

THE LITERARY DIGEST

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RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE "TITANIC" DISASTER



MR. JOSEPH BRUCE ISMAY,

President of the International Mercantile Marine Company, testifying before the committee of investigation. He declares the wreck of the *Titanic* has taught him a lesson.

WHILE a certain element of mystery must always shroud the loss of the *Titanic*, while certain facts are known only to the dead captain and first officer, and while others are hidden forever in her rent hull two thousand fathoms deep, much also is being cleared up by patient and thorough investigation, and the press are sifting these facts and placing the blame. The world wants to know where to put the responsibility; it would have false rumors corrected, it would have all told that would help to make ocean travel safer henceforth. So a committee of the United States Senate is hearing testimony from survivors and officials of the White Star Line and a similar inquiry is to be instituted by the British Government. As the passengers, officers, and members of the crew tell their successive stories, and answer the searching questions of the investigators, the horror of the *Titanic's* sinking, it is remarked, only increases, "while the needless loss of life becomes more and more obvious."

Back of the high speed in an ice-infested sea, and back of the lack of life-boats, there was another reason, which is daily becoming more apparent to the press, and which to the *New York Tribune* is the only theory upon which the various elements of the disaster are explicable. This is, that passengers, proprietors, and officers alike "were obsessed with the infatuation that the ship was unsinkable." The safety of the modern all-steel liner, with her watertight compartments, had kept the British Board of Trade content with an inadequate life-saving requirement. The owners of the *Titanic* had been content with complying with the law, tho it meant refuge for less than half of those on board. Because, as Captain Rostrom of the *Carpathia* crisply puts it, "the *Titanic* was supposed to be a life-boat herself." And the alleged lack of vigilance before the collision, the failure to fill the life-boats to their capacity, the holding back the news of the ship's

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loss—all are ascribed to this persistent and fatal belief that she was “unsinkable.” As *The Army and Navy Journal* (New York) remarks: “Out of the fabric of its delusion and hope the public created the ‘unsinkable boat’ and confided itself blindly to it in spite of warnings that even a child might have listened to.”

But people are not content with knowing *what* is responsible. “Responsibility is personal,” we are reminded, and the question is, “Who?” And two persons are named: Captain Smith and J. Bruce Ismay. The captain went down with his ship, and many are inclined to cover him with the mantle of charity and remember only his heroic end. But the *Albany Journal* and the *New York Times* are among the papers which can not absolve Captain Smith from blame. Says *The Times*:

“Ice was in plain sight, floating ice and bergs. Not only that, but Captain Smith had received by wireless messages at least three warnings that icebergs were in his path—from the *Touraine*, from the *Amerika*, and from the *Mesaba*. He had acknowledged with thanks the *Mesaba*’s warning that dead ahead of him lay ‘much heavy-packed ice and great numbers of bergs.’ Yet straight into the jaws of destruction he steamed at high speed.

“The company is by no means to be absolved. Undoubtedly the Captain was aware of a desire on the company’s part for a quick voyage. It would please the passengers and bring trade to the line. But no orders from the company compel, and its desires should not persuade, a captain to steam through a field of icebergs at 21 knots an hour. The responsibility of the wreck rests upon the

Titanic’s Captain directly, and secondarily upon the owners.”

Tho *The Times* gives the White Star Line, or the International Mercantile Marine Company which controls it, a secondary responsibility, most of its contemporaries assign it the first, and some the only, place among the guilty. Captain Rostrom, they recall, admitted when questioned, that under the law a captain’s control over his ship is absolute, and then he added:

“But suppose we get orders from the owners of our ship to do a certain thing. If we do not execute that order, we are liable to dismissal.”

Captains are supposed to use supreme care, but the *Springfield Republican* observes that “they are also supposed to bring in their boats with speed and regularity or give place to a more competent man”.

“Under this pressure, felt if not admitted, a commander must often be obliged to take risks not less real because intangible. . . . Speed in itself, tho expensive, is safe enough; what is extremely dangerous is the demand for speed combined with a high degree of regularity. A captain ought to be absolutely free, in fact as well as in theory, to use his best judgment, even if a four-day crossing should be stretched out to a fortnight.”

