

(No. 5691.)

“SHAFNER BROTHERS.”

Bahama Islands, }
New Providence. }

At a Court of Enquiry, held at the Police Office, in the Island of New Providence, on the 3rd day of February, 1898, before PERCY W. D. ARMBRISTER, Esquire, Acting Stipendiary and Circuit Magistrate, in and for the Bahama Islands, and one of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace for the said Islands, and JOHN H. BETHEL, Esquire, Port Officer, and one of Her Majesty's Justices of the Peace, as aforesaid, sitting as Nautical Assessor.

In the matter of the stranding of the British Schooner “SHAFNER BROTHERS,” S. C. Le Cain, Master, on the 30th January, 1898, at Little Rum Cay, Berry Islands, Bahamas.

Report.

The schooner “Shafner Brothers,” is a British ship of 148 tons burthen, and registered at Annapolis, Nova Scotia. She is owned by James D. Shafner and others, of Annapolis, and was launched at Clementsport, Nova Scotia, on 20th September, 1894. She was classed for 11 years in American Lloyd's. The schooner left the port of Kingsport, Nova Scotia, on the 12th January last, bound to the port of Havana, Cuba, loaded with 1,991 barrels of potatoes and 20,000 feet of lumber. She carried a crew of six men all told, and appears to have been in a good and seaworthy condition. The vessel touched at St. John's, New Brunswick, on the 13th January, and left the next day. On leaving St. John's rough weather was experienced, which continued until the Gulf Stream was crossed. After crossing the Gulf Stream the weather became moderate, the wind blowing from N.W. to S.W. All went well on board. On 27th January the weather began to get thick and squally. An observation was taken on that day, but neither the master nor mate remember the exact position of the ship on that day; and there is no entry in the log book to show what the latitude and longitude were. The master, however, states that he thinks his latitude was about 25° 51', and that he was about 95 miles E. of Abaco. The wind on the 27th was variable; sometimes the vessel headed W. by S., and at other times S. and S.W. The observation on Thursday was the last one taken, the weather having become too thick and cloudy after that to get a sight. The master states that from and after that date he depended entirely upon dead reckoning. Matters continued in this condition, and on Saturday, the 29th, the master calculated that he was rounding Hole-in-the-Wall. He did not see land, and, therefore, thought that he was in mid channel on the morning of the 29th. The first part of that day the schooner was headed W.S.W., and kept on that course until 3 p.m., when the wind went out to about N.W. by N. The schooner then headed about W. by N. The day was squally and the weather thick with heavy clouds. The vessel continued on that course until midnight. The master estimates the vessel's speed on that day to have been at the rate of from 6 to 7 knots. He states that he saw neither the light at Hole-in-the-Wall, nor the one at Stumps Cay. At midnight of the 29th the water was observed to be getting smooth; the vessel was tacked and headed N.E. ½ E. A look-out appears to have been kept. The man at the wheel and the one on the look-out, who were in the starboard watch, both state that they did not see the master on deck when they turned out, and the vessel appears to have been entrusted to them entirely at the time. At about 1 a.m. of the 30th, the man on look-out saw land on the weather bow. He at once ran below and called the master. The master came on deck and

ordered the wheel to be put hard up. This was done, but before the vessel could keep off she struck bottom. It was then very dark, and the master states that he could see nothing. The vessel stuck fast and remained stationary—the sea being smooth. Nothing was done until daylight, as the vessel did not thump, and the tide was ebbing. At daylight land was seen bearing N.W. ½ W. This land was afterwards discovered to be Little Rum Cay—one of the Southern Berry Islands. The pumps were tried, but the vessel was not found to be making more water than usual. On the morning of the 30th, an anchor was run out with 60 fathoms of chain in a S.W. by W. direction. Soundings had been made, and the water was found to be deepest in that quarter. The chain was hove tight—at ½ past 12, high water—the crew began to heave on the chain—the vessel's head swung round—the anchor was run out again with the same quantity of chain, and hove taut. The tide was again high on Monday morning at a ¼ past 2. The master then gave orders to heave on the chain, which was done. The anchor, however, did not hold. The wind breezed up and the vessel's head swung back again. The tide began to fall so that nothing more could be done in attempting to get the vessel off. At 8 a.m. of the 31st three small vessels came to the schooner's assistance. After taking off nearly all the lumber and running out anchors the schooner was floated and hauled out into deep water on the morning of February 1st. The lumber was then put back on board. During the whole of the time that the vessel was on the bottom the pumps were tried every hour or two. The master states that he did not notice that the schooner was making more water than usual until after she had been floated off. The schooner was then got under way and proceeded to Nassau, where she arrived at 6.30 p.m., of the 1st, and anchored in the harbour. The master states that before the vessel struck he imagined that he was well to the north of his real position, and attributes the stranding of his ship to a current setting in a S.E. direction. The log book of the schooner has been very carelessly kept. There is not a single entry as to the ship's position on the days that observations were taken, nor the length of time that she was kept on the different courses. In fact, no notice whatever appears to have been taken of the printed directions given in the book for keeping it properly. The ship, apparently, has not received very much damage from the stranding.

Opinion.

We are of opinion that the stranding of the schooner “Shafner Brothers” was caused by gross carelessness on the part of the master. He had not had an observation since the 27th January. He was not certain of his true position on the night of the 29th, beyond the fact that he thought he was somewhere in the vicinity of Hole-in-the-Wall. He had not seen the light, and the night was very dark and the atmosphere thick. There was, therefore, only one thing left for a prudent shipmaster to do, viz., to heave to until daylight. This he did not do. At midnight of the 29th, when his suspicions should have been aroused that something had gone wrong, as Stumps Cay Light had not been sighted, both he and the mate went below and turned in, the ship continuing on her course at the rate of about 7 knots. The mate was inexperienced, having never before been on voyages other than coastwise, and did not understand how to navigate a ship properly.

(Signed) P. W. D. ARMBRISTER,
Acting Stipendiary and Circuit
Magistrate.

(Signed) J. H. BETHEL,
Port Officer.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the
31st day of March, 1898.)