(No. 7295.)

"SLAVONIA" (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

IN the matter of a Formal Investigation held at Liverpool, on the 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th days of September, 1909, before T. SHEPHERD LITTLE, Esq., Stipendiary Magistrate, assisted by Commander C. K. McINTOSH, R.N.R., and Captain JOHN TAYLOR, into the circumstances attending the stranding and loss of the British steamship "SLAVONIA," on the south end of Flores Island, Azores, on or about the 10th day of June, 1909.

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 "Slavonia" was due to the default and error of judgment of the master in setting too fine a course and navigating at too high a rate of speed in such weather as prevailed when nearing land, and in placing too much reliance on two admittedly poor bearings for compass error, which were not taken by himself.

The Court, in consideration of his previous excellent record, and his successful exertions to save life after the casualty, refrains from dealing with his certificate, but severely reprimands him, and cautions him to be more careful in future.

Dated this 10th day of September, 1909.

T. SHEPHERD LITTLE,
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

C. K. McINTOSH, JOHN TAYLOR, } Assessors.

Annex to the Report.

The "Slavonia" was a British twin-screw steamship built of steel by Sir James Laing & Sons, Ltd., at Sunderland in 1903. She was registered at Liverpool, her official number being 115,761.

Her dimensions, according to the register, were :— length 510 feet, breadth 59·5 feet, depth of hold 22·3 feet, and length of engine room 75·8 feet, her gross tonnage being 10,605·91 tons, and the deductions 3,881·31 tons, leaving a registered tonnage of 6,724·60 tons.

The vessel had eight water-tight bulkheads and was fitted with two sets of triple expansion engines and had six steel boilers of 200 lbs. working pressure built by the Wallsend Slipway and Engineering Company, Limited.

She was owned and managed by the Cunard Steam Ship Company, Limited, of Liverpool, and according to her passenger certificate, was certified to carry 2,331 passengers and crew. She was well equipped with boats and other life-saving appliances. The vessel had three compasses, one, the Standard, placed on the top of the chart house, a steering compass on the bridge, and one aft.

She was commanded by Captain Arthur George Dunning, who holds a certificate of competency as extra master No. 022188, and who had been in command of this ship for 16 months prior to this voyage.

The "Slavonia" sailed from New York bound to Gibraltar on the 3rd of June, 1909, with a crew of 225 hands, and 373 passengers, of whom 100 were first class. Her draught of water was 22 feet 8 inches forward and 23 feet 10 inches aft. On the 9th of June the vessel's position by observation at noon was latitude 40° 12′ N. and longitude 34° 55′ W., and the total compass error obtained about 8 a.m. that morning, by several good bearings, was 26½° westerly. From this position a course was set to clear the Island of Flores by about 3 miles to the south, the course set by compass being S. 47° E., which, with an allowance of 25° westerly, made S. 72° E. true. During the afternoon, viz., at 2 p.m. and at 6 p.m., the error obtained by two bearings taken by two junior officers was 25° westerly, and this correction was applied by the master to the course steered. At 11 p.m. the weather, which had been cloudy, set in thick with mist, and the second officer, who was on the bridge, sounded the whistle and called the master, who, on coming on deck, altered the course 5° more southerly. At 0.25 a.m. the course was again altered 2° more southerly, and 10 minutes later was altered finally 5° more southerly, being NOW S. 35° E. by compass and S. 60° E. true, and had all these courses been made true the vessel should have cleared the land by about 9 miles. The weather during all this time alternated between thick mist and fairly clear intervals, but no alteration was made in the speed of the vessel.

At 2.28 a.m. on the 10th, when the vessel appeared on the point of entering a bank of mist, she struck on the rocks off Pico Joas Martin, a point about a mile north of the south extreme of Flores, and remained fast, becoming a total wreck. The sea was smooth and nothing was seen of either land or breakers to warn those on the bridge or look-out of their danger. At 7.30 a.m. the task of landing the passengers was begun, ten of the ship's boats being employed. At 11 a.m. some boats came off from the Island, and they also were employed conveying passengers and baggage on shore, this being completed by 4 o'clock in the afternoon. During this day a line had been run out to the shore from the bow of the steamer, and later on taken aloft on the foremast, tightened, and a boatswain's chair rigged, and by this means the crew remaining on board (about 70) were landed.

During the night of the 10th/11th the wind freshened from seawards, and the four boats remaining alongside were smashed at 4 a.m. of the 11th June. The crew began to leave the wreck by means of the line, and this was accomplished in safety by 1 p.m., the master and chief officer being the last to leave. According to the evidence witnesses attribute the casualty to an unusual current setting to the northward, and two independent witnesses were called in support of this, but the Court does not consider that the existence of any such current is proved. No log was towed, and the master relied entirely on the revolution of the engines for the speed of the vessel, though there was a patent log on board.

The Court is of opinion that the master was not justified in accepting as correct the doubtful bearings obtained for compass error during the afternoon of the 9th, especially as he did not verify them himself, and that the error as found accurately in the morning would, had he continued to apply it, have carried him clear of the land. After the casualty, energetic and efficient measures were taken by the master and officers to land the passengers and crew safely, and no little credit is due to them for the excellent discipline preserved, the master and chief officer being the last to leave the wreck by means of the line from the foremast to the rocks.

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

(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) Was the vessel supplied with proper and sufficient charts and sailing directions?

(4) Were proper measures taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about noon of the 9th June last; was a safe and proper course thereafter steered; and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?

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(5) Were safe and proper alterations made in the course at or after 11 p.m. of the 9th June last ; and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents ?

(6) Having regard to the state of the weather after 11 p.m. of the 9th June last, was the vessel navigated at too great a rate of speed ?

(7) Was a good and proper look-out kept ?

(8) What was the cause of the stranding and loss of the vessel ?

(9) Was the vessel navigated with proper and seamanlike care ?

(10) Was the loss of the steamship "Slavonia" caused by the wrongful act or default of the master ?

Mr. Miller having addressed the Court on behalf of the master, 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, they were in good order and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel. There was no evidence before the Court as to when they were last adjusted.

(2) The master did ascertain the deviation of his compasses by observation from time to time, the errors were correctly ascertained and the proper corrections to the various courses applied, this however being subject to what is contained in the judgment.

(3) The vessel was supplied with proper and sufficient charts and sailing directions.

(4) Proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at or about noon of the 9th June last. A safe and proper course was not thereafter steered. Seeing that the vessel was to pass an unlighted island during the night in cloudy and misty weather, a sufficient offing was not allowed. No allowance was made for tide and currents.

(5) The alterations made in the courses after 11 p.m. of the 9th June were in the direction of safety but were inadequate. No allowance was made for tide and currents.

(6) Having regard to the state of the weather after 11 p.m. of the 9th June last, the vessel was navigated at too great a rate of speed.

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

(8) The cause of the stranding and loss of the vessel was due to the default and error of judgment of the master in setting too fine a course and navigating at too high a rate of speed in such weather as prevailed when nearing land, and in placing too much reliance on two admittedly poor bearings for compass error which were not taken by himself.

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

(10) The loss of the s.s. "Slavonia" was caused by the default and error of judgment of the master.

T. Shepherd Little,
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

C. K. McIntosh, } Assessors.
John Taylor, }

Liverpool,
11th September, 1909.

(*Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 1st day of October*, 1909.)