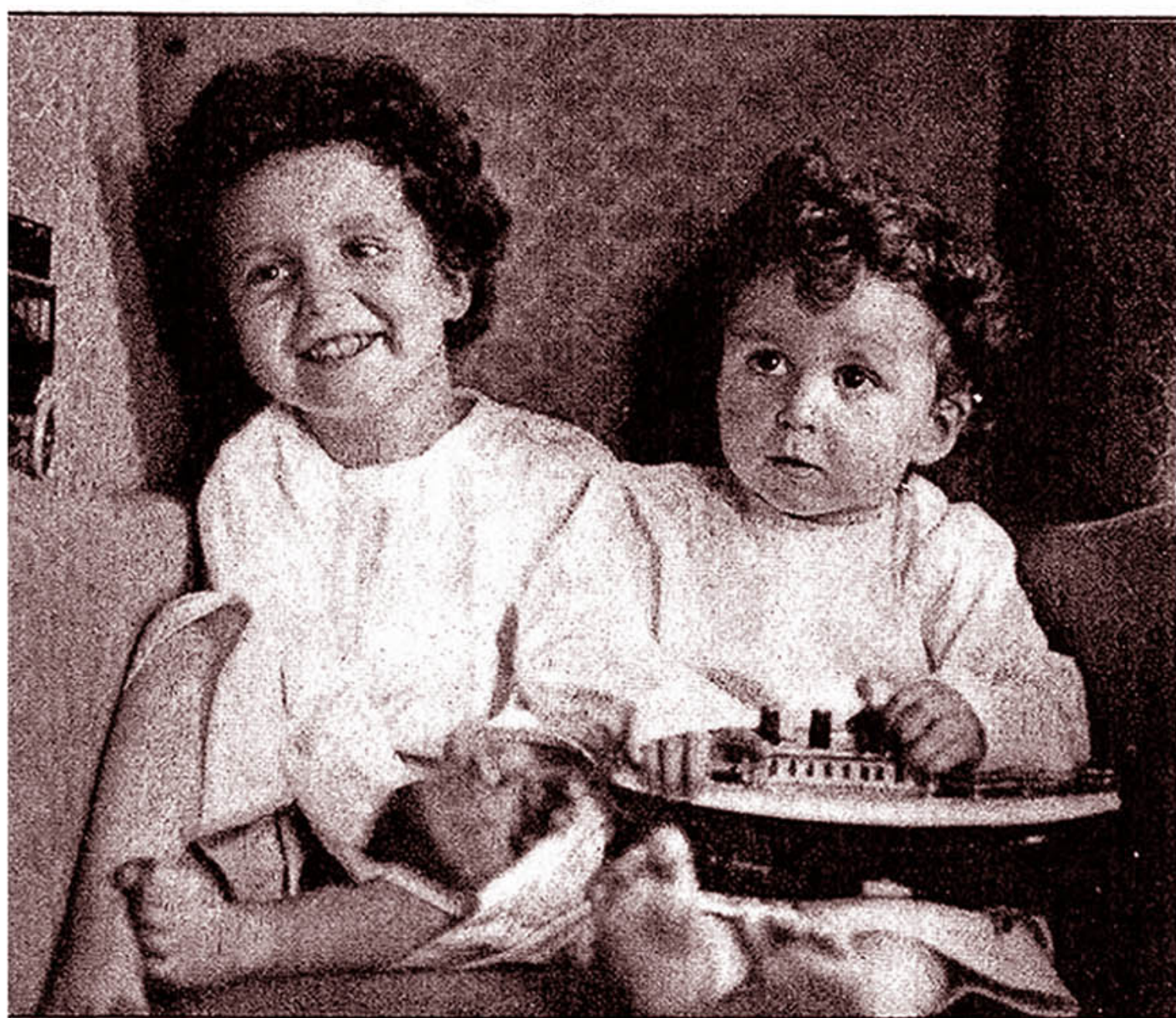
Special reasons for desiring a quick and splendid run on the *Titanic*’s maiden trip are found by this daily in the company’s financial condition. International Mercantile Marine bonds, notes *The Republican*, “have paid interest charges, but investors in the company’s preferred and common shares have never had a dividend.” The common stock sold as low as 5, par value 100, and the preferred at 26 before the *Titanic* disaster.

