

(No. 1242.)

“HOWARDS” (S.S.) AND “EMMA.”

REPORT of Inquiry held at Halifax, Nova Scotia, into the collision between the steamship “HOWARDS,” of Sunderland, and the brigantine “EMMA,” of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia.

In obedience to an Order in Council, dated the 17th November 1881, directing me to hold a formal investigation into collision which occurred between the steamship “Howards,” of Sunderland, G. B. Stephen Shotton, master, and the brigantine “Emma,” of Lunenburg, N.S., Charles Inkermann Dowling, master, at about 2 o'clock on the morning of the 15th instant, Sambro Island bearing about N.E. by E., distant 22 miles, I proceeded under the authority of the 5th section of the Act 32 and 33 Vic., cap. 38, and caused the officers and those of the crew cognizant of the facts to appear before me on the 18th and 19th instant, when their evidence was taken.

The evidence goes to prove that the brigantine was seen by the steamer's look-out man in sufficient time to avoid any difficulty. This look-out man reported to Mr. John Tracey, second mate, who was the officer in charge of the watch, that a sail was on his starboard bow about 5 minutes before the collision occurred, and the second mate replied, “I see her and am watching her.” It appears in the latter part of the look-out man's evidence that about two minutes before the collision the second mate ordered the steamer's helm to be put hard-a-starboard, and the second mate in his evidence states that he first saw the brigantine about two points on his starboard bow, but could not make out any lights, only observing her sails; and by the course she was steering, about E. by S., while the steamer was heading W.S.W., he should have known that she was crossing his bow.

As the vessels were each going over 7 knots per hour they were approaching each other at a speed of nearly 15. Thus it will be seen that a very short time must elapse when a collision would be unavoidable unless prompt steps were taken to prevent it.

Albert Sheppard, who was at the wheel of the “Howards,” and who could see on both sides of his ship, states that when he first saw the brigantine she seemed to be only 60 or 70 yards off on his starboard bow “under a cloud of canvas,” and he then got orders to put the helm “hard-a-starboard.”

The second mate in his evidence states that the night was cloudy, but middling clear on the horizon. The man at the wheel has also stated that it was cloudy, but clear on the horizon.

With respect to the brigantine's lights, although not seen by the crew of the steamer before the collision, they saw them burning after they had taken to the boats.

Referring to the regulations for preventing collisions at sea, article 17 states: “If two ships, one of which is a steamship and another a sailing ship, are proceeding in such directions as to involve risk of collision the steamship shall keep out of the way of the sailing ship.” Article 18 states: “Every steamship when approaching another ship so as to involve risk of collision shall slacken her speed or stop and reverse if necessary.”

I find that the precautions prescribed by the above rules were not taken in time to prevent a collision; that when the sail on the starboard bow was observed and no lights seen the “Howards'” steam whistle was not sounded, as is usual in such cases, nor was her course altered; and I also find that after the accident had occurred the engines were not stopped till the master had got on deck and given the order to do so.

The “Emma” was steering E. by S., with the wind right aft and her yards square. They observed a light about one point on their port bow fifteen or twenty minutes before the collision, which proved to be the “Howards'” masthead light, but at no time before the accident could they make out the side lights. As the “Emma” approached the “Howards” the master of the former observed that the light was crossing his bow from his port to his starboard side, and then discovered it to be a steamer's masthead light, and seeing that a collision was inevitable, ported his helm to avoid the shock, hoping to strike her obliquely.

From a consideration of all the circumstances connected with the above I cannot attach any blame to the master of the brigantine “Emma;” but I deem it my duty to suspend the second mate's certificate of competency held by John Tracey for a space of six months from the date of the collision, as he, being the officer of the watch on board the steamer “Howards” at the time, does not appear to have taken such prompt measures on this occasion as the circumstances of the case required.

Given under my hand at Halifax, Nova Scotia, this 21st day of November 1881.

(Signed) P. A. Scott, Captain, R.N.,
Chairman of the Board,
Examiners, masters, and mates
Commissioner.