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## "ALEXANDRA," (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

IN the matter of the formal investigation held at Liverpool, on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th instant, before H. C. ROTHERY, Esquire, Wreck Commissioner, assisted by Captain HOLT, I.N., and Captain WILSON, as Assessors, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship "ALEXANDRA," of Dublin, on the coast near Clogher Head, on the 3rd January last, and also into the circumstances attending the foundering of the said vessel on the 29th January last, off Copeland Island, when seven lives were lost.

### Judgment.

*The Commissioner.* The vessel which forms the subject of the present inquiry is the iron steamship "Alexandra." She was built at Stockton-on-Tees, in the year 1863, and was a vessel of 581 tons gross register, 363 net, and was fitted with two engines of 90 horse power combined. She belonged to Messieurs McCullagh, Bargrave, and Murphy, of Dublin. Mr. Michael Murphy, of 11, Eden Quay, Dublin, being the managing owner.

As regards the vessel herself, no question seems to arise, she had been specially surveyed in July last, and was on the voyage in question in a good and seaworthy condition. There is therefore no imputation upon her owners for having sent her to sea.

The vessel left Cadiz on the 24th of December last laden with a cargo of 420 tons of wine bound to Liverpool, thence to Dublin, and thence to Glasgow. She reached Liverpool on the 30th of December and having there discharged about 100 tons of her cargo she left at 12.30 on the morning of the 3rd of January, for Dublin. At this time she drew 9 feet forward and 11 feet aft. Her crew consisted of 21 hands, including Captain Burrell as her commander, and there was a waterman on board to take her down the river. Captain Burrell had also his family on board. The vessel had two lifeboats and two quarter boats, she had also two compasses, a steering compass and a bridge compass. At about 8 a.m. she was off Point Lynas and as the master has told us he passed at a distance of some three or four miles, and thence laid his course west-north-west, the course indicated by the steering compass being north-west by west half west, there being half a point deviation.

Now a course west-north-west is, as Mr. Cottingham has truly observed, a true west course; but inasmuch as Dublin lies considerably to the south of Point Lynas, and the vessel was three to four miles north of Point Lynas, I thought it necessary to ask the master why he had laid his vessel on that course for the purpose of making Dublin, and he then told us that he had calculated upon the ebb tide setting him down to the southward. If, indeed, the ebb tide had been setting to the southward, no doubt it might, as it runs very strong through the Irish Channel, have carried him so as by following that course to make Dublin, but unfortunately for the master when he passed Point Lynas it was low water, instead therefore of having the ebb tide setting him to the southward he would have six hours flood setting him as strongly to the northward, and which in the course of those six hours would have carried him some 12 miles to the northward of his course. This is what I am told by one of my assessors who is thoroughly acquainted with the navigation of the Irish Channel.

Here, then, was a very grievous error of judgment committed by Captain Burrell, which I am glad to say, when it was pointed out to him, he was ready to admit. And although his counsel has strongly contended that the master was not guilty of any act of carelessness in the navigation of his vessel, I do not find that the master says as much. It seems to us that the master never thought anything at all about the tides, nor is this at all an unusual circumstance with masters who are not in the habit of crossing the Irish Channel. They seem to think that what they lose by one tide they gain by another, so they generally lay a straight course from point to point without reference at all to tide, and that is what no doubt this master did. To add to the mischief there was a strong south-east wind blowing which would help the flood tide and retard the ebb tide, and which would assist to set him still further to the north.

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To return, however, to the incidents of the voyage. He left, as I have stated, Point Lynas at 8 a.m., and was something like, as he calculated, 26 to 27 miles past Holyhead, when his shaft suddenly broke. Being under his square foresail he continued his course for an hour and a half, when it being then nearly 1 o'clock, and the weather being somewhat hazy, he hauled his vessel up with her head to the north-east and with his starboard side directly exposed to the whole force of the gale. From 1 o'clock till four he continued with his head up to the north-east, drifting bodily to the north-west, when suddenly land was observed, and believing this to be Lambay Island he got the vessel's head before the wind hoping to get under the shelter of the island and thus escape the fury of the gale. The master it seems had been taking soundings, but on approaching the land he found that there were only four and a half fathoms of water which convinced him it was not Lambay Island.

