

(No. 1758.)

“EDMONDSLEY” (S.S.)

The Merchant Shipping Acts, 1854 to 1876.

IN the matter of the formal Investigation held at Newcastle, on the 7th day of April 1883, before H. C. ROTHERY, Esquire, Wreck Commissioner, assisted by Captains FORSTER and KENNEDY, as Assessors, into the circumstances attending the stranding and loss of the steamship “EDMONDSLEY,” of London, on a rock off the Island of Tevenec, Finistère, on the 13th of March last, whilst on a voyage from Sunderland to Bayonne.

Report of Court.

The Court, having carefully inquired into the circumstances of the above mentioned shipping casualty, finds, for the reasons annexed, that the stranding and loss of the said vessel was due to Christopher Frederick M^cLachlin, the master, in having attempted to pass through the dangerous and narrow channel between the Saints and the mainland, when he should have taken the shorter and safer route, outside the Saints; and in having, when he had elected to pass through that channel, neglected to put two men at the wheel to prevent the vessel going ashore when she sheered, as she was very likely to do when she met the strong flood tide setting through the channel.

For these wrongful acts and defaults, the Court suspends the certificate of the said Christopher Frederick M^cLachlin for three months from this date, but recommends that during the period of such suspension he be granted a first mate's certificate.

The Court is not asked to make any order as to costs.

Dated this 7th day of April 1883.

(Signed) H. C. ROTHERY,
Wreck Commissioner.

We concur in the above report.

(Signed) GEORGE H. FORSTER, } Assessors.
H. C. KENNEDY, }

Annex to the Report.

This case was heard at Newcastle on the 7th of April instant, when Mr. De Hamel appeared for the Board of Trade, Mr. Roche for the master, and Mr. Green for the owners of the “Edmondsley.” Four witnesses having been produced by the Board of Trade and examined, Mr. De Hamel handed in a statement of the questions upon which the Board of Trade desired the opinion of the Court, Mr. Roche then addressed the Court on behalf of the master, and Mr. De Hamel having replied for the Board of Trade, the Court proceeded to give judgment on the questions upon which its opinion had been asked. The circumstances of the case are as follow:—

The “Edmondsley” was an iron screw steamship belonging to the port of London, of 818 tons gross, and 524 tons net register, and was fitted with engines of 90 horse power. She was built at Southwick, in the county of Durham, in the present year, and at the time of her loss was the property of Mr. William Jopling Branfoot, of Bonnersfield, Sunderland, and others, Mr. Branfoot being the managing owner. She left Sunderland on the 10th of March last for Bayonne, this being only her second voyage, with a crew of 16 hands all told, and 900 tons of coal, and at about 11.15 a.m. of the 13th was about 6 miles from Ushant with the two lighthouses in one, bearing east a little southerly. At this time the course was altered to S.S.E. southerly by the pole compass, or S.S.E. by the bridge compass, with the view of passing through the Raz de Sein between the Saints and the mainland; and that course was continued until about 10 minutes past 3, the vessel all the time going at full speed, and making about 8 knots. They were now within about a mile and a half of Tevenec Lighthouse,

which bore from them about E. by N., when she suddenly took a sheer to starboard; the helm was immediately put hard a-starboard, and after paying off about a couple of points, she began to come up again, but instead of stopping when her head was S.S.E. she continued to pay off to port until she had got to about E. by S., and was heading nearly for the lighthouse. On seeing her pay off to port, the captain at once rushed to the helm and helped the second mate to get it hard over; and as the vessel again came up to her course, and when about S.E. she struck with her port bilge upon one of the outlying rocks off Tevenec, she at once began to fill, and within 20 minutes sank. In the meantime the crew had got into the boats, and they subsequently landed at a place called Douarnenez some fifteen miles to the eastward. The vessel and cargo were, however, totally lost.

These being the facts of the case, the first question upon which our opinion has been asked is, “What was the cause of the loss of the British steamship “Edmondsley” off the Island of Tevenec, Finistère, on the 13th day of March 1883?” We were told by the master that, when when he got off Tevenec, the tide was about 3 hours flood, and it would therefore be at its strongest; and as in the Raz de Sein the flood sets to the northward, it would be very likely, if it took her on the starboard bow, to give her a strong sheer to port; and it is this, no doubt, that caused the loss of the vessel and her cargo.

