

(No. 3718.)

"MOBILE" (S.S.)

Bombay, Chief Presidency Magistrate's Court,
18th December 1888.

Pursuant to Government Resolution, Marine Department, No. 249, dated the 10th November 1888, appointing C. P. Cooper, Esquire, Chief Presidency Magistrate, Captain B. Arbuthnot, R.N., Her Majesty's Ship "Mariner," and Captain W. Potts, Superintendent B.I.S.N. Company's Dock, to conduct an investigation into the circumstances connected with the stranding of the s.s. "Mobile" near Zanzibar in August last, the Court assembled on the 17th and 18th days of December for the purpose stated.

2. From the evidence before the Court it appears that the s.s. "Mobile," a screw steamship built of iron at Linthouse, Glasgow, in 1879, by Alexander Stephens and Sons, schooner-rigged, 250 feet long, with compound engines 140 horse-power, 916¹⁰⁰/₁₀₀ths registered tonnage, owned by the Persian Steam Navigation Company, stated to be insured for about Rs. 2,000,000, and commanded by Captain John Cormack, who holds an ordinary master's certificate of competency, No. 347, dated 25th February 1886, granted at Bombay by His Excellency the Governor in Council, in pursuance of Her Majesty's Order in Council, dated the 29th June 1882, left Bombay on the 5th August last, fully manned and equipped, with a general cargo for Zanzibar. She drew 15 feet forward and 16 feet 6 inches aft. She had three navigating officers and three engineers. There were on board the usual charts, amongst them being three Admiralty charts—(1) "Africa, East Coast, Pungume to Ras Kimbiji, including the approaches to Zanzibar, 1875"; (2) "Zanzibar Harbour and its approaches, 1875"; and (3) "Admiralty chart of the North End of Zanzibar Harbour and its approaches, 1875." There were two compasses—the standard compass aft and the steering compass on the bridge—and a deviation card, dated 17th May 1888, taken in the Persian Gulf; a Walker's patent taffrail log; a Walker's patent lead; a common deep sea lead, and two hand leads.

3. The vessel encountered a strong S.W. monsoon, and very strong S.E. trades, and on the 20th August, at 2.30 p.m., the captain, who was on the bridge, states his vessel was abeam of the south end of Zanzibar Island, distant four miles, and bearing N. by E. He marked that position on the chart, and steered from that position N.W. by W., a magnetic course, and having gone 11½ miles on that course, he verified his position by bearings on Pungume Island, the south end of which bore N.N.E. ½ E., distant about two miles. He then altered his course to N.W. by N., and continued on that course until he got quite close to Chumbe Island. He did not verify that position. He says, "I passed the island on what I considered a very fair position, and after coming up to Chumbe Island, the vessel not steering very well, and owing to the current between the two islands, she took her own way, and before I could get her to stop she took the ground." The ship's head at that time was N.N.W. She struck at about 1½ or 2 miles off the island, about 4.30 p.m. He says "the weather was very strange. He could hardly see the distance they were off objects. There was a strong mirage." Before going ashore he saw no discoloured water. It was high water. He did not see any buoy before she struck. She was going at about 8½ knots an hour. When the current caught her they had to slow her down. This was about ten minutes before she struck. She was going slow at the time she struck. He says, "I guessed my distance from my position off the south part of the island. I may have been wrong in my bearings in mistaking Pungume Island for Niamembe Island. That would lead me a mile further inshore. When I saw Chumbe Island I knew it was that island. The only doubt I had was its distance from me. I intended to pass Chumbe Island at the distance of 1½ miles. I did not know the leading marks for entering the southern pass. I could not make them out properly. I observed the town of Zanzibar after I got ashore. I never noticed it at all before. I knew my chief officer had been through the chan-

nel before. I did not consult either of my officers at any time except in taking bearings. I did not take soundings, as in the Zanzibar Channel they are of very little use. On my course N.W. by W. I allowed a deviation of three degrees to the westward. On my course N.W. by N. I allowed very nearly the same westerly deviation. I cannot say if that deviation was correct. I took them from the card. I never had the ship on those courses before. I was aware at the time that the card could not be trusted. I was not exactly going by this card. I was taking particular notice of the land as I was going along. I was sailing both by courses and by observation of the land. I was aware that if my deviations were wrong my bearings could not be trusted, but I thought my card would be nearer the truth. I did not test the correctness of my compass by the bearings of objects on shore. Perhaps a careful bearing of Chumbe Island taken 10 or 15 minutes before I grounded would have put me in a position to so control my ship that she might not have grounded."

