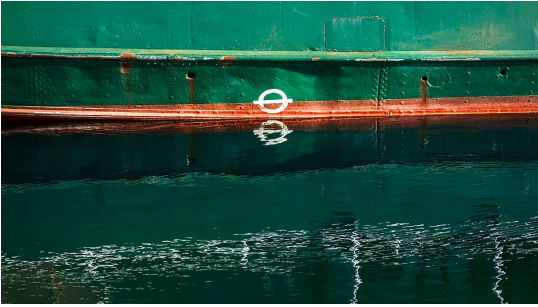


Samuel Plimsoll¹



This picture shows you part of a tug boat. It is the side of the ship. Can you see the white mark? It is a line and a circle. Look out for this mark if you are ever looking at ships. This little mark saves lives!

James Hall lived in Hull in Yorkshire. Hull is a port and Mr Hall owned ships. He thought of a way to make sure his ships did not have too much cargo put in them. The more cargo is put on a ship the heavier it gets. If it is too heavy it will sink when there are storms. Mr Hall cared about the sailors who sailed on his ships. He did not want them to drown.

Mr Hall made sure there was a line painted on all his ships. The line was on the side of the ship. It was just like the line part of the white mark in the picture. When the ship was empty the mark was quite high up on the side. When the cargo was being put in the ship at the port the ship went lower and lower into the water. That made the line get nearer and nearer to the water. Mr Hall's line was in just the right place. If the line went under the water he knew the ship was too heavy. There was too much cargo. If the weather was rough the ship might sink. Not all the ship owners did this. If the ship sank the insurance money would pay. They did not care about the sailors.

Samuel Plimsoll was a Member of Parliament. He thought this was very wrong. "All ships should have the line," he said. "Sailors should not have to sail ships that might sink. Ships that are overloaded are coffin-ships."

Samuel Plimsoll tried and tried to get a law made about the line. In 1872 he wrote a book, *Our Seamen*. In the book he told everyone how dangerous the "coffin-ships" were. "Our brave sailors are in danger," he said, "but they do not

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need to be in danger. All it takes is a little line on the side of all the ships.”

In Parliament someone brought forward a Bill. A Bill is an idea that can be made into a law. It was a Bill about the lines on ships. Samuel Plimsoll supported the Bill. If the Bill became law it would have helped. But Samuel Plimsoll knew it was not quite enough to make all the ship owners use the line. “It will be better than nothing,” he thought.

Samuel Plimsoll was sitting in Parliament. He was listening to the Prime Minister speaking. Suddenly he could not believe his ears. What was the Prime Minister saying? The Bill would be dropped! It would not be made into a law! Samuel Plimsoll was very, very angry. For a moment he forgot where he was. He lost his temper. He shook his fist. He called the Members of Parliament “villains!”

Such talk is not allowed in Parliament. Members of Parliament are not allowed to shake their fists at one another. Samuel Plimsoll had to say he was sorry. The Bill did not get made into a law.

But everyone knew about what was happening now. Ships were being overloaded! Sailors were being drowned! The very next year Parliament did pass a bill. It became a law. It was a better law than the one that had been dropped before. Now all ships had to have the line on them. Every port had a man whose job was to check the lines on the ships. Today the line is still often called the “Plimsoll line”. Ships all over the world have to have one.