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DEADLY LIFE-BUOYS.

(From the *Daily Telegraph*.)

IN those amphibious regions which skirt the quays and docks of seaports, amid sextants and hammocks, ship-bags and brass cannon, canvas, cordage, and all the maritime paraphernalia of the slop-shops in such neighbourhoods, the eye is constantly caught by large yellow belts or rings suspended over the doorways, and stamped with the words "warranted corkwood." Everybody knows what is the use of these odd-looking girdles: they are "life-buoys," bought and sold to save drowning men at sea. We look at them with a certain affection and interest, imagining them to be articles which, at a pinch, would preserve that most precious thing—a human life. The fancy wanders away from the slop-shop to the vessel tossed and leaking in the fierce ocean, where one of these yellow circles might be worth—not merely the few shillings which it cost, but all the wealth that a man possessed. In a collision at sea, when one ship goes suddenly down, and the only chance for life lies in floating long enough to be picked up by the boats of the uninjured vessel, the price of a "life-belt" might prove the best investment ever made; or when the gale is blowing, and the craft drives furiously along, and some hapless sailor falls from the yard-arm into the billows, one of these awkward-looking commodities flung overboard might keep him up till the ship could be brought-to, and the boat lowered. Or, at the awful hour when a bark strikes upon the lee-shore, and begins to break in pieces; to have a life-buoy at hand, and to slip it under the arms, might be the means of bringing a shipwrecked mariner or passenger out of the very jaws of death to the safe and firm shore. When we think on all these contingencies, the yellow belt of safety has a charm for landmen as well as for seamen. It is an honest and a Christian trade, we say, to manufacture such goods; the money is good money which is taken over the counter for them; and the emigrant or seafaring man is surely wise, who, before "going down to the sea," provides himself with one of these useful and trustworthy safeguards. "Useful and trustworthy!" Let the ingenuous public dismiss these pleasing thoughts from the mind, and henceforth regard the yellow canvas-bound life-buoys with looks of shame and suspicion. There is no sham so wicked, no cheat so infamous, as that perpetrated upon poor landmen and emigrants

by the makers and sellers of these benevolent-seeming objects. Those who go much among maritime folk, know that the buyers of life-belts are seldom or never captains or mariners. The passengers, the travellers, the emigrants, keep a few shillings aside to add one of these belts to their sea stock : but if one ask a sailor's opinion about them, he shakes his head, and says that he "would rather go down and have done with it," than trust to one of those lying pretences, which he knows by experience are "made to sell," and in eleven cases out of twelve are merely worthless—sinking as soon as they become sodden in the water.

We owe to the correspondent of a contemporary revelations on the subject which will fill the mind with indignation and horror. This gentleman had reason to believe that the so-called "life-buoys" were villanous hypocrisies, in far too many instances constructed to deceive the purchaser, and cheat him possibly out of his life, for the sake of the few shillings of difference in value between the real article and the spurious. A Sunderland buoy maker disclosed the fact that he had found more than one belt bought at London slop-shops to be stuffed with worthless material, such as common rushes. He added that, within his own knowledge, seafaring persons had consequently given up all faith in the deceitful belts, and preferred to "take their chance," rather than trust the rascally slop-shops. Shortly afterwards, the writer met a Shadwell operative, whose business it was to make the yellow "life-buoys." The man frankly confessed that "not one in a dozen" was so constructed as to keep a human creature afloat. "You couldn't do it at the price," this person said ; "the shopkeepers won't give more than three-and-six or four shillings for 'em, and I'd like to know how much cork you can stuff in at that figure." Interrogated farther, this naïve purveyor of deadly life-preservers volunteered the information that "almost anything does to stuff them. Cocoa fibre mostly, sometimes straw, sometimes rushes, same as what the caulkers use ; anything will fill 'em well enough for sale—shavings, if you haven't got anything better." All this various rubbish, coated with canvas, bound and painted, would float for a little time ; and by-and-bye, as it became soaked in the salt water, it would sink through its own weight ; but, of course, with the weight of a man clinging to it, much sooner. Armed with this intelligence, the correspondent of our contemporary went life-buoy-buying in the slop-shops of maritime London. He visited Shadwell, Ratcliff, and Poplar, and in each of these quarters he purchased a "good life-belt." One was "warranted corkwood ;" another was branded "all cork ;" the third simply bore the word "warranted." They ranged in price from six shillings to seven and sixpence. Having brought them home, the experimentalist first proceeded to test them by dissection. When the yellow integument was laid open, the belt "warranted corkwood" was found to

STRAWS FOR DROWNING MEN.

