

(No. 2755.)

“IBERIAN” (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 15th and 16th days of December 1885, before THOS. STAMFORD RAFFLES, Esquire, Stipendiary Magistrate, assisted by Captains CASTLE and DAVIES, Nautical Assessors, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship “IBERIAN,” of Liverpool, in Dunmann's Bay, county Cork, on the 21st November 1885.

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 vessel was stranded owing to the master having steered too fine a course to make the Fastnet in hazy weather. The Court suspended his certificate for four calendar months.

Dated this 16th day of December 1885.

(Signed) T. S. RAFFLES, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) JOHN S. CASTLE, } Assessors.
T. DAVIES, }

Report.

This was an inquiry into the stranding of the British steamship “Iberian,” in Dunmann's Bay, co. Cork, on the 21st November last. Mr. Paxton appeared for the Board of Trade, Mr. George Dickinson for the owners, and Mr. Pickford was counsel for the master. The “Iberian” was an iron screw steamer built at Belfast in 1867, of 350 horses power combined, and registered at Liverpool of 2958 tons gross and 1951.50 tons registered. She was the property of the Iberian Steamship Company (Limited), Mr. Frederick W. Jeffery, of Liverpool, being registered manager. She was commanded by Mr. William John Maxwell, who holds a master's certificate of competency, No. 97,694, dated 20th December 1877. He had commanded her since August 1882, and he had been 11 years in the same service. She had a crew of 50 hands all told. She took in a general cargo at Boston, U.S., of 2,300 tons, and had 58 head of cattle on deck, in charge of whom were six men, and there were also found on board after sailing two stowaways. She sailed on the 10th of November last with a list of from 2 to 3 degrees to starboard, said to be caused by the quantity of coals—90 to 100 tons—stowed in a large bunker on the starboard side. They experienced strong N. to N.W. gales during the earlier part of the voyage, during which time the list increased, and the master said that he thought the grain in bulk—about 24,000 bushels—in the lower holds must have moved a little. The maximum list was 11 degrees on the 15th November, when they hove to for 12 hours to relieve the cattle, which had been a good deal knocked about. About this time the wind changed to S.E., and after that the vessel became more upright, 50 tons of coal having been moved to the port side of the thwart ship bunker. On the 20th two of the port boats were filled with water, which made a difference of three degrees, and on the 21st, when the ship struck, she was nearly upright. On the 19th they got an observation at noon which placed them in lat. 50°54' N. and long. 20°48' W. The course set thence was E.S.E. by standard compass, there being 2° E. deviation on that course, making N. 85° E. true. At noon on the 20th they got no observation, but their position by dead reckoning was lat. 51°16' N. and long. 14°6' W. The master kept the same course, and he said he was steering to go 6 miles S. of the Fastnet, which he said he expected to be abeam of about 4 a.m. on the 21st. The master was

on deck till 11.30 p.m. of the 20th, when he turned in, the weather being clear but showery, and lay down in his clothes. The first officer at the end of his watch at midnight reported the weather the same, and the second officer, who had since died, came on watch from 12 to 4 a.m., the fourth officer being with him. About 1 a.m. on the 21st he called the attention of the second officer to the green colour of the water, which he also saw, and they agreed that they were in soundings. At 1.45 a.m. the log was hove, which showed that they were going 10 knots. The weather was then pretty hazy, but the fourth officer said they could see about 1 1/2 of a mile. Very shortly afterwards the boatswain's mate said that he saw some black object on the port beam, and he called the attention of the second officer to it. He said it looked rather suspicious and they had better call the master. The fourth officer went to call him, and he told him the hour and that they were in soundings, and that the weather was very hazy, but he did not say anything about the dark object they had seen, the fourth officer considering that the second officer would do so. The master went up immediately after the fourth officer, who, on returning to the bridge, found the dark object no longer visible, and the master said that the second officer never said anything to him about it. The master spoke of the weather on his going up as hazy, but he said they could then see 3 to 4 miles, in which estimate the Court had no doubt that he must have been mistaken, as the result proved. He did not think it necessary to reduce the ship's speed. About 2 a.m. the master asked the fourth officer as to the distance run, and he reported 144 1/2 miles, from which the master judged he was fully 20 miles from the Fastnet. On getting to the upper bridge, the master said he could see nothing. His first order was to haul the fore trysail down, that he might see better. In about five minutes the look-out reported something on the port bow, and at the same time the master saw an object which he took to be a sailing vessel, on which he ordered the helm “hard-a-port,” to avoid collision. Almost at the same moment he saw that the object was land, the look-out also singing out “land ahead.” The master immediately ordered the engines to be reversed full speed, but before they got stern way on, the ship struck. The boats were ordered to be got out, and on sounding, 13 feet were found in No. 1 hold, nothing in the others. The boats were lowered into the water, and in about an hour and a half after striking, the crew and passengers got into them. The master sent three boats away—one for assistance, to Crookhaven, and the other two to find a landing. The boat under the third officer's command got adrift, and landed at a different place, but all the boats reached land safely and no life was lost. The vessel eventually foundered. She was insured for 13,000l., and was valued by her owners at 32,000l. There was no insurance on freight.