He had no after sails, all his sails having previously blown away with the exception of the fore and aft foresail, and I think the forestaysail, and he was obliged to continue his course, keeping the land which he had first observed on his port beam. Previously to this he had ordered his anchors and chains to be got ready, and finding it was impossible to get the vessel again head to wind, and that she was driving on to the shore, the only course that remained for him was to drop his anchors. The port anchor was let go, but before they could pay out the chain it parted. The stopper of the starboard anchor was foul, and although it may possibly be that it was cleared before they touched the ground, we attribute no blame to the master for not having dropped his starboard anchor, for it could have done but little good; it must have itself parted, and the result probably would have been that instead of going head foremost on the shore he would have come broadside on to the beach, and in that case possibly none would have survived. We think, therefore, under the circumstances, failing to bring up with the port anchor, it was a wise precaution on his part to run the ship with his bows as far up as he could upon the beach, and thus afford some chance of saving the lives of those on board.

Under these circumstances a charge has been made against the master by the Board of Trade that he caused the stranding of the ship by his wrongful act in carelessly and improperly navigating her on the voyage from Liverpool to Dublin. And we certainly think that that charge has to a certain extent been proved. It has been proved that the master laid his ship from Point Lynas on a course which of necessity must have carried him a considerable distance to the northward of his course. As a matter of fact the vessel grounded a mile and a quarter to the west by north of Clogher Head, or something like 26 or 27 miles northward of Dublin Harbour. It is impossible after this to say that the master did not carelessly navigate his vessel; that he navigated it carelessly by disregarding the force of the tides, and by, as he has told us, supposing that it was high water between 11 and 12 o'clock, when in fact he ought to have known that it was not high water that afternoon until close upon 2 o'clock. At the same time, although we think the master has been guilty of negligence in this respect, we are not prepared to hold that it was so gross an act of negligence as would justify us in punishing him very severely for his offence.

It must be remembered that if his shaft had not broken down, the master, although he would have found himself far to the north of his port of destination, would probably have been able to work down to the southward with the ebb tide, and so have reached Dublin. Moreover, in the subsequent navigation of his vessel, although probably his wisest course would have been as soon as his shaft was broken to have laid the vessel to, and to have waited there until some steam tug had come to his assistance, or at least until he had been able to obtain assistance of some kind or other, although we think that that would have been his wisest course; still in the navigation of his vessel at the last in driving her up on the beach as he did, and in the measures which he ultimately adopted to save the lives of all on board, we think that the master acted in a proper and seamanlike manner. And although we are disposed to reprimand him for his neglect in not paying that attention which he ought to have done to the tides, we shall return to him his certificate.

I now come to a much more serious and much more difficult part of the case, namely, the attempts that were subsequently made to save this vessel and to take her into a port of safety. It seems that after the casualty the

owners abandoned her to the underwriters, who immediately took steps to save the cargo, and if possible the ship, and for that purpose despatched a Captain Teulon to Clogher Head, with full authority to take all the measures which he deemed to be necessary. Captain Teulon arrived there on Monday, the 8th of January, and immediately proceeded to discharge the cargo, which was completed by Friday the 12th. In the meantime arrangements had been made with a salvage company at Ardrossan to send engineers and carpenters to the ship for the purpose of raising her. On the very day on which the cargo had been discharged a small steam vessel called the "Seamen," arrived from Ardrossan with five engineers and four carpenters on board bringing with them three steam pumps. The pumps were immediately transferred to the "Alexandra," and by Monday morning they were got into working order. It was found, however, that with the pumps alone it was impossible to raise the vessel, and that it was necessary that other means should be adopted for the purpose. Accordingly Captain Teulon proceeded to Ardrossan on Tuesday, the 16th, and having conferred with the salvage company at Ardrossan, he returned on the following day, I think, with eight more carpenters, and a Mr. Anderson, as foreman over them, bringing with them a quantity of materials for the purpose of constructing a platform in the interior of the vessel to prevent the water rising in the hold.