4. The second officer states he went on duty at noon on the 20th on the bridge. He was there all the watch, until the chief officer relieved him about 4.25 p.m. The captain gave orders to the helmsman of the course to be steered. He examined the charts and watched the ship's position from time to time. He took the bearings of the south end of Zanzibar Island at 2.30. He does not remember what it was. He thinks they were about four miles distant from the land. He does not remember the course steered from there. He remembers giving the captain a bearing of Pungume. He does not remember what that bearing was nor the distance they were off. It might be 3 or 5 miles. He does not remember the course steered from there. That was the last bearing he recollects being taken. He does not remember if he took four-point bearings of the islands as he passed them or not. He had no particular instructions as to taking bearings. The captain told him to take bearings as he was there. It may have been five minutes after he was relieved that the ship took the ground. He was below in his cabin. He does not remember how the ship's head was when he left the bridge. The ship was then going full speed. He did not correct the bearings for deviation before giving them to the captain. He took no bearing of Chumbe. He does not know for certain that the captain was steering by courses. The captain was referring to his chart, and was also keeping an eye on the land. He did not notice any coloured water. He did not notice any difficulty in the steering due to currents. He cannot say how the accident happened. He was not on the bridge. He went in the boat when it was lowered, but found no eddies that troubled him in handling her.

5. The chief officer stated he had been three times to Zanzibar by the southern passage previously. He came on the bridge on the 20th about 4.15 p.m. He came to relieve the second officer, but after being about 5 minutes on the bridge he received instructions from the captain to get ready the anchors, &c., and he left. When he came on the bridge he did not pay much attention to the position of the vessel, as the master and second officer were there. He thought Chumbe Island bore one point on the starboard bow. It might be 3 or 4 miles off. He formed no opinion about the matter because he was not consulted. The vessel struck possibly a quarter of an hour or 20 minutes after he first went on the bridge. She was going full speed, and did not change her speed that he was aware of. He could form no opinion how the accident occurred. He was on the bridge the moment the ship struck. He had been there not over 5 minutes previously. The engines were going full speed ahead. He noticed Chumbe Island. He thought it was possibly 2 miles off. He did not notice anything about her steering. He heard no order given with reference to her helm before she struck. He did not consider the ship in danger at all until she struck. He considered with Chumbe Island ahead she was a little close, but the water was quite smooth. He was not consulted by the captain at any time. He could not account for the vessel getting aground unless the current swept her in broadside. After the ship struck he took the bearings. Chumbe Island was then on the port bow about a point. The conspicuous house at Ras Bayu bore N.E. by N. northerly, and Chumbe Island N.W. by N. ½ N.

6. The secunnie at the wheel states he went on duty at 4 p.m. That the course given him was N.N.W. He steered that course for about 10 minutes, when he received an order to steer N. by W. $\frac{1}{2}$ W. from the second officer. The next order he received was to steer N. by W. That was 5 or 6 minutes after the previous order. He received that order from the second officer. He continued on that course for 7 or 8 minutes. He then received an order to steer north. He continued on that course for 9 or 10 minutes. While on that course the ship struck the ground. He received no other order before she struck, and no order was given to him after she struck. He noticed an island ahead before she struck. He received all the orders from the second officer.

7. The chief engineer states that at 4 p.m. the engines were going full speed. At full speed she goes $8\frac{1}{2}$ or 9 knots. She went full speed until she struck at 4.28 p.m. Before he felt the shock he received an order "full speed astern."

8. After the ship stranded steps were taken to get her off by carrying out an anchor astern. After two or three attempts, and after lying there for 23 hours, she was got off on the 21st of August at 3.30 p.m. They then proceeded to Zanzibar, where they anchored the same evening. One of the crew was sent down as a diver to ascertain what damage she had sustained. He reported no damage except that all the four blades of the propeller were partly broken. The vessel made no water, and no repairs were done to her at Zanzibar. The captain made a report to the British Consul and asked for a Court of Enquiry. He says they were rather busy there, and as no court had been held and his ship was ready for sea, he wrote to the admiral, asking him to cancel his application for an enquiry. The admiral did so and allowed the vessel to go. She left Zanzibar on the 30th of August, with 60 asses and part of the cargo she had taken from Bombay, and proceeded towards the Mauritius, where she arrived on the 14th of September. She made no water whatever on the passage. She discharged her cargo there and took in other cargo. She was surveyed there by Lloyd's surveyor, who reported one plate bent and the bilge keel broken. The captain was authorized to take a cargo, and was granted a certificate as a good risk for insurance. The captain fitted another propeller there that he found on board. She left the Mauritius on the 5th of October, bound for Bombay, where she arrived on the 24th of October last. She did not make a drop of water on that voyage. After her arrival in Bombay she was put in dry dock. It was ascertained that the damage she sustained was 9 plates injured in her bottom, which had to be taken out, straightened and renewed; 7 frame angle bars were fractured; 30 feet were broken off the starboard bilge keel; the bilge rolling keel was twisted on both sides; the caulking of the upper deck was started fore and aft, and the cement in the lower hold over the bottom was displaced in several places. Four blades of the propeller were broken, and it was rendered useless. The cost of the repairs, it is stated, will be from 12,000 to 15,000 rupees.