The second question which we are asked is, “Whether the master, Christopher Frederick M^cLachlin, was justified in attempting to pass inside the Saints; and in navigating the vessel so close to Tevenec Isle; and in neglecting to take any measures to verify his distance therefrom?” There can be no doubt that the master was not justified in attempting to pass inside the Saints. When he laid his course to pass between the Saints and the Bec du Raz, he was, according to his own account, 6 miles outside Ushant, and his shortest course from that point to Bayonne would undoubtedly be to go outside the Saints. Why, then, he preferred to take the inner and longer course between the Saints and the mainland, which is full of dangers, is to us utterly inexplicable. He said that many vessels, steam as well as sailing vessels, were accustomed to take that course; but that would be no justification for him, seeing that it is full of dangers, and that the tides there are notoriously very strong and uncertain. Why, too, when he had a shorter and a safer course before him, he should have preferred the longer and more dangerous route, it is difficult to understand; the more so as he must have known that when he got into the Raz de Sein he would have a strong flood tide against him, whereas outside the Saints he would have been beyond the influence of the tides. On the other hand, we have no reason to think that he was not going down the mid-channel between Tevenec and the Saints when the vessel took the sudden sheer, first to starboard and then to port, which ultimately put him on the rocks; or that he neglected to take all proper measures to verify his position; the fault was in going at all through that narrow and dangerous channel inside the Saints, when he had a better and shorter course before him by going outside of them altogether.

The third question which we are asked is, “Whether he made proper allowance for tide and current, and whether, having regard to the dangers existing in the Raz de Sein, he was justified in neglecting to have a man on the fore-castle head?” The tides in this narrow channel are, as we have said, notoriously very strong and uncertain, and it would therefore be very difficult to make due and proper allowance for them; but this is a reason why he ought not to have taken this route, seeing that he had a shorter and better one open to him. We are not, however, disposed to blame him for not having had a man on the look-out on the fore-castle, seeing that it was broad daylight, and that he and the second mate were on the upper bridge, whence they could have seen any dangers ahead as easily, if not more easily, than from the fore-castle.

The fourth question which we are asked is, “Whether a good and proper look out was kept from the bridge, and particularly for shoal or discoloured water?” We think that a good and proper look out

was being kept from the bridge; but the casualty was due not to the want of a good look-out, but to the sudden sheer which the vessel took in the tide way.

The fifth question which we are asked is, "Whether the vessel was navigated with proper and seamanlike care;" and it is added that, "if the Court find Christopher Frederick McLachlin, the master, in default, his certificate should, in the opinion of the Board of Trade, be dealt with?" I have already stated that the master was not justified in taking the longer and more dangerous route, when he had a shorter and safer course open to him. If however he chose to go through that narrow channel, it was his duty to have taken the utmost precautions to prevent the vessel getting on the rocks on either side of the channel. Knowing to, as he must have done, that the tides in the Raz de Sein are very strong and uncertain, and that, when he got there, the flood would be at its strongest and against him, it was his duty to have had two men at the wheel ready to bring the ship up at once, in case she took a sheer, as she was very likely to do, and which, according to the second mate, who was at the

wheel, might possibly have prevented the casualty. In our opinion the vessel was not being navigated with proper and seamanlike care; and the result has been the loss of a perfectly new and valuable vessel with everything on board. At the same time it is only proper to observe that the master was on the bridge, and attending to his duties; and we are therefore disposed to take a more lenient view of the case. Under all the circumstances we think that a suspension of his certificate for three months will meet the justice of the case.

The Court was not asked to make any order as to costs; but on the application of Mr. Roche it agreed to recommend to the Board of Trade to give the master a chief mate's certificate during the suspension of his master's certificate.

(Signed) H. C. BOTHERY,
Wreck Commissioner.

We concur
(Signed) GEORGE H. FORSTER, } Assessors.
H. C. KENNEDY, }

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