And here I should state that the vessel was divided into five compartments, separated from one another by watertight bulkheads. Forward of all was the fore peak, then the fore hold, then the engine-room, then the main hold, and aft of all was the lazarette with the cabin above it. Over the fore hold were two hatchways, a large and a small hatchway, and over the main hold was one hatchway. The hatchways, however, were fitted with high combings (we have been told exceptionally high combings) as much as three feet or three feet six high. I mention this fact as one cause to which the loss of the vessel has been attributed was the want of any hatches over the hatchways, but we are not disposed to think that the want of hatches at all contributed to the loss of this vessel, and we think it might have been very inconvenient to have had the hatches on whilst they were towing her to the northward, seeing that the men had to be constantly below watching, lest the water should gain upon them.

On the arrival of Mr. Anderson and the carpenters from Ardrossan, on the 18th or 19th, they at once commenced to construct a platform in the main hold. There was no necessity to construct a platform in the fore hold for one steam pump was, it seems, quite sufficient to keep the water under there, but it was into the main hold that the water was flowing with the greatest force. The platform was constructed in the following manner: level with the top of the shaft tunnel beams were laid across the ship at a distance of four, five, and six feet from each other, on these were laid 3-inch planks fore and aft, close together, and upon the top of these were again laid planks, across which were held firm by struts or props secured against the upper beams. I think that generally is a description of the mode in which the platform was laid. The vessel, however, being an iron one it was not possible to secure the platform very closely to the sides, and accordingly chocking pieces were put in at the sides, and the platform was then well caulked throughout. When the platform had been laid in the main hold, an attempt was made on the 24th or 25th of January to pull her off with the steam tug "Kingfisher," which had been engaged from the first by Captain Teulon to attend upon the wreck. The attempt, however, failed, owing to the lazarette being full of water, which kept the stern down, and it was accordingly determined to construct another platform in the lazarette.

There is some doubt whether the platform in the main hold was or was not shaken by the first attempt to get her off. The carpenters told us that it was never so good after that first attempt as it had been before; on the other hand, we were told by Captain Teulon, that although it leaked after the attempt, workmen were put upon it, and that it was made as good as ever. The point is not of much importance, for it was not to the giving way of that platform that the loss of the vessel is to be attributed, for up quite to the last the main hold was kept free.

The platform in the lazarette having been completed, and another steam tug, the "Challenger," having been engaged to assist in the operations, everything was ready for raising her by the morning of the 29th of January last. Accordingly on that morning the "Challenger" having been lashed alongside, and the "Kingfisher" attached to the port bow, orders were given for the "Challenger" to go ahead to start her out of her bed, and as soon as this was done the "Kingfisher," by hauling on her port bow, brought the vessel's head round to the southward towards

Clogher Head. By 10 or half-past 10 a.m. she was afloat, whereupon the "Seamen" proceeded alongside, was there lashed, and began discharging coals into her for the supply of the steam engines which worked the pumps, the "Challenger" dropped astern to assist in steering her, the "Alexandra" having lost her rudder and rudder post, and the "Kingfisher" towed ahead. In about a hour and a half the "Seamen," who had discharged about eight tons of coals into her, then dropped astern, and the "Challenger" went ahead of the "Kingfisher" and assisted her in towing.

Up to the last almost there seems to have been some uncertainty as to where the vessel should go. It depended apparently on the direction of the wind at the time of her coming off. If the wind had been favourable they would probably have gone down to Dublin; the wind, however, was from the west-south-west, and this seems to have determined them to go northward towards Belfast. It was at one time in contemplation to put into Drogheda, but as there was a falling tide when they came off it was thought that it would have been very imprudent, and in that opinion we quite concur, to go to that port, probably the wisest course under the circumstances was to make for Belfast; but after they had been under way a short time Mr. Anderson suggested to Captain Teulon that they should go on to Ardrossan, telling him that if he did so his company would give a better price for the materials which they had been using for their platforms than anybody else, and that he would get more for them at Ardrossan than elsewhere. Captain Teulon seems to have assented to that plan, provided that the weather continued to hold good.

