

(No. 7188.)

"STAR OF JAPAN" (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

In the matter of a Formal Investigation, held at Caxton Hall, Westminster, on the 3rd day of September, 1908, before R. H. B. MARSHAM, Esq., assisted by Commander W. F. CABORNE, C.B., R.N.R., and Commander A. S. HOUSTOUN, R.N.R., into the circumstances attending the stranding of the British steamship "STAR OF JAPAN," of Belfast, on or near Pedra de Galha Rock, West Coast of Africa, on the 2nd of April last.

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, serious damage, and subsequent loss of the steamship "Star of Japan," were caused by the master setting too fine a course in order to pass Pedra de Galha, and by his non-use of the leads.

The Court finds the master, Mr. Frederick Whyte Ulyatt, in default, and suspends his certificate of competency as master, numbered 014221, for a period of three months from this date. Upon the application of Mr. Miller, the Court recommends that the master be granted a first mate's certificate during the period of his suspension.

Dated this 7th day of September, 1908.

R. H. B. MARSHAM,
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

W. F. CABORNE, } Assessors.
A. S. HOUSTOUN, }

Annex to the Report.

This enquiry was held at Caxton Hall, Caxton Street, in the City of Westminster, on the 3rd day of September, 1908.

Mr. Alfred J. B. Tapling, barrister-at-law, represented the solicitor to the Board of Trade, (Mr. R. Ellis Cunliffe); Mr. Alexander T. Miller, Junior, barrister-at-law, appeared for the master, and Mr. Alfred C. Thomas, barrister-at-law, watched the proceedings on behalf of the owners of the vessel.

The "Star of Japan," Official Number 120717, was a British steamship, built of steel, at Belfast, in 1906, by Messrs. Workman, Clarke, & Company, Limited, and was registered at the port of Belfast. She was schooner-rigged, had two decks and a shade deck, was provided with seven water-tight bulkheads, and was of the following dimensions, namely:—length, 440·3 feet; main breadth, 55·3 feet; and depth in hold from tonnage deck to ceiling at midships, 30·35 feet; her gross tonnage being 6,235·52 tons, and her registered tonnage 3999·74 tons. She was propelled by triple-expansion engines of 600 nominal horse-power and 3400 indicated horse-power, designed to give her a speed of 12½ knots, and was fitted with

four steel boilers having a working pressure of 200 lbs. to the square inch, both the machinery and boilers having been constructed by the builders of the ship. She was provided with electric light and steam steering-gear, carried four boats (two of them life-boats), with their necessary equipment, and was also supplied with the other life-saving appliances required by the statute. She was furnished with five compasses, as described in answer to question No. 1, Lord Kelvin's patent sounding machine, Walker's latest Cherub taffrail log, and requisite Admiralty charts and sailing directions.

Lastly, she was owned by the Star Line, Limited, having its principal place of business at 9 and 11, Fenchurch Avenue, in the City of London, Mr. Robert William Corry, of the same address, being the person to whom the management of the ship was entrusted, by advice under the seal of the Company received on the 28th of September, 1906.

The "Star of Japan" left the Royal Albert Docks, London, about 5.30 p.m. of the 24th of March, 1908, bound to Australia and New Zealand, and at 7.45 p.m. of the same day anchored below Gravesend for the purpose of taking on board a large quantity of explosives. At 5.15 p.m. of the following day she resumed her voyage, having a general cargo of 6700 tons, including 350 tons of dynamite, her draught of water being 27 feet forward and 27 feet 10 inches aft, her crew consisting of 58 hands all told and exclusive of 3 stowaways, and she being under the command of Mr. Frederick Whyte Ulyatt, who held a certificate of competency as master, numbered 014,221.

Fine weather was experienced, and at 5.6 p.m. of the 28th of March Cape Villano was abeam, bearing S. 73° E. (true) and distant 4½ miles.

At noon of the 1st of April the position by observation was in latitude 25° 28' N. and 15° 57' W., and a course S. 32° W. by compass, equal to S. 15½° W. true was thereafter steered, the engines making 66½ revolutions per minute, equal to a speed of a little over 12½ knots per hour. During the afternoon and night of this date there was a light north-easterly breeze, and fine clear weather, with a smooth sea and a northerly swell. While the weather remained the same, the northerly swell appears to have increased somewhat, early on the morning of the 2nd of April.

At 0.30 a.m. of the last-named day, the master went below, leaving written instructions that he was to be called when the log (which is said to have registered a quarter knot per hour too slow) showed 195 miles from noon.

