

(No. 1022.)

“MIZPAH” (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

In the matter of a formal Investigation held at St. George's Hall, Liverpool, on the 23rd and 24th days of May 1881, before THOS. STAMFORD RAFFLES, Esq., Stipendiary Magistrate, assisted by Captains BURNEY, R.N., BEASLEY, and COMYN, Nautical Assessors, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship “MIZPAH,” of Newcastle, about one mile E. from Old Skaw, Jutland, on the 20th April last, whereby loss of life ensued.

Report of Court.

The Court, having carefully inquired into the circumstances attending the above-mentioned shipping casualty, finds, for the reasons stated in the annex hereto, that the said steamship was stranded and lost owing to the master having overestimated the distance run from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. on the 20th April, and in consequence taken a S.E. course too soon, and this was very much owing to an unusually strong W. current which he could not have anticipated.

Dated this 24th day of May 1881.

(Signed) T. S. RAFFLES,
Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) HENRY D. BURNEY, R.N.,
THS. BEASLEY,
D. R. COMYN, } Assessors.

Annex to the Report.

The “Mizpah” was an iron screw steamer, built at Sunderland in 1869, of 953'61 tons gross, and 727'91 tons registered, and of 99 horses power combined. She was registered at Newcastle, and was owned by Mr. George Peplow Forwood and the mortgagees of 43 shares. She was commanded by Mr. George Henry Lewis, who holds a master's certificate of competency, No. 96,578. The “Mizpah” sailed from Liverpool in good condition and well found in every respect, on the 15th April last, with a crew of 20 hands all told, and one passenger, and with a general cargo of 1,260 tons, bound for ports in the Baltic, and drawing 16ft. 6in. aft and 14ft. 8in. forward. She had two lifeboats and a pinnacle, all in good order. They passed through the Pentland Firth on the 18th, and at 9 p.m. on the 19th made the Naze Light, and were abeam of it at 10.30 p.m., distant 8 to 10 miles, and could see the Light quite plainly, the weather being clear. The wind was from W.N.W., and a fresh breeze. They took their departure, thence steering a course by the standard compass E. by S. $\frac{1}{2}$ S., which was E.S.E. magnetic for the Skaw. They made Hirtshalls Lighthouse about 11.15 a.m. on the 20th, and the master stated that he approached the Lighthouse nearer than he otherwise should have done, in order to see if any ice signals were out, and to get a good departure. At 1 p.m. the Lighthouse bore S.S.E. magnetic, distant about five miles when nearly abreast. He then took soundings, which gave 30 fathoms fine sand, and he considered that to be an indication that his position was correct. He took his departure thence, and set a course N.E. by E. by standard compass, which was N.E. 2° N. magnetic, and finding that he had made the land nearer than he expected, he stated that he allowed one point for the current which was setting his vessel inshore, and he supposed that he would make a course E.N.E. At this time there was a fresh breeze from N.W., but there was not much sea. Soon afterwards, however, the weather became hazy, and the master ordered the engines to be put at half speed, and they proceeded at a rate of about 5 knots, having set the patent log. He continued this course, using the hand lead every quarter-of-an-hour, and getting no bottom at 23 fathoms, until 6 p.m., the weather being hazy during all the time, and the steam whistle being kept going. An A.B. had been placed on

the look-out when the weather became hazy, but about 4 p.m., the spray dashing over the bows, he was ordered to the bridge, where the master and second officer were. At 6 p.m. the vessel was stopped for ten minutes to take soundings with the deep sea lead, when they got 64 fathoms blue clay, and the log being hauled in registered 30 miles; and the master having examined his chart, was satisfied in his own mind as to the correctness of his position. Considering therefore that his vessel was well to N., and sufficiently E. to open the Kattegat, he set his course S.E. by standard compass, which was S.E. 2° S. magnetic, expecting the N. current through the Kattegat would catch him on his starboard bow and take him well clear of the land and about 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles E. of the lightvessel off the Skaw. At 7.25 p.m. they again stopped for 10 to 15 minutes to sound, when the second officer, who took the soundings, reported no bottom at 51 fathoms. They then went on again at half speed, the weather being still thick but occasionally lifting, and the master gave orders to have all ready for another cast of the deep sea lead at 8 p.m., shortly before which hour a heavy snow squall came on. About three minutes before 8, the master ordered the engines to be stopped, but before the vessel had deadened her way, she touched the ground aft. The master immediately ordered the helm hard-a-starboard, and the engines to go full speed ahead, when her head came round a little, but she struck again about the mainmast, and shortly afterwards parted amidships. The master then ordered all hands on deck, and the boats to be got ready for lowering. The port boat, which was on the lee side, when they began to lower it got smashed, as it became exposed to the weather by the vessel's change of position. They then proceeded to the starboard lifeboat, which was got ready, and the master sung out for two hands to get into her. Before she could be lowered the passenger, the carpenter, and six firemen jumped into her, and these 8 people being in her, the master said he told the second mate to get into her and take the command of her. She was lowered safely and kept alongside by the painter, but being somewhat short the chief officer bent the end of the boat's tackle full on to it to make it longer. The sea, however, which was very rough, unshipped the rudder out of the second mate's hand, and he then tried an oar; but that also was carried away, and the sea partly filled the boat. The master then told them to come back to the ship, but no one would attempt to climb up by the painter, and the second mate saying he would shew them the way got on board the vessel again, and they had partly got another man on board when the rope broke and he fell into the water; at the same time the boat capsized and all in her unfortunately were drowned. The remaining 12 of the crew took refuge in the rigging and on the fore-castle head, and were rescued on the following morning by the Skaw lifeboat, but one of the men subsequently died from exposure and exhaustion.