On leaving, Captain Teulon had directed the masters of the "Kingfisher" and "Challenger" to keep her as near the coast as practicable without danger to the ship. There were, however, two large bays, Dundalk Bay and Dundrum Bay, which they had to cross, and in doing so they were necessarily at a considerable distance from the land. The master of the "Kingfisher," who has been examined before us, and who gave his evidence in a manner that was most creditable to him, told us that the course in the first place having been left to him he had made a straight course for St. John's Point, the northern extremity of Dundrum Bay. In crossing these two bays the vessel seems to have felt the force of the wind and the waves, for though the wind was moderate at the commencement it was quite sufficient in the state in which this vessel was to affect her when she was away from the shelter of the land. When they reached St. John's Point and got under the land again matters seem to have gone more smoothly until six o'clock, when they were approaching the north and south rocks.

In order to round these rocks it was necessary to keep out from the land, as some of the witnesses have told us as much as 4 or 5 miles, by that time the wind had begun to blow a strong breeze, but still from the westward, and therefore off shore. The "Challenger" was towing ahead, the "Kingfisher" following in her wake. As they got further out they began to feel the full force of the wind and sea, and the vessel got a strong list to starboard so that they could not get the pumps to act. At this time there seems to have been some alarm felt by those on board, not only on account of the strong list which she had to starboard, but because the water was gaining in the lazarette, it being at that time, we are told, on a level with the cabin floor. I may here observe that there were two steam pumps laid upon the main hold and one upon the fore hold, but there was only a hand pump upon the lazarette, the consequence was that it was extremely difficult to keep the water under in the lazarette. Accordingly a signal was made by a torch on board the "Alexandra" for one of the steamboats to come to her, and the master of the "Seamen," as he has told us to-day, feeling himself somewhat alarmed at the condition in which he saw the "Alexandra," hailed them to know in what condition they were, and received for answer that they thought she would sink. He thereupon burnt a blue light and waved it from starboard to port, which the captain of the "Kingfisher" understood to mean that he was to go inshore. The "Challenger" in the meantime was steaming ahead, and the captain of the "Kingfisher" having endeavoured, but in vain, to attract the attention of those on board the "Challenger" at length, as a last resort, cast off her tow rope. The "Challenger," finding herself free, came down to the "Kingfisher," and was told to go to the "Alexandra." He accordingly passed round the stern of the "Seamen" and came up on the port quarter of the "Alexandra," and was then told that they wanted to be towed nearer inshore and into smoother water. In the meantime the "Kingfisher," who had understood the "Seamen's" signal, was towing them towards the land. As soon as the "Alexandra's" head was brought to the wind and she got into smoother

water she became upright and the pumps got a better hold of the water.

Some questions arose as to whether Captain Teulon ordered the "Challenger" after she had been with them to go on ahead and assist the "Kingfisher" in towing, or whether he ordered her to stay by them. Many of the witnesses stated that Captain Teulon ordered the "Challenger" to go ahead and tow, but that they remonstrated so strongly against it that at length the "Challenger" was ordered to return, and accordingly after giving the order to the "Kingfisher" she dropped down off the "Alexandra's" port quarter and remained by her in attendance from that time.

In passing across Ballyhalbert Bay, the captain of the "Seamen," who was hanging astern, and who seems to have known more of this coast than any of them, waved a blue light to the right as a signal to the "Kingfisher" that she should keep out a little. This the "Kingfisher" seems to have understood, and the vessel's helm was accordingly ported so as to keep clear of the Skulmartin Rock. After rounding this point a course was laid with the Coupland Light about one point upon the starboard bow. It should be observed that from Skulmartin to Donaghadee the land recedes and forms a bay so that the vessel would be somewhat farther from the shore than she had been, and as the wind had increased considerably in violence the "Alexandra" again got a heavy list to starboard. Accordingly orders were given to the "Challenger" to go forward and tell the "Kingfisher" to steer for the shore and to hold the "Alexandra" head to wind until they could pump the water out.