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

- 1. Was the standard compass properly adjusted and compensated for heeling errors?
- 2. What was the list of the vessel when she left Boston, and what was the cause of such list?
- 3. Did such list increase on the voyage, and if so, what was the cause?
- 4. What steps were taken to remedy such list?
- 5. Did such list or the steps taken to remedy the same, in the opinion of the Court, affect the compasses?
- 6. Did the master set and steer safe and proper courses from noon on the 19th November, and did he make due and proper allowance for currents?
- 7. What report was made to the master by the fourth officer?
- 8. Ought the master to have used the lead when he came up shortly before 2?
- 9. Was any land seen before the master was called up on the morning of the 21st., and if so, was it reported to the master?
- 10. Was a good and proper look-out kept?
- 11. What was the cause of the stranding?
- 12. Was there any default on the part of the master in regard to any of the above matters?

And he stated that, in the opinion of the Board of Trade, the master's certificate should be dealt with. Mr. Pickford then addressed the Court for the master.

The court gave judgment as follows:—

1. The standard compass was apparently properly adjusted and compensated for heeling errors. The master's compass book was produced. It was well kept, and it showed that there had been no difference in the deviation on the courses steered since 1882.

2 and 3. The list on leaving Boston was caused by having a large quantity of coals in the starboard bunker. It increased on the voyage by the settling of the cargo, the ship being on the port tack with strong northerly winds till it reached a maximum of 11 degrees.

4 and 5. The coals were consumed from the starboard side, and the master had 50 tons removed to the port side of the thwart ship bunker, and he also filled two of the port boats with water. The Court did not consider that on the course the vessel was then being steered the compasses were in any way affected by the list.

6. After the observation which the master got at noon on the 19th November, the Court could not say that the master steered a course which was not safe and proper at that time; but after noon on the 20th, when he got no observation and was wholly dependent on dead reckoning, the Court did not consider the course safe and proper. The weather being hazy and no allowance being made for the N.W. current shown on the chart and mentioned in the sailing directions the master was steering too fine a course to make the land.

7. The fourth officer on calling the master about 2 a.m., told him that the weather was very hazy, that they were on soundings, and could only see land at a short distance.

8. The use of the lead when the master came up just before 2 a.m. would not, to judge by the result, have saved the ship.

9. According to the evidence of the fourth mate, there was a strong suspicion of land being seen about 1.45 a.m. on the 21st, which induced the second officer to send the fourth to call the master. The fourth officer

did not, as already stated, say anything about it to the master, as he said he considered it was the duty of the second officer to mention it to him. The master in his evidence distinctly stated that the second officer did not do so, and the second mate having died since the casualty, the master's evidence is uncontradicted.

10. A good and proper look-out seemed to have been kept.

11. The cause of the stranding of this vessel was undoubtedly that the master steered too fine a course to make the Fastnet in hazy weather.

12. The Court has given very serious consideration to the evidence in this case, so far as it bears upon the question whether or not the master was in default; and looking at his long career in the same service, and having had due regard to the fact that he had been master of the vessel for nearly four years, they have reluctantly come to the conclusion that he is to blame for the loss of this ship. He had no right, unless in perfectly clear weather, to steer so fine a course to make the land, and the Court could not leave out of their consideration the circumstance that it was against the Company's orders to do so. His long experience was relied on in his favour, and no doubt it gave him over confidence in his navigation; but considering that the safety of so many lives was involved—to say nothing of a valuable ship and cargo—the Court could not say that the master was guilty simply of an error in judgment, but felt bound to pronounce him in default. Under the circumstances the Court suspended his certificate for four calendar months.

(Signed) T. S. RAFFLES, Judge.

We concur in this report.

(Signed) JOHN S. CASTLE, } Assessors.
T. DAVIES, }

Liverpool, 16th December 1885.

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