

(No. 5935.)

“NETTLETON” (S.S.).

FINDING and Order of a Naval Court held at the British Consulate-General, Rio de Janeiro, on the 23th and 29th days of August, 1899, to investigate the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship “NETTLETON” of London, official number 98,910, on Maricas Island, at the hour of 11.20 a.m. on the 20th day of August, 1899.

The “Nettleton” is a steamer of 1,534 tons register, official number 98,910, built at Sunderland in 1891, and belonging to the port of London.

It appears from the evidence given before the Court, that she sailed from Norfolk, Virginia, United States of America, on or about the 24th day of July last, bound for Rio de Janeiro with a cargo of coals, and a crew of 22 hands all told.

That all went well with the said vessel until 5 a.m. on the 20th instant, Cape Frio being then N. six miles distant, estimated by four point bearing.

The course was then shaped N. 80° W. compass, speed about nine knots. At 6.15 a.m., the total error of the compass having been ascertained to be 25° W., the course was altered to N. 65° W. compass. At 7.30 a.m. a thick fog came on, speed was reduced to about six knots, and at 8.10 the ship was stopped, and soundings were taken, 25 fathoms.

Soundings were subsequently taken at 8.30 with 25 fathoms, at 9 a.m. and 9.30 a.m. with 25 fathoms. At 10 a.m. the lead gave 22 fathoms. At 10.30 stopped, with 17 fathoms; at 11 a.m. 13 fathoms. During this time the vessel had been steaming at various speeds, from two to four knots: the aggregate being estimated by the master at 42 miles.

When 13 fathoms was obtained, the master appears to have realized that he was out of his reckoning, and accordingly turned the ship's head to seaward, altering the course first to S. 42° W., and shortly afterwards to S. 20° W., but before the ship was steadied on this latter course, breakers were reported ahead; the engines were reversed, but before the ship could be stopped she grounded on the northern part of the Maricas Islands where she remained.

The Court, having duly considered the evidence brought before it, are of opinion that the stranding of the steamship “Nettleton” is due to the following causes:—

1. That the error of the standard compass appears to have been abnormally large, pointing to some defect in its position.

2. That the dead reckoning does not appear to have been kept with much care, and .

3. That the soundings taken, had they been compared with the chart, should have indicated that the reckoning was faulty in ample time to have prevented the casualty.

In pursuance, therefore, of the powers vested in it by section 483 of the Merchant Shipping Act (57 & 58 Vict.), the Court begs to record its opinion that the steamship “Nettleton” was not navigated in a sufficiently careful manner, but when the casualty was inevitable the master appears to have done everything in his power to prevent it, and, furthermore, that the officers and crew conducted themselves properly and used their utmost exertions after the casualty occurred to save the vessel and cargo, which they succeeded in doing with assistance obtained from this port.

The Court, therefore, reprimands the master, John Vigers, and he is hereby reprimanded for his want of care in navigating the vessel, but the officers are exonerated from all blame connected with the stranding of the s.s. “Nettleton.”

The Court finds that the s.s. “Nettleton” was well-found and manned; that she was supplied with proper charts, though the Court is of opinion that the Admiralty Variation Chart should be carried by all British ships. The “Nettleton” appears to have been supplied with proper compasses, but from the very large and unstable deviations, coupled with the statement made by the master as to the proximity of iron to the compass, the Court are of opinion that the standard compass was not properly placed and recommends that this matter be further inquired into on the ship's arrival in the United Kingdom.

The Court are further of opinion that the chart of the approaches to Rio is not on a scale commensurate with the importance of that port, and having regard to the frequency of thick weather, the strength and uncertainty of the currents, the Court considers it extremely advisable that the present chart of the approaches to Rio should be extended to take in the Maricas Islands on the East and Guaratiba Islands on the West.

The Court directs that all expenses of the Naval Court shall be defrayed by the Board of Trade.

Dated at Rio de Janeiro this 29th day of August, 1899, at the British Consulate-General.

WM. GEO. WAGSTAFF,  
Consul-General and President.

BERTRAM M. CHAMBERS,  
Lieut. H.M.S. “Flora.” } Members.  
G. JENKIN,  
Master s.s. “Castanos.” }

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 3rd day of October, 1899.)