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Reorganization is said to be imminent. *The Wall Street Journal* confirms these statements, remarking upon a movement to stimulate speculation in the stock; "and part of the plan of campaign was alleged to be a movement to interest the public on the successful maiden trip of the *Titanic*. Obviously, such plans miscarried."

The criticisms of J. Bruce Ismay, responsible head of the White Star Line and the company owning it, for saving his own life, have been stilled somewhat by sworn testimony justifying his act; but there is still an inclination to make him a scapegoat. Senator Smith's insistence on keeping him in this country to give testimony with regard to the disaster is one of the matters to call forth caustic comment from the British press on the conduct of the Senatorial investigation. The Hearst papers, the *Philadelphia North American*, and other journals see in his presence on the *Titanic* proof of his authority there.

At least, thinks the *Baltimore News*, his word would have weight with the captain, who told him of one of the iceberg warnings. So that *The News* finds it "difficult to believe that one word of caution from Mr. Ismay to the effect that the *Titanic* would better come into New York behind schedule time than to hit an iceberg would not have been taken even by the most autocratic captain as a hint not to be disregarded." But other papers are beginning to agree with the *Louisville Courier-*



TWO LITTLE WAIFS FROM THE "TITANIC."

"Lolo" and "Momo," who were placed in a life-boat by a man who stayed on the ship. A Mme. Navratil, of Nice, France, is coming to claim them as hers. Many offers of adoption have come to Miss Margaret Hays, who has been caring for them.

Journal that something is to be said for him. Mr. Ismay's own statement is at least clear and consistent. He says in part:

"When I went on board the *Titanic* at Southampton on April 10 it was my intention to return by her. I had no intention of remaining in the United States at that time. I came merely to observe the new vessel, as I had done in the case of other vessels of our lines.

"During the voyage I was a passenger, and exercised no greater rights or privileges than any other passenger. I was not consulted by the commander about the ship, her course, her speed, navigation, or her conduct at sea. All these matters were under the exclusive control of the captain.

"I saw Captain Smith only casually, as other passengers did. . . . I was never consulted by Captain Smith nor by any other person; nor did I ever make any suggestions whatsoever to any human being about the course of the ship.

"The only information I ever received on the ship that other vessels had sighted ice was by a wireless message received from the *Baltic*.

"If the information I received had aroused any apprehension in my mind—which it did not—I should not have ventured to make any suggestion to a commander of Captain Smith's experience. The responsibility for the navigation of the ship rested solely with him."

"Everybody learns by experience," observes Mr. Ismay, and he believes that in this

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crisis the steamship-owners of the world have learned "that too much reliance has been placed on water-tight compartments and on wireless telegraphy, and

that they must equip every vessel with life-boats and rafts sufficient to provide for every soul on board, and sufficient men to handle them." They have learned, too, that "there are at present no such things as unsinkable ships." As a first result of this lesson Mr. Ismay has ordered that all ships belonging to the International Mercantile Marine Company shall be fully equipped with life-boats. In announcing this decision he says:

"I am candid to admit that until I had had actual experience in a wreck I never fully realized the inadequacy of the rules of our and other lines with reference to the preservation of life in case of an accident in mid-ocean. I had gone along like the rest of the steamship men on the theory that our ships were unsinkable.

"I determined to do this irrespective of any present or future laws on the subject, either in this country, in England, or Holland, or any other foreign countries touched by the lines of the International Mercantile Marine Company. I am going to see to it that not only every passenger, but every member of the crew on any ship of the White Star, the American, and all other lines of the International Mercantile Marine shall in the future be as safe as possible in case of another accident.

