(No. 2725.)

"HANOVERIAN" (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

In the matter of a formal Investigation held at Glasgow Sheriff Court on the 3rd and 4th days of November 1885, before Walter Cook Spens, Advocate, Sheriff-Substitute of Lanarkshire, assisted by Captains Beasley and Davies, into the circumstances attending the stranding and subsequent loss of the steamship "Hanoverian," on the 2nd September 1885.

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 steamship "Hanoverian" was lost owing to the current and heavy beam sea having set the vessel to the northward of her course, by which and other circumstances the master, believing himself to be to the eastward of Cape Race, altered the course of the ship, which eventually led to her stranding near Portugal Cove, Trepassey Bay, but for reasons stated in the annex the Court does not deal with the master's certificate.

The Court makes no order as to costs.

Dated this 4th day of November 1885.

(Signed) Walter C. Spens, Judge.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) Ths. Beasley, T. Davies, } Assessors.

Annex to Report.

The "Hanoverian," official number 85,931, was an iron screw steamer built at Sunderland in the year 1882, and registered the same year at Glasgow as of 3,602·67 gross and 2.352·80 registered tonnage. She had five water-tight bulkheads, which were fitted with sluice valves, and had two compound surface condensing engines of 450 horse power, and was rigged as a three-masted schooner. She was the property of Messrs. T. and A. Allen, of 70, Great Clyde Street, Glasgow. Mr. Alexander Allen was appointed managing owner on 23rd May 1882. She carried 7 boats, 3 of which were lifeboats, and had 4 compasses. One, the standard one, which was placed half-way up the mizen mast by which the courses were set, and one, Sir W. Thomson's compass, by which the helmsman steered, in a wheelhouse on the bridge. On 25th August the "Hanoverian" started on her homeward voyage from Baltimore, calling at Halifax, which she left on the 31st of the same month. She was under the command of Mr. Benjamin Thomson, who holds a certificate of competency of master, and a crew of 78 hands all told, and when she left Halifax 152 passengers. The mails were taken in also at Halifax. She was bound to St. John's, Newfoundland, and Liverpool. She had a full cargo, consisting of grain, canned meat, and provisions. Her draught of water at the time of leaving Halifax being F. 21·7 and A. 24·3. At 1 3 a.m. of September 1st they were off Cranberry Island at the entrance of the Gulf of St. Lawrence; the master stated in his evidence that it then bore N. ½ W. distant 10 miles, which he had verified by taking a 4-pt. bearing of it. A course was then set by the standard compass E. ½ S., on which the master stated there were 12° E. deviation, the weather at the time being rather hazy with a strong breeze from the southward with a heavy southerly swell, the vessel having all sail set. This course was continued till noon of the same day, when the sun was obscured, and they placed themselves by dead reckoning in latitude 45.46 N. and longitude 58.40 W. At 4 p.m. the weather was overcast, and there was a heavy beam sea, the square sail was taken in and the course altered to E. ¾ S., and then at 5 p.m. they got a cast of the lead, which gave 43 fathoms (sand and gravel), and continued sounding every hour until 3 a.m. of the 2nd, when they got no bottom at 75 fathoms. At 4 a.m. 2nd September, it came on misty, the fore and aft sails were taken in, and the speed of the engines reduced to "half-speed." 7 a.m. it came on a thick fog, the speed of the engines was still more reduced and the lead kept constantly going, the master, in his evidence, stated that as the fog lifted so he increased the speed of the vessel. On a cast being obtained at 9.20 a.m., of 17 fathoms, the master, who thought from the soundings he was on the Pig Bank (a belief which, to a certain extent, was also due to he and the mate having, at 9 a.m., heard what they believed to be the fog whistle on Cape Race, in close vicinity) altered the course to N. 75 E. and went down to the chart room to consult his chart, as he said then he could see about ½ a mile all round. Shortly afterwards the mate and man on the look-out saw the land, and the mate ordered the helm to be put "hard-a-port," and he then stopped the engines and ran forward to get the anchors clear for letting go. The master feeling the vessel stopped rushed out of the chart room to the bridge and ordered the engines to be reversed, singing out to them to "Hold on the anchor, that the vessel was coming "round," but at that time, or immediately afterwards, the vessel stranded on a place which was afterwards found to be near Portugal Cove, Trespassey Bay, to the west of Cape Race. The ship took the ground just before the engine room, and the force of the current swung her round broadside to the shore, carrying away her stern post, so that she at once began to fill, the water first beginning to come in under the engine room. The ballast donkey and feed donkey pumps were put on, but the leak was so serious that pumping was found to be unavailing. The boats were then lowered, and the passengers all landed thereby with rapidity, and happily without any loss of life. The crew were also all safely landed. The mails and part of the cargo were subsequently landed, and the master and crew remained in the vicinity of the stranded vessel for some time afterwards, saving what cargo they could, but the hull remains where she stranded, a total wreck.

