

(No. 6608.)

“LAUREL BRANCH” (S.S.).

FINDING and Order of a Naval Court held at Talcahuano, Chile, on the 2nd, 3rd, and 5th days of October, 1903, to investigate the stranding and subsequent total wreck of the British steamer “LAUREL BRANCH.”

The steamer “Laurel Branch” was a two-masted vessel, built of steel, of 2140 tons nett register, official number 99621, built at the port of Sunderland in the year 1893, and was owned by Messrs. Nautilus Steam Shipping Company, Limited, of Sunderland.

It appears from the evidence given before this Court that she left Guayaquil on the 18th of July last, and subsequently sailed from Valparaiso on the 18th of August last, bound for Liverpool and intermediate ports, with a full cargo of general merchandize, including some two thousand odd tons of metals.

Her total crew consisted of 33 hands all told, including the master, besides which there were four children passengers.

That upon the evidence given the vessel appears to have been well found, sufficiently manned, &c.

That on the 26th of August last, at noon, Huamblin Island bearing East, 35 miles, the course was set S. by E. $\frac{1}{2}$ E. magnetic, to pass not less than 15 miles off Cape Raper, and that the Court considers same to be a safe distance to allow for a possible inset of current.

That overcast and rainy weather prevailed during the night, and, owing to the intense darkness, it was materially impossible to see any distance ahead.

That at 1.50 a.m. on the 27th of August last, the vessel stranded, the exact position being latitude $46^{\circ} 30'$, and longitude $75^{\circ} 26'$, between Pringle Point to the South and Steward Bay to the North.

That it is very regrettable that, after the stranding of the vessel, whilst engaged in landing the passengers and crew, two of the children passengers were drowned, owing to the life-boat capsizing, and that the Court recognizes that every possible effort

was made by the boat's crew to rescue the two children.

That the log book, charts, articles, &c., and all other documents pertaining to the vessel, excepting the ship's register, were placed at the disposal of the Court.

That, upon the evidence given by the master, first, second, and third mates, first and third engineers, carpenter, and three able seamen, the Court is of opinion that the cause of the stranding and subsequent total wreck of the vessel is entirely due to an exceptionally strong inset of current; that it finds no grounds whatever for blaming the conduct of the master, officers, or any of the crew, and

That the Court is unanimously of opinion that the master, officers, and crew be exonerated from all blame.

That the existence of such strong currents is confirmed by a letter signed by three officers of the Chilean transport “Casma,” to which the Court desires to call special attention, the original being attached to the second mate's deposition.

That the master and officers appear to have navigated the vessel in a seamanlike and proper manner, and the Court has much pleasure in now returning to the master, first, second, and third mates, and first and third engineers, their corresponding certificates.

Dated at Talcahuano this 5th day of October, 1903.

A. E. STEEL,
Vice Consul,
President of the Court.

D. T. EVANS,
Master of the barque “Eaton Hall,”
at Talcahuano.

WILLIAM DRUMMOND,
Master of the British barque, “Miefield,”
at Talcahuano.

W. O. APPLGATH,
Clerk to the Court.

(Issued in London by the Board of Trade on the 8th day of December, 1903.)