On the conclusion of the evidence Mr. Paxton, for the Board of Trade, asked the following questions:—

1. What was the cause of the stranding and subsequent loss of the vessel?
2. Whether the position of the vessel was properly verified at 1 p.m.?
3. Whether a safe and proper course was set and steered after passing the Hirtshalls Lighthouse, and whether due and proper allowance was made for tide and currents?
4. Whether proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel from time to time, and whether safe and proper alterations in the course were made at 6 p.m., and whether due and proper allowance was then made for tide, currents, and leeway?
5. Whether at the time of the stranding of the vessel the weather was thick with fog, and if so, how did it happen that the siren at the Skaw Lightship was not heard?
6. Whether having regard to the thick state of the weather, the lead was used with sufficient frequency?
7. Whether a good and proper look-out was kept?
8. Whether the starboard lifeboat was managed in a proper and seamanlike manner?
9. What was the cause of the steering gear carrying away, and whether prompt and proper measures were thereafter taken to save the lives of those in the boat?

10. What was the cause of the boat capsizing, whereby 8 lives were lost?

11. Was the stranding and subsequent loss of the ship, or the loss of life, caused by any wrongful act or default on the part of the master, first and second mates, or any of them, in respect of any of the above matters?

And he stated that in the opinion of the Board of Trade, the certificates of the master and the two officers should be dealt with. After which Mr. Copeman, Solicitor for the master, addressed the Court, and Mr. Paxton replied.

In answer to the 1st question, the Court found that the stranding and subsequent loss of this vessel was owing to the master having over estimated the distance run from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. on the 20th April.

As to the 2nd question, the master seemed to have ascertained his position at 1 p.m. with tolerable accuracy.

As to the 3rd and 4th questions, the course steered by the master after passing the Hirtshalls Lighthouse appeared to have been correct, but he allowed one point E for the current, whereas the current in that neighbourhood on the day in question set to the westward, which impeded his way, so that at 6 p.m. when he altered his course, he had not run the distance indicated by the patent log. The course steered by the master from 6 p.m. would have been the right course had he really reached the position which he concluded that he had reached at that hour.

As already stated, the master was unaware of the true direction of the current, but a document was handed in

to the Court, accompanied by a translation signed by H.B.M. Consul at Frederikshaven, purporting to be a declaration by J. G. Steinmann, master of the Lightship Skaw Reef, which was to the effect that on the 20th April the current "set westward with unusual "velocity." This, of course, could not have been known to the master of the "Mizpah."

As to the 5th question, the weather had been foggy since 1.30 p.m., and just before the vessel stranded a heavy snow squall came on, during which she went on shore. The wind being from the N. would probably account for their not hearing the siren on the Skaw Lightship.

As to the 6th and 7th questions, the lead seemed from the evidence to have been frequently used, and a good look-out appeared to have been kept.

As to the 8th, 9th, and 10th questions, the starboard lifeboats seemed to have been safely lowered into the water, but the heavy sea speedily unshipped the rudder and carried away an oar which they tried to use in its place, and very soon capsized the boat. The Court thought nothing more could have been done to save the vessel under the circumstances.

In reply to the 11th and last question, the Court could not say that the stranding and loss of this ship was caused by any wrongful act or default on the part of the master or his officers. The error which stranded the vessel was the miscalculation of the distance run when the master shaped his course S.E. and this was an error of judgment only.

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