9. The captain states as his reason for the vessel stranding that it was just at the top of high water that the currents begin to eddy, and that the vessel was caught in an eddy.

10. After carefully considering the evidence, the Court have come to the conclusion that the s.s. "Mobile" was stranded on a reef adjacent to and lying south of the island of Chumbe, near the southern entrance to the port of Zanzibar, on the 20th of August 1888. We are of opinion that the stranding of that vessel was due to careless navigation on the part of Captain Cormack, the master, in that he had not fixed the ship's position by such bearings and other means as is necessary in order to insure a safe course being steered.

11. We find that the vessel's position was not fixed by means of cross-bearings from the time the land was first made until after she had taken the ground. The only two attempts to approximate her position were—

(1) a rough bearing of the south end of the island of Zanzibar, taken at 2.30 p.m., when that point was a-beam, and her distance from the land was estimated to be about 4 miles; (2) a bearing of the south end of the island of Pungume, taken at the time when her distance from that island was estimated at about 2 miles. From the position obtained from these approximate and unverified bearings a N.N.W. course was shaped, and while on that course the vessel took the ground at about 4.30 p.m.

12. We find that after Chumbe Island was sighted no bearing of it was taken. Had this been done, it must have been apparent to the master the course he was steering would inevitably place his vessel aground.

13. We find that the usual precautions taken when navigating in the neighbourhood of dangerous reefs, as in the approaches to Zanzibar, were totally neglected, no efficient look-out being kept for shoal water nor the lead hove.

14. The evidence of the master that a current existed in the neighbourhood of Chumbe Island, which for 10 minutes caused his vessel to sheer off her course, and that for 10 minutes previous to her grounding he had eased the engines, is entirely unsupported by the evidence of other witnesses.

15. We consider that the chief officer failed to realize his responsibility in connection with the navigation in close waters, especially as officer of the watch, in having neglected to form any opinion as to whether the vessel was being properly navigated, or to interest himself in any way with regard to the safety of the vessel, and that the evidence given by the second officer is of a most unsatisfactory nature. That although he was officer in charge of the deck, while passing islands and approaching the land during the period of his watch up to about 4.15 p.m., he did not observe the courses steered, nor form any opinion with regard to the safety of the vessel. Though doubtless the master was to blame for not seeing that his officers took a constant interest in the proper navigation of the vessel, still it was their duty, without the captain's supervision, to intelligently watch the navigation and know the position of the vessel from time to time.

16. We find that the vessel was supplied with all the requisite charts and sailing directions, and was fully equipped and seaworthy when she left Bombay on her voyage to Zanzibar.

17. The Court suspend Mr. John Cormack's certificate for a period of six months, and recommend that a certificate of a lower grade be granted to him.

(Signed) C. P. COOPER,
Chief Presidency Magistrate.
CHARLES R. ARBUTHNOT,
Captain, H.M.'s Ship "Mariner."
WILLIAM FLEMING POTTS,
Superintendent, B.I.S.N. Company's
Dock.

Bombay, December 18th, 1888.

After due consideration of the evidence and the hearing of the charges framed by the Court, I am of opinion that the captain of the ship was in error in not taking cross-bearings of Chumbe and Kwale Islands to verify his position after passing Pungume Island.

(Signed) J. A. MAGENIS,
Commander, s.s. "Java."

Bombay, 18th December 1888.

After careful consideration of the evidence and hearing of the charges, I am of opinion that the captain of the ship was in error by not verifying his course (after passing Pungume Island) by a four-point bearing of Kwale Island or cross-bearings of Chumbe Island and Kwale Island.

(Signed) J. ROBERTSON,
Master, s.s. "Kilwa."

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