It seems that the greatest cause for anxiety arose from the increase of the water in the lazarette on which they had merely a hand pump, which was quite insufficient to keep the water under. It was therefore suggested whether one of the steam pumps could not be brought to bear upon the lazarette, but as it would have taken a long time to shift one of the steam pumps to the lazarette it was thought better that a hole should be cut through the bulkhead separating it from the main hold so as to let the water from the lazarette into the main hold and thus bring the steam pumps to bear upon it, a small hole had indeed been already cut in this bulkhead but on the port side; owing, however, to the list which the vessel had to starboard, this hole was useless, and it was proposed to cut another low down on the starboard side. Whether Captain Teulon gave orders for this to be done is not very clear. Lindsay, the engineer, who gave his evidence in a very creditable manner, told us that he proposed that this should be done some time before, but that Captain Teulon objected. However this may be, as soon as the vessel's head was turned towards the shore, Lindsay and some of the men went into the main hold for the purpose of cutting the hole in the bulkhead, for about half an hour, and whilst Lindsay and his men were employed cutting the hole the "Kingfisher" held the vessel with her bows inshore and head to wind. Suddenly, however, and before the hole was cut through, and consequently before the lazarette could be emptied of water, an order was given from the "Alexandra," by whom we have never been able to discover, for the "Kingfisher" to put out to sea for the purpose of rounding the Coupland Light. To do this it was necessary to go outside the Mew Island and consequently well out to sea and clear of the shelter of the land. I may here observe that with the weather as it then was and in the state in which the "Alexandra" was it would have been highly imprudent to have passed between Coupland Island and the main land, and we therefore do not blame them for this. They were just rounding the Mew Island and were about to haul her round towards the lighthouse when it was observed by those on board that the "Alexandra" was settling down by the stern. The men who were at work in the main hold and who had not yet succeeded in cutting the hole in the bulkhead were at once called up. A signal was then made to the "Challenger" to come alongside, which she did, and Mr. Anderson in attempting to leap from the "Alexandra" to the "Challenger" missed his footing and fell into the water and was drowned. The "Challenger," however, was brought as near as she could be and a great number of persons clambered or jumped on board and were saved. Six of them, including Captain Teulon and Captain Morrison, got into the lifeboat which was towing astern and were ultimately taken out of her. There were, however, seven, including Mr. Anderson, who went down with the vessel and were drowned.

Now the first thing which strikes us in considering this case is the utter want of management which seems to have prevailed throughout, so far at least as Captains Teulon and Morrison are concerned. Indeed their statement of the occurrence was of the most confused and unintelligible character. And had it not been for the clear and straight-

forward evidence given by the captains of the "Kingfisher," "Challenger," and "Seamen," and by the engineer Lindsay, we should have had the greatest difficulty in understanding how the vessel came to be lost at all.

In the first place, when they left Clogher Head, or at any rate before the "Seamen" was cast off, it must have been known to Captain Teulon that they were going either to Belfast or to Ardrossan, and that she could not reach either of those places till probably the following morning, yet no care seems to have been taken that the men who were on board should have anything to eat on the voyage. Captain Teulon also seems to have left the entire guidance of the expedition to the steam tugs, and although, no doubt, there might have been a little difficulty in directing the course to be followed, seeing that he had no compass aboard, yet he ought, as having the general control, to have seen that the proper course was being steered, and not to have left the arrangements so entirely, as he seems to have done, to others. Captain Teulon also should have seen that proper precaution should have been taken to save the lives of those on board in case any such accident as that which actually occurred should happen to her, whereas all that seems to have been done was to have a somewhat damaged lifeboat towing astern. And it is, in our opinion, very doubtful whether he gave any orders about the steam tug "Challenger" standing by them, without which nearly all on board would have perished.

But what we chiefly blame Captain Teulon for is for allowing the "Alexandra," when she was lying in Donaghadee Bay with her head to the wind and in smooth water, to be towed out to sea for the purpose of rounding the Coupland Sand, and this too before the hole had been made in the bulkhead, and the lazarette thus cleared of water, and which, in our opinion, was the direct and immediate cause of the loss of this vessel. Captains Teulon and Morrison over and over again, in their examinations, denied that they had given any such order. Captain Teulon said that he and Captain Morrison and Mr. Anderson were anxiously watching the rise of the water in the cabin, which was above the lazarette. He also said that he did not give the order to the "Kingfisher" to go out to sea, although he said he was very glad to see her do so, as he had become anxious at her being so near into the shore. But it would surely have been better to have remained in smooth water close to the shore where the lives of all could easily have been saved rather than to have taken the vessel in the state in which she was, with her stern almost level with the water right out to sea, and at a time when the storm was more violent than it had ever been.

