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(No. 5563.)

“YIK SANG” (S.S.)

FINDING and Order of a Naval Court held at Her Britannic Majesty's Consulate, Nagasaki, on the nineteenth and twentieth days of May 1897, to investigate the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship “YIK SANG,” of the port of London, official number 91,934, at Iwaya Saki, and the cause of such stranding, and to inquire into the conduct of the master, officers and crew of the said vessel.

The “Yik Sang” is a steam vessel, schooner rigged, of 886 tons registered tonnage, official number 91,934, built at Dumbarton in 1886, and belonging to the port of London.

It appears from the evidence before the Court that she sailed from Chefoo on the 19th of April 1897, bound for Kobe with a cargo of beans and beancake and a crew of forty hands, all told, as well as forty passengers, and that she proceeded on her voyage in due course until 2 p.m. of the 21st of April, when Ko Saki light on the Southern point of the island of Tsu Shima was sighted. The light was subsequently passed at 2.57 p.m., at a distance of three and three-quarter miles, and the course was then set South 75 degrees East, or allowing for 15 degrees of Westerly error in the compass, which had been verified on the previous day, true East. At 5 p.m. the island of Iki Shima was sighted at a distance of eight miles, and the course was then altered to South 85 degrees East, true. At 7 p.m. Oro-no-shima was abeam, distant six miles, moderate breeze, and the weather overcast, but the island clearly visible. The course was then set South 75 degrees East, or allowing for the error in the compass, due East, and the speed of the vessel was then eight and three-quarters to nine miles per hour.

At eight o'clock the master, who had been on deck during the greater part of the previous night and almost continuously during the day, left the deck in charge of the chief mate, having previously pointed out to him on the chart the exact position of the ship, with verbal orders “to keep a good look out for Wilson Island, to take a four point bearing of it, to give him (the master) the exact distance off it, and to call him at nine o'clock.” As to the terms of these orders there is a marked discrepancy in the evidence of the master and mate, the latter alleging that they were limited to a direction that the vessel would pass Wilson Island about five miles off and that if it was sighted the master should be called. Both parties are equally positive of, and have sworn to, the correctness of their evidence on this point, and the Court has not come to a decision as to which is correct. The master's intention was to alter the course to the North at 9 p.m., or on sighting Wilson Island, making the latter a final point of departure, and head the ship for Rokuren.

However, he fell asleep in the chart room, immediately below and within easy distance of communication with the bridge, and was not called by the mate, who had in the meantime kept the ship on her course and had failed to sight Wilson Island till 10.40 p.m. The weather had become thicker, the night was deceptive, the wind almost abaft, and the vessel following the smoke of the funnel, and nothing was seen by the mate until breakers were discerned ahead just before 10.40 p.m. Almost immediately afterwards the vessel struck on what subsequently proved to be Iwaya Saki. The breakers were not reported by the man on the look-out on the fore-castle, but were first seen by the mate. The helm was immediately put hard-a-starboard, the engines reversed at full speed, and the captain called, but the striking took place before the latter could reach the bridge. The vessel remained on the rocks until the third of May, when she was floated and subsequently brought by her own steam to Nagasaki. The passengers were all safely landed by means

of a boatswain's chair on the day following the casualty, but a large part of the cargo was lost or damaged, and the vessel herself seriously damaged, both involving very serious loss.

The vessel was in every way well found, sufficiently manned, seaworthy, the cargo properly stowed, there was no deck cargo, and she was not overloaded. Perfect discipline was maintained on board; after the casualty all the officers and crew conducted themselves properly, and valuable assistance in landing the passengers and in subsequent salvage operations was heartily rendered by the local Japanese authorities, fishermen and people.

The Court, having regard to the circumstances above stated, finds as follows:

1. That the master navigated his vessel in a seaman-like and proper manner, that the course set from Oro-no-shima was a safe and proper one until 9 p.m., and that Wilson Island was properly regarded as a final point of departure.

2. That the master having from previous experience perfect confidence in the skill and care of the first mate, having a clear run of about nineteen miles before getting into a margin of danger, the ship's speed being nine miles, and the weather being clear, was justified in leaving the deck at the time he did with verbal orders only.

3. That even admitting that the mate did not receive orders from the master to call him at nine o'clock, he, as an experienced seaman, was not justified in continuing his course after the estimated time at which Wilson Island should have been abeam, and that, especially in view of the increasing thickness of the weather, he committed a serious error in not, under any circumstances, calling the master when he failed to sight Wilson Island. While this error has unfortunately been attended with grave consequences, it is in itself not of such a nature as to impose on the Court the duty of dealing with the certificate of an officer who has heretofore shown himself able, painstaking, and worthy of all confidence.

4. That the compasses having been verified on the day preceding the casualty, and the ship having on the day itself made a perfectly straight course from Tsushima to Oro-no-shima, the Court cannot consider the casualty due to any unknown error in the compasses, but ascribes it to an unusual drift current setting to the southward, which carried the vessel about three and a half miles out of her course after passing Oro-no-shima.

5. That the Court desires to direct the attention of the Board of Trade to the valuable assistance described in the master's evidence rendered by the Japanese on the spot after the casualty.

6. That the expenses of the Court, fixed at fifteen pounds twelve shillings sterling are approved, and in pursuance of the powers vested in it by Section 483 of 57 and 58 Victoria, c. 60, the Court orders that this amount be paid in equal shares by the master, David Smith, and the first mate, William Lambie, the parties thereto, and they are hereby ordered to pay the amounts of their respective shares accordingly.

Dated at Nagasaki this 21st day of May 1897.

(Signed) JOSEPH H. LONGFORD,  
H.B.M. Consul at Nagasaki,  
President of Naval Court.

(Signed) J. C. SMITH,  
British Merchant at Nagasaki.

(Signed) A. B. BARRIER,  
Master of the British merchant  
ship, “Rewa.”

(Signed) R. F. ANDERSON,  
Master of the British Merchant  
ship, “Lucia.”

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the  
22nd day of July 1897.)