate rate of speed to be observed, not the 23 knots an hour of which some passengers speak; and that the look-out would be so efficient as to give warning long before collision had become inevitable. If our mammoth liners are not fitted with searchlights capable of piercing the night for miles around, they ought to be, and to be compelled to use them continuously when in any zone of danger. And the question may well be asked, why should any liner take this dangerous path? The northern track commonly followed from August to January, when the Atlantic is free of ice; but at other seasons of the year the rule is to steer a course some two or three hundred miles further south, which lengthens the voyage by a day or two days at most, but secure practical immunity from ice. To expose both passengers and ship to known risks of such a serious nature is contrary to the dictates of prudence and shows a faith in the invulnerability of the newest type of vessel that in this instance has not been justified by the sad event. There is reason to fear that considerations of safety have been sacrificed to the demands of luxury as well as the passion for speed. In regard to the provision of lifeboats, the Titanic more than fulfilled the minimum requirements of the Board of Trade; still, reckoning the collapsible boats as well, which would hardly be seaworthy in a tempest, there was accommodation for only 1178 persons, and the 775 survivors seem to have occupied all which it was found possible to launch. For two-thirds of those on board there was no place in the boats. There was a full complement of life-belts and life-buoys; but these would be of practically no use, as a few hours' exposure in ice-cold water would overcome any who escaped being dragged into the vortex of the sinking vessel. In the construction of the ship provision was made for carrying double the number of boats which were actually on board; and if some of the space

so liberally given up to pleasure promenades had been utilised to provide a full complement of boats at least another seven hundred of the passengers might have escaped a watery grave. A ship's lifeboat is not by any means a full insurance against disaster; but it increases the chances of escape, and the calm sea on this occasion gave it its maximum of value. Mr Buxton informed the House of Commons that the revision of the rules regarding life-saving apparatus with which steamers must be provided has been under consideration of a committee of the Board of Trade for some time, and the adoption of new rules had been delayed because he desired to make them still more exacting. Not a day should be lost in giving effect to his intentions. Other points which may be disclosed by the inquiry to be held at New York will no doubt also receive prompt and adequate attention.

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