(Reprinted from the *Morning Star*, by special permission of Mr. JAS. GREENWOOD.)

AT this season of gale and wreck—when “the stormy winds do blow” in the dreary night-time, and hearing them as we hug our pillows, we exclaim “God help poor souls at sea!”—permit me to disclose to your readers a monstrosly cruel and heartless cheat systematically imposed on mariners, and those who make long journeys at sea. It concerns what in devilish mockery are “in the trade” known as “life-buoys.” I may mention that my attention was directed to this subject so long ago as last November twelvemonth, when that memorable hurricane swept the island of St. Thomas, and the sea in its neighbourhood, causing such appalling devastation amongst the shipping thereabouts. It was my duty to describe in your columns the marvellous escape of a lad named Bailey, who was attached to H.M.S. “Rhone,” of whose crew, numbering nearly 100, about a dozen were saved. Battling for his life in the raging wreck-waters, Bailey was so lucky as to secure a floating life-buoy suddenly vacated by a hapless fellow, who, with his body within the ring, was nipped off at the middle by a shark, causing the poor wretch to fling up his arms and slip through “like a bolt out of its socket,” as Master Bailey graphically described it. Clinging to the precious buoy, Bailey was carried out to sea, and far out of sight and sound of land. Night came on, and quite done over with fatigue, he fell asleep, and so remained until his buoy drifted ashore, carrying him with it; and he was awoke by the rasping of his legs against the shingle. I examined that life-buoy, and saw the clear imprint of Master Bailey’s stubbly hair on the soddened, yellow-painted canvas, showing where his sleepy head had rested.

As may easily be understood, I at once conceived a high respect for life-buoys; and resolved, if ever I went to sea, to provide myself with one, though I had no more money left than would secure me a berth in the steerage. I shouldn’t have had much trouble over the purchase. In all seaport towns, and in the vicinity of the principal docks, there are dozens of maritime outfitting warehouses, and all of them sell life-buoys, most of them keeping such an extensive stock of the article as to prove unmistakably the popular faith in, and extensive demand for, it. Like any other unsuspecting person, I should have asked for a life-buoy, and seeing that it was properly branded “warranted cork,” I should have paid for it, and carried it away never doubting it.

How woefully I might have miscalculated, will presently appear.

The opening of my eyes to the true state of the case is mainly due to a well known life-belt and buoy maker of Sunderland, Mr. T. Dixon. Writing to me concerning loss of life at sea, he informed me that he had grave suspicions of the quality of the life-buoys manufactured in London, and supplied to the Jew slop-shops. He informed me that he himself had met with life-buoys composed of the basest materials; and sent me bits of *common rush* as a sample of the interior of one he had dissected. He further apprised me of the fact that to such an extent had this fraud been perpetrated, that a very large number of seamen would have nothing to do with life-buoys, declaring that they would rather go down and have done with it, than hang in the jaws of death for a few hours, with the certainty of drowning after all becoming more apparent as the treacherous support gradually soddened, and sank under their weight.

It was scarcely to be credited that so murderous a business as my Sunderland friend hinted at, could be commonly pursued; but I resolved to watch my opportunity for testing it; and just lately, by chance, I met a man in the poor neighbourhood of Shadwell, who informed me that he was a belt and buoy maker.

