

(No. 4521.)

"CIRCE."

REPORT of a Court of Inquiry held at Hobart, on the 5th day of March 1892, by WILLIAM TARLETON, Police Magistrate, and Captain J. SHORTT, R.N., Nautical Assessor, in regard to the loss of the brigantine "Circe," of Invercargill, N.Z., at the entrance of Macquarie Harbour, on the 21st of February last.

John Henry Jahns, master, Robert M'Quillan, mate, and Robert Monks, A.B. seaman, were examined, and from their evidence it appeared—

1. That the brigantine "Circe," of 150 tons burthen, and owned in New Zealand, was chartered to carry a cargo of coke and firebricks, &c., from the Port of Greymouth, New Zealand, to Macquarie Harbour.

2. That, whilst loading, the master communicated by cable with the Marine Board of Hobart, and received in reply a letter to the effect that it would not be safe to attempt to cross the Macquarie Harbour Bar with a ship drawing more than 8 ft. 6 in. water.

3. That, consequently, whilst taking in cargo, the master demurred to load his ship to a draught over 8 ft., but upon being threatened with an action by the charterers he yielded; and that thus when he sailed from Greymouth the ship was drawing in the fresh water of the River Grey 8 ft. 2 in. forward and 8 ft. 8 in. aft, or, in salt water, according to his calculation, 2 in. less, *i.e.*, 8 ft. forward and 8 ft. 6 in. aft.

4. That the ship sailed from Greymouth on the 2nd February, and arrived off Macquarie Harbour on the morning of the 21st.

5. That having waited till 1 o'clock p.m., when judging from the age of the moon Captain Jahns reckoned the tide would be at the full, he steered in for the entrance, the weather being fine, the wind moderate from W.N.W., nearly right aft, and the ship under plain sail going about 5 knots, and well under command.

6. That there was a hand in the chains heaving the lead, and that the master followed the sailing directions given for entering the harbour, and kept the two guiding beacons lately erected carefully in line with one another.

7. That as the ship neared the bar the lead gave 3 fathoms, and then next cast 9 ft., immediately after which she took the ground slightly, and scraped over the bar into deeper water.

8. That there is no reason to believe that she had then received any serious injury, but the grazing on the bar had so checked her speed as to deprive her of

steerage-way, and having thus become unmanageable her head canted round to the north, and she was driven by the send of the sea and the run of the tide on to a sandbank, where she struck heavily.

9. That her false keel being knocked off and the bottom seriously injured, she speedily filled, and settling down in the sand became a total wreck.

10. That when it became evident that the ship was hopelessly lost the master and crew took to the boat, and tried to make for the land.

11. That the boat was capsized in the tide rip, and the men, after two hours of perilous clinging to her bottom, were all rescued by a boat from the shore.

From the facts thus proved, the Court is clearly of opinion that the loss of the ship was caused solely by the water on the bar not having been sufficient, in the then state of the tide, to enable a vessel drawing 8 ft. 6 in. to pass over it without touching. In the Sailing Directions for Macquarie Harbour the irregularity of the tides is specially noticed, and is, indeed, well known to those who have any experience of the port. It is therefore very probable that Captain Jahns's calculation as to the time of high water was erroneous; but even presuming him to have been correct there would not have been more than 9 ft. on the bar, and it is evident that a ship with only 6 in. water to spare would be almost certain in a rolling sea to touch the ground. With a steamer, or a vessel in tow of a steamer, this would probably be of little consequence, but in a ship depending entirely on her sails the check to her speed, and the consequent loss of steerage-way in a narrow and dangerous channel, would be almost certain to result, as it did in this instance, in disaster.

The Court finds that the loss of the ship was not caused by any wrongful act or default of the master. He appears to have endeavoured to obtain information from the proper quarter as to the port he was bound to, and to have loaded his ship in accordance with the information so obtained. When entering the Harbour he seems to have judged the state of the tide by the only means at his disposal, and to have steered his vessel by the guiding beacons laid down by the Marine Board; and it must not be forgotten that neither he nor any of his crew had ever entered Macquarie Harbour, and that he was compelled to attempt to take his ship through a dangerous and intricate channel without any pilot, and without any signal from the shore to guide him as to the state of the tide.

We transmit herewith the evidence taken before us from the witnesses examined.

(Signed) W. TARLETON, Police Magistrate.

I concur.

(Signed) J. SHORTT, Nautical Assessor.

Hobart, 17th March 1892.