

(No. 1235.)

"MOBILE" (S.S.)

REPORT of an Inquiry held on the 10th day of December 1881, at Alice Town, in the Island of Biminis, Bahamas, into the stranding of the steamship "Mobile," of Glasgow, before GEORGE WILLIAM MINNS, Esq., Assistant Resident Justice in and for the Island of Biminis, and one of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the said Bahama Islands.

In the matter of the stranding on the Moselle Bar, near Biminis, of the British steamship "Mobile," of which Horatio Nelson Herriman is master, on the 9th day of December A.D. 1881.

The steamship "Mobile," of Glasgow, left Liverpool, England, bound for New Orleans, in the United States, on the 12th November 1881, under the command of Horatio Nelson Herriman, with a general cargo on board. After leaving Liverpool she was compelled to put into Queenstown to have some repairs made to the main boiler feed-pipe, which had burst. From thence, on 17th November, she resumed her voyage for New Orleans. On the voyage she experienced very heavy gales from the westward until reaching the Azores, during which time she lost sundry articles from the deck. After a time the weather became moderate. The ship passed Abaco on the evening of the 8th December at 11 p.m., steering west half south for Stirups Cays, which was passed at 4 a.m. 9th instant; from whence the course was altered to west half north for the Great Isaacs, which was at 12.30 p.m. 9th inst. These courses were steered by the pole compass, which showed a deviation of 9° 40' east from Asimuth, obtained on the morning of the 9th.

From the Great Isaacs a course was steered south-west by south, which should have carried the ship clear of the Moselle Bar, but on account of the compass, which had been adjusted in Liverpool at the time of the swinging of the ship, being found to be incorrect, and the card given to the captain worthless, it was thrown aside, and the ship worked by observations, and the general course steered across the Atlantic.

The ship being nearly out of coal on account of the heavy weather experienced before reaching Biminis, the captain intended to put into Key West, Florida, for coal to continue his voyage; consequently he placed the ship at half speed, set the second mate at the lead (which was thrown every ten minutes), and tried to keep as far from the Gulf Stream (which set to the northward) as possible, and skim the bank to get as far as Gun Cay before stretching her across to Florida. The mate, during the time of throwing the lead, found five fathoms of water along the edge of the bank. After heaving several times in the same depth, suddenly it decreased to three. Immediately on hearing this the captain, who was on the bridge, gave orders to put the wheel hard-a-port and to stop and reverse the engine. If this could have been effected in time the ship would have paid off and gone around the shoal on the northern edge, which would have brought her out into the channel near the gulf and in safety. But in consequence of the water shoaling so fast on the Moselle Bank this could not be effected. From five to three fathoms and from three to the bar is shoaled in less than ten minutes with a vessel going at the rate of seven miles per hour. Before the speed could be checked the ship struck. The captain tried by keeping the propeller going astern to get her off, but finding this useless she proceeded to run out a kedge, and the

starboard bower anchor in a north-east direction with a hawser (12 inches) attached; this was taken to the after-winch, and an effort made with the help of the engines to get the ship off. The tide was then ebbing. Finding the attempt fruitless he desisted until the next high tide. When the tide was on the full he commenced again to try and get the ship off, but without avail. He had been offered assistance by several of the wrecking captains who were lying alongside (no one being allowed on deck), but this he refused. After using every means in his power to get her off, and finding them unavailing, he agreed with one Charles Kelly and others to take the ship off if possible (by lightening her) for the sum of 13,000 dollars. This agreement being effected the wreckers proceeded to work. (This was at 8 a.m. 10th instant, the ship then having been on shore about 17 hours.) At about 1.20 p.m. 10th the ship was got off after the wreckers had taken out a part of her cargo. In the position of the ship (at the time that she was given up) she was in a dangerous place; if a north-east wind had come on, both ship and cargo would have been lost. The ship after being taken off was brought down and anchored on the north side of North Biminis, where the cargo was replaced; the captain gave the wreckers a bill for 13,000 dollars in gold, and Sunday evening the 11th instant proceeded on his voyage to New Orleans, having obtained a supply of coal sufficient for the voyage from a schooner that was at the time passing down the gulf.

The wreck-master, Charles Kelly, and E. J. Wilkinson, went with the bill to collect it in New Orleans and to return to this place, either by first opportunity offering by the way of Key West, or on the return trip of the steamer "Mobile."

*Opinion.*

My opinion is that the "Mobile," after leaving the Great Isaacs on a course south-west by south, was on the right course to clear the "Moselle" Buoy, but being out of coal and trying to skim the edge of the bank to get out of the strength of the stream he came in nearer than he intended. It proves to me that he was vigilant by his placing the second mate at the lead and on a look-out. He shows his quickness in trying to escape being on shore by his orders to put the wheel hard-a-port and to reverse the engine immediately after he found he was in 3 fathoms of water. The water shoals very quickly on the part of the Moselle Bar on which the ship struck, in fact from 3 fathoms to two in a less space than 500 feet. I myself proceeded to the scene of disaster and remained there all night (but was not allowed to board the ship). I saw that the captain was using every means in his power to get his ship off, and it was only after finding his efforts unavailing, and being told that his ship was in a dangerous position, that he consented to receive the assistance of the wreckers.

I think the captain acted in a most judicious manner throughout, and that the stranding of the ship was an accident, and that there can be no blame attached to the captain. I therefore exonerate him from all blame of wilfulness and carelessness.

(Signed) GEORGE W. MINNS,  
Asst. Res. Justice.

*Attorney-General's Opinion.*

"I see no occasion to question the decision arrived at."

(Signed) W. A. M. S., A.G.

22nd December 1881