We had some conversation on the subject of his trade, and then it came out, not only that Mr. Dixon's suspicions were well founded, but that he had not suspected the worst. With a candour that contrasted queerly with the villany his statements betrayed, the Shadwell operative informed me that the buoys which are all stamped "warranted corkwood," are nothing of the kind—"not one in a dozen." "You couldn't do it for the money," said my informant; "the Jews that such as we work for won't give more than 3/6 or 4/- for 'em; and how much cork can you afford to stuff into 'em for that, I'd like to know?" I asked him what he could afford to stuff into his buoys at the price, and he replied—"Cocoa fibre mostly; sometimes straw; sometimes rushes, same as what the caulkers use; anything almost does; shavings, if you haven't got anything better." He appeared to think that it did not matter what the canvass covers were stuffed with, so long as they were well sewn and painted. I further inquired as to where the precious goods of his manufacture might be bought, and he replied shortly—"Anywhere." And it seemed that this was perfectly true.

The neighbourhoods of Shadwell, Ratchiffe, and Poplar were visited; and at each place at a seaman's slop-shop, a "good life-buoy" was inquired for, and bought. One was branded "warranted corkwood;" one "all cork;" and the third simply bore the word "warranted." They ranged in price from 6/- to 7/6. They were all three carried home, and dissected, with the following results:—

No. 1 ("warranted corkwood"), when its flimsy yellow skin was slit, was discovered to consist bodily of straw, sparsely covered with cork shavings for the satisfaction, it is presumed, of any cautious mariner who might feel disposed to risk a little slit in his purchase, so as to make sure of its quality before he paid for it.

No. 2 ("warranted") was stuffed with rushes.

No. 3 ("all cork") cork chips and rushes; about 20 per cent. of the former, and 80 of the latter.

To test the buoyant capability of the three detected impostors, they were placed in water, a weight of ten pounds being attached to each. This was the result:—

"Warranted corkwood" sank in an hour.

"Warranted" stood the test for nearly two hours, and then succumbed.

"All cork" floated for four hours, and then sank from view.

Here is a pretty revelation! In our inbred love for the sea, and all that pertains to it, in this, more than in any other direction, do our sympathy and charity extend. An appeal for funds to float a life-boat on any dangerous coast, is seldom or never made in vain. We have hearty despising for all "crimps" and "long-shore" sharks, who prey on the seaman and fleece him of his hard earnings, more than all. Of all men, none is so utterly abhorred as the "wrecker," the cold-blooded villain who by means of false lights and signals betrays a vessel to certain destruction, for the sake of such plunder as the shattered hulk and the bodies of drowned men may yield. What, then, must be our opinion of the man who, for the sake of an extra profit of half-a-crown, consigns a fellow-creature to the lingering

torture of death by gradual drowning? To be sure, it may often happen that, cast on the face of the wilderness of water, the possessor of a life-buoy deserving the name may in the end be worse off than the man who has no such hope left him out of the wreck of his ship, and "goes down and has done with it;" but who, since this wretched imposture began, can reckon up the instances of desperate hope all unexpectedly mocked to death, of life lost that would have been saved, had the promise that the treacherous buoy held out but proved true? Nay, how many men, and women too—emigrant mothers bearing up their little children in the fathomless waters—have been cheated out of their lives, by abandoning the spar or plank, for the more hopeful-looking ring of stuffed canvas, "warranted solid corkwood," but which is no more than straw and rags, and which soddens and sinks, dragging the clingers with it?

SCOUNDRELISM BY THE SEA.

(From *Punch*.)

PERHAPS no plummet that shall be cast will ever find the bottom of human baseness and wickedness. We have sometimes thought that we had nearly sounded them—as in the case of the first Napoleon, or the last hag sent to prison for stripping children of their clothes. But up crops a new case, which seems to demand a heavier lead and a longer line than do either of the criminals we have mentioned. At first, we knew not whether to thank Mr. James Greenwood, or not, for making the revelation—so disgusting is the cold, sickening brutality he records; but, on reflection, we thank him for having added another to his good deeds. What think you, brothers and sisters, who lie safely listening to the furious tempests, and who find some comfort, when you are pitying the sailors, in the thought that they are furnished with life-buoys, that may hold them up in the fight with the black waves,—what think you, we say, of this?—

