

(No. 7485.)

"MERSING" (S.S.).

AND

"KHENG SENG" (S.S.).

MARINE COURT OF INQUIRY into the circumstances relating to a collision between the s.s. "KHENG SENG" and the s.s. "MERSING," resulting in the foundering of the latter vessel with the loss of seven lives off Pulau Pisang, Straits of Malacca, on 27th July, 1911.

Description of the Vessels.

S.S. "Kheng Seng," of Singapore, Official Number 119272; tonnage 128 gross, 40 net register; built of wood, 1903. Owner, Tan Keong Kiam, of Malacca.

S.S. "Mersing," of Singapore, registered under Section 90 of "The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894"; tonnage 64 gross, 36 net register; built of wood, 1911. Owner, Wong Siew Kwan, of Singapore.

Narrative.

The s.s. "Mersing" left Singapore at 5.50 p.m., 26th July, with a crew of 20 hands, 18 passengers, and a cargo of rice and merchandise of 6 tons, bound for Batu Pahat, Johore Territory, Straits of Malacca.

The s.s. "Kheng Seng" left Malacca at 4.30 p.m., 26th July, with a crew of 30 hands, 76 passengers, and a general cargo of 28 tons, bound for Singapore.

All went well until about 12.5 a.m. of 27th July, when the vessels were approaching Pulau Pisang Light from nearly opposite directions, the s.s. "Kheng Seng" sighting the white light of the s.s. "Mersing" on the starboard bow, and the s.s. "Mersing" sighting the white light of the "Kheng Seng" ahead, and at or about the same time altering her course a half point to starboard, thus causing the s.s. "Kheng Seng's" white light to bear a little on her port bow.

The vessels continued to approach each other, and eventually came into collision about 12.25 a.m., two to three miles south-westward of Pulau Pisang Light, the "Kheng Seng" striking the "Mersing" at nearly right angles about amidships on her port side.

The latter vessel received serious damage, and the engine-room immediately began to fill with water. The master steered at once for Pulau Pisang, the vessel sinking after from ten to fifteen minutes in four fathoms about half a mile from Pulau Pisang shore.

Nine men reached the shore in the ship's boat, four others clung to the mast; two (or three) had boarded the s.s. "Kheng Seng" at the time of collision, and 16 (or 15) reached Pulau Pisang or neighbouring islands by swimming, making a total of 31 saved. The numbers lost were four passengers, three Chinese (male), one Javanese (male), and three crew—one Chinese, one Javanese, one Boyanese—a total of seven.

The s.s. "Kheng Seng" received trifling damage to her stem, causing a small leakage into the forehold.

After the collision the master of the s.s. "Kheng Seng" remained near the spot for about ten minutes, and after an examination of his vessel's condition proceeded to find anchorage in the neighbourhood of Pulau Pisang, where some slight temporary repairs to the damaged stem was effected.

A heavy storm of wind and rain occurred, as far as can be ascertained, between 1 and 2 a.m.

At dawn the s.s. "Kheng Seng" weighed anchor and proceeded to search for the s.s. "Mersing," and having quickly located her position (by the mast showing above water) collected the survivors from the

mast and shore and proceeded for Singapore, arriving there 4.45 p.m., 27th July.

Report of Court.

In the matter of an inquiry held at Singapore on the 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th days of August, 1911, before Harold William Firmstone, acting first magistrate, assisted by Charles Amyas Radcliffe, Commander R.N., and Joseph Gray and Robert Shotton Bainbridge, master mariners, into the circumstances attending the collision between the steamship "Kheng Seng" and the steamship "Mersing," and the subsequent loss of the steamship "Mersing," the Court finds as follows:—

1. The s.s. "Mersing" was properly found and equipped and in a seaworthy condition on leaving Singapore on the 26th July, 1911.

2. The s.s. "Kheng Seng" was properly found and equipped and in a seaworthy condition on leaving Malacca on the 26th July, 1911.

3. Each vessel carried her proper complement of officers as required by Ordinance II. of 1882.

4. There is no evidence to show that a proper look-out was not kept on the s.s. "Mersing." In the opinion of the Court the look-out on the s.s. "Kheng Seng" was not properly kept.

5. The Court finds that proper steps were taken by those in charge of the s.s. "Mersing" to ensure her safe navigation after the s.s. "Kheng Seng" had been sighted, but is of opinion that those in charge of the s.s. "Kheng Seng" did not take proper steps to ensure her safe navigation after sighting the s.s. "Mersing."

6. In the opinion of the Court those in charge of each vessel took proper action at the last moment when a collision was inevitable to minimise loss or damage.

7. The Court is of opinion that the master of the s.s. "Kheng Seng," after ascertaining that his own ship was not in immediate danger, should have made efforts, earlier than he did, to ascertain the fate of the s.s. "Mersing" and of those on board her, and to render necessary assistance.

8. After the collision the master of the s.s. "Mersing" took proper action to save life.

9. The s.s. "Mersing" foundered in from ten to fifteen minutes after the collision.

10. Seven persons are missing from the s.s. "Mersing"—i.e., three of the crew and four passengers.

11. The s.s. "Mersing" sank, and is a total loss.

12. Slight damage was done to the stem of the s.s. "Kheng Seng," just above the copper sheathing. This caused the stem planking to open out, and resulted in slight leakage.

13. The Court is of opinion that the ships were crossing ships, the s.s. "Mersing" being on the starboard bow of the s.s. "Kheng Seng." It was the duty, therefore, of the s.s. "Kheng Seng," under Article 19 of the Collision Regulations, to keep out of the way of the other ship. This she failed to do, owing to the wrongful action of the gunner of the s.s. "Kheng Seng."

Dated this 22nd day of August, 1911.

(Sd.) H. W. FIRMSTONE,
President of the Court.

We concur in the above report.

(Sd.) C. A. RADCLIFFE,
Commander, R.N.,
Master Attendant, S.S.

(Sd.) R. S. BAINBRIDGE, }
(Sd.) JOSEPH GRAY, } Assessors.

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