

(No. 7309.)

“LAURENTIAN” (S.S.).

The Merchant Shipping Act, 1894.

IN the matter of a Formal Investigation held at the Sheriff's Jury Court (No. 2), 40, Wilson Street, Glasgow, on the 4th and 6th days of November, 1909, before WILLIAM GEORGE SCOTT MONCRIEFF, Esquire, Advocate Sheriff Substitute of Lanarkshire, assisted by Captains ALEXANDER WOOD and OWEN R. MITCHELL, into the circumstances attending the loss of the British steamship “LAURENTIAN,” of Glasgow, through stranding at or near Mistaken Point, South Coast of Newfoundland, on or about the 6th September, 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 loss of the British steamship “Laurentian” was caused by the wrongful act and default of the master, Henry Imrie, by altering the course towards the land and continuing the vessel at full speed through a fog, which had for some time before the stranding become very dense. The Court taking into consideration his long and faithful service, and the watchfulness and care which he otherwise exercised in the navigation of his vessel, while finding it necessary to deal with his certificate, suspends the said certificate, No. 05601, for the period of three months only.

Dated this 6th day of November, 1909.

W. G. SCOTT MONCRIEFF,  
Judge.

We concur in the above Report.

A. WOOD,  
OWEN R. MITCHELL, } Assessors.

Annex to the Report.

This was an Inquiry into the circumstances attending the stranding and loss of the British steam vessel “Laurentian,” which was lost on Mistaken Point, near Cape Race, on the South Coast of Newfoundland, on the morning of the 6th September last.

Mr. James Morton, writer, Glasgow, conducted the Inquiry on behalf of the Board of Trade; Mr. James Letham, writer, Glasgow, appeared for the master; and Mr. Thomas Stout, writer, Glasgow, watched the case on behalf of the first and second officers, but as they were not made parties to the Inquiry, he did not answer to the sederunt.

The “Laurentian” (formerly named the “Polynesian”), Official Number 67994, was built of iron, in the year 1872, by Messrs. Robert Steel & Co., Greenock, in the county of Renfrew, and was of the following dimensions, viz.: length 400 feet, breadth 42.25 feet, and depth of hold 35.5 feet. Her gross tonnage as amended was 4522.10 tons, and her registered tonnage 2837.85 tons. She was registered at the Port of Glasgow, and was owned by the Allan Line Steamship Company, Limited. Mr. James Smith Park, of 25, Bothwell Street, Glasgow, is entered in the transcript of registry as manager, by advice under the seal of the company received 15th September, 1909.

The “Laurentian” was a single bottom three-deck vessel, and was constructed with eight watertight bulkheads. She was schooner rigged with two masts, had houses on deck, a bridge amidships with a wheelhouse

thereon, had the usual steam and deck hand pumps, which were in good order, was fitted with both hand and steam steering gear, carried eleven boats, eight of which were lifeboats, was supplied with twelve lifebuoys and two hundred and seventeen lifebelts.

In the year 1893, Messrs. Workman, Clark & Co., Limited, Belfast, fitted her with a new set of engines and boilers of 570 nominal horse-power, with a speed of 13 knots, the diameter of the cylinders being 28.46 and 76 inches respectively, with a stroke of 54 inches.

The “Laurentian” also carried Admiralty charts and sailing directions for the waters in which she was being navigated. She had also a Kelvin White patent sounding machine and a Bliss patent taff rail log. This taff rail log was not being used, the distance run being measured by the hand log every two hours, and verified by the number of revolutions made by the engines as registered by the indicator in the engine-room. The master stated that, when the patent log was out, it interfered very much with sounding operations. The vessel had five compasses, particulars of which are given in the answer to question number one.

The “Laurentian” loaded 800 to 1,000 tons of general cargo supplied by various shippers in Boston. The cargo included 30 tons of steel plates which were stowed on top of some ballast at the bottom of No. 2 hold. This portion of the cargo was stated to be at least 60 feet from the compasses on the bridge. The vessel's draught of water, as so laden, was 21 feet 6 inches forward and 22 feet 8 inches aft.

On the 3rd September last she left Boston bound for Glasgow under command of Mr. Henry Imrie, who held a certificate numbered 05601, and who had been engaged in the Atlantic trade for over 23 years.