About 4.5 a.m., just before he was going to be relieved, it then being dark but clear, the second officer, who had been in charge of the deck since midnight, thought that he saw something white, resembling breakers, right ahead and a point on the starboard bow, at a distance of about one mile. He ordered the helm to be put hard-a-port and the engines reversed full speed, and called the master through the speaking tube from the bridge. The master immediately rushed on deck, and found the ship's head swinging to the westward, and directly afterwards the vessel took the ground gently. The log upon being subsequently examined showed a distance of 192 miles.

The holds were sounded and found to be staunch, and it was ascertained that there were 20 feet of water under the bows and 30 feet aft.

The engines were worked as deemed requisite, but the ship remained fast, and about 20 minutes later, owing to the action of the swell, swung broadside on, and her stern likewise stranded.

Up to now the vessel had remained watertight, but a heavy swell lifted her on top of a rock under No. 4 hatch, abaft the engine-room, and she commenced to make water. The manual and other pumps were then set going.

At daylight it was found that the ship had struck in the neighbourhood of Pedra de Galha Rock, which was distant about one mile and is 45 feet high.

At 7.30 a.m. the starboard anchor was let go, and about 8 a.m. the second officer was sent away in a lifeboat to seek assistance, if such could be procured, from a passing vessel. It may here be mentioned that he returned to the "Star of Japan" some thirty-six hours later, having been unsuccessful in his quest.

At 9 a.m. an attempt was made to run out a stream anchor, but the swell was so great about the stern of the ship, which was bumping heavily, that it was feared that the weight of the anchor would cause the boat to be swamped, and so the project was abandoned.

During the afternoon there was a strong breeze from the N.E., causing the ship to work heavily on the bottom and to commence to leak in all the holds.

Similar weather, if not rather worse, prevailed on the following day, and on the 4th of April it was blowing a strong gale from the N.E., a very heavy sea was running, and the condition of the vessel was getting worse.

At 11.35 a.m. of the 5th of April the chief officer, with eleven men, left the ship in a lifeboat with instructions to make for Cape Verde unless previously picked up by some vessel.

On the 6th of April a French steamer, the "Espagne," passed the scene of the casualty and signalled that she would cause assistance to be sent from Dakar.

The chief officer fell in with the German steamer "Hans Woermann," on the 6th of April, was picked up, and returned in her to Pedra de Galha on the morning of the 7th of April. In the afternoon the "Hans Woermann" continued her voyage, taking with her 49 members of the "Star of Japan's" crew and the three stowaways.

A salvage steamer, belonging to the London Salvage Association, arrived on the 19th of April, and then proceeded to Las Palmas to report, returning to the "Star of Japan" on the 26th of the month to commence salvage operations.

The balance of the crew, including the chief, second, and third officers, the chief engineer, and four others, remained until the 28th of June, when, the dry cargo having been salvaged, they, too, took their departure.

The master continued by his vessel with the salvage men, finally leaving her on the 29th of July.

The "Star of Japan" has since been abandoned as a total loss.

The foregoing are briefly the facts of the case.

With regard to the navigation of the vessel, her equipment, as already described, appears to have been very good, and she carried two chronometers, the accumulated rates of which showed a difference of 9 seconds of time, equal to $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles of longitude, the position given by the most easterly one being in this case adopted. Care seems to have been taken to constantly ascertain and verify the errors of the compass, and a well written up compass error book was produced for the inspection of the Court.

At noon on the 1st of April, as already mentioned, the position of the vessel by a.m. sights and meridian altitude of the sun was in latitude $25^{\circ} 28' N.$ and $15^{\circ} 57' W.$, no subsequent observations being made. From that position Pedra de Galha Rock bore, by Mercator's Sailing, $S. 14^{\circ} 34', 15^{\circ} W.$, at a distance of 202 miles, and the course set by the master of the "Star of Japan," namely, $S. 15\frac{1}{2}^{\circ} W.$ true, was barely a degree outside of this danger. He expected, so he said, to pass about 6 miles from the rock, and anticipated that the current would set him to the westward. Unfortunately, this anticipation was not fulfilled, and in general terms it may be remarked that, when there is plenty of sea room and no necessity for such a course exists, it is not good navigation to set a fine course in the expectation that a current will set the ship off the land to a position of safety, notwithstanding that such a current may have been experienced upon former occasions and also be shown upon the chart.

With respect to the distance which the course set should have taken the ship from the rock, while it is difficult, perhaps, to estimate it to a mile or two on a chart of the scale of Admiralty Chart No. 1230, the one used, Mercator's Sailing shows, assuming that the position at noon was absolutely correct and that the course was exactly steered and made good, that she would have passed at a distance of $3\frac{1}{4}$ miles. Looking at the uncertainties which always exist at sea, the Court is of opinion that this course was much too fine, taking into consideration the character of the coast and that the rock and its surrounding shoal would be approached before daylight.

