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(No. 5141.)

“EARNSLIFFE.”

FINDING and Order of a Marine Court of Inquiry held at Singapore, on the 20th day of March 1895, to investigate the circumstances attending the loss of the British sailing ship “EARNSLIFFE.”

The “Earnsliffe,” master and part owner Howard Falconer M’Kenzie, certificate No. 539, Canada, was a wooden vessel, ship-rigged, of 1,775 tons registered tonnage, official No. 100,331, built at Maitland, Nova Scotia, in 1891, and belonging to that port. It appears from the evidence given before this Court that she sailed from Cape Town on the 18th January last, bound for Saigon in ballast, with a crew of twenty-four hands all told.

On the 9th February, when off St. Paul’s Island, a squall carried away a considerable portion of the upper sails, masts, and rigging. A portion of the damage was repaired, but at the time of the ship’s loss she was still without anything above the topsails. Early on the 1st March Java Head was sighted, but light and variable airs kept the ship outside the Straits. The captain’s first intention was to pass through Prince’s Channel, but on the evening of the 3rd March at 6 p.m., being then as he estimated about ten miles west of the west point of Prince’s Reefs, he set a north-east by east course to pass to the northward of Prince’s Island.

There was then a light south-east breeze, and the ship just made steerage way.

The night from 10 p.m., when the wind changed to north-west, is said to have been dark and rainy with several squalls, the most severe being at 11 p.m. and 3 a.m., but, according to the evidence, the ship’s course was not altered, and at 3.30 a.m. she struck on the west point of Prince’s Reefs in a position pointed out on the chart by the captain, that is, in latitude 6° 37’ south, and 105° 5½’ east longitude.

No soundings were taken previous to the casualty, and the first intimation of any danger was the ship’s striking on the rocks, the bottom was coral, and with the swell on; she was so damaged by daybreak that the captain abandoned all hope of saving the ship. A boat was sent off to the lighthouse on 1st Point, and on the 5th the ship was abandoned, the crew being taken by the lighthouse tender to Batavia, whence they were forwarded by the British Consul to Singapore.

We find that the ship was very carelessly navigated, the daily position after sighting Java Head not having been recorded in the log by cross bearings, except at noon on the 3rd March, when impossible bearings are entered.

We are further of opinion that the position fixed by the captain at 6 p.m. on the 3rd must be incorrect, considering the course steered and the wind that prevailed during the night of the 3rd—4th March. We severely censure the captain for generally negligent navigation. The first mate, who kept the ship’s log, is ill in hospital, and we are, therefore, unable to call upon him for an explanation of the exceedingly careless way in which that book has been kept.

(Signed) WALTER EGERTON,
Acting 1st Magistrate, President.
R. MORRISSEY,
Lieutenant, R.N.,
H. J. HARMER,
Deputy Master Attendant,
JOSEPH GRAY,
Master Mariner,

Nautical
ASSESSORS.

Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 13th day of May 1895.