

(No. 3758.)

"EMPRESS OF CHINA."

REPORT of a Court of Investigation held by the Police Magistrate of Hobart, on the 23rd day of January 1889, respecting the loss of the Barquentine "EMPRESS OF CHINA," of Hobart, near the Coast of Tasmania, on the 31st December 1888.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined, namely:—Thomas James Chaplin, master; Isaac Lear, chief mate; Charles Murray, boatswain (able seaman); and from their evidence it was shown that the "Empress of China," a barquentine of 255 tons, sailed from Geelong, Victoria, bound to Hobart, in ballast, on the 28th December 1888; that she cleared Port Phillip Heads at 11 p.m. of the 29th; and that at 4 a.m. of the 30th, Cape Schanck then bearing E. by S., distant 12 miles, the master, the wind being easterly, determined to make his passage down the West Coast of Tasmania, and shaped his course S. $\frac{1}{2}$ E. The weather was hazy and overcast, and the master was unable to obtain any sight of the sun on that day, but at 6 p.m. the ship had run by patent log 58 miles. The course was then altered to S. by E. At midnight the weather became thick, and at 2 o'clock a.m. of the 31st the fog became dense. The course was then again altered to S. $\frac{1}{2}$ E., and the ship, which had made 58 miles by the log since 6 p.m., ran on at the rate of 5 knots till half-past 2, when the boatswain, who was stationed on the look-out, made out "white foam," and immediately sang out to the master, "Breakers ahead." Captain Chaplin then ordered the head sheets to be let go, and helped the man at the wheel to put the helm hard down, and the ship came up about 2 points, when she struck heavily and hung fast. Finding that she was filling rapidly the master got his boats out, and having secured a compass and a small quantity of provisions, he and the whole of the crew got into one of them. The boat remained near the Pyramid Rock, on which the ship had struck, till daylight, when, the vessel having sunk, the master made for the land of Tasmania, and at 5 p.m. of the same day landed safely with all hands in the neighbourhood of Cape Grim.

By the course of the ship marked off on the chart produced by the master, it appeared that he had made due allowance in the course he steered for the currents indicated in the chart, and there seems no reason to believe that there was any carelessness in steering. According to the master's calculation the ship should have been at the time she struck 7 miles to the eastward of the Pyramid; and the fact of her being so much to the westward of her supposed position seems only to be accounted for by the presumption that the prevalence of easterly winds for some days previous had caused the currents to run to the westward at a stronger rate than usual, or than that shown on the chart.

The Court therefore finds that the master, knowing that he was in the vicinity of dangerous rocks, would have acted more prudently when the fog came on if he had brought his ship to and waited for daylight, but that her loss was not caused by any such default or wrongful act on his part as to call for the cancellation or suspension of his master's certificate.

After the ship struck the master appears to have acted with commendable coolness and energy; and it is a matter for congratulation that, considering the circumstances of the wreck, the lives of all his crew were by his prompt action preserved.

(Signed) W. TARLETON, P.M.

I concur.

(Signed) JAMES RIDDLE,
Nautical Assessor.

Hobart, 30th January 1889.