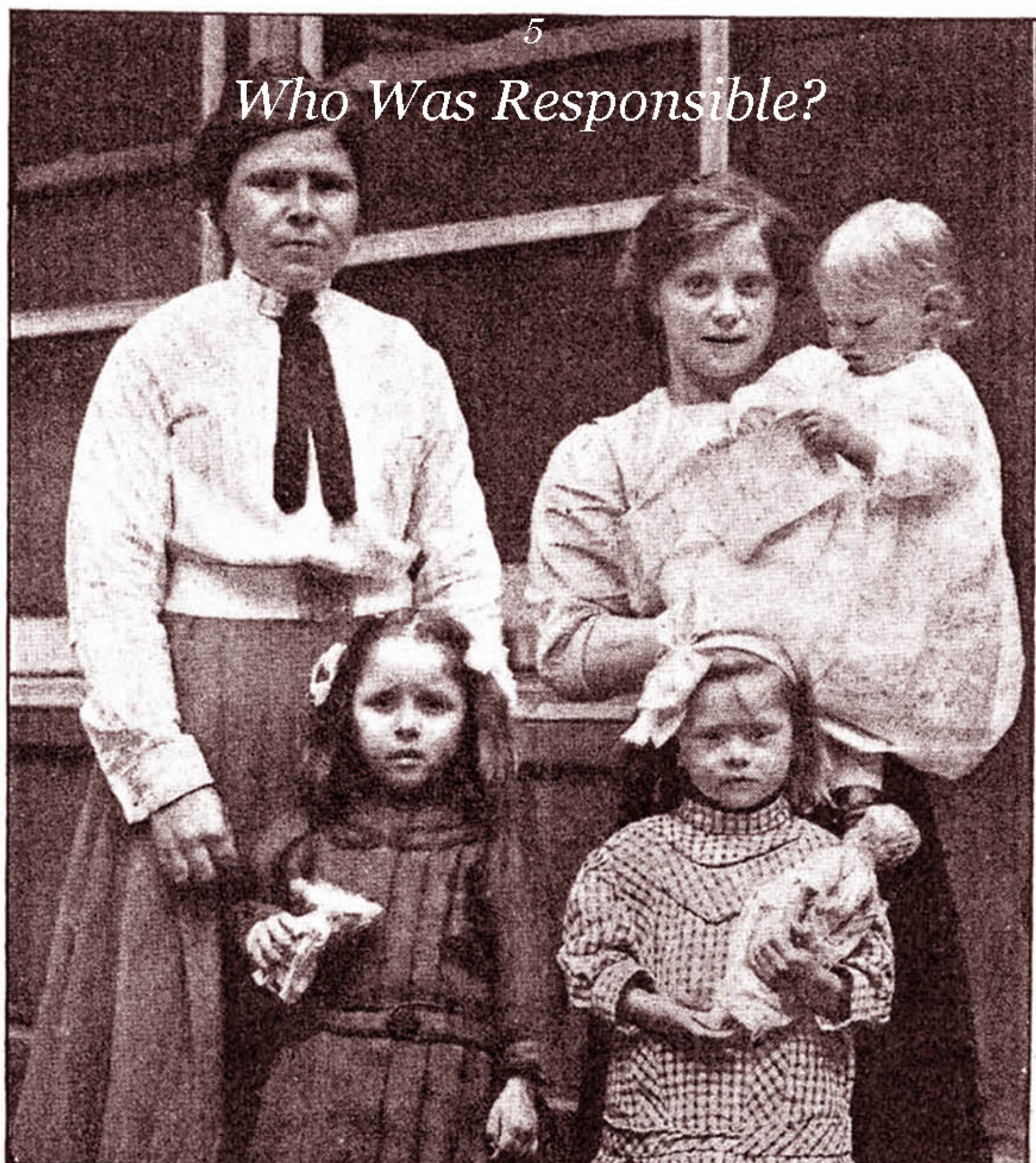
"We are not waiting to merely comply with the law. We are going to disregard technicalities and give the most ample and complete protection to human life, irrespective of all legal requirements. In the future there will never arise a condition in which there is not room for everybody in the life-boats or on the unsinkable pneumatic life-rafts, that are not even capable of being upset in rough weather."

Similar action has been taken by other steamship lines, so that the *New York Sun* thinks it "safe to say that never before in the history of the mercantile marine of any nation have life-saving appliances aboard ship been brought to their maximum efficiency so quickly as has been done by all nations since the *Titanic* disaster taught its tragic lesson." Immediately after the first report of the accident to the *Titanic* the steamship companies conferred with the United States Hydrographic Office and all captains were instructed to take a new southern route, which is intended to bring them many miles south of the iceberg zone, tho adding 200 miles to the westbound course. Moreover, notes *The Sun*, the ships "are going out equipped with more life-boats than ever before, and these boats are ready for service."