A few words should now be said about the character of the master. He joined the service of Messrs. James Corry and Company as an apprentice in August, 1877, and, with the exception of a period of about eighteen months, remained in their employment until the casualty which formed the subject of this inquiry. He was promoted to the command of the steamship "Star of France" in 1893, and commanded other vessels belonging to the same line until 1906, when he was appointed to the "Star of Japan." It should be added that he produced to the Court a very excellent testimonial from Messrs. James Corry and Company, dated the 28th of August, 1908.

Under all the circumstances of the case, while finding the master in default, the Court felt that it would be justified in not suspending Mr. Frederick Whyte Ulyatt's certificate of competency as master for a longer period than three months.

In conclusion, the Court desires to express its acknowledgments to the masters of the French Messageries Maritimes steamer "Espagne" and the German steamer "Hans Woermann" for the assistance they rendered upon the occasion of this disaster.

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

Questions.

- (1) What number of compasses had the vessel, were they in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel, and when and by whom were they last adjusted?
- (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) Were proper measures taken to ascertain the position of the vessel at noon on the 1st April last, was a safe and proper course thereafter steered, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?
- (4) Was the lead used after noon of the 1st April, if not, should it have been used?
- (5) Was a good and proper look-out kept?
- (6) What was the cause of the stranding of the vessel?
- (7) Was serious damage to the s.s. "Star of Japan" caused by the wrongful act or default of the master?

Mr. Miller then addressed the Court on behalf of his client, Mr. Tapling replied, and the Court gave judgment as above, and returned the following answers to the questions of the Board of Trade:—

Answers.

- (1) The vessel had five compasses, namely, a standard (Lord Kelvin's patent) placed on top of the wheelhouse by which the courses were set; another (also Lord Kelvin's patent) in the bridge wheelhouse by which the courses were steered, a third one in the after wheelhouse, and two spare ones. They were in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel, and were last adjusted by Messrs. Kelvin & White, in 1906.

(2) The master compasses by observation from time to time, errors appear to have been ascertained and the proper corrections to the courses applied.

(3) Proper measures were taken to ascertain the position of the vessel at noon on the 1st April last, was a safe and proper course thereafter steered, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?

(4) The lead was used after noon of the 1st April, and, if not, should it have been used?

(5) A good and proper look-out was kept.

(6) The cause of the stranding of the vessel was the wrongful act or default of the master.

(2) The master ascertained the deviation of his compasses by observation from time to time, and the errors appear to have been correctly ascertained and the proper corrections to the courses applied.

(3) Proper measures were taken to ascertain the position of the vessel at noon on the 1st April last. Too fine a course was then set and thereafter steered. Proper allowance was not made for currents.

(4) The lead was not used after noon on the 1st April, and, considering the fineness of the course set, it should have been used.

(5) A good and proper look-out was kept.

(6) The cause of the stranding of the vessel was that the master set too fine a course and made no use of the lead.

(7) The serious damage and subsequent loss of the s.s. "Star of Japan" were caused by the default of the master. Having regard to the master's long unblemished record, the Court suspends his certificate for three months only.

R. H. B. MARSHAM,
Judge.

We concur.

W. F. CABORNE, } Assessors.
A. S. HOUSTOUN, }

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 25th day of September, 1908.)

h the course set
e rock, while it is
mile or two on a
art No. 1230, the
assuming that the
correct and that
made good, that
nce of 3½ miles.
ways exist at sea,
rse was much too
character of the
urrounding shoal

out the character
ervice of Messrs.
rentice in August,
period of about
employment until
ct of this inquiry.
of the steamship
commanded other
til 1906, when he
n." It should be
t a very excellent
ry and Company,

e case, while find-
felt that it would
Frederick Whyte
as master for a

es to express its
the French Mes-
ne" and the Ger-
for the assistance
this disaster.

e, Mr. Tapling, on
itted the following
urt :—

ad the vessel, were
or the safe naviga-
y whom were they

he deviation of his
e to time, were the
e proper corrections

n to ascertain the
the 1st April last,
reafter steered, and
made for tide and

on of the 1st April,

-out kept?

he stranding of the

s.s. "Star of Japan"
ult of the master?

Court on behalf of
and the Court gave
ned the following
oard of Trade :—

mpasses, namely, a
placed on top of the
es were set; another
e bridge wheelhouse
l, a third one in the
ones. They were in
e safe navigation of
by Messrs. Kelvin &