

(No. 6374.)

“DALBLAIR,”

Report of the Marine Board of Mauritius, held at the Port office on the 19th, 24th, and 25th February and 6th March, 1902, to inquire into the loss of the British barque “Dalblair” to be forwarded to the Board of Trade under Article 2 of Ordinance No. 1 of 1856.

Members present were:—

- J. H. ACKROYD, Esq., District Magistrate Chairman.
- A. NAIRN, Esq., Acting Harbour Master
- G. I. H. DAVIDSON, Esq., Member of the firm of Ireland Fraser and Company, Agents for Lloyds
- Captain M. McDONALD, Surveyor to Lloyds
- Captain A. H. CARY, Agent and Surveyor for the British Corporation... ..
- P. ADAM, Esq., President of the Chamber of Commerce

Statement of the Case.

The “Dalblair” was a steel barque of 1474 tons register, and was built in the year 1895 at Troon by the Ailsa Shipbuilding Company, and classed 100 A.I. at Lloyds.

She left Cardiff for Mauritius with a cargo of coals on the 14th November last. She was well found and well manned. Nothing occurred of any importance until the 4th of February last, when it appears from the evidence before the Board that by observation the vessel was in latitude 22° S., and longitude 58° 18' E. She was then steering north. The wind was S.S.W., moderate. The ship must have been then distant about 90 miles from the Ile aux Fouquets Lighthouse. But no land was in sight, either Bourbon or Mauritius.

As the wind was increasing, about 4 p.m. of the above-mentioned date (4th February), the Captain shortened sail. At 6.30 p.m. he took in the fore and main upper top-sail, and altered the course to E. by S. as night was approaching. The patent log showed that from noon to 6 p.m. the vessel had run 60 miles on a northerly course, and she must, therefore, have been at that hour between 30 and 40 miles from land. At 8 p.m. the wind shifted to the south-east with increasing force and falling barometer. The foresail was stowed and the vessel hove-to on the starboard tack, being then under two lower top-sails, and, after heaving to, she headed E.N.E. Towards midnight, the barometer was still falling and the wind blowing with hurricane force. An attempt was made to take in the fore lower top-sail, but, in doing so, it was blown away. A tremendous sea was then running and the vessel was labouring very heavily. Towards 2 a.m. the weather was something terrific. The vessel was shipping heavy seas, and the barometer had fallen to 29.50.

At 4 a.m. the weather was the same, and the atmosphere was so thick that the crew could not see the length of the vessel.

Matters continued in this state until 8 a.m. on the morning of the 5th ultimo, when the vessel struck on the reefs at Pointe D'Esny, a little south and west of Mahebourg Harbour. Prior to the vessel striking, the water was noticed to be discoloured; the lead was used, but no bottom was found, and then an attempt was made to set sail, but failed.

It was only after the vessel had struck that land was seen. Tremendous seas breaking over the vessel, the crew tried to launch the life-boat, but unsuccessfully.

The sea was sweeping everything off the deck, and three of the four boats were smashed. Signals of distress were put up and rockets let off, but no boats came out that day. The crew made no further attempt to reach the shore until about 6 p.m. in the afternoon of the 5th ultimo, when they succeeded in launching a life-boat. Ten men went in her and took a line with them so that the boat might be hauled back for the remainder of the crew.

Shortly after the boat left the ship she was capsized, and only seven men succeeded in getting safely on shore, the remaining three, Thomas Griffiths, James Murrows, and Joseph Jenkins being drowned.

The captain and rest of the crew remained on board that night, and the next morning Christian Petersen, A.B., swam on shore with a life-buoy and a line, and communication was then established by means of a rope by which all were able to get safely on to the reefs, whence they were taken ashore in canoes by fishermen.

The vessel was abandoned to the underwriters and, no doubt, will become a total wreck.

Opinion of the Board.

From the evidence it appears that neither the barometer nor the conditions of the weather and sea indicated the close proximity of the cyclone, which, coming upon the vessel so suddenly, and the wind increasing so rapidly, rendered it impossible to keep any sail on the vessel, which, in consequence, being at the mercy of the wind and sea, was driven helplessly on to the reefs.

This may at first appear strange, but when it is recorded that even at the Observatory in Mauritius, which was nearer the centre of the cyclone than the “Dalblair” was, the barometer did not fall sufficiently to cause any alarm, it is not surprising that the captain did not foresee the approach of the cyclone until it was too late to do anything to get away from it.

We are of opinion, therefore, that no blame can be attributed to the captain or officers of the “Dalblair.”

