

(No. 4351.)

"ATALANTA" (S.S.)

REPORT of Court of Inquiry held at Savanna la Mar, Jamaica, on the 30th April and 8th and 9th May, into the stranding and loss of the S.S. "ATALANTA," of London, 294 tons, off Savanna la Mar, on the 5th December 1890.

We think it greatly to be regretted that this inquiry was not ordered at a much earlier date. Captain Cook and all necessary witnesses were in Jamaica until 12th March, more than three months after the date of the casualty, the lateness of the inquiry has rendered our task much more onerous, and we are not able to speak with that certainty which we would have been, had the evidence of several material witnesses been available; and we think also that the above-mentioned delay has put Captain Cook to expense for which he should be recouped.

From the evidence adduced before us, we consider the charterers have throughout shown their perfect *bonâ fides*.

We divide this inquiry into two parts:—

Firstly. The stranding of the s.s. "Atalanta," and
Secondly. Her subsequent loss.

On the first point, we consider Captain Cook was guilty of a wrongful act in steering a dangerous course, and in not taking proper precautions to ascertain the position of his ship from time to time. According to his own evidence, he ran a distance of 34 miles on a course which would take him within 400 yards of a reef, and that during that dangerous run, and with the knowledge of the variableness of the currents existing, he took no precautions to ascertain his bearings, or that his course was being steered correctly, knowing at the time that there was an appreciable difference between his standard and wheel-house compasses. We, consequently, under the powers given us by Law 21 of 1873, suspend his certificate, No. 015,458, for nine months from the date of the casualty, 5th December 1890.

On the second point we are able to form no certain opinion. The facts proved tend to one of two conclusions, either that through inadvertence some sea communication was left open, or that the nature of the reef on which the "Atalanta" grounded caused some injury to her plates in the vicinity of the engine-room, which was aggravated in towing her off. We, however, attach no blame to anyone on board.

We consider that no blame is attached to H.M.S. "Buzzard," who did her best to carry out the instructions she received from the "Salvage Association"; at the same time we are of opinion the removal of the "Atalanta" from the reef without proper appliances hazardous.

We consider that it is our duty in the interests of the public to bring before the Governor the fact that passenger vessels, trading between Jamaica and foreign ports, are in the habit of sailing with only one certificated navigating officer, and we would respectfully suggest that under the powers given by 17 and 18 Victoria, chapter 104, section 288, the Legislative Council may see fit to render the provisions of section 136 of the above-mentioned statute imperative upon all vessels carrying passengers from this Island.

In conclusion, we would say that a lighthouse on South Negril Point would be of great assistance on this dangerous coast to navigation.

(Signed) REGINAL H. COKE,
Resident Magistrate,
Westmoreland.

RICHD. J. ROGERS,
Staff Commander, R.N.

F. BASTIAN,
Master, Mercantile Marine.

Given at Savanna la Mar this 9th day of May 1891.