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(No. 5492.)

"ALCESTER."

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

In the matter of a formal investigation held at the Magistrates' Court, Liverpool, on the 10th and 11th days of March 1897, before W. J. STEWART, Esquire, assisted by Captain COSENS and Captain S. BROOKS, into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British Sailing Ship "ALCESTER," of Liverpool, on Typet Ledge, off Atherfield, Isle of Wight, on February 19, 1897.

Report of Court.

The Court, having carefully inquired into the circumstances attending the above-mentioned shipping casualty, finds, for the reasons stated in the annex hereto, that the stranding and loss of the said vessel were due to the careless navigation of her by her master, Mr. Allison Davie Haws, whose certificate, numbered 014,178, the Court suspends for a period of three calendar months from the date hereof.

Dated this 11th day of March 1897.

(Signed) W. J. STEWART, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) WILLIAM COSENS, } Assessors.
SAMUEL BROOKS, }

Annex to the Report.

The "Alcester," official number 87,907, was a British sailing ship of the port of Liverpool. She was built of iron in 1883 at Greenock. She was 257 ft. long, 38.2 ft. broad, and 23.2 ft. deep. Her registered tonnage was 1596.73 tons, and she was owned by Mr. R. C. Haws, of 16, South Castle Street, Liverpool, and other, the former being registered as her managing owner.

The "Alcester" left Calcutta on November 2nd, 1896, bound for Hamburg with a cargo of 2360 tons of jute and 130 tons of ballast. She had a crew of 23 hands all told, and was commanded by Mr. Allison Davie Haws, who held a certificate of competency as master numbered 014,178.

About 4 a.m. on February 19th the glare of the Start Point Light was seen on the port bow, and shortly afterwards the light was made out distinctly about two points on the port bow. The wind at that time was S.W., a moderate breeze, and the weather was hazy. At 4.40 a.m. the vessel's course was altered to E. 1/2 N. true, and at 4.45 a.m. the Start Light was abeam, distant, as the master estimated, at least six miles. No cast of the lead was taken to check this estimate. This course was kept for half-an-hour, and was then altered to E. 1/2 N. true, and the latter course was kept until 12.45 p.m., by which time the patent log showed that the vessel had run under all plain sail about 64 miles. The flood tide had begun to make about 5.45 a.m., and the master allowed an additional 15 miles for its effect. At 12.45 p.m. the course was altered to E. by N. 1/2 N. true, the master stating that he hoped to pick up the land, or, at all events, the fog signal on St. Catherine's Point, and so be able to take a fresh departure. That course was kept until about 4 p.m., the vessel having made by the log about 14 miles since 12.45 p.m. Up to 3.30 p.m., though the weather was hazy, they had been able to see four or five miles, and as vessels had passed them on both sides, the master supposed that he was a safe distance from the land. At 3.30 p.m. a dense fog came on, and about 4 p.m. the master ordered a sounding to be taken, which gave 17 fathoms. The sounding was taken by Basnett's patent machine, which could, so the master declared, be used with accuracy while the vessel was proceeding at even a greater speed than that at which she was then going, namely, six to seven miles an hour. The master then consulted his chart, and coming to the conclusion that he was clear of St. Catherine's Point,

altered the course to N.E. by E. 1/2 E. true, which course was kept until the vessel stranded shortly before 5 p.m. Although no accurate departure from Start Point had been secured, and the vessel was proceeding on an inshore course in a dense fog, no other sounding was taken. Having regard to the fact that the vessel's position on passing Start Point could only be estimated, that about 3.30 p.m. she had entered into a dense fog, and that the course set at 12.45 p.m. was a course which if kept would, unless altered, lead her into danger, the Court cannot acquit the master of negligence in not taking additional casts of the lead, more especially as with the apparatus on board such casts might easily have been taken, the results of which would most certainly have warned him in time of the danger into which the vessel was running. Shortly before the vessel stranded, the master again went to consult his chart, and on his return to the deck observed with surprise a discolouration of the water. He at once ordered the helm hard-a-port, but before the alteration could affect the vessel's course, she struck on what was afterwards found to be the Tippet Ledge, off Atherfield, Isle of Wight. Every effort was made to get the vessel off, but without effect, and as the flood tide set in with a considerable swell, she began to bump heavily, and between 9 and 10 p.m. to make water. Meanwhile, the master had been able to communicate with the shore, and a tug came off to his assistance. Three attempts were made to tow the vessel off, but each time the hawser parted. The crew asked to be allowed to leave, to which the master assented, he and the chief officer remaining by the vessel all night. A fresh gale began to blow with a heavy sea, the vessel, having holed herself amidships, was making much water, and the master and mate had to take refuge in the foretop. In the morning they were taken off by the Atherfield lifeboat, and two hours later the vessel broke in two and became a total loss.

At the conclusion of the evidence Mr. Paxton, for the Board of Trade, submitted the following questions for the opinion of the Court:—

- 1. What number of compasses had the vessel, and were they in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel?
- 2. Did the master ascertain the deviation of his compasses by observation from time to time, were the errors correctly ascertained and the proper corrections to the courses applied?
- 3. Whether proper means were taken at or about 4 a.m. of the 19th February last, and from time to time thereafter, to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel?
- 4. Whether safe and proper courses were steered after 4 a.m. of the 19th February last, and whether due and proper allowance was made for tide, currents, and leeway?
- 5. Whether, having regard to the state of the weather after noon of the 19th February last, the vessel was navigated at too great a rate of speed?
- 6. Whether the lead was used with sufficient care and frequency after noon of the 19th February last?
- 7. Whether a good and proper look-out was kept?
- 8. What was the cause of the casualty?
- 9. Whether the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care?
- 10. Whether the loss of the "Alcester" was caused by the wrongful act or default of the master?

Mr. Cameron, for the master, having addressed the Court, the Court gave judgment as above, and returned the following answers to the questions of the Board of Trade:—

- 1. The vessel had three compasses, namely, a standard on the bridge, a steering compass aft, and a tell-tale. They were all in good order, and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel.
- 2. The master did ascertain the deviation of his compasses from time to time by observation, and in the opinion of the Court the proper corrections were applied to the courses steered.
- 3. Proper measures were not taken at 4 a.m. on the 19th February last, neither were they taken from time to time thereafter, to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel.
- 4. The courses set and steered from 4.40 a.m. till 12.45 p.m. of February 19th were safe and proper, and

due and proper allowance appears to have been made for tide. After 12.45 p.m. the course set and steered was not safe or proper.

5. Having regard to the state of the weather, and to the fact that the "Alcester" was a sailing ship, the vessel was not navigated at too great a rate of speed.

6. The lead was not used with sufficient care and frequency after noon of the 19th February last.

7. A good and proper look-out was kept.

8. The casualty was caused by neglecting to use the lead while steering in for the land in dense fog.

9. The vessel was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care.

10. The stranding and subsequent loss of the "Al-

cester" were caused by the default of the master alone.

(Signed) W. J. STEWART, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) WILLIAM COSENS, } Assessors.
SAMUEL BROOKS, }

Liverpool, 12th March 1897.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 25th day of March 1897.)

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