The Board wish to call attention to the brave conduct of one of the crew, Christian Petersen, who swam on shore through heavy surfs, and, by taking a line with him, established communication between the ship and the reefs, and so enabled the rest of the crew to land safely.

Dated this 26th day of March, 1902, at Port Louis, Mauritius.

GEORGE I. H. DAVIDSON.
 MURDO McDONALD.
 H. A. CARY.
 P. ADAM.

Dissent.

The Chairman of the Marine Board and the Harbour Master do not agree with the opinion of the majority, and submit the following opinion, which they consider ought to have been adopted by the Board.

It will be noticed that they differ from the majority of the Board on three particulars. (1) They are not prepared to state positively that neither the barometer nor the conditions of the weather and sea indicated the close proximity of a cyclone, though they admit that neither the captain nor the other officers of the vessel foresaw it, or are to be blamed for not foreseeing it. (2) They think mention should be made of the fact that one of the officers suspected a cyclone was coming on, but did not mention it to the master. (3) They consider attention should be called to the fact that the life-boat capsized, and that the question should be considered whether a better one could not be constructed.

Opinion of the Board, as the minority consider it should have been worded:—

The cause of the wreck of the “Dalblair” was the cyclone which passed over Mauritius between the 4th and

5th February last, and which probably set up a strong north-west current.

This cyclone overtook the vessel in the evening of the 4th ultimo, and it appears from the evidence before the Board that after 8 o'clock p.m., she made no headway and drifted bodily to leeward. As she was at the time on a lee-shore, she finally struck on the reefs at Pointe D'Esny, a little south and west of the harbour of Mahebourg.

It is true there were in the afternoon of the 4th ultimo some symptoms of bad weather, but considering that even at the Observatory in Mauritius, which was nearer the centre of the cyclone than the "Dalblair" was, the barometer did not fall sufficiently to cause any alarm, it is not to be wondered at that the captain and the chief mate of the vessel did not foresee bad weather, and, although the second mate says he suspected that a cyclone was coming on, yet he did not communicate his suspicions to the captain, to whom no blame attaches.

The Board wish to call attention to the brave conduct of one of the crew, Christian Petersen, who swam on shore through a heavy surf, and, by taking a line with

him, established communication between the ship and the reefs, and so enabled the rest of the crew to land safely.

It also appears to the Board that the question whether ships' life-boats could not be built in an improved form is worth considering, for, generally speaking, the boats in use at present seem unable to stand heavy seas. Of course, in very bad weather and near the shore any boat must run the great risk of being capsized, but possibly a new boat might be so constructed as to be able to resist even very heavy seas.

Dated this 26th day of March, 1902, at Port Louis, Mauritius.

J. H. ACKROYD,

Chairman, Marine Board.

A. NAIRN,

Acting Harbour Master.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 4th day of July, 1902.)

(No. 6384.)

"STRATHGRYFE"

JUDGMENT of the Court of Marine Investigation into a charge of negligence in navigation) preferred against the master of the British ship "Strathgryfe," of Greenock (2,190 tons registered), in connection with the stranding of the vessel on the coast of Victoria, about a mile northward of Shellback Island, on the 8th day of April, 1902. No lives lost.

In the matter of a formal investigation into a charge of negligence in navigation) preferred against the master of the British ship "Strathgryfe," of Greenock (2,190 tons registered), in connection with the stranding of the vessel on the coast of Victoria, about a mile northward of Shellback Island, on the 8th day of April, 1902. No lives lost.

The Court having carefully investigated the circumstances attending the above-mentioned stranding, and for the reasons stated in the Annex to this judgment, a charge has been sustained, and the master, Donald McIntyre, is found guilty of a gross negligence in that he set a course to be steered by the ship which was not a safe and proper course, and which resulted in the stranding of the ship.

The Court, therefore, suspends the master's competency as a master, No. 018541, issued by the Board of Trade, for a period of two (2) months from this date, and orders the said Donald McIntyre to pay to the clerk of the Court of Marine Investigation fifteen pounds (£15) on account of the expenses of the investigation.

Annex to Judgment

In the matter of a formal investigation into a charge of negligence in navigation) preferred against the master of the British ship "Strathgryfe," of Greenock (2,190 tons registered), in connection with the stranding of the vessel on the coast of Victoria, about one-and-a-half mile northward of Shellback Island, on the 8th day of April, 1902. No lives lost.

The evidence taken before the Court consisted of that of the first and second mates, and of the able seamen of the said ship, and the master of the "Strathgryfe" gave evidence on his own behalf.

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