Writing to me (says Mr. Greenwood, in last Friday's *Star*) concerning loss of life at sea, Mr. Dixon—a well-known life-belt and buoy maker, of Sunderland—informed me that he had grave suspicions of the quality of the life-buoys manufactured in London, and supplied to the Jew slop-shops. He himself had met with life-buoys composed of the basest materials, and sent me some bits of *common rush* as a sample of the interior of one he had dissected. He further apprised me of the fact, that to such an extent had this fraud been perpetrated, that a very large number of seamen would have nothing to do with life-buoys, declaring that they would rather go down, and have done with it, than hang in the jaws of death for a few hours—with the certainty of drowning, after all, becoming more apparent as the treacherous support gradually soddened, and sank under their weight.

There, just read that quietly. It is no case for tall language. The simple words are pretty nearly enough, don't you think? You have taken in the fact. The men struggling in the waters—thinking of firesides and children—and feeling the article from a Jew's slop-shop giving way under their cold hands! Let us go on, then.

Mr. Greenwood, naturally, did not care to receive this story without inquiry. He is no Gusher, eager to gush before a tale can be contradicted;

on the contrary, a hard-headed, practical gentleman. He went to Shadwell, and found a belt and buoy maker. The man was frank enough :—

He informed me that the buoys which are all stamped “warranted corkwood,” are nothing of the kind—“not one in a dozen.” “You could’nt do it for the money,” said my informant; “the Jews that such as we work for, won’t give more than 3/6 and 4/- each for ’em, and how much cork can you afford to stuff in ’em for that, I’d like to know?” . . . He appeared to think that it did not matter what the canvas covers were stuffed with, so long as they were well sewn and painted. I further inquired as to where the precious goods of his manufacture might be bought, and he replied shortly—“Anywhere.” And it seemed that this was perfectly true.

He told Mr. Greenwood what was put into the articles—rushes, shavings. But this will be shown better in Mr. Greenwood’s own account :—

The neighbourhoods of Shadwell, Ratcliffe, and Poplar were visited; and at each place, at a seaman’s slop-shop, a “good life-buoy” was inquired for, and bought. One was branded “warranted corkwood,” one “all cork,” and the third simply bore the word “warranted.” They ranged in price from 6/- to 7/6. They were all three carried home, and dissected, with the following results :—

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We really do not see that we can do better than leave the case as thus succinctly stated. We thought that no form of rascality could surprise us much; but this revelation has more nearly produced astonishment than any atrocity of which we have read for years. Yet, why be astonished? For “bithneth is bithneth,” as the Jew slop-keeper would say; and “business is business,” as his Christian rival would remark. But—would it not be pleasant to fling a gang of the vendors of these accursed things into the sea off Brighton on a blowy day, and pitch them a choice assortment of their own buoys and belts to save them? We doubt whether a purer pleasure could be suggested to us, unless we could hand them to the unfriendly Maories about dinner-time. We may not have either happiness; but we may call upon all our contemporaries to do their best to spread the knowledge that such are among the devilish tricks of trade; and we may among us save a good many poor fellows from the deep. Can’t the Sailors’ Home, among other channels, publish the facts? And if Jack inquires into the matter, and, breaking open a buoy at a slop-shop, finds straw or shavings, we hope that he will not be so hard as to pull the Jew’s nose off—that is, not quite off.

consist almost entirely of straw, overlaid with just a sufficient quantity of cork-cuttings to deceive a purchaser so cautious as to examine into its quality. The "warranted" belt was stuffed wholly with rushes. The third sample of these scoundrelly commodities, marked "all cork," contained about 20 per cent. of cork chips; the rest was rushes. The belts were then re-closed, and their floating capacity tried by placing them in water, with a weight of ten pounds attached to each. Let the public note that ten pounds was an exceedingly moderate test for articles sold as capable of supporting a man's body in the sea! But what was the result? The best, "warranted corkwood," sank to the bottom in the space of an hour; the "warranted" life-preserver floated two hours; and the "all cork" villainy kept itself up for four hours, and then disappeared. It is needless to observe that, if these three false and vile specimens had been in actual use, not one of them would have sustained a shipwrecked seaman or passenger for a moment longer than the time necessary to saturate with sea-water the belt and the clothes of the poor betrayed wretches.