The following are the questions upon which the Board of Trade desired the opinion of the Court, and the answers thereto in giving judgment:—

1. What was the cause of the stranding of the vessel?
2. Whether proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at noon on the 1st September, and from time to time thereafter.
3. Whether proper courses were set and steered, and whether due and proper allowance was made for tide and currents?
4. Whether the speed of the vessel was properly and sufficiently reduced during the time the weather was thick with fog?
5. Whether proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at 9.20 a.m. on the 2nd September, and whether the master was then justified in altering the course to N. 75° E.?
6. Whether the lead was used with sufficient frequency?
7. Whether a good and proper look-out was kept?
8. Whether the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care? and finally,
9. Whether the master and officers are, or any of them is, in default?

In the opinion of the Board of Trade the certificates of the master and mates should be dealt with.

Answers.

1. The stranding of the vessel was proximately due to the master, at 9.20 a.m. on the morning of 2nd September, assuming that he was in a position six miles to the south-east of Cape Race, and steering in a direction which he believed led to the open sea. The error as to his position arose through the master not having sufficiently taken into account the effect of the current and heavy beam sea on the ship's passage from the point where Cranberry Light was seen to the place where the vessel was stranded.

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2. This question is answered in the affirmative.

3. Proper courses were set if steered, but sufficient allowance was not made for the current and heavy beam sea.

4. This question is answered in the affirmative.

5. Measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position at 9.20 a.m. on the 2nd September. This was done by casting the lead and comparing the depths given with depths shown in the chart. The sounding gave a similar depth of water to that on the Pig Bank off Cape Race, where the master then supposed himself to be, he along with the chief officer having about 9 a.m. heard a whistle which they both assumed was the fog whistle off Cape Race. Had the assumption been well founded the alteration of the course was justifiable.

6. This question is answered in the affirmative.

7. This question is also answered in the affirmative. 2 men were stationed in the forecastle for that purpose, and the officer and master were continually on the bridge.

8. This question is also answered affirmatively under reference to the answer given to the first question.

9. The Court is of opinion that no blame is attachable to any person except the master. In his case, the Court is of opinion that there was grave error of judgment. That error of judgment was due in the first place to a failure to make sufficient allowance for the deviation from the proper course caused by the current and heavy beam sea in the voyage from where the Cranberry Light was seen to the point where the course was altered at 9.20 a.m. on 2nd September; and in the second place to the master's over-confidence in the *data* upon which the mistaken belief was based. The Court however considering the master's previous excellent character, the great assiduity which he displayed in the general navigation of the ship, and specially that from four in the morning of the 2nd September till the ship struck, he was at his post attending to his duty to the best of his ability and taking constant soundings; that the 152 passengers were under his directions landed with safety and rapidity, and a considerable portion of the cargo as well as the mails were saved, refrain from dealing with the master's certificate.

(Signed) WALTER C. SPENS, Judge.

We concur in the above judgment.

(Signed) THS. BEASLEY, T. DAVIES, } Assessors.