Now both Captains Teulon and Morrison denied that the water was much smoother under the land than it was out at sea, although the wind was at the time blowing a strong gale from the west, and therefore directly off shore. But in this they are distinctly contradicted by every witness in the case, who all say that when they were under the shelter of the land, they were in perfect safety. Surely Captains Teulon and Morrison should have been too wise to make a statement which they must have known that the Court could not possibly have believed. Captain Teulon also stated that it was not possible for the steam tug to have held the "Alexandra," with her head to the wind in shore, he ought hardly to have ventured to make such a statement to a court, constituted as this is, with two experienced naval officers as members of it. Moreover, the statement was distinctly denied by the masters of the two steam tugs, and is moreover contradicted by the fact that the "Kingfisher" did hold the "Alexandra" with her head to wind and inshore for about half an hour, and until that unfortunate order was given to put her head off the shore.

How to account for the conduct of Captains Teulon and Morrison, how to account for their apparent forgetfulness of the main incidents of the voyage, and for the confused statement of the facts which they made before us, is extremely difficult. The charge of drunkenness has been withdrawn, had it been pressed we should have had some difficulty in dealing with it, seeing the very positive evidence of Lindsay and others on the subject. But we cannot acquit Captain Teulon of very grave misconduct in having, I will not say given the order for the vessel's head to be put off shore, but for allowing it to be done before they had seen that the lazarette and cabin were clear of water, which they would have been as soon as the cutting of the hole had been completed.

We are sorry to have to pass such severe censure upon men who appear to have deserved the confidence of their employers for so long a time, but at the same time it is no light fault, I would even say crime, in those to whom the lives of their fellow subjects are entrusted, that they should by their misconduct expose them to unnecessary danger, and that is what we think those gentlemen have done.

Although we think that both these gentlemen have been guilty of great misconduct in this case, I must not forget what Mr. Cottingham has urged in their behalf, that in the duties which they were then discharging they were not acting as officers in charge of a vessel. They were acting as agents for salvors, and as Mr. Cottingham has truly observed, all salvage service is attended with risk; and although no one is at liberty to expose the lives of his fellow subjects to unnecessary risks, I hardly think that the Legislature intended that a master should lose his certificate if in the prosecution of a salvage service he incurred risk and exposed others to risks, which he would not be justified in undertaking in the ordinary discharge of his duty as a master or officer of the vessel. The duty which these gentlemen were performing was not that of an ordinary master or mate of a vessel. Under those circumstances we should perhaps not be justified in cancelling their certificates, but we think that they have been guilty of very grave misconduct, and that it was to their mismanagement or rather want of management that the loss of life which occurred on this occasion is principally due.

Of course after the judgment that I have given there will be no costs to anyone.

(Signed) H. C. ROTHERY,  
Wreck Commissioner.

*Finding.*

The Court having carefully inquired into the circumstances of the above-mentioned shipping casualties, finds, for the reasons stated in the annexed judgment,—

(1.) That the stranding of the vessel "Alexandra," on the 3rd of January last, was due partly to the breaking of the shaft of her screw propeller, and partly to the fact that her master, James Burrell, in crossing the channel, had not made any allowance for the flood tide, which drifted him far to the northward of his course.

The Court therefore reprimands Captain Burrell for his negligence, but returns to him his certificate.

(2.) That the foundering of the said vessel "Alexandra," on the 29th January last, was due to the neglect of Captain James Teulon and Captain George Morrison, in whose charge she was at the time, in allowing her to be towed out from the shelter of the land in order to round Copeland Island when her stern was low down in the water, and before the measures which were being taken to free the water from the lazarette were completed.

The Court accordingly strongly reprimands Captains Teulon and Morrison for their neglect.

The Court is also of opinion that there should be no costs of this investigation.

Dated this 4th day of May 1877.

(Signed) H. C. ROTHERY,  
Wreck Commissioner.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) G. TREFUSIS HOLT,  
Indian Navy, } Assessors.  
R. WILSON, }

(No. 48.)