A remarkable instance of the effect of the *Titanic's* loss was the mutiny of the crew of her sister ship, the *Olympic*, because of the firemen's distrust of the collapsible boats furnished to complete her equipment, causing the scheduled trip from Southampton to New York to be abandoned last week. In addition to the steps taken by the shipping companies, Great Britain, the United States, and other maritime Powers, we read, will make their respective regulations more strict and will enforce more careful inspection. An international conference which will recommend uniform legislation on the problem of insuring safety of steamers, and on similar matters, is to be held in the near future.

While it is universally acknowledged that one valuable lesson taught by the *Titanic* disaster is the priceless worth of wireless communication at sea, it is no less generally felt that the wireless system "has fallen short of its possibilities from lack of systematized organization and cooperation," as the *Baltimore Sun* puts it, "in connection with the recent disaster." True, the *Carpathia*

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TWO WIDOWS AND THEIR CHILDREN
Steerage survivors who will find
the relief fund a godsend.

heard the call of distress, but only because the single operator had by chance postponed his usual hour of retirement. Another ship which might have come up in time to save all the passengers failed to receive the call from the *Titanic* because the operator was asleep. Hence there is a strong demand for some regulation providing for wireless outfits on freight as well as passenger steamers, and requiring that every passenger-boat carry two operators. Then, too, the confusion regarding the messages from the *Carpathia*, other vessels, and stations on shore, accusations of holding up messages and of refusals of operators on rival lines to com-

municate courteously with each other bring forth such indignant editorial comment as this in the *New York World*:

"One reform made mandatory by the *Titanic* disaster is the immediate systematization of wireless communication at sea and its regulation in the public interest. . . . Out of the revelation of lax and chaotic methods of wireless communication on the ocean should come a reform which must secure its stricter regulation for the public benefit under international agreements providing for its more responsible control."

Meanwhile the Senate's committee is carrying on a thorough investigation. It is composed of Senators Smith, of Michigan, Chairman; Perkins, of California; Bourne, of Oregon; Burton, of Ohio; Fletcher, of Florida; Simmons, of North Carolina; and Newlands, of Nevada. The purpose of the inquiry, according to Senator Smith, "is to get all facts bearing upon this unfortunate catastrophe which we are able to obtain." The detention of Mr. Ismay, and officers and members of the crew of the *Titanic*, which has been criticized in England, is thus explained by Senator Smith: "It has been our plan from the beginning to first obtain the testimony of citizens or subjects of Great Britain temporarily in this country, and this course will be pursued until the committee concludes it has obtained all accessible and useful information to a proper understanding of this disaster."

Members of the committee, in particular Mr. Smith, are criticized because of an apparent unfamiliarity with things afloat. The British press sneer at them and express surprise that the Senate did not leave such things to a committee of experts. Some of this harsh criticism our press find to be deserved. The *Springfield Republican's* Washington correspondent admits that the investigation is ludicrous, and that the chairman of the committee, in particular, shows "remarkable persistence and fertility in asking puerile questions." The Senate's "hasty action" in starting the investigation, which began the morning after the *Carpathia* reached New York, has been condemned by the English press and by speakers in the House of

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Commons. But our papers praise such "promptitude" and it will, thinks the *New York American*, spur "the English themselves to quicker and more resolute action than they otherwise would have been likely to take."

The further assertion that the United States Senate has no right to conduct such an inquiry, the disaster having occurred on a British ship on the high seas, is thus answered by the *New York Tribune*:

"The *Titanic* inquest is being held here because, as one of the members of Parliament suggested yesterday, many American citizens lost their lives in the disaster. . . . Nor can there be any valid denial of the right of this Government to investigate the equipment and conduct of foreign ships which seek the use of its ports and the patronage of its citizens, and in so doing to ask questions of any of the alien owners and officers of those ships whom it may happen to find within its jurisdiction."



ONE OF THE "TITANIC'S" LIFE-BOATS APPROACHING THE "CARPATHIA," BARELY HALF FULL.

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