The crew consisted of 113 hands all told, among whom were four officers, each being in possession of a master's certificate. They were placed in two watches, the first and third officers being together in one watch, and the second and fourth in the other. There were also on board 51 passengers.

At 1.50 p.m. on the 3rd September, 1909, Boston light-ship was passed, and the vessel's departure was taken from this point. A course east by the standard compass was set to pass 10 miles off Cape Sable. On this course the deviation was 4° E. The weather was fine and clear, with a light wind from southward.

On the 4th observations for longitude were taken by the master and the first and second officers, which was according to the usual practice—the master and second officer using one chronometer and the first officer the other. The positions obtained from these independent calculations practically agreed. At noon the latitude was obtained from the meridian altitude of the sun. The vessel's position was found at this time to be—by observation, 43° 26' N. and 64° 44' W.; while by dead reckoning the position was 43° 27' N. and 64° 40' W. The weather continued fine, and at noon, on the 5th, the position of the vessel by observation and dead reckoning was identical, being 45° 12' N. and 58° 3' W. A cast of the lead was taken at this time, which gave a depth of 42 fathoms—bottom stones and shells.

From this position a course E. ½ S. was steered by the standard compass, the deviation on this course being 2½° E.

The weather remained clear till midnight of the 5th, at which time the first officer relieved the second officer. At 12.15 a.m. on the 6th the weather became thick and bazy, and the first officer telegraphed to the engine-room to stand by, and commenced making the regulation fog-signals with the steam whistle. He also sent the third officer to call the master, as instructed to do in the night order book.

The master, who went on the bridge at once, stated that he found the fog had lifted, and he continued the vessel at full speed. But after this time, as appears from all the evidence, the weather was more or less thick, with the fog lifting sufficiently at intervals to enable the look-out to see a distance of from half a mile to one mile from the ship. The wind and sea continued moderate from the south. At 3 a.m. a sounding was taken with Lord Kelvin's patent sounding machine, when a depth of 75 fathoms and stony bottom was obtained. At 4 a.m. the second and fourth officers relieved the first and third officers, and another cast of the lead was taken, when 53 fathoms with sand and stones was found. Again, at 5 a.m., the fourth officer took soundings, and got

37 fathoms and stony bottom, and on sounding at 5.30 a.m. 32 fathoms was found. At daylight the weather was found to be very thick, and an extra man was placed on the look-out, in addition to the single look-out usually stationed there, with instructions to keep a good look-out for ice or any other object. Fog signals as required by statute were being regularly made, but the speed of the vessel was not reduced.

As the vessel approached the land the fog became so dense that, in the opinion of the men on the look-out, objects could only be seen at a distance of 20 yards from the vessel. At 6 a.m. the fourth officer took another sounding and found a depth of water of 22 fathoms. All these soundings had been taken with the vessel going at full speed. From this sounding it was assumed the ship had passed Cape Race; but this assumption was not justified by the series of soundings that had been obtained since 3 o'clock.

At 6.15 a.m., Archibald McDonald, A.B., one of the two men on the look-out forward, said to the other man on the look-out along with him, "there is something white on the water," and immediately shouted to the bridge, "ice." The master and second officer were also on the look-out, on the bridge, and the fourth officer was standing by the telegraph, but before the orders to stop and reverse, which were given, were received in the engine-room, the vessel struck the rocks, going at a speed of 12½ knots. An attempt was made to port the helm, but its action had no time to take effect, and the vessel ran ashore within half a point of her course. The vessel remaining fast, resting on a ledge of rocks with her stem at a distance, variously estimated from 20 to 200 yards, from high cliffs. The bottom of the vessel was so extensively and seriously damaged that she at once began to rapidly fill with water.

The chief engineer, who was on deck at 6.13 a.m. listening to hear Cape Race fog horn, proceeded to the engine-room with all speed. He stated that the engines were stopped, reversed, and stopped again within one minute. Water came into the engine-room so rapidly that the engine-room staff had to leave the engine room abruptly and go on deck, after drawing the fires and easing the safety valves.

Rockets were fired, and other sound signals of distress made. The boats were lowered, and the passengers and some of the crew were placed in them. A fishing boat arrived shortly after the vessel stranded, and piloted the ship's boats to a safe landing place. The vessel was found to have stranded at Bach Cove, on the west side of Mistaken Point. All hands were safely landed, but the vessel became a total wreck. A portion of the cargo was subsequently salvaged.