And these were three "life-belts" bought at hazard from the shops in the chief streets of London—bought and sold as "good life-buoys," and branded, in plain letters, with the audacious lie that they *were* good! The heart sickens as we learn what man will plot against his fellow-man for the sake of a wretched and dishonest profit! It is bad enough to sand sugar, to mix horse-beans with coffee, to put alum in bread, quassia in beer, and grains of Paradise in gin. It is shamefully wicked to defraud the poor, day by day, and ounce after ounce, with cheating scales and weights. Yet we understand how the coarse conscience may become indurated by the constant practice of petty baseness; for the evil is indirect, the mischief is not forcibly present to the guilty thought. That a human being, however, well aware what a vile and cruel sham he is constructing, should sit down to fill a "life-buoy" with deceitful rubbish, that he should go with his painted murder to the slop-shop, that it should be then and there taken of him at a price which denounces it for a manufactured lie, and should in turn be sold to the unwary customer as a means of saving life in time of need, when the shopman knows that in time of need it will miserably sink the buyer—all this appears to be well nigh the most cold, awful, and horrible demonstration of unpunished homicide which we ever encountered. Yes—homicide! since hundreds of wretched creatures must have perished by reason of these mendacious goods. Many and many a poor soul, cajoled into purchasing one of the yellow shams, has trusted his life to it; and at that moment only, when no human justice could help him, he has found that his life had been bought and sold for the paltry shilling or two which would have made the belt genuine and serviceable. Merciful and just Heaven! who can realise the bitter agony of a human being so betrayed?

At the moment, perhaps, when he is on the very point of rescue—when a little longer buffeting in the waves will give the boat's crew time to reach him, or will let him wash on shore alive and safe, though bruised—he feels the accursed thing to which he trusted become a trap of death. The wicked, lying fraud sags and sinks under his arms, and he goes to his fate a murdered man. And there are artizans and traders here among us who know that such scenes have been, may be, and will be, and who yet go on fabricating these painted villainies, or hanging their “warranted” life-destroyers at their doors, ready to sell them with a smirk and a flourish to the first poor emigrant—simple soul, taking it for granted that, in such a matter, no man with a man's heart would hold the life of his neighbour as nought for the sake of half-a-crown or three shillings. In some countries, a cross is hung over the lintel to keep evil things away : with us, people are not afraid to swing a mock “life-belt” over their thresholds—a token that only the triumph of evil designs is desired by the heartless shopkeeper. We can almost fancy those treacherous doors haunted by the ghosts of poor creatures betrayed in their last hope—angry and awful spectres, banning the wicked places where death was sold to them under the name of rescue. Let those who inspect and punish the villainies of trade look into this matter quickly ; for it is a civil curse—a national malediction—that the lives of men should be brutally endangered, and contingent murder practised, for a gain of thirty pence.

(From the *Newcastle Chronicle*.)

MR. R. JAMES GREENWOOD has done a most valuable service to the maritime community, by exposing the iniquitous conduct of certain east-end-of-London manufacturers, in the production of an article they call a life-buoy. Many of these buoys, instead of being filled with cork, are stuffed with rushes, hay, and such like rubbish, which, of course, will only hasten the end of the poor drowning man who may lay hold of one of them. We believe Mr. Greenwood is indebted to Mr. Dixon, of Sunderland, for having called his attention to the iniquity. This species of manufacture is free-trade with a vengeance ; but the pirate and freebooter are gentlemen beside the rascals who make a living by this diabolical fraud. We hope that the attention of Parliament will be called to it immediately, and that some stringent test will be applied to the manufacture of life-buoys. Lynch law is quite good enough for the people who engage in such an infamous trade ; and it could not be much regretted if a party of indignant sailors were to lay hands upon those east-end tradesmen and “manufacturers,” and throw them into the Thames, with their fraudulent life-buoys fastened about them, so that they might become the victims of their own villany.