The Court cannot too strongly condemn the high rate of speed at which the vessel was being navigated during the fog previous to stranding. Both men on the look-out said they could only see a distance of about 20 yards for some time before the vessel struck. The speed of the vessel was 12½ knots, so that any object ahead would be struck within three seconds after it was sighted. The master himself and the second and fourth officers were on the bridge, and two able seamen were placed on the look-out forward, but all this care was useless while the speed of the vessel was not reduced, as it was impossible to avoid any object ahead when once within the range of vision.

At the conclusion of the evidence, Mr. Morton, on behalf of the Board of Trade, submitted the following questions for the opinion of the Court. Mr. James Letham addressed the Court on behalf of the master, and Mr. Morton reviewed the evidence for the Board of Trade. The questions and answers thereto are as follows:—

*Question 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?

*Answer.*—The vessel had five compasses in position. The standard, a Kelvin White compass, was placed on the top of the wheel house, above the bridge. One of Dobbie's compasses was placed in the wheel house on the bridge, by which the vessel was steered. Two liquid compasses were in the after wheelhouse, and an ordinary compass was fitted to the main mast. They were in good order, and sufficient for the safe navigation of the vessel. They were last adjusted on the 6th September, 1902, by Messrs. Alexander Dobbie & Son, Limited, Glasgow.

*Question 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?

*Answer.*—The master ascertained the deviation of his compasses from time to time. The errors were correctly ascertained and the proper corrections to the courses were applied. Deviation books were produced showing that a very careful record had been kept of the deviation from voyage to voyage.

*Question 3.*—Was the vessel supplied with proper and sufficient charts and sailing directions?

*Answer.*—The vessel was supplied with proper and sufficient charts and sailing directions.

*Question 4.*—Were proper measures taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at noon of the 5th September last, was a safe and proper course thereafter steered, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?

*Answer.*—Proper measures were taken to ascertain and verify the position of the vessel at noon of the 5th September last, a proper course was thereafter steered, and due and proper allowance was made for tide and currents.

*Question 5.*—Having regard to the state of the weather after 0.15 a.m. of the 6th September—

(a) Was the vessel navigated at too great a rate of speed?

(b) Was the lead used with sufficient frequency and accuracy?

*Answer.*—Having regard to the state of the weather after 0.15 a.m. of the 6th September—

(a) The vessel was navigated at too great a rate of speed.

(b) The lead was used with sufficient frequency and accuracy.

*Question 6.*—Was a safe and proper alteration made in the course at or about 5.30 a.m. of the 6th September, and was due and proper allowance made for tide and currents?

*Answer.*—Considering the uncertainty of the vessel's position, the thickness of the weather and the proximity of land, a safe and proper alteration was not made in the course at or about 5.30 a.m. of the 6th September, and therefore due and proper allowance cannot be said to have been made for tide and currents.

*Question 7.*—Was a good and proper look-out kept?

*Answer.*—A good and proper look-out was kept.

*Question 8.*—What was the cause of the stranding and loss of the vessel?

*Answer.*—The cause of the stranding and loss of the steamship "Laurentian" was the altering of the course towards the land in which direction the vessel had been carried by an unanticipated current and continuing her at full speed through a fog which for some time before stranding had become very dense.

*Question 9.*—Was the vessel navigated with proper and seamanlike care?

*Answer.*—The vessel was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care.

*Question 10.*—Was the loss of the British steamship "Laurentian" caused by the wrongful act or default of the master?

*Answer.*—The loss of the British steamship "Laurentian" was caused by the wrongful act and default of the master, Henry Imrie. The Court taking into consideration his long and faithful service, and the watchfulness and care which he otherwise exercised in the navigation of his vessel, while finding it necessary to deal with his certificate, suspends the said certificate, No. 05601, for the period of three months only.

On the motion of Mr. Letham, the Court recommends that the master be granted a first mate's certificate during the period of suspension.

W. G. SCOTT MONCRIEFF,  
Judge.

We concur.

A. WOOD,  
OWEN R. MITCHELL, } Assessors.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 3rd day of December, 1909.)